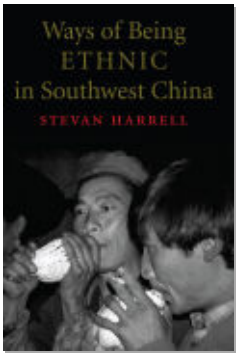
9. Nuosum Yi, China, and the World



Published by

Harrell, Stevan.
Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China.
University of Washington Press, 2012.
Project MUSE. https://muse.jhu.edu/book/19896.

9 / Nuosu, Yi, China, and the World

This chapter begins with a self-criticism. In the previous three chapters, describing Nuosu ethnicity in three very different rural communities, I have perpetrated a convenient fiction: the idea that one can describe ethnic identity and ethnic relations in a certain locality without considering the larger, national and international discourses of ethnicity and nationalism that pertain to the country in which the locality is situated. Certainly, chapters 6–8 did not treat Mishi, Baiwu, and Manshuiwan like the "primitive isolates" described in early twentieth-century ethnography. In this book imperial dynasties, warlord regimes, and modern revolutions sweep across Liangshan; people leave their communities to become educated, bringing back with them skills, knowledge, and even spouses from the outside; communities are collectivized in the 1950s and decollectivized in the 1980s, and are allowed to begin both capitalism and religion anew in the reform era. But throughout all this historical and geographical context, I have acted as if the important categories were the local ones: local Nuosu and outside Hxiemga in Mishi; Nuosu, Prmi, and Han in Baiwu; plains Nuosu, mountain Nuosu, and Han in Manshuiwan. I have neglected the fact that people who are Nuosu in local discourse, speaking their own language, and who are Yi (which in this context is nothing but a translation of Nuosu) when speaking Chinese, are also Yi or Yizu in a different sense: the sense that was created by the ethnic identification process, which made everybody a member of one or another of the fifty-six officially recognized *minzu*, or "nationalities." This category of Yi is not simply the local category of Nuosu or Yi writ large. It is founded on different principles, includes and excludes different people, and gives its members the potential to participate in a wholly different discourse of ethnicity, a discourse that seeks to lump rather than split, that takes Yi as an imagined community rather than as a face-to-face group (Anderson 1991), that invites, even requires, the creation of another whole series of myths of common history, descent, and, stubbornly enough, culture.

I committed this sin of omission knowingly, and for two reasons. First, I

wanted, as an anthropologist, to focus in a serious way on the local, to attack the assumption that the official categories, the fifty-six mailboxes in a row, somehow reflect local reality. I wanted the local reality to be appreciated in its own right, to the point where I would not even assume that "Nuosu" meant the same thing in one community as it meant in another. Second, to do it all at once would be too complicated. So I postponed, as it were, the discussion of this larger-scale context of ethnic relations. But postponement is not cancellation, and now the rain check is due: it is time to focus not on the *minzu* discourse as something separate from the local relations in each community, but rather as something in which the same people participate and the same communities are involved, and ultimately as something that alters the vocabulary and syntax of the local language of ethnic identity. Local ethnic relations are a part of and influenced by larger-scale *minzu* relations, and there are several ways in which the fact that Nuosu are also Yi influences what it means to be Nuosu. But first we must talk about the participation of local community members in being Yi.

ETHNIC LEADERSHIP AND LOCAL PARTICIPATION

Nuosu people have not been entirely absent from the national stage of twentieth-century China. Probably the most prominent of all was Long Yun, a *nuoho* from Jinyang County in southeastern Liangshan, who went to study in military school in Kunming and later rose through the military ranks to become the ruler of Yunnan from 1927 until the Communist takeover extended to Yunnan in 1950 (Xie Benshu 1988, Lu Hui 1994). Also in the pre-Communist period, *nzymo* Leng Guangdian of Tianba in Ganluo was prominent in local political, military, and educational affairs, not only graduating from the Whampoa Military Academy in Nanjing but also returning to Liangshan in 1936 to mediate several local wars, as well as to establish the first modern school in a Nuosu area in Ganluo (Azha 1994, Wu Guoqing 1994). Both of these regional leaders lived on after the Communist takeover in Beijing, first honored as united-front personalities, then attacked as rightists in the 1950s, and finally rehabilitated (in Long Yun's case, posthumously) in the Reform Era. Two of Long Yun's sons emigrated to the United States, where they had successful careers in the restaurant business in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Washington, D.C.

After 1950 certain Nuosu emerged not only as united-front personalities but at the mid-levels of the Communist Party structure itself. The most prominent of these has been Wu Jinghua, or Luovu Lapu (b. 1931), who came from a village just upstream from Mianning City, in an area where Nuosu and Han

villagers lived interspersed, much as in Baiwu. Lapu and his male cousins went to a local elementary school in the city, from which several bright students were picked up and trained as cadres in the Revolution. Wu Jinghua rose to several prominent posts, most notably Party secretary of the Tibet Autonomous Region from 1985 until 1988 (Schwartz 1994: 18, 148) and also as Party secretary of the Central Nationalities Commission. A protégé of the late General Secretary Hu Yaobang, Wu fell from effective power after Hu's ouster in 1987; recently he has held a series of largely sinecurial posts. His three daughters have all studied for graduate degrees at the University of Michigan. Another Nuosu who has reached high posts is Feng Yuanwei, a plains Yi from Yuehua, who rose to the position of vice-secretary of the Sichuan Provincial Communist Party.

