

Folk wisdom in Bouyei proverbs and songs

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1. Introduction

Before delving straight into the storehouse of Bouyei folk wisdom, I think it only fair and necessary and helpful to give an introduction into the Bouyei people themselves, their language and present writing system. This introduction will give you a place in which to think about the Bouyei, a background, a context. My hope is that the Bouyei, traditionally little known and often neglected, will not remain so distant from your experience, but you will come closer in knowing them and seeing them as definitely related to the rest of the Tai peoples.

1.1 The Bouyei people and language

The Bouyei live mainly in Guizhou Province southcentral China. There are also some Bouyei in Yunnan Province and some transplanted Bouyei in Vietnam. According to the 1990 census, there are 2.5 million Bouyei in Guizhou, 34,000 in Yunnan (Ma 1995), and perhaps some 40,000 in Vietnam (otherwise known as Gai or Yai, see Edmondson forthcoming). The Bouyei have a long history, being some of the original inhabitants of Guizhou. They are not a flashy flamboyant people, but rather go quietly about their work, which is mostly agriculture. They have long assimilated into the majority Han society around them, while still keeping their own traditions. They live simply and dress simply, but as you will see from this study, they think deeply. Although not as prevalent as in the past, Bouyei women still weave their own cloth with treadle looms, embroider their own cloth shoes, and wear the traditional button-down-the-right-side shirts. Young people still enjoy singing the traditional songs, and when they are recorded, everyone loves to listen to them, saying they are very moving. Their lives are interspersed with proverbs throughout each day so that they become ingrained, practical wisdom being passed down as naturally as the air they breathe.

Bouyei is considered to be the northernmost Tai language. Figure 1 shows the relationship of Bouyei to other Tai languages.

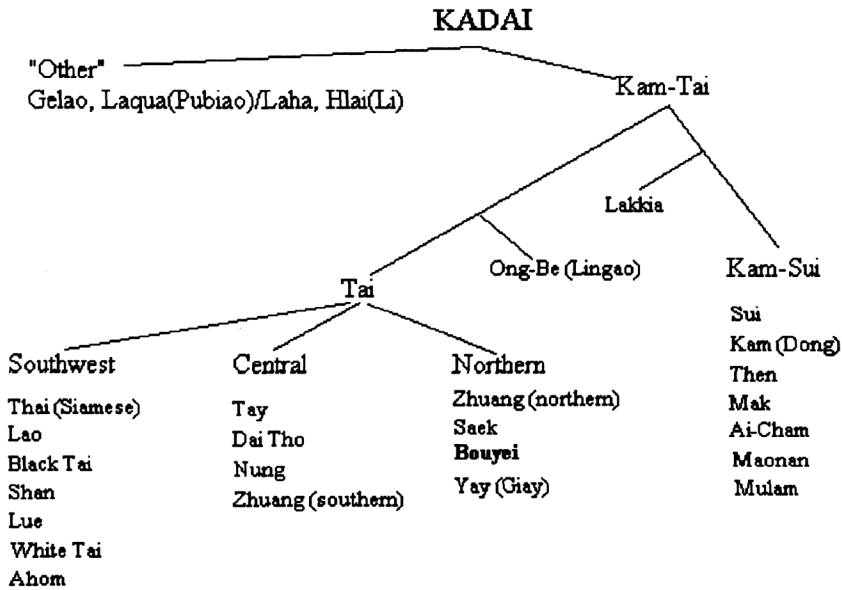


Figure 1. Relationship of Bouyei to other Tai languages. (adapted from Edmondson 1997:2)

As seen in Figure 1 above, Bouyei is classified as a Northern Tai language, according to Li Fang Kuei 1960. This Bouyei classification has been widely accepted by Kadai linguists over the years since then. The closest related languages to Bouyei are the other Northern Tai languages, northern Zhuang in neighboring Guangxi province, Saek in Thailand and Laos, and Yay in Vietnam, which has recently been equated with the Bouyei of Guizhou (Edmondson forthcoming).

A typical Bouyei lect has six tones in open syllables. Tones on checked syllables range from two to four, depending on area (Snyder 1995). Tone values vary from place to place which can affect the reading of proverbs. Vocabulary also differs from place to place, anywhere between 40% and 90% similar, which changes some of the wording of the proverbs, but for the most part, keeps the same meaning. Even accounting for this, there is a large percentage of proverbs that have stood the test of time and space and are still used widely today. This fact shows the long lasting character of proverbs in general and the durability of values in a culture.

1.2 A word about the orthography

An orthography for Bouyei was first created in 1956 by Chinese linguists. It was not until 1982 that promotion of the orthography was encouraged with small

pilot programs. The standard orthography for all of the varieties of Bouyei is based on the Wangmo lect (Buyiwen Fang'an 1985). Wangmo is centrally located, therefore is representative of a large percentage of the regional varieties, allowing for slight modifications. Table 1 shows the IPA symbols (according to place and manner of articulation) for the phonemicized consonants and the representative orthographic symbol next to it. The proverbs in this paper are written using the Bouyei orthography.

Table 1. International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for consonants with corresponding Bouyei orthography

	Labial	Dental	Alveolo-palatal	Palatal	Velar	Laryngeal
Stops	p, b	t, d			k, g	ʔ, q
Fricatives	f, f	s, s	ç, x			h, h
	v, w	z, r				
Affricates			tç, j			
Nasals	m, m	n, n		ɲ, ny	ŋ, ng	
Liquids		l, l				
Semi-vowels	w, v			j, y		
Labialized					kw, gv ŋw, ngv	
Palatalized	pj, by					
Preglottalized	ʔb, mb ʔw, qv	ʔd, nd		ʔj, qy		

Vowels are represented as shown in Table 2. Note that those symbols representing more than one sound are due to regional variations.

