“DEALING AND DWELLING WITH DEMONS, SPIRITS AND OTHER BEINGS ON THE MARKETPLACE”: PURITY, RITUAL AND AUTHORSHIP AMONG NUOSU-YI SCRIPTURAL RITUALISTS IN CONTEMPORARY LIANGSHAN

JAN KARLACH

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The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
Department of Applied Social Sciences

"Dealing and Dwelling with Demons, Spirits and Other Beings on the Marketplace": Purity, Ritual and Authorship Among Nuosu-Yi Scriptural Ritualists in Contemporary Liangshan

Jan Karlach

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it reproduces no material previously published or written, nor material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma, except where due acknowledgement has been made in the text.

Jan Karlach

To all my ancestors

along with 昕怡 and [illegible]

Abstract

This dissertation presents an ethnographic account of Nuosu-Yi *bimox* ritualists practice on the Shimazi Marketplace in Xichang (Latbbu Oprro), a prefecture-level city in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (Nipmu), Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China. Almost exclusively concentrating on the text of the *bimox* scriptures, with the help of various interpretations of Marxist-Leninist theories, the overwhelming majority of previous studies fed into narratives used for top-down state-building purposes related to the solidification of the Yi nationality identity and locating it in the large multi-ethnic body of the PRC. Focusing on speech instead of text, my thesis brings a bottom-up, polyphonic account of how the *bimox* negotiate their identity in front of various audiences – foreign anthropologists, among themselves, face-to-face with their clients, Chinese (predominantly Nuosu-Yi) academics, and their ancestors and successors – and how they open possibilities for sets of fresh perspectives on their prestigious vocation. By intertwining theories of Butler's performativity, Aristotle's rhetorics understood as persuasion, Bakhtin's dialogism, Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatics, and Hobart's conceptualization of ethnography and practice, the goal of this text is to explore the ritualists' speech tactics of fitting their personalized lineages of thought into a complex environment of increasingly globalized, contemporary Liangshan. The findings show that most of these tactics revolve around Nuosu-Yi conceptualizations of purity, ritual and authorship deployed through persuasion. Furthermore, instead of a unified system, the *cytvi* clan-oriented *bimox* inhabit a polyvalent canon consisting of permutations of their positioned and situated systems of knowledge.

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Every person is different
the internodes of bamboo differ as well
the patterns of tiger skin are diverse
and an ant lays a different amount of eggs every year

Nuosu proverb

"Having to exist with the help of the guidance of pure thinking
is like having to travel in Denmark with a small map of Europe
on which Denmark is no larger than a steel pen-point
—indeed, even more impossible."

Søren Kierkegaard, *Concluding Unscientific Postscript To Philosophical Fragments*, 1846

Do I contradict myself?
Very well, then, I contradict myself,
I am large – I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, 1855

1. Prologue

"Wake up, quickly! You must not sleep now!" I felt a firm grasp of a hand on my shoulder. It was half-past six in the morning when I got out of my sleeping bag. The person waking me up also prompted others, who were wrapped in the *jietshyr vapla* cloaks, half-asleep while lying on the ground sogged by the early-morning dew, under a big tree – all on the slope of a bowl-like valley located not far from Above the Sun Township, in Jjixke H.'s native village. On the opposite slope, a narrow crack in the structure of the mountain created a small passage with many cavities – a little valley, an eternal resting place for one of the souls of every Jjixke clan member of this village. This was the third day of *nipmu coxbi* – a large-scale set of rituals. Its purpose was to send one of the souls to the legendary imagined ancestral land of the Nuosu-Yi, to appease them, and not let them become one of the countless demons daily haunting individuals and places of Nipmu. In early April 2015, this once-in-a-lifetime duty came to my Nuosu-Yi friend. It was after his oldest brother succumbed to the kidney failure in one of the Chengdu's hospital.

A group of Nuosu-Yi *bimox* ritualists, headed by Pugu as *nipmu bimox* – the principal ritualist of this large ceremony for the dead –, was invited to take care of the rituals. The individual *bimox* were paid a couple of thousand yuan each, with Pugu taking the biggest share. Because of an unfavourable traffic situation in Nipmu – the main roads were all under construction, and the trip from the prefectural capital Latbbu Oprro to Lipmu Moggux took close to sixteen hours –, I arrived at the scene late at night. The *maddu* – a temporary, bamboo house where the soul dwells during the journey to the ancestral land – was already created from a bamboo stalk, and ready to go through numerous hardships, over places where the path frequently forks and where it possibly had never walked as a part of the flesh-and-blood body before. For this, it needed guidance. The *bimox* saw the approaching soul in a dream. He was actively attracting it by tasty meat from a freshly killed sacrificial animal. At the same time, he battled malicious demons who wanted their share of the feast. After waking up from a dream, Pugu and others erected a *qoyuo* stand, where he and other ritualist spent the whole night declamating lines of their scriptures.

Jjixke H. purchased three cows, thirteen light-skinned sheep (the female element) and over thirty dark-skinned suckling pigs (the male element) serving as the sacrificial animals (*zipmo*). He spent over one hundred and twenty thousand *yuan* on them. During the ritual, the suckling pigs were killed by suffocating, and the sheep by smashing their head towards the ground

while holding them by their back feet. The row of animals, covered by a corn and buckwheat flour and banknotes of various denominations, led from the *qoyuo* to the nearby hillside. The chicken – a usual sacrifice during other rituals – were all spared this time. The flour which Pugu kept throwing over his head filled the air and landed in faces of everyone standing around. The shouts of *hxiehxilio* – literally meaning "a phallus is coming" – resonated between all these practices, while a group of people were led by a person holding a trident in both of his hands. He wore the old, battle-proven Nuosu-Yi armour and kept encircling the *qoyuo* and the row of sacrifices. As a person guiding the way (*mohmat* in Nuosu-Yi, or *kailu* in Chinese), he was always first to announce the emergence of the phallus. His shouts were then imitated by a crowd.

Vaqip sha – a diagnostic method consisting of consulting egg yolk to verify that everything went according to a plan so far – ended a short break filled with a lively discussion and cigarette smoke. The young *bisse* apprentice named Latbbu – a disciple who, along with a *ndepggup* mediator present to the whole ritual, acted as an assistant in the whole process – started to jab one bamboo *mguva co* stick after another into the pliant soil to build a system of paths (*mguva*) for the soul. With the help of the *bi* – the Nuosu-Yi-specific ritual practice connected to the declamation of the *bimox* scriptures' content at moments when the ritualists were not able to recite it by heart – and the sacrifice, it took the *maddu* about one hour to travel through this segment *mguva*. This part of its journey ended by the construction of a house model (*quyix*) where *maddu* found its temporary shelter, getting thoroughly permeated by winding lines of smoke emanating from a mixture of the wet moss and chilli powder. We were not only a passive audience. We were also active assistants (*xymu lotmu*) during the whole process. The person holding the trident subsequently led us under the house of Jjixke H. His mother stayed inside all the time. Dressed in the Lipmu Moggux traditional female garments, she kept chain-smoking her favourite cigarettes: tobacco rolled in a scrap of daily print – some of it decades old – covering the walls serving as insulation.

During the umbrella-like *nipmu coxbi* ritual, every segment that was about to follow was intensively discussed among the ritualists. At many occasions, the parts were happening in parallel on different stretches of the soul path. Under the house, one of the *bimox* made a small hole into the ground around which he placed a small wreath made of grass. Into the hole, the ritualists temporarily "planted" a freshly cut young *zhypzot* – the "heir-praying pine." Another dose of parallelly flowing *bi* followed. The name of Apsy Latzzi – a legendary *bimox* ancestor – appeared more frequently among the mutually entangled lines and words. The tree

was adorned by pieces of pork meat and intestines originating from the mutilated body one of the sacrifices. The most precious part – a tail of one of the suckling pigs – hung just above the head of one of the ritualists. At one moment, Jjixke H. had to take a white rooster on his shoulder and repetitively walk a designated track between the tree and the declamating ritualist. During every circle he made around the pine, an assistant threw a handful of flour into his mouth. Another break followed, where everyone had thrown different amounts of flour into each other's faces. All seriousness of the moment was gone, and everyone joyfully tried to whiten as many faces as possible.

The ritualists sat around the pine and declamated decades-old texts written by a brush made of pig bristles on a yellowish paper scroll. The ink was presumably produced from ash collected around a hearth. Some of the scriptures, however, were scribbled by a ballpen into a notebook with plastic, red boards. Three *bimox* (including Pugu) sat next to each other. Latbbu joined them on the right end of this body-chain. A fuzz growing above his upper lip, ruffled hair, a simple silver earring in his left ear, blue sports shoes and an imitation of the U.S. Army jacket which he had clad over his shoulders in the *jietshyr vapla* manner made Latbbu look like any other cool teenage village kid. However, the young *bisse* was different. His relatives chose a different path for him. Latbbu was an inheritor of the venerable Nuosu-Yi *bimox* vocation. With eyes closed and all focused, the apprentice jumped straight in between the lines of the three *bimox* chanting various scriptures in parallel. Fishing out the line of his master, he started to follow his lead. Delayed less than a second, he repeated segments of older ritualist's words. As his master later remarked, he is in the final stages of his curriculum. "Now he is learning through practice," the old *bimox* said, "and soon he will be able to perform his own rituals.

After this passage, we moved forward down the road, towards the valley where souls of the local Jjixke clan rested. The ritualists brought one of the sacrificed sheep and cut its belly open. The soul travelled three times the short distance dotted by the *mguva co* leading out of the village towards the soul-resting valley and back. Again, the house made of bamboo stalks and pine needles rose to contain the soul, followed by yet another *mguva*. The soul was complemented by a chunk of meat. During the previous stage, one of the assisting *bimox* (the most elderly one) made a *wobu* – a wooden "vessel" for the souls, which contained not only a soul of the recently deceased person but also those of deceased family members who were "waiting in line" for Jjixke H. to fulfil his duty by organizing the *nipmu coxbi* – with two narrow grooves where *maddu* found its final destination. In this final stage of the ritual, Pugu

prepared the “last supper” for the soul: buckwheat cakes, potatoes and alcohol. Subsequently, he unwrapped the protective layers of the *maddu* and took out layers of downy stalks and another natural material. It was the naked soul without the protective layers of the “tablet.” Elderly ritualist then placed them into two *wobu*, as one was not enough to contain all of them. Pugu, holding a cigarette in his right hand, subsequently wrapped them into the white cloth. He equipped the whole bundle with a carrying strap to make its transportation comfortable.

Both *wobu* found themselves among the motionless bodies of a suckling pig and a sheep, wedged into “The Spider Web” (2013) sex position. The elderly *bimox* then used a stick to poke one of the bodies, so both started shaking in a simulation of coital movements. “This is the last time for them,” Jjixke H. explained the whole cycle during which the death interlaced with procreation and a strive for continuity. Voices of all declamating ritualists kept intertwining, as each of them followed different lines of separate scriptures, sitting on various segments of the soul corridor. Following one last emotive declamation, the movable, loose eagle on Pugu’s wooden *qike* ritual fan copied a perfect circle for the very last time. A part of us headed by the trident-wielding person set on a short journey to the opposite slope, during which we had to cross a river through a suspension bridge, and walk a small path heading upwards. Pugu was not with us, this was a task for the oldest ritualist and a couple of relatives.

While shouting “phallus is coming,” we ascended to the valley. The smoke from firecrackers permeated our lungs, kept irritating our eyes and its sound almost pierced my eardrums. On the left slope above our heads gaped a visible cavity. The old ritualist skillfully swung up to its proximity. He began unwrapping the white cloth. Followed by the unyielding declamation of lines he knew by heart, *bimox* set alight the pigtail which two hours ago hung on the “heir-praying pine,” and encircled the whole crack and *wobu* with it. He half-opened both *wobu* and placed them inside, adding a couple of hard-boiled, cracked-opened, partially smashed eggs. This crack stood for Ngemu Puxggu, the ancestral land, the Nuosu-Yi “paradise” as Jjixke clansmen explained. With his head and a chest fully in the crack, the rest of us had to pull the old *bimox* out. One of the Jjixke H.’s relatives grabbed also his *nzuptip* – a neatly cut floccule of hair at the top of his head –, a place on the body that should not be touched deliberately. “He was in a different world for a while, we had to pull him back here,” he explained. We had to eat one boiled egg and drink on a gulp of the liquor, so we have enough stamina to make it safely back to the Jjixke H.’s house.

Approximately one month later, Jjixke H. and I started to plan our trip to Shuonuo Apjjubbo – a massive plateau-mountain towering above a steep canyon connecting areas of Lipmu

Juojjop, Gatlyp Mopbbo and Lipmu Moggux. The buckwheat tea session in a teahouse on the top of the Big Through-gate – a pivotal place in the hundreds of years old town wall of the prefectural city – was only a short intermezzo, which interrupted our exploration of Shimazi Marketplace occupying the whole area below us. Back then, it was a bustling focal point of Latbbu Oprro's social life. Walking from one *bimox* ritualist to another, Jjixke H. was engaging in small talks. He asked about what *tepyy* scriptures they possess or use, examined their ritual paraphernalia, and shook their drums to coax different sounds from them. I stood in the background and shoot everything on my camera, as Jjixke H. and I agreed on making a short visual documentary of our upcoming journey, which we scripted to begin here. While the marketplace ritualists were usually dressed in varieties of the area-specific Nuosu-Yi garments – on which later my companion commented that they are not hand-woven, thus not genuine – Jjixke H. dressed in a very "urban" manner: leather boots, black shirt, a casual hat on his head, and a scarf around his neck. He introduced himself to people as a *bimox* from the Lipmu Moggux's Jjixke clan. On Shimazi, he greeted one of the relatives he knew from before and found out about two other clan members who were frequenting the marketplace.

Jjixke H. notably "performed" for my camera, making it evident that he – not practicing in the marketplace and originating from the "Homeland of the Bimo" – enjoyed much more respect, fame and knowledge than those daily dwelling in the bustle of the busy trading streets. Months later, when sitting over a hotpot with our friends, I asked Jjixke H. about who has the decision right over the "representative transmitters" recruitment for China's very own intangible heritage preservation project. "The people from the Bimo Culture Research Centre in Lipmu Moggux," he replied. "They are all *bimox*. They know who are the ancestors of the proposed candidates, and what did they achieve. If they find all this information acceptable, the person can get registered." Jjixke H. himself was in a process of getting re-registered for the transmitter status since his membership was suspended during his prolonged stay in Beijing. The prestigious ritualists' Jjixke clan membership, origin in rural Lipmu Moggux and a loose connection to the research centre through a vast *cytvi* network of relatives preferring those of their kin over anyone else, these all were markers and at the same time outward indicators of the genuineness of Jjixke H.'s "*bimox*-ness" for the mainstream narrative as well as for the young ritualist himself.

The next day, we set off for the journey. Jjixke H. desired to reconnect with his ancestors through the place his clan sees as a sacred ancestral land, and also vital point in the series of its migrations. Allegedly, Apsy Latzzi also resided here at one point. In one of the caves

dotting the mountain slopes, he worked on his scriptures. Apart from this, there was another reason for our endeavour. Jjixke H.'s village in Lipmu Moggux was in recent years periodically struck by series of hailstorms. The young *bimox* was trying to figure out a way how to divert these events he believed were caused by malicious demons away from the trajectory of his settlement. Jjixke H. concluded that the most effective way will be to call his ancestors – through a relatively small-scale ritual invoke their spirits –, and plead for their help in battling these misfortunes. Jjixke H. decided to take me along with him in to teach me about the *bimox*, soothing my burning curiosity concerning everything that related to Nuosu-Yi. Since we had relatively a lot of time in his hands, we decided to hike through the whole Shuonuo plateau.

After equipping ourselves with the necessary rations in the Lipmu Moggux's county capital, we spent a night in the hotel. The next day, early in the morning, we took a bus to the western lower fringe of the plateau. After stepping out from the vehicle, the rattling sound of the departing engine was gradually replaced by the clanging bells hung on the necks of the sheep grazing here, accompanied by two herdsmen. The journey, at the end five days long, began in a thick fog. We made our way through heath, carefully avoiding moorlands. In a tent, which we have set in a small flat spot among the omnipresent rhododendrons, we hid from a windstorm ravaging through the whole night. Moist penetrating through the outer membrane of the celt brought us chills and worries, the night turned out to be almost sleepless. The following morning looked as if nothing of this happened. Under a strong sun and azure sky, we walked through bloom-filled meadows while trying to find a way over an abyss of gurgling streams of crystal-clear, ice-cold water, refreshing at the exact moment when it touched tips of our fingers. Passing through temporary wooden settlements of seasonal herders, where the dog barked at us and kept snapping our direction, we hiked by a kilometres-long agate vein occupied by the illegal miners testing their luck with a vision of a great fortune hidden in the soil covered by a thick green carpet made of variegation of different species of grass and plants, lengths and colours. After three days, we reached one of the Shuonuo Apjjubbo's summits. After a series of chants, movements of *vyxtu* ritual quiver, and moments of silence – all happening within fast-moving clouds, which played with the landscape around us –, Jjixke H.'s objective was completed. Our eventful return through a steep canyon running through the massive mountain wall ended where it began – on the Shimazi Marketplace. "I have shown you the real heritage of the *bimox*," Jjixke H. remarked. "These on the marketplace are not genuine," he kept repeating.

My engagement with Nipmu was connected to the railway running between Chengdu and Kunming. Latbbu Oprro is situated almost in the geographical middle between these two provincial capitals. Shimazi was a location I used to visit most often in the whole Nipmu. It was due to its proximity in the centre of prefectural capital. In the end, it is a place to which I kept returning up until now for over a decade. When in Latbbu Oprro, I have lived in a flat of my friend Duane, an Australian of the Papuan-New Guinean descent, an English teacher, and somewhat a local celebrity. I met him in 2015 by chance in the local newly-opened reggae bar. From the perspective of locals, he was renowned for his exotic looks, drinking skills, the infectious storming laughter that could pierce the eardrums of everybody around and infect them with a good mood, outstanding musical skills, and a great friendly personality. His flat – with a dingy large blue sofa set in the living room, dusty kitschy chandelier with only two working dimly glowing light-bulbs, tile-walled and oil-scented kitchen, a guest room (occupied by me) with a desk covered by a permanent, seemingly unremovable layer of dust and sand from the nearby mountains, and a bedroom featuring an unrepairable, yet still used walk-in closet – was located in the upwards alley connecting to the Horse Water River Road, in the compound of one of the local elementary schools. Every working day, early in the morning, a loud chime calling students to congregate on the playground for the morning exercise, sometimes followed by a national anthem, was loud enough to wake us all up even before our alarm clocks had a chance to ring.

The Latbbu Oprro's Old Town with Shimazi near one of its entrances was not far from Duane's flat. The shortest way lead through two local densely populated streets: Street of the Famous Brands and The Promenade. Right after traversing the latter, the vibe of the surroundings started to change. Along the route, I often stopped by one of the antique shops for a chat, in the pet shop across the street to play with snakes, or I just strolled through the narrow and curvy alleys formed by the Sichuan-style countryside houses. I used to love that place in its old, seemingly timeless form. The unrelenting buzz of the marketplace hung in the air mostly through the day, slowly receding towards the evening when people were getting tired for various reasons, including hard work, long-term exposure to merciless sunrays, endless waiting, or infinite loops of superficial or deeper conversations, in many cases combined with alcohol intake. The analogue "slot machines" – rectangular crates resembling suitcases when opened, with their inside coated in cheap, crimson plush –, where the dices featuring six animals kept endlessly falling with a soft bounce from the upper part to its bottom brought joy or despair to the soft-gamblers, usually betting between one and twenty,

rarely fifty *yuan* bills. The winner took the double of his bet, while the loser would not see his stake unless winning it back in the following round. A record shop situated in one of the wooden houses and selling Nipmu's local pop-/world-music CDs and VCDs blared the mountain rhythms usually underlined by a synthesized faster electronic beat all around the street, where its waves merged with the rest of the random sounds: dog barking from the pet seller, hawking of the cold-noodle vendor carrying his whole business fit into a cabinet on a shoulder pole, or just a quarrel over the price of the Nuosu-style dagger forged by Mr Hxietlie sitting next to the trolley of a key-cutter and a bit further from the vendors offering the "miraculous" aphrodisiacal medicine. The "ordinary" outfits mixed with the mass-produced, affordable ethnic clothing on the bodies of those who participated in this unyielding fair. The Nuosu-Yi tunics, earrings, or wedding dresses were sold in shops around and beyond the Old Town's wall. Frequently, the vehicles of various sizes – but only those which could fit this narrow, often overpopulated street – honked vigorously to make a passage through the crowd. People were sitting by the door of the small, notoriously overloaded clinic. Over their heads hung drip-feeds connected through infusion lines to their veins, leaving the patients with only one option: patiently sitting and observing this bundle of sounds, smells, gestures, and unceasing mobility.

Close to the Big Through-gate, looking south-eastwards beyond the balustrade separating the sidewalk from the embankment, I frequently spotted people huddling around various ritualists performing ceremonies in the mostly dusty riverbed, which turned lush only during the rainy season. The reinforced embankment protected the city from the flash floods. Often accompanied by the fire, the smoke was rising above heads of the knot of people and spread to all directions. If observed at night, the fire flames would dot the darkness, accompanied by the sound of nearby running water. This was close to the segment of Shimazi where the ritualists dwelled. Settled near the clinic, during those years, the density of them around this crossroad peaked. The sounds of their chants, drums, and bells were practically unceasing.

Then, almost suddenly, everything changed. The city management of Latbbu Oprro decided to relocate the marketplace into more hygienic settings – into a three-storey building beyond the Big Through-gate. This caused the fragmentation of practices previously seen in the marketplace. In the indoor settings, only the commodity resellers were allowed, causing ritualists to lose the platform for their vocation. Simultaneously, several academic articles deemed the presence of the *bimox* on the Shimazi harmful not only to urban hygiene but also to the way how the public perceives the ritualists started to emerge. The ritualists frequenting

Shimazi Marketplace were accused of stigmatization of the venerable *bimox* who live in rural areas and whose ways of practicing as well as places where the ceremonies took place were seen as "traditional." Nevertheless, the Shimazi ritualists found themselves a new location even after the rather indirectly enforced abandonment of the original location. However, ever since repeatedly dwelling with my friend Jjixke H. in his home village of Lipmu Moggux, joining the *nipmu coxbi* organized for his deceased brother, hiking with him to the Shuonuo Apjjubbo, and listening to his definitions of what consists of the genuine *bimox* culture, which shifted over time in direct proportions with his gradually deeper involvement in various cultural organizations in Chengdu, Latbbu Oprro, and Lipmu Moggux, I started to feel a tension between his version of the narrative and those I sensed emanating from the Shimazi Marketplace. It was this tension between the various lineages of definitions surrounding the ritualists and their craft, the rigorous didacticity of their explanations, which proved to be a productive force that put me on a very long, winding and exhausting journey of cobbling together the following story.