These are, of course, only four of the hundreds of Nuosu people who have had successful careers in Republican and Communist China. The point here is not to prove that Yi, too, can be stars, but to illustrate two things about the points of connection between the Nuosu world and the wider Chinese world. First, all four of these men came from mixed Nuosu-Han districts, and all had early contact with Han people, culture, and language. Both Long Yun and Leng Guangdian spent part of their childhood with Han families, Wu Jinghua went to school with Han children from age seven or eight, and Feng Yuanwei came from Yuehua, an acculturated environment much like Manshuiwan. Very few Nuosu from the nuclear area—Zhaojue, Meigu, Butuo—or from remote villages in the peripheral counties have made their mark in the wider world, even to the extent of becoming county or prefectural officials in Liangshan.

Second, whenever these men or people like them ascend the national stage, their ethnic identity as Nuosu, in the sense of being members of local and kinship communities like those described in the previous three chapters, is eclipsed by their *minzu* identity as Yi. In these wider contexts, the differences between Nuosu and other kinds of Yi, such as Nasu, Lipuo, Laluo, Sani, Samei, Ashi, or Nisu, to name a few, disappears, and Yi becomes a homogeneous category, rather like Han, with internal differences relegated to the rubric of "branches," or *zhixi*, and even these branches are rarely known to outside observers. To the adoring crowds who slaughter oxen when they visit villages, these Nuosu who have made it are just that, local boys who have made good in China and the world. But to the outsiders, they are Yi, and that is about all one needs to know. Nevertheless, Yi is a category that subsumes a lot of local and cultural difference, and in order to understand the place of Nuosu in the national scheme of things, we need to examine the category Yi in more detail.

CHAPTER 9

YI AS A CATEGORY

The category Yi was not exactly invented by the Communists during the process of ethnic identification in the 1950s. For a long time, there had been both the category and the name, though they did not correspond. In the Qing period and the first half of the twentieth century, the Chinese term Luoluo was used for a wide variety of people, including most of the people now classified as Yi. There were several theories as to the origins of this term (there is even one group that calls itself Lolopo—see Lietard 1913, Mueggler 2001), but none is really conclusive. Westerners also picked up the term, beginning with missionaries and explorers in the late nineteenth century; most probably did not realize just how pejorative the term was. In general, it seemed to refer primarily to people who lived east or southeast of Tibet and spoke Tibeto-Burman languages, mainly those of what is now identified as the Yi branch. There were at the same time, however, a lot of local names for various peoples who might have been included in the broader Luoluo category. Several early Western explorers and missionaries commented on the problematic boundaries of the category: Alfred Lietard, for example, a meticulous and unbiased early observer of the Yi, included in his list of "Lolo tribes" the Lisu, now a separate *minzu* altogether (1913: 43–44). Herbert Mueller, in an authoritative summary published about the same time, included the Woni of Puer and Simao, a group now officially classified as part of the Hani *minzu* (Mueller 1913: 44). He also expressed a Westerner's exasperation with the problem: "But it is often difficult to decide which races should still be thought of as Lolo, and which as more independent relatives of this people" (ibid.: 40). And A.-F. Legendre, a doctor who spent years traveling here and there across Yi territory in Sichuan and Yunnan, was sure that the peoples in this category ought not to be classed together: "This time I became certain that one finds in Yunnan many tribes known as Loloish, and who call themselves that, who have almost nothing in common, physically or morally, with those of Liangshan" (Legendre 1913: 392).

It is easy to demonstrate that there is, in many cases, little in common among the various "branches" now assigned to the Yi *minzu*. For example, even though the six officially recognized dialects of the Yi language differ considerably in their vocabulary and pronunciation, and even though the Central and Western dialects are closer to Lisu and Lahu than to the Northern, Northeastern, Eastern, or Southeastern branches, Yi is considered a single language in official classifications. Similarly, there is extreme cultural variation among the groups. None but the Nuosu have the caste system (though others, specifically the Nasu,

most closely related to the Nuosu, may have traces of something like it). Many Yi groups, especially in Yunnan, have had much closer contact than have the Nuosu with surrounding Han society and culture, particularly since the reabsorption of the Southwest into the empire in the Yuan, with its concomitant massive immigration of Han military and civil colonies to the area, and even more so since the *gaitu guiliu* of the Yongzheng era incorporated most of their communities into the regular civil administration. And in fact, many sources attribute the *divergence* of language, custom, and social practices specifically to the differential influences of the larger Han environment. For example, Chen Tianjun writes that the slave-feudal transition occurred at three different times in the three different areas of Yi settlement. In Yunnan, it came earliest, at the time Nanzhao was taken over by Dali, whereas it persisted in Guizhou and northeastern Yunnan until the Ming, and in Liangshan, in modified form at least, to the 1950s (Chen Tianjun 1987: 114–17).

It is still not entirely clear exactly why the limits of the category Yi were drawn during the ethnic identification project exactly where they were, to include the Laluo and Lolopo, for example, and exclude the Lisu and Woni. We do know, from retrospective accounts, that investigators put the burden of proof on those groups who wanted to be separate *minzu* (Lin Yaohua 1987). We also know that they paid heavy attention to language and to demonstrable common historic origins, even when those were not part of the local people's own versions of their history or origins (Jiang Yongxing 1985). But my best guess is that they included in the category Yi just about everyone who had previously been called Luoluo, either by Han neighbors or in written Han sources.

