

**Review of: Pinson, Thomas M. 2012. A Naxi-Chinese-English
Dictionary (Naqxi-Habaq-Yiyu Ceeqdiail / 纳西英字典)**

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► **To cite this version:**

Alexis Michaud. Review of: Pinson, Thomas M. 2012. A Naxi-Chinese-English Dictionary (Naqxi-Habaq-Yiyu Ceeqdiail / 纳西英字典). *Linguistics of the Tibeto-Burman Area*, Dept. of Linguistics, University of California, 2013, 36 (2), pp.129-137. <halshs-00867348v2>

HAL Id: halshs-00867348

<https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-00867348v2>

Submitted on 5 Dec 2014

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**REVIEW OF: PINSON, THOMAS M. 2012. A NAXI-CHINESE-ENGLISH
DICTIONARY (NAQXI-HABAQ-YIYU CEEQDIAI / 纳西汉英词典).
KUNMING: YUNNAN MINORITIES PUBLISHING HOUSE (云南民族出
版社). 706 PP. ISBN: 978-7-5367-5471-3.**

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Until 2011, there existed no full-fledged dictionary of Naxi. This major gap in the field of Sino-Tibetan linguistics was filled by two remarkable publications in quick succession: *A Dictionary of Colloquial Naxi* (《纳西语常用词汇》) by He Jiren, edited by Zhao Qinglian et al. (2011), and *A Naxi-Chinese-English Dictionary* by Thomas Pinson. Both dictionaries were published by Yunnan Minorities Publishing House (Kunming), but were produced independently. The present review focuses on T. Pinson's book. Dialect abbreviations are the same as those provided on p. 39 of the dictionary (initials of the place names in Chinese Pinyin), with the addition of FK, for Fengke (奉科乡善美行政村; Naxi: *Fvlko*); for simplicity, tone marks used here are 1, 2 and 3 for High, Mid and Low tones, instead of the contour stylization used by the author: 55, 33 and 21, respectively.

The author set himself the ambitious goal of producing a dictionary of Naxi as currently spoken in the Lijiang plain, and accomplished this important project through “more than 16 years of work on the Naxi language” (p. 2 of the Introduction), from 1995 to 2012. This 700-page volume is much more extensive in coverage, and more precise in detail, than the initial *Naxi-Chinese-English Glossary with English and Chinese Indexes* (Pinson 1998). The dictionary is presented as a practical reference work, with Chinese-Naxi and English-Naxi indexes. Its many strong points include plentiful examples, brief discussions of grammatical and phonological issues within some of the lexical entries, and an indication, for nouns, of the most commonly associated classifier.

The author consistently focuses on the spoken language, resisting the attraction of the Naxi written tradition, which has been at the centre of much of the work conducted on Naxi to date (in particular Li Lin-ts'an, Chang K'un & Ho Ts'ai 1953; Rock 1963; Fang Guoyu & He Zhiwu 1995). No attempt is made to incorporate data from other sources into the dictionary. This has major advantages in terms of consistency. Concerning vocabulary coverage, on the other hand, some traditional cultural terms are absent from the dictionary, for instance ‘mortar’ and ‘pestle’, even though small mortars and pestles for pounding hot peppers or medicines are still in use, and foot-powered pestles were still widespread in the area at a relatively recent point in time. In future lexicographic work of comparable scope, it would be useful to check that cultural terms specific to the area are all included. This does not necessarily require going through entire

volumes to search for entries to add to the dictionary: the author could use a vocabulary questionnaire devised for the Himalayan cultural area, and/or for Southeast Asia, such as the list jointly developed by *Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique* and the School of Oriental and African Studies on the basis of an earlier word list prepared by the *Ecole Française d'Extrême Orient*.

In keeping with the choice to produce the dictionary essentially as a collection of the author's first-hand data, the volume does not include a bibliography, and only makes reference to another publication once (p. 32 of the Introduction, referring to the creation of the romanized script, *Naxi Pinyin*). References could have been useful at various points, for instance when employing grammatical glosses that are not widely used, such as “gerundizer” (p. 45).

