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Lost in Translation? A Brief History of the Study of Dongba Manuscripts from its Beginnings to 1945

Abstract: The study of Dongba manuscripts began in the late nineteenth century in the wake of missionary and colonial activities in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands. After the First World War, these manuscripts were increasingly traded as exotic artefacts, until in the 1930s scholarly efforts began to study them as remains and witnesses of a unique but moribund culture. This chapter attempts to reconstruct the history of Dongba manuscript studies up to the end of the Second World War. Special attention is given to the contributions of Naxi and Chinese scholars and their network, and to Joseph F. Rock who would later dominate Dongba studies in the West.

Introduction

The Naxi 納西 are one of the People's Republic of China's composite national minorities. Most of them live in the loop of the Yangzi (Golden Sand River, Jinshajiang 金沙江) in the North-western part of the province of Yunnan, some in adjacent areas in South-western Sichuan. The ethnic groups constituting the Naxi nationality speak 'Naish' languages classified as 'Qiangic' and belonging to the Tibeto-Burman branch of the Sino-Tibetan family. According to a recent assessment, the linguistic situation is much more complex than previously thought, but here we are mainly concerned with the Naxi proper (approx. 270,000) who live in Yunnan province with Lijiang 麗江 as their centre. The matrilineal Na or Narua (approx. 40,000) need to be mentioned too; they are better known in the West under their Chinese name Mosuo (written 摩梭 today, but with many variants in older literature) and live to the east of the Naxi in Yongning 永寧 and around Lugu Lake 瀘沽湖 (see Fig. 1).¹ For simplicity's sake, in what follows 'Naxi' will be used for the Naxi proper and 'Mosuo' for the Na, although 'Mo-so', 'Mosso' and similar

¹ Michaud, Zhong and He 2017.

transliterations have been used in Chinese (often written 麽些)² and in Western literature for the Naxi until 1954, when the national minority was first created.³

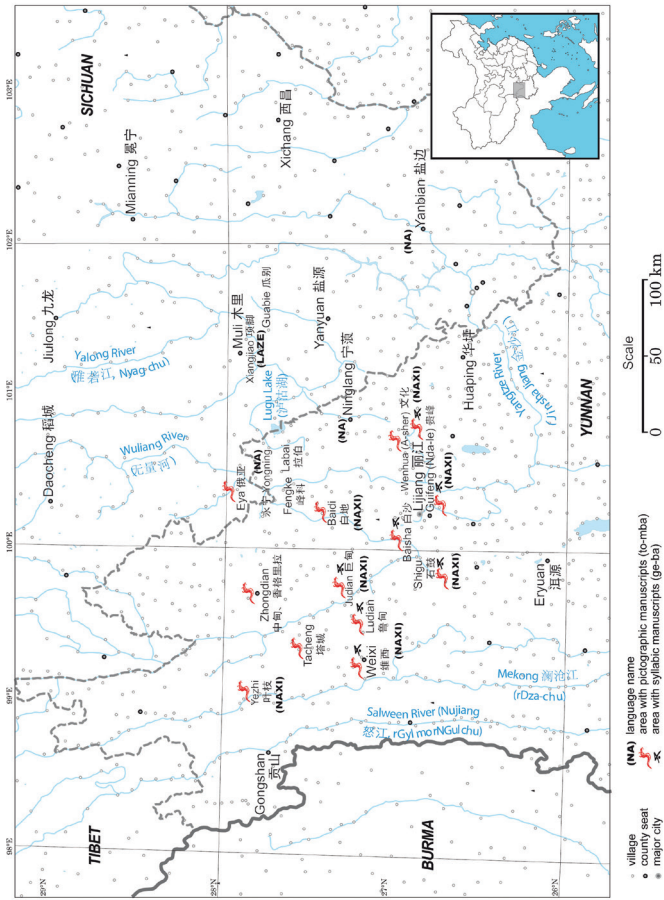


Fig. 1: Map of the area where Naish languages are spoken, with indications about writing systems (Alexis Michaud), Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0).

2 Lacouperie had already noted that the character nowadays mostly used for writing *xie* was also used for *suo*, see Lacouperie 1885, 454, n. 1 (= Lacouperie 1894, 40, n. 1); Cordier quotes this, but transliterates as ‘Mo-sie’, see Cordier 1908, 663. – For a survey of the different ways of writing Mosuo transmitted in literature see Fang Guoyu 2008. Today the characters are mostly read ‘Moxie’.

3 For the Nationalities Identification Project of Yunnan see Mullaney 2011.

The origins of both the Naxi and the Mosuo are unknown,⁴ although many scholars believe they are related to the Qiang 羌 who appear in literary sources of ancient and medieval Chinese history.⁵ The region in the foothills of the Himalayas where Naxi and Mosuo live today was first subdued by the Mongols when Kublai Khan and his army passed through it on their way to conquer the Dali 大理 kingdom in 1253. Under the Ming (1368–1644), Lijiang became a powerful suzerain state (*tusi* 土司) ruled by the Mu 木 family, until it was fully integrated in the Qing empire after 1723.⁶ Only then did Chinese sources start reporting in more detail on the region and its multi-ethnic population.⁷ Today the Naxi proper are scattered over an area that is more or less coextensive with that of the former state of the Mu dynasty and speak a relatively homogenous ‘dialect’, while the other groups to the east are linguistically more diverse, parallel to the shifting centre of political power in that area.⁸

Large-scale manuscript production is only known from the Naxi,⁹ and more precisely from their higher-ranking ritual specialists or ‘priests’, the Dongba 東巴 (in earlier sources Duoba 多巴). They used two types of signs for producing manuscripts, called Dongba and Geba 哥巴 (in earlier sources 格巴) in Chinese. The origins of these two types are just as obscure as those of the Naxi ethnic group itself.¹⁰ Geba is a syllabographic system deriving some of its characters from the

4 Scientific studies have yielded differing results such as: the maternal lineages of the Mosuo are closest to those of the Naxi, their paternal lineages to those of the Yunnan Tibetans (mtDNA and Y chromosome variation, Wen et al. 2004); Tibetans and Mosuo are closest (Y-STR polymorphisms, Yang et al. 2004); the Mosuo have the closest genetic relationship with the Pumi (Premi, mtDNA, Lu et al. 2012).

5 Whether the Qiang-speaking part of the modern ‘national minority’ is related to those groups, is far from clear, see Wang 1999 on the ‘Qiang belt’ along the ‘mountainous fringes of the northern and eastern Tibetan Plateau’, an area including the places where Bon and Naxi manuscripts have been found. Other scholars have called this area an ‘ethnic corridor’, see Sun Hongkai 1990.

6 For an ‘ethno-history’ of the region see Mathieu 2003, the updated version in Mathieu 2011, again updated and with a focus on the relation with Bon, Mathieu 2015; for a summary of Mosuo history from a linguist’s perspective see Michaud 2017, 487–516.

7 The first gazetteer of Lijiang was published in 1743; an ethnography of Weixi followed in 1770 (Yu Qingyuan 1936); for the travel routes see the sources translated by Chavannes in Bacot 1913.

8 Michaud, Zhong and He 2017.

9 The Mosuo also had manuscripts, but only few are extant, see Song Zhaolin 2011a and 2011b, vol. 2, 220–245. It has been proposed that the characters used by the ritual specialists of the Na for the 28 lunar mansions are the ancestors of the Dongba script, see Xu 2016 and Xu 2017.

10 Li Jingsheng recorded six traditional myths about the origin of Dongba writing and then agreed with Fang Guoyu that there is no evidence for determining its age or originator, see Li Jingsheng 2016, 3–5. The discovery of petroglyphs in the Naxi areas has led some scholars to assume that they were the ancestors of Dongba characters, see Mathieu 2011, 83–86 and Michaud,

Nasu or Nuosu (Chin. Yi 彝, in earlier Western sources Lo-lo, in earlier Chinese ones Luoluo 猯猯 / 保保 / 羅羅, etc.), Tibetan and Chinese scripts, traditionally used for spells, the efficacy of which depends on the right enunciation. On a stele dated 1619, an inscription in Geba characters is found next to Tibetan and Chinese writing.¹¹ Manuscripts written with Geba characters are only found in the southern and central parts of the Naxi areas (see Fig. 1).

The great majority of the more than 30,000 extant manuscripts, however, contain Dongba characters, sometimes with additions in Geba, Tibetan or Chinese writing.¹² Only a few manuscripts older than the nineteenth century are known with some certainty, most of them dating to the latter half of the nineteenth century and to the first half of the twentieth century.¹³ In the late eighteenth century, an immigrant group from Yanyuan 鹽源 (Sichuan) in the East, calling themselves Malimasa (瑪麗瑪薩), came to Weixi 維西. They used a syllabic system of writing made up of about one hundred Dongba characters.¹⁴ It is similar to the one used by the Rek'ua (Chin. Ruoka 若喀, Ruanke 阮可 or Ruka 汝卡) who are located on the Northern side of the Golden Sand River. Just as many Mosuo, members of this small group living in Sichuan have been classified as belonging to the Mongol nationality, because they claimed descent from Kublai Khan's soldiers. Linguistically they are close to the Naxi, just as the Malimasa are.¹⁵

The nature of the Dongba characters, which have been regarded as 'pictographic' in the West or 'hieroglyphic' in Chinese (*xiangxing wenzi* 象形文字), has given rise to many erudite discussions which to a certain degree resemble those about the 'ideographic' nature of Chinese characters.¹⁶ Contemporary *opinio*

Zhong and He 2017, 154.

¹¹ See Michaud, Zhong and He 2017, 155.

¹² For the estimate see the catalogue of Guo Dalie 2003 (more than 20,000) and the incomplete list of Western holdings (more than 9,300) in Jackson 1979, 23 (reproduced in Yang Fuquan 2012, 462–463); for the collection of the Barcelona ethnological museum see Poupard *s.a.*; for the one of its Viennese counterparts, see the contribution of Agnieszka Helman-Ważny and Mengling Cai in this volume.

¹³ For a discussion of the age of the so-called Dto-la manuscripts dated by Rock to the sixteenth century see Jackson 1979, 52–57; for a manuscript kept by the Library of Congress, dated to 1668 by Li Lincan see He Jiquan 2010.

¹⁴ See Michaud, Zhong and He 2017, 155; in the official linguistic survey of 1985, their language is classified as Na, see He and Jiang 1985, 107. A list of the 105 most frequently used Malimasa syllabograms is found in He and Jiang 1985, 128–129.

¹⁵ See Wellens 2010, 73 and 246, n. 11; also see Ge Agan 2008a, 54–59. For a survey of the present state of Rek'ua studies see Li Xiaoliang 2016.

¹⁶ For Chinese writing see DeFrancis 1984 and Friedrich 2003; see Deng Zhangying 2010 for a

communis in the West has it that Dongba characters were traditionally not used for recording the spoken language. They are regarded as ‘mnemonic notes’ of the Dongba priests who would have memorized their ritual chants anyway, thus only needing prompts for activating their mental texts.¹⁷ Whether the manuscripts were only meant to serve as prompt books for chanting, however, is far from clear. In addition to the ritual specialists’ books, there are some specimens of a mundane nature, such as contracts, minutes of Dongba meetings, account books, letters, medical manuscripts and song and dance notation. In the minutes of a 1933 meeting, a set of Dongba characters unambiguously represents *all* sounds of the spoken language including the particles and thus constitutes ‘true’ writing.¹⁸ It may well be that due to their mostly ephemeral nature most of these written artefacts have been lost, thus contributing to the impression that the ritualists’ use of the characters was the only one and exclusively linked to their rituals.

Dongba manuscripts are traditionally mined for their content by anthropologists, for relevant data by linguists and as evidence for the history of writing. The huge number of artefacts and the winding path of the century-long history of research pose problems which have only recently been taken into consideration more seriously, although most of them have been known for a long time. In order to avoid speculation on shaky grounds, methodological and conceptual impediments need to be discussed, especially if one wants to dig deeper into the relations between Dongba rituals and Bon rituals. According to established opinion, the word Dongba signifying both the ritualists and their writing is cognate with the Tibetan *ston pa* for teacher. The first teacher was Dongba Shiluo (< Ston pa Gshen rab, Chin. now mostly written 東巴什羅 with many variants in earlier scholarship) or Dingba Shiluo 丁巴什羅, the mythical founder of the Bon ‘religion’. Although many scholars adhere to this view first voiced by French travellers in the early twentieth century, some consider this figure to be a synthesis of the ancestors of the formerly independent Bon and Dongba traditions.¹⁹ Various

discussion of terms for the Dongba script.

¹⁷ See Michaud, Zhong and He 2017, 153, summarising a century of research. Consequently, Dongba writing is not mentioned in *The World’s Writing Systems*, and Geba only in passing in its introduction to the ‘Yi Script’, see Daniels and Bright 1996, 239. For a few specimens of contracts, recipes, petroglyphs and the wood-block printing of Dongba and Geba characters in the 1930s see Yang Fuquan 2012, 447–453, for dance notation, songs and other non-ritual content see Dongba wenhua yanjiusuo 2000.

¹⁸ See Jiang, He and Gu 2013.

¹⁹ For the latter see Ge Agan 2008b and Yang Zhengwen 2008b.

ways of writing this name in Chinese point to a great variety of pronouncing it, complicating a discussion that is not without political implications.²⁰

For convenience's sake, five periods may be distinguished in the history of Dongba manuscript studies:

- First, from 1867 when a copy of a Dongba manuscript first brought Dongba writing to the attention of European scholars through 1913 when Bacot published the first monograph on the 'Mo-so' including two French-Naxi glossaries, one including both Geba and Dongba characters;
- Second, from 1916, seeing the purchase of a cache of forty Dongba manuscripts by the John Rylands library to the 1930s and 1940s when Chinese and Naxi scholars took note of Westerners collecting and studying Dongba manuscripts, both working in close parallel to each other and leading to the publication of the first Chinese inventory of Dongba characters and a Naxi-Chinese dictionary using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) and Geba in 1944/1945;
- Third, the first thirty years after the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, when on the one hand a few Western scholars continued to work with the manuscripts, while on the other Chinese scholarship on the Dongba was either highly politicised or completely banned;
- Fourth, from 1980, when the 'Dongba Culture Research Institute' was founded in Lijiang and Western researchers slowly allowed back into the Naxi areas, through to 2000 when the publication of the one-hundred volume series containing facsimiles of 897 Dongba manuscripts and translations of their 'texts' appeared;
- Finally, after the turn of the millennium scholarship on the Dongba manuscripts has grown exponentially. Besides utilising them in order to create a unique 'Dongba culture', scholarly interest in their manuscriptological features and their historical diversity is slowly gaining ground.

The present article will deal with the first two periods, covering the pre-history and the foundational period of Dongba manuscript studies up to the Second World War. The data collected and the methods developed during this time still inform today's research.

Since recent scholarship on the Naxi in general and concerning the Dongbas in particular is either published by authors writing Chinese or by scholars reading Chinese, all names and terms will be given in Chinese (Hanyu pinyin and traditional characters) unless marked otherwise. While in the West the offi-

²⁰ See Varutti 2014, 137–138.

cial romanisation of the Naxi language ('Naxi pinyin')²¹ is used by some scholars, authors writing Chinese usually prefer IPA with the Chao tone letters, including most of the Naxi. For reasons discussed below, consistency in transliterating Naxi is neither possible nor desirable when studying Dongba manuscripts produced before the 1950s.

The wealth of available published and archival materials is a blessing and a curse at the same time: missionary and (auto)biographic writings have too often been accepted without question, while scholarly works have rarely been examined with regard to their sources. In addition to the lack of linguistic uniformity and standardised transliteration systems, major problems are posed by the nature of the sources: concerning the period before 1949, research often has to rely on diaries, memoirs and much later recordings of oral sources, which at times contradict each other and have to be carefully checked in every single case. This especially pertains to dates which are notoriously unreliable, but also to names, since many Dongba have two or more names, besides Naxi and Chinese names a ritual one (*faming* 法名). Most Naxi use their Chinese names, but some preferred their own until very recently. The wars of the twentieth century, both worldwide and on Chinese soil, the bamboo curtain and also political persecution have led to ruptures within 'Dongba culture' that are difficult to assess but most probably graver than its proponents tend to admit.

A final note: the present author has no knowledge of the Naxi language. His linguistic expertise relevant to the present topic is limited to Literary and Modern Chinese.

1 From Auguste Desgodins (1867) to Jacques Bacot (1913): Missionaries, explorers, orientalists

Building on earlier engagements in Tibet, the Vatican established the Apostolic Vicariate of Lhasa in 1846 and entrusted its management to the Missions Étrangères de Paris (M.E.P.). In addition to 'Tibet proper', its territory later also included 'Chinese Tibet', that is, the various Tibetan polities in Sichuan and Yunnan, with Dartsedo (Chin. Tachienlu [Dajianlu] 打箭爐, today's Kangding 康定 in Sichuan) as episcopal headquarters. At the turn of the century, the non-sectarian Protestant China Inland Mission (C.I.M., founded in 1866) had their only

²¹ For Naxi pinyin see Hansen 1999, 51–52.

outpost in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in Dartsedo,²² while the M.E.P. had established a network of mission stations along the major trade routes in the region. They included Yezhi 葉枝 and Weixi in the Mekong valley, the Western part of the Naxi areas, but not Lijiang, the centre in the East (see Fig. 2).²³ The M.E.P. network provided the infrastructure of most ‘travellers’ well into the twentieth century, including famous British explorers like Thomas Thornhill Cooper (1839–1878), William Gill (1843–1882) and Edward Colborne Baber (1843–1890), who collected data and documented their experiences in travel reports and communications with learned societies. Together with letters from the missionaries, they provided for the first time detailed information on the geography, ethnography and complex political setup of the region with its Chinese officials, local chieftains and Tibetan lamas. Yunnan was a stronghold of bandits and a major producer of opium and would not change much in this respect, even after the Nationalists had established a more stable central government in 1927.

Interest in the region increased exponentially after the British and the French had extended the borders of their territories toward the north in the 1880s: in 1883 the French established their protectorate over Tonkin, hoping for a trade route with China that would bypass the treaty ports of China’s southern coastal provinces. Only two years later, in 1885, the British took Upper Burma and founded the Province of Burma in 1886. As a result, both the French protectorate and the British colony now had common borders with China – in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, which included the Naxi areas. Commercial and military interests of the rival powers led to an increasing number of exploratory missions to Yunnan. In 1909, Henry Rodolph Davies (1865–1950) published the non-confidential results of his voyages in the book *Yun-nan: The Link Between India and the Yangtze*. It was the most comprehensive source on the province, including its ethnic make-up, and became a major point of reference for all subsequent travellers.

²² For the C.I.M. stations see the map in Taylor 1902. Like many concepts, the term ‘Sino-Tibetan borderland’ is in dispute today, see Mortensen 2019, 116–117.

²³ See Michaud 2007 and Bray 2019.



Fig. 2: The principal M.E.P. mission stations in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, c. 1900 (Rémi Chaix and John Bray), Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

In 1885 the ‘versatile orientalist’²⁴ Terrien de Lacouperie (1844–1894) published an article on the ‘Beginnings of Writing Around Tibet’ in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, dealing with two Dongba manuscripts, with drawings of their first pages.²⁵ The first one was actually a hand-drawn copy of a Naxi manuscript made by the M.E.P. missionary Auguste Desgodins (1826–1913) in 1867 (see Fig. 3); the second was sent to the British Museum in 1877 by William Gill (1843–1882), who had acquired it in ‘Ku-deu’ (probably Guduwan 古渡灣 close to Judian 巨甸) when travelling with his guide and companion William Mesny (1842–1919), an adventurer and botanist who had been in the service of the Qing army, through western Sichuan and Tibet to Yunnan and Burma.²⁶

²⁴ This characterisation is by Laufer 1916, 275.

²⁵ Lacouperie 1885, 454–470 (= Lacouperie 1894, 40–56). The first pages of Desgodins’s manuscript were also published in Devéria 1886, 166, apparently from another hand-copy.

²⁶ For the ‘Mu-su’ at ‘Ku-deu or Chi-Tien’ see Gill 1880, 269–270; for the first description of the

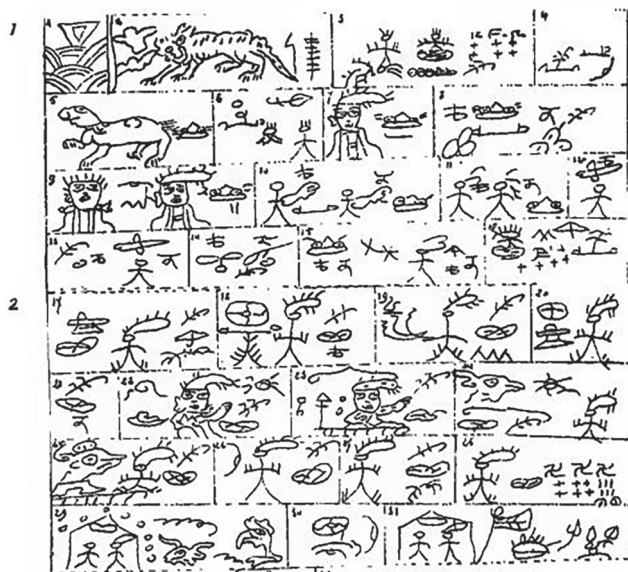


Fig. 3: Mo-so MS. (*Desgodins*) (Lacouperie 1894, Plate III).

Besides dealing with the history and ethnography of the ‘Mo-so or Na-shi’ and correctly assigning their language to the Tibeto-Burman family,²⁷ Lacouperie notes that the *Desgodins* manuscript was described as a ‘Hieroglyphic Book of Prayers from the Mountains between Burma and China’²⁸ and translates from a letter sent by Father *Desgodins* in 1882:

These hieroglyphics [...] are not, properly speaking, a writing, still less the current writing of the tribe. The sorcerers or *Tong-bas* [*Dongbas*] alone use it when invited by the people to recite these so-called prayers, accompanied with ceremonies and sacrifices, and also to put some spells on somebody, a speciality of their own. They alone know how to read them and understand their meaning; they alone are acquainted with the value of these signs, combined with the numbers of the dice and other implements of divination which they use in their witchcraft. Therefore these hieroglyphics are nothing else than signs more or less sym-

Gill manuscript see Yule 1880, 89–91. In the chapter ‘In the Footsteps of Captain Gill’ of his *From China to Hkamti Long*, the botanist and explorer Francis Kingdon-Ward (1885–1958) recorded that from ‘Chi-tien, a typical Mo-so village’ ‘the road to Wei-hsi branches off’, see Kingdon Ward 1924, 68.