1.1 Aim, Disciplines, Theoretical and Methodological Orientations

This is a story of a loose group of the *bimox* – the Nuosu-Yi scriptural ritualists, practitioners of a prestigious vocation – from the area they call "Nipmu," who kept encountering and interacting with each other as well as with different people (including me) on the Shimazi Marketplace located in the urban capital of Nipmu's overarching administrative unit (Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in the south-western corner of the Sichuan Province in Southwest China) locally called "Latbbu Oprro" (officially Xichang). The "Nuosu-Yi" label is a composition of an autonym "Nuosu" meaning "Black People," and ethnonym "Yi," under which they are classified as one of fifty-six nationalities (*minzu*) – or, as I call it, ethnic categories – in the People's Republic of China. The Nuosu-Yi – a semi-pastoral people who are now more intensively than ever interacting with the urban centres of the country and beyond – are classified in the Tibeto-Burman language family, and possess their own literary tradition written in the unique script. In the past, this script is thought to be almost exclusively in the hands of the ritualists. However, between the late 1950s and early 1980s it underwent a standardization process which made it – at least theoretically – an official means of written communication for Nuosu-Yi. The Nuosu-Yi live in a society based on complex interrelationships between bigger and smaller clan lineages (*cytvi*), which are further influenced by the endogamy of the aristocracy (*nuohop*), which behaves exogamous towards the commoners (*quhox*) and all other "outsiders." The *bimox* – today still in 99.9% cases male

individuals, and mostly coming from the *quhox* stratum – are important mediators between the worlds of the living Nuosu-Yi, spirits of their respective clans' deceased ancestors, and the malicious demons. The *bimox* craft could be inherited as well as gained through extra-clan apprenticeship – learned from a father, uncle or other close relatives, or from the recognized master willing to accept an individual as his follower – and it brings a particular type of prestige to their carriers. Ideally, being a *bimox* is a life-long endeavour connected to continuous learning.

This dissertation aims to unpack the tension between the extant academic portrayal of the *bimox* vocation and various situated conceptualizations of the *bimox* practices as narrated by individual ritualists coming from different backgrounds, *cytvi* lineages, and areas of Nipmu. The result, I hope, is a polyphonic account emanating from years of dialogues which I lead with the *bimox* as well as those I observed happening among the ritualists themselves, between the *bimox* and their clients, the *bimox* and domestic and foreign anthropologists, between ritualists and their ancestors and descendants, and between the *bimox* and Latbbu Oprro's residents along with, rather indirectly, the city leadership. Through backtracking these narratives, tapping into the motivations driving them, and providing a voice to all research partners – the co-authors of this text – it brings an alternative approach on how to understand not only the *bimox* vocation but possibly similar phenomena in theorization of groups and/or societies in general.

The dissertation benefits from the theoretical framework interconnecting thoughts of Judith Butler's performance-cum-performativity (1993; speech acts), George A. Kennedy's take on and translation of Aristotle's work on rhetorics (2007; persuasion), Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism (2010b; utterance), and Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatics (2005; absence of patterned structure). To these are connected multiple other theoretical concepts – Western as well as those drawing on the works of Nuosu-Yi researchers –, which are used *ad hoc* to explain partial phenomena emerging in the various stages of the narration. Methodologically, the dissertation finds its origin in Michel Foucault's (1991) genealogy of knowledge which gives a way for Mark Hobart's (1996) approach to ethnography as a practice. Driven by the principal research question of how the individual ritualists frequenting the Shimazi Marketplace perform their "being a *bimox*" to various audiences – while these performances and practices take a place *vis-à-vis* multitudes of official and unofficial perspectives, accounts and texts –, it contributes to the extant knowledge by proposing several unconsidered approaches to the bottom-up thinking about the *bimox* vocation through the voice of its

bearers. This was achieved through interrogation of ritualists' presuppositions that motivate their situated thinking, acting and articulation of "being the *bimox*" in contemporary Nipmu. The novelty of this approach dwells in the prioritization of the situated speech as an alternative to the extant approach concentrating almost exclusively on the text of the ritualists' scriptures as a basis and a starting point for the field research. This dissertation then takes the Nuosu-Yi *bimox* vocation out of the folkloristic studies (in the context of Nuosu-Yi called "Yi Studies" or "Yiology" – Yixue) – in the Chinese context heavily influenced by the Marxist-Leninist ethnology – and places it on the intersection of Area Studies, Socio-cultural Anthropology and Communication Studies. My approach is multidisciplinary, as apart from trends prevalent within these disciplines it also incorporates elements of my past training as a historian of ancient as well as modern China. I hope that this piece of writing might serve as a thought-provoking, complementary material to reflect not only on the practices of my research partners but equally also on those of practitioners of all abovementioned disciplines including myself.

1.2 Organization and Outline of Chapters

The text's composition drew its inspiration from Diderot's *Encyclopedia*, where the entries are interconnected and constantly communicate with each other. Every data chapter – including the "outer chapters" of methodology (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5) as well as the core chapters (Chapter 6, 7 and 8) – puts a spotlight on one type of relationship which the ritualists are engaged in. It, however, does not cut off all other relationships. They are still present and running in the background. The organization of the chapters was inspired by Bamo Ayi's (2000) three types of the *bimox* relations: with other *bimox*, with the world of spirits and demons, and with the world outside their craft (p. 6, 8). My text reconfigures and adds to this division, hopefully showing its openendedness in the context of developments in the contemporary Nipmu.

This *Prologue* ethnographically introduces the reader to the particularly layered events which inspired my line of conceptualization and highlights the initial tensions between various understandings of the *bimox* and the situatedness of their practice. It also brings a very brief overview of the contextual elements concerning the world of Nuosu-Yi, which are further contested and elaborated on through the following chapters.

The second chapter, *Lineages of Concepts: Liangshan, Nuosu-Yi and the* Bimox, starts with looking into how the threads of the basic context for my text gradually came to be. It starts

with a discussion of how the Nipmu, the Nuosu-Yi, the *bimox* and the concept of Bimo Culture were created and represented through various narratives. The chapter ends with my theoretical framework which stems from the conceptualization of the extant narratives, to which it provides an unexplored alternative.

The third chapter, *Methodology: Cooperatively Establishing Research Methods,* discusses in detail how and for what purpose I assembled my methodological toolbox, how it is connected to my theoretical orientations and my relations with Nipmu and its inhabitants. It also discusses in detail the inspirations and reasons for the way how was this text cobbled together, the issue of languages, my stance towards saturation, research validity and ends with a short, self-reflexive account.

The fourth chapter, Bimox *and the Exotic Other: Narrations of the Self,* connects to the auto-ethnographic nature of the previous chapter's last section and brings life stories of my research partners how they narrated them to me through the past several years in different places and on different occasions. In these narrations, I position myself as an amalgam of a foreign researcher, a friend, and, most crucially, an exotic other. The chapter shows the individuality of each ritual practitioner through their different life journeys.

The fifth chapter, *Dwelling in Shimazi:* Bimox *Ways of Spacing*, addresses the complex ways of how the central node of my research – the Shimazi Marketplace – took a shape in various narratives. I provide a multi-dimensional view on how the place is conceptualized when viewed through historical records, through my repetitive walks over a period of ten years, through its present, accelerated and fluid existence enhanced by the Latbbu Oprro authorities and the public, and, finally and most crucially, through the understanding of its position within broader, individualized Nuosu-Yi cosmology explained by the ritualists. Together with their sustained presence on the Shimazi Marketplace, this understanding then constitute an "embodied persuasion" of their belonging to the urban surface aimed towards the Latbbu Oprro inhabitants and authorities

The sixth chapter, *Real vs. Fake* Bimox*: Claiming Purity Through Tactically Deployed Dichotomy-based Rhetorics*, draws on the loose relationships between the ritualists suggested towards the end of the previous chapter. It explores how the Nuosu-Yi ritualists encapsulate various narratives circulating the popular as well as academic debates according to their dichotomous understanding of purity stemming from the Nuosu-Yi conceptualization of the blood superiority of the aristocracy versus the commoners. It uncovers how each *bimox*

through speech and persuasion makes space for his individualized orthodoxy and legitimacy as a ritualist in competition with other *bimox*.

The seventh chapter, *Ways of* Bi-*ing as Individualized Persuasion: Gaining Authority and Control Through Ritual Performance,* is linked to the previous chapter and focuses on the Nuosu-Yi-specific ritual performances (referred to as *bi*) – of the *bimox* for their clients. It claims that by the bodily and verbal ritual performance, the *bimox* not only battle the demons but also seek followers who would find their lineage of though stemming from their individual heritage as a "reputable opinion," which then leads to an emergence of the ritualist's authority. This relationship, however, not always succeeds to materialize. In a broader sense, the chapter shows how the ritual performance within the situated ecology serves as persuasion to assimilate the environment lying outside of the particular ritualist's domain into the orbit of his influence. Moreover, the chapter explores the ways through which the ritual serves as an intensification and explicitation of the Nuosu-Yi day-to-day ritualized lives, and how each performance tends to assert the performer's own singularity *vis-à-vis* other performers.

The eighth chapter, *Transmission and Assimilation of* Bimox *Knowledge(s): Emergence of Authorship Among Nuosu-Yi Ritualists*, applies findings articulated in the previous chapters onto the question of the *bimox* knowledge, its transmission, emergence of authorship and creation of the author's content through assimilation of texts of other authors. It shows emerging creative ways of the *bimox* knowledge dissemination, discusses the nature of the *bimox* scriptures when contested with our limited knowledge of how they were created and circulated in the past, and shows how the *bimox* strive to "assimilate" the ways of academic production into their own knowledge-making practices.

The *Epilogue* first brings an open-ended account of the further development of Shimazi Marketplace and some of its frequenters' lives. Furthermore, it draws together threads of my ethnographic practice, provides answers to the research question, discusses implications, and addresses limitations of this dissertation together with sketching possible future research directions directly stemming from some of the unfollowed thought lineages within this text.

1.3 Note on Languages and Romanization

This dissertation deliberately uses place-names in Nuosu-Yi language where possible (and bearable). The reason for this is not only to provide account close to the actual word-use of

my research partners, but it also aims to uncover rich meanings of place-names lying in the Nipmu domain, which are being gradually lost with their rendition into the Chinese language. Through this choice, I strived – per conclusions present in this dissertation – to show the other end of this assimilation process. Nuosu-Yi are active assimilators as well. Most of the place-names are also listed in the Nuosu-Yi and Chinese language glossary (Appendix), along with their original written forms and contextual translations.

There are many Nuosu-Yi and Chinese, and a few Latin terms in the text. All of these are marked italics. For the transcription of Chinese, I am using the Hanyu Pinyin standard, and for Nuosu-Yi the only extant transliteration to the Latin alphabet. The Nuosu-Yi "glyphobet" is composed of 756 basic glyphs of the Nipmu standard Shypnra dialect with added 63 syllables used exclusively in words borrowed from Chinese and one iteration mark – thus totalling 820 glyphs. In comparison with Chinese, the search for each Nuosu-Yi-language equivalents is much more strenuous due to language's limited usage, public exposure and specific dictionaries and learning materials. For this reason, I decided to preserve the tone-marking suffixes in the transcribed Nuosu-Yi terminology. The *-t* suffix marks high tone, *-x* mid-high tone, *-p* a low-falling tone. Absence of any of these suffixes marks mid-level tone, which is for a non-native speaker very hard to distinguish from the mid-high tone. There are dictionaries available but I found only a handful of them truly reliable. During my language learning and the research, I greatly benefited from the Engish – Chinese – Nuosu-Yi glossary edited by Ma Linying, Dennis Walters and Susan G. Walters (2008) – also available online at http://nuosuyi.webonary.org – as well as from the two separate dictionaries: Yi-Han Dictionary (Jjihni, 2008) and Han-Yi Dictionary (HNDBYBS, 1989). On my smartphone, I used "The Translation Bureau Yi Script Input Method" (Fanyi ju Yiwen shurufa) – its glyph-drawing component made the manipulation with the written content significantly easier.

2. Genealogies of Concepts: Liangshan, Nuosu-Yi and the *Bimox*

In 2006, during my first visit to China, I have woken up to the world that in China, there are more nationalities than Han-Chinese and Tibetans – and these immediately caught my attention. One year after enrolling to study Sinology at the Charles University, during one sleepy afternoon in a café Citadela located in the historical centre of Prague I learned from Tibetologist Daniel Berounský about the work of Nina Vozková (now surnamed Kopp), who, as I was told, "studied the people of Southwest China called 'Yi,'" who, allegedly, constituted an imprint of the ancient times, until a few decades ago still owned slaves, and, most importantly, possessed their own script. At that time I have already read *The Naxi and Mosuo Ethnography* (Oppitz & Hsu, 1998) and a few other publications available in various libraries around my hometown, drawing my interest to the Naxi pictographic script. The next day, I managed to get my hands on Vozková's M.A. thesis along with the accompanying CD-ROM. Apart from the electronic version of a relatively freshly defended thesis, it contained various photos and videos from Nipmu. Meanwhile from the general introduction into the Nuosu-Yi culture, the core of the thesis consisted of the first-ever translation of *Hnewo tepyy – The Nuosu Book of Origins* – into a language other than modern Nuosu-Yi or Mandarin Chinese.

This "discovery" immediately made me become even more passionate about the topic of the Chinese ethnic groups, mainly those of Southwest China, where I have spent most of my times during my summer trips. However, I was just in the first year of Sinology and my Chinese could have been considered "very basic" at best. Furthermore, because of the problematic accessibility of the publications in English and French, and non-existence or inability to reach databases containing academic works, I had to buy my own copies on-line. This is how I first read works of Stevan Harrell, Thomas Heberer and others. Through them, I have found more about Prof. Batmop Ayit (Bamo Ayi) and Prof. Batmop Qubbutmop (Bamo Qubumo) and their work. My B.A. thesis was dedicated to the depiction of "other" in the early Chinese sources. After two years, I went on a one-semester study exchange to Sichuan University to work on my language skills, and in August 2009, I visited Latbbu Oprro for the first time. In November of the same year, I went back again, and on Shimazi Marketplace – for the first time of my life – I spoke with a *bimox* ritualist. After half a year, I went back to the Czech Republic, finished my B.A., and was subsequently awarded the Confucius Institute Scholarship to continue the language study in Sichuan (2010-2011). I have made three more trips to Nipmu and other, at least nominally related ethnic communities in Yunnan Province,

during which I was able to accumulate more literature. The open approach in the local study centres – including China's Meigu Yi Bimo Culture Research Centre (Zhongguo Meigu Yizu bimo wenhua yanjiu zhongxin) –, pleasantly surprised me, as its personnel was eager to equip me with their materials, some of which were not publicly available. With my improving Mandarin the range of the works I could read significantly enlarged. Many books were already out of print. However, I was able to purchase some of them via the Confucius' Online Antique Book Store (Kongfuzi jiushu wang). After returning to my home country, I became acquainted with Nina Kopp, who at that time chose not to pursue her academic career further, and donated to me many other books which I was not able to find in China.

To write and finish my M.A. thesis about the Native Chieftain System (*tusi zhidu*) in Liangshan, I luckily obtained an opportunity to spend a semester at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University during autumn 2013. The integrated system of libraries and more or less unlimited access to the article databases provided me with many sources, which seemed unreachable not only from Europe but, curiously, also from Mainland China. It was during this time that one of my friends – Dr Francesca Olivotti – persuaded me to apply for a PhD in Hong Kong. The initial failure proved productive, as it permitted me to spend more or less two years (2014-2016) in Nipmu to study Nuosu ddopma – the Standard Modern Yi – at Xichang College. More importantly, I was able to live a "non-academic" life in the area which contained so many exciting and "exotic" things to study. During these two years, which I filled with extensive travelling around Southwest China and Nipmu in particular, I engaged in the mapping of native headmen's former offices – figuring out their locations, documenting their appearances, and looking for the living descendants of the ruling families and their stories. It was pure joy as I felt so free and unrestricted. At the same time, I was able to self-support through odd jobs of interpreting between Czech, English and Chinese around Southwest China or in the coastal cities. Eventually, with my further, this time successful PhD application, I resettled in Hong Kong where I have spent three years (2016-2019) during which I frequently visited Southwest China.

For what follows, I deem this brief autobiographical note important, as it sheds light on how I got to know the Nuosu-Yi and narratives surrounding them. It offers a glimpse into how, from where and through what kind of practices I accumulated sources of my knowledge and engagement with the Nuosu-Yi and Liangshan. My own positionality will be discussed in Chapter 3. In the following chapter, I critically address the sources relevant to the story of the Shimazi Marketplace *bimox*. My views on Liangshan has a turbulent history of its own – from

somewhat naive and uncritical reception of the texts' content to an urge for a total deconstruction of every narrative after the feeling of "exoticism" gradually faded away and I was able to "read" Nipmu from the perspective of a long-term inhabitant. During my first full year in Nipmu (2014–2015), I have witnessed a start of an accelerated flow of transformations which gradually made some of the claims in academic texts still circulating in various debates hard to connect with the situation on the ground. Inevitably, this experience – a profound discrepancy between what was articulated and what could be observed – had a deep influence on my approach. It fuelled my shift from a structuralist approach towards the post-structuralism and search for new possibilities of how to talk about such a fluid reality. Another inspiration stemmed from the day-to-day joys and anxieties of my friends in Nipmu, which I was lucky to meet along this way. Daily conversations with them kept reminding me that "something is happening," and that the "structure" is more rhizomatic and dynamic rather than rigid and pre-given.

In this chapter, I start with an excursion into the world of Nipmu by introducing the area and its formation based on various discourses, which then translate into a tangible official as well as unofficial spatial divisions. After introducing the Nipmu, I am turning to the examination of various genealogies of its inhabitants. I am doing it in a true sense of the word by discussing the *cytvi* – a patriclan organization of the Nuosu-Yi –, as well as in a figurative manner, pointing to the evolution of the concepts such as nationality (*minzu*) in the broader context of the People's Republic of China (further abbr. as "PRC"). Examining the latter, I focus on the way this concept was grafted on the complex ethnic situation in Southwest China and Nipmu in particular, forming a perception on several aspects of the Nuosu-Yi identity. Towards the end of the chapter, I zoom in to decipher how the Nuosu-Yi scriptural ritualists (*bimox*) happened to be seen as an "epitome of the Nuosu-Yi culture" (Kraef, 2014) and as such a discursive tool to escape some of the state-imposed concepts, designations and their – in many cases negative – implications for the Nuosu-Yi's overall picture. This chapter ends with an assemblage of my theoretical framework which provides a way to see the situation in an original way, yielding fresh possibilities for reconsidering some of the seemingly finite conclusions about the Nuosu-Yi and the *bimox* ritualists.

2.1 Making of Liangshan

2.1.1 Geography and Demography

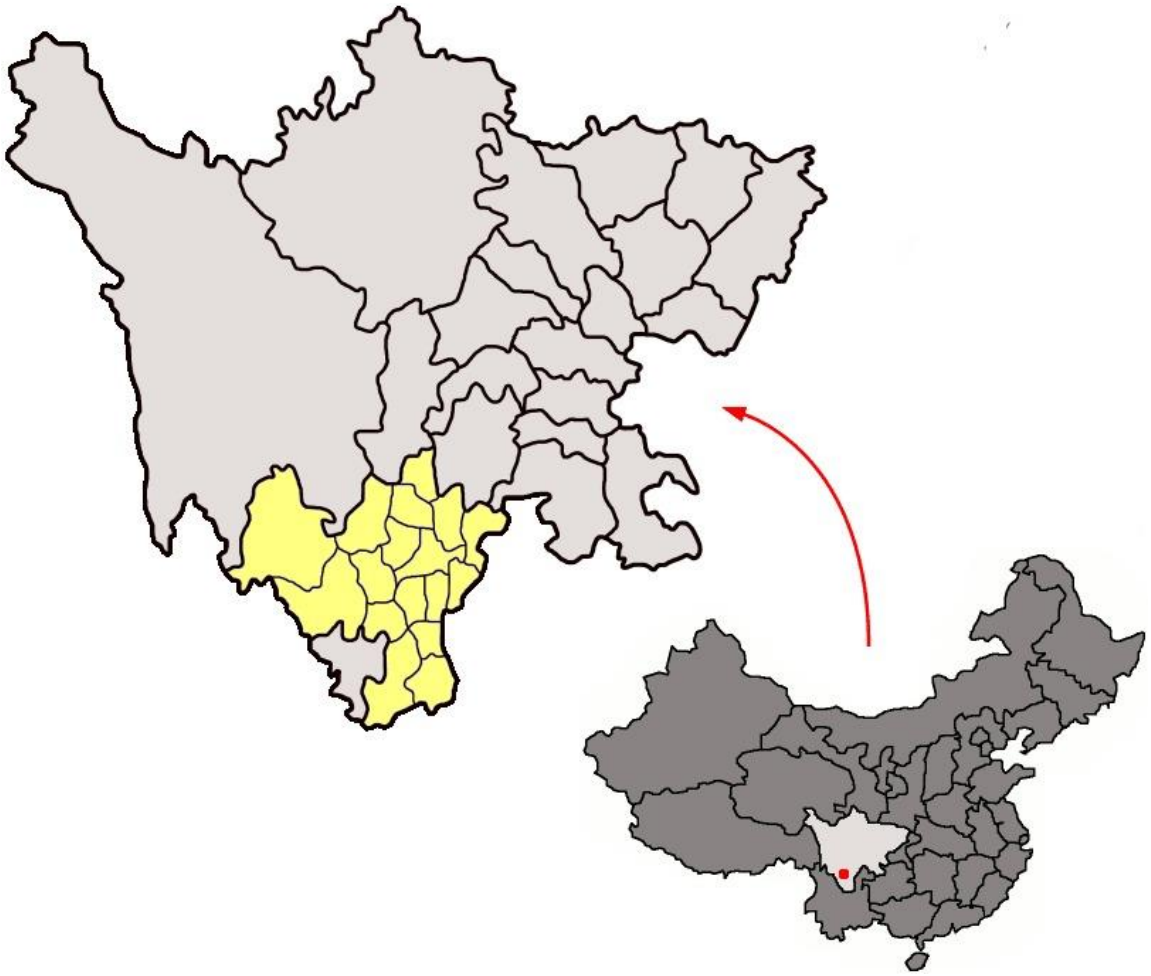

Figure 1: The situation of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China; Source: Wikimedia Commons; Author: Croquant

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture ("Cool Mountains" or "Cold Mountains"), where most of this dissertation takes place, is an administrative unit in the southwestern part of Sichuan Province, People's Republic of China. It changed its designation multiple times throughout history. From the *longue durée* perspective, in relatively recent times – since 1728 – it was called Ningyuan fu ("The Prefecture of Distant Tranquility"), and its centre was established in Xichang ("Western Prosperity"), a walled centre of the local network of the military garrison and caravan outposts which was originally called Jianchang ("Established Prosperity"). It was an important settlement on one of two trade routes connecting the Sichuan and Yunnan Provinces. Jianchang gudao ("Ancient Jianchang Road") was an important part of the trade

route between China and India (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 64). The current name of the administrative unit which it gained in 1952 allegedly points to the "mutually interconnected lofty and rugged mountain peaks and the cool climate dominant across all four seasons" (Pan & Hu, 1992, p. 1). Initially, its centre was established in Zhaojue County. However, in 1979, after the *de facto* bankruptcy of the whole region, it was moved "back" to Xichang, where it stays until now (Harrell, 2007, p. 227). The Chinese-language names of these locations reflect often a pious hope of the imperial centre, which through the history tested numerous strategies how to bring Liangshan under its firm control, eventually succeeding only after the establishment of the PRC.