International Phonetic Alphabet transcriptions offered in the dictionary are an improvement on the IPA equivalents officially selected for the transcription of Standard *Naxi*. For instance, the official IPA transcription mis-represents syllables with a /-jɿ/ rhyme, transcribing them with a /-ɿ/ rhyme and ascribing the syllable's palatalization to the initial, thus practically doubling the number of initials appearing in front of /-ɿ/. To take an example, ‘to cook by boiling’ (*Naxi Pinyin* : *jel*) was formerly phonemicized as /tɕə/, with an alveolopalatal initial and a neutral vowel. T. Pinson's dictionary transcribes this item as [cjɿ], reflecting the palatal pronunciation of the initial stop, [c], and the articulation of the main vowel of the rhyme as a back vowel, not a central vowel. The adoption of the ‘ram's horn’ vowel symbol, /ɿ/, remedies a confusion caused by the earlier notation as *schwa*. He Jiren and Jiang Zhuoyi's [ə] confused two vowels: a back unrounded vowel, /ɿ/, realized as [ɿ] in an onset-less syllable; and a neutral vowel, /ə/, which always constitutes a syllable on its own, harmonizes with the following syllable's vowel, and is realized with an initial glottal stop.

The dictionary entry for ‘to cook by boiling’ also indicates the variant with an alveolopalatal initial, [tɕjɿ], which is currently becoming standard in Lijiang city – most probably through identification of *Naxi* [c] with the alveolopalatal [tɕ] initial of Mandarin. The author refrains from pushing phonemicization further; thanks to the details provided in the dictionary entry, the interested phonologist has all the relevant information at hand to reflect on the extent to which it may be justified to phonemicize [cjɿ] as /kjɿ/.

Notational innovations in the dictionary (as compared with the 1998 Glossary, and with standard IPA equivalents for romanized *Naxi*) may have come relatively late in the preparation of the dictionary, resulting in a less than complete harmonization of notations. For instance, phonetic transcription as palatal instead of alveolopalatal is extended to the unvoiced fricative /ɕ/, as in ‘person, man’ (*Naxi Pinyin*: *xi*), which is transcribed as palatal [çi] in the entry for ‘person, man’ but is still transcribed as [çi] in compounds such as [by|leiɰ] ‘non-family members’ (p. 36).

It is to be hoped that provisions will be made by the author for the publication of an electronic version of this dictionary as a digital version identical with the paper version (PDF document or equivalent format), or even as an online

dictionary. The book, although published by a Chinese publisher, is not currently available online or in Chinese bookshops, and requests for purchase are to be sent to the East Asia Group of SIL International, so the paper version alone may not ensure the broad circulation that this dictionary deserves.

In addition to these general points, the present review goes into some detail on two topics: the treatment of dialect data, and the treatment of recent Chinese borrowings. Finally, some current needs for the development of Naxi studies will be discussed.

TREATMENT OF DIALECT DATA

The dictionary contains data from no less than twelve dialects; the source for each word is indicated in full. “A headword that has only one phonetic representation and dialect abbreviation is not meant to imply that the given word or associated pronunciation is unique to that sub-dialect. Primarily, it means that that particular word or pronunciation is at least attested to that sub-dialect” (p. 19 of Introduction). This is essential information for avoiding the pitfall of ‘pan-dialectal’ publications, which pool together data from various dialects without taking care to provide information as to which dialect each piece of data comes from. For instance, the *Presentation of the Naxi Language* by He Jiren and Jiang Zhuyi (1985) suffers from this shortcoming: the book states that it is based on the variety chosen as standard, namely Lijiang Old Town, but in fact it also contains data from He Jiren’s native dialect, Yangxi 漾西, and from Qinglong 青龙 – present-day Changshui 长水 –, the dialect of Jiang Zhuyi’s teacher, He Zhiwu.

Despite his commitment to broad dialectal coverage, the author’s perception of Naxi appears to be (understandably) tilted towards the varieties with which he is most familiar. For instance, concerning the opposition of voiced and prenasalized consonantal onsets:

Historically, Naxi had a four-way voice onset timing distinction within the stops and affricates, for example: /p^h/; /p/; /b/; /mb/. Although this distinction is in decline, there are still pockets of Naxi speakers who can produce and perceive this four-way difference. It is significant, though, that the voiced—pre-nasalized voiced pairs carry a very low functional load. This means that there are very few true minimal pairs of words (i.e. having the same phonetic shape, tone and part-of-speech) that are distinguished solely on the voiced—pre-nasalized voiced contrast. Therefore there is essentially no need to distinguish these words for the few speakers for whom it still matters (pp. 32-33).