²⁷ See the English-Mo-so word list in Lacouperie 1894, 51–52, which he had excerpted from the eight-language one published in *Desgodins* 1873.

²⁸ Lacouperie 1885, 460 (= Lacouperie 1984, 46).

bolical and arbitrary, known to a small number of initiated, who transmit their knowledge to their eldest son and successors in their profession of sorcerers. Such is the exact value of the Mo-so manuscripts; they are not a current and common writing; they are hardly a sacred writing in the limits indicated above.²⁹

Lacouperie comments on Desgodins's remarks as follows:

[...] they are extremely important for the general theory of writing, inasmuch as they do not pretend to show in that peculiar hieroglyphical writing any survival of former times. According to these views, should they prove correct, it was apparently made up for the purpose by the tombas [Dongbas] or medicine-men. This would explain, perhaps, the anomalous mixture of imperfect and bad imitations of ancient seal characters of China, pictorial figures of animals and men, bodies and their parts, with several Tibetan and Indian characters and Buddhist emblems. The superfetation and addition of the Chinese, Tibetan, Indian, and Buddhist signs are obvious, while the pictorial ground of the writing with peculiarities of its own is no less visible. The tails of animals, caps of men, etc., are modified according to the sentence; on the other hand, these occasional additions are also used independently. This feature deserves more attention than would be supposed; should we get a phonetic rendering and a translation of these texts those appendices might turn to be phonetic complements.³⁰

And he concludes:

Yet we cannot help thinking that this sacred writing embodies survivals of the pictorial stage of notation independent of synchronical dates and progresses elsewhere, which seems (within their limited area of self-progress) to be proper to all races of mankind, the white race with exceptions. The latter was more often satisfied with systems of notation more symbolical and conventional; simple combinations of dots and strokes, straight, curved or spiral lines, round and deep as cup-marks or angular and square, were sufficient for them, while the inferior races have always wanted, and have made a more material and eye-speaking system of notation. We may be sure that pictorial writings have crept up everywhere, though very few have survived in the struggle of civilizations; the long period required for their passing through the pictographic and ideographic phases was not allowed to them, and the untimely intrusion of an older and more perfected system, or another one better fitted to the surrounding circumstances, superseded them altogether.

[...] The only possible life for still-born writings of that description is that which lingers in obscure corners of superstition and witchcraft. We think that this Mo-so writing may be an instance of the fact, excepting the modifications introduced in the mean time for the purpose of those who use it. [...] On some of these charms [from Western Tibet] are drawn hieroglyphical signs, which are not without analogy with those of the MSS. drawn by the Mo-so sorcerers. [...] As the Mo-so have not taught the western Tibetans any more than they

²⁹ Lacouperie 1885, 461–462 (= Lacouperie 1984, 47–48).

³⁰ Lacouperie 1885, 461 (= Lacouperie 1984, 47).

did the eastern, from whom, on the contrary, they have learned so much, we must understand the ground of this writing to be of Tibetan origin of unknown date. The inference is plain and cannot be impugned.³¹

These short remarks set the stage for what was to come: 1) the characters were invented by the Dongbas; 2) their core elements are perhaps very old and have survived as a means to transmit esoteric knowledge from father to son; 3) they do not constitute true writing, but represent the most primitive of the stages leading to the alphabet; 4) certain elements of the characters may have a phonetic value which could only be known from ‘a phonetic rendering and a translation of these texts’.

The following years saw more and more Dongba manuscripts reaching Europe. In an addendum to a reprint of his 1885 article in his work *Beginnings of Writing in Central and Eastern Asia, or Notes on Embryo-Writings and Scripts* (1894), Lacouperie mentions a

bilingual Mosso manuscript of the Musée de Trocadéro in Paris, where it has been sent by a Missionary, Père Delavey. This MS. consists of 18 pages of writing; the four first are almost chiefly Mosso, the nine following are Mosso interlined with these unknown characters, and the five last pages do not contain any Mosso at all. These written characters, of which about two hundred different appear in the MS., consist of fragments, simplifications, or imitations of Chinese symbols.³²

This is apparently the first mention of the Geba script in a Western source.

In another addendum, he quoted the ‘Chinese General Geography of Yunnan, published in 1729’: ‘They have a writing solely pictorial: for a man they draw a man; for an object they draw the object, to make their writings.’ Lacouperie concludes ‘that these hieroglyphics had a more extensive use than that of magical purposes, the only one known to the missionary [Desgodins].’³³

³¹ Lacouperie 1885, 462–463 (= Lacouperie 1894, 48–49). For the ‘charms’, Lacouperie quotes Schlagintweit 1863 but does not give a page number; some superficial similarities to Dongba characters of some of the figures reproduced in the plates and the poor quality of the Desgodins copy may have prompted this assumption.

³² Lacouperie 1894, 183–184; Jean Marie Delavay (1834–1895), M.E.P. missionary, explorer and famous Botanist, worked in Yunnan in a missionary district including Lijiang since 1882.

³³ Lacouperie 1894, 182; he had apparently wrongly dated the gazetteer and misunderstood the original entry which quotes an ethnographic report on the region of Weixi from 1770, see Yu Qingyuan 1936, 2 and Bacot 1913, 119, n.1. In Chinese the sentence reads: 有字，跡專象形，人則圖人，物則圖物，以為書契，see Yu Qingyuan 1936, 6, see the French translation in Bacot 1913, 122. The same author also reports on the bamboo stylus used for writing and its preparation, see Yu Qingyuan 1936, 16.

In 1898 Prince Henri d'Orléans (1867–1901) published the report on his recent travel from Hanoi to Calcutta via Yunnan. He included drawings of the first three pages of two of the manuscripts he had obtained in the North-western corner of the Naxi areas, in Yetché (Yezhi, see Fig. 1).³⁴ In the English translation of the prince's book which appeared in the same year, the relevant paragraph reads:

Mosso writing has no real existence as such. The wizards make and keep manuscript books filled with hieroglyphics; each page is divided into little partitions, horizontally from left to right, in which are inserted rough drawings of men, houses, animals' heads, and conventional signs for the sky, lightning, etc. I was enabled to carry away with me several of these books. The traveller Gill and the Abbé Desgodins had already taken specimens to Europe, but without a clue to their meaning. The magicians explained two of them to me. They were prayers beginning with the mention of the creation of the world, and ending by an enumeration of all the ills which menace man, which he can avoid if he is pious and gives gifts to the magicians. I have been able by collation to establish the identity of certain ideas with certain signs, although the wizards told me they had no alphabet, and that the hieroglyphs were handed on by oral tradition alone. It was interesting to light among an isolated people upon one of the first stages in the evolution of writing. Many of the Chinese characters were originally simply pictorial hieroglyphs; and had the Mossos developed instead of restricted their signs, we might perchance have seen in their sacred books the birth of letters for them also.³⁵

For the first time, drawings of a manuscript were accompanied by a 'key' with 'oral text', being transliterations and interlinear translations.³⁶ In addition, the complete manuscript pages were represented showing their visual organisation and conveying an approximate sense of their size.³⁷ Their presentation has not changed much since then: first a facsimile of the manuscript page is given, then the 'oral text', and finally a translation. The classification of the manuscripts' contents as 'prayers' would remain an exception, while the 'creation of the world' mentioned at their beginning would later become a topic of scholarly interest.

³⁴ During the Bon and Naxi manuscripts workshop at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) of the University of Hamburg, 18–19 March 2022, Ewa Paśnik-Tułowicka reported that in 2018 the prince's 'Mosso manuscript no 1' was discovered at the library of the Faculty of Oriental Studies of the University of Warsaw.

³⁵ D'Orléans 1898, 212; see also 216 for a manuscript gift of the local ruler and 215 for his dwelling: 'The walls exhibited a variety of patterns and Mosso hieroglyphs, all, as well as the mouldings, the design of the royal owner himself, whose more ordinary accomplishments and occupations embraced those of a goldsmith, merchant, and cider maker on a large scale.'

³⁶ The 'literal translation' of a second manuscript, being a specimen from Tsekou (Cigu 茨姑), is not accompanied by an 'oral text'.

³⁷ D'Orléans 1898, 448–455; on 456 the 'fragment of a Mosso manuscript' is reproduced.

One year earlier, the French vice-resident in Indochina Charles-Eudes Bonin (1865–1929) had presented a *Note sur un manuscrit Mosso* during the XIth International Congress of Orientalists in Paris, which was published 1898 in its proceedings. He had obtained the manuscript from ‘Keloua’ (probably Geliuwan 格六灣)³⁸ on the Eastern route through the valley of the Golden Sand River (see Fig. 6 below). Here, in the North of the Naxi areas, their priests, ‘les Tong-pa, en chinois “To-pa” 多巴 ou sorciers’, could only secretly transmit their rites because of the dominance of Tibetan lamas.³⁹

In addition, he described its material features, according to the paraphrase of Berthold Laufer (1916):

it is an album of oblong size, comprising twelve folios of very strong paper, the verso and recto of each leaf being inscribed, save the last page, which is decorated with designs of red flowers. The two sides of the first folio are occupied with representations of deities and objects of the cult. The ten following folios are covered with colored hieroglyphs peculiar to the writing of the *tong-ba*, and on each page distributed over three horizontal lines, each line being divided by vertical strokes into two or three sections. These form a series of rectangular enclosures, the characters of each quadrangle representing a phrase, so that the vertical lines assume the function of our punctuation.⁴⁰

The description as ‘album de forme oblongue’ for the first time addressed the form of Dongba books, which combines the oblong leaves of the pothi with a stitch binding on the left. Bonin believed his manuscript to date from a more ancient period of ‘Mosso’ history, since its characters did not show any additional elements taken from Lolo or Chinese writing, such as Lacouperie had mentioned. According to Bonin, nearly all characters, some with the help of colouring, directly represented the object which they signified, similar to the Egyptian and pre-Columbian hieroglyphs, the first stage of writing. This monogenetic view of the history of writing, already voiced by Lacouperie, dates back to the sixteenth century and would continue far into the twentieth century.⁴¹

In his *Note* Bonin provided a French ‘translation’ of the first six pages: ‘this translation was fixed under my eyes by my interpreter in Chinese characters corresponding to each of the sacred [!] hieroglyphs.’ According to Bonin it would be possible to translate the whole book, since the same characters frequently appeared throughout it. This interlinear character-for-character ‘translation’ had only one shortcoming: since the Dongba characters would only signify nouns, the

³⁸ According to Chavannes, see Bacot 1913, 149, n. 6.

³⁹ Bonin 1898, 4.

⁴⁰ Laufer 1916, 276.

⁴¹ See Friedrich 1996.

sentences thus lacking the verb, one would have to rely on conjectures for constructing the exact meaning of the phrases. Bonin's 'translation' is consequently not a continuous text but a word list with many question marks.⁴²

For the first time we have a description of the complicated translation process: first the Dongba 'translates' (Bonin does not say into which language), then an interpreter notes down Chinese characters for each of the Dongba ones, and finally these Chinese characters are translated into a European language (Bonin again being silent on who did the second translation). This method of translating with the help of an intermediary language, apparently in most cases Chinese, is still in use today. The problems caused by this practice are obvious: beside the high probability of losing or distorting content there is no way to reconstruct the relation of the source language to the written characters.

In his 1911 book *Les Royaumes des Neiges* Bonin added an appendix on the 'Mossos'.⁴³ He expanded the former short *Note* and extensively quoted an article by Jacques Bacot that had appeared shortly before in the same year. According to Bacot the Mossos have two writing systems which only the *tumbas* use, the one ideographic, the other syllabic. The former must be the older one, since 'ideographic characters always precede syllabic writing'. Bacot claimed to have studied both with 'tumbas', one in Yezhi, the other in Lijiang. In addition, he mentioned 'Bedjri', the holy place of the Mossos, where every 'sorcerer' wanted to go at least once in his lifetime. There was no sanctuary, just springs, a holy cave and limestone sinter terraces: 'La religion des Mossos n'est qu'un culte de la nature.'⁴⁴ At the end of his appendix Bonin mentions, perhaps for the first time, the relations between the religion of the Mossos and the 'sect of the *Bönpos* or *black lamas*'.⁴⁵

Jacques Bacot (1877–1965) had travelled in the Sino-Tibetan border regions in 1907 and 1909 and had developed a keen interest in Tibetan religion. Before his career as an academic Tibetologist, he published the first monograph on the Naxi in 1913, *Les Mo-so. Ethnographie des Mo-so, leurs religions, leur langue et leur écriture*, including a reprint of a recent article on Chinese historical sources and a genealogy of the Mu dynasty by the eminent Sinologist Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918). In this genealogy, which is known in different versions today, the

⁴² Bonin 1898, 5–9; Laufer politely commented: 'It is difficult to form an opinion on the translation of the Mo-so ritual, as it is offered by M. Bonin' (Laufer 1916, 277).

⁴³ Bonin 1911, 281–296; in his bibliography Bonin refers the reader to Cordier's *Bibliotheca sinica*, but does not mention Cordier 1908 which is the first compilation of European reports on the Naxi, see Bonin 1911, 282.

⁴⁴ See Bonin 1911, 293–295 quoting Bacot 1911, 245–246.

⁴⁵ Bonin 1911, 295.

second king (thirteenth century CE) is credited with the ‘invention of writing for his country’. He is said to have been able to read Chinese characters at the age of seven and the writings of the various Man 蠻, i.e. the non-Chinese ethnic groups, and furthermore he understood the language of the animals.⁴⁶ Chavannes does not comment on this mythical account that later would give rise to learned discussions on the question which of the two scripts was invented by the king.⁴⁷

Bacot’s volume was to remain *the* reference work for Dongba studies, until Rock’s scholarly works started appearing from the late 1930s. From one of his manuscripts, reproduced in facsimile, Bacot translated the beginning of the ‘legend of Tumbashéra’, who was none other than ‘Çerabmibo of the Pönbos’. In this legend he found ‘manifest relations between Mo-so shamanism and Pömböisme’. Instead of describing details of the ‘sorcery practices of the tumbas’, ‘which are the same in all magic with some variants without interest’, he just mentioned his Lijiang Dongba manipulating a red-hot ploughshare, then dancing in the flames while holding a pot with burning oil and sprinkling drips of fire on him with his hand. Bacot apparently did not know yet that the Dongba producing and using manuscripts were not identical to the ‘sorcerers’ who performed feats such as the fire ritual, but did not use books. His ‘tumba’ may have been one of those ritualists practising in both fields.⁴⁸

Concerning the vocabulary of the spoken language, Bacot notes that his transcriptions have to be taken with caution, as with all language not fixed by writing: ‘Car on ne peut appeler écriture, dans ce sens, les hieroglyphs et les caractères mo-so.’ He relied on a Mo-so who knew Tibetan, with the questions and answers controlled by a Tibetan who knew Mo-so. The pronunciation was not stable and varied from one to another, but he refrained from unifying the transcriptions and stuck to the way the words were dictated by his Yezhi Dongba. He found 5 percent Chinese and 8 percent Tibetan words, and 25 Xixia (Tangut) words. In addition, Bacot reports that the Mo-so language had five dialects: those of Lijiang, ‘Bedjri’ (Chin. Beidi 北地, today’s Baidi 白地, see Fig. 1), Weixi, Yezhi and of the ‘Tibetanized Mo-so’ in the North. The southern dialects were influenced by Chinese, and

⁴⁶ The part by Chavannes reproduces Chavannes 1912, 614, here Bacot 1913, 176.

⁴⁷ For the decisive sentence, the Chinese text has *zhi benfang wenzi* 制本方文字, with *zhi* actually not meaning inventing something from the scratch but rather constructing something from pre-existing materials (‘cut to size’), thus pointing to the Geba script which is understood to be constructed from Chinese, Lolo and other elements – if one wants to take this seriously.

⁴⁸ Bacot 1913, 16–22; these tasks were usually performed by another group of ritual specialists (sometimes called ‘shamans’, in Rock’s transliteration the *llü-bu*) who did not use books, although in some cases a Dongba might acquire the qualification of the latter, see Jackson 1965, 57–58.

the northern ones by Tibetan, the one of Baidi being the ‘purest’ one.⁴⁹ Besides its geographical position on the Eastern route following the Jinshajiang, Baidi was the ‘holy place’ where the first Dongba Shiluo was supposed to have meditated in a cave.⁵⁰

VOCABULAIRE.

Français.	Mo-so.	Prononciation ou transcription différente, synonymes ou mots étrangers ¹⁾ .	Langue écrite.
à (datif)	kou; ko		
abeille	mba mé <i>miel-mère</i>	kioujé	
abimer	mago bi sé		koa
aboyer	leu	k'euneutsa	
abri	geu		
accompagner	djindjé bié <i>avec-aller</i>		
accrocher	téhada		
accoucher (d'un fils)	zou chi		
— (d'une fille)	mi chi		
accuser	achou		gnion
acheter	ha	goudzé	
admirer	chi lubié		
adorer	tepa ben		
adroit	rjia		
afin, pour. (inf.)	tso		
agrafe	zeu		
aider	ââ khou khou		
aiguille	kou		ko
aile	dophi		
aigle	kondo		kon
aimer	baia	chi to ba	
ainé (frère)	ab(v)eu		
air	h'a	heu	ha pha tso
s'agenouiller			bi
à l'aise			je
alcool, eau de vie	araki		beu; bu
aller	bié	beu hū, hū ze	

¹⁾ Les mots de cette colonne sont empruntés aux vocabulaires publiés par Desgodins, Bonin, Madrolle, Johnston, d'Ollone.

Fig. 4: 'Vocabulaire' (Bacot 1913, 29).

⁴⁹ Bacot 1913, 27–28.

⁵⁰ A European traveller visiting the place in 1914 did not notice any 'holy place of the Moso', see Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 84–85 (Winstanley 1996, 39), but see Rock 1947, vol. 1, 265–268 for the sinter terraces, the 'sacred grotto' and the 'sacred spring'.

The vocabulary (see Fig. 4) is presented as a word list like those the missionaries had compiled. Following the alphabetical order of the French words, three columns provide first the ‘Mo-so’ equivalents, then different pronunciations, synonyms or foreign words, and finally equivalents from the ‘written language’. This term apparently refers to words of the ritual language used when chanting.

Then Bacot introduces the two types of script (see Fig. 5). The syllabic one consists of ancient and some modern Chinese characters, but rarely derived from the pictographic characters. In addition, there are some analogies with the Lolo characters.⁵¹ The ‘hieroglyphic writing’ comprises pictographic characters resembling animals or objects and ideographic characters for verbs or abstract ideas and in general the terms used in magic whose symbolism is rather obscure; both of them can be used as phonetics. Concerning the ‘texts in ideographic characters’, Bacot remarks that they are the more obscure ones: ‘Leur lecture est toujours un commentaire’. Certain passages seem to belong more to iconography than to writing, and the secondary use of them as phonetics adds an obscurity to writings perhaps intended to address the initiated and keep the content unintelligible to those who only know the ‘fixed characters’. On the following fifty pages Bacot collected characters of both types according to their meaning in French, including almost one hundred with ‘unknown transcription’ (transliteration).

Comparing the entries of both the vocabulary and the writing section, only seven of the nine French words on the first page of the latter list are matched by entries in the former. Five of them differ more or less in ‘transcription’, in a few cases evidently being different words (e.g. *koa* vs *magô bi sé*), and only two are identical. Bacot understands this as evidence for the presence of a ‘veritable written language’.⁵² In addition, he agrees with Lacouperie that these ‘hieroglyphic’ characters could be remnants of the writing of pre-Buddhist Tibetan shamans and that the charms discovered in Western Tibet might belong to a primitive stage of writing lost in Tibet and only preserved by the Mo-so.⁵³

⁵¹ Bacot here refers to the work of Henri d'Ollone (1868–1945) on ‘non-Chinese writing systems in China’ (*Écritures des peuples non chinois de la Chine*, Paris: Ernest Leroux 1912), presenting evidence collected during the latter’s expedition to the border regions of the Qing empire, 1906–1909, see Bacot 1913, 66.

⁵² Bacot 1913, 64.

⁵³ Bacot 1913, 64–67.

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LES MO-SO














Signification.	Transcription.	Caractères idéographiques.	Caractères syllabiques.
abimer	Koa		
aboyer	leu		
accuser	gnion		
s'agenouiller	pha tso		
aigle, épervier	ken, ku, kou		
aiglon	ö		
aiguille	ko		
air	ha		
à l'aise	bi		

Fig. 5: 'Écriture' (Bacot 1913, 68).

In addition to ethnographic photos and photos of two inscriptions of the Mu rulers from the sixteenth century transcribed and translated by Chavannes, the volume contains facsimiles of sample pages of four Dongba manuscripts. The first one is written in Dongba and contains the legend of Dongba Shiluo partially translated by Bacot, the second one has spells written in Geba, with Chinese characters added by a different hand and transliterations in pencil by a third one.

For this manuscript Bacot provides the transliteration, an interlinear translation as well as a running text, with lacunae showing the limits of his understanding. The third one is written in Geba with Tibetan vowel signs, again with transliterations this time written with a pen, and the fourth contains a 'glose indigène donnant les caractères idéographiques avec leurs correspondants syllabiques'. In this 'indigenous glossary', a hand that is probably the same as the one involved in the third manuscript has added French translations to most of the Dongba characters below and transliterations to their Geba 'correspondences' above (see Fig. 6). Together with information from his Yezhi Dongba, Bacot used this source for his dictionary.⁵⁴



Fig. 6: 'L'enseignement supérieur de l'écriture est contenu dans ce livre' (Bacot 1913, Pl. XXVII).