The administrative unit is partially stretched over the large (but not entire) part of the mountain range at the foot of the Himalayas called Daliangshan (Great Liangshan). The highest peak of this geographical unit is Shamat Mothxobbo (in Nuosu-Yi pointing to the Shamat clan, in Chinese – Shizishan – meaning "Lion Mountain") of Zhaojue County at 4076 meters above the sea level, with an average elevation between 2500 and 3000 meters. However, the administrative unit – divided in half by the Jianchang Valley and its vein, the Anning River (Athxop Nyoyy) – stretches over different geographies. Apart from the Yi-dominated areas to the east, it also includes the western, ethnically diverse regions of Yanyuan County and Muli Tibetan Autonomous County. The latter is often viewed as one of the most ethnically diverse area (after Xishuangbanna and Northeastern China) of the PRC. Gradually Tibetanized from 16th Century onwards, it is also a place where various schools of Tibetan Buddhism competed for influence, and so did different ethnicities (Hu, 2019). The highest mark of the Liangshan Yi autonomous Prefecture is thus the Mount Chanadorj (5958 meters) – one of the three sacred Tibetan mountains of the area – while the lowest point is located in the Jinsha River riverbed at 305 meters in Leibo County (LYZDBW, 2002).

During the last census in 2019, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture had roughly 5299400 inhabitants with 53.62% of them (2841538) were people designated as the Yi (ZLYXW, 2019). To complicate the designation further, the "Daliangshan" (Greater Liangshan) label is used as a marker of demography as well as ethnicity. It points to the "core area of the Yi culture" (*yizu wenhua fuxinqu*) (Kopp, 2011) – the area demarcated, in line with the administrative composition, quite exactly as an amalgam of Meigu, Zhaojue, and Butuo County – while its dichotomous opposite "Xiaoliangshan" (Lesser Liangshan) serves primarily as a vernacular designation for the Ninglang Yi Autonomous County in Lijiang Prefecture of neighbouring Yunnan Province to the south of Liangshan Yi Autonomous

Prefecture, which saw a large Yi migration in the turbulent 19th century (Harrell, 1990, p. 525). Furthermore, the "Xiaoliangshan" serves as a designation of particular areas (mostly counties) without a dominating Yi presence – thus areas with more mixed ethnic population, where Yi and Han still stand out, but their demographic numbers are close to each other. The term "Lesser Liangshan" could then informally designate Leibo County in Liangshan, Yanyuan County (Vermander, 2004), Panzhihua Prefecture (esp. Yanbian County) adjacent to Liangshan's southwestern part, as well as the Yi autonomous counties of Ebian and Mabian, which administratively belong under the Leshan Prefecture adjacent to the Liangshan from the north. In short, the area nowadays understood as "Liangshan" has a complicated history, topography as well as ethnic composition.

2.1.2 Nuosu-Yi Demarcation of Liangshan

Being defined from the outside, many of these aforementioned conceptualizations have often little to do with how the Nuosu-Yi see their surroundings. The standard, state-crafted Yi language's official designation of the area within and partially beyond the aforementioned administrative unit – "Niepsha" – seems to be a loan-word from the name "Liangshan" distilled through the local dialect of Sichuanese Mandarin, which often uses letters "l" and "n" interchangeably. The Niepsha-dominant Yi nationality, however, possesses its own understanding of the whole area as well as its particular segments and locations. To begin with, this name derives the autonym "Nuosu," or its more primordial autonym "Nip," and brings an interesting "chicken or egg" question, namely whether "Liangshan" could have been partially inspired by the Nuosu-Yi designation (and pronunciation of) Nipmu ("Land of the Nip") or Nuosu muddix ("Land of the Nuosu"). In English – apart from the direct translation – Liu (2011) and Hill (2001) prefer the designation "Nuosuland," a translation stemming from some of the earlier namings of the area by the Westerners. From the Nuosu-Yi perspective, the demarcation of approximate borders of this land is rooted in the original meanings behind the Nuosu-Yi expressions for the four cardinal points. In principle similar to Di, Yi, Rong, and Man of Ancient China – exonyms for the hostile inhabitants of the lands surrounding the Chinese proto-state(s) (Yang, 2019, p. 9) –, the Nuosu-Yi language's designation points to the various topographic and ethnic entities: *yyxo* (north) roughly means "source of the water," pointing to Ddipbox Hxoyy (Dadu River); *yyxmy* (south) means "tail of the water," meaning most probably the Axhuo Shyxyy (Jinsha River); *bbuxddur* (east) – "[a place of] coming [from inside to outside]" – seems to be a metaphor for the legendary place of origin of the Nuosu-Yi; *bbujji* (west) literally "the place where enemies are" pointing to the hostile tribes

designated as Xifan in most of the pre-PRC sources (Shih, 2010, p. 43) – Mili's diverse tribes historically called as "Opzzup" in Nuosu-Yi, an exonym which now stands for Tibetans, or precisely, Tibetan nationality. Until today, *bbujji* means "enemy" in contexts detached from discussing the cardinal points.

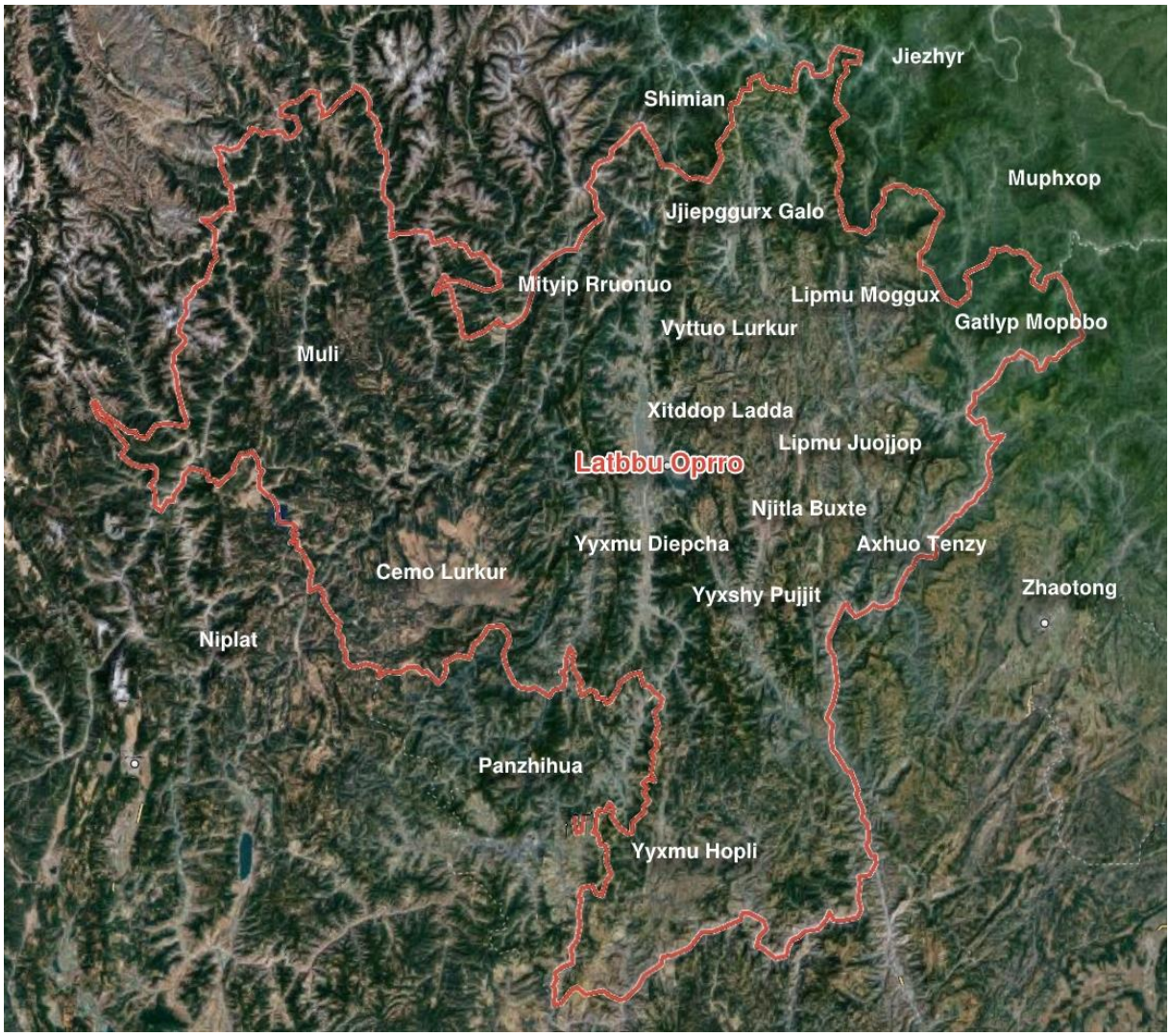

Figure 2: Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture grafted over the topography and Nuosu-Yi areas of Southwest China; Source of the satellite image: Google Maps

Basso (1988) points out that the "situated talk of geographical landscapes is more than a valuable resource for exploring local conceptions of the material universe" (p. 102). The Nuosu-Yi placenames often derive from the Nuosu-Yi clan names in combination with the topographical features: Lipmu Moggux (the name of the local river) and Lipmu Juojjop ("Flat Plain") preceded by the name of the once-powerful local native headman Lili; abstract and poetic notions (Hxobbu liettuo – "Above the Sun"); typical features of the place (Latbbu Oprro – "A place where bulls graze"); translations between the two languages pointing to typical features (Cemo Lurkur means "The City of Salt," while Yanyuan means "A Source of

Salt"); loans entering the Nuosu-Yi language from Chinese for places partially (Yyxmu Hopli – "Hopli by the Water" – the first half being native, second loaned) or entirely (Komip, Chepdu, Chopqip, or Zhuoto) outside of the Nuosu-Yi realm. Until today, it is not a trivial task to search for the original Nuosu-Yi toponyms without directly asking locals – some of which might not even know. The place-names are increasingly known only by the Chinese-language designation. Their original meaning was changed completely, and in many cases shortened, with the clan or geographic affiliations being erased altogether: "Meigu" ("Beautiful Girl" – a phonetic loan from the Nuosu-Yi changing the original meaning, possibly engendering the area – see Schein, 2000); "Zhaojue" (a phonetic loan from Nuosu-Yi, originally transcribed as Zhaojiao according to the Sichuanese Mandarin pronunciation of "*jue*" as "*jiao*," gradually reshifting its phonetics to mirror a Buddhism-related placename in Chengdu, possibly in a similar manner to the lofty historical local names in Chinese mentioned above); "Houbonaituo" (pure phonetic loan without any logical meaning-making); "Xichang" (preference for the Chinese name without any connection to its Nuosu-Yi equivalent); "Yanyuan" (similar meaning in both languages), along with the original Chinese language designations: "Huili," "Kunming," "Chengdu," "Chongqing," and, finally "Zhaotong."

2.1.3 A Brief History of Intertwined Liangshan-Making Practices

With the place-names, understandings of the area and a picture of its inhabitant were – and constantly are – overwritten by the past and present sediments of Chinese state-centric narratives and relevant research connected to them. The Western colonial powers, especially Great Britain and France, also had a great influence on how the place was and still to a certain degree is understood, while some of these understanding spilt over to the state-crafted narratives. Generally speaking, except for the often very brief information related to the state-appointed local native headmen (*nzymop*; ch. *tusi*), the area of Nipmu had a very little coverage in the Chinese-language primary sources until the Qing Dynasty, when various textual and even visual representations (e.g., LS, 1968; HQZGT, 1968) started to be more consistently present. For a long time, they were the only source of information about these lands – frontier regions of the Chinese Empire – and people inhabiting them. The imperial writings perceived such areas as an inner fringe of the state's border. However, Chinese dominance over the borderlands might have been rather imaginary, as its inhabitants were more or less independent from the imperial centre (Karlach, 2014). Roughly following the period stretching out from the Opium Wars, the Western explorers and/or travellers (e.g.,

Baber, 1881; d'Ollone, 1910; Goullart, 1959; Kendall, 1913) along with the Christian missionaries (e.g., Broomhall, 1953; Covell, 1990; Pollard, 1921; Vial, 1898) started to frequent Southwest China more intensively and brought more or less detailed descriptions of Nipmu. In these works, the Nuosu-Yi were not represented as subjects of the Empire, but as more or less romantically free (yet violent) mountain people living in their "Independent Lololand" (Fergusson, Brooke & Meares, 1911), name of which reflects one of the historical, nowadays pejorative exonyms "Lolo."

Most of the authors, such as Baber (1881) and Goullart (1959), wandered through fringes of the contemporary Nipmu, as travelling further into the area was problematic and possible only under the protection of the local chieftains and clan leaders. Some individuals – namely d'Ollone (1910) and Pollard (1921) – ventured deeper into the Nipmu, while long-term Lipmu Juojjop resident, missionary-doctor Broomhall (1953), managed to live among the Nuosu-Yi in the feared "Greater Liangshan" for several years. More explorers, adventurers, or botanists-turned-ethnologists such as Joseph F. Rock (see Mueggler, 2011; Yoshinage, He, Weissich, Harris & Swain, 2011; Wyss, 2011) followed. One of them, John Weston Brooke, did not survive his visit to Lipmu Moggux. His wanderlust and a dose of arrogance caused a momentary slippage in observation of the local manners, which proved to be fatal – ironically in the late afternoon preceding the Silent Night of 1908. The incident caused diplomatic tension between Republican China and the Kingdom of Great Britain (Fergusson, Brooke & Meares, 1911). While continuously escaping from being subjects of the Empire through its only loosely, mostly clan-based clusters, the Nipmu inhabitants were indeed subjected to the gaze of the European and American individuals – in turn equally perceived as exotic "other" by the locals –, whose narratives then set a ground for the further ways of not only how their respective homelands approached Nipmu and its inhabitants but also contributed to the ways of how the Nipmu was treated by the increasingly westernized governance of the Chinese state.

It needs to be stressed that even though the "Independent Lololand" was not under the firm control of the Empire, it should not be essentialized as being cut off from the outer world. As soon as the Song Dynasty, there is evidence of trade between Han-Chinese settlers and the inhabitants of Nipmu (von Glahn, 1987). Furthermore, despite a very unstable climate of accessibility and passableness, a travel route running in the east-west direction (from Zhaotong to Latbbu Oprro) lead through the heart of Nipmu. Even though this travel route was not safe in any time, with the Han-Chinese businessmen (Qumu, 1934, p. 110) often

being kidnapped by the Nuosu-Yi clans (Zeng, 2012, p. 9), many of them made it through under the protection of the local native headmen, and some of them even settled along this route, especially in Lipmu Juojjop (see Hein & Zhao, 2016). Putting Nipmu among "the only portions of the globe which are to-day unexplored" (d'Ollone, 1910, p. 12) indeed was a Western colonial imagination. It might have been also caused by the temporal "cushion" of decades of events containing outright violence among many different fractions (see Lin, 1995, p. 116-117) – a more or less perpetual turmoil during the second half of the Qing Dynasty –, which overspilled to Republican China, when Nipmu was among the last places to grow opium (see Lawson, 2017, p. 102), and where various warlords such as Liu Wenhui, Long Yun (Yunnanese warlord, Nuosu-Yi originating from Axhuo Tenzy), or Deng Xiuting constantly competed for power and resources on the background of the corrupted Nationalist government and Nuosu-Yi interclan warfare (Ling, 1988). Due to the lack of detailed earlier sources, this "cushion" – representing one of the most violent times the area ever experienced (Hill, 2004) – then more or less defined Nipmu and its inhabitants as rugged, rough, stubborn, and not trustworthy. As Lawson (2017) points out, his study of the violence in upland Southwest China with the focus on Nipmu "makes no claim that Liangshan was more violent than any other place in China in this era" (p. 5). In short, many of the reasons why Nipmu is perceived the way it is now have their roots in the narratives originating from the essentialization of Nipmu during the time it started to be increasingly textualized and visualized within the written sources.

With the previously unseen increase of reports about Nipmu written by the interlocutors of the incoming colonial powers into China, and simultaneously with the partial accommodation of the "Western" understanding of science into the Chinese ways of thought, the various local Nuosu-Yi (Qumu, 1934), as well as Han-Chinese "outsiders" (Chang, Shi, & Yu, 1935) working in the service of the Chinese state caught in series of transformations started to survey the area for natural resources. Many of the anthropologists were profoundly influenced by the ideas of the highly influential work of Lewis Henry Morgan (1877) (see Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 289). Ma Changshou's extensive, two-volume report from two fieldwork trips to Nipmu in 1937 and 1939 (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006), a first of its kind, presented a thick amalgam of a description of historiographical-cum-ethnological material on the Nipmu and its inhabitants. In a sense of his approach of "culture as travel" (Pan, 2002b), he included everything that he encountered along the way. His meticulous, detailed work carried out in the often unstable environment is nowadays perceived as a classical endeavour. Through until

that time unprecedented textualization of his subjects' practices, it transformed the ephemeral, fragmented, feared, and to a large extent unknown Nuosu-Yi into a localized, not-so-close but not-too-distant "other." In other words, the Nuosu-Yi started to take a coherent shape by Ma's etic-style description, which aligned them with a more familiar "other" (e.g., Hui, Tibetans, Mongols, etc.), all to be utilized in the nation-building practices by the Chinese governments – first nominally Nationalist and then Communist. However, the "knowledge transfer" in this period should not be viewed as merely unidirectional, thus informing only about the Nuosu-Yi. Features of the Nuosu-Yi social organization also informed the discipline of anthropology. The work of Yenching University (M.A.) and Harvard University (Ph.D.) alumnus Lin Yaohua (1961), who spent three months in Nipmu in the 1940s, allegedly – according to some Nuosu-Yi academics – influenced theoretical thoughts of Claude Lévi-Strauss about kinship and structure (Li Chunxia, 2018, personal communication). Similar to Ma Changshou's ethnographic practice, Lin – wearing the Western-style suit and the "anthropologist hat" (see illustration in the front matter of Lin, 1995) – was moving from one place to another almost every day, researching various aspects of the Nuosu-Yi "society," finally coming with far less detailed, but more structured and theoretical text. Pan (2002b) points out that Lin "wrote against culture," hence engaging in a practice that had "different political implications in different circumstances" (p. 102). Lin did not demonize the "other," as it was typical for earlier Chinese accounts. Instead, writing against the centuries-old constructed image of the Nuosu-Yi, which portrayed them as barbarians, he aimed to "defrost" the Yi (p. 102-103). Travelling from Chengdu to Gatlyp Mopbbo and later to inner Nipmu, Lin showed on the background of his anthropological writing the transition from the Han-dominant land to the buffer zone where the two seemingly antagonistic cultures – Han and Nuosu-Yi – lived side-by-side under the nominal power of the female native headman. It was perhaps this vivid sense of transition – along with his approach calling the Han and the Yi as "one family" (*yi jia ren*) – that helped to partially dissolute the sedimented, deep-rooted differences deemed as insurmountable. In a similar spirit, Jiang Yingliang, who took his master's thesis defence in the air-raid shelter during turbulent times towards the end of 1930s, argued that "the naive and honest southwestern minorities were misunderstood as savages, and their beautiful and fertile homeland was described as dangerous and ghostly" (Yen, 2017, p. 169). Nevertheless, while debunking one image, the anthropologists constructed another one, through which they provided invaluable insight for "the Chinese state's colonialist-cum-nationalist intention to penetrate the Yi area and put it under the Chinese control" (Pan, 2002b, p. 102). In short, Lin, Ma and others transformed one narrative of Nipmu and Nuosu-Yi into another one, which

later became a "database" for the formation of the Yi Studies (Yixue) in the second half of the 20th Century, when the (Nuosu-)Yi officially became an integral part of the Chinese nation (Zhonghua minzu).

During the turbulent 1940s, the violence peaked in the whole of China, and Nipmu was not an exception. The layered conflicts – local among the Nuosu-Yi clans and also with all possible outsiders, the simmering country-level conflict between the Nationalist and Communist Party, and the international due to the ravaging Second World War –, all mirrored in Nipmu. Ralph Covell (1990) described the 1940s Lugu – a township on the route between Latbbu Oprro, Vyttuo Lurkur, and Chengdu, as follows: "During my first few days living in Lugu, I was horrified to see a man casually walking through the streets carrying on his back a basket filled with ten Nosu heads, still dripping blood" (p. 89). With nearing end of the Nationalist rule over China, the contacts of the Nipmu elites with the Nationalist government intensified. Chiang Kai-shek visited Latbbu Oprro multiple times during his tenure as the leader of the country (Zeng, 2012), and in 1939, he designated Latbbu Oprro as one of the backup retreat positions for the Government involved in the war with Japan. Zeng (2012), visiting the city around this time, described it as a place of thriving modernity – with a newly built airport, streets lighted by the gas lamps, hospitals, and even being the second city in China to be fully equipped with the telecommunication technology – all because of its strategical designation. In these depictions, the relative modernity of Latbbu Oprro sharply contrasted with the roughness of the valley-antagonistic mountainous regions of Nipmu. In the end, between 27th December 1949 and 27th March 1950, Latbbu Oprro became an unofficial capital of Republican China (during some time in parallel with Taipei) and happened to be the last place for some of the military personnel loyal to Nationalists who from the local airport escaped to Taiwan (Covell, 1990, p. 179-180). However, all these events and endeavours ran as if in parallel with the somewhat ahistorical narratives concerning the Nuosu-Yi.