Table 2. Phonetic vowels and their orthographic symbols

IPA	Bouyei orthography
a:	a (syllable final), aa (syllable dial)
ɐ, e	a (syllable medial)
i	i
ɛ	ee
u	u
ɔ	o
o	oo
i, ʊ, ə	e
i:, ʊ:, ə:	ea

Since Bouyei is a tonal language, each syllable being assigned a certain pitch value, it is important to represent the tone in writing. Tone is represented by a letter at the end of each syllable as seen in Table 3. Tone values (based on a scale of 1 to 5, low to high) vary from place to place, but the tone categories (derived historically) are very consistent.

Table 3. Representation of tone in Bouyei orthography

Tone category	Wangmo tone value	Written representation, with example
1	24 low rising	l <i>nal</i> 'thick'
2	21 low falling	z <i>naz</i> 'field(wet)'
3	33 mid level	c <i>nac</i> 'face'
4	41 high falling	x <i>nax</i> 'uncle'
5	35 high rising	s <i>nas</i> 'arrow'
6	55 high level	h <i>nah</i> 'otter'
7	35	t <i>naqt</i> 'heavy'
8	33	(no symbol) <i>nab</i> 'chase'

Tones 1 to 6 occur on syllables that end in a vowel or nasal. Tones 7 and 8 occur on syllables that end in b [p], d [t], or g [k]. It is helpful to note that the letter representation of tone looks somewhat like the number it represents, e.g. l=1, z=2, c=3, x=4, s=5, h=6.

When citing proverbs I use written Bouyei with word for word English glosses (note that *cl* stands for classifier), and a free translation in English. As far as I am aware, this paper is the first instance of English translations of Bouyei proverbs. Any errors in translation or misinterpretations are solely mine. Any comments, corrections, or additions are greatly appreciated.

2. Folk wisdom

Folk wisdom in Bouyei culture has been preserved orally through proverbs and songs. The vast majority of Bouyei folk wisdom has been passed down through generations by word of mouth. Occasionally Chinese characters have been used to write down Bouyei songs, but they do not accurately or consistently represent the sounds of Bouyei. Only recently have any written records in the Bouyei orthography appeared. The fact that this wisdom has lasted so long without any written documents shows how integral a part this wisdom is in Bouyei culture. It also shows how language is a strong reflector of culture (see Huang 1992), whether written

down or not. This paper provides a descriptive analysis of Bouyei proverbs, some of which are also found in songs. These proverbs tell us what the Bouyei are like and what they value.

2.1 Proverbs

Proverbs are classified as one type of wisdom literature, short pithy sayings which state rules for personal happiness and welfare, give instructions for successful living, and ponder the perplexities of human existence. Bouyei proverbs are no different. They also employ typical literary devices such as analogies, metaphors, poetic parallelism, and alliteration. The words themselves are simple, yet the meanings are deep and the images are powerful. Succinct phrases reflect the realities of life from differing perspectives; they give inspiration and encouragement. Understanding the deeper meanings under the surface of the proverbs gives us a glimpse into the minds and hearts of the Bouyei.

Sources and method. The proverbs used in this study come mainly from one or more of the following three sources: 1) Bouyei Proverbs 1983, 2) Zhuang-Dong Language Family Proverbs 1987, and 3) Libo Bouyei Proverbs (Yu 1993).

Bouyei Proverbs 1983 is a small booklet published by the Guizhou Minbrity Affairs Commission. It contains 160 proverbs written in Bouyei orthography with Chinese glosses. Many of these were originally collected over a hundred years ago by the French missionary Williate who worked in the Ceheng and Wangmo areas. A group of six men, the chief among them Mr. Wang Hanwen, did the work of organizing these proverbs and setting them down in print for posterity.

Zhuang-Dong Language Family Proverbs 1987 is a collection of over a thousand proverbs from eleven languages of the Zhuang-Dong language family. Zhuang-Dong is the term used by Chinese linguists to denote the Kam-Tai family of Figure 1. Besides Bouyei, the other languages are Zhuang, Lingao (Ong-Be), Dai (Xibsongbanna and Dehong), Dong (Kam), Mulao, Shui, Maonan, Li (Hlai), and Lajia (Lakkja). They are all written in IPA with Chinese word for word glosses and a Chinese translation. The Bouyei section has 150 proverbs, translated and organized by Professors Wang Wei and Chen Xiuying, both of the Central University for Nationalities Minority Research Dept. Professor Wang is a native Bouyei of Luodian county. Many of the proverbs in this book are drawn from the Bouyei spoken in Wangmo and Luodian.

Libo Bouyei Proverbs (Yu 1993) is a collection of 180 proverbs personally gathered over the years by Mr. Yu Jiongbiao of Guizhou University, formerly of

Libo county. Mr. Yu wrote the proverbs in IPA and explained them in Chinese and this author subsequently made her own notes in English.

All the proverbs above drawn from the Wangmo-Luodian areas amount to around 300, with some overlap. The author checked these for present-day usage and translation accuracy with Miss Wei Dingfang, a nineteen-year-old Bouyei from Luodian. Only those familiar to her were included in the database for this paper, plus a few proverbs that she remembered which were not recorded elsewhere. Accounting for overlap in the two Wangmo sources cited above, we came up with at least 150 documented proverbs in current use today, recognizable by a modern day young Bouyei. I find this remarkable since many of the proverbs were originally collected one hundred years ago. Folk wisdom in Bouyei proverbs has stood the test of time.