In 1916, almost fifty years after Desgodins had sent his hand-copy of a Dongba manuscript to Paris, a scholarly observer such as Berthold Laufer (1874–1934) summarized Bacot's (and Chavannes') achievements as follows:

He supposes that it [Dongba] is identical with the script which is said to have been in vogue among the Tibetan shamans prior to the seventh century. Forgotten in Tibet, it would have survived among the Mo-so, while its traces may still be recognized in certain pictorial charts employed by the Tibetans for purposes of magic. It is very likely that the realistic and partially conventionalized designs now serving the expression of ideas were in their origin religious symbols utilized in magic rites and devil exorcisms, or even purely ornamental motives. Certain it is that, in the same manner as the peculiar writing of the Lo-lo [Yi], the

⁵⁴ Bacot 1913, 66. The first pages of the second and the third of Bacot's manuscripts had already been published in an appendix to Cordier 1908 (= Bacot 1913, Fig. 34 and 39), while a third one, here wrongly also attributed to Bacot, is actually manuscript no 1 in D'Orléans 1898, 448. On the earlier reproductions the transliterations are clearly visible, while on the later ones these do not show due their poorer quality.

pictographs of the Mo-so bear no relation to those of the Chinese and are entirely independent in their origin and development. The Chinese Chronicle of Li-kiang relates that Nien-pao A-tsung, the son of the ancestor of the Mo-so chiefs, invented a system of writing for his country in the twelfth century, but we are left in ignorance as to what this writing was.⁵⁵

Laufer was the first to observe material details of the manuscripts. A curator at the Field Museum had assessed the paper of the 'Nichols Mo-so manuscript', probably the first Dongba manuscript in the United States, as belonging to the family *Streblus asper*, whose bark was called *khoi* in Siam. Nichols had sent this manuscript, probably acquired in Weixi, in 1904. In addition, Laufer drew attention to the fact that the Nichols manuscript was written in black Chinese ink with a bamboo or wooden stylus like all others known, with the exception of the one using colours, which Bonin had described.⁵⁶

All accounts stated that the manuscripts were rare.⁵⁷ They were acquired by chance or presented as a gift. In addition, most of the travellers followed the Western route via Yezhi and Weixi parallel to the Mekong on their way to Dali and Yunnan-fu, thus moving along the margins of the Naxi areas. Bonin was apparently the first to have visited Lijiang, which did not lie on one of the two major routes connecting Yunnan-fu via Dali with Tibet and Sichuan through the valleys of the Mekong in the West and the Golden Sand River in the East.⁵⁸ Dongba writing was mainly studied as a specimen of an 'ancient' or 'primitive' stage in the development of writing, culminating in the invention of the alphabet.

Some striking inconsistencies, if not contradictions, can be observed in most of the accounts:

1. Dongba writing is not true writing, but consists of 'hieroglyphic' characters, representing a primitive stage in the evolution of writing lost in Tibet but surviving with the Dongba. The meaning of these signs is only known to the Dongba sorcerers who use them to orally transmit their esoteric knowledge from father to son. The signs have to be explained or commented on.

⁵⁵ Laufer 1916, 280.

⁵⁶ Laufer 1916, 276, 280–281; the article provides images of the first four pages of the Nichols manuscript. Laufer quotes a letter dated 20 September 1904: 'My greatest treasure I enclose. It is a book in the Ton-ke, the original language of the Mo-so tribe, who now speak and write Tibetan. Books like this one are exceedingly rare and difficult to obtain. I consider myself fortunate in having secured this manuscript. Part of it I have been able to translate.' (274)

⁵⁷ There may have been more Dongba manuscripts taken to Europe; Schubert mentions two brought from Yunnan in 1910 by a certain Heinrich Bachfeld, but adds that he had forgotten to note the source, see Schubert 1949, 120 and 140, n. 86.

⁵⁸ See Chavannes in Bacot 1913, 141–142.

2. The contents can be translated, but only with the help of a Dongba. To this end an intermediary is needed, apparently someone knowing Chinese or perhaps Tibetan.
3. The contents of the manuscripts mainly concern sorcery (or, according to Henri d'Orléans, prayers) and are related to Bon, but the longest 'translation' contains part of the biography of Dongba Shiluo. The sorcerers' witchcraft is only described once (Bacot), but – correctly – not linked to the manuscripts.

These inconsistencies were caused by long-distance scholarship on the one hand, on the other by certain preconceived ideas on the nature of writing (as visually representing spoken language) and the use of written artefacts (as transmitting texts). Bacot's observation that the difference between the words of the spoken language and those corresponding to the characters points to the existence of a 'veritable written language'⁵⁹ paved the way for the idea of a Dongba literature which would in turn fuel the manuscript trade.

2 From George Forrest (1916) to Li Lincan (1944): Botanists, linguists, art historians

In the same year that Laufer's note on the Nichols manuscript appeared, George Forrest sold more than forty 'Mo-So manuscripts' to the John Rylands Library in Manchester, a number by far exceeding the total of all others known at that time. Forrest was a botanist exploring the diversity of Yunnan's flora and had probably collected them during his recent journeys. He had first arrived in the Sino-Tibetan borderlands in 1904, even before Bonin and Bacot, and in the course of his seven expeditions became a regular visitor who knew his way around and where to recruit assistants.

In 1914 the botanist Heinrich Handel-Mazzetti (1882–1940), who led an expedition to Yunnan financed by the Austrian Academy of Sciences to Yunnan, met his fellow botanist George Forrest (1873–1932)⁶⁰ in Lijiang. In his travelogue, published in German in 1927, Handel-Mazzetti relates that Forrest invited him to the village where he lived, Ngulukö (Nguluke in the English translation, Chin. Xuesong cun 雪嵩村), 15 km north-north-west from Lijiang at the foot of the Jade Dragon Mountains (Yulong shan 玉龍山, see Fig. 7).

⁵⁹ Bacot 1913, 64.

⁶⁰ For Forrest see Mueggler 2011a, part I.

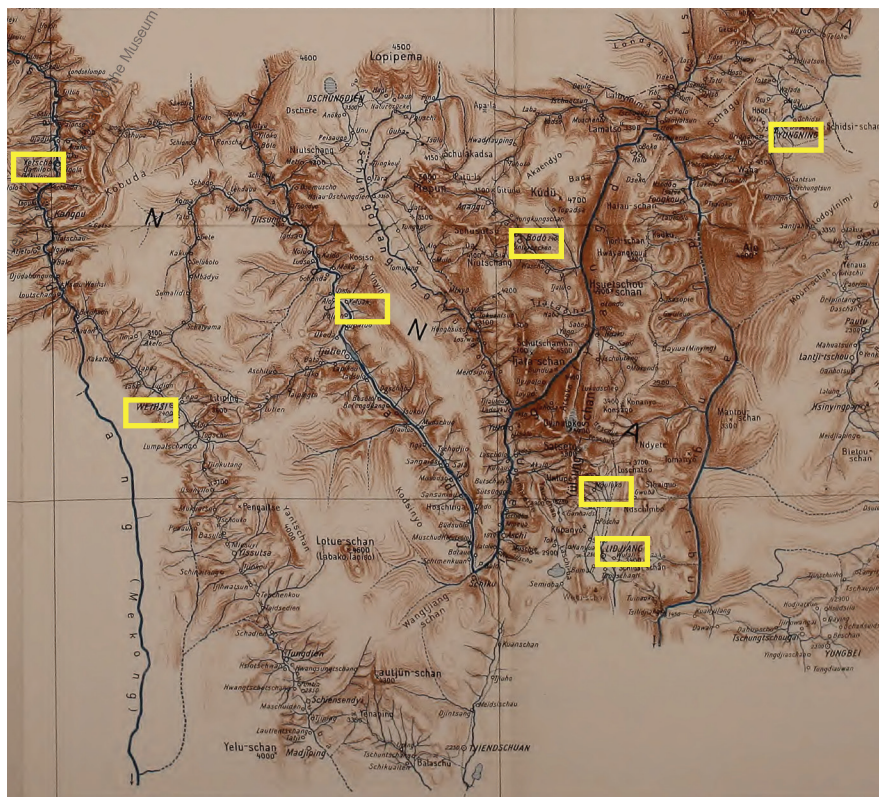


Fig. 7: Part of map of Northwest Yunnan and South Sichuan (Handel-Mazzetti 1919, 15).

Besides praising Forrest's hospitality and good advice, Handel-Mazzetti reports that the people from this village

consisted largely of 'botanists'; since 1904 Forrest had employed them as collectors, and many of them, owing to their intelligence, keenness, feeling for form and not least their knowledge of the mountains, had given outstanding service. They knew the various plants which grew there better than he did himself, so he told us. So it came about that every evening of my nine day stay in the village they thronged into my house, invited or uninvited, spread out their spoils in the yard and held what developed into a regular plant market.⁶¹

Since Ngulukö was the last village before the track led up into the mountains and because he did not like Lijiang, Handel-Mazzetti would always use the 'Botani-

⁶¹ Winstanley 1996, 34 (Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 72–73).

kerdorf'⁶² as his base camp, hiring the same guides and assistants as Forrest and some others recommended by Arie Kok (1883–1951), the Dutch missionary of the Pentecostal Missionary Union (P.M.U.) in Lijiang.⁶³ Handel-Mazzetti highly regarded their expertise and reliability and mentioned those of them he trusted most by name.⁶⁴ The infrastructure established by Forrest and his hospitality attracted further travellers, who arrived in growing numbers in Naxi territory after the completion of the Yunnan railway in 1910 had greatly facilitated travel from Hanoi to Yunnan-fu (today's Kunming). Handel-Mazzetti mentioned his compatriot Anton Karl Gebauer (1872–1942) whom he had met in Lijiang in 1914 after the latter's unsuccessful attempt to enter Tibet, and the members of the zoological mission of the American Museum of Natural History, led by Roy Chapman Andrews (1884–1960), whom he encountered in Ngulukö in 1916.⁶⁵ However, he missed the botanist Francis Kingdon Ward (later Kingdon-Ward, 1885–1958) who visited Lijiang for the first time in 1913.

In addition to the local flora and fauna, there were further exotic specimens to be found. Handel-Mazzetti observed: The 'Nahsi'

often had a small temple but in the village there was no real priest or medicine-man, though in many houses one found their books of magic spells written in strange hieroglyphic script. It was by no means obsolete and was still in use at that time; in 1915 Kok showed me an account for the construction of a house which a carpenter had written out for him in Naxi characters.⁶⁶

Although Handel-Mazzetti did not mention having acquired books himself in his travelogue, he and others must have done so: the ethnological museum in Vienna houses four Dongba manuscripts from him and ten from Gebauer.⁶⁷ The Naxi botanists had presumably helped them to collect books too. Contrary to what

⁶² Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 214 (Winstanley 1996, 102).

⁶³ The P.M.U. was founded in 1909 and followed the principles of the C.I.M., perhaps one of the reasons why some of the sources mention 'C.I.M. missionaries' in Lijiang when clearly referring to those of the P.M.U.

⁶⁴ Winstanley 1996, 102 (Handel-Mazzetti 1917, 214), see also Mueggler 2011a, 8–9 et passim and Mueggler 2012.

⁶⁵ Winstanley 1996, 33 and 127 (Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 71 and 264–265); also see Andrews and Andrews 1918, 113.

⁶⁶ Winstanley 1996, 34 (Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 73); the same author also reports having seen them on houses: 'The undersides of the roof tiles above my balcony were painted with their hieroglyphs — otherwise seldom seen except in their books of spells', see Winstanley 1996, 39 (Handel-Mazzetti 1927, 84–85). This observation is similar to the one of Prince d'Orléans, see n. 35.

⁶⁷ See the contribution of Agnieszka Helman-Ważny and Mengling Cai in this volume.

earlier travellers had reported, there were many of these books to be found, and Forrest was apparently the first to realize that they could be sold for a good price to Western institutions and collectors.

Already after his second journey 1910, he had started inquiring about the value of the Dongba manuscripts. In a letter to Forrest dated 15 January 1912, Laurence Waddell (1854–1938) expresses his wish

to see the photos of your manuscripts [...] It would add to the series of hieroglyphics if you have elicited the native explanation of signs as did Prince Henri, as people & institutions acquiring such materials like to have a clue to its meaning & contents. Did you get the native interpretation of any of their characters and did you take a note of it at the time? These are important points.⁶⁸

Forrest had probably approached the surgeon, explorer and expert on, among others things, Tibetan and Indian Buddhism, because he was also known as a collector of antiquities such as Tibetan manuscripts. Forrest perhaps already contemplated the commercial value of the books. Four years later, while negotiating the price for his collection of Dongba manuscripts with Henry Guppy (1864–1948), the librarian of the John Rylands Library, Forrest thanked him for

your proposal to consider the purchasing of my collection of mss. In a previous communication I think I stated my wish for £100, at least, for the whole fifty. The translation would be included of course. That some [sic!] is my lowest price for the whole collection though, as I said, I should like more. The ms. represent fully 2 years search, a good deal of labour, and an expenditure of at least half the above amount, so you will understand I do not gain a great deal over the transaction. Of course I have little knowledge of the market value of them all I have to go on being the price received for more sold to the Foreign Office authorities and their eagerness to secure them.⁶⁹

A week later he accepted Guppy's offer, apparently of his 'lowest price' – the sum of 100 Pounds would be equivalent in purchasing power to almost 9,000 Pounds today.⁷⁰ In addition, he announced that he would despatch the manuscripts the next day and wrote: 'I shall include the key to the translation which I promised.' His cover letter to the parcel had a note: 'MSS & key'.⁷¹ Guppy published this

⁶⁸ Gow 2013, 1.

⁶⁹ Letter of 24 March 1916, see Gow 2013, 2; according to Jackson, Forrest sold seventeen manuscripts to the Foreign Office in 1916, see Jackson 1965, 143 and Jackson 1979, 23 (here: India Office (Commonwealth) Library).

⁷⁰ See 'CPI Inflation Calculator' at <https://www.in2013dollars.com/uk/inflation/1916?amount=100>, accessed on 16 August 2021.

⁷¹ Letters of 2 and 4 April 1916, see Gow 2013, 2.

new acquisition of ‘forty’ (!) manuscripts in the next issue of his *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library* as being the ‘largest group in this particular script to be brought to Europe.’ Referring to Bacot’s characterisation of Dongba writing, he adds: ‘we attach considerable importance to an excellent key to one of the manuscripts, which Mr. Forrest was fortunately able to obtain, through the services of a Chinese scholar, who was familiar with the people and their language.’⁷² As usual in these cases no one bothered to mention the name of the ‘scholar’ who might have been none other than Forrest’s ‘Lao Chao’. The Naxi Zhao Chengzhang 趙成章 had served him as head of the local teams from 1906 and continued to do so almost until his death, having become a serious botanist himself. He apparently could read and write Chinese.⁷³ The ‘key’ consisted of a list of Dongba characters appearing in one of the manuscripts, to which Chinese glosses and their English translations were appended. It did not fulfill the expectations Forrest had aroused and was soon forgotten, although it provides one of the earliest testimonies of the practice of ‘translating’ Dongba ‘texts’.⁷⁴ In addition, Guppy noted that the ‘text of the translated manuscript is of a religious character, opening with a version of the creation story, and as far as we are able at present to judge, most of the others are of a similar type.’⁷⁵ This is the second time the ‘creation story’ is mentioned, something that would continue to stimulate Naxi studies for decades to come.

In 1920, Forrest followed the same procedure, bargaining with Guppy over another batch of ‘Mossoo’ manuscripts he had obtained during his fourth journey

72 Guppy 1916, 142.

73 See Mueggler 2011a, 1–14, 78, 89. For the education system in the Naxi areas see Hansen 1999, 25–60. Zhao Chengzhang’s hand on his maps appears similar to the one that wrote the Chinese text of Mo-So 9 and 93 of the John Rylands Library, especially on those maps reproduced in Mueggler 2011a, 4 and 10. Forrest’s transliterations on another map share features with the hand in a manuscript containing an English draft translation of the beginning of the Chinese text on Mo-So 93, held by the John Rylands Library (<https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester~91~1~420757~160503?qvq=q:mo-so&mi=24&trs=48>), and are written with a pencil as well, see Mueggler 2011a, 12; on the Rylands website it is also assumed that Forrest was the scribe (although wrongly identifying the translated text as ‘Mossaobook No. 1’). Comparison with part of a letter signed by Forrest does not leave much doubt about this attribution being correct, see <https://stories.rbge.org.uk/archives/14339> (accessed on 16 January 2022). Poupard 2018b, 99–101, seems to think that the translation was written by Scharten, but the hand is clearly different from the one in her letter. If the English pencil entries in the ‘key’ have also been written by Forrest, this must have occurred at a different time, since there are marked differences. However, without an in-depth analysis of the hands of *all* specimens of Chinese ‘translations’ including the ones held by the British Library (see below), any attribution must remain guesswork.

74 For a study of the ‘key’ and related manuscripts see Dan Petersen’s contribution to this volume.

75 Guppy 1916, 143.

1917–1919, starting with ‘over twenty of them all in fairly good presentation’ (4 October 1920). After sending forty of them on 21 October, four days later he offered ‘some others which though fragmentary you may wish included in the collection, some 16 in number’. In the same letter he mentioned that ‘yearly the MS are becoming scarcer & I had much difficulty in securing those I have sent you.’ The argument proved effective, and Forrest was immediately commissioned ‘to secure further ms – Mossuo & Tibetan’ during his next journey.⁷⁶

Besides trading the manuscripts Forrest seems to have developed a genuine interest in them and acquired some for his own collection, which was sold to the John Rylands Library by his widow shortly after his death in 1932.⁷⁷ He had corresponded with the P.M.U. missionary Elise Scharten (1876–1965), the ‘Lady from Lijiang’, who, with the exception of some furloughs, continuously stayed there from shortly after her arrival in Yunnan-fu in 1912 until 1945. She had first learned Chinese, then Naxi and was involved in the editing of the first primer for writing Naxi published in 1914 as well as in the translation of religious texts.⁷⁸ Dated 21 November 1922, she sent ‘the two Mo-su books with translation’. One of these translations, done with her notorious type-writer, is kept by the John Rylands Library. Since the names of Naxi deities are romanised in a way close to the Wade-Giles system for transliterating Mandarin Chinese, it is safe to assume that her translation – one of the first of a Dongba ‘text’ into a European language – was once again done with the help of someone speaking or writing Chinese.⁷⁹ We do not know how the translations announced by Forrest to accompany the manuscripts sold in 1916 were meant to be undertaken, perhaps with the help of the nameless Chinese scholar.⁸⁰ They were, however, apparently never made or are lost. Scharten’s letter responding to the request by Forrest suggests that he turned

⁷⁶ Gow 2013, 2–3.

⁷⁷ Gow 2013, 3.

⁷⁸ Laan 1997, Poupard 2018b. In 1936 Scharten donated sixteen manuscripts to the ‘Rijksmuseum voor Volkenkunde’ in Leiden, one of them accompanied by her translation of the ‘Origin of Mankind’, see Poupard 2018b, 102–105.

⁷⁹ Digital images of Scharten’s letter (<https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester~91~1~420756~160505?qvq=q:mo-so%20scharten&mi=0&trs=1>) and the translation of ‘The book to invite the spirit’ (<https://luna.manchester.ac.uk/luna/servlet/detail/Manchester~91~1~420758~160501?qvq=q:mo-so%20forrest&mi=0&trs=47>) are available at the website of the John Rylands Library. Names such as ‘Hu-fa-shen’, ‘Sa-i-wa-teh’ and ‘K’ai-chi-to-chiu’ clearly reflect the Wade-Giles system, while using the German ‘-i’ of the Lessing-Othmer system instead of the ‘-ih’ of the former.

⁸⁰ Even if the translation mentioned in n. 73 was written by Forrest, there still remains the question of who translated the text, since ‘Forrest’s Chinese was rudimentary’, see Mueggeler 2011a, 78.

to the one person in Lijiang known for her linguistic skills, hoping to engage her in his project.

In 1922, during his fifth expedition of 1921–1923 to the borderlands, Forrest met his fellow botanist Rock in Dali. Rock would not only copy his business model but also by far surpass him as a dealer in manuscripts and was to become the foremost authority on ‘Na-khi’ manuscripts in the West. Later, Forrest must have cursed that day in 1922 when he had taken Rock to ‘his’ village Ngulukö and helped him to settle there, although he had taken an immediate dislike to him as a ‘blowhard Yankee upstart’.⁸¹ As long as Forrest lived, he tried to avoid him, and *vice versa*; the same held true for Kingdon Ward, who had left Lijiang after his last visit in 1922 and then diverted his activities to Assam and North Burma, after he found out that Rock had ‘stolen his men’ by paying them better wages while he himself was in the field.⁸²

Joseph Francis Rock (Chin. Luoke 駱克 or 洛克, 1884–1962) was an ingenious impostor, a man with many talents and a master of self-staging. The Austro-American had not even finished high school,⁸³ but was already well-known for his work on the Haiwai’ian flora, when he first entered Yunnan in 1922.⁸⁴ In the service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, ‘Dr. Rock’ arrived from Burma where he had been sent to find a medicinal plant against leprosy, and now continued to search for ‘economic plants’.⁸⁵

Contrary to all other travellers before him, Rock took an interest in the ‘religious ceremonies’ of the ‘Nashi’. In his first article on the Naxi that appeared in 1924 in *The National Geographic Magazine* he describes in some detail two such ‘ceremonies’ he had witnessed at Ngulukö (using the German romanisation), one exorcism involving a group of ‘Tombas’, ‘shamanistic sorcerers’ or ‘priests’, with their chief performing more or less the same feats with fire as those briefly

⁸¹ Mueggler 2011a, 29–30, 159.

⁸² See Sutton 1974, 18.

⁸³ See Paul Harris in Yoshinaga et al. 2012, 142; Sutton 1974 and others claim that he had finished secondary education at the famous Schottengymnasium in Vienna, but there is no evidence for this.

⁸⁴ The essential biography is still Sutton 1974, for biographical literature on Rock see Walravens 2002, 27–33; see also Mueggler 2011b and Yoshinaga et al. 2012; for a list of archival sources see Walravens 1995, and for selections of Rock’s correspondence see Walravens 2002, Walravens 2007 and Taube 2009. Sutton already critically assessed the reliability of Rock’s own statements (see Sutton 1974, 103–120), but she was more interested in the man than his involvement in Naxi scholarship; for an anthropological approach see Mueggler 2011a, part II. A scholarly biography taking Chinese-language sources into full account is still a desideratum.

