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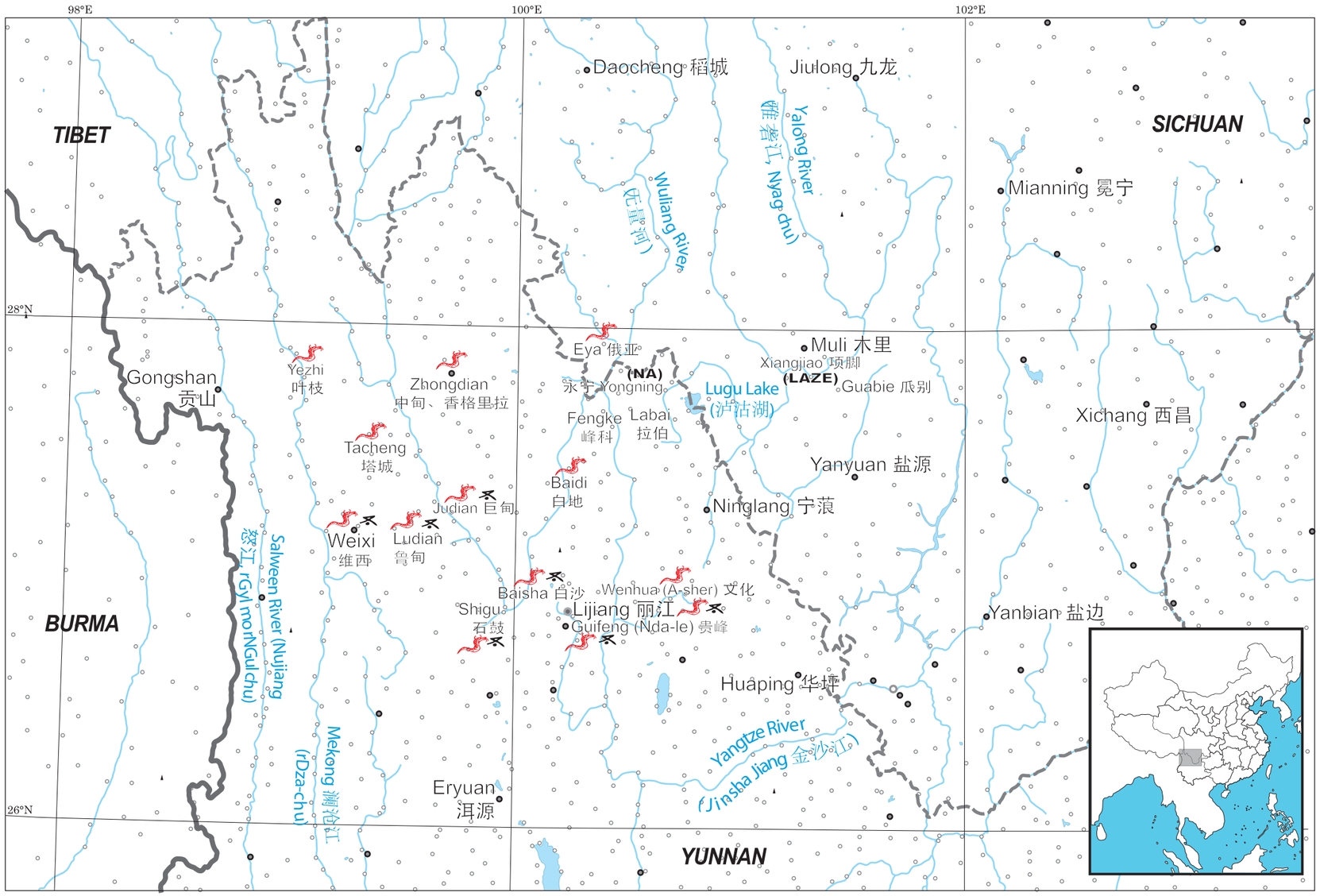
Introduction

In the field of Sino-Tibetan studies, there are few languages with a long-standing written tradition. Of these, the Naxi pictographic tradition encapsulates unique information about the Naxi and their language and holds special promise for research. The language of the Naxi rituals raises a range of issues, such as: How old are the characters of the Naxi script? What is the origin of the seemingly strange words and turns of phrase found in the rituals? The philological study of the Naxi tradition is greatly complicated by the fact that Naxi books were passed from one generation to the next as mnemonic summaries of the rituals rather than complete transcriptions, unlike Tibetan or Chinese texts. The absence of standardization of Naxi texts allowed the Naxi priests some freedom when copying books; this resulted in great diversification.