Nipmu was promulgated as "liberated" by the new rulers of China in the second half of the 1950s, significantly later than the rest of the country. The violent resistance of some of the local powerholders – mostly the Nuosu-Yi nobility – caused losses to the People's Liberation Army (see SSBXBW, 1993, p. 374-376). Through this act of social engineering, the Nuosu-Yi and their bondservants switched the place in the local hierarchy, which did not eradicate the "class problem," but, quite to the contrary, sew seeds for the potential future conflict (Harrell, 2001a, p. 321). Until this day, many people hold the grudge for past events as they are very clear who belongs to which stratum. Alan Winnington (1962), a pro-Beijing British

journalist, had a rare opportunity to be a first-hand witness to the times immediately following the Nipmu's "liberation." Winnington described the process of freeing of the bondservants of the Nuosu-Yi seen through the lens of Marxist historical materialism imbued by the concept about the stages of societal development articulated by Lewis Henry Morgan. Authorizing such view, his and similar contributions constructed the designation of the Nipmu as a backward place dwelling in the stage of "slave society" (*nuli shehui*) with the Nuosu-Yi being the main perpetrators in this tale.

Through the 1960s and 1970s – the silenced, seemingly ahistorical and static decades when very little research activity was possible –, 1980s and 1990s – the decades of relaxation and development of the local Nuosu-Yi academia –, until and into Xi Jinping's "New Era," Nipmu's general image did not change much to what it inherited from these narratives which saw it as a remote and violent place. Along this way, various stigmata seem to vanish, only to be replaced by other ones. As Ardener (2012) points out, places such as Nipmu are to a large extent imaginary worlds which seem to resemble gangster hideouts (p. 524) – "full of activity, and of half-recognized faces" (p. 526). As such, these "remote" places constructed in these particular ways, then serve as mines for the definition of identity. The past – textually embodied by and asymmetrically layered within the area of Nipmu –, which serves merely as such identity's container, from which the counter-narratives of locals are gradually discarded, then has profound implications for its present and future. It is only relatively recently that things became more dynamic. However, the question remains, whether the Nuosu-Yi do have a say in the debate about the direction of the Nipmu's course. To enter this field, I need to further discuss the conceptualization of the state-imposed Nuosu-Yi identity *vis-à-vis* the self-perceptions, along with an explanation of the concepts which I sketched out in previous paragraphs.

2.2 From "Barbarians" to Nationality: *Yi ren* and *Yizu*

As Harrell (1995a; Harrell & Li, 2003) points out in two interconnected articles, when looking into the history of the Nipmu's dominant ethnic group, we have to bear in mind that the Yi history has its own history, grassroots of which, according to Kraef (2014), might lie as far as the May Fourth Movement (p. 153). The history-making process gained significant momentum in the liberal 1980s. Before discussing the construction process of this history, let me first shed a light on its pillars, which came articulated as a mixture of decades of variously shaped research projects.

As I have already mentioned, the primary historical autonym of the Nuosu-Yi – speakers of a language which Bradley (1997) classifies as a line of Tibeto-Burman → Lolo-Burmese → Loloish → Nisoish → Nuosu – is "Nip," from which the place-name "Nipmu" derives. The autonym "Nuosu," which I use in combination with the exonym "Yi" granted to them after the registration of the state-crafted nationalities (*minzu*), literally means "Black People." Interestingly, Bradley's classification reflects the already briefly mentioned historical, nowadays pejorative exonym "Lolo." The pejorative exonym originated in the imperial official histories and gazetteers. Clarke (1911) maintained that it derives from a Chinese expression for a specific kind of basket (*luoluo*) (p. 112-113) which Nuosu-Yi until today utilise for the hunting of wild pheasants as well as for the ritualistic re-capturing of a lost soul belonging to a particular individual (Swancutt, 2016b, p. 81). The exonym "Lolo" was then adopted by Western writing and even by Western-educated Chinese anthropologists.

Historically, Nuosu-Yi are seen as semi-pastoral people living in heavily fortified clusters of houses without windows – a measure against the surprising attack of an enemy (Guo, 1996). Nuosu-Yi did not build cities (Goullart, 1959), therefore, the Nuosu-Yi word for "city" (*lurkur* - "inside the stone [wall]") derives from the imperial walled garrisons and caravan posts. On paper, the Nuosu-Yi were subjected to the empire-appointed native headmen selected most probably from families willing to be partially loyal to the court. In reality, however, the native headmen controlled only certain parts of the area at certain times (see Karlach, 2014) while being in perpetual conflict with the local powerful clans, which preferred to not be subjected by the central imperial court.

The Nuosu-Yi are heavily clan-based and clan-dependent communities loosely connected by similar material, cosmological, and linguistic traits. The identification with one's patrilineal lineage – *cytvi* – is, according to Harrell (2001a, p. 144), the primary identity of every Nuosu-Yi person. The ranking of these lineages divides the Nuosu-Yi into two major groups of people – the aristocrats (*nuohop*; in Chinese source often designated as *heigutou* – "Black Bones") and the non-aristocrats (*quhox*; Ch. *baigutou* – "White Bones"). The social mobility between these two groups is theoretically impossible, as the status of "Black Bones" is ascribed through inheritance and traces its history back to the two original clan branches which entered Nipmu in closely unspecified "ancient times" – Qotniep and Gguho (Ch. Qunie and Guhou; Kopp, 2011; Yi, 2000; Qiesa, 2002). The non-aristocrat group of people is further stratified into free commoners (*quxnuo*), light-labour (*ggapjie*) and hard-labour (*gaxy*) bondservants. The "White Bones" consist mainly of the captured individuals of other

ethnicities (mostly Han) and the drop-outs from the aristocratic caste. One of the main reasons for dropping out from the privileged bloodline was an elopement with the non-aristocrat, where a child of such a relationship would be automatically regarded as "not pure." However, these situations also had different social permutations concerning a specific area. Lin (1961) observed that in Gatlyp Mopbbo "an illicit relationship between a black Lolo male and white Lolo female is tolerated," and that the offspring coming out of such relationship is seen as having "yellow bones," which makes the children, however, "accepted by neither the black nor the white Lolo," making their social position precarious (p. 71). Within the group of "White Bones," there exists a possibility of social mobility – bondservants can gradually become free commoners after numerous generations of toiling for their masters (Lin, 1961, p. 97-111; Schoenhals, 2003, p. 22-25). Such free commoners were still under the influence of aristocrats but possessed their own land and bondservants (Lin, 1961, p. 100). The "White Bones" group thus served as an "institution" for partial assimilation of individuals into the Nuosu-Yi world. The captured people tried to adopt the customs of Nuosu-Yi as quickly as possible, so they can move upwards within the hierarchy of their group (Lin, 1961, p. 97, 108). Although commoners and both categories of bondservants theoretically belonged to the same class of people, the term *quhox* was used almost exclusively by the free commoners, who (even today), together with aristocrats, look down upon the former bondservants. In line with the meaning behind the abovementioned Nuosu-Yi autonym, and similar to the "Blue Blood," which in European context signifies membership to an aristocratic lineage, the black colour in the Nuosu-Yi context points to the membership to the aristocracy, and simultaneously to the purity of the Nuosu-Yi ancestors all projected into general sentiment which Swancutt (2015) calls "essentialist theory of blood superiority." Such understanding and feelings towards the black colour are presented as something that is autochtonous to Nuosu-Yi and Nipmu. However, Wu Da (2011) maintains that such division might have been internalized by the Nuosu-Yi ancestors from the way how the Chinese officials and their writings divided the ethnic people on more (white) and less (black) acculturated to the imperial customs and ways of living perceived as standard.

Another addition to these ranks was *nzymop* – "the one in charge of affairs" – a superstratum which is ambiguously associated with the clans even purer than *nuohop* aristocracy. This designation stems from the records in Nuosu-Yi epic *Hnewo tepyy* and is also closely connected to the institution of the indirect rule through native headmen installed by the imperial court. Similar to the discussion about the black colour also mentioned in *Hnewo*

tepyy (see Bender, Aku & Jjivot, 2019, p. 65-66), such perception of the *nzymop* might be only one of many interpretations. The *nzymop* are seen as the ultimate overlords, while they might have been *primus inter pares* with the *nuohop* aristocracy, as passage recounting practices making the *nzymop* clan superior to others suggests (see Bender, Aku & Jjivot, 2019, p. 86-87). Furthermore, Schoenhals' (2003, p. 26-27) and my (Karlach, 2016) research suggest that many, if not most of the *nzymop* came from the *quhox* caste. This opposes the traditional view that "the *nzymop* blood was the purest" (Lu, 2001, p. 69). According to Schoenhals, the power was given to the hands of the "White Bones" to oppose the hegemony of the aristocrats. The term "*nzymop*" thus possibly changed meaning from the designation for a lineage to the name for new strata of native headmen brought to Nipmu through the interventions of the empire. The *nzymop* stratum then internalized the mechanism "theory of the blood superiority" (Swancutt, 2012a, p. 106; 2016c, p. 140) and intermarried only between themselves (see LS, 1967, p. 439, 466), often regardless of Nuosu-Yi original strata belonging and even ethnicity.

The Nuosu-Yi – along with several other, but not all subbranches of the state-crafted Yi nationality – possess a unique literary tradition with a distinctive script which does not bear any semblance to the Chinese writing system (Kopp, 2011). The script was firmly, but – contrary to some researchers' argumentation (e.g., Névot, 2012, p. 24) – not exclusively directly connected to the ritualists of the Yi communities. The oldest discovered inscription on a stone stele comes from Guizhou Province. Most of the information about the origin and development of the Nuosu-Yi naturally comes from the Chinese-language primary sources (histories, gazetteers, etc.), as the other Nuosu-Yi written sources are notoriously hard to work within the context of the way how historiography understands time and chronology. There is not explicit dating in the texts written in the script, only the genealogical recounting of generations. Another problem is that often poetic and closely location-bound descriptions are hard to understand and locate, as many of these texts' content is already hard to translate (Ajiao, 2015), as the meanings were lost with the lineages of their authors. The invention of the script is often attributed to a mysterious individual called A Ke (Bender, 2019, p. xlvii) about whom there is no other information. Circumstances of the script's origin are thus largely unknown.

The aforementioned epic, *Hnewo tepyy*, anchors another vital point on the map of the Nuosu-Yi cosmologies. Eastwards from Nipmu, there is a place called Zzypzzyppuvut – a legendary, even mythological location somewhere between Axhuo Tenzy and Zhaotong (already in

Yunnan), where the legendary Six Tribes (Ch. *liuzu*) – a designation which is not present in the original scriptures and was coined *ex post* through the academic research –, or Six Sons of the legendary primordial ancestor Axpu Jjutmu (Kopp, 2011) (*Jjutmu sse fut)* allegedly divided and left into different directions. A related concept to Zzypzzyppuvut is Ngemu Puxggu – a place where souls of the ancestor eternally live, and from which they can be temporarily called when needed as the protective good spirits during the battle against the demons. Antagonistic to the good spirits, the malicious demons are the lost souls which could not find peace, eternally stuck in the world of the living where they cause many mishaps. In conversations, Ngemu Puxggu – in my view more a cosmological term – is often used interchangeably with Zzypzzyppuvut, which seems to be rather a geographical location.

Apart from the sporadic ethnographic writings found in Chinese sources, the Nuosu-Yi were – similar to Nipmu – "discovered" by the Euro-American individuals frequenting the Qing Dynasty China. Soon after they were embedded into various anthropological narratives. Legendre (1909a, 1909b, 1909c), Feng and Shryock (1938), and others incorporated the Nuosu-Yi into the discourse on the race. Some celebrated the uniqueness of their customs and social organization. The latter was by some seen as "one of the phenomena most worth studying within the history of humankind" (e.g., Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 204), while others stated that the role the ethnic people played in the evolution of the world is zero or insignificant (Legendre, 1909c, p. 638). This line of thought – encapsulated with the notion of race and later replaced by the discourse on *minzu* ethnic categorization –, interestingly managed to stay alive even well beyond the foundation of the PRC. Curiously, in 1968 – during the height of Cultural Revolution when fieldwork was close-to-impossible for the Chinese and even more for Western anthropologists, a French researcher named An Ye (only Chinese name is given) allegedly came to Nipmu and met with the Nuosu-Yi ritualist Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo, imposing racial tags on him. Jjixke expressed his disgust by stating that it was ridiculous and humiliating (Jike, Jike, & Liu, 1990, p. 230) since his ideas of race and ethnicity significantly differed from those of the "foreign scientist."

With the establishment of Republican China, a concept of the "Five Races Under One Union" (*wu zu gong he*), which stemmed from the Chinese localization of the Western discourse on race, was supposed to unite Han, Manchu, Tibetan, Mongol, and Muslim (all referred to as Hui) "races" under the five-striped colourful flag. The "small" nationalities such as Nuosu-Yi were non-existent in this debate. While Nipmu was swept with chaos, Leng Guangdian – the native headman from Jjiepggurx Galo and a celebrated figure of the Nuosu-Yi history who

received an education in a military school in Nanjing during the 1930s – tried to spearhead the negotiation between the Nationalist government and the local native headmen, whose offices were oscillatively abolished and reinstated multiple times during the first half of the 20th Century. Despite their strive for recognition proved ineffective at the end, their endeavour serves as a lens into the grassroots of the modernity discourse in Nipmu (see Rodriguez, 2017), modernity which was at that time seen as imported from the greater China through interlocutors such as the famous Leng *nzymop*.

The official recognition came only after the victory of the Communist Party over the Nationalists. After the foundation of the PRC, a large-scale state-organized survey took place in the borderlands and other minority areas. Folklorists, ethnologists, sociologists, and anthropologists – often of the ethnic origin, such as Fei Xiaotong –, took a leading part in this process. The principal driving force for this project was a campaign for the identification of nationalities (*minzu shibie*). Some of the Bluntschli's (2000) theoretical ideas about the state and a nation were localized in USSR as "Stalin's four criteria" of how to determine a nationality: language, territory, economy, and psychological nature manifested in a common nature (see Harrell, 2001a, p. 39-40 – citing Gladney, 1991, p. 66-67). Through the Soviet Union, the concept took root in the PRC, and was further amended even with the help of a taxonomy originating in the Western colonial enterprise in order to better fit the local conditions (Mullaney, 2011). In the hasty "search for authenticity" (Tapp, 2010), which was imbued by the framework of the mutually inspired Marxist historical materialism and societal Darwinism of Lewis Henry Morgan, many practices lead to a curious, yet finite results. Some groups were broken into smaller ethnic categories, which, according to Tapp (2010, p. 72n59), might have had strategic value in the sense of "divide and rule." On the other hand, some were seen as a mistake, such as Fei Xiaotong's identification of Bouyei as a separate group from the Zhuang. The influential anthropologist later admitted his "error," but it was too late to correct it as the newly emerged nationality was already registered (Unger, 1997, p. 75-76). The Nuosu-Yi got their designation through the correction of one of their pejorative exonyms meaning "barbarian" (Yi 夷) to a homophonous, neutral, newly emerged ethnonym previously serving as a designation for the ancient Chinese vessel (彝). Allegedly, it was granted upon them by Mao Zedong or Zhou Enlai himself, as the new ethnonym's character components include rice, silk and pork snout, which would bring the impoverished minority wealth and abundance (Pan, 2002a, p. 190). Contrary to the division between Bouyei and Zhuang, or different subbranches of Zhuang (see Kaup, 2000), the Nuosu-Yi were mashed into their

ethnic category with dozens of different sub-branches about which they never heard of, speaking mutually unintelligible languages and with vastly diverse cultural practices, everyday lives, and geographical conditions. Hence the combination of the autonym "Nuosu" and ethnonym "Yi" to distinguish the Nipmu inhabitants from dozens of their Yi ethnic category co-members. The ways Nuosu-Yi are perceived nowadays are a result of layers of practices with different directions, where they could be authorized as nobles (Goullart, 1959), barbarians (e.g., Broomhall, 1953) or anything in between.

2.3 Building, Teaching and Sedimenting the Emerging Ethnicity

Stevan Harrell defined a threefold pattern of ethnic classification in China: ethnohistory, which is a scholarly discourse of the history of an ethnic group or an area; a state discourse of ethnic classification, which is the basis for official classification by Chinese authorities; and ethnic identity, which is the perception of one's own ethnicity (Heberer, 2007, p. 28 – citing Harrell, 1995a, p. 98). The *minzu shibie* campaign activated the first two patterns, which partially reshaped the third. Enriched by the new narratives, the third pattern took on "a life of its own in certain cases" (see Harrell, 1990). However, the new ethnicity with all its attributes took a slow start in Nipmu, since the "Democratic Reforms" (*minzhu gaige*) – a goal of which was the incorporation of the recognized *minzu* inhabiting the topographically diverse Chinese southwest – met with armed resistance from the aristocratic or powerful Nuosu-Yi clans who did not want to give up on their bondservants, guns, silver ingots and other assets. Lawson (2017) points out that "from late 1956 through early 1957, there was an intense conflict in many parts of Liangshan" (p. 181) and that "the killing associated with the Democratic Reforms retains a powerful place in Liangshan's historical memory" (p. 182). The events undoubtedly alienated the Nuosu-Yi from the cadres and volunteers, who previously – at least partially, nevertheless, unprecedently – managed to win the heart of the locals for the newly emerged state by their friendly and creative approach (Dreyer, 1976).

Simultaneously with these events, between 1956 and 1958, series of field surveys were carried out, reports were written (SSBZ, 2009) and concise histories (*jianshi*) of each *minzu* started to get published. Based on the reports and in tune with the dominant social theory of Marxist historical materialism serving as a lens for viewing past, present and even future societal processes, the Nuosu-Yi were designated as "slave society." Moreover, based on his research practice, Lin Yaohua designated them during the classification process as the "archetypal Yi" (Mullaney, 2011, p. 112) – the most "ancient" of the Yi who allegedly

preserved the historical customs due to their isolation from the outside world. Therefore, they were gradually treated as the most "authentic" and worth studying. Along the trajectory of notions of the "traditional culture" remaining in the unchanged state over centuries only to be "rediscovered" by the contemporary research which labelled it as the "long-forgotten childhood of the humankind" (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 3), the narrative of the "living fossil" (*huohuashi* – e.g., Chen, Chen & Kong, 2010; Mao, G. G., 2013, p. 77) – an imagination of the ahistorical imprint of the specific stage of human society development originating at the Morgan-inspired work of Cen Jiawu (Yen, 2017, p. 162-164) –, began to merge with the starting point of practically any inquiry into the segments of the Nuosu-Yi social lives. Until today, the Nuosu-Yi are by far the most researched Yi subgroup. For these reasons, along with the fact that they are also the most populous sub-branch of the Yi ethnic category, they are *de facto* functioning as a representative for the Yi ethnicity (Kraef, 2013, p. 238). The rapidly unfolding social engineering and research practices were both abruptly halted by the Cultural Revolution, which practically eradicated the social science research in any meaningful scope for the next two decades. While the Westerners were not allowed to research in China, the Chinese scholars paid a high price for their interest in topics that became undesirable in the unstable political climate. They were sent to the countryside or labour camp for re-education.

With their ethnicity stigmatized by the designation as backward during the "Destroy Four Olds" (*po si jiu*) campaign, the Nuosu-Yi academia witnessed a promising development during the early 1980s, when its distinct voice emerged and was heard for the very first time since Yi ethnic category was put on the political map of the Chinese state. The standardization of the language – a process which has begun in the 1950s –, was finalised and deployed through learning materials which equipped the written and spoken language with many neologisms (newly created on the basis of the extant Nuosu-Yi vocabulary as well as borrowed from the Chinese), including those connected to the socialist ideology (Harrell & Bamo, 1998). As Apyop Tiessyr – the local expert on the ancient Nuosu-Yi script – conveyed to me, the standardization of the Nuosu-Yi characters in Nipmu ignored the traditional orientation of the script, and pushed for the same way as the modern Chinese: from left to right, but horizontally in lines, and not vertically in columns. Gradually moulded into the "official language of the Yi" (Kraef, 2013), the new Nuosu-Yi script had sown confusion into other ways of how the different, local versions of Yi characters found in Southwest China were written. Since the Nasu-Yi of Guizhou and various other groups such as Sani-Yi,

Lolopo-Yi or Azhe-Yi from Yunnan retained the original orientation and ran their own projects regarding the usage of the local variant of the script, the standardization gradually divided the Yi instead of making them close. Therefore, many view the Nipmu variant of the script and language standard as a superscription (Kraef, 2013, p. 219-220). Through a substantive amount of publications, some of which recently started to appear *en masse* also on the shelves of the Latbbu Oprro's Xinhua Bookstore – including the Nasu-Yi dialect acting as the official Yi *minzu* standard (see Pu & Yang, 2017) –, multiple Yi "subbranches" (especially the Nasu-Yi from Bijie) are pursuing their own agenda and promoting their branch of Yi language along with their script connected to it to be regarded as an official pan-Yi language. These tensions are not apparent when perceived from the top, but are almost immediately revealed when approached from the bottom. The confluence of the variously constructed narratives suggests the fragility of the pan-Yiism (especially its strain with the Nuosu-Yi seen as leaders) on which the whole Yi internal coherence depends.