⁸⁵ Mueggler 2011a, 28.

mentioned by Bacot. Rock invited the Dongbas to his house and had the ritual performed for him in order to take photos, some of which accompany this article and later publications. Just like Bacot, Rock apparently did not yet know that there were two groups of ritual specialists, with the ‘sorcerers’ who did not use books being responsible for offices such as the fire ritual. In addition, the article mentions the Dongbas’ books:

Among the Nashi there has survived a religious literature written in most peculiar pictographic symbols. The writing is undoubtedly of Tibetan origin and of an unknown date, resembling certain drawings in pre-Buddhistic religious books of the Bönpo sect. The Tombas alone are acquainted with this script, and they pass on their knowledge to their sons, for the office of the Nashi priesthood is an [sic!] hereditary one. There are, however, two forms of writing in use---the pictographic symbols and a character-writing resembling somewhat the Chinese---in fact, certain of these symbols are purely Chinese. I believe the latter form to be a later development, and the pictographic writing much the more primitive.⁸⁶

Two manuscript pages are reproduced, one in Dongba writing, one in Geba. The caption comments that the latter ‘is a combination resembling Chinese and ideographic characters which no Western scholar has as yet been able to decipher’.⁸⁷ These remarks clearly show that Rock already had some knowledge of the scholarly literature at that time. Also worth noting is a short ‘translation’ of one folio of a book about the ‘story of the Flood’. Rock first provides a romanisation of the text and then his translation, line 1 reads as follows: ‘*Nluo sse hhö dku dje*---Nluo and Ssë: Male and Female (corresponding to our Adam and Eve) came to live together’, and line 12: ‘*Ör pü pö nü dö*---ShiKia-fu appeared and taught the people to write these books’.⁸⁸ Rock announces a ‘technical article’ on the subject, but explains neither his idiosyncratic system of transliteration nor the way he obtained this ‘translation’. One of the many photos accompanying the article shows a Dongba reciting from a book, perhaps also staged for Rock. (see Fig. 8) The *Washington Post* reported on 29 June 1924, under the headline ‘Creation Picture Story in Manuscripts Brought Here from China by Explorer’, about Rock’s discovery of ‘religious books of Nashti [!] tribes’ that ‘tell version similar to that found in present Bible’.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ Rock 1924, 489, 493.

⁸⁷ Rock 1924, 493.

⁸⁸ Rock 1924, 493, 498.

⁸⁹ Walravens 2007, 22.



Fig. 8: New Year's Offering Performed by a Nashi Priest (Rock 1924, 492).

Shortly before Rock's article appeared, he had sold 69 'Moso manuscripts', 1 'Chung-chia' (Zhongjia 仲家, today Buyi 布依 for Bouyei or Zhuang 壯, probably the latter) manuscript and 8 bundles of Tibetan manuscripts to the Library of Congress. An appendix to the Librarian's report for the fiscal year 1923–1924 on Chinese manuscripts has the following:

Moso manuscripts have been brought to Europe and America before and have been made the subject of attentive study by scholars, but up to date barely a dozen manuscripts all told have reached western countries. Doctor Rock secured no fewer then [sic!] 69 manuscripts, by far the largest collection ever brought together outside of the Moso country. These manuscripts show the two methods of writing used by the Mosos; most of them are plainly pictographic, but some are written in a syllabic script. Some of the manuscripts combine both systems of writing.

The gem of the collection is a pictographic story of creation that Doctor Rock was able with the help of a Chinese interpreter to transcribe in Moso sounds and also translate in full. Without doubt this Moso creation myth will become an important document not only in

the study of the Moso language and literature, but also to students of the folklore of the aboriginal tribes of West China.⁹⁰

The report presented more facts than Rock's article: the second type of script is termed syllabic, and the translation was done with the help of a Chinese interpreter. The author of the appendix was Walter T. Swingle (1871–1952), a botanist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, who had travelled in China 1918–1919 and brought back a huge number of Chinese gazetteers and books on botany for the Library of Congress. It is probable that Rock already knew him at that time, and that it was Swingle who had connected Rock to Harry Putnam (1861–1955), Librarian of Congress 1899–1939.⁹¹

Rock would always hire Naxi from Ngulukö for his expeditions, even for the one to Gansu 1925–1927, but mainly relying on younger ones than those Forrest had trained. He continued publishing in *The National Geographic Magazine*, but did not return to the topics of his 1924 article, although his book collecting continued on an even larger scale. A 'special file' of the Putnam Archives contains correspondence with Rock on 'Na-hsi pictographic manuscripts' (1927) and on the acquisition of '542 Na-hsi books for US\$ 1,000' by the Library of Congress in 1930.⁹² Clearly enough Rock had entered the manuscript trade almost immediately after having come to 'Naxi land' for the first time and thus became a direct competitor to Forrest in this respect too.

In an article from 1926 he acknowledged that Bacot and Handel-Mazzetti had already visited the region north-west to Lijiang, but immediately added that they had not penetrated it as deeply as he would.⁹³ In an earlier article Rock had staged himself as 'lone geographer' and the 'first white man'⁹⁴ in the region, surviving dangerous situations and visiting remote places, thus adding a second profession to his being a botanist. In 1952 Rock recalled that he and Forrest 'were about the only ones in Li-chiang',⁹⁵ omitting to mention the increasing number of foreigners visiting the Naxi areas and staying there. According to a much later and not completely reliable report, in those times locals called Lijiang 'foreigners' village' with up to forty long-time residents from abroad.⁹⁶ As early as 1926, H. Gordon

⁹⁰ Swingle 1924, 278.

⁹¹ In the 'Preface' to his *Encyclopedic Dictionary* Rock calls Swingle 'my good friend', see Rock 1963, xv; on Swingle see Bartlett 1952.

⁹² Walravens 1995, 214.

⁹³ Rock 1926, 135.

⁹⁴ Rock 1925, 346 and again in later articles.

⁹⁵ See Poupard 2018b, 98 and as always *cum grano salis* Andrews 1999, 54–56.

⁹⁶ See Gao Fuhua 2017.

Thompson (1878–1953), a surgeon and missionary who had been to Lijiang in 1923 together with the famous traveller George Edward Pereira (1865–1923), wrote in his travel report: ‘The valley of the Mekong [...] has been so frequently described that I will pass rapidly over this part of the journey.’⁹⁷ Two years later, Theodore Roosevelt, Jr. (1887–1944) and his brother Kermit, sons of the president, led a zoological expedition in search of the giant panda. Coming from Bhamo in Burma, they picked up a certain ‘Tsao, Forrest’s former servant’ in Dali, most probably Zhao Chengzhang.⁹⁸ In Lijiang they then met James Henry Andrews (1891–1967) in early 1929. In 1924, the Scotsman Andrews had succeeded the Dutchman Kok as head of the P.M.U. station in Lijiang.⁹⁹ Here the Roosevelts’ team was joined by Xuan Mingde 宣明德, the first native missionary in the P.M.U. station at Lijiang. He was liked by the Roosevelts because of his fluency in ‘many dialects’ and because he knew some English – ‘the only man we met in Likang who could speak a word’.¹⁰⁰ The expedition met Rock in Yongning, where he liked to spend the cold season on the island in Lake Lugu.¹⁰¹ During this trip, Theodore also acquired a few Dongba manuscripts and a long picture scroll which would later arouse his son’s interest in the ‘hieroglyphic writing’ of the ‘Nashi’. Almost immediately after their return to the United States in the same year 1929, the brothers’ travelogue was published. It contained an episode recalling that Xuan Mingde, when hearing a hunter playing the Jew’s harp, said ‘That very bad thing’, ‘This country, same as everywhere’: when young lovers were to be married against their will, they would communicate with the help of that instrument and hang themselves at the top of a mountain. Hundreds had died that way.¹⁰² This custom

⁹⁷ Thompson 1926, 4.

⁹⁸ See Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 80 and Mueggler 2011a, 144.

⁹⁹ Andrews 1999 is a confused and hagiographic account of his work in Lijiang by his son. The Roosevelts praised his untiring support; see Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 73–76. For the discontent between Andrews and the Dutch missionaries that finally led to the latter leaving the P.M.U. see Laan 1997, 348–351.

¹⁰⁰ See Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 76 and 83–89; on Xuan Mingde see also Andrews 1999, 27 where he is called a ‘Tibetan Evangelist’, a title doubted by the Roosevelts who only call him Hsuen, see Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 108. According to his son Xuan Ke 宣科 (b. 1930), the P.M.U. had sent his father to the ‘Guiyang Theological Seminary’ 貴陽神學院, see Gao Fuhua 2017.

¹⁰¹ On Rock’s encounter with the Roosevelts see Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 83–89 and Sutton 1974, 192–195; as usual these accounts contradict each other on certain points such as the place where Rock met the Roosevelts and who had introduced Xuan to the Roosevelts. Xuan Ke whose memories are recorded in Gao Fuhua 2017 recalled what his father had told him, while Sutton draws her information from Rock’s diary which in this case is more trustworthy, since it is also confirmed by the Roosevelts’ travelogue.

¹⁰² Roosevelt and Roosevelt 1929, 216–217.

and the ritual to propitiate the souls of the dead would become one of the major topics in Dongba studies.

In 1916 Forrest had already mentioned the ‘Foreign Office authorities’ eagerness to secure more’ Dongba manuscripts of which he had apparently sold seven-teen. This interest may have been motivated by the continuing dispute about the Sino-Burmese border after the McMahon Line had been established in 1914 by the Simla or Anglo-Tibetan Agreement. Forrest regularly spent time in Tengyue 騰越 (today’s Tengchong 騰衝), a merchant town on the Chinese side of the Sino-Burmese border and a British trading port, from where he dispatched plants and artefacts to the United Kingdom; ‘Foreign Office authorities’ may therefore refer to the consulate. In 1929, Stanley Wyatt-Smith (1887–1958), British Consul in Tengyue from 1927 to 1931, reported

that many Mo-so books were for sale. He was authorized by the Foreign Office and the India Office to arrange for the purchase and the translation of some them. One ceremony of fifty-five books was translated into Chinese but only partly into English [...]. In 1931, all translation stopped and a hurried purchase was made of 125 manuscripts since a mild inflation of prices (1d to 6d) had set in as a result of massive purchases by the American botanist J. F. Rock. [...] In 1934 the whole of the British consuls’s collection was neatly divided among the British Museum and the India Office – even to the extent of splitting both translation and originals into two separate and distinct halves.¹⁰³

Some of these manuscripts and the accompanying translations were acquired by the British Library in the same year (see Figs 9–11).¹⁰⁴



Fig. 9: Cover page of British Library manuscript Or.11417A (Poupard 2018a); public domain.

¹⁰³ See Jackson 1979, 21, an earlier version of these events by the same author has some differences, reporting that a ‘dictionary of “hieroglyphs” had been compiled which would enable the manuscripts already collected to be translated, or so it was fondly hoped’, see Jackson 1965, 144.

¹⁰⁴ See Jackson 1979, 23 and Poupard 2018a, where the English translations are attributed to Andrews. In a later publication, Poupard believed that Xuan Mingde took part in the translation project, see Poupard 2002, 137–138.

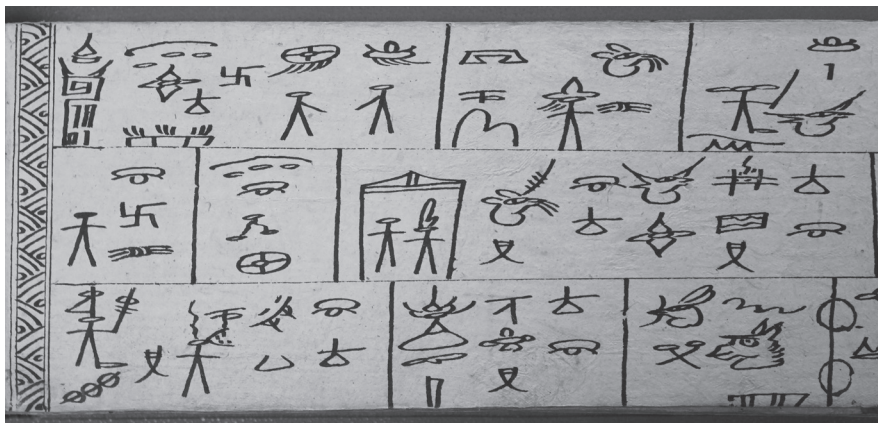


Fig. 10: Detail from the opening page of British Library Or.11417A (Poupard 2018a); public domain.

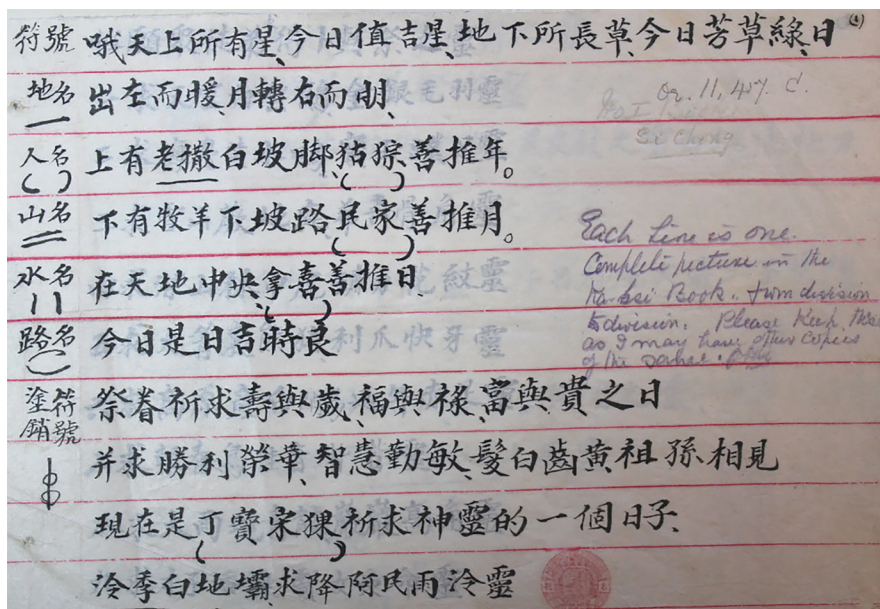


Fig. 11: Or.11417C, Chinese translation of Or.11417A (Poupard 2018a); public domain.

The Chinese translation of one of those texts displays an elaborated system of marks for different types of names and a deletion mark, the note written in

English is significant: 'Each line [of the translation] is one complete picture in the Na-hsi Book, from division to division. Please keep these as I may have other copies of the same' (see Fig. 11). The anonymous author considered each 'division' to be one *picture* in the manuscript, apparently being unfamiliar with the peculiar nature of Dongba writing. 'Na-hsi' faithfully represents the Chinese Naxi 拿喜, one of the early ways of writing the self-appellation of the group, as in the Chinese title of the 1914 P.M.U. primer: *Naxi chuxue* 拿喜初學.¹⁰⁵ We do not know who purchased the manuscripts and translated their contents, but it is safe to assume that Forrest's network of Naxis and missionaries was involved. The fifty-five manuscripts for one ceremony were written by a Dongba by the name of Ā-dzhi or Dto-dzhi (Dongzhi 東知, b. 1814/1825)¹⁰⁶ a few kilometres west of Lijiang in the winter of 1867, in the same year Desgodins had sent his copy of a Dongba manuscript to Paris. According to Anthony Jackson, this unique set is 'uniformly bound with orange covers edged with blue, the central titlepiece being flanked by two blue lozenges while on the back cover is given the sequence number of the books' (see Fig. 9).¹⁰⁷ The above specimen shows that there was some variation.¹⁰⁸ Some of the fourteen manuscripts acquired by the Swedish Pentecostal missionaries Karl and Hanna Asp during their first stay at Tengyue, 1927 to 1933, show similar features.¹⁰⁹

In published sources Rock later recalled having returned to 'Naxi land' in 1930 'to devote my entire time to the study of the 'Na-²khi Literature',¹¹⁰ while his stay there, after his expedition to Gansu, from 1927 was 'not to occupy himself with the study of the 'Na-²khi written language'.¹¹¹ According to the reconstruction of an anthropologist, Rock converted to this study only in late 1929 because

105 See Li-Kiang Fu-Yin-T'ang 1914; its thirty lessons contain simple dialogues with Christian messages in Romanised Naxi in two fonts (one resembling handwriting), clearly meant for alphabetising the converts.

106 For the Chinese name and the earlier date of birth see Deng 2013, 144–157.

107 Jackson 1979, 297.

108 Further evidence is found in the manuscripts sold to the Harvard-Yenching Institute by Rock, see the coloured images in Zhongguo shehuikexue yuan minzuxue yu renleixue yanjiusuo 中國社會科學院民族學與人類學研究所, Lijiangshi Dongba wenhua yanjiuyuan 麗江東巴文化研究院 and Hafo-Yanjing xueshe 哈佛燕京學社 2011, vol. 1.

109 Together with Chinese translations and a notebook containing the English translation of one of these, Hanna Asp donated the manuscripts to the Ethnographic Museum in Stockholm in 1946, see Poupard 2022, 141–142.

110 Rock 1948, 1.

111 Janert 1965, XVI; Rock is insinuating here that he stayed there all the time after 1930, while he actually continued travelling and even accepted assignments when needing money, see for example Sutton 1974, 214.

of the suicide of two Naxi girls in Ngulukö. After having seen the dead girls and learnt the reason for their suicide, namely that they were to be married against their will, he had the appropriate ritual re-enacted in his house in order to study it.¹¹² His first attempts to learn reading Dongba books having completely failed, he hired a Dongba for the first time to explain the meaning of all characters to him, obviously following Bacot's example. Shortly afterward he went to Washington, D.C. to obtain funding for a new expedition from the National Geographic Society. It was denied not only because the stock market had crashed, but also because Rock had only delivered half an article and two and a half thousand photos without captions in exchange for US\$68,000 the Society had paid him for his recent two journeys. In March 1931 he was back in Ngulukö on his own, where he was finally introduced to 'his' Dongba He Huating 和華亭 from Longpan 龍蟠 on the other side of the Jade Dragon Mountains, who would, according to Rock's later accounts, become his major medium. After initial discontent, Rock finally settled with He and some other Naxi in Yunnan-fu in 1932.¹¹³ Film footage from this year showing He Huating in action, probably performing in Rock's Kunming house, has been preserved.¹¹⁴ They soon established a routine, again involving at least one go-between who was never mentioned in subsequent publications:

First, He Huating copied each page of the pictographic text in his elegant hand. Then he recited the text for Rock to transcribe with the idiosyncratic orthography he invented for this purpose. Third, he dictated a summary translation of each line of the recited text in colloquial Naxi to Li Shichen or He Guangyi. Li or He translated this into Chinese, and Rock rendered their Chinese into elegant English. Fourth, the translation doubled back, plunging into the pictographs with blocs of text that mapped out each rubric.¹¹⁵

This was the beginning of Rock's third career as a scholar.

112 If this account, culled from Rock's diary by Mueggler, is accepted, then the date of 1928 for Rock's film footage of the ritual to propitiate the souls of suicides is probably wrong: a short film (*The Na-khi Hār-la-llü Dance for the propitiation of suicides*, 'Performed for this film, Na-khi village and people of Nv-lv-k'ö at the foot of the Li-chiang snowrange, Yunnan province, China') using this footage was co-produced by the Russian and Far Eastern Institute and the Department of Anthropology of the University of Washington in 1954, see <https://archive.org/details/WaSeUMCEMC48003DaKhiHarLaLluDances> (accessed on 1 May 2021).

113 Mueggler 2011a, 266–269.

114 *NA-KHI DANCES Performed by Ho Hua-t'ing, Na-khi dto-mba (shaman) from west of the Li-chiang snow range in Kunming, 1932*, see <https://archive.org/details/WaSeUMCEMC48002NaKhiDances> (accessed on 1 May 2021).

115 Mueggler 2011a, 273–274.

According to his own, albeit much later and perhaps incomplete testimony, Yang Zhonghong 楊仲鴻 (1903–1983) learnt by chance in 1933¹¹⁶ that He Huating was in Yunnan-fu assisting Rock in translating Dongba texts. Yang was a Naxi from Lijiang who had received a Chinese education and belonged to the upper stratum of Lijiang.¹¹⁷ A photo of the ‘Lijiang elites in 1929’ shows him in the company of Zhou Lin 周霖 (1902–1977), an elementary school teacher from a scholarly Naxi family, who would become one of the most influential Naxi painters and poets after 1949, Li Yaosan 李耀三, ‘poet, capitalist’ and – Xuan Mingde, the missionary. In the caption Yang is labelled as ‘editor of The Commercial Press’ in Shanghai.¹¹⁸ Like other educated Naxi, he had become director of an elementary school in Yunnan-fu in 1933. Again, according to his own statement he had encountered the name of Rock for the first time in 1929 when a Shanghai journal published a translation of the latter’s 1925 article on the ‘Muli kingdom’ in Sichuan, a de facto independent principality some 50 km north of Yongning.¹¹⁹ Angered by Rock’s depiction of an ‘independent kingdom’, Yang wrote a refutation for the same journal, trying to show that it had always been part of China. He used the opportunity of Rock having left to borrow about forty manuscripts from He Huating and have his wife copy their content. With the help of He Huating, who showed him his work for Rock, including a catalogue of Dongba manuscripts, he compiled the first-ever Naxi-Chinese dictionary. In three columns it provided 1,042 Dongba characters and the corresponding words written with Geba characters, followed by Chinese translations with traditional phonetic notation for the pronunciation of the words. The dictionary was arranged in eighteen categories similar to those of traditional Chinese encyclopaedias, beginning with heaven and earth and, after having dealt with the natural and social world, finishing with rituals and spirits; in addition, he translated a dozen texts.

In 1935 a relative suggested to Yang that he should send his works to an acquaintance in the Ministry of Education, who forwarded them to Academia Sinica and asked Yang to wait for a response which never came, although the eminent archaeologist and palaeographer Dong Zuobin 董作賓 (Tung Tso-pin, 1895–1963) later recalled having seen it in that year in Nanking. Shortly afterwards

116 In secondary literature, one often finds the date given as 1931 which is clearly a mistake copied from Dong Zuobin’s preface to Li Lincan’s dictionary which was first published in 1944, see Yu Suisheng 2008b, 371–372. For the preface see Li Lincan 1944, ‘*Mosuo xiangxing wenzi zidian xu*’ 麼些族象形文字字典序, 1 (= Li Lincan 2001, “‘*Naxizu xiangxing wenzi zidian*’ xu” 《納西族象形文字字典》序, 4–5).