The field of linguistics can contribute some evidence and provide some tools to address these complex topics. The approach adopted here consists in looking at the Naxi facts in the light of a comparison between several dialects of the Naxi language and, beyond Naxi proper, a comparison with other Sino-Tibetan languages that are closely related to Naxi.

Naxi is the largest and best-described language of the Naish branch of Sino-Tibetan languages. Two other languages of this branch, spoken in areas that do not have pictographs, will be mentioned: Na and Laze, spoken in Yongning and Muli, respectively (these two language names are printed in capital letters on the map). The analysis of detailed examples reveals how this comparative work sheds light on seemingly obscure aspects of the language used in the Naxi rituals.



- village
- county seat
- major city

(NA) language name
area with pictographic manuscripts (to-mba)
area with syllabic manuscripts (ge-ba)

Scale
0 50 100 km

Naxi books and the Naxi language

The language of the Naxi rituals is close to the ordinary language, what is known as colloquial Naxi. This is due to the fact that, strictly speaking, there was no clergy among the Naxi: the practitioners of the Naxi religion, the Naxi priests, did not constitute a separate social class.[i] Monks at a Tibetan Buddhist monastery learned written Tibetan and performed rituals in Tibetan, irrespective of their native language; by contrast, Naxi priests did not need to study another language in order to learn the rituals, even though they did need to learn by rote some proper names, such as those of mythological creatures, and some unusual terms and turns of phrase. This means that research into the language of the rituals can build on the research being done on colloquial Naxi and vice versa.

Anthropologists and linguists have a common interest in transcribing large amounts of texts. The transcription of oral renderings of Naxi texts has been a concern of researchers ever since these texts came under scholarly scrutiny at the turn of the twentieth century. As a result, philological and linguistic work progressed hand in hand, sometimes as a coordinated effort, such as when the linguist Chang K'un (张琨) worked out the sound system of Naxi to devise a transcription system for recording the pronunciation of Naxi characters.[ii] The dictionaries by Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu and by Joseph Rock constitute important lexicographic references as well as importance resources to understand the Naxi writing systems: the pictographic system—called /to˧mbɑ˩/ in Naxi (hereafter *to-mba*) and Dongba (东巴) in Chinese—and the syllabic system.[iii]

To this day, annotated editions of Naxi ritual texts actually constitute the largest available translated corpora in Naxi. In addition to collections such as that by Fu Maoji, which predate the official definition of a transcription for so-called “Standard Naxi” in the 1980s, there now exists a massive, one-hundred-volume edition of annotated and translated pictographic manuscripts.[iv]

However, anthropologists and linguists diverge in the amount of attention that they pay to fine details in pronunciation. To the linguist, these details provide crucial hints about

the history of the language and the rituals. But first, some essential notions about the Naxi language should be mentioned.

Like all of the world's languages, Naxi has various dialects. The city of Lijiang can be considered the center of the Naxi-speaking area; in Chinese scholarship, its dialect is called "Standard Naxi." As one moves away from Lijiang, there are differences from place to place in the pronunciation of the vowels, consonants, and tones; there are also some differences in the lexicon and in the grammar. The point of view adopted in Chinese scholarship consists of using the phrase "Naxi dialect" for all the language varieties closely related to Naxi—although quite a few of these language varieties are not called Naxi by the speakers themselves and are actually so distant from it that they are not intelligible to Naxi speakers from Lijiang. Chinese linguists distinguish two dialect areas: Western and Eastern.[v] The Western area is relatively homogeneous linguistically; throughout this area, the name of the language (autonym) is "Naxi" (the exact transcription is /nɑ˩hi˧/). (In this article, the phrases "Naxi language" and "Naxi dialects" will be restricted to this area, following the practice of the speakers themselves.) This area largely corresponds with the territory controlled by the feudal lords of Lijiang: the plain of Lijiang had semi-independent rulers as early as the tenth century and until the eighteenth century.[vi] The relative homogeneity of Naxi dialects is due to historical causes. The centralization of power in Lijiang created a degree of linguistic convergence, and the enforcement of conscription presumably played a role in leveling dialect differences: it is generally observed that nonstandard dialects tend to be stigmatized or derided—typically, the dialect of a major city is more prestigious than that of smaller cities and villages—and that conscripts are under strong social pressure to adopt the most prestigious dialect. As for the languages referred to in Chinese scholarship as "Eastern Naxi," they are so diverse that it appears more adequate to refer to them as distinct languages, rather than as dialects of a single language—keeping in mind that there is no clear boundary between a language and a dialect. These languages, referred to in Chinese scholarship as "Naxi dialects," will be referred to here as "Naish languages."[vii]