Structure. The two basic structures of Bouyei proverbs are those with one line and those with two lines, also called couplets. One-line proverbs can have anywhere from four to eight syllables, each syllable usually representing one word. Couplets usually have four or five syllables to a line, but can also have three, or six or seven. See examples (1) through (10).

one line, four syllables

(1)

Gaangc haaus luams songh.
Talk word fall hole

When you talk without paying
attention, you may fall into a hole. In
other words, when you talk without
thinking, you may trap yourself.

one line, five syllables

(2)

Gveec linx ood bas gaus.
Saw tongue stick-in mouth self

You saw your tongue off and stick it in
your own mouth. In other words,
mocking others is like mocking
yourself.

one line, six syllables

(3)

Genl ndil miz dangz qyus ndil.
Eat good not arrive live good

Eating well is not as good as living
well.

one line, seven syllables

(4)

Maic haanz miz deengl soongl jauc
dodt.

Pole shoulder not nail two head fall

If there is no nail on the two sides of
the shoulder pole, things will fall off. In
other words, if you are not careful, you
will not succeed.

one line, eight syllables

(5)

Bux laiz yanl ranc nyuz goonl dangz
byaaail?

Person what see stem grass empty
arrive tip

Who can see the tip of the stem
through the stem? In other words, who
can know the outcome of something?

two lines, three syllables

(6)

Lix genl gugt,
Have eat tiger

Bius rub mumh.
Empty stroke beard

When you have a lot, you can eat a
tiger, or a lot; when you don't have
anything, you will just stroke your
beard.

two lines, four syllables

(7)

Miz genl noh mul,
Not eat meat pig

Yanl duz mul byaaic.
See cl pig walk

You don't eat pork, but you see a pig
walking. In other words, just because
you haven't done something before
doesn't mean you cannot see what
needs to be done and do it.

two lines, five syllables

(8)

Maic laaux daab miz roh,
tree big break not straight

Rox gaangc haaus xic soonl.
know speak word then teach

You can't straighten out an old tree, so
as soon as a child can speak you need
to teach them. In other words, don't
wait until a child is older to start
teaching him, because he won't be so
teachable then.

two lines, six syllables

(9)

Raanz lix xib duez vaaiz donl,
home have ten cl buffalo castrate

Miz gveh hoongl yac wul yungh.
not do work also without use

Your home has ten castrated water buffaloes and yet you don't put them to use, that's a waste. In other words, you have the resources but are not using them.

two lines, seven syllables

(10)

Henc bol xaaux rox bol saangl dams,
up mountain only-then know mountain
tall short

Rongz ramx xaaux rox ramx mbog lag.
down water only-then know water
shallow deep

Only when you climb the mountain will you know if it is high or low; only when you go down into the water will you know if it is shallow or deep. In other words, you learn what things are like by experience.

The most common structure is two lines of equal number of four or five syllables in each line. There is also a two line pattern of four syllables in the first line and five syllables in the second line, as seen in examples (11)-(13).

(11)

Gveh hongl laaul nyamh,
do work afraid hardship

Miz lix genl lix danc.
not have eat have wear

If you are afraid of hardship when you work, then you won't have food to eat or clothes to wear.

(12)

Maic laaul duans nangl,
tree afraid peel skin

Wenz laaul dal ndangl byadt.
person afraid eye nose burn

A tree is afraid of its bark getting peeled, while a person is afraid of his eyes and nose getting burned (of having a sad grieving heart). In other words, be kind or you will end up hurting someone.

- (13)
- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>Bux gac bians ndil,
cl kill change good</p> <p>Aul bil meeuz xib hac.
want year cat ten five</p> | <p>For a murderer or criminal to change his ways you will have to wait till the fifteenth day of the year of the cat. In other words, (since there is no year of the cat), it's almost impossible to change bad character.</p> |
|---|--|

There are also rare occurrences of three line structures. Two examples follow in (14) and (15).

- (14)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Xeeuh boh gugt,
generation father tiger</p> <p>Xeeuh leg nyanl,
generation child wild-cat</p> <p>Xeeuh laangl duz jih seenc.
generation after CL yellow weasel</p> | <p>The father's generation is like a tiger, the son's generation is like a wild cat, and those to come are like a yellow weasel. In other words, later generations will not be as good as former (if there is no teaching or training).</p> |
|---|---|
- (15)
- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>Nueeil feangz liangz haadt,
snow frost cold morning</p> <p>Nueeil raanl liangz jux,
snow grain cold storm</p> <p>Gamz dungx liangs bil.
hard stomach cold year</p> | <p>Frost is cold for a morning, snow is cold for a storm, but a cold heart is cold for a year. In other words, bitterness lasts long.</p> |
|---|---|

Rhythm and rhyme. Because most of the proverbs have the same number of syllables in each of their two lines, they also have a certain rhythm, not unlike Bouyei songs. Other devices which give the proverbs a rhythmic quality are parallel grammatical structures, repetition, alliteration, and rhyme. Parallel grammatical structures are related to repetition in that verbs and classifiers are repeated in the second line. Examples follow in (16) to (20).

(16)

Rooml seuc banz laail,
gather little become a-lot

Rooml ramx banz damz.
gather water become pool

When you gather a little at a time, you will end up with a lot, just as when water gathers together it becomes a big pool.