117 For educated Naxi becoming school teachers in their home land see Hansen 1999, 44.

118 See Niu Xiangkui 2021.

119 Rock 1925; for Muli and Rock’s visits there see Sutton 1974, 161–174.

war broke out, and Yang's manuscripts fell into oblivion. These works were never published; three of Yang's manuscripts are now kept at the National Library in Beijing.¹²⁰ In a text privately published in 1993, Zhou Shanfu 周善甫 (1914–1998) recalled Yang, himself and others including a Dongba retreating to the scenic Huating (!) monastery in the Western Hills of Kunming in 1933 for the purpose of compiling the dictionary. This account in itself is as convincing as Yang's own and only partially contradicts it, but it is difficult to verify too.¹²¹ Zhou was a Naxi artist who together with his elder brother Zhou Lin rose to fame during the 1940s, but unlike him suffered persecution after 1949, just like Yang himself, who was closely affiliated to people working for the Republican government.¹²² Without new evidence it will be impossible to reconstruct the genesis of the dictionary, but the case demonstrates the far-reaching effects of the Communists' victory.

In autumn 1933, at the same time when Yang Zhonghong was preparing his dictionary and translations with He Huating in Yunnan-fu, the Naxi Fang Guoyu 方國瑜 (1903–1983) returned to his native Lijiang. He had just graduated from the sinological department of Peking University where Liu Bannong 劉半農 (Liu Fu 劉復, 1891–1934), one of the many famous scholars teaching at that institution had shown him Bacot's work and told him that in the Naxi areas there were still Dongbas practising their arts. According to a very late statement Fang had obviously not been aware of this before, just as Yang learned this the same at approximately the same time. Together with the Naxi Zhou Rucheng 周汝誠 (1904–1985), a former elementary school teacher, and Yang Pinchao 楊品超, Fang invited the Dongba He Zongdao 和宗道 to explain the rituals, compile a catalogue of the 'scriptures' (*jingshu* 經書) with summaries and explain the book 'Origin of Mankind' (*Renlei lai yuan* 人類來源). Fang then asked three other Dongbas to fill in a card for each character, including its pronunciation and meanings,

120 There is little reliable information on Yang, probably because of his – after 1949 – unfavourable social background; the account is based on Niu Xiangkui 2021 (first published in 1991) which should be taken *cum grano salis*. It mainly follows an autobiography of Yang from 1950 dated back to 1949 (!) and an undated, probably also apologetic text on Rock and He Huating by Yang, which must have been written after 1956 since it uses simplified characters and Naxi instead of Mosuo; the first pages of the manuscripts kept by the family are reproduced in Niu Xiangkui 2021. In the second text Yang claimed that Rock first met He Huating in 1928, while Rock in his diary dates their first meeting to 1931, see Mueggler 2011a, 268.

For a description of the three manuscripts see Yu Suisheng 2008b and Yu Suisheng 2008c; two of the notebooks contain copies of the dictionary, the third one the catalogue. I am grateful to Max J. Fölster who reported the results of his examination of these works, adding details on the codicology and the present condition (personal communication 3 June 2021).

121 See Yu Suisheng 2008b, 372–374.

122 The 1991 biography jumps from 1935 to 1982, see Niu Xiangkui 2021.

finally inviting He Shigui 和士貴, a senior Dongba of more than seventy years, to proof-read and amend all that had been prepared. When returning to Peiping (as Beijing was called in those days) in June 1934, he brought with him a first draft of an inventory of the ‘pictographic’ characters of the ‘Mosuo’ as the Naxi were still called in Chinese. The following year, the famous revolutionary and philologist Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (Chang Ping-lin, 1868–1936) composed a preface in which he advised combining the study of Dongba characters with Chinese palaeography.¹²³ After studying phonetics with the famous linguists Zhao Yuanren 趙元任 (Y. R. Chao, 1892–1982) and Li Fanggui 李方桂 (Li Fang-kuei, 1902–1987) at the Academia Sinica in Nanking, he finished a first version in 1936, and this was reviewed by Dong Zuobin even before it was published.¹²⁴ This first version underwent two substantial revisions, accompanied by the praise and advice of many renowned scholars, before it was finally published in 1981 with the help of the Naxi scholar He Zhiwu 和志武 (1930–1995) who together with Zhou Rucheng had already been involved in the second revision in the 1960s; this was not published due to the outbreak of the Cultural Revolution.¹²⁵ Disregarding later versions, at least seven persons were involved in the initial version beside Fang himself – a truly collective effort.

In his preface Fang mentioned an American named Luolunshi 羅倫士 (a way of writing ‘Lawrence’ in Chinese) who supposedly carried away his original draft as well as the cards with the lemmata, when leaving China due to the outbreak of the Pacific war. This story is difficult to verify, especially since the preface was dated to 1979, after the so-called Cultural Revolution, by a Communist cadre in the academic system. Fang’s inventory has been reprinted many times and is still one of the major references for the study of Dongba writing. The 1981 edition, however, must not be considered as representing the situation in the 1930s, as not only the anachronistic use of the ethnonym ‘Naxi’, of ‘Beijing’ for Peiping and other internal evidence show, but also the comparison with a summary of an earlier version. In 1944, Dong Zuobin mentioned having seen parts of Fang’s work in 1940 and provided its table of contents. Its four parts correspond structurally to the four parts of the later publication, but, according to the titles, with significant changes, among them the replacement of a chapter on religion by splitting the one on writing into two on Dongba and Geba characters respectively. While the publication has eighteen categories, the earlier version had two more. Dong also noted that Fang had included the pronunciation of each word according to

¹²³ A facsimile is reproduced in Fang and He 2005, *Bianyan* 弁言, 9–10.

¹²⁴ Zhang published his foreword as early as 1940, see Ge Agan 2008c, 255.

¹²⁵ Fang and He 2005, *Bianyan* 弁言, 1–5.

the conventions of the International Phonetic Association (IPA) together with its tone.¹²⁶

It is perhaps only a coincidence that at almost exactly the same time three men set out to accomplish the same task: Rock first, then unknowingly sharing 'his' Dongba with a Naxi elementary school teacher who tried to recover a tradition he did not know (or had only been aware of as something backward and primitive), and finally another Naxi, this time an academic who was made aware of this tradition by one of his teachers referring to the work of Bacot. Whether it is also a coincidence that there are quite a few correspondences between their works remains to be seen. It seems to be clear, however, that Yang's and Fang's interest in Dongba writing was triggered by the work of Bacot and the efforts of Rock. The simple fact that Yang knew Xuan Mingde connects him to Forrest's network and casts some doubt on his later account that he 'accidentally' learnt about Rock's efforts in Yunnan-fu. In addition, it is hard to imagine that Fang's work went unnoticed by the native members of the network who apparently accepted contracts from all sides and for different types of commodities.

After a series of misfortunes, Rock decided to leave Yunnan once and for all. According to his biographer, he had already fired his Dongba (He Huating?) in April 1933 'for improvising the books he did not know' and sent back to Lijiang for a replacement.¹²⁷ Having found a better one, he continued translating and writing, until suddenly deciding to return to Europe. Before coming back to Yunnan-fu only nine months later in June 1934,¹²⁸ he made himself known to scholars and editors, sometimes through the gift of a Dongba manuscript, and thus established the foundation for his later fame.¹²⁹ During that journey, he must also have met the German Tibetologist Johannes Schubert (1896–1976) whom he would ask for translations of Tibetan texts, until in 1956 Tucci rejected one of them which was scheduled to appear in Rock's work *The Amnye Ma-Chhen Range and Adja-*

¹²⁶ See Dong Zuobin's preface in Li Lincan 1944, 'Mosuo xiangxing wenzi zidian xu' 麼些族象形文字字典序, 1 (= Li Lincan 2001, "Naxizu xiangxing wenzi zidian" xu' 《納西族象形文字字典》序, 5). Just like Zhang's preface Dong's was already published in 1940, see Ge Agan 2008c, 255.

¹²⁷ See Sutton 1974, 231.

¹²⁸ See Sutton 1974, 233–244.

¹²⁹ See *inter alia* Taube 2009 not only for Rock's correspondence with the Tibetologist Johannes Schubert; his present of a manuscript is mentioned in his letter of 17 May 1935, see Taube 2009, 23 and Schubert 1949, 141, n. 117.

cent Regions.¹³⁰ In addition, Rock offered his unique collection of Dongba manuscripts for sale.¹³¹

In the second half of the 1930s, Rock could reap the first fruits of his labour. In 1935 and 1936 he published three articles on Dongba manuscripts in the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*, the academic outlet of the West China Union University in Chengdu established by English and North American Protestant missionary boards in 1914.¹³² Although utterly despising the missionaries in principle,¹³³ he apparently did not mind publishing his first scholarly works in a journal devoted to the work of ‘the explorer missionary’. In a curious address in the journal’s first issue covering the years 1922 and 1923, the society’s president had claimed: “Intelligence, initiative, character, courage and the divine spark of the human soul” constitute practically the stock in trade of the explorer missionary.’ In addition, the president had proposed that the ‘Tibetans and the Tribes folk’ ‘may well constitute as it were a root nationality: are they, or are they not, a parent stock?’¹³⁴ The journal later published, among other things, David Crockett Graham’s (1884–1961) work on the Miao and the ideas of Thomas T. Torrance (1871–1959) on the Qiang being a lost tribe of Israel, sent as missionaries to Sichuan.¹³⁵ What might have appealed to Rock was the general attitude of the members of the society, many of whom did not like the Chinese and were in favour of the ethnic groups who were considered barbarians by them. During a visit in 1925, he had met and befriended some of them.¹³⁶ Against this backdrop, the topic of Rock’s first article might have particularly aroused the editors’ interest: ‘The Story of the Flood in the Literature of the Mo-so (Na-khi) Tribe’. It was perhaps the ‘technical article’, announced by the author in 1924.

130 For Rock’s letter of 7 July 1956 to Schubert informing him about the decision, see Taube 2009, 285; on Schubert’s career in East Germany see Walravens 2008.

131 Rock mentions having shown it to the linguist Ferdinand Lessing (1882–1961, professor at the Seminar für Orientalische Sprachen and curator at the Ethnological Museum in Berlin) in his house in Yunnan-fu and, in vain, offered to sell it, see his letter of 31 July 1935 in Taube 2009, 25.

132 For the society and its journal see Zhou Shurong 2018. The *Journal* may be considered as Protestant answer to the Catholic *Anthropos* which was established in 1906 and published articles of M.E.P. Missionaries on Tonkin, Sichuan and Yunnan, see Michaud 2007, 141–152.

133 In an undated text on ‘Missionaries in West China’ Rock only exempts medical missionaries from his observation that ‘those in the extreme west belonged to the type called “Holy Roller”’. Nearly all of them were without any education, couldn’t compose a letter, but the Lord called them from their Alma Mater the dungcart to convert the heathen. [...], see Rock *s.a.*, 1. For his antipathy towards the Andrews family see Sutton 1974, 216.

134 Morse 1923, 5, 6.

135 McKhann and Waymann 2012, 201–203.

136 Sutton 1974, 91.

Just as in his first article on the Naxi, a topos familiar to a Western audience served to attract attention, but by 1935 Rock had abandoned any attempt to harmonize the Dongba myths with the Old Testament. After explaining the title *Ts'o mbër t'u* and emphasizing that all manuscripts were chanted 'at ceremonies only', he introduced his source as 'their genesis, for it tells of the creation of the world, the cause of the flood which was incest, and the marriage of the lone survivor after the flood with a celestial female, who became the parents of the human race'.¹³⁷ In this article Rock presented for the first time his system of transliterating Naxi, which is already close to its final stage, even though the tones are not given yet, and some diacritical marks would be replaced by other means for representing phonemes. While introducing the two types of writing, he airs for the first time the idea that the phonetic one may be more ancient than the pictographic:

The former strange as it may seem is the older, and the least known, very few dto-mba or sorcerers of to-day being able to read it, while all can read the pictographs. The latter has developed in the present home of the tribe, for the animals and plants etc. used as characters, are such as appear in the mountains of Li-chiang. The phonetic script was undoubtedly brought with them from their ancient home, the grasslands of northeastern Tibet, whence they started on their great migration south. Thus their written language has degenerated rather than developed. [...]

The Na-khi religious literature is of the greatest interest as it gives an idea of what the genuine pre-Buddhistic religion of Tibet the Bon chos or Bon religion consisted of, for it has survived in its purity in this tribe. The latter having come in contact with the later lamaism only in its new home, in the district of Li-chiang, and as late as the Ch'ien-lung period [Qianlong, r. 1735–1796] of the Ch'ing [Qing] dynasty.¹³⁸

He further stated that it 'was known the Na-khi possessed a written language', 'it was however not known that they possessed an extensive literature in manuscript form, the translation of which has occupied me for the last five years', and their literature 'is mainly a religious one'.¹³⁹ In addition, he announced a 'monograph on the Mo so or Na-khi' consisting of four or five volumes including 'a dictionary and phrase book of the two written languages, the pictographic and syllabic', the first of which would appear in spring 1936.¹⁴⁰

The translation is first accompanied by copious notes, often taking most of the space on a page, adducing again and again explanations of words, names

¹³⁷ Rock 1935, 66.

¹³⁸ Rock 1935, 65–66

¹³⁹ Rock 1935, 64.

¹⁴⁰ Rock 1935, 65–66.

or characters and digressions of diverse sorts. After five pages the author starts intervening in the narration, and after ten pages remarks: 'The story is a long one and would cover many pages'.¹⁴¹ He finishes it off by summarizing the content and showing reproductions of four pages representing four types of manuscripts and finally hand-drawings of two pages of 'the original manuscript' with some explanations of 'pictographic' characters. The caption of one of the images reads: 'In this type of text the characters act only as milestones in the sentence, much must be read into it which is not written'.¹⁴² In principle, Rock would follow this pattern in most of his later works, on the one hand lamenting the vagueness of the 'pictographic manuscripts' in varying diction, on the other resorting to summaries and paraphrases when the 'religious texts' were too long. It is impossible to reconstruct the original 'text' from this presentation. His first scholarly article is clearly written by a dilettante unfamiliar with the genre, but trying to make the product look genuine. In addition, this article already shows Rock's tendency to present all information relatable to a given topic including much of little immediate relevance.

Some general remarks on the history of the Naxi are probably taken from Chavannes – with rare exceptions Rock never gives credit to previous scholarship. In this case, however, it is clear that Bacot's work together with the translations of historical sources provided by Chavannes was a major source of inspiration for Rock, although he dismissed it as 'foam' in a letter dated 31 July 1935.¹⁴³ We know that he had the book with him, when he visited the descendant of the Mu family in 1931. Rock showed him its reproductions of the Mu genealogy and was in exchange given the opportunity to inspect the original and a second, different version.¹⁴⁴ His copy of Bacot's work contained numerous notes to the character list (see Fig. 12).¹⁴⁵

The notes are not dated and were apparently added over a period of time, but must have been compiled in the course of his work with 'my Tomba' in the 1930s (see last line in Fig. 11). Besides providing English translations as well as additions and corrections and sometimes Chinese characters, Rock supplies equivalents in his own system of transliterating Naxi words with the numerals 1 in the

141 Rock 1935, 76.

142 Rock 1935, Plate IV.

143 'Das Buch von Bacot ist nur Schaum. Er kannte nicht Chinesisch und musste alles mit einem Dolmetscher machen, und das ist lange nicht der richtige Weg', see Taube 2009, 25.

144 See Mueggler 2011a, 279.

145 I am grateful to Professor William G. Boltz for providing a scan of the dictionary part of Rock's copy of Bacot's work, which came to the library of the University of Washington in 1954, when Rock sold his private library to this institution.

lower left, 2 in the upper left and 3 in the upper right corners, representing three of the four tones; the fourth one, being rare, is left unmarked. The articles in the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* do not yet contain these tone marks which are first found in his articles published in 1937 and retained by Rock in all later works, although most of the time all of the tone marks were printed in the upper left, probably for typographic reasons. This system may have been inspired by the traditional way Chinese scholars marked tones with circles in the corners of a character.

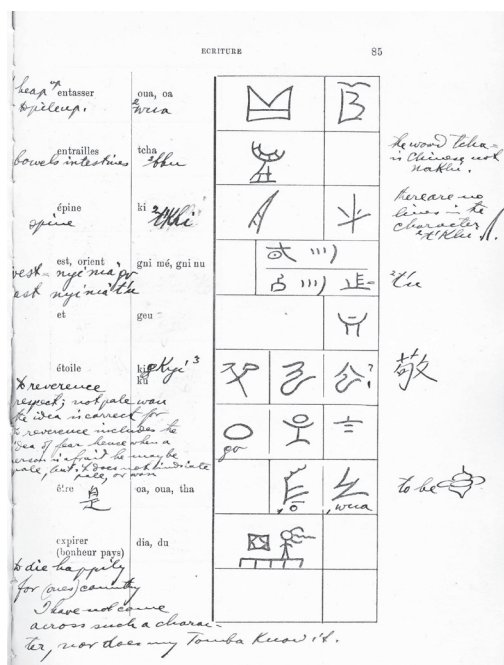


Fig. 12: Bacot 1913, 85 with Rock's notes; Seattle, WA, Libraries of the University of Washington, Suzzallo and Allen Libraries, DS 731 / M7 / B3 / 1913.

The two 1936 articles following the first one published in the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* are devoted to the origins of books for divination (Tso-la) and to one specimen of a collection of 'Dharaṇis' (Hwa-lü). The former gives the 'translation' of the myth with comparatively few notes; there is no attempt to relate the characters of the accompanying drawings of six pages to the translation. Rock notes that the divination books are not sewn at the left like all others but at the top, without giving any reason for this codicological peculiarity

that links them to similar books from Tibet to the Tai world, all of them using the pothi as more common book form.¹⁴⁶ The short article on the spell explains the ritual for killing someone, reproduces the syllables of the *Hoa-lü* and a page with the drawing of the prospective victim, surrounded by Tibetan characters. Rock does not forget to mention that he ‘had often enquired from the dto-mba, who assisted me for several years in the translating of their literature, if there was such a custom among the Na-khi’ which was ‘stoutly denied’ until shortly before his departure from Lijiang.¹⁴⁷

Rock must have known that publications in the *Journal of the West China Border Research Society* would hardly reach his preferred audience, namely scholars of various denominations and collectors of Asian art in the West. In 1937 he finally appeared on the stage of serious scholarship with three articles: in a contribution to the *Geographical Review* he revisited the Nichols manuscript which Laufer had described thirty-one years previously in the same journal; in *Artibus Asiae* he translated the story of the first Dongba ‘Shi-lo’ with copious notes on the iconography, and in the *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* ‘Studies in Na-khi Literature’ he reprinted the *Artibus Asiae* article with almost no changes (but this time the author’s name adorned with ‘F. R. G. S.’, that is Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society, a title which he kept for some time) and added a second study of the pictorial scrolls on long strips of cloth called ‘Hä ²zhi ‘p’i’ in Rock’s romanisation used in funerary rituals.¹⁴⁸

Concerning the Nichols manuscript, Rock corrected the former identification of the paper as having been made from *Strebis asper* and stated that it was made from several species of the genera *Daphne* and *Wikstroemia*. He provided the Naxi title, a transliteration in his system including the tone marks at the places seen in his copy of Bacot’s work, a ‘literal translation’ and a ‘free translation’ of the four pages published by Laufer in 1916, lavishly adorned by ‘notes’. In one of them he warned the reader:

146 See Almog 2011, 132 and Grabowsky 2011, 148–149; the article is Rock 1936a.

147 Rock 1936b, 53.

148 Rock 1937c; in the newly added part the author displays erudition and exchange with renowned scholars on the topic of the elephant with thirty-three heads, see Rock 1937c, 42–44. The reason for the parallel publication of the Dongba Shiluo article is probably Rock’s worry that *Artibus Asiae* would not accept it, leading him to activate his connection to the École française d’Extrême-Orient in Hanoi; for his continuous attempts since at least August 1935 to persuade Richard Hadl (1877–1944), the publisher of *Artibus Asiae*, see Taube 2009, 28, 47–50, 54, 55 *et passim*.

It may be remarked here that the dto-mba custom is actually to write only a very few words or characters. These serve more or less as prompts to the memory, and much more that is not written has to be read into the text. Furthermore, a single character appearing in a phrase may do duty three or four times; i.e. it is read that number of times. Consequently, unless one is familiar with the story – has learnt it by heart, indeed – it is impossible to read it no matter how accomplished a Nakhi scholar one may be.¹⁴⁹

In addition, he stated:

Nakkhi, or Mo-so, manuscripts are not so rare now as they were once thought to be, but complete sets of books are very rare. The dto-mba, or sorcerer, business is more or less on the wane, and the dto-mbas today are not so particular about the number of books they chant at a ceremony. The main objects nowadays are the slaughter of pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens and the feasting on them; the sooner the chanting is finished, the more time remains for eating. There are more than a hundred different kinds of ceremony, to each of which a certain number of books pertain. At some of the larger ceremonies, which sometimes last from five to seven days, as many as 150 different books have been chanted in a recognized sequence. Every one of the ceremonies has its special books that can be chanted only at that particular ceremony. Other books are common to all ceremonies, the texts only differing slightly; there are not many of these, however. I have been able during more than ten years' contact with the Nakhi to collect complete sets of manuscripts, all arranged according to the ceremony. Most of these ceremonies I have had performed for me, sometimes by as many as twelve dto-mbas. The greater part of this mass of literature I have been able to translate, and, while doing so, with the constant assistance of two dto-mbas, I have compiled a fairly complete dictionary of the written language of the Nakhi, comprising both the pictographic and syllabic types.¹⁵⁰

This lengthy introduction is remarkable. On the one hand, Rock needed to explain why formerly rare items had become readily available, which he did by pointing to the decline of Dongba rituals. On the other hand, he emphasised again, just as in most of his publications, the inaccessibility of the 'texts' which required a Dongba knowing them by heart. Since he had 'most of the ceremonies' performed for himself, the reader is assured of Rock's intimate knowledge of his topic. Thus having set the stage, he introduced his own work (ten years' contact with the Naxi, complete sets of manuscripts with the greater part translated, a fairly complete dictionary) and himself as *the* authority on things Naxi. His mention of two Dongbas 'constantly assisting' him deviates from his later emphasising 'his' Dongba as main source. He may have been referring to He Huating and the translator He Guangcheng. In addition to the translations and the dictionary,

149 Rock 1937a, 235.

150 Rock 1937a, 230.

Rock announced the publication of ‘a tragic and beautiful romance’: ‘One would hardly expect to find such language among a primitive and virile tribe like the Nakhi. Truly the poem may be looked upon as one of their great epics’.¹⁵¹ Like a story-teller who ends a session with an invitation to the next, Rock used to advertise future results of his study. This is one of the few publications of his mentioning previous research, probably because he was directly addressing Laufer’s summary of earlier scholarship.