It is of paramount importance to linguistic research to possess data on various Naish languages, not on one variety only. Minor differences in pronunciation within the Naxi area proper are best studied through comparison with other Naish languages. Suppose,

for instance, that a *to-mba* priest from the village of Nda-le (to the south of Lijiang; see map) pronounces "horn" as /k^hɑ˧/ whereas a priest from Old Town of Lijiang pronounces this word as /k^ho˧/, with a different vowel. This difference in pronunciation is not reflected in the writing; it is solely due to a difference in the Naxi dialects of the priests, who, when reciting rituals, pronounce such common words as they would in everyday conversation. It is tempting for researchers whose interest lies in the Naxi tradition to adopt a standard transcription, overlook dialect differences, and convert all the transcribed data into Standard Naxi. A standard transcription system was indeed developed in the 1950s, selecting the dialect of the city of Lijiang as the norm.[viii] International Phonetic Alphabet symbols for the sounds of Naxi were selected, and a Romanized script was created. Although this transcription system is not actually used among the Naxi, it has served as a standard for researchers. One consequence is that a transcriber working with a priest whose pronunciation differed from the standard did not actually transcribe that dialect on its own terms: instead, the transcriber converted the sounds into the standard transcription. This choice was made for the sake of convenience: standardization allows the relatively rapid training of large teams of transcribers. Requiring each transcriber to work out the entire phonetic system of the dialect of each speaker would have been unrealistic since this requires solid training in linguistics and a painstaking analysis of the language variety under study.

For linguists, however, the fine details whereby dialects differ from one another are precious clues to the history of the Naxi language. When a dialectal difference is observed, all the words that belong in the same phonetic set are examined systematically. For example, the word "horn" is presented in Table 1 as part of the entire phonetic set to which it belongs.

Standard Naxi (Lijiang Old Town)	Nda-le Naxi	Meaning	Correspondence between vowels
$k^ho˧$	$k^hɑ˧$	‘horn’	o:ɑ
$k^ho˥$	$k^ho˥$	‘to kill (animal)’	o:o
$k^ho˧$	$k^hɑ˧$	‘noise’	o:ɑ
$k^ho˧$	$k^hɑ˧$	‘hole’	o:ɑ
$lɑ˩jɤ˥k^ho˧$	$lɑ˩jɤ˧k^hɑ˥$	‘sleeve’	o:ɑ
o˩	ɑ˩	‘turquoise’	o:ɑ
o˧	ɑ˧	‘trunk (of tree)’	o:ɑ
ʂo˧ɭo˧	sɑ˧lɑ˧	‘bone’	o:ɑ
ho˩	ho˩	‘rib’	o:o

Table 1. Some correspondences between two Naxi dialects: Lijiang Old Town (defined as the standard variety of Naxi in China) and Nda-le (in the Lijiang plain).

The first two examples, “horn” and “to kill,” have the same vowel in Standard Naxi. However, the fact that they have different vowels in Nda-le Naxi shows that they have two distinct historical origins. It is a basic principle of historical linguistics that sounds are not expected to change at random: the presence of a vowel /ɑ/ in the word for “horn” in Nda-le Naxi is not due to chance. The presence of other examples exhibiting the same sound correspondences, such as “noise” and “hole,” puts to rest any suspicion that the vowel correspondence o:ɑ for “horn” is due to some unaccountable anomaly.