This point of view appears to be close to the perception of speakers living in areas where the distinction is lost: the author may have been swayed by his repeated observation that the opposition was lost in the dialects around him, to the point of becoming skeptical of the possibility that this opposition plays a significant role in any Naxi dialect. Had the author chosen to live in the heart of a hamlet in the area where the distinction is preserved (e.g. WH), he may have been led to a different conclusion. The opposition between voiced vs. prenasalized initials is lost in most dialects in the Lijiang plain, but this does not detract from

its functional yield in the dialects where it is still attested, including WH, FK, and Ciending (a word list is provided in Michaud & Xu Jirong 2012). Minimal pairs are not hard to come by, e.g., after a bilabial initial, /bi-/ ‘rope attached to a cow’s nasal ring’ vs. /mbi-/ ‘urine’, /by-/ ‘to dare’ vs. /mby-/ ‘to share’ (WH dialect). More importantly, a great number of words partake in the opposition; lexical frequency has been argued to serve as a reasonably adequate estimation of functional yield (Martinet 2005:35–37).

Importantly, despite his impression that the voiced vs. prenasalized opposition is essentially a thing of the past, the author scrupulously indicates prenasalized pronunciations whenever he encounters them. This will be much appreciated by linguists with an interest in diachrony, who can use the dictionary to obtain some hints as to the lexical distribution of this opposition: words that are transcribed with a voiced initial in the dictionary may have lost historical prenasalization, so no certainty can be obtained from T. Pinson’s dictionary for those words; on the other hand, words that are transcribed with a prenasalized initial in the dictionary can safely be placed in the “prenasalized” category.

On Naxi Pinyin and ‘Common Naxi’: The author expresses the hope that “this dictionary will make a small contribution to others who engage in Naxi language and culture research, and that the Naxi themselves find it useful” (Introduction). In line with this orientation, Naxi words and sentences in the dictionary are written in the romanized script defined in 1957 on the basis of dialect data collected the previous year (He Jiren & Jiang Zhuyi 1985:130), and still used in some recent publications (e.g. 和洁珍 2009). The Naxi dictionary is sorted by alphabetical order of Naxi Pinyin transcription. At some points in the dictionary, there seems to be a tension between the commitment to distinguish data from various dialects, on the one hand, and on the other hand the choice to adopt a transcription system – Naxi Pinyin – which was initially based on one single dialect: the speech of Lijiang Old Town, and whose initial motivation was to serve as a standard orthography for the entire Naxi-speaking area. The author expresses confidence about the adaptability of Naxi Pinyin:

There are some notable differences between the sub-dialect spoken in Lijiang Old Town and many of the other sub-dialects. And yet, Naxi Pinyin is very flexible. For the Naxi sub-dialects that fall within the dialect group known as Western Naxi, Naxi Pinyin is sufficiently adaptable to express the variations of the sub-dialects’ lexicons (p. 32).

Naxi Pinyin is “flexible” in the sense of constituting a tool for phonetic, rather than orthographic, notation: for instance, for ‘knife’, three forms are found in the English-Naxi index: *rertei*; *sseetei*; and *ssertei*, corresponding to three different pronunciations, in different dialects (IPA /zə-ɬ^he-ɬ/, /zə-ɬ^he-ɬ/ and /zɿɬ^he-ɬ/). It is an overstatement, however, to assert that Naxi Pinyin suffices to transcribe all of the “sub-dialects” of Western Naxi. Thomas Pinson does not mention the modified version of Naxi Pinyin developed by Pr. He Xueguang (and taught at the Naxi Culture Education Association, Lijiang) to reflect some oppositions found in his native dialect, WH, such as oppositions between dental and retroflex consonants,

nasalized vs. voiced stops, and palatal and alveolopalatal fricatives, which standard Naxi Pinyin cannot reflect (Michaud 2006a).

In the Dictionary, there exist a few cases where a Naxi Pinyin form is used for two phonemically different syllables, or two Naxi Pinyin forms are given the same IPA equivalent. For instance, the IPA equivalents provided for *ssi* are [zi³³] in the BD dialect and [zi³³] in the LQ dialect (for the word ‘grass’). *Ceel* is transcribed as /tɕ^{hi}/ in *ceelbba* ‘billy goat’, and as /ts^h/ in *ceelmeel* ‘catalpa tree’, both in the LQ dialect; a slight mistake may have crept in. The case of two Naxi Pinyin forms that are given the same IPA representation is illustrated by *xi* and *si*, both transcribed in IPA as [çi] (and with [çi] as a variant pronunciation corresponding to *xi*): e.g. pp. 78, 353, 386. In the dialect with which I am most familiar, WH (Wenhua; Naxi: *Asherq*), ‘grass’ is /zɿ/, but the syllable /zi/ is also attested, in /zi/ ‘beautiful’ (a word transcribed as /zi/ in the dictionary under review); the syllable /zi/, on the other hand, is not attested: /z/ is not a phoneme (or even an allophone) in WH. This is an example where further comments on the choices made in the broad phonetic transcription, and in the choice of Naxi Pinyin vowels and consonants, would be welcome. Some progress in the analysis of these syllables could perhaps be realized by recognizing the combination of phonemes /si/, parallel to /zi/, mentioned above. These combinations are firmly attested in WH, and it may be instructive to pay special attention to cognates of the WH /si/ and /zi/ words when analyzing other dialects: examples include /zi/ ‘to cremate (a corpse)’; /si/ ‘poor’, in /si~si~ŋɬu~ŋɬu/ ‘down and out’; and /silli/ ‘pear’.