(17)

Gveh naz miz laaul laail,
do field not afraid a-lot

Gveh meangl miz laaul raiz.
do ditch not afraid long

When you work the fields you are not afraid of there being a lot; when you dig a ditch (for irrigation) you are not afraid of it being long. In other words, don't be afraid of hard work.

(18)

Aul duz bidt sos hanl,
want cl duck call crow

Aul duz meeuz sos yaus.
want cl cat call bark

You want a duck to crow like a rooster, and you want a cat to bark like a dog. In other words, do things appropriately.

(19)

Bux goons ndaix bangz ndil,
person ahead get cloth good

Bux langl ndaix vaε roix.
person back get pants ripped

The person who goes first gets the good cloth, but the person who goes later gets ripped pants. In other words, better early than late.

(20)

Ndaail naz ndaail dangz gauh,
weed field(wet) weed arrive corner

Ndaail rih ndaail dangz heenz.
weed field(dry) weed arrive side

You have to weed the rice fields all the way to the corners; you have to weed the fields to all sides. In other words, you need to complete your job, don't stop when you are not finished.

Parallel structures also function with alliteration, as seen in examples (21), (22).

(21)

Genl haux aul uadt nac uadt ndangl,
eat rice want wipe face wipe nose

After you eat, you wipe your face and nose; after you speak, you watch your face and back. In other words, you

Gaangc haaus aul rel nac rel langl.
speak word want attend face attend
back

need to be careful of the words you
speak and the effect it may have on
others, don't speak ill of others.

(22)

Faz miz dauc jic daaus naix,
iron not come several time rust

Iron will not rust several times; you
can only peel the bark of a tree so
many times. In other words, there are
limits to things.

Faix miz dunc jic daaus nangl.
tree not peel several time skin

In (21) we see alliteration in *Genl haux* and *Gaangc haaus*. In (22) we find it in *faz* and *faix*, *dauc* and *dunc*, and *naix* and *nangl*.

We also see examples of two types of rhyme in these two examples. In (21) *ndangl* at the end of the first line and *langl* at the end of the second line are an ideal external rhyme. In (22) *naix* at the end of the first line rhymes with *faix* at the beginning of the second line. The first type of rhyme is rare in Bouyei proverbs, but the second type is prolific. The second type is described in Hartmann (1992). He says it is an "external rhyme linking the last or external syllable of the first line with the first, second, or third syllable of the next." He says that this type of rhyme occurs in couplets of Thai proverbs and Tai Dam proverbs and other verse forms. He quotes a Thai proverb inscribed in 1283, and a similar Tai Dam proverb. The Bouyei also have a version of this proverb, seen in (23).

(23)

Lix ramx dongz lix byal,
have water together have fish

Where there is water there is fish; where
there are wet fields there is rice. In other
words, where there are poor people,
there will be someone to take care of
them.

Lix naz dongz lix haux.
have field(wet) together have rice

It is remarkable to note the translation of the old Thai two-couplet proverb. "In the water there are fish. In the paddy fields there is rice. The lord of the realm takes them not. He would invest them in his people." (Hartmann 1992). This similarity in structure, rhyme and meaning shows a definite relationship between the Bouyei in the far north and the Thai in the south.

This type of external rhyme is also found in the structure of Libo Bouyei songs as described in Snyder (1996). It should be noted that to constitute a rhyme the tones do not have to match, so it is therefore called a 'loose' rhyme as opposed to a 'strict' rhyme where tones match.

For more examples of these structures see the Appendix.

Content. The content of Bouyei proverbs is rich and varied. In Zhuang-Dong Language Family Proverbs 1987, there are ten different categories that the proverbs fall under. These are: social conduct; understanding reality; studying and training; teaching; group harmony; will power; social class; diligence and frugality; marriage and family; and production and weather. I have condensed these and modified them for the purposes of this study. Topics discussed in this paper are: home and family; humility, sincerity and hospitality; diligence and planning; and harmony in relationships.

In this section, I will share a few proverbs for each topic that exemplify characteristics and values of the Bouyei. Although we are extracting generalities, most of these proverbs are directed at certain people in certain situations. In taking a detailed look at these proverbs, we will get closer to knowing what the Bouyei are really like. For those interested in taking a longer look, the Appendix contains thirty one more proverbs.

Home and family. The Bouyei are a very family-oriented people. Family includes the extended family. Grandparents are very much involved in the raising of the grandchildren, (24). The oldest in the family is responsible for making sure the parents are taken care of, (25).

(24)

Yah daais haec ndal,
old-lady grandma give baby-carrier

Baus dal oh xoh.
old-man grandpa give name

Grandmother gives the baby carrier (or the baby shower) while grandfather gives the child its name. Each one from the generation before has their part in starting the child off in life.

(25)

Bol laaux bol lix fenz,
mountain big mountain have firewood

Wenz laaux xiangx boh meeh.
person big care father mother

A big mountain has a lot of firewood; the oldest in the family takes care of the parents.

A home needs both parents to make a good home, (26) and (27), and children will be as strong and as smart as their parents, (28) and (29).

(26)

Raanz lix boh xih ndil,
home have father then good

A home with a father is like a home
with a fire, warm and comfortable.

Raanz lix fiz xih rauc.
home have fire then warm

(27)

Buz ndeeul gveh fiz gveh namc
person one do fire do water

Each family needs one person to be
fire, to judge, to punish, and one to be
water, to calm down, to comfort.