“Horn” and “to kill” must therefore be assumed to have had different pronunciations at a time before Standard Naxi and Nda-le Naxi split apart (due to historical events such as migrations). If only one variety of Naxi were documented, these pieces of historical information would be irretrievably lost. As more dialects of Naxi are described, linguistic investigation can proceed further. In the case of the data in Table 1, crucial evidence comes from another Naish language: the language spoken in Yongning—referred to by different authors as Yongning Na, Mosuo, or Moso.[ix] In Yongning Na, the words that have a vowel correspondence oːɑ between Standard Naxi and Nda-le Naxi all have an uvular initial consonant: an initial pronounced further back in the mouth than the velar /k/. It is plausible that these uvular consonants are of some antiquity in the Naish languages. The crucial evidence comes from a highly conservative language of the Sino-Tibetan family, which is distantly related to the Naish languages: the words that have an uvular consonant in Yongning Na also have an uvular initial in Rgyalrong, a language spoken in Sichuan, China.[x] The interpretation is that, in the course of the historical evolution which led to Standard Naxi, the uvular consonants merged with the velar consonants without leaving any traces; in Nda-le Naxi, they also merged with the velars, but before they disappeared, they influenced the pronunciation of the following vowel in such a way that the vowel *a following uvulars and the vowel *a following velars had different evolutions. (Note that the asterisk, *, is used to indicate reconstructed forms, i.e. hypotheses about past forms, as opposed to forms found in the Naish languages as we observe them today.)

Therefore, dialectal differences are essential for research; in this respect, the official creation of a standard transcription for Naxi was a mixed blessing. It would be a valuable resource for linguists to have transcriptions of rituals as chanted by priests from the widest possible range of places within the Naxi area. Language documentation projects should ideally include the collection of the rituals that remain alive in Naish language areas without a written tradition, in particular the counties of Muli (木里), Yanyuan (盐源), Yanbian (盐边) and Mianning (冕宁). If substantial numbers of transcriptions can be produced before these traditions fade from memory, this will yield precious historical insights about the evolution of the Naxi language. Conversely, linguistic research may provide useful insights into Naxi rituals.

Evidence of the age of *to-mba* characters

How old are *to-mba* characters? This is not a simple question. According to Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, the Naxi pictographs developed more than one thousand years ago; Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu hypothesize that major texts of the written Naxi tradition date from the Song dynasty, 960–1279. On the other hand, A. Jackson provocatively argues that this tradition only flourished much later, in the 18th and 19th centuries.[xi] Some hints to the answer could in theory be gleaned from phonetic components within the characters. These phonetic components were developed to remedy the inherent limitations of pictographic writing systems: not many objects, persons, and actions can be represented in a simple pictograph. Pictographic systems therefore tend to be enriched through the combination of two or more basic pictographs, typically using one as a clue to meaning and one as a clue to pronunciation. This is especially well studied in the case of the Chinese writing system.[xii] To take an example in the Naxi script, "village" (pronounced /mbeꟾ/) is represented by the character for "house," which is a highly stylized representation of a house (its roof and timber work and its two side walls), to which the symbol for "snow" is added, drawn inside the "house" character. The "house" pictograph is used for its semantic value: "house" and "village" belong in the same semantic field. The symbol for "snow" serves as a phonetic cue: "snow" is pronounced /mbeꟾ/ and is homophonous with "village." Also, a pictograph is sometimes used simply for its phonetic value, without any visual signal that it is being used for a pronunciation cue and not for its original meaning. For instance, the characters for "monkey" and "life" are both pronounced /yꟿ/; the pictograph for "monkey" can be used to stand for "life."[xiii]

This is of special interest in assessing the age of *to-mba* characters. In the history of the Chinese writing system, simple characters were likewise used for their phonetic value; adding a semantic clue created a new character, and the resulting sets of characters are extremely useful to understand the history of the Chinese language.[xiv] Since the time when the characters were created, the Chinese language underwent considerable phonetic changes, but the characters remained basically unchanged. The phonetic components are therefore unreliable as a cue to the present-day pronunciation of the characters—hence the staggering complexity of Chinese characters for present-day Chinese language learners, who must learn characters whose initial phonetic motivations have long disappeared. For linguists, however, Chinese characters are of great interest because they provide evidence as to which words had similar pronunciations in ancient

Chinese. Applying the same method to the Naxi pictographs, characters which share the same phonetic element call for a closer examination: they could potentially provide hints on sets of homophones or quasi-homophones from when the Naxi pictographs developed. Returning to the example above, does the use of the pictograph for "monkey" to mean "life" in some Naxi texts demonstrate that these words were already pronounced in the same way (or in a very similar way) centuries ago?