Whatever the principles of classification (and the search for principles may be futile, since the process was hurried and often ad hoc), the name for the category became a real question. Luoluo was clearly ruled out because it was pejorative, and there was no local term common to all groups or comprehensive of local groups and others included in the category. The solution came from the fact that in Liangshan and many other areas, Nuosu or other Yi, when speaking the Han language, often called themselves Yi 夷, an old term that originally referred to eastern barbarians but that had long been used in the ethnology and administration of the Southwest. Lin Yaohua, in his 1947 monograph, explains at the beginning that Nuosu people speaking Han call themselves Yijia, in contrast to Hanjia (from which derives, perhaps, Hxiemga), and that they almost never use the term Luoluo (Lin 1994 [1947]: 1). Yi 夷 itself seemed a bit derogatory, but the homophonic Yi 彝, seemed perfect, and aside from the fact that nobody who isn't one can remember how to write the char-

acter, the name has stuck, and become the Han translation of Nuosu, Lipuo, Nasu, Laluo, Sani, Nisu, and many other local self-appellations.[1]

In other words, ethnic identification lumped together a large number of local and regional communities whose origins seemed to be similar and whose languages were related, and who had some customs in common, such as texts for sending the soul back through a series of geographic place-names to the supposed point of origin. Before 1949, however, these "branches" had had very little to do with each other. This is demonstrated by the fact that, although the term Ni can be found in ritual texts from many areas, and it seems to refer to Yi as opposed to Han, Tibetan, or other peoples, there was never a term in common parlance in the local languages that referred to the whole group we now know as Yi.

There is lots of remaining evidence of the disunity of Yi as a category, in Liangshan and elsewhere. For example, in Puwei Township, Miyi County, there are officially three "branches" of the Yi: Nuosu, "Abu," and Tazhi. The "Abu" and Tazhi were relatives or retainers of the Ji *tusi* who ruled the area from the late Ming to the 1930s; the Nuosu came in the great migrations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Similarly, in neighboring Malong Township, there are Nuosu and Yala (Peng Deyuan et. al. 1992: 24). In neither of these communities do Nuosu intermarry with "Abu," Tazhi, or Yala, even though all of them are classified as Yi. The Nasu language probably formerly spoken by "Abu" and Tazhi is almost (but not quite) mutually intelligible with Nuosu, and the Yala language, though also classified as a dialect of Yi, is completely mutually unintelligible with Nasu and Nuosu.[2] There are even groups classified as Yi who want to be something else; most prominent among these are the Sani in Lunan (now Shilin) and Luliang Counties, east of Kunming, who even inscribe their tourist artifacts "Sani *zu*," elevating the Sani to the status of a *minzu* of their own; some of the Laluo (or Shuitian) people in Renhe and Huaping also objected, at least in the 1980s, to being classified as Yi. Despite this demonstrable diversity, the 1950s project generally has stood the test of

1. In the 1994 edition of Lin's book, titled *Liangshan yijia de jubian* (The great transformation of the Liangshan Yi), the modern character replaces the former in the title and also in the text, which otherwise seems to remain unchanged except for the addition of new material in some chapters. I will not analyze the politics of this graphic change here.

2. I treat the ethnic identity and ethnic relations of these and other "little groups" in some detail in chapter 13. Despite the fact of their classification as Yi (and only some of them dispute it), the nature of their ethnic relations is completely different from that of the Nuosu and is thus treated separately.

time; only the Jinuo of Sipsong Panna, once classified as Yi, have successfully obtained recognition as a separate *minzu*.

When I first tell Western friends about this situation, their sympathies immediately gravitate to the little guys, or in this case, the little groups of a few tens or hundreds of thousands who do not want to be indiscriminately lumped in with the huge category Yi. But ethnic identification did not create a situation that only opposed clunky, lumpy state categories against the reality of local discourse. The process in fact incorporated some of the local discourse (and more of the local people) into the larger discourse of the unified country with fifty-six *minzu*. And among ethnic elites, this has led to a counterdiscourse that suggests that the category of Yi is not too big, but rather too *small*.

A Nuosu scholar friend of mine, for example, expressed this view. He told me that he had traveled among many different ethnic groups in Sichuan and Yunnan, including not only various branches of the Yi, but also Lisu, Lahu, Hani, Naxi, and Mosuo. He found, everywhere he went, great linguistic and cultural similarities. And in fact, this is true enough. There is a basic Tibeto-Burman grammatical structure, with verb aspect markers, a subject-object-verb word order, a certain kind of pronominal structure, and so forth. The similarities are even closer if we take only the Yi branch (which includes Lisu, Lahu, Naxi, and Hani in addition to the Yi language). There were also cultural similarities—the aforementioned soul-sending rituals are common to most of these peoples (I myself have recorded some of the chants among the eastern Naze). From all this, he drew the conclusion that ethnic identification had probably been structured with the intention of breaking up the Yi into smaller units, so they would not be potentially so strong politically.