As Nuosu-Yi often ritualistically point out, from the 1980s onwards, their culture "finally received a state recognition" (*zhongyu dedaole guojia de zhongshi*). The Chinese intellectuals were rehabilitated and were allowed to conduct research and publish again. The grassroots of the Yi Studies could be located in works of Ma Changshou, Lin Yaohua and a historian, linguist and ethnologist Ma Xueliang (see Bamo, A., 2007a, p. 12; Kraef, 2014). Liu Yaohan – the ethnic Lolopo-Yi from the Chuxiong Prefecture in Yunnan – crafted a large-scale constructivist scholarly project titled *Collection of the Research on Yi Nationality Culture* (*Yizu wenhua yanjiu congshu*). It encompassed the partly resurrected and partly newly emerging discourse on Yi ethnicity. Apart from editing many of its volumes, Liu featured as their author or co-author. All of these works contain his uniform preface stressing that the Yi – meant as an umbrella term for all the Yi communities in Southwest China – are the carriers of the most ancient civilization of China, and, by extension, the whole world. As Liu openly states in the preface, one of his aims was to help the PRC to overtake Egypt, Babylon, and India to become the oldest civilization in world history (Liu & Lu, 1986). Such narratives later prompted many Nuosu-Yi intellectuals (e.g., Qiesa, 2002) to appropriate significant ancient Chinese archaeological findings (most notably, the Sanxingdui). This history-crafting practice strived to boost the pride of the Nuosu-Yi – academics, but most importantly the "masses" –, who, according to Bamo Ayi (2001), started to spontaneously work towards the restoration of their culture and heritage (p. 118; see also Kraef, 2014, p. 151). While I by no

means would dare to underestimate the zeal of the Nuosu-Yi, the explanation for this surge might be more pragmatic and less emotional.

The practice of appropriating the earliest archaeological findings in China for the all-Yi purpose spurred some backlash. The work about the Yi astronomy by the historian Yi Mouyuan (2006) directly attacked two seminal works of Liu Yaohan's Yiology dedicated to the same topic (Chen, Lu, & Liu, 1984; Liu & Lu, 1986). However, the appropriations proved to be a productive and overall "win-win" way of embedding the Yi (in this case, not only Nuosu-Yi) voice into the official state narrative. Within the given circumstances, it legitimized this voice through pushing the already jointly confirmed long and linear "five thousand years of history" even further. By attributing the history of Nanzhao Kingdom – a regime emergent between 738 and 937, ruling in parallel with the Tang Dynasty – to the Yi, the PRC deflected similar historical claims made by Thailand (see Liang, 2010). At the same time, these seemingly quite far-fetched ideas autochthonous to the Yi ethnic category fed directly into the aspiration of some of Yi elites to achieve a greater inter-Yi as well as intra-Yi cohesiveness. Furthermore, both of these centripetal forces also fuelled the desire of the PRC state leaders and their policies to achieve its idealist "harmonious unity of nationalities," a campaign still running until now. In short, the "Yiology" played a vital role in connecting the state policy-making, the ethnic nationalism, as well as the subliminal promotion of the Nuosu-Yi hegemony over other Yi sub-groups.

However, one element of the Nuosu-Yi history proved unfavourable and at the same time proved to be a sensitive matter to attack, since it was directly connected to the official state ideology. In 1985, the Museum of Yi Nationality's Slave Society (Liangshan Yizu nuli shehui bowuguan) arose at a slope of Ndapssypbbo above the Oprro Shupmop lake. The designation as "slave society" was increasingly seen as connected to the notions of backwardness and underdevelopment, thus reminiscent of the rhetoric permeating the decades of the Cultural Revolution. By the various tactics, including ones of appropriation of certain archaeological findings, the Nuosu-Yi searched to "break out of the Morgan-Engels paradigm by denying that 'slave society' is an accurate characterization of the society of the Nuosu, considered by many to be the most representative of true Yi culture, finding alternative models of stratification by clan membership or categories of purity and pollution" (Harrell, 2001b, p. 151-152 – citing Pan WC, 1987; Ma, 1993; Liu 2001). However, arguments such as Hill's (2001) – that the local system bore signs of "society with slaves" rather than "slave society," – are outnumbered by those following lines of the official narrative, of which the most visible

materialization is the vast museum complex. Lawson (2017) accurately points out that the "captive-taking was not unique to the Nuosu" as "Qing and Republican Chinese forces also regularly took Nuosu captives" (p. 136). Analogically, not all "outsiders" settling in Nipmu, particularly in Lipmu Juojjop, were enslaved. Some of them were called *qopbop* – "friends" in Nuosu-Yi, rendered as *kehu* – "non-native resident" in the Chinese-written report (see SSBZ, 2009, p. 332-335). Lawson (2017) maintains that the Nuosu-Yi were enslaving captives "from at least the early nineteenth century," further remarking that "it is often difficult to determine whether kidnappings were motivated more by a desire for slave labour, or for ransom money" (p. 136), and could be connected to the rapid expansion of the Nuosu-Yi population due to the opium cultivation (p. 89). "Longstanding modes of Nuosu, Manchu, and Han captive-taking had independent origins but coalesced over the nineteenth century, if not earlier, into reciprocal, mutually reinforcing patterns of behaviour" (p. 156), Lawson concludes. Nevertheless, these conclusions are still unable to dismantle the "slave society" as a dominant representation of the Nuosu-Yi's culture, because they are mostly penned by the Western researchers, whose works have it difficult to penetrate the academic mainstream in the PRC. Moreover, as Pan (1997) suggests, the post-collectivist survival of the *cytvi* patrilineal lineages is something unexpected and not exactly desirable by the state, as they constitute a parallel social structure to one firmly under the control of the Communist Party. As one of the main tools of the Nuosu-Yi to question the representation as "slave society," *cytvi* is thus lying in somewhat a grey area.

In the late '70s and early '80s, Thomas Heberer was among the first Westerners allowed to officially conduct fieldwork in Nipmu, and the first person since Lin Yaohua with research presented in a Western language. Making the Yi as a case study, his research dealt with development projects (Heberer, 1984) and policies (Heberer, 1989) of the central government towards the minority population. Heberer's presence was a sign of the gradual opening of Nuosu-Yi-related research to the world. During the 1990s and early 2000s, the Western anthropologists began to approach the ethnicity of the Chinese *minzu* as a social construct – contrasting it to the "scientific" and "historical" truths championed by the PRC government. They kept searching for the different ethnic consciousness "on the ground" by pointing to the discrepancies within the Chinese official narrative. Like their predecessors, their efforts were not purely self-motivated. Instead, they fuelled into a collectively formulated and approved need to give a voice to minorities deemed as oppressed. Some of the conceptualizations of the Yi intellectual elite – especially those working on the *bimox* ritualists – found its way into the

writing of the Western anthropologists, and in many cases (e.g., Kopp, 2011; Ting & Sundararajan, 2018) remained critically unaddressed. Furthermore, apart from giving a prominent voice to the Nuosu-Yi – especially to their academic counterparts – these authors often discussed the ways how ethnicity is constructed, taught and embodied by their research subjects, which, in conclusion, in many cases questioned the essentialist views disseminated by the PRC state policy-makers. However, in this matter, the Nuosu-Yi academics seemed to side with their employer. Recently, most of the vocal Nuosu-Yi academics have ambitions to reduce heterogeneity within the Yi ethnic category – as well as within the subbranch of Nuosu-Yi as such – through components of the Nuosu-Yi culture acting as a cohesive element for the "harmonious unity of the nationalities" (*minzu tuanjie*). Western academics are caught in a remarkable paradox: they collect voices of their research participants, but due to the administrative and political dependence on their fieldwork connections (Bamo, A., Harrell & Ma, 2007), I feel that they might be overwriting the voice of their research participants in favour of the selected agendas of the Nuosu-Yi academics.

In recent years, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and its ethnic inhabitants became one of the frontlines of the Xi Jinping's battle against absolute poverty (*juedui pinkun*), which is planned to be eradicated by the end of 2020. For the first time in its history, the 2016/2017 New Year's Gala (*chunwan*) featured multiple live broadcasts from Latbbu Oprro's Torch Square with Nuosu-Yi people welcoming the Chinese New Year, even though their own *kutshyr* celebrations take place between November and December. Nevertheless, seen through Weixin – the popular Chinese smartphone app including a social network –, the show became a source of pride for many Nuosu-Yi. Moreover, the officially worshipped campaign of the "economic development" (*jingji fazhan*) manifested in the continuous significant infrastructural improvements also keeps changing the way of Nuosu-Yi life. The implementation of the normalized housing under sub-campaign titled "The Construction of New Socialist Countryside" (*shehuizhuyi xin nongcun jianshe*) had been underway for the last couple of years and significantly influenced dwelling of the Nuosu-Yi, drawing them closer to the mainstream. The continuous flow of the Nuosu-Yi into big cities (including the coastal metropoles), unyielding de-population of the mountainous countryside, microcredit loans to those who stayed and resettled to the valley [closer to the new-built road], state-sponsored pastoralism or the campaign for the poverty alleviation (*fupin*) are continuously supplying the academia with the new topics for research. In recent years, it had been centred around the studies on migration – one of the most popular contemporary research directions in the PRC –,

and health. The work of Taiwanese anthropologist Liu Shao-hua (2011) on heroin addiction, HIV/AIDS, and failure of the state healthcare attracted enormous attention. It happened especially after Chinese translation of her work (Liu, 2015) surfaced on the shelves of many bookstores almost one decade after the author's fieldwork, only to be banned in the following years due to the state's increased control of publications, seeing it as too "negative." Before its disappearance, the book managed to stir an academic fashion, prompting Liu (2016) and Zhou (2015) to produce similar studies. Perhaps unwittingly, these works superscribe new features to the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity. Despite the research is carried with good intentions and its goal, at least in the case of Liu Shao-hua, was a de-stigmatization of her research subjects, many of these new elements are not positive. It seems that due to the sudden popularity of Liu Shao-hua's book followed by numerous public discussions, the intended effect might have been quite the opposite. From the reactions of the general public who was not closely acquainted with the Nuosu-Yi, it seemed to me that the publication re-stigmatized the Nipmu inhabitants. With the increased mobility and a growing presence of the Nuosu-Yi beyond the Nipmu, they are now – possibly more than ever before – primarily seen as carriers of the HIV/AIDS infection, drug users, and overall a problematic group of people.

Regarding the research of the 1980s onwards, it might seem that the discussion on what constitutes Nuosu-Yi culture, what are its epitomes, and who authorized these designations is a closed conversation. The research had been "done" and the knowledge already accumulated and created. As if the problems of the Nuosu-Yi shifted more closely to the general situation in the PRC during its push for the inner homogeneity. There is a tactical aspect to this – namely that of driven sedimentation of the incredibly fluid identities of Southwest China, de-politicization (*quzhengzhihua*) and a subsequent culturalization (*wenhuahua*) of the minorities (Ma, 2004). However, it is hard to see an act which is not political or at least does not possess the potential to be politicized. In what follows, I am going to closely address the developments of the two decades between the 1990s to 2000s, which were paramount in authorizing the Nuosu-Yi "culture" and its most prominent carriers.

2.4 Ritualists As the Epitome of Nuosu-Yi Culture

In the context of distancing the Nuosu-Yi from the notions of "slave society," the 1990s saw increased attention given to the *bimox*, the Nuosu-Yi scriptural ritualists, who were – rhetorically as well as physically – model targets of the Cultural Revolution's "Destroy the Four Olds." In comparison with the Nuosu-Yi shamans (*sunyit*) and shamanesses (*mopnyit*),

during the various rites, the *bimox* do not rely on visions emergent during states of trance but on declamation of the content memorized through oral performances of their teachers and recorded in their scriptures. There are various ways of rendering the designation "*bimox*" into English. Each of them carries specific overtones which reflect the author's stance towards them. The generic term "sorcerer" was used mainly in the travelogues from the beginning of the 20th Century as well as by Winnington (1962). The most widespread notion is "priest-shaman" coined by Eliade (1989). Swancutt (2012b) uses "text-reading shaman," and Névot (2012) prefers the designation "scriptural shaman." I prefer to use a simple designation as "ritualist" or "scriptural ritualist" when referring to the *bimox* as distinguished from the *sunyit* and *mopnyit* shamans and shamanesses. My division is provisional and serves for the easier orientation in the text because on several occasions, the practices of both occupations interlace. Furthermore, the Nuosu-Yi tend to see the *bimox* as more legitimate in connection to the ritual practice – an expression referring to it (*bi*) is an integral part of the scriptural ritualist's Nuosu-Yi language designation.

In the widespread, somewhat ritualistically iterated explanation of what the two syllables "*bi*" and "*mop*" mean in the Nuosu-Yi language, the authors often provide a quite simplistic explanation: *bi* means "to perform a ritual through declamation of scriptures," and *mox* "a person who possesses knowledge" (Bamo, A., 2001, p. 119). In a collective, partially emotional reaction stemming from the aftershock following the decades influenced by the Cultural Revolution, during which the ritualists were labelled "feudal superstition practitioners" (*fengjian mixin congyezhe*) (Harrell, 2000, p. 9), and partially rational conceptualization and typification of the *bimox* vocation, its practitioners came out to be perceived as "village intellectuals" (Bamo, A., 2001, p. 119) and an "epitome of Nuosu culture and the core of Nuosu society" (Kraef, 2014).

Prestigious vocations – or, as Swancutt (2016b) calls it, "specialist occupations" (p. 77) – run through the Nuosu-Yi social order, ensuring its carriers a highly-esteemed status. Apart from *bimox*, *sunyit* and *mopnyit*, these include a clan leader (*sippo*) craftsperson (*getmop*), mediator (*ndepggup* in Nipmu and *mopsat* in Ninglang), warrior (*ssakuo*), or "a person who accumulates wealth without setbacks" (*surgat*) (Swancutt, 2012b, p. 59). However, the position of the scriptural ritualist is special even among these occupations, as the widely known Nuosu-Yi proverbs suggest: "When the *nzymop* enters a house, the *bimox* does not have to stand up" (*nzy la bi ap dep*) or "The knowledge of *nzymop* counts on thousands, the knowledge of the mediator counts on hundreds, the knowledge of the *bimox* is limitless" (*nzy*

syp dur lyp lyp, mop syp hxax vo vo, bi syx ap vup shop). The *bimox* thus occupies a privileged position not only in the allegedly non-hierarchical set of specialist occupations but also within the framework carved out by the blood superiority of aristocrats vs. commoners/bondservants.

The genesis of the *bimox* is similarly unclear as are the origins of the script. In the narrative universally accepted by the Chinese and Nuosu-Yi historians alike, the predecessor of the *bimox* was "spirit master" (*guizhu*), a clan leader emerging already in the Tang Dynasty sources (Herman, 2007, p. 34). Allegedly, these leaders combined political-military and healing-religious roles (Kopp, 2011, p. 23). The clan leader of one to two hundred families was called "small spirit master" (*xiao guizhu*) and the one who controlled more units was "great spirit master" (*da guizhu*) (Long, 1993, p. 127). At the end of the 10th Century, the land under the rule of clans designated as Wudeng and Lianglin was called "A Sovereign Land of the Hundred Barbarian Spirit Masters" (*Bai man du guizhu*) (Long, 1993, p. 127). A similar formation existed in Guizhou Province and was called "Demon-dominion of the Luo Clan" (*Luo shi gui guo*) (Herman, 2009, p. 278). These were "mandala polities" (Tambiah, 1977), clan-based proto-state formations a structure of which replicated the nearest powerful centre – the empire or a polity of other, stronger clan. In centuries, the syncretic role of these rulers allegedly divided – the leadership was bestowed upon the *nzymop* or *sippo*, and the religious and healing agenda was left for the *bimox*. According to the introduction in Museum of Yi Nationality's Slave Society, the ritualists were called as *sippo* (*xipo*) in the Qing Dynasty sources. This might suggest the role division, but also a projection of the above-mentioned narrative back to one ambiguous reference found in the dynastic histories. Moreover, since some of the clan leaders can also perform simple clan-related ceremonies. Vermander (1999, p. 38) calls them "religious intermediaries." Various permutations of the individuals able to hold ceremonies bring ruptures into the widely accepted narrative of the *bimox* as the exclusive ritualists. Instead, we should consider addressing the history of the *bimox* vocation as a result of many syncretic processes happening over a prolonged period. In Southwest China, ritualist vocation is not exclusive to the Nuosu-Yi. A similar name for the ritualist is used among the Bouyei and Zhuang nationalities (*bumo* – Weinstein, 2014) and even among Dai for their allegedly pre-Buddhist ritualists (*mophi* – "the one who tells" or "spirit doctor" – Michaud, 2006, p. 345). The same applies to the *sunyit* and *mopnyit* vocations, which might have been a result of the heavy Mongol influence in Nipmu during the Yuan Dynasty. However, as Kraef (2014) points out, the Nuosu-Yi academics purposely

distanced themselves from the perception of any outer influence on their ethnicity – including that of the "northern shamanism" (p. 161, 162, 163-164; Bamo, A., 1997, p. 123) – and emphasised the singularity and uniqueness of the Nuosu-Yi culture, in which the *bimox* was about to play a central role (Kraef, 2014, p. 161).

Within the briefly outlined complex Nuosu-Yi social order, the *bimox* play a significant role. Their special place within the Nuosu-Yi hierarchy and multifacetedness of their craft both make them different from, for example, the fortune-tellers of the Hong Kong's Temple Street. Within the Nuosu-Yi clan-based kinship system, the *bimox* predominantly belong to the *quhox* stratum (Harrell, 2001a, p. 97). Using the Lévi-Strauss' (1955) simile of a myth to politics, the *bimox* ritual practices are presented as the "everlasting pattern, which explains the present and the past as well as the future" (p. 430). The scriptural ritualists – theoretically exclusively males – are animators of the Nuosu-Yi's pools of knowledge. In Nipmu, they are "doing" politics by mediating the lives of their clients. Even though Bender (2019, p. xxx) mentions only one way how to become a *bimox* – the inheritance from fathers and uncles – there is also a quite common practice of external apprenticeship, when *bimox* as a teacher accepts a student from the clan which is not necessarily designated as a "*bimox* clan." The intra-clan apprentice through the orthodox succession is called *bisse.* He learns from his relatives through memorization of the oral chants and/or scriptures and observation of rituals practice. In theory, the *bisse* turns into *bimox* only when he is knowledgeable enough to conduct rituals independently (Bamo, A., 2001, p. 128). The clan-external apprentice is called *zzybi*. After learning a certain amount of the curriculum, the *zzybi* – literally meaning "those practicing and inappropriate craft" or "uncategorizable people" (Ma, 2000, p. 51) –, should theoretically never become a fully-fledged *bimox* and should be allowed to conduct only specific sets of simple rituals (see Bamo, A., 2001, p. 122; Mao, G. G., 2013, p. 75). Even after an individual can practice alone, the learning should never cease, as it is, theoretically and ideally, a life-long process. Among the most prominent ancestors of the *bimox* in Nipmu belongs the mythological hero Zhyge Alu (see Chen & Cheng, 2002). However, the most revered, possibly real-world figure allegedly living during the late Yuan and possibly early Ming dynasties, is the legendary Apsy Latzzi, an individual surrounded by an ever-increasing, cumulative corpus of legends and myths. He is seen as a unifier, standardized and categorizer of the Nuosu-Yi ancient script (Mose, 1996, p. 168; Like, 2011) by many ritualists.

Within the hereditary *bimox*, there are many different ranks according to the accumulated reputation, which increases with every invitation the *bimox* receives (see Swancutt, 2012b, p.

64). Furthermore, there is another division according to the type of ceremonies *bimox* can orchestrate. One of such division is provided by Bamo Ayi (2007b) who distinguishes between ritualists who conduct *nbopbi* ("good rituals") and *bbibi* ("bad rituals") (p. 81). In comparison with the former, the latter ones are reserved for ritualists who did some wrongdoings in the past (e.g., murder), and are allegedly avoided by most of the people (p. 81-82). They are pictured as ugly, with crooked personalities, and "polluted." Therefore, they are summoned to deal with the unnatural deaths. At the same time, they are an irreplaceable part of certain rituals, because their task is to purify the souls, bodies of which perished during unfortunate accidents. After this, the *bbibi bimox* are chased out of the client's village. Although imagined, pictured and treated this way, simultaneously, they have a unique, irreplaceable position within the Nuosu-Yi social order.

The *bimox* craft encompasses practices of religious, shamanistic, fortune-telling, astronomical, medical, and counselling character. Many identify *bimox* as historians. However, the most prolific practice are the rites: the *bi*. There are hundreds of different ceremonies, usually connected to a particular demon, which the *bimox* need to expel either from one's home (Swancutt, 2016b, p. 77; Swancutt, 2015, p. 134, 136), or, comparatively less frequently mentioned, directly from the surface of client's body. Probably the most important rite – or, in this case, rather a composition of smaller rites in one umbrella designation – is *nipmu coxbi* described in Prologue. Its objective is to drive one of the three souls (Like, 2011, p. 170) of the deceased relative, or group of relatives, to the place where Nuosu-Yi see their origin – Zzypzzyppuvut, and, consequently, to Ngemu Puxggu. Name of this ritual contains expressions which are worth exploring in detail. They reveal a lot about the indigenous understanding of the Nuosu-Yi identity, the world of spirits, and the attachment to the diverse environments of Nipmu. At the same time, it reveals how its Chinese-language, and subsequent, mishandled English equivalents tend to obfuscate this relationship. *Nip* here comes from *nipddu* (or *maddu*), an expression translated into Chinese as "spiritual tablet" (*lingpai*). This translation imagining a similar concept in the Han-Chinese culture. However, there are differences. The direct translation – *ma* being "bamboo" and *ddu* "a house" – suggests that *maddu* is a temporary place of dwelling. Swancutt (2012a) and Ma (2000; or rather his English translator) uses an expression "spirit vessel" for the vehicle for one of the souls of deceased persons on its way to Zzypzzyppuvut (and Ngemu Puxggu). In short, *nip* points to the Nuosu-Yi understanding of a "soul." *Mu* is often interpreted as "to do" – to "make a soul." Therefore, the name points to the practice and process of crafting the soul

rather than its result. It is treated as a material object rather than a symbolic representation (for a similar case, see Swancutt, 2015). *Cox* means a person – in this case, the deceased person, and *bi* points to, simplistically said, the ritual practice. In short, it is a very potent expression with many connotations (Qumu & Bamo, 2017, p. 106), often mutually interconnecting the world of spirits, flesh-and-blood bodies, and the land.