The study devoted to ‘dto-mba Shi-lo’, the first Dongba, included the tone marks, albeit only in the upper left corner. Perhaps addressing himself to the readership of *Artibus Asiae*, Rock discussed images of the first Dongba some of which were provided at its end, as well as facsimiles of the first text ‘translated’. For this translation he provided a drawing of the first ‘rubric’ (as he called the divisions created by vertical strokes in the lines), a transliteration, an extensive explanation of characters and words and finally a ‘free translation’, but following established practice explained:

To transcribe and explain the entire book (manuscript) would lead us too far and therefore I shall simply give a translation of the text, indicating each page and rubric, so that the meaning of the original text can easily be recognized.¹⁵²

In his introduction Rock reiterated his idea that their ‘religion, if such it can be called, is the almost pure Bon Shamanism which has survived among them in a more or less unadulterated form. They never had any temples or lamaseries, neither in the Chinese or Tibetan sense of the word, and all their numerous ceremonies like those of the ancient Bon were and still are performed out in the open’.¹⁵³ As usual he recycled earlier material with more or less variation, for example the hypothesis that the phonetic script was older than the pictographic one:

A detailed account of the origin of the Na-khi writing, both phonetic and syllabic, I intend to give in other studies on this tribe, where their literature, religion, ceremonies, &c. will be fully discussed and explained. I have collected over four thousand Mo-so manuscripts which, arranged in sets, belong to about one hundred or more different ceremonies during which they are chanted in a certain sequence. Some of these ceremonies are very elaborate and may last from one hour to seven days. Many of them are no more performed and only few priests or dto-mbas remain who have a knowledge of these ceremonies, of the objects used, the sacrifices made, and the books chanted during their performance. I have exam-

¹⁵¹ Rock 1937a, 230.

¹⁵² Rock 1937b, 11 = Rock 1937c, 6.

¹⁵³ Rock 1937b, 5 = Rock 1937c, 1.

ined all this literature during the last seven years and have translated hundreds of the most important manuscripts with the help of several priests, and later with one priest in particular who proved to be the most intelligent, and who, after a few years of translating, realized that he had learned a great deal about his own books and their contents.¹⁵⁴

Rock here repeats his idea of a system of approximately one hundred ‘ceremonies’ during which ‘manuscripts, arranged in sets’ are chanted. Megalomaniac as he does appear once in a while, he claims to have acquired more than four thousand of these books, examined ‘all this literature’ during the last seven years and translated ‘hundreds of the most important manuscripts’. It is evident that Rock continued to work with more than only ‘his’ Dongba who was so intelligent that he would even recognize Rock as his teacher; he would even take some of his Naxi along when travelling.¹⁵⁵ Rock would further develop this topos by reduction: since 1930 more than four thousand manuscripts, hundreds of translations and one Dongba. For the first time, he describes with more precision the structure of the ‘ceremonies’:

The priests, when performing a ceremony, recite the books at a given time or at given intervals, when they are not occupied with dancing or fighting sham battles with demons. The latter are always first invited to the ceremony, then fed, and finally driven out. When chanting these books, they very often have no clear understanding of the meaning, and simply recite from memory. Some they know by heart, especially the texts of such ceremonies as are still much in vogue viz: ²Har ³la - ¹l̥l̥i ³k’ö for the propitiation of the spirits of suicides. The pictographs act more as prompters or milestones in a sentence or phrase, for much must be read into a paragraph which is not written, the pictographs simply helping to refresh the memory and recall the sentence.¹⁵⁶

In addition to the by-now familiar reference to the pictographs as prompts, ‘chanting’ is identified as one of three major activities of the Dongbas during a ritual beside dancing or fighting. In a letter written in the same year Rock went even further into detail, specifying that ‘almost all Moso books are written in metrics just as a poem, in verses. When they are chanted by the Tombas, each verse is accentuated with a gong and drumbeat, and at the end of a paragraph is especially emphasised by much drumming and gong beating.’¹⁵⁷ The relation of chanting to other components of a ritual is only uncovered later:

¹⁵⁴ Rock 1937b, 6, almost identical Rock 1937c, 2.

¹⁵⁵ In 1937, Rock was in Hanoi with He Zhihui 和志輝 (Ho Chi-hui), ‘my Na-khi writer and interpreter’, see Rock 1937c, 41 and Sutton 1974, 255. Once he had even taken two of his Naxi ‘boys’ to the United States, see Sutton 1974, 252 and Walravens 2007, 34.

¹⁵⁶ Rock 1937b, 6–7 = Rock 1937c, 2.

¹⁵⁷ Letter of 29 January 1936, see Taube 2009, 40; the translation is an attempt at rendering

It is the custom of the Na-khi dto-mbas before invoking the deity, spirit, or demon with which the particular manuscript deals, to first relate their origin. The version is not always the same, although in some it is more fully given than in others.¹⁵⁸

The books are clearly part of the rituals in which they are used, and deal with those agents the rituals are devoted to. The ‘genesis’ Rock had earlier ‘translated’ was thus not an independent literary text but necessary for the efficacy of the performance of which it is part. He now disclosed that there are different versions of those narrative parts, without however clarifying the reasons for this variation or describing its extent, except length. Having thus explained the existence of other versions of the story, he ‘translated’ an ‘abbreviated’ one from another ritual and proudly noted:

The copy in question is a particularly beautiful one. It is part of a set which like the book ³Shi-lo ³t'u ³bbue belonged to a dto-mba of the village of ³Ghügh-k'o, Ch'ang-shui 長水 in Chinese, a few li west of the city of Li-chiang in the county of La-sha or La-sha li 刺沙里. The dto-mba's name is Yang Fu-kuang [Yang Fuguang] 楊福光 and I was able to buy his whole library. His father inherited the manuscripts from his ancestors, they were painstakingly written, and many of them handsomely illuminated. The son who inherited the office as well as the books, neither intelligent nor interested in the dto-mba business, cared little for the books. Just before I had purchased his books, over one hundred had been burned by accident, and the rats were beginning to eat the rest in the attic where they were being kept. No doubt all this made him desirous of disposing of the books, which in such more or less complete sets are most difficult to come by. As his manuscripts were well written and the texts most complete, they served in the major part as the basis for our translations.¹⁵⁹

Contrary to what Rock may have believed at the time when buying the library of Yang Fuguang, it was not complete anymore. The manuscripts purchased by Wyatt-Smith in 1931, including the set written by Ä-dzhi, had belonged to the same collection, and Rock obtained only a few manuscripts belonging to that ritual.¹⁶⁰

A footnote in this article relates to the ‘llü-bbu’ or ‘sang-nyi’:

Rock's awkward German.

158 Rock 1937b, 47 = Rock 1937c, 36.

159 Rock 1937b, 47 = Rock 1937c, 36.

160 See Jackson 1979, 297. For some of them, sold by Rock to the Harvard-Yenching Institute, see Rock 1952, vol. 2, 497–498 (three volumes: nos. 1904, 999, 1903) and, somewhat contradicting the statement before, 502 (same name of Dongba but with different place), 511 (no. 1020, date of colophon 1866) and 763 (no. 1011); Rock 1955, 161 (no. 1881). For a comprehensive approach to this corpus of manuscripts see Deng 2013, 14–157.

The ³Llū-¹bbu (²San-¹nyi is a derogatory term never used in their presence), are the genuine sorcerers in contradistinction to the ²dto-¹mba who are the priests. They are employed to enter into communication with souls of departed beings.

They are always depicted in the Mo-so manuscripts as females with flowing hair. The ³Llū-¹bbu are said to be followers of the sister of Chiang-tzu-ya 姜子牙 or Lü-shang 呂尚, the former was a Tuan-kung 端公 or Shaman or Shih-niang 師娘 or sorceress with flowing hair. The Na-khi protecting spirit of the ³Llū-¹bbu is the great Sa-don or ²Sa-²dto (he is none other than the great warrior Sa-tham of the Mo-so, but called Sa-tham by the Tibetans, with whom the famous Ge-sar fought many battles; Li-chiang is named after him thus by the Tibetans). He is the mountain god of the Li-chiang snow range called Yü-lung shan 玉龍山 or the Jade Dragon mountain. His brother ²A-¹wu-²wua who dwells in a cave on the western slopes of the snow range at T'ai-tzu tung [Taizi dong] 太子洞 is also a patron of the ³Llū-¹bbu and is invoked by them in their shamanistic rites. The ³Llū-¹bbu wear perforated paper flags stuck in their girdles on their back, and a blood red turban wound around their head. In ancient days they were all women, but now only male ³Llū-¹bbu practice their black art.¹⁶¹

This observation, accompanied by an image of such a 'genuine sorcerer', would be repeated by Rock himself and others, and give rise to many educated speculations about the relations of the two types of ritualists. The search for Dongba 'literature' has probably kept scholars from studying this tradition while it was still practised.¹⁶²

Two more articles by him came out in 1938 and 1939, before the war caused a gap of almost one decade. The first one appeared in the third issue of the journal *Monumenta Serica. Journal of Oriental Studies of the Catholic University of Peking* edited by missionaries and scholars from China and Europe in Peiping. The article was devoted to 'The Zher-khin tribe and their religious literature'. Rock had found some Rek'ua villages in the valley of the Wuliang river (無量河) before it joins the Golden Sand River and observed that the

'Zhër-khin, Hli-khin (Nda-pa) [= Mosuo] and Na-khi all believe in *dto-mba* Shi-lo as the founder of their religion; the Zhër-khin call him To-mba Shera, also To-mba Zhër-la, the Na-khi *dto-mba* Shi-lo and the Hli-khin Ti-mba Shera.'¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ Rock 1937b, 16 = Rock 1937c, 10. Jiang Ziya or Lü Shang was a general helping the Zhou to overthrow the Shang in the eleventh century BCE and later entered the pantheon of what is usually termed Daoist religion. 'Tuan-kung' (*duangong*) is one of the appellations of the lower-ranking ritual specialists in Chinese and other traditions.

¹⁶² In a late article on 'shamanism', Rock provided some additional information, see Rock 1959, 796–801.

¹⁶³ Rock 1938, 174.

Furthermore, he claimed that their language was closer to Naxi than to Na (Hli-khin = Mosuo) and reported that they had ceremonies and books very similar to but fewer than those of the Naxi with ‘a modified written Na-khi language’,

yet they write their texts more fully, in fact every syllable is written, unlike the Li-chiang *dto-mbas* who use only few characters to express a whole paragraph, the symbols employed being mere milestones in a sentence to refresh the memory, much being therefore read into a sentence or paragraph which is not written.¹⁶⁴

The surprising fact that Dongba characters may be used just like any other writing system is dealt with in passing by Rock who was apparently more interested in the reduced portfolio of the ‘Zhěr-khin’ ritualists. He had noted that their books have four lines instead of three (as those of the Dongbas usually have) and provided a list with their ‘ceremonies’ as well as a catalogue of the books chanted at one of them, first giving the characters, then transliterations, and finally comments in his own style.

Rock’s last article, published before the end of the Second World War, contained the ‘Romance’ announced in the Laufer critique of 1937, ‘a tribal love story translated from Na-khi pictographic manuscripts, transcribed and annotated by J. F. Rock’. In 1939, it appeared in the *Bulletin de l’École française d’Extrême-Orient* with the author not only adding ‘F. R. G. S.’ to his name as he had done in his first publication in this journal but also ‘Research Professor in Oriental Studies, University of Hawaii’ and ‘Membre Correspondant de l’Ecole Française d’Extrême-Orient’. After explaining the high number of suicides among young Naxi as being caused by the Chinese marriage system and a digression into ‘free love’ as still practised by the Mosuo (here ‘²Lü-²khi’, in earlier publications ‘Hli-khin’), Rock sketches the ‘ceremony’ for the propitiation of the souls of those having died unattended or by their own hand. A digression on the Jew’s harp as used by the Naxi for communication between boys and girls follows, after which Rock announces:

While this is not the place to describe the entire ²Här-²la-¹llü ceremony, which is reserved for a separate volume in which translations of all the books used will appear, it seems appropriate, before proceeding with [sic!] the actual romance of ²K’a-²mä-¹gyu-³mi-²gkyi, to give a description of the various wind spirits. These wind spirits were originally females who, in the dim past, had committed suicide and are now believed to entice girls to follow their example.¹⁶⁵

164 Rock 1938, 173–174.

165 Rock 1939, 13.

On page 19 of this article, its author approaches its topic and then, concerning the two manuscripts, notes:

The first twenty pages of the first volume are devoted to the ²lv [souls of suicides] in general who cannot be reborn, having committed ¹Yu-²vu [suicide together] in their last existence. The remainder deals with ²K'a-²mä-¹gyu-³mi-²gkyi who, we are told, was a bride and was given in marriage; rather than become the wife of a man for whom she does not care, she intends to commit suicide with her lover, a shepherd boy called ²Ndzi-²bö-¹yü-¹lä-¹p'er. He, however, is not so easily induced to join his sweetheart in death, and invents all kinds of excuses. [...]

She begs [the boyfriend of her lover] for forgiveness. A similar message she sends to her prospective parents-in-law. They, however, scorn her and send her offensive messages which finally drive her to suicide by hanging. Her lover, a shepherd, has lost a black cow and he searches the mountain side for it. In so doing, he reaches the highest alpine slopes at the foot of the limestone crags and there, hanging from a tree [...], he finds the body of his sweetheart. The dialogue which ensues is indeed beautiful. Her body is dead, but her soul speaks to him and tells him of the messages she had sent to him and finally gives him directions as to the disposal of her remains. It is a sad yet beautiful story.¹⁶⁶

On page 22 of the article, the title page of the first manuscript is explained, followed by a treatment of its pages 25 to 31; beginning on page 43 of the article the second book, with thirteen pages is presented, and on page 114 the reader is seen off with the final note: 'this finishes the romance'. Many pictures of landscapes, Dongba priests and ritual implements follow. The article concludes with one appendix dealing with a deity that Rock identifies with a Bon deity, and a second one presenting a cycle of love songs to be performed on the Jew's harp. Disregarding the pictures and the captions, Rock managed to fill 152 pages of a prestigious academic journal with a 'romance' completely detached from its ritual context. Because most of the space is given to excessive explanations of Dongba characters, an ordinary reader will never realise how 'beautiful' this story is. Rock used a tripartite schema for presenting the 'text': following a hand-copy of the original, first a 'transcription of text' in Rock's romanisation is given, then a 'translation', finally an 'explanation of text' meandering from character to character and whatever may have come into the minds of his Dongba or of Rock himself. Probably trying to arouse readers' interest by announcing a romance, his presentation in no respect lives up to this expectation; instead, it requires a very special devotion to peruse it from beginning to end. Even if Rock had added a complete translation instead of splitting the 'text' into the units he called rubrics, its repetitiveness and formulaic nature would have made it sufficiently clear that this was not a

¹⁶⁶ Rock 1939, 20.

literary romance, but part of a ritual. Rock's obsession with divining the 'pictographic' quality of the characters would persist, and most of what he published later would be just as difficult to digest.

While Rock was travelling and producing articles for learned journals, Chinese scholars, Naxi assistants and Dongba priests intensified their cooperation. In 1935, after assisting Fang Guoyu, Zhou Rucheng helped Tao Yunkui 陶雲達 (1904–1944), who had just returned from studying ethnology in Germany the previous year, to collect materials among local ethnic groups, among them Dongba manuscripts. As one result of his studies, Tao published a lengthy study on bone divination in 1938. It contained copiously annotated translations of the content of three manuscripts on this topic, probably the first published ones of Dongba 'texts' in Chinese, and included hand-copies of the manuscripts. Tao did not fail to acknowledge his partners: first He Shigui, the old Dongba who had already assisted Fang Guoyu, then the Dongba Asi 阿四 from Beidi (today's Baidi) who claimed to be a ninety-fifth generation disciple of Dongba Sale 東巴薩勒 (= Dongba Shiluo?) and Zhou Rucheng, at that time teaching at a primary school in Lijiang. Zhou acted as translator between the two Dongbas on the one hand, whom Tao also called 'sorcerers' (*wushi* 巫師) and Tao on the other, who sent the draft to Fang Guoyu for several rounds of checking before it was finally published. Tao used IPA notation for transliteration, but only for the titles and important terms, because it would have taken too much time to transcribe the whole 'texts', and these were not relevant to the topic.¹⁶⁷ This article was probably the first full treatment of Dongba 'scriptures' including 'translations' into Chinese.¹⁶⁸ It was also one of the first outputs of the ethnology division at the Institute of Social Sciences of the Academia Sinica which had been founded in 1928 in Nanking, the new capital of the Republic of China.

These were fateful years. In 1935 Rock had fled Yunnan-fu, fearing the Communist troops that were reported to be approaching the city on their Long March. In 1937, the Japanese had finally started their invasion of China proper and, by the end of the year, had taken Nanking, the capital of Republican China. Its government escaped to Chongqing in Sichuan, and three of the most prestigious universities of northern China merged into the National Southwest Associated University and relocated to Changsha. When the capital of Hunan had been captured by the

¹⁶⁷ Tao 1938, 92–93; Tao uses the term *jingdian* 經典 ('classics') for the Dongba 'texts', which evokes textual traditions.

¹⁶⁸ See Wang 2017, 107 on Tao's place in the history of Chinese anthropology and Yang Qingmei 2013 on the legacy of Eugen Fischer (1874–1967), race biologist and supervisor of his 1933 Berlin doctoral dissertation.

Japanese in 1938, the Southwest Associated University again relocated together with some of the most renowned Chinese scholars, this time to Yunnan-fu, just as businesses, industries and the military had done, thus changing the formerly parochial city into one of the major centres of the time. After Yunnan-fu had been hit by Japanese bombs in 1938, Rock moved his books and himself to Hanoi. Having obtained the title of Research Professor of the History, Geography, and Botany of China of the University of Hawaii at a stipend of US\$3,000 per year in exchange for his library, he spent the next one-and-a-half years at Dalat in Vietnam together with some of his Nazi assistants, until the Japanese appeared there too in mid-1940.¹⁶⁹ In Vietnam he first met Rolf Alfred Stein (1911–1999), the Sinologist and Tibetologist, who because of his Jewish background had fled Germany and for the same reason was not allowed to become a full member of the *École française d'Extrême-Orient* (EFEO) in Hanoi under the Vichy regime. Stein made a living as translator for the EFEO in Hanoi and others, among them Rock, helping him also with ‘arranging my Mo-so dictionary’.¹⁷⁰ In 1940, when the latter returned to Lijiang, the Japanese installed a puppet regime under Wang Jingwei 汪精衛 (1883–1944) at the former capital Nanking, in consequence indirectly controlling important parts of East China in addition to the North-east under their direct rule. In that same year, two of Rock’s book manuscripts were ready for printing but were later destroyed when the Japanese bombed Shanghai.¹⁷¹

Yunnan-fu thus became an important hub for supplies and one of the major stations on the ‘Burma Road’ which was built by the Chinese in 1937 and 1938 under extremely difficult conditions and with heavy loss of human life. It ran from the railhead Lashio in Eastern Burma to Kunming, connecting the wartime capital Chongqing with the British harbour of Rangoon. In 1942, it was cut off by the Japanese, and U.S. Army engineers constructed a Northern route known as ‘Ledo/Stilwell Road’. At the same time, the U.S. Air Force took up flying supplies to China via the so-called Hump, an extremely dangerous air route crossing the Himalayas without any reliable navigation aids and called ‘Skyway to Hell’

169 See Sutton 1974, 266–268.

170 For Rock’s letters to Serge Elisséeff, director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute, dated 11 May 1940 (from Dalat) and 7 July 1940 (from Manila), see Walravens 2002, 192 and 193. It is not known how he ‘helped’ Rock and what Stein translated, presumably Tibetan texts, but perhaps also Chinese ones such as the ten-volume work mentioned by Rock in a letter of 8 May 1939 from Dalat, see Taube 2009, 75. According to Rock’s later accounts, they must have been lost together with other materials in 1944 (see below).

171 See Sutton 1974, 267–268. According to a letter from 23 November 1947, Rock learned enough Tibetan in the war years to translate texts in that language himself, sometimes with the help of a lama, see Taube 2009, 91.

by some.¹⁷² At Lijiang an airfield was opened for the Hump in late 1943 (see Fig. 13).¹⁷³ The local population had already seen airplanes before the war, with Rock causing quite an uproar when he landed there on a meadow with a chartered flight in 1936.¹⁷⁴ Handel-Mazzetti's 1919 map (see Fig. 7) had provided the most reliable topography of the region, but was not sufficient for pilots to safely fly over the mountains of the borderlands. In 1944, therefore, when Rock had escaped to Calcutta, he was asked to collate all available geographical information and to produce a more precise map.¹⁷⁵

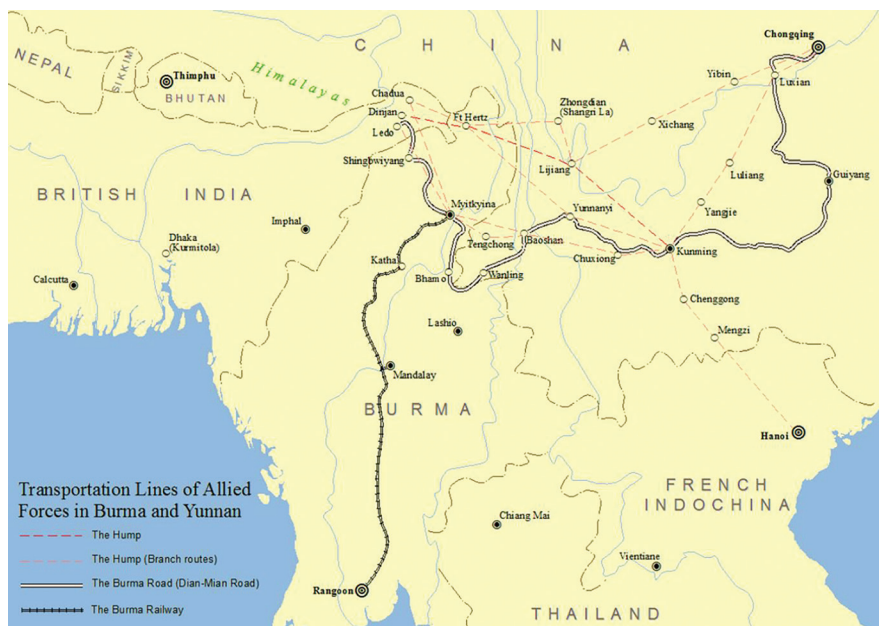


Fig. 13: Transportation Lines of Allied Forces in Burma and Yunnan Province of China During World War II (SY), Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License (CC BY-SA 4.0).