The unity of the category is a sensitive matter with ethnic elites generally. For example, I wrote an article (Harrell 1990) contrasting the nature of ethnic identity in three Yi communities: a Nuosu community in Yanbian; a Lipuo community in Pingdi, in southern Renhe; and a Shuitian community in Zhuangshang, in western Renhe. Though neither the Nuosu nor the Lipuo community had any problem with the category Yi, many Shuitian at that time did not like it. The article has been reprinted, in a Chinese translation, in the journal *Sichuan Minzu Research* (Sichuan minzu yanjiu), and although the description of the Shuitian community and its less-than-friendly relationships with the local Han was left in the article, any mention of their disagreement with being included in the category Yi was excised as too sensitive, particularly for Yi elites.[3]

3. In a similar vein, several small groups, including the Baima people of northwestern Sichuan, have tried to separate themselves off from the Zang, or Tibetan, *minzu*. The explanations that cir-

Outside of the elites, it is hard to know how much importance the unitary category of Yi has for local people. Clearly, in those areas where there are multiple Yi groups, many of whose animosities or lack of interaction reach back far beyond the period of ethnic identification, telling people they are all Yi has not materially changed their relationships with one another. And in areas where there is only one Yi group (such as most of Liangshan), the distinctions have little practical relevance. It is when members of local groups also participate in the wider national and international discourse that being Yi becomes important. And in these wider contexts, ethnic elites have gone to great efforts in many areas not so much to assert the unity of the Yi (which they assume without question), but to communicate the nature, the history, and, most of all, the glory of Yi culture to the Chinese world and to the world at large.

SCHOLARSHIP ON YI HISTORY AND CULTURE

There is now an enormous amount of scholarship on Yi ancient and modern history, on ritual and historic texts written in the Yi script, on the slave social system of Liangshan, on certain rituals and celebrations, and on prospects for economic development in Yi districts. In addition to the aforementioned collections of historical and ethnological materials, there are monographs (e.g., Zimei 1992, Bamo 1994, Wu Jingzhong 1993), all dealing with customs and religion (mostly in Liangshan) as well as essay collections on general topics (Xinan Minzu Yanjiu Xuehui 1987a and 1987b), and on specific areas such as literacy in *Nuosu bburma* (Sichuan Minzu Yuyan Xuehui 1990 and Sichuan Minzu Guangbo Diantai 1990) or household and family organization (Yuan Yayu 1992). There are now three journals—*Yi Research* (Yizu yanjiu), published in Chuxiong; *Liangshan Nationalities Research* (Liangshan minzu yanjiu), published in Xichang; and *Yi Studies of China* (Zhongguo Yixue), published in Beijing—devoted wholly or mostly to Yi studies. I have to confess right here that, despite the middling number of such articles and books cited in this volume, I have not yet begun to gain what historians have traditionally called "bib-

culate informally among the ethnology community for why their petitions have been rejected, time and time again, by the Nationalities Commission in Beijing, always center on the desire not to offend Tibetan elites, especially the late tenth Panchen Lama. There are, however, also scholarly arguments in Tibetan-language journals purporting to demonstrate on historical and philological grounds that these people (and the Prmi as well—see chap. 10) are unambiguously Tibetan (Upton 2000).

liographic control" of this literature, let alone to make a real dent in actually reading it. I do believe, however, that from even a cursory look at a very nonrandom sample of this literature, we can learn something about the enterprise that is Yi scholarship and how it fits into the general ethnic enterprise of promoting Yi culture both to the outside world and to the growing literate (mostly literate in Han, since that is the language of most of the scholarship), educated Yi public.

First, fitting both with the traditions of writing ethnohistory (*minzu shi*) and with the conclusions about the nature of *minzu* embodied in the project of ethnic identification, scholarship on Yi assumes the historical unity of the category, the objective reality of something called a *minzu* that endures through history. In order to establish the historicity of this reality, of course, historians must construct a *minzu* narrative similar in structure and function to the national narratives described by Bhabha (1990).[4] Whatever the shifting reality of ethnic relations, of local peoples and their alliances and conflicts, over the millennium and a half from the early Tang or even earlier to the present, it must be made to look like the unfolding of a single, unified historical narrative. To this end, historical writers such as Ma Changshou (1987) and Chen Tianjun (1987) speak of the existence of identifiably Yi people at least as early as the time of the Baiman and Wuman in Yunnan during the early Tang dynasty; the Wuman are said to be identifiable as the ancestors of the Yi. Qi Qingfu (1987), reviewing the establishment of the Nanzhao kingdom in the 740s, advances the now generally accepted hypothesis that the first ruling dynasty of that kingdom was Yi (and not Bai) and that all of the succeeding dynasties were Bai.

In order to make this assumption of a single historical *minzu* narrative convincing, scholars combine traditional Chinese historiography with Yi genealogical recitations (usually by *nzymo*, *nuoho*, or *bimo*), which lead back through several tens of generations to the time when "the six ancestors split up" (*liuzu fenzhi*). Two of these ancestors, called Qoni and Gguhxo in Nuosu, are traditionally considered to be the ancestors of the Yi of Liangshan; the other four are considered to be the ancestors of various groups of Yi in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi (Ma Changshou 1987: 10–31). *Nzymo*, *nuoho*, and *bimo* clans in Liangshan routinely trace their own genealogies to one or the other of these

4. I have elaborated on the structure of *minzu* narratives in Harrell 1996a. A similar (and similarly constructed) historical narrative for the Yao, another widely dispersed, culturally and linguistically diverse *minzu*, is described in Litzinger 1995.

two ancestors.[5] People who engage in the study of southwestern history generally, or Yi history in particular, now talk routinely of the breakup of the six ancestors as a historical event, even though many people now think that the six ancestors were six tribes of proto-Yi who were originally allied but then split up and migrated to various points in the Southwest.