The smaller, day-to-day rites, especially those relevant to my analysis, follow a similar logic in terms of their naming related to Nuosu-Yi understanding of their environment. In the case of *yyrkut* – the ritual for calling back the soul which detached from one's body in a form of a small, white spider (Swancutt, 2016b) – *yyr* points to one type of the soul, while *kut* in a certain context comes as a specific expression derived from the practice of livestock grazing. The activity of "driving [sheep, cows/souls] into different directions" points to many parts of Nipmu where pastoralism prevails over agriculture. The expression often translated as "fortune-telling" – *kutsi* – is composed of *kut* ("year") and *si* ("select"). Therefore, *kutsi* is a basis for everything that unfolds after the fitting day for a ceremony is selected. It can be seen as a diagnostic tool to determine whether the conditions on a certain day are suitable for major decision-making or conducting a particular ritual or social event (e.g., wedding). This practice is very different from *lotgga hxep* – a palm-reading (literally "to see traces on the palm") – which is much closer to the idea of fortune-telling when seen through the Chinese expression *suanming*. Possibly, this practice might have been habitually adopted through the similar practice of different ethnicities, namely Han-Chinese with their elaborate theory on meridians connected to Traditional Chinese Medicine. *Vaqip sha* points to a disease diagnosis following rubbing the egg against the patient's body. It could be done "remotely" and the egg brought to the *bimox* by somebody else than a patient. The egg is subsequently broken and mixed with water in a bowl for a consultation. This practice is also a segmental part of many rites, including the *nipmu coxbi*, where it serves, among other things, as a verification of the success of a given ritual. *Vaxi* – lit. "to wash by a chicken," is a simple purification rite which might be performed in combination with *yyrkut* (see Vermander, 2004, p. 4). Finally, the *zzyrmuo bi* – the "blessing ritual practice" – is a general, relatively small-scale rite, practiced by the more tradition-bearing Nuosu-Yi households at least once a year.

While drawing this rough picture of the *bimox*, it has to be stated that these descriptions consist of fragmentary observations from various, very diverse places of Nipmu, all mashed into one text. As Kraef (2014) persuasively states in her article, the roots of the ritual specialists' re-configuration into the epitome of the Nuosu-Yi culture and the core of the

Nuosu-Yi society stems from the initially etic hermeneutic approach of Ma Xueliang and Lin Yaohua – the Han-Chinese scholars (p. 147). Kraef prefers using "hermeneutic" to "textual" to emphasize the cultural particularity of such practice (p. 153-154). Since the 1980s, scholars inclined towards the notion of "*bimox* (ch. *bimo*) culture" (p. 147). Apart from the emphasis on the Nuosu-Yi cultural particularity through Ma Xueliang's perception of the Yi culture as a two-way interaction between text and praxis – in other words, activating texts through ritual –, Kraef's notion of "hermeneutics" serves to interpret the Nuosu-Yi scholars' premise as "scriptures and documents are the core of traditional Yi culture and involve issues such as social structure, historical development, cultural transmission, ethnopsychology, and ethnic identification" (p. 153). According to her, the primary motivation was to establish a culture – the *bimox* culture –, which would then represent or embody the whole (Nuosu-)Yi culture. The emphasis on the *bimox* might be one of the reasons why the *sunyit* and *mopnyit* shamans and shamanesses gaining their skills not through texts but through an initiation disease did not win the respect of the ordinary people (Qumu, 2007, p. 92) and academics alike. They are perceived being just too similar to the northern shamans (Zhang, 2012, p. 230), which do not fit into the exclusivist narrative of the Nuosu-Yi academic elite, who simply tag them as "less cultured" (Kraef, 2014, p. 149-150). As Bender (2019) points out, since the 1950s, the Chinese scholars – including the Nuosu-Yi ones – tend to see the local texts, such as the previously often mentioned *Hnewo tepyy*, as "encyclopedias of the local knowledge" (p. xxiv). Smoothly interlacing this approach with the Marxist historical materialism and its linear view of history, the scholars researching the Nuosu-Yi started to assume that they are engaging in the emic perspective (Kraef, 2014, p. 156). This combination of ideas led to a widely accepted conclusion that the *bimox* practice, the Nuosu-Yi everydayness, past, present and future directly derive from the text. Moreover, the inclination towards the text might have been in line with the general emphasis on knowledge of a relatively complex written script in the greater East-Asian region as a sign of one's (or group's) refinement (Kwan-Terry & Luke, 1997, p. 280) – the more characters one knows, the more cultured he or she is.

As I have already foreshadowed, I believe that apart from a rational approach, a great role was played by the feeling of crisis, in which the Nuosu-Yi culture was during the Cultural Revolution. This feeling is then extended until now and is often reproduced by Western academics (see Kraef, 2013, p. 219). This notion of crisis thus sparked spontaneous "auto-immune" reaction not predominantly among the Nuosu-Yi folk, but among the Nuosu-Yi academics. The Nuosu-Yi culture – especially reflected through the *bimox* practice – is seen

as in need of preserving the ideal, "traditional" state which keeps quickly changing, disappearing and being "polluted" by outside elements. However, as Ma Changshou observed already in the 1930s, the decline of the *bimox* vocation seemed to be in a full swing (see Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 546 – found through Kraef, 2014, p. 155) due to the arrival of the Western medicine to Nipmu. Leng Guangdian (1988) describes the anxieties of the *bimox* when confronted with these developments. During the turbulent period close to the mid-20th century, which yet again saw a massive influx of different people, the demons of Tibetan, Miao, and even Japanese and Western origin followed them into Nipmu, causing apprehension among the ritualists, since they thought these demons would not understand the Nuosu-Yi language, and the *bimox* won't be able to expel them (p. 124). Leng used their worries, among other things, "to smuggle the Western medicine into the *bimox* practice" and "to cure by medicine as well as spirits" (*shen yao liang jiefa*) (p. 123). He adopted Western medicine to Nipmu ritual practice. Over time, the two practices did not become exclusive, but rather complementary (see Liu X., 1998). The *bimox* did not cease to exist. Liu Xiaoxing – daughter of Liu Yaohan – made such observation by inquiring directly into the *bimox* day-to-day practices instead of concentrating on the text. However, her work seems to remain somewhat overlooked. Following the collapse of the "barefoot doctor system" (*chiluo yisheng*) along with the overall Nipmu's economy (Heberer, 2007, p. 33-34), after decades of the denial of the *bimox* vocation under the extreme political campaigns combined with the lack of accessible healthcare, at the beginning of the 1980s, there was significant demand for the *bimox* services (SSMXBW, 1996, p. 715) as means of solving many day-to-day life anxieties of the Nipmu inhabitants. This situation was reminiscent of the post-Socialist Czechoslovakia, and its abrupt surge in demand for various traditional healers and fortune-tellers. Nevertheless, the Nuosu-Yi academics seen the immediate danger in the encroaching modernity coming from outside (Liu, 2011), and started to resuscitate the "living fossil."

Paradoxically, even though the *bimox* vocation is traditionally restricted to males, it was initially three daughters of the influential official Batmop Lurhxa – Latbbu Oprro's "mayor and later City Party Secretary" with a mission to actively pursue "his agenda of reviving and developing Yi culture" (Bamo, A., 2007a, p. 11) – who were the *de facto* executors of their father's objectives. Growing up in half-Yi household (p. 5), educated in an elementary school for Prefecture and County cadres in Lipmu Juojjop (p. 7) and later doing PhD under Ma Xueliang who acted as her advisor (p. 12), Bamo Ayi, later followed by her younger sister Qubumo, unlike their third sister stayed in academia and published informed, thick, in-depth

ethnological studies on the *bimox* ritualists. A large volume titled *Bimo wenhua lun* (*The Bimo Culture Theory*) edited by Zuo and Tao (1993) compiled dozens of papers examining various aspects of the *bimox,* mostly addressing their allegedly ancient practices. With a substantial contribution of Bamo sisters, this volume symbolically crowned a birth of the official "Bimo Culture" (*Bimo wenhua* – as contrasted to the notion of *bimox* culture – without capital letters and with the Nuosu-Yi transcription). Followingly, it started to resonate among the Chinese ethnologists as well as their Western counterparts. In the end, through Prof. Stevan Harrell, the Nuosu-Yi culture – including the Bimo Culture – for the first time travelled in the form of an exhibition in Seattle's Burke Museum (Harrell, Bamo, Q., Ma, 2000). In its initial years, the concept was still only parallel to other official narratives permeating various areas of Nipmu. A significant discrepancy in the nomenclature is evident when reading through the county gazetteers published around the time when the concept of Bimo Culture officially materialized. In the Liangshan Prefecture Gazetteer, it is described as "belief" (*xinyang*) with the concluding remark that "after the liberation, Nuosu-Yi increasingly believe in science and not in superstition" (LYZDBW, 2002, p. 304-306). In Lipmu Moggux – seen as the most traditional are of the Nuosu-Yi culture (Vermander, 1999) – local gazetteer mentions the *bimox* as artists (SSMXBW, 1996, p. 592), while in Njitla Buxte, also part of the "Yi culture core area," the practice is openly described as superstition (SSBXBW, 1993, p. 501-502). Within the official discourse, the *bimox* practice was increasingly promoted to be perceived and treated as "culture" – in line with Ma Rong's (2004) later need for "culturalization" of minorities. In this case, however, I see the Nuosu-Yi academia somewhat torn apart. The rhetorics of culture is surely present and deployed in many contexts, but the desire to perceive the *bimox* culture as "bimoism" (*bimojiao*) – an (ethnic) religion (Bamo, A., 2001; Li, 2016; Wu Da, 2016) – or even "mixture of religion and science" (Kang, 1995, p. 8) to elevate it on par with the five state-recognized official religions (Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam, and Protestantism) seems to be still tempting. In her major study, Bamo Ayi (1994) addressed the *bimox* practice with the "belief" (*xinyang*) and "religion" (*zongjiao*) in the title of her work. Subsequently, the *bimox* practice was attentively defined as the original and/or primitive (depending on the context, the expression *yuanshi* can point to both) religion (Baqie, 2004; Li, 2016).

Bamo Ayi (1997) defined the Bimo Culture as a complex and comprehensive culture of "encyclopedic qualities," combining the belief in ghosts and spirits (*shengui xinyang*), ceremonial offerings through sorcery (*wushu jiyi*) and many other elements of the (Nuosu-)Yi

traditional culture. She saw it as distinct from of the oral culture as well as written and ritual culture found in everyday life of (Nuosu-)Yi people – those who are not a *bimox*. Furthermore, through ten years of periodical fieldwork (Bamo, A., 2000, p. 2), she obtained enough data to define various detailed aspects of the *bimox* "profession" (*zhiye*). Based on her observations, most notably she articulated the moral codex which each individual dressed into the *bimox* identity (*shenfen*) should internalize (p. 6-8). This is also including the prescriptive ways of how to share *bimox* knowledge. Other academics then followed this picture (see Wu, Wang, & Luo, 2016, p. 29), replicating and further elaborating on these definitions. The day-to-day lives of the ritualists and their diverse practices were narrowed into a notion of the mark(er) (*fuhao* – p. 29) of the Nuosu-Yi culture, which over the time keeps growing through the addition of new responsibilities (Wu, 2018, p. 24), rights, obligations, and certificates of qualification (p. 26). This all makes the *bimox* vocation carriers to seem more like administrative workers than "intellectuals." The practices of Bimo Culture composition and efforts to retain it in the unchanged state resemble the history of how the *minzu* ethnic categories came to be. Both concepts rely on historical downstreaming through an examination of the various sources (see Qumu, 2007; Zhang, 2012), and distilling the information to define and demarcate their boundaries through selection and exclusion. Prevalent in the *minzu* histories, these narratives take advantage of the very vague legendary, often anecdotal evidence, which is then recast into an official, "scientific" history for the *minzu*-building purposes. It then serves for different purposes. Among the most notable ones would be an enhancement of *minzu* internal cohesiveness and homogeneity through a pride invoked by the shared glorious history. Presentation of the *minzu* to various audiences (including Han-Chinese as well as foreign tourists) as having a linear, cascade-like history then reinforces these perceptions. Similarly to the scientifically-backed emergence of the Yi *minzu*, the Bimo Culture, the ethnicity and the role of the *bimox* is considered a *fait accompli*. A significant body of works address its different aspects, adopting the ontological lens of the Bimo Culture discourse – be it a translation of ritual texts (Vermander & Bamo, 1998), manuals of how the rituals should be conducted (Ji'er, Qumu, Ji'er, & Bamo, A., 2013; Qumu & Bamo, A., 2017), or analyses of the *Hnewo tepyy* (ch. *Leiwo Te'yi*; Bamo, Q., 2001; Bender, Aku & Jjivot, 2019; Kopp, 2011). Consciously or not, these and similar works keep cementing the prescripted identity of the ritualists. Being crafted as the Nuosu-Yi "official culture" (*guanfang wenhua*) (Luo, Xu, & Zheng, 2015, p. 101), this amalgam of intentional, and undoubtedly also consequently automatized, subconsciously-driven production is supposed to help the Nuosu-Yi and *bimox* to shake off the label of feudal superstition.

Through the knowledge generated in such manner and deployed "to the ground," the notion of "culture" aspires to enable the Nuosu-Yi to be perceived as more civilized in the ways of spiritual life (Kraef, 2014, p. 173), practices of which often needs to be sanitized through the academic treatment (see Guo, 2008).

In the recent decade, Bimo Culture became an integral part of China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Program (further abbr. as "CICHP"). Within the program, the *bimox* practices were reconfigured once again, this time as artistic creations. Possessing qualities resonating with the canon, carefully selected *bimox* are being designated as the "representative transmitters" (*daibiaoxing chuanchengren*) who are awarded a yearly stipend according to their rank: from the county (*xianji*) to the national (*guojiaji*) level. Each national level representative transmitter is allocated over twenty thousand *yuan* a year, a substantial sum for many rural residents (Rees, 2012, p. 31-32), especially when some of the Nipmu's counties average per capita annual income was a couple of years ago less than one thousand *yuan* (Heberer, 2007, p. 60). As Kraef (2014) points out, scripture chanting now becomes "an art rather than a religious or spiritual device, thus further confining it within politically and culturally acceptable terms" (p. 168). Such sanitization is trying to push the *bimox* practices further from the cruel animal sacrifices. Allegedly, to the discontent of Nuosu-Yi academics, the sacrifices prevented the inscription of the Bimo Culture onto the UNESCO Intangible Heritage List (Moplox Yygumox, 2014, personal communication). At the same time, the Bimo Culture's canon enters areas such as tourism industry or poverty elevation (Lu & Wang, 2006; Luo, 2011; Yang, L. Q., 2006) as it possesses an exploitable capital. To this day, the account of Olivia Kraef-Leicht (Kraef, 2014) constitutes one of a few critical approaches on how the Bimo Culture became an official canon and as such further promoted. Kraef concludes that the Bimo Culture helps to expand the local elite's localized power, as these projects are promoting development in Nipmu (p. 172). The state-backed policies are thus directly dependent on these elites, through which the state, reciprocally, exercises its influence. However, if we would treat the *bimox* practice as a "closed conversation" and/or *fait accompli*, a textual "living fossil," we would not do justice to those who, similarly to the Nuosu-Yi academics, wish to shake off the labels and create a lineage of her or his own within this "pool of tradition" (Bender, 2019, p. xxvi).

2.5 Theoretical Framework

A substantial part of the previous research on the *bimox* was carried out by the two outstanding Nuosu-Yi scholars. Briefly addressing their life trajectories might give a hint not only about their theoretical and methodological orientations, which they seldom explicitly mention in their written works concerning the *bimox*, but also about the underlying motivations for dedicating their lives to the research of the Nuosu-Yi culture. Bamo Ayi was the first Yi nationality member to receive PhD degree (Hayhoe, Pan & Zha, 2016, p. 201). It was in 1991 at an institution nowadays called Minzu University of China, in the area of Tibetan-Burmese linguistics. Under the guidance of Prof. Ma Xueliang – one of the early founders of the Yi studies who during the '30s and '40s "lived in Yi villages around Wuding and Luquan, observing the local people's lives, participating in their rituals, investigating and recording Yi spoken and written language, and collecting, collating, translating, and annotating Yi-language scriptures" and, in her words, "enriched his work on documents by incorporating anthropological theory and field research" (Bamo, A., 2007a, p. 12) – Bamo Ayi gained access to anthropological works of Ling Shun-sheng, Roger Keesing, and William Haviland (p. 12) as a complementary to her earlier exposure to Marxist philosophical theory (p. 9). Combining linguistics, textual analysis and fields research, Ma's interdisciplinary approach is reflected in Bamo Ayi's work on the Nuosu-Yi belief (Bamo, A., 1994). Her sister, Bamo Qubumo, obtained her PhD in 2003 at Beijing Normal University, in folklore studies. Gradually, they became the most influential researchers of the Nuosu-Yi culture of the 1990s and early 2000s, forming a "thought collective" (Fleck, 1981) which then generated knowledge about the Nuosu-Yi and a basis for the definition of Bimo Culture. Even though the escape from the Morgan paradigm of the "slave society" was to some extent successful, the remarkable folkloristic material collected by the Bamo Ayi and Bamo Qubumo was still gradually organized to fit into the overarching Western, putative theoretical framework of Marxist historical materialism. Bimo Culture – the "official cuture" – started to function as "a folk culture from which the folk had been banished and replaced by its perverse double: 'folklore'" (Lachmann, Eshelman & Davis, 1988, p. 118).

Despite being from the "half-Yi" household, the strong identification with their father's heritage naturally made both researchers deeply embedded into the Nuosu-Yi web of clan-oriented relationships. Bamo Ayi (2007a) in one of her autobiographical vignettes mentioned that due to her Grandfather's opium addiction and Grandmother's early passing, their "family's wealth was exhausted and its people scattered, and so our class had been designated

as ‘semi-slave’” (p. 8). This could explain an underlying motivation to break away from the stratified Nuosu-Yi society – and especially the designation as the “slave society” –, in which the former bondservants are until today discriminated against in the Nuosu-Yi day-to-day life. Another aspects of the Nuosu-Yi way of life, which is directly or indirectly reflected in research projects of Bamo sisters as well as other researchers that follow their path, includes an emphasis on a genealogical purity (meaning that Nuosu-Yi possess a unique culture with ancient roots without outside influences) and respect to the elders (thus the sensitivity of criticizing seminal works of forefathers of their discipline). In sum, the lineages of the research then consist of a mixture between Nuosu-Yi, mainstream Chinese, and indigenized, carefully selected Western concepts which often tend to overwrite complexities possibly visible only to those standing “outside” of the culture. Such a perspective underscores the importance of the critical approach and delving into presuppositions of all sides engaged in research practice.

Between 2000 and 2001, both Bamo Ayi and Bamo Qubumo – as the already established bi-cultural elite and authors of narratives that later became canonized and hegemonic (see Litzinger, 2000) – stayed at Harvard-Yenching Institute as visiting fellows. During their stay, they were further exposed to a different working environment and anthropological theories which had a profound impact on their work. Bamo Qubumo started to engage with notions of reflexivity, the situatedness of the performances and the need for increased sensitivity to their subsequent textualization. She synthesised these ideas in her theoretical-methodological concept of “five presences” (*wuge zaichang*: a tradition of oral performance, a situation of the oral performance, audience, performer, and researcher – Bamo, Q., 2004b, p. 151-153). Bamo Qubumo saw these performances as possessing “dialogic ambience” (*duihua fenwei*) (p. 150). Claiming that the Nuosu-Yi are “face-to-face textual community” (*mian dui mian de wenben shequ*) when performing their folklore (p. 152), she further saw the performances as processual (p. 154), unique, and incomplete (p. 155). She understood the relations in a performer’s life as “numerous and of multiple directions” (p. 151). Moreover, Bamo Qubumo explicitly acknowledged that the number of “presences” in her concept is not finite (Liao & Bamo, 2004) but open to additions. In this way, she was inclining towards Phelan’s (1993) observation that performances only exist in the present and cannot be recorded or documented, because they would get caught in self-generating cycles of representations, eventually becoming “something else” (p. 146). As she states in the interview, her updated theoretical orientation largely owe, among others, to writings of Pierre Bourdieu (Liao & Bamo, 2004, p.

18). The tendency of inclination towards the researchers employing the theory of practice with structuralist overtones is palpable in some of the recent research endeavours, which use the already "finalized" concepts from the 1990s periods, only reworking them to fit these theoretical frames. Wang Y. (2015) uses Lévi-Strauss', Giddens', and Bourdieu's theories on several on-the-ground assumptions originating at the roots of the pre-manufactured, Yi-related definitions. Similarly, Wang J. finds the *bimox* field as an exercise platform for application of Bourdieu's habitus on different aspects of the ritualists' practice: relations (Wang, J., 2010a), language (Wang, J., 2010b), reproduction of the *bimox* culture (Wang, J. & Liao, 2010), and conceptualization of the *bimox* fields (Zhang & Wang, J., 2008) as if the genealogy of the research concepts copied the trajectories of the Nuosu-Yi clans.

Bamo Qubumo's turn had no notable effect "on the ground," where a strong emphasis on economic development through tourism started making use of the frameworks developed during the 1990s. As Kraef (2014) points out, Shen Luqing – between 2004 and 2006 serving as a major of Lipmu Moggux and later as head of the Liangshan Prefecture's Tourism Bureau – developed a strategy bringing together the Bimo Culture with the economic development campaign, making the Bimo Culture the principal "export article" of the area under his governance (p. 165). The conclusions concerning the Bimo Culture – presented as ahistorical universals and not stemming from specific, situated ethnographic practices – were iterated within rounds of hermeneutical cycles, which this time did not concern the *bimox* scriptures, but works which were written about them – in accordance with the tradition of Yi Studies focused more on text than on what the *bimox* do and say in the "field." Consequences of the monological research is a critique of the ritualists deviating from the canon in various ways: by "*bimox* setting up a stall on the street" (*jieshang baitan de bimo*) and thus being greedy for profit (e.g., Mao, G. G., 2013, p. 75), by simplifying the rituals (Mao, G. G., 2013; Mao, Y., 2012), and overall by lacking the pre-defined *bimox* qualities (*bimox suzhi*) (Guo, 2008; Mao, 2012; Shen, 2015). Such research fails to treat the *bimox* as a living, speaking and acting subjective individuals. Although Bamo Qubumo is still engaged with research on how to treat and preserve living heritage (Bamo, Chao & Niles, 2016; Bamo, Q., 2016), her attention seems to be diverted more towards the integration of the Nuosu-Yi culture into the international UNESCO database (Bamo, Q. & Zhang, 2016). Very little *bimox*-oriented fieldwork is being done.