The answer to this question is somewhat disappointing: almost all the pictographs used for their phonetic value are transparent, that is, they are used for words that have the same consonants and vowels in the present state of the language (tone is simply overlooked).[xv] This leads to the hypothesis that the Naxi writing system underwent a continuous historical evolution: unlike the Chinese writing system, which remained largely unchanged since its official codification, Naxi pictographs were not standardized, and priests modified them where they found it necessary. When a priest copied a character in which the phonetic element did not coincide neatly with the actual pronunciation of the intended word in his own speech, practical considerations would encourage him to substitute another, more adequate phonetic element. These decisions were not affected by the forces of tradition since the script was not standardized.

This leads to a question for future research: how did the Naxi script evolve from the earliest Naxi manuscripts? The study of the evolution of the characters could reveal changes in the sound system of Naxi and could provide insights into the Naxi language spoken several centuries ago. An ideal basis for addressing this question would consist in studying a large sample of manuscripts, from the oldest (perhaps from the Ming period, 1368–1644) to twentieth-century manuscripts. Using manuscripts of the same rituals would facilitate this type of philological research.

The origin of "strange" words and turns of phrase in *to-mba* rituals

Some words are specific to Naxi rituals: they do not exist in colloquial Naxi and are unintelligible to people who have not been trained in the practice of rituals. Table 2 provides some examples.

Table 2. Some words that differ in the language of the rituals and in colloquial Naxi.

Meaning	Naxi (colloquial)	Learned reading of to-mba character	Page number in Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu 1995	Page number in Rock 1963-1972
moon	he˧me˧	le˩	91	223
sun	ŋi˧mi˧	bi˧	91	22
forest	çi˩	bi˧	144	22
child	zy˥ly˩	by˧	–	26
chicken	æ˩	hjɤ˥	167	191

Linguistic tools can be extremely useful to interpret these words. For example, the word /le˩/ for "moon" has equivalents (cognates) in two other Naish languages: Yongning Na and Laze, a Naish language spoken in the county of Muli, to the northeast of Lijiang Municipality.[xvi] In Yongning Na, "moon" is pronounced /ɬi˧mi˧/; in Laze, it is pronounced /ɬie˧mie˧/. The second syllable in these words can be analyzed as a suffix, like the /mi˧/ in the colloquial Naxi words for "sun" and "moon." Leaving aside this suffix, and only considering the consonants and vowels of the main syllable, the correspondence between the language of Naxi ritual, Na, and Laze is /le:ɬi:ɬie/. The vowel correspondence /e:i:ie/ between Naxi, Na, and Laze is very common, as is the consonant correspondence /l:ɬ:ɬ/. The word /le˩/ in ritual Naxi cannot be a recent borrowing from Yongning Na or Laze, or the vowel in Naxi would be the same as in

the donor language. The presence of the vowel /e/ reveals that this is an archaic word.[xvii]

The conclusion to be drawn from this comparison is that the word for "moon" used in Naxi rituals, /leɻ/, is a word of some antiquity, which has been replaced in colloquial Naxi by the term /heꟾmeꟾ/. The word /leɻ/ has disappeared from colloquial Naxi whereas it has been preserved in the language of rituals. At the time when the word /heꟾmeꟾ/ was coined, it was probably perceived as more familiar or vulgar than the older word, and the priests therefore continued to use /leɻ/, even after this word vanished from colloquial Naxi.

As for the word "chicken," /hjɤʌ/, it has long been analyzed as a Tibetan borrowing,[xviii] though the exact conditions of borrowing need to be worked out (the classical Tibetan word for "chicken" is *bya*; it was brought into Naxi via a Tibetan dialect which remains unidentified). Quite a few notions of the *to-mba* religion are borrowed from Tibetan Buddhism along with numerous proper names. It is somewhat surprising that Tibetan borrowings are mostly restricted to proper names and religious notions given the influence of Tibetan culture in this area, which borders on Tibet. This may be partly accounted for by the limitations of Naxi priests' command of Tibetan; however, another factor may be the way in which Tibetan influence was looked upon by the rulers of the Naxi area and by the Naxi priests. Language is very important in religion, as abundantly documented in the history of Christianity and the use of Latin. It is clear that Buddhist monks trained in Tibetan rituals actively resisted the local language and local cultural practices, which were perceived as threats to orthodoxy. A monk in the village of La-bai (拉伯) who translated Tibetan rituals into the vernacular—using the Tibetan alphabet to transcribe his native language (a Naish language close to Yongning Na)—was persecuted by the monastery authorities with such violence that he was driven to madness.[xix] While the pressure of orthodoxy was probably less intense within the *to-mba* religion, concerns of political orthodoxy no doubt played a role in the evolution of *to-mba* rituals. The *to-mba* religion has sometimes been considered an emanation of folklore and indigenous culture—an age-old primitive religion directly addressing the forces of nature, which survived into the twentieth century as part of popular culture.[xx] This is only part of the story: anthropological and historical research into the Naxi religion reveals the ties between the *to-mba* rituals and the political projects of the Naxi state of Lijiang from the late fourteenth to the mid-eighteenth century. The *to-mba* religion appears to have been used as part of a strategy of territorial expansion, playing,