¹⁷² See Sutton 1974, 280.

¹⁷³ See 'India-China Division, Air Transport Command', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/India-China_Division,_Air_Transport_Command, accessed on 18 September 2021, and Andrews 1999, 155–158.

¹⁷⁴ See Rock 1947, vol. 1, 272–274 and Sutton 1974, 281–282.

¹⁷⁵ See Wilson 2015.

In 1939, Quentin Roosevelt (1919–1948), grandson of the former president, visited the Naxi areas. After travelling to Gansu, he set out from Chongqing on the Burma Road in a Buick supplied by T. L. Soong, brother of Mme Chiang Kai-shek and financier of her husband. The Dongba funeral scroll his father had given to him as Christmas gift after his visit to South-west China had aroused his interest in the imagery of the Naxi, and the Harvard undergraduate had successfully collected funds for an expedition to obtain more artefacts, especially the funeral scrolls described by Rock in his 1937 article. ‘No Nashi manuscripts could be bought in the city of Li-kiang itself’,¹⁷⁶ but with the help of Andrews, the missionary who had become a friend of Quentin’s father during his visit to Lijiang in 1929 and some Naxi assistants he managed to buy more than 1,000 Dongba manuscripts in just ten days. In an article published in 1940, he not only recalled the V.I.P. reception he had received everywhere due to his elevated status, but also reported on the manuscript trade in his time, once the news of the arrival of a potential buyer had spread and after having already acquired about 200 books:

Four different *dtombas* visited us the next morning. The one we had commissioned to go out and buy for us returned with several books and a few Nashi paintings, but no scroll. We put him to work immediately sorting out 1000 or so books I had acquired by this time. Another priest arrived, with one of the long scrolls, a very good one, and we closed the deal quickly. [...] The third *dtomba* appeared with about 300 books, and we bought them after a short altercation about the price. This one also had a cymbal and four or five painted crowns he wanted to sell. Luck was certainly with me that day. The fourth priest [...] had brought his long scroll, but it was a very dilapidated and incomplete one, so we let it go.

That same afternoon the mission worker appeared with over 700 more books. [...] ¹⁷⁷

The scene appears very similar to the one Handel-Mazzetti had witnessed twenty-five years earlier when the Naxi came to sell their plants, the only difference being the goods traded. After Roosevelt had left China, he continued to correspond with Andrews who helped him to acquire more ‘Nashi books’. In a letter of 14 August 1940, however, Andrews drew attention to the expected arrival of Rock:

If you need a thousand more, just wire OK, and I will know and go ahead and get them, and anything else on the market. The reason for this rush is, I have heard that ROCK is on his way to Likiang from Honolulu. [...] Now, if he comes here, he will buy up all the books he

¹⁷⁶ Roosevelt 1940, 204.

¹⁷⁷ Roosevelt 1940, 208.

can put his men to buy, and the value of them will go up in price 200%. In fact, it will be hopeless to try and buy against him, and his men will see that no books are brought here.¹⁷⁸

With the help of Andrews, Roosevelt could acquire many more Dongba manuscripts and sold more than 2,000 of them to the Library of Congress in 1940 and 1945 for US\$3,000.¹⁷⁹ His 1941 undergraduate thesis 'A Preliminary Study of the Nashi People: Their History, Religion, and Art' was the first contribution in art history to the field of Dongba studies and heavily relied on the publications of Rock, comparing the iconography of Dongba artefacts to those of other Central Asian and South Asian cultures.¹⁸⁰ Rock would later, as always in case of potential competitors, belittle his contribution.¹⁸¹

In the late 1930s, He Siquan 和泗泉 (1885-?) and He Xuedao 和學道 (1890–1942) created an orthography for the writing of the Dongba characters, because 'they lacked a rigorous graphic standard which is the reason for their backwardness when compared to the characters of other nationalities'. He Siquan hailed from a famous Dongba family in Lijiang prefecture and sold all sorts of paper goods from new year pictures to funeral money, using wood blocks carved by himself in his shop; he was one of the Dongba assisting Rock, Zhou Rucheng and others. In the preface to their inventory of Dongba and Geba characters He Siquan and his assistant emphasized the role of Chinese and foreign visitors who asked Dongbas to teach them their characters. While some cheated for money's sake, others explained their characters, but their students were still asking for phonetic and orthographic standards. He Fengshu 和風書 (1877–1952), head of the Dongba assembly of Lijiang, had called the Dongbas for a general meeting and discussed this matter for more than two years. Finally, it was decided to collect characters, have a good hand copy made of all of them and finally print them as lithographs. The manuscripts written by the legendary Dongba Jiuzhila 玖知臘 were to serve as the orthographic standard. Jiuzhila was said to have lived under the Ming (1368–1644) in Baisha. Due to a lack of funds, in the end the printing was to be done with wood blocks and the whole enterprise entrusted to He Siquan and He Xuedao. A Chinese scholar reported seeing some prints of interlinear versions of pictorial and phonetic characters as early as 1940, but the book was still not finished when he left Lijiang in 1943. Two of the wooden blocks, probably carved by He Siquan in his own writing, have survived in the Museum of the City of Lijiang. Whether

¹⁷⁸ Brauer and O'Connor 2011, 37.

¹⁷⁹ See Brauer and O'Connor 2011, 43, n. 19.

¹⁸⁰ See Brauer and O'Connor 2011, 37–42.

¹⁸¹ For his letters to the director of the Harvard-Yenching Institute of 21 October 1940 and 11 March 1946 see Walravens 2002, 208–209 and 269.

the idea of creating an orthography really goes back to the 1920s as some scholars have proposed, still awaits confirmation.¹⁸²

While young Roosevelt was sailing back to the United States, another man interested in art had come to the Naxi areas. Li Lincan 李霖燦 (Li Lin-ts'an, 1913–1999) 'roamed' there as a landscape painter after his graduation from the National Art College at Hangzhou. In summer 1939, he arrived in Kunming and was immediately enthralled by a Dongba manuscript he was shown. The famous writer Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902–1988) who was teaching at the Southwest Associated University gave Li a translation of Rock's and told him about the beautiful landscape of Lijiang, whereupon Li made up his mind to go there. Zhou Rucheng introduced him to He Shigui, the old Dongba who had already assisted Fang Guoyu and Tao Yunkui and recited a story from one of his manuscripts for him. Zhou translated it, and Li decided to collect these stories and make them available to a larger audience. This episode, reminiscent of Fang Guoyu's 'conversion' to Dongba studies by Liu Bannong, was first published in 1984.¹⁸³

This was his first visit, and five more covering most of the Naxi territory were to follow until 1943, supported by friends and institutions and devoted to collecting artefacts and translating Dongba 'texts'. In 1941 he had found a position at the National Central Museum, that had relocated to Lizhuang 李莊 (Li Chuang) in Sichuan, and during his stays collected more than 1,200 manuscripts, at a time when Wan Sinian 萬斯年 (1908–1987) was doing the same. Wan stayed in Lijiang from July 1941 through to November 1942 and acquired approximately 4,000 Dongba manuscripts for the National Peiping Library which had also relocated to the South.¹⁸⁴

While trying to reconstruct the route the Naxi people had taken when migrating from the North, Li visited Beidi in 1942 where he met 'his' Dongba, He Cai 和才 (Ho Ts'ai, 1917–1956),¹⁸⁵ who was to become his 'reciter' (*fayin ren* 發音人) for the Dongba 'texts'. He Cai was the first Dongba to be given a position by a Chinese government institution at the Central Museum in 1943, thereby recognising the value of his contribution to Dongba studies. On the same trip Li later met Rock

¹⁸² Mu Chen 2012; since Mu consistently uses post-1954 language, his terminology is not followed here. See also Li Lincan 1984b, 46.

¹⁸³ For the episode see Li Lincan 1984d, 285–287; for his claim that the 'stories' on the following one hundred pages were written down in 1939, see his note dated 1952 in Li Lincan 1984d, 388.

¹⁸⁴ For the campaign of the Peiping Library to collect books and rubbings in the Southwest see Meng Hua 2015; Jackson must have mistaken the much more famous Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950) who was also involved in this endeavour for Wan Sinian, see Jackson 1989, 136.

¹⁸⁵ Li Lincan 1984 was dedicated to He Cai, for a personal account of his cooperation with him, written in 1994, see Li Lincan 2015, 514–525; also see Yu Suisheng 2008d, 207–211.

in Yongning. Rock was staying on the island in Lugu Lake and showed him some of his publications, receiving due praise by Li as the one who had studied the Naxi for the longest time. Then he lived more than eight months in a village close to Ludian 魯甸 with the Dongba He Wenzhi 和文質 (1907–1951)¹⁸⁶ who assisted him in translating and summarising Dongba ‘classics’. In 1943 Li studied phonology with Zhang Kun 張琨 (Chang K’un, 1917–2017), a student of Li Fanggui’s, and then finished the draft of his *Mosuo xiangxing wenzi zidian* 麼些象形文字字典 (*A Dictionary of Mo-So Hieroglyphics*). In 1944, it was published as a lithographic print in five hundred copies by the Central Museum, copied on oil paper for the only stone available at Lizhuang by Li himself and accompanied by a foreword by Dong Zuobin, already mentioned above.¹⁸⁷ The list of persons Li Lincan mentions in his preface is long, and includes, among various celebrities and some Dongbas, Fang Guoyu and Zhou Rucheng, showing that out of the local infrastructure established by Forrest for plants *and* manuscripts there had evolved a Dongba studies network sharing advice and expertise.¹⁸⁸ Contrary to the Westerners, Chinese and Naxi scholars always mentioned their partners in scholarship in their publications; Li Lincan even mentioned He Cai and Zhang Kun on the book cover.

The Dongba dictionary lists 2,120 characters, first giving the IPA notation, then a Chinese translation followed by an explanation of the graph, then more or less copious notes on the graph and the word or words represented by it, its relation to other graphs and words and additional information on the region where it was found or on problems posed by the data (see Fig. 14).

As in Yang’s and Fang’s dictionaries, the characters are arranged in categories similar to those of traditional Chinese encyclopaedias, Li Lincan has eighteen such categories. Unlike his predecessors, however, he included two categories not related to content: no 13 for characters only used by the Rek’ua, and no 14 for those he found in two manuscripts used for writing Tibetan texts.¹⁸⁹ In addition to Chinese works, the references include Bacot’s book and five of Rock’s articles.

186 For the dates corrected according to the text of a colophon written by He Wenzhi, see Yu Suisheng 2008e, 350–352.

187 For the details of production see Jayne 1946, 27; for the English title see the English summary by Zeng Zhaoyue 曾昭燭 (Tseng Chao-yueh) in Li Lincan 1944, 201 (= Li Lincan 2001, 415); besides praising Li Lincan’s achievements, Dong used the Dongba evidence for comparison with the oracle bones inscriptions.

188 See the author’s preface in Li Lincan 1944, ‘Zixu’ 自序, 1–2 (= Li Lincan 2001, 23–25).

189 The original work has the old ethnonym Guzong 古宗, the modern edition has ‘Tibetan language’ (*Zangyu* 藏語), see Li Lincan 1944, 128 and Li Lincan 2001, 288.

Two indexes, one Chinese and one Naxi written in IPA, and an English summary complete the work.

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十七. 多巴龍王類.

麼些族之多巴在經典中稱為 [pyɪ mbvɪ] 其地位甚高且在龍王之上, 因而天地神人等皆各有其多巴, 總集於此另作一類, 又以龍王各名附入之.
















1901.  [doɪ mbaɪ] 多巴也麼些人之巫師巫師頭戴五佛冠之形在經典中原寫作  漸簡化作  其冠原有五瓣正面有只見三瓣也. [pyɪ mbvɪ] 多巴之古音也經典中錄多巴如此其地位在人神之間在鬼及龍王之上各神各龍王又各有其 [pyɪ mbvɪ] 也. 多巴自錄有三種: 一曰 [ɪwɪ kvi pyɪ mbvɪ] 聰明能幹之多巴也. 一曰 [laɪ ɪaɪ nɪaɪ boɪ] 自食自足之多巴也. 一曰 [laɪ tɕɕɪ ndaɪ hwaɪ] 龍王喪時用之. 1902.  [pyɪ] 多巴陰經也. 1903.  [pyɪ] 多巴陰經也. 1904.  [tɕɕɪ] 趕鬼也. 1905.  [nɪaɪ] 刮除不潔之物也. 1906.  [tsɕɕɪ] 來也. 1907.  [pɔɪ mɔɪ pɔɪ] 結婚時宴飲之禮也. 1908.  [pɔɪ] 女巫也. 1909.  [pɔɪ] 巫也. 1910.  [ɰɪɪ nɪaɪ suɪ beɪ goɪ] 神巫三弟兄也. 1911.  [ɰɪɪ mbaɪ sɔɪ ɪaɪ] 多巴教主也. 1912.  [kɔɪ bɪɪ tɕɕɪ] 多巴教主之第一大弟子. 1913.  [naɪ bɪɪ tɕɕɪ] 多巴教主之第二大弟子.

Fig. 14: *Mosuo xiangxing wenzi zidian* 麼些象形文字字典 (*A Dictionary of Mo-So Hieroglyphics*) (Li Lincan 1944, 143). Category 17: 'Duoba [Dongba] and Dragon Kings'; no. 1901 has the character for doɪ mbaɪ which in the ancient language is pyɪ mbvɪ.

In his introduction Li Lincan reconstructs the history of the Naxi with the help of the Mu dynasty chronicles and sources from the Dongba manuscripts. According to him, the Naxi came from Sichuan, and after passing Muli and Yongning established themselves in Baidi and Lijiang. This route served as a backdrop for explaining the fact that east of Yongning there was no written tradition but an oral one in many ways resembling the written one of the Dongbas. Dongba writing was later invented in the Rek'ua (Ruoka) region in the lower Wuliang River area and, after crossing the Golden Sand River, fully developed in Baidi from where it further spread to Lijiang and beyond. The Dongba characters which Li usually

called ‘shape characters’ (*xingzi* 形字) were thus older than Geba writing (‘sound characters’, *yinzi* 音字), which was difficult to date and could only be found in the southern part of the Naxi areas from Lijiang to Weixi (see Fig.1). Due to its composite nature, as it integrated elements from different scripts including Chinese, Li tentatively suggested the integration of the Naxi territory into the Qing empire in the eighteenth century as a *terminus post quem*. All of the manuscripts of Dongba ‘classics’ (*jingdian* 經典) exclusively written in Geba of which he had only found a few specimens could be traced back to a Dongba named He Wenyu 和文裕 who lived in the late nineteenth century. According to oral tradition, He had been ridiculed by a local official for reading books with ‘ox heads and horse faces’ (*niutou mamian* 牛頭馬面) and decided to transcribe Dongba books into the syllabic script. This led Li to the conclusion that He Wenyu actually created the Geba script, a position he later corrected.¹⁹⁰ Compared to the space devoted to these historical ruminations, Li is very brief on the characters.

Concerning the ‘hieroglyphics’, he first provides examples of a change in meaning when a character is tilted or turned or manipulated in other ways, including the addition of dots or lines or the blackening of a shape. The second property expounded by him is the phonetic loan (rebus) used to write words usually written differently or words without a Dongba character with the same or a similar sound. He uses the character for ‘fire’ (mi-ɿ) as an example: read as mi-ɿ it can mean ‘ripe’, ‘to forget’ or ‘girl, woman’, read as mi-ɿ it can mean ‘to hear’ (k’wa-ɿ mi-ɿ) or ‘to hope’ (ba-ɿ mi-ɿ), finally it can mean ‘name’ (mi-ɿ). In addition, the character can be used for further words with different pronunciations.¹⁹¹ Finally, he discussed two peculiar features of the ‘classics’ which were ‘just symbols arbitrarily jotted down by the Dongbas in order to help their memory, among them images and characters representing a whole sentence, but these are definitely not complete sentence constructions’. As Li acknowledged, this fact prohibited use of the dictionary for reading texts character by character as in standard works, but there was nothing one could do about it. The second of Li’s features had already been noted by Bacot: the use of ‘ancient’ language. He adduced three examples, adding that they were numerous:

190 See Li Lincan 1944, ‘Yinyan’ 引言, IX–XV (= Li Lincan 2001, 36–47); in the introduction to his Geba dictionary Li proclaimed He Wenyu as creator of the syllabic script, see Li Lincan 2001, ‘Xuyan’ 序言, 428–429. For his reassessment see Li Lincan 1984c, 58–60.

191 See Li Lincan 1944, ‘Yinyan’ 引言, XX (= Li Lincan 2001, 52) and entry #1357 with even more readings.

	Li: ancient	spoken	Bacot: 'transcription'	written/spoken
Sun	biɿ	ŋiɿmɛɿ	hè, lè (93)	gnimé / oua gni; gni; meu (50)
Moon	lɛɿ	hɛɿmɛɿ;	gni (106)	hémétseu / [...] / lé (44) ¹⁹²
Man	ts'oɿ	ɕiɿ	chi (90)	chi; chidieu / chi (42)

Li concluded this part by summarising the status of the Dongba characters: they were right on the border between picture and script.¹⁹³

Regarding the Geba characters, he just mentioned their confusing variety on the one hand and their lack of tonal notation on the other, referring the reader to his forthcoming Geba dictionary. He also considered them, however, to mark an epochal progress. The 1945 Geba dictionary *Mosuo biaoyin wenzi zidian* 麽些標音文字字典 is much shorter and arranged according to the syllables written in IPA and followed by the corresponding characters. Following sometimes more than a dozen variants for writing the same syllable, monosyllabic and polysyllabic words as well as composite ones are listed according to tones and provided with a brief translation or explanation. The data were taken from He Siquan's printed Dongba-Geba inventory, two 'classics' completely written in Geba and another inventory. In the introduction Li referred to his previous Dongba dictionary and repeated his assumption that Geba writing was later than the Dongba characters, thus contradicting Rock who held that the Geba characters were the older ones, and announced an article on this topic. In addition, Li Lincan elaborated some problems in the study of Geba: the high variability of the characters which might appear in thirty or forty different shapes and their polyphony, inasmuch as they were used for writing different sounds; the astonishing fact that some of the words written with Dongba characters contained syllables not to be found among the approximately 2,000 Geba characters collected by him; the problems caused by the absence of tone marks in the Geba characters; and finally the ornamental and meaningless elements which could be added on either side (imitating Chinese) or on top (imitating Tibetan).¹⁹⁴

Although Li considered the Dongba dictionary only as a draft for a future work that would meet the standards expected of a dictionary, it enjoys a huge popularity among Chinese-reading scholars up to the present day. This is easy

¹⁹² Bacot has a third category, 'variants, synonyms or foreign words', here: 'ch'limé; goudzou'.

¹⁹³ See Li Lincan 1994, 'Yinyan' 引言, XX–XXI (= Li Lincan 2001, 52–54). The first edition defines the three major tones of Naxi as ɿ (55), ɿ (33) and ɿ (11), see Li Lincan 1944, XXIV; according to later standard the modern edition replaces ɿ by 31, see Li Lincan 2001, 'Yinyan' 引言, 57. For a contemporary assessment of the ritual language see Michaud 2011, 97–100.

¹⁹⁴ See the preface to the Geba dictionary, Li Lincan 2001, 'Xuyan' 序言, 427–433.

to explain: the indexes allow the user to look up a character via its meaning in Chinese *and* the word or words written with it, that is using it as a true dictionary, which neither of the other two influential ones, namely Rock's (publ. in 1963 and 1972) and Fang's works (publ. in 1981), was equipped for. There have been critical remarks on Li Lincan's work, the most devastating made by the ever-malevolent Rock who, in letter from 1947, called it 'worthless' and suspected that 'they rushed it into print (it is a photographic reproduction of his manuscript) for fear I would get ahead of them'.¹⁹⁵ He must have had problems with reading the hand of Li who had written the model for the lithograph himself. Although there have been discussions on certain features of the dictionary by Chinese and Naxi scholars, it is still hailed as *the* breakthrough in the study of Dongba writing. In 1946, Wen You enthusiastically welcomed its appearance, not without nationalist pride:

The wealth of sources for 'A Dictionary of Mo-So Hieroglyphics' is really without precedent, the phonetic renderings below each character are reliable and by far surpass Rock's romanisations without understanding the principles of phonetics (e.g. the unintelligible gk, de [dt?]). With the publication of this book, the section on the [Dongba] characters in Bacot's book has become waste paper.¹⁹⁶

Wen You 聞宥 (1901–1985) was an archaeologist and linguist with many interests, who had taught in more than one university before joining the West China Union University in 1940, where he published in its *Journal of the West China Border Research Society*. In 1941 his article on the Dongba characters appeared in the new journal of the same Ethnology Section of the Academia Sinica that had supported Li Lincan's research in the same year. Wen set out with a literature review including most of what has been introduced in section 1 of the present article, and some of Rock's articles, including the latter's announcement of a four- or five-volume work on 'The History and Geography of the Ancient Na-Khi Kingdom' and dictionaries of Dongba and Geba characters. While acknowledging Rock's merits, Wen found fault with him in two regards: first, he was a botanist, not a linguist, therefore making mistakes when describing nasalisation phenomena and even inventing phonemes such as gk and dt. The second point was Rock's lack of expertise in Chinese palaeography, especially of the Shang oracle bone inscriptions, which prevented him from undertaking a systematic study of the characters. Instead, he explained each character individually, thus not only missing systematic aspects but in turn also impeding the individual character's analysis. However, Wen ends the introduction with modest remarks – he himself had just

¹⁹⁵ See Walravens 2002, 307, also see Taube 2009, 92.