Constructing a unified historical narrative in support of the idea of *minzu* unity runs into problems, however, when the great cultural and linguistic diversity of the present-day Yi peoples is taken into account. There are two ways to deal with this. One, of course, is the simple expedient of looking for commonalities in language, ritual, religious belief, and other areas of common culture. This is the tack taken, for example, in the Bamo sisters' *Record of the Customs of the Yi* (Yizu fengsu zhi), where the first chapter is devoted to a general account of the Yi, including a demonstration that the language is basically the same everywhere, though there are dialectal variations (Zimei 1992: 2–3). In this view, the differences are superficial and due to the lack of communication over long distances, as well as different historical conditions in different areas. The second possible strategy is to admit the great size of the differences between one group and another but use the simplified Marxist theory of historical stages, along with the progress of Han civilization and differential contact of various Yi groups with it, to explain why Yi society and culture are so different, for example, in Yunnan and in Liangshan. This is the tack taken in Chen Tianjun's aforementioned article (1987).

Much ethnological scholarship, covering such areas as religion, ritual, and customs generally (as well as folklore) can exist outside this unifying narrative, as particularistic accounts of local social and cultural phenomena. But in another sense, such literature on Nuosu society and culture assumes a particularly important place in the dialogue on Yi studies generally, precisely because of the purported isolation and slow development of Liangshan in comparison to other areas (Zimei 1992: 5; Chen Tianjun 1987; Ma Changshou 1987). Nuosu customs and culture become the typical, the original, the untouched and unspoiled versions, the pure phenomena that in other areas can only be glimpsed through multiple filters of Han influence and historic cultural and demographic change. This attitude is best exemplified by the idea of the slave system of production. Because of Marxist-Leninist historiographic stage models, the Nuosu slave system (which was real enough, but see Ma Erzi 1993), becomes the model for the slave system that *must have existed everywhere* before

5. E.g., see numerous examples recorded in Sichuan Sheng Bianji Zu 1987; each clan traces its ancestry to either Qoni or Gguhxo.

Han influence shoved history forward in other areas while it stood still in Liangshan.[6]

Second, scholarship on the Yi is designed to demonstrate to whoever is watching (and perhaps particularly to the Yi themselves) that Yi culture is something to be proud of, something that has many refined and highly developed features, something that can hold its head high in the face of the world. Part of the impetus for this kind of scholarly effort stems from the knowledge among Yi scholars that the Yi are usually considered one of the most backward (*luohou*) *minzu* in China and that the Nuosu of Liangshan, who exemplify Yi society because of their relative purity, are thought not only to be backward in the sense of dirty, poor, illiterate, and remote but also backward in the sense of having retained the slave system so much longer than all the other *minzu*. Because traditional scholarship, mostly by Han scholars, often used terms such as "cruel" to describe the oppression and exploitation of slaves, producing such gems as "tools who could talk" to describe the *gaxy*, Nuosu scholars have felt even more strongly the need to demonstrate the positive side of Yi life and culture.

One very commonly heard defense among Nuosu intellectuals goes something like "You can't take the conditions of Yi society in Liangshan on the eve of Liberation to represent the situation of the Yi throughout most of our history." According to this view, there were times when Yi culture was every bit as refined and developed as that of the surrounding peoples, including the Han. One piece of evidence often adduced for this opinion is the tradition of the *bimo* priests. Called "traditional Yi intellectuals" (*Yizu chuantong zhishifenzi*) in this discourse, *bimo* are praised for their knowledge of history, geography, medicine, physiology, agronomy, and a wealth of other humanistic and scientific fields, and for transmitting this knowledge down through the generations (Bamo 2001).

Another manifestation of this desire to demonstrate the value of Yi culture appears in scholarship and intellectual discourse on the origins of the various Yi writing systems. There is, in fact, little concrete, datable evidence of any Yi writing systems before the Yuan and Ming dynasties, at which time inscriptions ancestral to most of the scripts used by Yi peoples today are found on stone stelae, mostly in Guizhou, where Nasu *tusi* ruled during that period (Ma Xueliang 1982: 1–8). But the story circulates among educated Yi that in fact the Yi were the first in the world to invent writing and that Han and others learned to write from the Yi. The idea was first brought up in conjunction with the

6. Pan Jiao (n.d.) provides a particularly lucid analysis of the phenomenon of making Nuosu into prototypical Yi.

fifty-some single symbols found on pottery dated to the fifth millennium B.C.E. (K. C. Chang 1977: 113–14) at the early Neolithic site of Banpo, now in the city of Xi'an in the northwest of China proper. People thought these symbols might be ancestral to Yi writing of some sort, and made some speculations as to a possible course of evolution to present-day systems. The story, however, has gone beyond formal or even speculative scholarship. I have heard it several times in exaggerated form, perhaps best exemplified by a Nuosu militia captain I met in Baiwu, who told me that the symbols on the Banpo pots (which were probably twenty thousand years old) had remained a mystery to the greatest scholars in the land, including Mao Zedong's captive intellectual Guo Moruo, until they were shown to a Nuosu *bimo*, who could read fifty-four of the fifty-six symbols immediately. This demonstrated conclusively that Yi had invented writing, and Han had learned it from them.[7] A more general idea of the contribution of Yi peoples to civilization in general and Yi civilization in particular is contained in the Yunnanese Yi scholar Liu Yaohan's book *A New Approach to the Origin of Chinese Civilization* (Zhongguo wenming yuantou xintan), in which he argues that many of the innovations of ancient Chinese civilization, including the calendar, originated with the Yi and were later adopted by other peoples (Liu 1985).