(28)

Meeh ndil leg dongx ndil,
mother good child same good

A child will be as good as his mother; a
child will be as fat (or as strong) as his
mother.

Meeh biz leg dongx biz.
mother fat child same fat

(29)

Boh gvaail leg dongz gvaail,
father smart child together smart

A child will be as smart as his father,
just as the fermented toufu will be as
good as the liquor used to ferment it.

Ail jeengl lauc dongz hans.
fermented-toufu ferment liquor together
bitter

Not only will a child “wear his father’s shoes,” but a daughter-in-law will also be like her mother-in-law, (30), in whose house she will live with her husband and children.

(30)

Leg danc haaiz boh,
child wear shoe father

A child will follow in the footsteps of
his father, a daughter-in-law will model
her mother-in-law.

Baex aul uns meeh.
daughter-in-law want pattern mother

It is important, therefore, for parents to be good models for their children to follow. Love and discipline go hand in hand, as the following four proverbs illustrate, (31)-(34).

(31)

Soonl leg miz aul maic,
teach child not want tree

Dois baix miz haaus saangs
toward daughter-in-law not words harsh

Don't use a stick to teach a child;
don't use harsh words in talking to
your daughter-in-law. In other words,
don't be harsh in disciplining those
under you, instead use respect to
teach.

(32)

Jaiz leg jaiz dungx,
love child love stomach

Gaaiah bagt sos jaiz.
don't mouth put love

You need to love a child with your
heart, not just with your mouth. In
other words, you need to love in deed,
not just with your words.

(33)

Riangl vaaiz diz vaaiz miz jeed,
tail buffalo hit buffalo not hurt

Boh meeh ndas leg miz rox nyaus.
father mother scold child not know
anger

A water buffalo will hit himself with
his tail and it won't hurt, like a parent
will scold his child and the child
needn't get angry.

(34)

Lix mal miz xug,
have dog not tie

Lix leg miz soonl.
have child not teach

If you do not teach your child, it's like
having a dog and not tying him up. In
other words, he will just run wild.

There comes a time when children grow up and have their own families. They
no longer sleep in the same bed with their mother, but 'get their own quilt', (35),
(36).

(35)

Wenz laaux banl mog,
person big distribute quilt

Rog laaux banl roongz.
bird big distribute nest

When a person gets bigger he gets his
own quilt; when a bird gets bigger he
gets his own nest.

(36)

Faix laaux banl ngaamz,
tree big (old) branch-off fork

Wenz laaux banl raanz.
person big branch-off home

People branch off to make a new home
when they get older just like when a
tree gets bigger it branches off.

Humility, sincerity, and hospitality. The Bouyei value humility. Thinking too highly of oneself brings its own consequences, as seen in (37)-(40).

(37)

Ruaml mengz daangc,
armspan you measure

heb mengz heb.
handspan you handspan

You measure with your armspan and
handspan. In other words, you will
only accept what you do, you think
your way is best.

(38)

Gvaail laail rox ringx,
smart a-lot know roll

Linc laail rox dog las.
flexible a-lot know fall under

If you are too smart you will roll
back down to the bottom; if you are
too flexible you will fall down. In
other words, too much of a virtue can
become a source of pride which will
lead to your downfall.

(39)

Dogt bail ndail gemz,
fall go inside hole

His bos remz miz dauc.
Air blow wind not come

The wind doesn't blow in a hole. In
other words, when you fall from a
high position, you don't have any
more power or influence.

(40)

Gaangc haaus laauxlenz,
Speak word big-big

Leg manz rabt baagt.
Cl sweet-potato stick-in mouth

If you speak very big words, you will
get a sweet potato stuck in your
mouth. In other words, be careful
how you speak, don't boast.

We all have faults, but some of us have a hard time seeing them ourselves. (41) is the Libo version; (42) is the Wangmo version. Even in different regions, separated by 200 kilometers, the proverbs can be very similar.

(41)

Max miz rox nac raiz,
Horse not know face long

Yeangz miz rox heangl dinc.
Sheep not know tail short

A horse does not know that his face is long; a sheep does not know that his tail is short. In other words, we don't know our own appearances, faults, shortcomings.

(42)

Vaaiz miz ranl vaaiz gaul dac,
Buffalo not see buffalo horn stick-out

Max miz ranl nac max raiz.
Horse not see face horse long

A water buffalo cannot see if his horns are sticking out and a horse cannot see that he has a long face. In other words, we quite often cannot see ourselves what faults we have.

The Bouyei value sincerity and integrity, (43), (44).

(43)

Ngaaz box miz wans,
Rice crispy not soft

Haaus mbangl miz yauc.
Word thin not warm

Crispy rice isn't soft as thin words aren't warm. In other words, speaking sincerely is the way to speak warmly.

(44)

Byac reegt miz dauc wenl.
Thunder yell not come rain

It is thundering very loudly but there is no rain. In other words, you are speaking empty words, you are not putting any actions to your words.

It is very important for the Bouyei to be polite and hospitable, (45)-(47).

(45)

Wenz aul laix,
person need polite

Faix aul mag.
wood need ink

A person needs to be polite just like wood needs to have an inkmark to tell you where to put the pieces together.

(46)

Haaus gaangc dongz hauc,
word speak together peaceful

Dodt lauc byus yaz waanl.
drink liquor empty also sweet

When there's pleasant speech, even when the liquor is all gone, the atmosphere will still be pleasant.