¹⁹⁶ Quoted from *Yanjing xuebao* 燕京學報, 30, 1946.6 after Yang Zhengwen 2008a, 108.

started to study Dongba writing, and Rock's dictionary had not yet come out.¹⁹⁷ He expressed his gratitude to Fang Guoyu and Dong Zuobin, praising the former as an outstanding expert in this field.¹⁹⁸

The main part of Wen's article is devoted to a systematic analysis of the graphic and phonetic aspects of Dongba writing which he undertook in three sections. He first distinguished six types of characters: a) animal heads, b) what Laufer had called 'head-dress', namely additions to the heads of human figures representing 'all distinctions of sex, age, and class', c) depicting movements by additional lines 'near the performing parts, in great resemblance to the American Indian picture words', d) representing abstract meanings by symbols, e) adding or subtracting elements from a character or combining characters, f) polyphony, 'cognate ones, of course'. Even though Wen did not mention them, he clearly had in mind the 'Six Ways of Writing' (*liu shu* 六書), a traditional method of analysing Chinese characters, although the categories are not the same.¹⁹⁹

Building on the works of Bacot, Laufer and William Albert Mason (1855–1923),²⁰⁰ as well as ethnographic and linguistic data from various ethnic groups in Asia and America, Wen proceeded to discuss 'ideographic' Dongba characters of which he distinguished two basic types: *xiangyi* 象意 ('suggestive ideographs') and *huiyi* 會意 ('interpretative ideographs'). Using examples from the ancient Egyptian, Cuneiform and Chinese scripts, the 'suggestive ideographs' are classified into earlier ones (extension, = d) above) and later ones (combination of two or more shapes = e) above). The term *huiyi* refers to one of the Six Ways of Writing and also implies the combination of two or more characters. Here, Wen again distinguishes an earlier stage, when the meaning is created by 'connotation' and a later one when the combinations 'are made in an abstract way from the very start'. Contrary to the Chinese writing system, the 'interpretative ideographs' are rare in Dongba manuscripts, and the 'suggestive' ones are in fact still pictographs. Wen therefore predicts that the Dongba characters will not develop further, and that even if they are not abandoned, they will not reach the purely ideographic state, thus revealing that, compared to the Chinese writing system, the Dongba characters are inferior.

Besides being 'hieroglyphs', Dongba characters are employed as phonetics. Wen again describes their functioning with categories taken from the Six Ways of

¹⁹⁷ Wen 1941, 97–100.

¹⁹⁸ Wen 1941, 119.

¹⁹⁹ Wen 1941, 100–105; the quotes here and in what follows are taken from the English summary Wen 1941, 120–124. For the *liu shu* see Boltz 2017.

²⁰⁰ *A History of the Art of Writing*, New York: Macmillan appeared in 1920.

Writing: *jiajie* 假借 ('borrowing') and *xingsheng* 形聲 ('phonetic compounding'). While the former refers to the rebus principle, i.e. 'borrowing' a pictograph to refer to a homophonous word (in English 'eye' for 'I'), the latter is more complex. 'Phonetic compounding' dissects a character in two parts, one representing the sound ('phonetic'), the other the meaning ('signific'). Wen distinguishes five types of phonetics: 1) to the main character another one is added as phonetic, signifying the pronunciation of the word to be written with the 'compounded character'; 2) the same, but with the pronunciation of the phonetic only being close to the word to be written; 3) in bisyllabic words, the phonetic only represents one of the syllables; 4) two phonetics are added, each representing one of the syllables of a bisyllabic word; 5) the phonetic has different values in different words. Quoting the Swedish sinologist Bernhard Karlgren (1899–1978), Wen points out that types 3) to 5) are not found in the Chinese writing system. In addition, there are two types of significs: 1) the signific is a pictograph and the phonetic is only added 'as a safeguard of pronunciation'; 2) 'the signific has two or more meanings which are distinguished by the phonetics', such as the character for 'woman' to which phonetics are added to represent the words for 'mother' and 'daughter'. Wen noted that here the significs come first and phonetics are added later, while the Chinese writing system 'employ[s] pure phonograms first and the significs which denote a generic meaning are beyond doubt added later on'. In this way, they represent two classes, with the 'Mo-so' and the Egyptian cases belonging to the first and the Chinese and Vietnamese *Chú Nôm* to the second. The first is similar to the early 'interpretative ideographs' that differentiate meanings, while the second specifies the sounds.²⁰¹

The final section is devoted to the Geba characters. Mainly using evidence from Bacot's work, Wen argued against the theory that they were derived from the Dongba characters, which was laid out in an unpublished paper by Fang Guoyu, but also against Rock who had proposed that the Naxi had brought the Geba characters from their former home land in the North and the Dongba characters were invented in 'Naxi land', because they depicted many animals and plants found only there. His main arguments against the latter were: 1) clear evidence that the Geba inventory includes characters of the Yi (Lolo), Chinese and Tibetan scripts; 2) if some of the Dongba characters were invented in the Naxi areas, this did not mean that all of them were late, and Fang Guoyu had even reported himself having seen a Dongba inventing new ones; 3) if the Dongba characters were younger, their tendency toward phonetisation would not make sense. Besides the

201 Wen 1941, 106–112.

‘phonetic compounds’ Geba characters could be used to note the pronunciation, similar to the glossing of *kanji* with *kana* in Japan. In the end, Wen suggests:

The two scripts are of different origin and were in earlier times in use among different branches of the Mo-so people. When the latter came to their present country and the two scripts met, the hieroglyphic writing ceased to develop along the phonetizing line on which it had made a start. But owing to influences other than the linguistic ones, the hieroglyphic writing has come to be dominant, and the syllabic *kyra* [Geba] script almost obsolescent.²⁰²

Eighty years after the publication of Wen’s article, scholarship has advanced in many respects and some of his terms and assumptions may not have stood the test of time,²⁰³ but the analysis of the type of characters called ‘phonetic compound’ by him was unsurpassed at his time and may still benefit contemporary debates on the nature of writing. His synthesis of Western linguistics and traditional Chinese palaeography allowed him to approach the Dongba characters in a systematic manner instead of the crude descriptions and single-character divinations in previous publications, including Rock’s.

Summarizing the results of the second phase in the study of Dongba manuscripts, some general observations may be in order.

Sinicization and modernisation had eroded the fundamentals of Dongba practices, and sons often did not continue their fathers’ profession. With Forrest probably having led the way even before the First World War, the commercial value of Dongba manuscripts along with further artefacts was discovered and more and more of them were offered for sale, presumably those originally used for ‘obsolete ceremonies’.²⁰⁴ When Rock with his well-filled purse appeared on the scene, prices soared, certainly further prompting Dongba families like Yang Fuguang’s to sell their books. Before the First World War, just a handful of Dongba manuscripts had reached Europe and the United States; by 1930 Rock had sold approximately 1,400 manuscripts to the Library of Congress, and after Nazi teachers and Chinese scholars had joined the collecting, more than 20,000 manuscripts had been acquired and distributed to institutions and private persons in China and the West at the end of the Second World War.

Unlike the missionaries, nobles and military officers from France, who dominated the first phase of Dongba studies, the botanists Forrest and Rock were self-made men with British and American passports, albeit with rather different backgrounds. While Forrest had to collect funds for his expeditions on a small

²⁰² Wen 1941, 124.

²⁰³ In addition, it is not always clear whether Wen refers to a spoken word or a written character.

²⁰⁴ See Jackson 1979, 171.

scale, Rock was an entrepreneur going for big money – and he needed a lot for his life-style.²⁰⁵ Competing for claims and reputation, Rock ousted Ward as early as 1924 by paying his Naxi assistants more. Besides collecting plants, Forrest had started buying and selling exotic artefacts including manuscripts, and Rock took over this business idea which eventually laid the foundation for his becoming the ‘father of Western Naxiology’. Both of them, however, would never have been able to acquire larger amounts of Dongba manuscripts without assistance by various groups of people.

In addition to the French missionaries of the M.E.P., the P.M.U station at Lijiang provided services to all foreigners passing through, and became more and more important for Westerners interested in Dongba manuscripts too. When absent, both Forrest and Rock left money at the station or sent it for paying their Naxi.²⁰⁶ The ‘botanists’ village’ Ngulukö was home to the network Forrest had established and whom he trusted so much that he let them go plant-hunting by themselves. Lao Chao served him during most of his seven expeditions and had become an experienced botanist himself. The manuscripts Forrest sold to the Rylands Library must have been acquired with the help of his Naxi assistants as well. After Rock had arrived in Ngulukö, he first relied on Forrest’s guides, but soon chose his own from the younger generation. Almost from the start, Rock had them not only collect plants but also manuscripts, keeping many for himself, but also selling growing numbers of them. Because of their linguistic competence and their intimate knowledge of the region, these assistants were the only ones who could provide access to plants, artefacts and people. This was even more important since the Dongbas were only found in villages outside Lijiang and usually did not speak Yunnan Mandarin which served as the *lingua franca* in most of the Naxi areas. Rock’s biographer notes that, contrary to Forrest, ‘he spoke both Chinese and the Nakhi dialect’,²⁰⁷ but this assessment, that was probably based on his diaries, does not specify the degree of his acquaintance with these languages. The account of how he arrived at his translations quoted above clearly shows that he still needed translation from colloquial Naxi into colloquial Chinese in the early 1930s.

After his ‘conversion’ to Naxi studies, Rock invited various Dongbas to recite their texts from the manuscripts and explain the texts’ meaning, including those of the individual characters. Although he later claimed to have relied almost

205 For his sixth expedition, Forrest collected fifty Pounds as salary and two-hundred Pounds for expenses, see Mueggler 2011a, 144; for Rock see above.

206 For Forrest see Mueggler 2011a, 143; for Rock Sutton 1974, 238.

207 Sutton 1974, 23.

exclusively on ‘his’ Dongba until the latter’s death, there is enough evidence showing that he employed different ones, sometimes even two at the same time, who were found for him by his assistants. Naxi and Dongbas were only hired for a certain time, so they would be available at others. Forrest’s Lao Chao first accompanied the Roosevelts, but left that expedition to meet Forrest when he returned to the Naxi areas. The same obviously held true for He Huating.

When in 1933 Yang Zhonghong started working on his dictionary in Yunnan-fu, He Huating apparently informed him in detail how Rock organised his study of Dongba manuscripts. Yang was connected to Xuan, the ‘Evangelist’ in Lijiang who in turn was close to the P.M.U. station and seems to have served as translator from time to time. It is not to be excluded that the Naxi catering to the foreigners knew much more about their respective employers’ activities than shows up in the published record. Forrest and Rock mention some Chinese names of Naxi assistants and Dongbas in their diaries, but it is difficult to identify them. In at least one case, namely Yang Fugang’s library, we know that family collections were sold in more than one batch.

While Yang worked in Yunnan-fu, Fang Guoyu had returned to his native Lijiang and established his own network, which would provide services to many of the Chinese scholars later active in the region, such as Tao Yunkui and Li Lincan. Thanks to his academic connections as an alumnus of Peking University and the early praise of luminaries like Dong Zuobin, Fang became *the* authority on Dongba manuscripts even before publishing his dictionary.

Growing awareness of the Southwest’s cultural diversity and its rich heritage led to the involvement of state institutions in the efforts of documenting it and preserving its rich heritage. Tao Yunkui was part of a project of the Ethnology Section of the Institute of History and Philology of the National Academy of Sciences. This Institute was founded in 1928 by the famous scholar Fu Sinian 傅斯年 (1896–1950), who had studied in Berlin and tried to establish modern ‘historical science’ as he had experienced it in Germany. In order to study the national history of China, he initiated many projects for collecting primary sources, including all types of written artefacts and linguistic data, not only from Chinese ‘dialects’, but also from non-Chinese languages. In 1929 Fu moved the Institute from Nanking to Peiping. In 1934 he integrated the Ethnology Section there, and after the Japanese invasion relocated to the south, following the three northern universities. Naturally, then, its ethnology section concentrated on the region that was accessible, leading to Wan Sinian’s expedition to Lijiang.²⁰⁸ While these activities were undertaken by the Academia Sinica, Li Lincan worked first for the

208 See Wang 2000, 90–91.

College of Fine Arts in Hangzhou, then for the Central Museum. Although some of the manuscripts were re-distributed,²⁰⁹ many of them ended up in museums or in exotic departments of libraries, thus institutionally divorcing them by and large from research until recently.

Nationalist sentiment played an important role in the political struggles of the day. As early as 1929 the translator of the Roosevelt expedition had suspected Rock of illegal activities. In a report on this expedition in the Shanghai-based *The China Weekly Review*, Jack Theodore Young (1910–2000), son of a wealthy Hankow merchant, mentions their brief encounter with Rock in Yongning and then continues:

Dr. Rock, as the natives there call him, has been ‘exploring’ in Western China for quite a number of years and I believe he knows more about Yunnan than any other foreigner living. Thru the medium of rifles, shotguns, automatic pistols and ammunition, he became the best friend of the ‘King’ of Muli. Hence he has the special privilege of ‘exploring’ in the ‘King’s’ territory at will, and the natives look upon him as the ‘Prince’ from America. I may be mistaken, but I heard rumors that his work in Yunnan at present is far more than mere exploring. A careful investigation by the National Government should be made to establish the authenticity of his explorations. We don’t want to see any more Sir Charles Bells in Western China.²¹⁰

Even though the editor added a footnote saying that ‘Prof. Rock is a member of the faculty of Harvard University [...]’, and that it ‘is unlikely that Prof. Rock is engaged in any subversive activities’, Rock was hurt by this ‘piece of impudence by a Bolshevik youth’. The article led to a strong reprimand of Young by the editor of the *China Journal*, another English periodical published in Shanghai.²¹¹ Working for the Commercial Press in Shanghai at that time, Yang Zhonghong may thus have become aware of Rock’s activities, arousing his nationalist feelings. This was strong meat indeed: Charles Bell (1870–1945) had been British India’s Political Officer for Bhutan, Sikkim and Tibet since 1908 and had become familiar with the thirteenth Dalai Lama. During negotiations for the Simla Convention in 1913 and 1914, he assisted the Tibetans in their claims to land occupied by China. The convention that resulted in the McMahon line was never signed by China and remained a constant obstacle in Sino-British relations. It probably was one of the

209 Numbers of Dongba manuscripts in the West vary; see for example Jackson 1963, Jackson 1979 and Jackson 1989; for the present distribution of Dongba manuscripts in Chinese collections see Guo Dalie 2003.

210 Young 1929, 198.

211 See Sutton 1974, 194–195 and 324, n. 14 and 17; the note appeared in the journal’s August issue, vol. XI.2, 94.

reasons why the British Consul in Tengyue had collected Dongba manuscripts, and it must have been known to the scholars studying the region. National pride apparently played a role too, when Li Lincan first presented his observations to a larger audience in 1940. After mentioning the Dongba manuscripts' precious content and his attempts to translate two of the 'classics', he stated that there were so many of them that it 'makes me believe that this is a promising task', and: 'although the foreigners have been allowed to take the lead, it is very problematic to do the work of China from a foreigner's perspective'.²¹² In consequence then, Wen You could declare Bacot's work to have become waste paper.

There were scholarly motives, of course. The discovery of another 'ancient' writing system after the excavation of late second millennium BCE oracle bone inscriptions triggered renewed consideration of the early history of writing. Different from the Europeans one generation earlier, Chinese scholars were naturally not trying to incorporate each type of script into the prevailing mono-linear genesis from pictures to alphabet. Instead, they wanted to understand the Dongba writing against the backdrop of what they knew about the evolution of the Chinese script. Yang, Fang and Li all arranged their character dictionaries according to categories modelled after the traditional Chinese encyclopaedias. There was no system available yet which would allow for arranging them according to purely graphical criteria like the ones developed for the Chinese writing system. Wen You proposed the first systematic way of analysing characters, based on both Western scholarship and Chinese philological tradition, adapting the traditional 'Six Ways of Writing' to the newly discovered script. In addition to the linguistic study of Naxi, thus, for scholars East and West the most fascinating topics were the Dongba characters and the manuscripts' content.

Almost at the same time as when Li Lincan's first dictionary was published, a Japanese torpedo hit the ship carrying most of Rock's belongings, among them 'translations' and a 'rough manuscript for his dictionary of the Nakhi language'.²¹³ Rock was on his way back to the United States and would resume work later, but did not live to see the appearance of his dictionary. Even if only one out of four attempts to publish a dictionary succeeded before the end of the Second World War, Dongba studies had greatly advanced during the generation following Bacot. Triggered by his and Rock's works, Chinese and Naxi scholars discovered a tradition they had either not known before or regarded as 'barbarian'. In spite of considerable progress in understanding Dongba writings and rituals, however, inherited preconceptions continued to shape their study.

²¹² Li Zaizhong 2021, 180.

²¹³ See Sutton 1974, 282 and *passim* in Rock's works and correspondence.

Terms like ‘scriptures’, ‘classics’, ‘religious literature’, ‘written language’ imply a textual tradition similar to the ones modern readers would associate with them, whether Buddhist, Confucian or Marxist. With the exception of the trained ethnologist Tao Yunkui, who ‘translated’ three complete divination books, scholars and amateurs selected content they deemed interesting. To this end they had to neglect the ritual setting of the chanting and cut out parts attractive as narratives in their own right, such as ‘The Origin of Mankind’. Although the manuscripts are always related to ‘ceremonies’, their concrete place and function in a ritual remain shadowy. Rock had already observed that the origin myths were recited in order to invite the deities involved in a ritual and that they could vary in length, but he still treated these stories as independent literary texts. Even if there may have been similar myths orally transmitted outside of the Dongba performative context, they would have to be regarded as different in nature. Typical for this stance is the following statement of Li Lincan, again from the text already quoted above:

The classics as such have the rhythm of a poem, because they are sung, and at the time when they are sung, although it is during a very solemn ceremony, but because it is very moving to listen to the story, there is always a very large audience. Among their classics there is one telling an extremely sad story, whenever it is sung during the night, all youth, especially the girls will come and quietly listen, this sad story ends with the suicide of the female protagonist, there is no one in the audience who will not silently shed tears for her.²¹⁴

Since this occasion apparently was the performance of the ritual to propitiate the souls of young people who had committed suicide, there is reason to believe that the girls wept not only because of the poetic quality of the story, but also because of the dead girl they might have known.

The effort to conjure away the ‘dark’ side of the Naxi spirit world is also seen in the fact that the ‘sorcerers’ are hardly ever mentioned. Their existence is stated, but apparently no one had much interest in their activities. This may be related to the intellectual background of the pioneers in Dongba studies, who followed the botanists – again, with the exception of the ethnologist Tao Yunkui, they were linguists or art historians, but neither anthropologists nor trained philologists used to working with primary sources, although Li Lincan’s Dongba dictionary already provided a starting point for palaeographical and regional aspects by noting ‘ancient pronunciations’ (*guyin* 古音) and regional use of certain characters.

All reports agree on one point: the Dongba traditions were dying out, and there were fewer and fewer Dongbas who could understand what they recited. The

²¹⁴ Li Zaizhong 2021, 178–279.

changing times had led to assemblies in Lijiang during which the Dongbas fixed prices for rituals and discussed standardisation of writing. The Dongba-Geba glossary printing project of the late 1930s has to be considered as an attempt to unify and modernise the Dongba traditions that were still active. At the same time, it was apparently conceived as a reaction to the outside world's interest in the manuscripts. From its very beginning, the study of Dongba manuscripts was driven by both commercial interests and intellectual curiosity. Western explorers, Naxi and Chinese scholars and their overlapping networks of local assistants tried to acquire as many manuscripts as possible, without always disclosing how much they knew about the others' activities.

3 Concluding Remarks

At the end of the war, a solid foundation for the scholarly study of Dongba manuscripts had been laid in China. Reconstruction and civil war, however, prevented academia from returning to normal life. Although banned from the Naxi region after 1949, Rock and Li Lincan continued their work, the former ascending to the throne of Western Naxi studies, the latter being isolated on Taiwan and his scholarly work rarely noticed by either Western scholars for linguistic reasons or Chinese scholars for political ones. Shortly after the Communists' victory on the Chinese mainland, Naxi ritual practices were forbidden. Although research on Dongba manuscripts continued in the People's Republic, few results were published. The only title giving a positive ring to what was otherwise considered as feudalistic superstition was 'literature', and thus a few collections of stories kept appearing. Only in the 1980s were works that had been completed in the 1960s published, many of them, such as Fang Guoyu's dictionary, probably undergoing further revisions. In 1981, the Academy of Social Sciences of Yunnan Province established the Dongba Culture Research Institute (*Dongba wenhua yanjiusuo* 東巴文化研究所) which is the major institution for research on the Naxi and on their scriptures, catering also to interested foreigners. It became one of the proponents of a 'Dongba culture' and was actively involved in having Lijiang added to UNESCO's World Heritage List in 1997. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, Lijiang was a thriving tourist town where Dongba characters were used as a sort of local cultural brand ('magical hieroglyphs') and 'Dongba paper' was sold to visitors. In 2000, the luxury hundred-volume edition of 897 'ancient Dongba literary manuscripts' was completed. The 'Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature Manuscripts' were inscribed in the register of UNESCO Memory of the World in 2003, marking the

final transition from a heterogenous ritual culture using manuscripts to a homogenous literary corpus, accessible in Chinese translation.

The years following these achievements have witnessed an amazing upsurge of Dongba studies in China as well as an enormous increase of scholarly quality, resulting in the fact that the *lingua franca* of this field has become Chinese. In spite of these advances, however, a simple question has still not yet been answered convincingly: When the Dongbas had memorised their ritual texts and these mental texts were more important than what was written, why did they produce this astonishing number of manuscripts?

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