Concerned with such development, my approach offers an alternative to the extant research: stepping back from an emphasis on the text in favour of inquiry into situated speech acts. My

attitude towards the whole situation developed gradually as a mixture of prolonged reflections on my pre-ethnographic (González, 2000) engagement with Nipmu (between 2009 and 2016) and research-oriented period (2016-2020). I kept re-evaluating my standpoints not only towards my understanding of Nipmu, Nuosu-Yi and their ritualists but also towards the written works about them. My close reading of pre-1990s anthropological texts together with somewhat forgotten and unaddressed reports of Benoît Vermander from the late 1990s revealed ruptures within the picture cobbled together by the marriage of Bimo Culture to economic development. Ma Changshou's pre-WW2 period text (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006) differs from other foundational texts of Yi Studies. His narrative gradually unfolds through encounters with the individual *bimox*. When evaluated in its entirety, Ma's accounts (perhaps unwittingly) fleshed out the immense diversity prevalent within the *bimox* practice. This then somewhat stands in the opposition to the stipulated homogeneity within the Bimo Culture. Ma's descriptions of how and where he engaged in the transcription, translation, and interpretation of the *bimox* scriptures, stories behind encounters with the *bimox* and vignettes of personal histories of his research participants all bring an understanding of how he arrived at his conclusions laying a base for the Yi Studies. Even though these conclusions later significantly contributed to the birth of Bimo Culture, the way of reaching them suggested how diverse these practices were. Vermander's (1999) ethnographic vignettes collected during his encounters with the locals while travelling in Lipmu Moggux confirm this diversity: "even in this Mecca of tradition, some developments and variations in social and religious behaviour were easily identifiable" (p. 28).

Because voices of the ritualists are largely suppressed in contemporary research, I have adopted Bakhtin's framework, which prioritizes dialogue over monologue (Holquist, 2002). For Bakhtin, the monologue is an absolute dominance of one language (or voice, idea, way of articulation, etc.), while dialogue is a co-existence of at least two of these different languages (Ivanov, 2008, p. 250). Contrasting with the hierarchy of the knower and the known, where the latter are the other people (Hobart, 1996, p. 2), a dialogic approach strives to treat the research participants as partners, with their voices being equal to that of the analyst. At the same time, it offers a way into presuppositions of the research partners which motivate their thinking. While Hobart (2000a) recommends the area of cultural studies to those studying "a whole range of issues from commodification and consumerism," he also sees numerous problems within the discipline. One of the most pressing issues is that the field "remains a set of theoretical arguments and has not really led to the emergence of a new kind of critical

ethnography" (p. 8). Hobart concludes that the discipline "always runs the risk of degenerating into a hermetic, textual exercise for metropolitan intellectuals," and that "it threatens to become an élitist game, which ignores the critical thinking of those whose culture it is to begin with" (p. 8). Instead of treating it as a "cultural text" (Hobart, 1996) – in an explicit sense when reflecting on how the *bimox* scriptures are seen as the "podstrochnik" (intermediary text – Witt, 2013) for the social life and, ironically, with the academic practice following a similar pattern – I prefer to treat all these "texts" as polyphonic utterances of beings "who are situated, partly autonomous and irreducible to any single summative consciousness, usually that of the author or academic analyst" (Hobart, 2000c, p. 202-203). This approach contrasts to "the surplus of vision which authors of the monologic works (whether novels, plays or ethnographies) have over their characters and by means of which they finalise and close the narrative" (p. 203). Using it sensitively, such an approach permits an analyst to inquire into "the articulable and the visible, the discursive formations and the non-discursive formations, the forms of expression and the forms of content" (Deleuze, 1988, p. 49), since the two are irreducible to one another and create an unresolvable tension (Hobart, 2020, personal communication).

The genealogy of academic discursive practices (Foucault, 1991) giving birth to a particular articulation of Nipmu, Nuosu-Yi, and ritualists could be seen as series of performative endeavours, "the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler, 1993, p. 2). With her take on performativity, Butler distances herself from the notion of performance as an essentialist Eurocentric theatrical metaphor in the sense Clifford Geertz used it when explaining Balinese society (see Hobart, 1983). Instead, she sees the social world and the life of the people embedded in it as analytically constituted through speech acts, which are not only symbolic but also material. Lin Yaohua's writing against culture along with Bamo Ayi's (1994) explicitly articulated a desire to "contribute to the development of new ethnic culture" through "study of (…) the society, history, culture, and psychological disposition of the Yi people" (p. 2) are two explicit examples among many. Related tendencies of dependence on repetition which should eventually solidify into a certain concept are traceable in any study concerning the *minzu* nationalities published in PRC since all must start with a sentence "China is a multi-ethnic nation (…), consisting of fifty-six ethnic groups" (Guo, 2020, p. 1). Such promulgations are not mere descriptions. Instead, they are iterative "speech acts" (Austin, 1962). The iteration makes them connected to ritualization which, when enacted both consciously or unconsciously, deploys "a particular construction of

power relationships" (Bell, 2009, p. 206). In a similar line of thought, Bakhtin (2010d) observes that "human life is always shaped and this shaping is always ritualistic" (p. 154). In the connection between language and ritual, Hollywood (2002), engaging with Bell, Austin and Derrida, points out that "ritual is like language not because it is a text whose symbolic meanings must be uncovered or deciphered but because rituals are actions that generate meanings in the specific context of other sets of meaningful actions and discourses" (p. 113). Therefore, the iteration works through the ritualized deployment of speech, which has a direct effect on the meaning-making. Bakhtin (2010c) also saw "the word as action" (p. 115) and as ultimately possessing rhetorical character. Even earlier, Aristotle saw the means of persuasion as driven through logical arguments (*logos*), projection of speaker's character (*ethos*) and awakening the emotions of the audience (*pathos*) (Aristotle & Kennedy, 2007).

Examining a genesis of the rhetorical turn in anthropology, an emergence of which, according to Richard Rorty, followed its two predecessors – linguistic and interpretative turns – Mokrzan (2014) sums up that "common-sense as well as scientific and philosophical representations and interpretations of the bio-socio-cultural reality are constructs developed by rhetorical devices such as tropes, figures, and acts of persuasion" (p. 2). To further frame his point, Mokrzan finds inspiration in Brown (2005), who makes case for rhetorics and persuasion by his observation that "humans *enact* truth not by legislating it scientifically, but by performing it discursively, in science, in politics, and in everyday life" (p. 646, italics in original).

Bakhtin (2010d) contrasts rhetorics and dialogue, drawing the former to persuasion, and the latter to continuation: "the rhetorical dispute is a dispute in which it is important to gain victory over the opponent, not to approach a truth" (p. 152), while in dialogue "the destruction of the opponent also destroys that very dialogic sphere where the word lives" (p. 150). Dialogue as constitutive of the social world encompasses rhetorics (meaning rhetorics is a dialogic practice), and "surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of (…) the cultures" (p. 7). To facilitate such relation between the ritualists and myself as a representative of particular research practice, I needed to not obstruct the *bimox* to be able to speak, perform, ritualistically iterate and articulate their mind. At the same time, however, I approached their context-situated utterances critically through analysis encapsulated into my own voice. Such an approach then, I believe, goes against of finiteness and closedness of the conversation concerning the Nuosu-Yi ritualists. Vermander (1997) cites one of the articles from Yunnan Daily which he stumbled upon when analyzing the journalistic narratives concerning the

Nipmu. Its author states: “If you want to study Yi language, go to the Bimo. If you want to translate and edit Yi ancient manuscripts, go to the Bimo. If you want to research the social history of the Yi people, go to the Bimo. If you want to understand the customs and traditions of these people, go to the Bimo” (p. 8). However, the journalists, as well as the researchers, seem to forget to ask the most fundamental and important question: “Who is this *bimox* and what on Earth it is he is doing right now?”

I was thus interested in how the individual ritualists frequenting the Shimazi Marketplace perform their “being a *bimox*” to various audiences. I believe that the answer informs the reader about what ritualists’ performative and rhetorical tactics could contribute to possibilities of bottom-up thinking about the *bimox* vocation. In the context of this question, I aimed to uncover presuppositions that motivate thinking, acting, and ways of articulation being *bimox* situated in a certain environment and bombarded with multiple academic, clan-base, location-specific, or various other narratives.

This general approach follows Collingwood’s (1939) understanding of metaphysics, which, according to him, is “no futile attempt at knowing what lies beyond the limits of experience, but is primarily at any given time an attempt to discover what the people of that time believe about the world’s general nature.” Furthermore, Collingwood maintained that “such beliefs being the presuppositions of all their ‘physics,’ that is, their inquiries into its detail.” Metaphysics is then an “attempt to discover the corresponding presuppositions of other peoples and other times, and to follow the historical process by which one set of presuppositions has turned into another” (pp. 65-66).

The concepts concerning the ritualists from 1990s were constructed as a top of the structure created by practices of historical downstreaming and appropriation. Through the academic-cum-political power, this structure is being ritualistically iterated in the spoken and written word, while at the same time protected from any possibility of mutability by the inclusion of the freshly emerging concepts stemming from the ever-shifting context of Nipmu. Bourdieu’s “account of objective structure” (Jagger, 2012, p. 222), which also found its way to Nipmu, essentializes the fluid and highly unstable social reality proposed by Butler through its notion of the preconscious, (pre)reflective level and somewhat “lazy” account of symbolic violence which “works as if by magic in (…) account of habitus/field relation” (Jagger, 2012, p. 225). According to Hobart (2015a), the emphasis on symbolism is only a convenient excuse for “failing to listen to what people say” (p. 1). Every utterance is “a link in the chain of speech communication, and it cannot be broken off from the preceding links that determine it both

from within and from without, giving rise within it to unmediated responsive reactions and dialogic reverberations" (Bakhtin, 2010b, p. 94). In short, each "subject" is being continuously "in-linked" throughout her or his life – or, as Ingold (2002a) says, "nurtured" – into different chains of utterances which s/he assimilates and, subsequently, tactically deploys through reiteration and a particular rhetorics. Because these practices are individual and as such do not feed into any unified system, Deleuze and Guattari's (2005) pragmatics – a concept that "do not add up to system or belief or architecture of propositions that you either enter or you don't, but instead pack a potential in the way a crowbar in a willing hand envelops energy of prying" (p. xv) – adds well to my framework. The emphasis on the potential is related to the ability of performativity to reshift life in general, to modulate it and allow for the emergence of unexpected permutations and hybridizations (Grosz, 1999).

My theoretical framework thus provides an alternative to the emphasis on text and structure prevalent in extant scholarship. It addresses the conceptualization of the *bimox* vocation and practice through their own voice – speech – in a post-structuralist manner. When put in conversation with my ethnography, Butler's performativity brings into play the perspective that the ritualist's iterative utterances *do things*; the use of rhetorics seen as persuasion uncovers how the utterances are brought together and tactically deployed in the discourse on the *bimox* by each individual to broaden space for his understanding of the *bimox* vocation and practice; Bakhtin's overall theory of utterance then sheds light on how the utterances deployed in a polyphonic environment relate and behave to each other; and finally, Deleuze and Guattari's pragmatics serves as a vivid image of what the utterances form when thought of as some sort of a "whole." This framework not only addresses the *bimox*, but also my own ethnographic practice as a multidisciplinary analyst, whose ethnography aims to take a form of a conversation (Lubaś, 2003, p. 170) and as such strives for polyphony. Being a rhetorical tool of anthropology aimed at refuting its own hegemony (Mokrzan, 2014, p. 9), the polyphony here stands for "a collective quality of an individual utterance," "the capacity of my utterance to embody someone else's utterance even while it is mine, which thereby creates a dialogic relationship between two voices" (Park-Fuller, 1986, p. 2). Such an understanding of polyphony stems from the compromise between the academic requirements on me as an analyst to have the final voice in the production of meanings (Tyler, 1987, p. 66) which guide the composition of this text – a rhetorical endeavour of its own designated to "urge, persuade or lure its readers" (Mokrzan, 2014, p. 15) within which my voice possesses "an epistemological as well as performative character" (p. 9) –, and an aim to broaden the dialogic

space for the voices of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists, which might give a hidden hint of a possibility of interpretations different to mine.

Furthermore, my theoretical approach draws on Hobart's (2015b) take on practice, which combines Collingwood's metaphysics, Foucault's various senses of practice, Deleuze's pragmatics and Butler's performance. Hobart articulates it as "those recognized, complex forms of social activity and articulation, through which agents set out to maintain or change themselves, others and the world about them under varying conditions" (p. 7). Portraying the *bimox* according to how they speak and act in different situations and in front of different audiences yields perhaps surprising views on how the ritualists – seen and treated here as human beings and not discursive categories – act upon the world in their own distinct ways. These sometimes run in parallel and sometimes escape those of the "ordinary" Nuosu-Yi. On the other hand, I am not concerned with how all these aspects feed into and form an ethnic identity or alternative totalizing concept of the *bimox* vocation. Instead, I explore the potential and possibilities of an approach which could allow picturing the Nuosu-Yi ritual specialists – and, by extension, Nuosu-Yi as such – not as those mysterious, eulogized or demonized mountain people ridden by ghosts and addictions, so different from us, passively eaten by modernity; or vulnerable, precarity-inhabiting individuals, communities or *minzu* nationalities: rare species of humanity on verge of extinction. The theoretical concepts used here to unpack the complexities of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists' social life should be understood as vectors pointing to tentative directions of attempted translation between partially incommensurable discourses (Hobart, 2015a, p. 2), which hopefully yield insights how the ritualists understand their world in their own words.

3. Methodology: Cooperatively Establishing Research Methods

"The only actual experts in understanding Yi culture are Yi," remarks Prof. Stevan Harrell (Harrell & Li, 2013, p. 13). By this statement, Harrell (as a geographer-ethnographer) seemingly resigned on the emic analysis – the inside perspective championed by Malinowski and his successors –, of the Nuosu-Yi culture. During our brief meeting at the Southwestern University of Nationalities, Harrell conveyed to me that the Nuosu-Yi colleagues, especially Bamo Ayi, tried to get him involved in the *bimox* research (including scriptures), which later brought Harrell to translating one scripture. However, Harrell chose not to proceed further: "I told them that *bimox* is the big responsibility for them – indigenous researchers" (Harrell, 2018, personal communication). Harrell's research combines both emic and etic (the outside, more generalizing) perspectives. However, his research orientation had little to do with the *bimox*. Therefore, he used this rhetorical tactic to opt out from this demanding task, which obviously was of an utmost significance to the Nuosu-Yi scholars, who tried to push their *bimox*-related narrative further beyond the Nipmu. There is not much to object to his initial statement when seen from the perspective of Nuosu-Yi speaking on behalf of their own culture. However, scholars and *bimox* are two different groups of people. For this reason, thoughts, ways of articulation and rhetorical tactics of both groups should be addressed critically – especially the methodological and theoretical orientations of the researchers. As I have shown in the previous chapter, the local academics could have been bounded by theoretical and methodological bias, which then directly influence how the "culture" is understood, presented, internalized, and assimilated into the social life. This then has direct consequences for those seen as the prominent culture carriers. The assumptions of the Marxist-Leninist ethnology blended with the genealogical understanding of superiority, continuity and time among the Nuosu-Yi contributed not only to the designation of the Nuosu-Yi as the most "authentic," thus representative of the Yi *minzu*, it also led to the designation of the Lipmu Moggux as the centre of Nuosu-Yi culture's centre. A substantial part of the research of Bamo Ayi and Bamo Qubumo took place in Lipmu Moggux (see Bamo A., 1994; Bamo, Q., 2004b, p. 151; Bamo, Q., 1998a, p. 123; Bamo, Q., 1998b, p. 107). So did academic events and conferences on the "Bimo Culture" such as the 4th International Conference on Yi Studies in August 2005 (Kraef, 2014, p. 158) which sealed the designation of Lipmu Moggux as the "Homeland of Bimo" (*bimo zhi xiang*) (p. 164), an alleged cradle of the Bimo Culture. However, the tendency to such designation preceded these for decades. To the date, the only edited auto-biography (*zishu*) of the *bimox* Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo was put

together by Liu Yaohan with the help of the masters' son during "one and a half year, when, after the meal, lying next to the firepit, recording [master's narative] through his son['s simultaneous translations and explanations]" (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 2). Liu reflexively admits that because his fieldwork was conducted this way, there are many vulnerable and potentially inaccurate passages within the resultant text (p. 234). Nonetheless, he viewed Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo as "the only remaining significant and knowledgeable ritualist emerging from the patriarchal clan and clan-based slave system" (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990 – inside cover page), quite a common designations among researchers engaging with their *bimox* research participants (see Bamo, A., 2007b, 2007c). The researcher suggested that in his opinion, all other knowledgeable *bimox* were already dead by the 1980s.

This whole situation had a profound effect also on Occidental researchers, who through the "fieldwork connections" (Bamo, A., Harrell & Ma, 2007) with local Nuosu-Yi interlocutors-gatekeepers internalized the narrative that the most knowledgeable *bimox* – those who can interpret the old texts and thus uncover the Nuosu-Yi long history – originate from and reside in Lipmu Moggux. Vermander (1999) states it explicitly by choosing Lipmu Moggux "as the observation point because the county has the well-deserved reputation of being the most traditional area of Liangshan in terms of religious and social structures, and of constituting the universally recognized centre of Nosu (sic) culture" (p. 28). However, he later reflected that even though being labelled "the most traditional," it also "contains a surprising diversity of situations" (p. 39). In line with Liu's engagement with Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo, Jjixke clan of Lipmu Moggux – direct heirs of the legendary Apsy Latzzi (Chen & Cheng, 2002, p. 409) – increasingly gained prominence of being the most desired research subjects among other *bimox* hereditary clans.

The way researchers such as Ma Changshou and Lin Yaohua collected their data through "research as travel" resonates with Song's (2017) description of a common ethnographic fieldwork practice in PRC nowadays, when a principal investigator gets funding at the national or local level, recruits students to form a team, and then arranges several-days-long field research through local connections. Subsequently, articles or books are produced based on this kind of short-term fieldwork (p. 236). Contrary to this, Bamo sisters were able to conduct "research as life" with the Nuosu-Yi characteristics: many of their research participants were introduced to them through their clan network, and/or were relatives themselves (Bamo, A., 2007b, p. 73). Researching the *bimox*, they often served as ritualists' assistants during rituals (p. 81). Moreover, they were able to stay with their research

participants for a prolonged time and engage in many day-to-day activities (see Bamo, A., 2004; Bamo, Q., 2004a). In short, both dedicated a great part of their lives to enthusiastic, often life-threatening (Bamo, A., 2007b, p. 77) fieldwork, engaging with their research participants with great humanity and compassion (p. 79), uniquely contributing to the discipline.

In the following chapter, I will introduce methods which I carved out through engagement with my research partners. I discuss my understanding of ethnography, the ethnographic methods I used – such as participant observation, dialogic informal unstructured conversations, open-ended group discussions – and ways of inquiring into the social world of the *bimox* ritualists. I also address problems of translation between numerous languages I encountered in and brought into the Nipmu. Followingly, I turn to an explanation of how I turned the ethnographic artefacts assembled with my research partners into the text which needed to fit criteria of the academic community. Towards the end of the chapter, I shed light on my understanding of validity and "truth." The chapter ends with a short, reflexive auto-ethnographic account uncovering my possible biases and assumptions which constitute an inseparable part of my personality and as such inevitably influenced my research practice. I have decided to dedicate separate chapters to explanations on how I got to know my research partners (Chapter 4), and why and how the Shimazi Marketplace became my field site (Chapter 5). Questions tinged with methodological overtones answered by these chapters constitute ethnographic processes *per se* and need to be addressed in proper length and with an appropriate degree of theorization.

3.1 Ethnography

In former Czechoslovakia, ethnography (*národopis*) was seen as a social science somewhat synonymous to ethnology, folkloristics (see Michálek, 1994), and often overlapping with the notion of anthropology. A strong emphasis was always given to comparativity. To a certain degree, this perception still prevails. As Ingold (2008) states, when ethnography is equated with anthropology, it imagines to "extract some common denominators – possible candidates for human universals" (p. 90). In the Czech context, to be an ethnographer (*etnograf*) still to a large extent means to engage with the more or less exotic "other," and thoroughly describe their culture, often with none or a very loose theoretical framework. Therefore, being an ethnographer carries different connotations according to the localization and understanding of the social sciences and its methodologies. It may be surprising how much the Czech

národopis has in common with Chinese *minzuzhi*. The latter added yet another local-specific overtones stemming from the imperial tradition of "records" (*zhi*) concerning the distant other, often designated as "barbarians." The surprise vanishes upon the realization that both of the traditions were for decades influenced by the Soviet approach and political climate driven by the Marxist-Leninist social and political approach to culture. However, as Ingold continues, the "human universals" which one would strive for if treating ethnography as anthropology are "abstraction of our own" (p. 90), thus the anthropology should be viewed and treated as separate from ethnography.

Despite I was initially influenced by the Czech notion of ethnography, the engagement with Nipmu, Nuosu-Yi, the *bimox* and narratives surrounding them made me reassess my stance. Moreover, the ethnography is increasingly thought of and presented as somewhat a slippery concept. Nader (2011) sees it as "a theoretical endeavour, one that has had and still has worldly significance, as description and explanation" (p. 211) due to its methodological eclecticism and its own toolbox of the ways of how to textualize an experience. In a similar vein, Biehl (2013) argues against the reduction of ethnography to proto-philosophy, seeing "sense of ethnography in the way *of* (instead of *to*) theory," which "like art—aims at keeping interrelatedness, precariousness, uncertainty, and curiosity in focus" (p. 575). Biehl further elaborates: "In resisting synthetic ends and making openings rather than absolute truths, ethnographic practice allows for emancipatory reflexivity and for a more empowering critique of the rationalities, interventions, and moral issues of our times" (p. 575). According to Ingold (2008), even though ethnography has its methods, it is not a method, but rather "a set of formal procedural means designed to satisfy the ends of anthropological inquiry" (p. 88). Understood in such a way, ethnography is not equal to social science, and despite possessing theoretical and methodical overtones, it is "practice in its own right – a practice of verbal description." As such, this practice – similar to speech – has performative potential, a possibility to be seen as series of utterances which are not "describing," "representing," but rather "doing" – as I have shown in the previous chapter when talking about certain writings and the often unexpected outcomes following their emergence. This is especially true when ethnography is seen as a product (Cockain, 2018) of such practice. In short, ethnography is a practice with direct consequences of its acting upon the world.