in effect, the role of an official cult.[xxi] Time and again in the history of the Naxi, the influence of Tibet was a sensitive issue. The creation of family names based on Chinese characters (such as Mu [木] for the ruling clan and He [和] for commoners) is one significant episode in the sinicization of Naxi culture.[xxii] The pressure to adopt Chinese family names makes itself felt to this day in areas where names of Tibetan origins are still used, for example in Yongning, where political tensions lead some local people to insist (in the face of linguistic evidence to the contrary) that their names are purely local and to deny their Tibetan origin. The observation by linguists that the proportion of Tibetan words in Naxi rituals is relatively low may be interpreted as evidence of resilience to Tibetan influence, which is worth investigating further from a historical-anthropological point of view.

In addition to individual words (typically nouns) in the rituals that differ from the everyday language, there also exist special turns of phrase (morphosyntax). Here is an example from the ritual /to˥kʰɯ˥/:

kɣ˧pʰɘ˩	kɣ˧hɘ˩	kɣ˧nɑ˩	kɣ˧ʂɯ˩	kɣ˧hy˩	wɑ˥sy˩	tʰɣ˧
white egg	green egg	black egg	yellow egg	red egg	five kinds	appear

kɣ˧	bɣ˩	hi˧	mɤ˧	gy˩ (...)[xxiii]
egg	hatch	nominalizer	negation	existential verb

A literal translation could be: “A white egg, a green egg, a black egg, a yellow egg, a red egg: there appeared five kinds (of eggs), but there was no hatcher (to hatch them).” The word /hi˧/ means “person” or “human being” in colloquial Naxi; in this passage, it has a grammatical function, referring to the agent hatching the eggs. It means “that which hatches eggs” rather than “a person who hatches eggs.” This point is made clear by the Chinese translation, 没有什么东西来孵化它, which means “there was no thing to come and hatch them” and not “there was no one to come and hatch them.”

In present-day Naxi, this construction does not make sense: one would need to use the

possessive /gɤ˧/ to convey this meaning. However, looking at languages closely related to Naxi, this strange construction becomes clear. The nominalizer is actually pronounced in the same way as the word for "man" in the two Naish languages mentioned earlier, Yongning Na and Laze. These two languages do not appear to have been in contact with each other in the past few centuries; the presence of the same nominalizer in both languages is therefore probably due to a retention from Proto-Naish, the reconstructed common ancestor of Naxi, Na, and Laze, and not to a borrowing from one language into another. In this light, Naxi can be hypothesized to have had the same type of grammatical construction and to have lost it in the course of history; its survival in some *to-mba* rituals can safely be interpreted as an archaic feature. Thus, linguistic evidence leads to an unambiguous conclusion about the origin of this peculiar linguistic trait: it is not borrowed from another language, and it is archaic. Such analyses open new perspectives for research into the historical depth of Naxi rituals by providing tools for establishing their relative chronology.