(47)

Hes dangz miz rox naail,
guest arrive not know talk

Wenz daail miz rox daic.
person die not know cry

When a guest comes and you don't
know what to say, it's like when a
person dies and you don't know how
to cry.

Diligence and planning. Working hard is definitely a value for the Bouyei,
(48)-(54).

(48)

Gveh naz gveh rih,
do field(wet) do field(dry)

Duz bih ndaml namc.
Cl dragonfly alight water

You are planting your fields like a
dragonfly alighting on the water. In
other words, if you don't work hard
enough, there's no use in working.

Lazy folks are not afraid of excuses, (49), (50).

(49)

Degt byal laaul yol,
hit fish afraid fungus

Laih boh laaul sigt.
move mountain afraid sweat

You are going fishing but you are
afraid of getting athlete's foot; you are
moving a mountain but afraid of sweat.
In other words, you won't get anything
done if you are afraid of hardship.

(50)

Jaangx-haadt laaul ramz raaiz
morning afraid water dew

Ngaaiz leux laaul ndic ndaadt.
brunch finish afraid sun hot

In the morning you are afraid of the
dew; after brunch you are afraid it's
too hot. A lazy person will find all
kinds of excuses for not going out to
do his work.

The diligent worker is not afraid of working hard because he knows the
results, (51)-(54).

(51)

Bux ganx gveh ngonz ndit,
cl diligent do day clear

Bux jigt gveh ngonz wenl.
cl lazy do day rain

Diligent workers work on sunny days,
lazy folks work on rainy days. In other
words, the diligent work more because
there are more sunny days than rainy
days.

(52)

Gol songl miz laaul ndadt,
cl onion not afraid nip

Byagt huc miz laaul gvanz.
vegetable onion not afraid cut

Onions are not afraid of being nipped or cut. In other words, don't be afraid of hardships because you will grow stronger through them.

(53)

Ganl bail ganl dauc dih leeux bol.
jin(~pound) go *jin*(~pound) come move
finish mountain

Little by little you can move a mountain.

(54)

Seml nyemx sel,
heart deeply-research book

Ngez banz longz.
snake become dragon

If you study hard, you can go from being a snake to a dragon. In other words, if you study hard, a small thing can become a big thing, you will prosper.

Work and life involve appropriate planning, and then you will reap the rewards, (55), (56).

(55)

Lix haux miz luanl genl,
have rice not careless eat

Lix fenx miz luanl xus.
have firewood not careless put

When you have enough rice, don't be careless in how you eat it; when you have firewood, don't be careless in using it. In other words, you need to plan out the important things, or else you may not have enough later.

(56)

Mul saaml ganl rox mac,
pig three *jin*(~pound) know grow

Xax hac ganl rox hed.
machete five *jin*(~pound) know wear-
down

A three-pound pig will grow, a five-pound machete will wear out (from grinding or using). In other words, your assets can grow if you wait, but they can also wear down if you just keep spending them.

Harmony in relationships. The Bouyei value the need to live in harmony with others. They know it is important to look out for each other, (57)-(58).

(57)

Dah lix ramx byal xaaux soongz,
river has water fish only-then stay

Ndoongl lix faix rog xaaux roongl.
forest have tree bird only-then nest

Only when the river has water will the fish stay and make their home; only when the forest has trees will the birds stay and make their homes. In other words, you need a support system to survive.

(58)

Xib leg mengl yabt mal ndail.
ten child hand close come inside

Ten fingers come together to make a fist. In other words, we need to take care of our own (family, relatives).

Cooperation and togetherness will get the job done, (59)-(61).

(59)

Wenz laail dobt mengl ndiadt,
person many clap hand noise

Dongz mianx naamh saauh bingz.
together step dirt only level

When everyone claps their hands they will make a noise; when everyone steps on the ground together then it will get level. In other words, we need to cooperate and work together to see results.

(60)

Xib bux bis naaiz xos gonc rinl xih lub,
ten cl spit saliva then piece rock then wet

Xib bux qyol bux wenz xih runs.
ten cl lift cl person then get-up

If ten people spit then the rock will get wet; if ten people lift a person then they can get him up. In other words, if you work together you can do it.

(61)

Xib duez max xamh xaaux,
ten cl horse together corral

Miz laaul maz nyiec jees.
not afraid what grass old

Ten horses together in a corral are not afraid of old grass. In other words, when people are together they don't have to care about a bad situation.

Conflicts are to be avoided (62), (63).

(62)

Dal laail baauh miz laul.
eye (knot in wood) many plane not
smooth

When there are too many knots in the wood, you can't plane it smooth. In other words, if there are too many conflicts between people, they may not be able to be worked out, so don't let this happen.

(63)

Dongz dac dongz mab,
together hit together fight

If you are always fighting, we are going to end up using a dustpan to cover someone when they die.

Jil gvab los his.
dustpan cover break breath

2.2 *Proverbs within songs*

The Bouyei are famous locally for their traditional songs. Each region has its own particular melody, but many of the rules are the same. There are several genre of songs, each used for its own particular occasion. Young people sing love songs and sad songs. Hosts sing welcoming songs, testing songs, and drinking songs. There are mourning songs, teasing songs, working songs, and songs while playing games and whistling leaves (Snyder 1996 and Ma 1995). It is beyond the scope of this paper to go into detail on the types of Bouyei songs, their melody and structure, but here we will examine some of the folk wisdom found in Bouyei songs.

Some proverbs are also part of songs. Two examples follow, (64) and (65).