The author clearly has in mind speakers of Naxi using the dictionary as a practical tool. From the point of view of speakers with different dialect backgrounds who interact in Naxi, dialectal differences detract from a common ground for mutual understanding, and orthographic standardization may be favoured. T. Pinson espouses this perspective when he chooses to mark out certain forms as ‘Common Naxi’ (abbreviated as COM): “When a majority of sub-dialects coincided on pronunciation and meanings, I considered it to be common and so indicated it as such” (pp. 2-3). The indication COM as provided in the dictionary is likely to reflect information that matters to the speakers and exerts an influence on their linguistic behaviour. For example, the LQ form /dzi/ for ‘to eat’ is perceived as unusual (and misleading) to speakers from other dialects of the Lijiang plain, who clearly consider the form /(n)dzu/ as the familiar, ‘common’ Naxi form, justifying its COM label in the dictionary. On that basis, *zsee* could be adopted as an orthographic standard. While the author transcribes dialectal forms such as LQ /dzi/ in Naxi Pinyin too (in this instance: *zzi*), the nonstandard entry is cross-referenced with the main entry: *zsee*. This perspective goes a long way towards explaining why the correspondence between Naxi Pinyin romanization and IPA transcription in the dictionary is not yet fully systematic in this first edition.

It is hoped that the author will publish individual reports on the many dialects investigated, for instance by expanding and publishing his “flat phonemic

statement of the Longquan (LQ) dialect” (Pinson 1996). A comparative perspective suggests that the lexical distribution of the LQ syllables transcribed as alveolopalatal initial+/i/ vs. dental initial+apicalized rhyme /ɲ/ corresponds to an opposition found in other Naxi dialects, such as Ciending (Michaud & Xu Jirong 2012; on the general topic of apicalization, see Baron 1974 and Michaud 2012). Thus the alveolopalatal initial+/i/ combination in LQ forms which have a dental initial+apicalized rhyme /ɲ/ in other dialects in the Lijiang plain (e.g. ‘to eat’, /ndzuɻ/, for which the LQ form is /dziɻ/) appear to be a retention of an earlier contrast, rather than the result of dialect mixture. While the dictionary contains a wealth of dialect data, it is sometimes hard to be sure to which exact sets of dialects a form indicated as ‘COM[mon]’ belongs. Among other advantages, an online version of the dictionary would allow for providing in full the list of dialects in which a given form is found, without concerns of taking up too much space or cluttering the page layout of dictionary entries.

TREATMENT OF RECENT CHINESE BORROWINGS

Thomas Pinson’s dictionary does not provide indications on which words are recent borrowings from Chinese. For instance, the entry *zeedail* (IPA: [tsɿ³³ta⁵⁵]) provides a translation as English ‘bullet’ and Chinese 子弹 *zǐdàn*, without mentioning the fact that this is a transparent borrowing: the IPA of the Mandarin form is [tsɿ.tan]. In the absence of nasal codas in Naxi, Chinese words are borrowed with an open rhyme, hence [tsɿ.ta]. Examples like this one are numerous.

The author’s choice to treat Chinese loanwords on a par with Naxi words is thought-provoking, bringing to our attention the extensive influence of Chinese on the language over the past sixty years. Naxi speakers living in and around the town of Lijiang are bilingual, and language shift to Southwestern Mandarin is under way. Under these circumstances, the perception of even the most recent layer of borrowings as foreign elements seems to be dwindling. Here is a piece of anecdotal evidence on this topic. At an International Phonetic Alphabet training course at the Dongba Culture Research Institute (东巴文化研究院) in Lijiang in 2012, I gave participants a list of syllables in IPA, asking them to say which ones were nonexistent in Naxi. In their answers, they provided numerous Southwestern Mandarin examples. I listed these examples side by side and asked them whether some of them were special in any way. I was greatly surprised by the amount of time it took before someone pointed out that these words were borrowed from Chinese. The sound systems of Naxi and Southwestern Mandarin appear to have become intermingled. This offers fertile ground for psycholinguistic experiments: contact between the widely different tone systems of Naxi (based on three levels) and Southwestern Mandarin is an important factor to take into account in the study of the (lexically marginal) rising contour of Naxi (Michaud 2006b; Michaud & He Xueguang 2007). This also sheds light on the phonological impoverishment of Lijiang Naxi, which (to my knowledge) has the smallest syllabic inventory in any Naish dialect documented to date – if Chinese borrowings are left out of the