This commitment of Nuosu and other Yi intellectuals to the enterprise they sometimes describe as propagandizing Yi culture to the world, or *xiang shijie xuanchuan Yizu wenhua* , carries over even to my own role and those of other foreigners who study one or another aspect of Yi culture and society. Senior and junior scholars alike have praised us for assuming whatever minor role we take in making the Yi and their culture known. The holding of two International Yi Studies Conferences (in Seattle in 1995 and in Trier, Germany, in 1998), along with the publication of the edited papers from the 1995 Seattle conference (Harrell 2001) are seen by many Yi scholars and intellectuals as an example of this broadcast function, which the Yi intellectuals themselves often take as their major mission in professional life.

7. In fact, Guo Moruo (1972), as well as Li Xiaoting (1969), did try to demonstrate the connection of these glyphs to the writing on shell and bone (*jiaguwen*) of north China about three thousand years later, and Ho Ping-ti, in his *The Cradle of the East* (1976) made similar claims. K. C. Chang's *The Archaeology of Ancient China* (1977: 114) shows a sample of these signs, and many of them do, in fact, duplicate or very closely resemble some of the syllabic signs in Nuosu writing. The same claim, however, could be made for the Roman alphabet: one can find the capital letters I, T, Y, X, Z, N, K, L, and E, along with an upside-down A.

CULTURAL DISPLAY

Another way to introduce Yi culture to the world (and to give Yi, particularly urban Yi, something to be proud of under the world's gaze) on a more popular level is the promotion of folk culture, or the modified forms thereof, for local and wider consumption. Since the adoption of the new Autonomy Laws and related policies in the early 1980s, this kind of activity has been one of the most politically innocuous ways of building or restoring ethnic pride without touching on sensitive topics that might get the perpetrators in trouble. In fact, as I have explored in more detail elsewhere (Harrell 1996b), one of the ways that the state *minzu* organs and local officials alike promote their project of nation-building in a "unified, multiethnic state" is to stress, for insiders and outsiders alike, the differences among *minzu* and local groups, while denying that those differences take the form of conflict. Many foreign writers (Schein 1989, 1997, 1999; Swain 1990; Oakes 1995) have stressed the interconnection of cultural display with the economics of the tourist industry: visitors want to see colorful ethnic costumes and customs, and locals want both to make money and to display their own cultures with pride, so ethnic color, in the form of clothes, dances, songs, and festivals, takes on a new life as a commodity.

There is a commodity aspect of ethnic color in Liangshan, as I will describe below, but I do not think commodification and tourism can be seen as the major reasons for this display, since there is very little tourism in Liangshan, by comparison to many places in Yunnan (such as Kunming, Dali, Lunan, Lijiang, and Sipsong Panna) or to tourist areas in southeastern Guizhou (Oakes 1995, Cheung 1996, Schein 1999). Foreign tourists are almost entirely absent, and even Chinese tourism usually passes the prefecture by on the way to more famous spots in Yunnan and Guizhou. I think the reason for the revival of cultural display in Liangshan is partly to increase the ethnic pride of the Nuosu themselves and partly to look impressive to the increasingly heterogeneous gaze of the Chinese reading and TV-watching public, as well as to visitors who come to the area primarily for reasons other than tourism but who like to experience a little ethnic color along the way. Ethnic color is thus less a commodity here than a form of symbolic capital whose value lies in insiders' ability both to enjoy it and to use it to impress outsiders.

An example of cultural promotion that is directed mainly at Nuosu themselves comes from the standardization, recording, and further innovation in Nuosu music and dance. Nuosu people in villages and small towns, like minority people all over southwest China (but pointedly unlike Han or Hui),

do a lot of dancing in a circle or a line. At the head of the line a man plays simple, repetitive melodies on a high-pitched, bamboo transverse flute; the second dancer in line places his or her hand on the flutist's shoulder, and all trailing dancers hold hands, forming part or all of a circle. Each tune, according to its melody and tempo, has a particular step that goes with it; these steps, ranging from sixteen to thirty-two beats, are repeated until the flutist changes the tune. They are easy to learn, and a large number of people around a roaring fire on a cold night at a wedding or holiday celebration can have a roaring good time, especially when the dancers are also skilled enough singers to invent or remember mildly titillating or insulting verses to sing to the songs.

Nowadays, however, these dances have taken on a more standardized and explicitly ethnic flavor. First, since boom boxes are available in all but the poorest and most remote areas, when the flutist gets tired or wants a smoke or drink, the boom box can be set on a bench or table near the fire, and there is a standard tape that uses pop instruments to play some of the same tunes, eliciting some of the same steps. But there is only one tape of Nuosu melodies (there is another one for Naze/Prmi dances, which is only slightly different), and so once-through-the-tape becomes a kind of routine. Nevertheless, every Nuosu township I have ever been to has this tape, and it has become a kind of prescribed ethnic performance, especially for schoolchildren and young people, and, when one is available, for any kind of outside visitor, including foreigners. In addition, there is a series of melodies on the other side of the tape that are designed to accompany a complex square-dance type of performance by eight boys and eight girls; I don't know what the original source of this kind of dance may have been.

Not only circle-dance tunes, but drinking songs have also become standardized property of the Yi, though of course only Nuosu listen to Nuosu drinking songs. In particular, the drinking song "Guests from Afar" (Sumu divi wo) has become a kind of Nuosu anthem, which is sung for visitors when they enter a school or sometimes a village, and certainly at all manner of banquets, receptions, and dinners; there is even a Han language version now, as recounted in the story of the banquet for the television reporters told in chapter 1.