(64)

Faix jaangl naangh deg rumz,
tree middle top is wind

A tree on top of the mountain gets hit by the wind; so also a single person often gets falsely accused.

Wenz gvaangl-goonls deg laaih.
person single is falsely-accused

Laaih gveh nuangx rag mas,
accuse do younger-sib steal fruit

You accused your younger sister (the one singing the song) of stealing fruit, but I didn't get to nibble any.

Bas miz nyamc jic ndeenl,
mouth not nibble several cl

Fengz miz gaml jic jiangs,
hand not hold several stem

My hand did not even get a hold of any stems.

Miz ndaix jic jiang jic nyiangs.
not get several stem several stem

(65)

Gvas dah lumz dengx,
cross river forget stick

You crossed the river and then forgot
your walking stick; you got a new
(fish)net and then forgot your old trap.

Ndaix meangx mos lumz saiz,
get net new forget trap

Ndaix gaail jaaul ndil-jaiz lumz bix,
get piece husband pretty forget brother

You got a good-looking husband now
and you forgot your older brother
(former boyfriend).

Ndaiz gaail gvaanl dongz-lemz lumz
ngo.
get piece husband same forget me

The verses in (64) are an example of part of a sad song sung by a young girl in her unsuccessful attempt at getting a boyfriend. She ‘stands alone on the top of the mountain’, no one to defend her, and she gets ‘hit with the wind’, accused of taking ‘fruit’ that does not belong to her. The metaphors are as follows: she is the ‘tree’, he is the ‘fruit’. But she did not get a ‘nibble’, she did not even get to ‘hold a stem’. She did not get the young man’s attention. The proverb is found in the first two lines. The wisdom in this song/proverb is that it is not good to be alone. In Bouyei culture, it is not good to attempt such an important endeavor as finding a life partner and do it alone. Otherwise you may have to defend yourself alone against false accusations.

The verses in (65) are part of a song sung by a young man whose former girlfriend found someone else to marry. He is the *dengx* ‘walking stick’ that she used to be with; now she has gotten a new *meangx* ‘fishnet’ and has forgotten him, her former ‘trap’. The meanings can go deeper; she used to depend on him, he used to help her, just like a ‘walking stick’ helps us cross rivers. A ‘net’ and a ‘trap’ are used to catch fish; the young man ‘catches’ the young girl. The second couplet expands on the first couplet. The first couplet is the proverb used to confront someone who is ungrateful and forgets his friend who has helped him before.

* In (64) we see the five syllable per line structure, except for six in the sixth line. In (65) we see an irregular syllable structure. Both (64) and (65) have examples of external rhyme; in (64) *mas* and *bas* in lines three and four; in (65) *dengx* and *meangx* in lines one and two.

3. Conclusion

Bouyei songs and proverbs are rich and full of the wisdom and culture of the Bouyei. One only has to hear them being sung and used in everyday speech to know how they have lasted hundreds of years without being written down.

Through systematic study, we have seen that the Bouyei value harmony in relationships, humility, sincerity, diligence and planning. They are characterized as friendly, hospitable, family-oriented, and hard-working. All these values and characteristics, plus more, are revealed in their proverbs and songs. Besides giving us a look at what the Bouyei are like, this study has provided us with more evidence of the relationship between the Bouyei and other Tai cultures. I also hope the proverbs and songs examined in this paper will provide material beneficial to the ongoing study of Tai folk wisdom and literature.

Appendix

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(1) Mingh yes lac saaml ngaamz.
life at under three fork</p> | <p>Your life is not yet at the crossroads.
In other words, you don't know what
the future will be so you don't need
to complain about it.</p> |
| <p>(2) Mail neemz jiml byaaic.
thread with needle walk</p> | <p>Thread goes where the needle goes.
In other words, we all follow our
leaders.</p> |
| <p>(3) Heeuc deeml linx doc lix dungx hab.
tooth and tongue both have
together bite</p> | <p>When you bite you use both your
teeth and your tongue. In other
words, when there is a disagreement,
it is often both sides who are at fault.</p> |
| <p>(4) Byaail wanl laaul meenx mad daail.
walk road afraid step ant die</p> | <p>When walking along you are afraid of
stepping on ants and killing them. In
other words, you are being far too
careful.</p> |
| <p>(5) Leg daauz wans ndil wenc.
cl peach soft good squeeze</p> | <p>A soft peach is easy to squeeze. In
other words, it's easy to take
advantage of a weak-willed person.</p> |
| <p>(6) Miz gel waaiz dag gab dagt meeh.
not feed buffalo male catch locust
female</p> | <p>You are neglecting the water buffalo
so you can go and catch a locust. In,
other words, you should do what's
appropriate and focus your time and
energy on the important things.</p> |
| <p>(7) Meeuz gvax mengl hidt saaml bil.
cat grab hand alert three year</p> | <p>When a cat grabs your hand you
remember it for three years. In other
words, even though some small thing
happens to you, you usually
remember it for a long time.</p> |
| <p>(8) Gah bis naaiz gah riaz.
alone spit saliva alone lick</p> | <p>You will end up licking your own
saliva. In other words, what you do
or say will come back to you.</p> |