Concluding perspectives

Studying the Naxi books and the Naxi rituals with increasing philological precision is a formidable challenge; at stake is the interpretation of Naxi culture and the deconstruction of widespread clichés. The Naxi pictographic texts are commonly considered in present China as a homogeneous, self-contained body of traditional lore. This point of view is reflected in the phrase "Dongba culture" (东巴文化),[xxiv] which identifies the pictographic writing system as the defining characteristic of "traditional Naxi culture."[xxv] This presents the culture of the Naxi as an idealized heritage from the distant past that has somehow survived into the present age. This is in keeping with the expectation that ethnic minorities should be steeped in tradition, preserving qualities of authenticity and peculiarity.[xxvi] In contrast to this conception of "Dongba culture" as fixed and timeless, philology and linguistics approach texts from quite the opposite perspective. There are numerous parallels between the philological-linguistic approach and the ethnohistorical approach. To the ethnohistorian, there is not one fixed Naxi identity but an ever-continuing process of construction and reinterpretation of identities in response to changing historical circumstances and opportunities.[xxvii] Likewise, to the linguist, there is not one Naxi language but a complex landscape of interacting languages and dialects—each dialect lending itself, in turn, to an analysis of a variety of speaking styles (idiolects). Philology and linguistics can therefore be strong allies of history in its arduous task of analysis and reconstruction. Learning the origins of new

characters and determining the approximate time frame of these innovations requires painstaking investigations. However, this area of research eventually yields evidence that can be used by historians for understanding the patterns observed in the rituals and for unraveling their complex history.

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[i] He Zhiwu, "The Specificities of the Naxi Pictographic Script, and the Difference Between Primitive Pictographs, Pictographic Writing and Ideographic Writing," *Yunnan Shehui Kexue* 3 (1981): 147.

[ii] Li Lincan, Chang K'un, and Ho Ts'ai, *A Dictionary of Mosuo Pictographs* (Hong Kong: Shuowenshe, 1953).

[iii] Fang Guoyu and He Zhiwu, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1995); Joseph Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary* (Rome: Instituto Italiano per il Medio ed Estremo Oriente, 1962, 1972).

[iv] Fu Maoji, *A Study of a Naxi Pictographic Manuscript, "White Bat's Search for Sacred Books*," Computational Analyses of Asian and African Languages Monograph Series 6 (Tokyo: CAAAL, 1981–84); Editorial team, *An Annotated Collection of Naxi Dongba Manuscripts* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1999–2000).

[v] He Jiren and Jiang Zhuyi, *A Presentation of the Naxi Language* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1985), 107.

[vi] Guo Dalie and He Zhiwu, *A History of the Naxi People*, 2nd ed. (Chongqing: Sichuan Minzu Chubanshe, 1999), 135–38.

[vii] The term "Naish" was built by adding the suffix "-ish" used for lower-level language groupings to the name "Na," meaning "black," which is the autonym shared by speakers of these languages. The usefulness of a higher-level grouping that includes populations closely related to the Naxi is also recognized by anthropologists: for instance, Yang Fuquan advocates the use of the term "Na studies" instead of "Naxi studies" and points out the importance of taking into account the Na groups outside Lijiang (in particular those located in Sichuan) in historical and anthropological research (see Yang Fuquan, "Introduction," in *Collected Papers about Mosuo Society and Culture, 1960–2005*, ed. Latami Dashi, 4–8 [Kunming: Yunnan University Press, 2006]). A side advantage is that unlike the term "Naxi," which has a strict administrative definition as one of the fifty-six officially recognized ethnic groups of the People's Republic of China, "Na" can be defined as an ethnological concept

independent of the officially defined boundaries between ethnic minorities. About the Na groups of Sichuan, see also: Yang Shangkong and Bai Lang, *Studies on Na(xi) Culture in Sichuan* (Beijing: Wenlian Chubanshe, 2006).

[viii] See: He Jiren and Jiang Zhuyi, *A Presentation of the Naxi Language* (Beijing: Minzu Chubanshe, 1985), 130.

[ix] See, in particular: Liberty Lidz, "A Descriptive Grammar of Yongning Na (Mosuo)" (PhD diss., University of Texas, 2010).

[x] See: Guillaume Jacques and Alexis Michaud, "Approaching the Historical Phonology of Three Highly Eroded Sino-Tibetan Languages: Naxi, Na and Laze", *Diachronica*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2011).

[xi] Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 44; Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People*, 159; Anthony Jackson, *Na-khi religion: An analytical appraisal of the Na-khi ritual texts* (The Hague: Mouton, 1979).

[xii] See, in particular: Redouane Djamouri, "The Development of the Writing System in Early China: Between Phonographic Necessity and Semiographic Efficiency" in *Ecriture chinoise: Données, usages et représentations*, ed. F. Bottéro and R. Djamouri, 1–34 (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale, 2006); and references therein.

[xiii] These and other examples are reported by Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters,* 67–70.