The appropriation of modern cultural forms in music goes beyond instrumentation, standardization, and recording, however. There is now a Nuosu pop/rock group, consisting of three young men, called (in Chinese) Shan Ying, or Mountain Eagle, which by 1994 had made two tapes, both widely available in Xichang record stores. The first, consisting mainly of pop-type tunes, is called in Han "Wo ai wode jiaxiang," or "I Love My Homeland," a translation of the Nuosu song title "Nga muddi nga cy mgu." Two of the songs on the tape express

love for the singer's mother, especially when he is far away and misses her; these often bring tears to the eyes of listeners. Other titles include the aforementioned "Go Softly in the Month of the Tiger" and an original drinking song, simply entitled "Drink Up," or "Nry ndo." Their second tape, *Liangshan Rock-and-Roll*, includes more rocklike songs, and in a crossover effort, some of these are sung in the Han language. In 1994 these tapes were extraordinarily popular; I think every driver I rode with had them in his car and played them frequently, and there was much talk among urban Nuosu about the artists, the songs, and their content. The forms may be borrowed, but the content, with such themes as love for the homeland and longing for mother, is explicitly ethnic, both in its attachment to place and idiom and in its themes, which would have little resonance in most mass cultures today. I doubt that many non-Nuosu people other than ethnologists or folklorists have ever purchased copies of this tape.

Another revived (or perhaps more accurately, redesigned) cultural form that is now displayed primarily for internal consumption is the factory-manufactured red-yellow-black painted wooden dinnerware. As described in chapter 6, until the 1980s the dishes were primarily made by certain specialist clans in particular villages in various parts of Liangshan. In the early 1980s, factories were opened in Xide and Zhaojue, and by the early 1990s they could hardly keep up with demand. They print brochures, sometimes complete with price lists, for foreign and domestic customers, but most people buy them at the factory, in nearby stores, or in the department stores in the cities. A Nuosu home cannot be without them, but in a reversal of the pop-music case described above, here a local form has been adapted to a contemporary use. There are now hundreds of types of utensils, many of them designed for urban Chinese social life, such as beer glasses, covered teacups, chopsticks, and the plates and bowls that make up a rather fancy Chinese banquet-table setting. Nuosu people living in Xichang, who eat stir-fried vegetables or Sichuan spicy bean-curd more often than they eat chunks of mutton or pork, can still eat ethnic if they use these dishes and can display their ethnicity just by having them in the glass-fronted cupboard in the living room (fig. 15). Nuosu-style serving dishes are thus commodified, and unlike other cultural forms, they have become popular among members of other ethnic groups, including Han; one increasingly sees them used as fruit dishes and the like in middle-class homes in the region.

Many other forms of cultural promotion serve the purposes of both inside affirmation and outside display. For example, starting in 1993 some officials in the prefectural government decided to hold a modern celebration of the mid-summer Fire Festival, which has been designated the Yi holiday, though in my

FIG. 15. Nuosu-style lacquerware at an urban Xichang banquet

experience all ethnic groups in the Southwest, including the Han, celebrate it. So every August there is now the International Torch Festival, complete with sports events (wrestling and horse racing), song and dance shows, and even a beauty contest, in which young women dress in elaborate versions of Nuosu dress, and in addition to the talent competitions (which would be recognizable to an American or Chinese audience familiar with Miss Universe and the like), contestants parade around in a half-moon type posture in which they hold the hems of their pleated skirts out on each side and move with tiny, mincing steps. I once watched a tape of this contest while a four-year-old boy in the family I was visiting did a hilarious imitation in front of the VCR with a cloth tied around his waist and a towel piled on his head.

It is difficult to discern the target—external or internal—of another kind of cultural display, the coffee-table book. These have been produced for the Yi of Guizhou (Chen Changyou 1992) as well as for Liangshan. The Liangshan volume, under the general editorship of the art photographer Zhong Dakun, and published by the People's Fine Arts Publishing House in Beijing, contains technically outstanding, sometimes breathtaking photography, high quality printing, and a lot of features that situate it in nationalities politics and in Chinese official publishing. Inscriptions at the beginning were written by Wu

Jinghua, who is joined by Feng Yuanwei and other notables on the editorial advisory committee, and Liu Shaoxian, then party secretary of Liangshan, has written the preface. Depicted in photographs accompanied by Chinese and English texts (but no Nuosu text) are such conventional subjects as landscapes, houses, costumes, dinnerware, holidays, *bimo* and *sunyi*, and of course modernization and progress. It thus celebrates the Yi of Liangshan in the context of Chinese cultural politics. Nuosu intellectuals and entrepreneurs will definitely want the book, but it is too expensive for most people; I suspect the publishers are hoping for a market among urban Chinese in China proper, and perhaps among overseas Chinese (since it uses *fanti*, or unsimplified, Chinese characters). It stands somewhere between the poles of cultural capital creation and ethnic commodification (Zhong 1992).

Probably the most spectacular cultural display I have ever seen was the dinner for the visiting television crew described in chapter 1. The setting was the finest, by mid-1990s Chinese urban standards, that could be had in Xichang, and the food, most of it at least, was impeccably representative of modern Sichuanese haute cuisine. The people in attendance were of high (though not extremely high) status: a former vice-prefect, a cardiac surgeon, the head of the Foreign Affairs Office, several professors, some foreigners. It was probably the kind of crowd and the kind of service this television crew had seen in a hundred small- and medium-sized cities all over China. But the display of ethnicity overrode everything. All of the local attendees save one (not counting the foreigners) were Nuosu. The waitresses were dressed in Yi garb, singing Yi songs, telling the guests of Yi proverbs and customs. There were red-yellow-black shot glasses served from similarly painted trays, the factory sort, of course. The food had to include, at least for a taste, buckwheat pancakes and chunks of meat. The topics of conversation were, of course, Yi culture, Yi society, Yi customs, even Yi language. And the purpose, of course, was to facilitate a good treatment, in the forthcoming television newsmagazine segment, of three young women who had done the Yi proud by becoming a professor, an academy researcher, and a radio broadcaster.