- (9) Xib leg mengl raiz miz dongz-hauc.
ten child hand long not same
Each of the ten fingers on your hand are not the same length. In other words, everyone is different.
- (10) Ndaix byaail fengz jaiz aul gog
jeenl.
get tip hand love want forearm arm
You get a fingertip and then you want the upper arm. In other words, you get an inch and you want a foot, you keep wanting more and more.
- (11) Waangl maic raaux bail ndail ringz.
horizontal tree bamboo-pole go
inside city
You are trying to get a long pole through the city gates sideways. In other words, you are being stubborn.
- (12) Gval sis ndil yuc,
pot four good carry
Huc miz ndil gead.
container not good carry
A small pot is easy to carry; a bigger container is not easy to carry. In other words, you will take on something easy but not something hard.
- (13) Vaanl miz gvas noh,
tasty not pass meat
Soh miz gvas leg neeh.
straight not pass child
You can't get anything that is tastier than meat; you can't get anything straighter than a child. A child will tell you things straight.
- (14) Jigt-jaag bux haagt laaux,
lazy cl leader afraid
Duz gvaaul gais miz dodt.
cl spider chicken not peck
Leaders don't like lazy folks, just like chickens don't eat spiders.
- (15) Gvaail xih gvaail ndaek mbugt,
smart then smart inside blanket
Hugt xih hugt dungx meeh.
stupid then stupid stomach mother
If you are smart, you were smart from when you were wrapped up in blankets; if you are stupid, you were stupid from when you were in your mother's stomach.
- (16) Haux miz xug gvaais moc,
rice not ready blame pot
Banz hoc gvaais denh raanz.
become poor blame base home
If your rice is not cooked enough, you blame the pot; if you become poor, you blame the plot of land your house is on. In other words, when something wrong happens we are ready to blame anything outside ourselves.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>(1) Rox banz dieh oonl nyaanz,
know become bush thorn grass</p> <p>Lac aul maanl bail das.
about-to want sheet go dry-in-sun</p> | <p>You know there are thorns in the bush and yet you still want to take your sheets out to dry there. In other words, you know it is the wrong thing to do but you still want to do it.</p> |
| <p>(2) Fih dauc fead ndiab mbinl,
yet come wing think fly</p> <p>Fih dauc dinl ndiab byaaic.
yet come foot think walk</p> | <p>You don't have wings yet and you want to fly; you don't have feet yet and you want to walk. In other words, you are not ready to do something yet but you are still determined to do it.</p> |
| <p>(3) Dinl mengl namc mbol,
foot hand water spring</p> <p>Boh meeh namc waail.
father mother water dam</p> | <p>If you have a skill, it's like having spring water, but if you lean on your parents, it's like irrigation water.</p> |
| <p>(4) Gal nauz gal roh,
leg say leg straight</p> <p>Daangz jauc-hos xih gauz.
arrive knee then bent</p> | <p>Your leg says that it is straight, but when you get to the knee, it bends. In other words, you don't know your own shortcomings.</p> |
| <p>(5) Mid hauc miz ramc jic-laail baiz,
knife sharp not chop several time</p> <p>Ronl jail miz byaaic jic-laail daaus.
road far not walk several time</p> | <p>If the knife is sharp you don't have to chop too many times, if the road is long you won't walk it too many times. In other words, the way things are often determines what we will do.</p> |
| <p>(6) Saaml hat runs xaux
three morning get-up early</p> <p>Daangs ndaix ngonx hoongl.
arrive get day work</p> | <p>If you get up early three mornings, you'll have gotten an extra day of work done.</p> |
| <p>(7) Nab gal-jas yaz miz dauc diengl,
press smoking-rack also not come sugar</p> <p>Nab gal-jiangz yaz miz dauc ramx.
press pot-stand also not come water</p> | <p>You can't get sugar by pressing the smoke rack, and you can't get water by pressing the pot stand. In other words, you can't get something out of nothing.</p> |

- (8) Raab benh bail,
carry fertilizer go

Raab haux os.
carry rice out

If you carry the fertilizer in, then you'll carry the rice out. In other words, you get out of something what you put in.
- (9) Qyas-faz qyus lac liange yac mag,
ugly at under umbrella also plain

Ndil-jaiz qyus lac joob yac ndoongc.
pretty at under bamboo-rain-hat also good-looking

Even under an umbrella an ugly person is still plain; even under a bamboo hat a pretty person is still good-looking.
- (10) Lauc hans aul peengz ndeeul,
liquor bitter want bottle one

Wenz ndil aul bux doh.
person good want cl single

When the liquor is good you only need one bottle, when a person is good you only need one of them. In other words, quality is better than quantity.
- (11) Duz nyaauh aangs namc rail,
cl shrimp like water clear

Byal luail aangs namc dungs.
fish loach like water muddy

Shrimp like clear water; loaches like muddy water. In other words, everyone has an environment that is just right for them.
- (12) Lix bux hoc xaux lix bux gvaangl,
have cl poor only-then have cl rich

Lix bux saangl xaux lix bux dams.
have cl tall only-then have cl short

You can tell you have rich people only if you have poor people. You can tell you have short people only if you have tall people.
- (13) Gol-nyec namc-naail xiangl,
small-grass dew raise

Hoc miz dams wenz.
poor not short person

Dew can make the small grass grow; being poor doesn't make a person short (of character or value).
- (14) Mal heenc genl noh,
dog yellow eat meat

Mal haaul ams sueix.
dog white carry(on back) beat

The yellow dog eats your meat, but *the white dog gets beaten for it*. In other words, someone is getting blamed for what they didn't do.

- (15) Gamc vaaiz dag lix leg,
force buffalo male have child

Gamc gais bux dauc jais.
force chicken male come egg
- It's like making a bull give birth to a calf, or a rooster lay an egg. In other words, it's quite an impossible thing you're trying to do.

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