[xiv] See, for example: Laurent Sagart, "L'emploi des phonétiques dans l'écriture chinoise" in *Ecriture chinoise: Données, usages et représentations*, ed F. Bottéro and R. Djamouri, 35–53 (Paris: Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Centre de recherches linguistiques sur l'Asie orientale, 2006).

[xv] There are nonetheless a few exceptions, which are worth investigating: for instance, the character for "door" (present realization: /$k^hu˧$/) is used to transcribe "to wish," pronounced /ho˥/ (see Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 70). At present, I have no explanation for this.

[xvi] Data on these languages were collected first-hand in the course of four field trips from 2006 to 2009. About Laze, see: Huang Bufan, "A Survey of Muli Shuitian," *Journal of Sino-Tibetan Linguistics* 3 (2009): 30–55; and Alexis Michaud, "The Prosodic System of Muli Shuitian (Laze)," *Minority Languages of China*, no. 6 (2009): 28–33. About Yongning Na, see: Alexis Michaud, "Phonemic and Tonal Analysis of Yongning Na," *Cahiers de linguistique—Asie Orientale* 37, no. 2 (2008): 159–96; and

Lidz, “A Descriptive Grammar of Yongning Na (Mosuo).”

[xvii] For a detailed discussion of the phonetic correspondences between Na, Laze, and Naxi and of the method used for linguistic comparison and reconstruction, the reader is referred to specialized work on this topic: see Jacques and Michaud, "Approaching the Historical Phonology.” In a nutshell, long-distance comparison between Naxi, Na, and Laze, on the one hand, and conservative languages of the Sino-Tibetan family, on the other, shows that words which have the vowel correspondence /i:ie:e/ between Na, Laze, and Naxi had the vowel *a at earlier times in their history, a stage referred to as “proto-Naish.”

[xviii] See: Fang and He, *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographic Characters*, 167; Rock, *A Na-khi-English Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 191.

[xix] Lamu Gatusa, personal communication with author.

[xx] See, for example, Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People,* 222.

[xxi] See: Christine Mathieu’s essay in this volume; Christine Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study of the Ancient Kingdoms of the Sino-Tibetan Borderland: Naxi and Mosuo* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2003). The use of Naxi rituals as political instruments is also mentioned by: Guo and He, *A History of the Naxi People*, 159. For analyses of the relationship of the religion of the Pumi or Prinmi (one of the most important neighbors of the Naxi) to other religions present in the same area, see: Koen Wellens, “Consecrating the Premi House: Ritual, Community and the State in the Borderlands of East Tibet” (working paper 288, Faculty of Humanities, University of Oslo, 2006).

[xxii] Examples of the alteration of cultural traits to comply with Chinese models abound in contemporary writings about the Naxi tradition. For instance, He Limin’s textbook (*Popular Dongba Script* [Guangdong: Guangdong Keji Chubanshe, 2007]), which was intended to give the younger Naxi generation a sense of “*to-mba* culture,” consists of lessons in which each syllable is represented by one *to-mba* character. This is very unlike the Naxi traditional texts, where character groups of varying length served as mnemonic cues to a portion of a ritual. One-to-one correspondences between characters and syllables effectively sinicizes the Naxi script, using it in a way that complies with Chinese habits. In this instance, sinicization is implicitly justified by a need for simplicity and clarity, with a view to making the Naxi script popular with a present-day audience.

[xxiii] Again with apologies for self-citations, I should point out that the notation is slightly adapted in keeping with the phonemic analysis set out in Michailovsky and Michaud 2006 and Michaud 2006.

[xxiv] Used, for example, by: Guo Dalie and Yang Shiguang, eds., *Collected Papers About Dongba Culture* (Kunming: Yunnan Renmin Chubanshe, 1985).

[xxv] See: Emily Chao, "Hegemony, Agency, and Re-presenting the Past: the Invention of Dongba Culture Among the Naxi Minority of Southwest China" in *Negociating Ethnicities in China and Taiwan*, ed. M. Brown, 208–39 (Berkeley: University of California
Press, 1996).

[xxvi] See, in particular: Stéphane Gros, "Le lieu du pouvoir. Mémoire et enjeu de l'histoire chez les Drung du Yunnan (Chine)" in *Les faiseurs d'histoires*, ed. G. Krauskopff, 189–95 (Nanterre: Société d'ethnologie, 2009).

[xxvii] See: Mathieu, *A History and Anthropological Study*.