It would be possible to bemoan the "inauthenticity" of a staged beauty contest (though there are things resembling beauty contests in traditional Nuosu culture), of drinking expensive Chinese liquor out of factory-produced lacquer cups, of coffee-table books with pictures posed just so that only girls dressed in the most Nuosu of costumes happen to enter the frame. Ethnic tourists, whose mission in their travels is to seek the ever-less-touristy and commercialized, ever-more-"authentic" place (Oakes 1998: 1–19) might be disappointed with any of these invented traditions. But the importance of this kind of display in

China's cultural politics—as Louisa Schein has shown for song-and-dance performances and official holiday celebrations among the Miao (1999), and as Almaz Han has shown for wrestling tournaments and summer fairs in Inner Mongolia (1999)—is that the impetus for these new versions of ethnic things comes primarily from the elites of the minority ethnic groups themselves. It is to instill pride in their own people and to gain respect and interest from outsiders (and of course to have fun and maybe make some tourist dollars) that these performances and displays are created and enacted. Nuosu cultural entrepreneurs, like Nuosu bureaucrats and economic entrepreneurs, are the instigators, leaders, and self-perceived beneficiaries of ethnically conscious activity, be it economic development, scholarly historical justification, or cultural display. The creation, systematization, and display of ethnic things, old or new, is an important component in the revival of ethnic consciousness in 1980s and 1990s China.

FROM ETHNIC GROUP TO *MINZU* AND BACK AGAIN

Most of the groups and group relations described in the village case studies of chapters 6, 7, and 8 are of the sort that Western social scientists would call ethnic groups and ethnic relations, or ethnicity. Groups of people, purportedly sharing common history and descent, and with some cultural traits in common, display through a variety of languages, verbal and symbolic, their unity as groups and their differences from other groups with whose members (present or haunting by their absence) they interact more or less frequently. In the Nuosu case this ethnic identity is based most strongly in common kinship, including descent and affinity, and displays clear divisions between the we-group—Nuosu—and everyone else, whether or not there are large cultural differences that also divide them. If all ethnicity is at least partly local, the local manifestations of ethnic identity in Mishi, Baiwu, and Manshuiwan are clear, unambiguous, stable, and omnipresent in everyday life.

I think most urban Nuosu in Xichang feel their ethnicity at least as strongly as do their village relatives. But because they are educated, and because most of what most of them do all day is done in the context of contemporary China, their ethnicity is not just Nuosu, but consciously Yi. The *minzu* categorization may originally have been quite artificial. The ethnic identification project may have imposed an umbrella category on a large conglomeration of groups who were only distantly related and at that time had little consciousness of commonality. But for urbanites in the 1980s and 1990s this commonality is important, for two reasons. First, they believe most of what they learn in school; they

certainly believe that China has fifty-six *minzu*, and they believe this whether or not they also think that one of these, the Yi, or perhaps fifty-five of these, the minority *minzu*, have gotten a raw deal for the last forty years. So whether they think more in terms of opposition or of cooperation, it is in terms of their identity as members of the Yi *minzu*. Although the specific kinds of ethnic display found in Xichang are all derived from forms developed by Nuosu people in Liangshan, the content of scholarship suggests identification with a wider category, which is promoted by scholarly contacts at conferences and meetings with Yi from other parts of the Southwest, in the same way that cadres, who meet other Yi cadres, also have a face-to-face framework for this more-than-just-imagined *minzu* community. Consciousness is not uniform among the Yi, particularly not for little groups who are classified as Yi but feel little in common with their Nuosu neighbors, for example (see chap. 13). But for many people, what was originally an objective classification has become a subjective identity, and Yi is a true ethnic category.

For villagers, the process has not gone so far in most places, though it has certainly gone much further, for example, with college-educated officials and teachers in Manshuiwan than it has for illiterate farmers in Mishi. But with the gradual increases in education, media penetration, geographic mobility, and bilingualism that seem to be irresistible trends even in the heart of Liangshan, village Nuosu too will learn about the history and traditions of the Yi, about Yi in other places, even about the principles of *minzu* classification. For some of them, there might be a reaction, a formation of ethnic distinctions on the wider scene, such as that described by Hsieh Shih-chung (1995: 326) for Dai in Kunming, where people from Sipsong Panna and Dehong call each other, in the Han language, Xidai and Dedai, and have chosen to recognize little affinity. Or, perhaps, Yi—including all the multiple "branches" from Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi—will become the relevant ethnic category for ordinary people, as it is now for governmental and scholarly elites. If this is true, if the local languages of ethnic identity and the metalanguage of ethnic identification begin to coincide in their vocabulary and syntax, then, paradoxically, China may begin to resemble the model set forth by Stalin, which was so unusable in practice for the workers of the ethnic identification project. It may also face in the Southwest, at that point, the kinds of ethnonational disputes and conflicts that have plagued the Inner Asian frontier areas of Tibet, Xinjiang, and Mongolia. For now, the Yi are not a nation, and the ethnic identity of the Nuosu—stable, discrete, and kin-based—works differently from that of other groups in Liangshan.