analysis. A phonological system for Lijiang Naxi that is established after teasing out recent Chinese borrowings (and hence the phonemes and syllables introduced by these borrowings) may, in fact, be lacking in synchronic adequacy.

The situation in present-day Lijiang is in some respects similar to the situation of diglossia that gave birth to Vietnamese. Diglossia between a Sinitic language (“Annamese Middle Chinese”) and a Mon-Khmer language eventually resulted in the creation of a language (Vietnamese) with a rich phonology that combines the phonological system of a conservative dialect of Middle Chinese with a (simpler) phonological system of Mon-Khmer stock (Phan 2013:437–439). Naxi speakers in Lijiang definitely employ a more complex phonological system than is apparent from their pronunciation of words of Naxi stock alone.

In the context of a Naxi dictionary, however, it would seem useful to indicate recent borrowings from Chinese as such. Readers who are familiar with Chinese will be able to identify the most recent layer of borrowings, on the basis of phonetic similarity and semantic cues: words such as ‘bullet’, or ‘bicycle’ (*daiche* [ta³³ts^hɿ³³], from 单车) are likely to be loanwords. But the addition of a special code singling out these borrowings would be a welcome addition for readers without an advanced command of Chinese. The author’s command of Southwestern Mandarin would be a great asset in identifying loans that will not be self-evident to all readers. There exist numerous layers of Chinese borrowings into Naxi, of course (on methods for distinguishing layers of loanwords, see e.g. Sagart & Xu Shixuan 2001), and etymology requires much more than a binary indication on whether a word is a Chinese loan or not. Creating an etymological dictionary of Naxi is a formidable task, but definitely a useful one; as a step in this direction, it would be a great service to the reader to mark out recent Chinese loanwords, adding a special mention for dubious cases, and etymological notes, for instance for words created by combining a borrowed syllable with a native root, e.g. /noʈʂ^hwaʈ/ ‘glutinous rice, *nuòmǐ* 糯米’, from Chinese *nuò* 糯 ‘glutinous’ and Naxi /ʂ^hwaʈ/ ‘husked rice’.

SOME THOUGHTS ON CURRENT NEEDS FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF NAXI STUDIES

The “three treasures” (孙天心 2007:103) that linguists can contribute on the basis of in-depth fieldwork are (i) a dictionary, (ii) a reference grammar, and (iii) a collection of glossed texts. The first treasure is now available. Concerning textual materials, Thomas Pinson explains:

Initially, while we were still learning to speak Naxi, I used direct elicitation of words, phrases and sentences. Later I began gathering informal texts of many genres. These texts, from both written and recorded sources, provided me with the nuanced meanings of many words and phrases. They also gave me a starting point for many of the illustrative sentences used in this dictionary. A small amount of the data, particularly from other sub-dialects, was shared with us by other researchers, but the greater part of the data from various sub-dialects came from friends and almost anyone with whom I crossed paths.

Since these materials were collected with lexicographic purposes in view, most may remain unpublished. Scholars who wish to take further the work contributed by T. Pinson may therefore want to develop other databases of Naxi texts and documents. Texts in Naxi remain relatively few in number and narrow in terms of genre, consisting mostly of glossed editions of Naxi ritual texts. There is clearly room for new editorial projects, for instance creating parallel-text editions of the small set of monolingual books in romanized Naxi (transcribed ballads, songs and tales) published in the 1980s (see also Yang Fuquan 1988), or recording texts anew and making the recordings available together with glossed transcriptions and translations. A few recordings with transcriptions are already available online through the Pangloss Collection (Michailovsky et al. in preparation), and colleagues are encouraged to contribute new resources and suggest improvements to the existing ones, e.g. adding translations (at text, sentence, and word levels) in more languages.

To conclude, Thomas Pinson's dictionary fills a major gap in Naxi studies and Sino-Tibetan scholarship. This excellent reference work is a must-own for anyone interested in the Naxi language.

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