Put into the perspective of a dialogic approach, which, as Herold (2000) points out, facilitates a bi-directional flow of utterances against the unidirectional (thus monological), establishes an order when this flow happens between cultures, and is not something one culture does to

another one, the ethnographic practice thus must be something done together with the research partners, and not to them. Hobart (1996) wishes to see ethnography as a practice avoiding "false identification by which we tame the strange, the different, by redescription" (p. 2). "This world," continues Ingold (2008), "is not just what we think *about* but what we think *with*" (p. 83, italics in original). Seeing ethnography as a process (Cockain, 2018) of working with individuals formerly seen as "natives," but now turned into colleagues – "into people we work *with*" (Ingold, 2008, p. 89, italics in original), it turns, as Hobart (2001) observes, into "a battle by the people you work with to overcome the analyst's ethnocentric and professional prejudices" (p. 10). The ethnographic practice then not only translates into working with, or, as Ingold (2008) maintains, "being *with*" (p. 89, italics in original), it is rather a question of "becoming with" analyst's research partners. In short, in the state of "doing," ethnography is a processual practice, during which not only the final product is born under the curatory of the analyst, who, in the best-case scenario, opts only to organize and not overwrite the voices of his research partners, it is also a situated activity during which both sides – the anthropologist and her or his research partner – unceasingly coming to be. In such spirit, Oesterreich (2009) claims "humans are rhetorical beings who use persuasive speech not only to influence others but also to shape themselves" (p. 49).

It also needs to be acknowledged that apart from being a kind of interlocutor, the ethnographer is always to a certain degree an interloper. Tersbol (2011) states that during the fieldwork, the researcher invades the local geography, which is never neutral: "The fact that the researcher is present in the community means that the domain of the study population is invaded and, therefore, the research process may potentially be experienced as intrusive and demanding by the study population. The study population may, on the one hand, feel inclined by their good manners to show hospitality, although they may also feel threatened and insecure" (p. 196). In this context, I wish to take Falzon's (2009) understanding of the ethnographic data as a gift with the implication of reciprocity (p. 1) further. Such exchange not only forms a spiritual bond while not ceasing to be part of the person who offers it (Mauss, 1966, p. 11), it provides an analyst with unrepayable debt for who s/he became. At a very least, the analyst should take responsibility for the final product to not only not to bring harm, but also to benefit those s/he works with. Often, however, this balance is very asymmetrical with advantages largely on the side of the analyst. With all this in mind, ethnography is not only a practice, but it is also an imperative of responsibility to gradually replace the invader with a listener, to withdraw when somebody refuses to participate, and, first and foremost, "to

go beyond banked book research methodologies to imagine other possibilities, to accommodate the researched's ways of knowing, and to wish for the researched what we would wish for ourselves" (Chilisa, 2012, p. 171). In other words, ethnography is also a "way of staying connected to open-ended, even mysterious, social processes and uncertainties—a way of counter-balancing the generation of certainties and foreclosures by other disciplines" (Biehl, 2013, p. 590) to "create holes in dominant theories and interventions and unleash a vital plurality" (p. 592).

All these concerns, I believe, are reflected in the way of how I constructed the theoretical framework *vis-à-vis* the presuppositions permeating the extant research, where the Nuosu-Yi ritualists were seen as "other" even by the local scholars since they consider *bimox* as "having their own internal belief" (see Bamo, A., 2000, p. 3), which distinguishes them from ordinary Nuosu-Yi people. Since anthropology should be considered as "a practice of observation grounded in participatory dialogue" (Ingold, 2008, p. 87), I now turn to the way of how the *bimox* taught me to observe.

3.1.1 Participant Observation

The collaborative development of the method stemming from the engagement with the research partners, who are unique individuals, and thus making ways of analyst's engagement individualized as well, is the first step to avoid the "fetishism of method and technique" (Mills, 1959, p. 246). Malinowski maintained that the participant observation – in one of the recent definitions "a qualitative method of social investigation, whereby the researcher participates in the everyday life of a social setting, and records their experiences and observations" (Coffey, 2006, p. 214) – significantly increases anthropologist's ability to learn how to speak, think, see, feel, and act like the people s/he studies (Shah, 2017, p. 51). He stated that "only such ethnographic sources are of unquestionable scientific value, in which we can clearly draw the line between, on the one hand, the results of direct observation and of native statements and interpretations, and on the other, the inferences of the author, based on his common sense and psychological insight" (Malinowski, 2005, p. 3-4). Hobart (1996), however, sees the participant observation as problematic when detached from research participants' mediation, often practiced "without let, hindrance or consideration of the consequences for those described" (p. 8). Maintaining that "the visual metaphor of knowing creates a world of a relatively stable state," Hobart continues prompting us that "[w]hen you see something in the field, you usually have to go and ask someone what it is that you have

just seen" (p. 9). Getting closer to the process, Hobart urges us to reflect on the line leading "from shifting, intensely situated polylogues and dialogues to the timeless monologues of the professionals" (p. 9). Malinowski's direct observation should not be separated from statements of the "natives," but actively interlaced with it. Addressing issues of such omittance in Malinowski's representations, Baker (1987) sees the ancestor of all anthropologists' rather as a "forerunner of the method" (p. 23). Therefore, the participant observation is not to be seen as a clear-cut, ready-made method. I prefer to see it as a spectrum of the intensity of participation merged with a plethora of ways of observation, which every researcher should in the context of her or his project explicitly state from the outset.

Challenging the approach to the culture through the Marxist politico-sociological lens, Bakhtin along with other Russian thinkers contributed to the development of "culturology" (Emerson, 1996, p. 107-108). In Bakhtin's perspective interpreted by Emerson, "to be a competent student of another culture, one must remain outside it, but outside in a particular way: one must become *an outsider equipped with some – not all, but some – insider skills* (p. 109, italics in original). In his own words, Bakhtin (2010a) to a certain degree opposed Malinowski's idea of participant observation: "There exists a very strong, but one-sided and thus untrustworthy, idea that in order better to understand a foreign culture, one must enter into it, forgetting one's own, and view the world through the eyes of this foreign culture. This idea, as I said, is one-sided. Of course, a certain entry as a living being into a foreign culture, the possibility of seeing the world through its eyes, is a necessary part of the process of understanding it; but if this were the only aspect of this understanding, it would merely be duplication and would not entail anything new or enriching" (p. 6). "*Creative understanding*," he continues, "does not renounce itself, its own place in time, its own culture; and it forgets nothing. To understand, it is immensely important for the person who understands to be *located outside* the object of her or his creative understanding—in time, in space, in culture. For one cannot even really see one's own exterior and comprehend it as a whole, and no mirrors or photographs can help; our real exterior can be seen and understood only by other people, because they are located outside us in space and because they are *others*" (p. 6-7, italics in original). Bakhtin saw the acknowledged outsidedness as the "most powerful factor in understanding," since "only in the eyes of another culture that foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly" (p. 7). Meaning, according to Bakhtin, "only reveals its depths once it has encountered and come into contact with another, foreign meaning: they engage in a kind

of dialogue, which surmounts the closedness and one-sidedness of these particular meanings, these cultures" (p. 7). In short, the meaning is then constructed in dialogue, "in-between" of cultures, and such encounter "does not result in merging or mixing" (p. 7), but rather in mutual enrichment, when each of the cultures maintains its position. Bakhtin thus developed his own understanding of participant observation – different from most of the casual approach to this method in anthropological circles, one which continuously, asymmetrically oscillates between emic and etic perspective –, which I utilised when interacting with the Nuosu-Yi scriptural ritualists. Similar to González (2000), who relied on participant's observation of her own observations (p. 634), my observations thus often constituted material for dialogue. To paraphrase Deleuze (1994), we do not learn anything from those telling us "do as I do," our teachers are those who invite us into the process by saying "do with me." We are then able to "emit signs to be developed in heterogeneity rather than propose gestures for us to reproduce" (p. 23). Furthermore, Mortier (2013) sees dialogue as the best method of teaching – mutual enrichment – by emphasizing its feature of correspondence and relatedness: "How else do master and pupil relate, if not by endless conversation?" (p. 383).

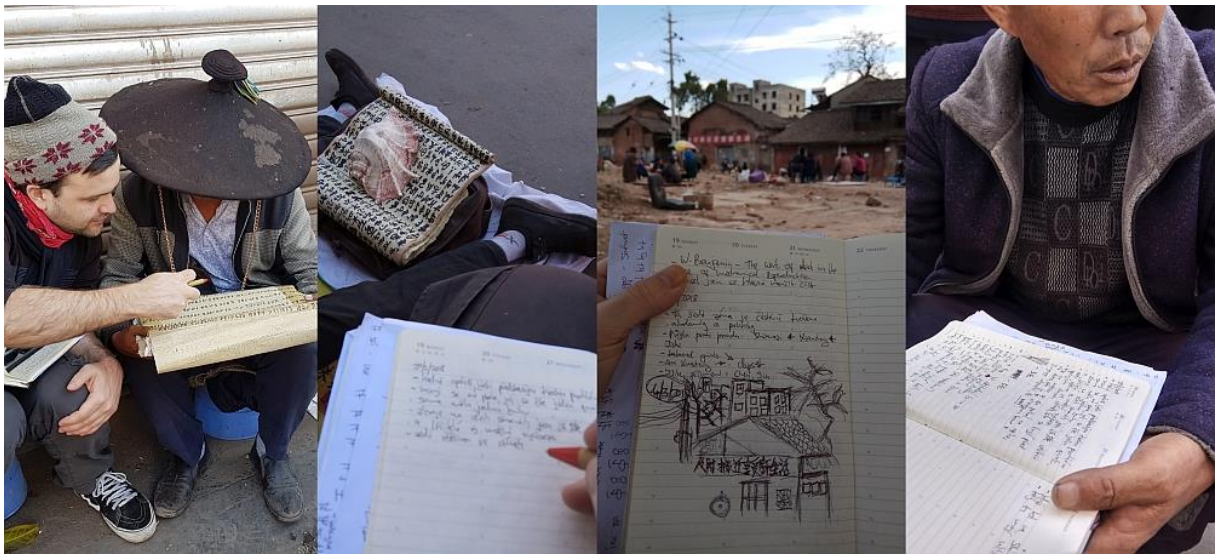

Figure 3: Fieldnotes – process of writing and consulting (photo credit: Renata Mirková)

During our sessions, I paid attention not to interfere with the *bimox*'s ceremonial practice to a degree which would make the individual ritual practitioner or his client uncomfortable. Often, I was invited to "do with them." Similar to Bamo Ayi (2007b), I sometimes turned into a *biqo*, the "*bimox* assistant," and honorary, often jokingly promulgated "follower" (p. 81). Thus, a certain level of customized sensitivity and precise timing was needed to ensure a confluence between the two ceremonies – the one of the ritualist and the other of me as the researcher. Most of the time, I kept coming to the marketplace in the early afternoon when the *bimox* already served to some of their clients, and the atmosphere was notably more relaxed. During

the discussions which kept often happening in a variously morphing groups of people sitting at the spot of the ritualist where I was present as well, I was taking the fieldnotes – scribbling and drawing in my notebook, often featuring also my current learning batch of the Nuosu-Yi logographs. These fieldnotes came to be in a sequence Clifford (1990) calls inscription, transcription, and description (p. 51). Since many of the conversations happened quickly and the environment was often chaotic, I was able to only make a general note of what happened (inscription), which would later elicit the situation, when, during the evening, I was already back at Duane's home and writing larger diary-like descriptions of what I have encountered during the day, how I felt about it, and what does it mean for my research project in general (transcription). The description then happened when looking through the field notes to identify lineages that connect separate events, which would be eligible to form a vignette or paragraph of the ethnographic product.

I also used my smartphone to record some of our dialogues. The notes in my field notebook then served as a pointer to a particular sequence in the dialogue. I took pictures and searched the internet for the information right on the spot. Some of my research partners were able to use a wifi hacking software, break to one of the hotspots detectable at the Shimazi Marketplace, and watch popular TV series. From my previous experience, people in Nipmu were usually reluctant and suspicious when given a document to sign. Therefore, to ensure the anonymity of my research partners, I sought an oral consent of their participation, as well as consent for picture-taking or voice recording. We were an ever-changing group of people with a core usually consisting of familiar faces – sitting, or walking around together, without a stable number of members, open to anybody around to join, leave and re-join at any time they want. In principle, these sessions possess an antagonism to room-based focus groups, during which "discussion may shut down opposing perspectives, either through overpowering personalities or the general tenure of debate, that may encourage less vocal or interested individuals to withdraw into reserved contemplation" (Clark, 2017, p. 95). While sitting in the "stand" of one of the ritualists – a designated territory of each of my research partners –, those interested in stepping into our conversation were informed when recorded. If they disagreed, they were naturally omitted from this final product.

Another important feature of the smartphone was Weixin – a Chinese "super-app," which served for messaging, paying, accessing services and including a social network – through which I stayed in touch with my research partners when in the field and also until now when two years passed since my last prolonged sojourn in Nipmu. Using Weixin, I also conducted

traits of netnography (see Kozinets, 2010, p. 60) due to the app's presence which was often "seamless in the hands of its users" (Bahroun, 2017, p. 3) through their smartphones. However, I was never constrained by the limits of the virtual world, as I have always treated events on Weixin only as a window to the social world offline.

3.1.2 Dialogue As Heuristic Tool

Bamo Qubumo criticized non-natural performances for the leaders (*lingdao*) and researchers (Liao & Bamo, 2004, p. 21) endemic in the context of the qualitative research in the PRC, such as those described by Kang (1995) whose research group – in a spirit of the Mao Zedong's "investigation meeting method" (Mullaney, 2011, p. 97-99) – invited the *bimox* to the government building to conduct group interviews with a result of no one showing up (Kang, 1995, p. 158). Similar stories prompted me to overcome the timidity and proceed with the dialogue right in the Shimazi Marketplace. I followed Bamo Qubumo's borrowing of the Liu Kuili's axiom that "the living fish is best observed in the water" (*huo yu shi yao zai shui zhong kan de*) (Bamo, Q., 2004b, p. 153).

A brief visit to China's Meigu Yi Bimo Culture Research Center offered a glimpse into how the research was possibly done on its premises – separate interview rooms with a table and a single chair told the story of practice of one-to-one interviews, which Hobart (2019) sees "an alien Western cultural practice, used (…) mostly by police and military intelligence when interrogating suspects" (p. 11). When taking into account Bamo Qubumo's criticism, it is fair to doubt that such practice is endemic only to the so-called "West," or think that it is inherited from the "West" and embedded into the Far-Eastern way of research. Following the local ways, Hobart interpolated himself "into groups of people who regularly socialized" – "I rarely asked questions; discussions lasted hours and meandered all over the place, while I took notes and tape-recorded, with their agreement. It is inefficient for getting answers to pre-formulated questions, but excellent for immersion into Balinese discourse" (p. 11).

Even though enlightened and inspired by such approach, soon after arrival to Nipmu and after spending a few days in the Shimazi Marketplace, I found out that I rarely could abstain from asking the questions since I always became an integral part of the conversation with a lot of questions going my way, followed by an expectation of – even if repetitive – answers. Firstly, I thought that this might be caused due to the limited time I was allocated for my fieldwork (see further in 3.1.5). However, soon I found out that Shimazi Marketplace was a much more fluid environment than that of Hobart's sessions, and a lot of new people came and went

every day. Shimazi's ambience and characteristics were also quite different from other described places of a similar sort. Researching the Mexican indigenous marketplaces, Canclini (1993) describes that "a popular market (...) operates in open and noisy surroundings, often in *plazas*; it encourages changing interpersonal relations and usually holds traffic up or blends with it" (p. 73, italics in original). However, this is where all the similarity with the Nipmu marketplaces ends. Canclini further states that the distinctive elements of the natural objects (e.g., indigenous practices such as clothing) are "overdone" when exposed to the urban culture (p. 84). In Nipmu marketplaces – and Shimazi was not an exception –, it is the exact opposite, as I will narrate in Chapter 5. The practices were often simplified to satisfy the needs of clients. The marketplace was thus separated from the meaning of being a stage for the ethnic display. The gazes of the tourists were random at best when some soul lost its way in the city, where the biggest tourist attraction was a lake and a Daoist mountain as the Bimo Culture at that time failed to attract urban travellers, and the practiced spaces served the needs of the Nuosu-Yi through the vocations (including, but not exclusive to those of the *bimox*) of the service providers. In such an environment, with me being always visible and embedded in the situation, I needed to develop a suitable method.

The dialogues with my research partners were in many cases unrelenting, often just paused and resumed the next day. Meanwhile, I conducted similarly unrelenting dialogues with myself and academic works – by merely thinking about them while talking to my research partners, and/or reading through them during the attacks of insomnia. Within such dense amalgam of information, and the asymmetric, oscillative flow of the exchanges often concerning me more than my research partners, I started to feel that the dialogic ambience not only exists as an abstract concept which I knew from works of Bakhtin (Holquist, 2002) and Vološinov (1973), but it also materializes into something that yields abundant evidence.

I have found an answer to this problem when reading about Denis Diderot – one of the most prominent Enlightenment philosophers –, who seems to be somewhat forgotten amidst the anthropology's collective sense of guilt rooted in this period for the atrocities committed in the name of science. Diderot, very atypically for his period, focused not on providing definite answers to questions, but on the way *how* to raise them (Mortier, 2013, p. 383, italics mine). He prioritized a "discovery," the risk of uncertainty over the systematicity of a spirit and non-productive ways of doubt. In this manner, his way is more personal (Mortier, 1961, p. 284). As Mortier (2013) observes, Diderot's way "is based on doubt and proceeds by inquiry. Its

author, rather than possessing truth a priori, is in search of answers. In this sense, Diderot's method can properly be defined as heuristic" (p. 383).

Even though there are many different views on the heuristicity of Diderot's method which then turned into a specific literary form (see 3.2). In line with the didactic *zeitgeist* of the Enlightenment, Sherman (1976) states that "his philosophical dialogues are only apparently, not fundamentally, heuristic and impartial; they never deliver an ambiguous or unintelligible message, and their dramatic, poetic, and enigmatic nature is, rather, in direct proportion to the intensity of their author's effort to convince his readers of a particular thesis." Naturally, I have not spoken with Diderot. However, I was inspired by the features of his written work which goes beyond the didactic appeal. Speaking only through a written work, the important feature of it is the potentiality (and not "appearance" or "fundamentality") of his method through which he somewhat stood out in the allegedly reason-obsessed epoch. Translated from theory to action, I often elicited the conversations among the ritualists by pointing to the information I encountered in academic writings. The conversation then drifted through the landscape of this topic in many unexpected ways, often resulting in disputations, even arguments. The guiding principle of Diderot's work was his "steering by truth-seeking, and not by finding the truth itself" (Mortier, 1961, p. 283). The goal is not to reach the conclusion, but the road, which leads to it – the simmering of thoughts, and the sinuosity of the thought process (p. 294-295). Mortier (2013) further thinks that Diderot refused "to play the role of guide or master," and, instead, aimed "to awaken minds that are too set in their ways," leading to disturbing peace of mind and "upsetting every form of intellectual complacency, his own included" (p. 383). While not stating it explicitly, Diderot was able to see the processuality behind the "being," thus think towards "becoming." In Mortier's (1961) words: "The real being, be it matter, though, nature or behaviour, is never defined by one's identity, the loyalty to oneself, but through mobility. 'To be,' for Diderot, is not to be a certain thing, but it means to change, experiment, to deconstruct and re-assemble, contradict and reveal himself." Diderot opposed stability with multiplicity or alternation and saw a rigid coherence as something that mutilates reality, an illusion which satisfy us and soothe our urge for seeking certainty (p. 284-285). Not only through these ideas, I felt that many of my Nuosu-Yi research partners went beyond their comfort zone in terms of expressing themselves, and in often emotional conversations somewhat forgot their adherence to common phrases and the "ways of doing and saying," showing ruptures in the rigidities of the written hypotheses of who they are. Oftentimes, they disabled their protective layers not only in front of me but also in front

of their fellow ritualists and other people present at a certain time and place. In short, I took Diderot's literary form and employed it on social life – from a written dialogue to practice of dialogic speech.

3.1.3 Multi-sitedness

The motivation for reducing the invasiveness of my ethnographic practice led me to make Latbbu Oprro's Shimazi Marketplace – a public space near the historical centre of the town – and its frequenters my principal location and research partners. As I have already mentioned, I address these, along with how they are seen as different from the rural ritualists, in two separate chapters (Chapter 4 and Chapter 5). The nature of the fieldsite frequented by people from all regions of diverse Nipmu made me contemplate the conceptualization of the multi-sited ethnography. Even though I was spatially engaged in one relatively narrow place, I felt that with every conversation I had I am travelling across Nipmu.

Falzon (2009) sees multi-sited ethnography as "a spatially dispersed field through which the ethnographer moves," where the researcher "follow[s] people, connections, associations, and relationships across space" (p. 1-2). Indeed, I was following my participants beyond the marketplace since it was only one of many places where they practiced their craft or lived their life in general. Seen as a multi-sited approach, it would bring a new set of issues connected to the ethnographer's spatial constructivism, the production of spatial networks, a result of which would be closely connected to the researcher's own interest (Falzon, 2009, p. 4; Hannerz, 2003, p. 209; Marcus, 1995, p. 105, 112). As Marcus (1995) concludes: "In practice, multi-sited fieldwork is thus always conducted with a keen awareness of being within the landscape, and as the landscape changes across sites, the identity of the ethnographer requires renegotiation (…) as one finds oneself with all sorts of cross-cutting and contradictory personal commitments. These conflicts are resolved, perhaps ambivalently, not by refuge in being a detached anthropological scholar, but in being a sort of ethnographer-activist, renegotiating identities in different sites as one learns more about a slice of the world system" (p. 112-113).

Marcus (2011) himself later admitted that the multi-sitedness often serves as a shield for a defence of the ethnographer's "thin" instead of "thick description" (Dalsgaard, 2013, p. 217). In other words, the multi-sited fieldwork then "implied problematic freedom to follow anything without providing the means for discussing how field sites need to be delimited" (p. 217 – quoting Candea, 2007). However, this might be related to as well as different from the

multi-sitedness as a characteristic permeating a single place in a particular way. While dwelling in Shimazi, I have observed the "emergence of more and more 'sites'" (Dalsgaard, 2013, p. 214) which were put together by the activities backed by the authorities (e.g., demolitions), me as a researcher, and also my individual research partners. Instead of a "description thickening" practice, this result contained the desired feeling of uneasiness along with multiple elements of fuzziness. Nadai and Maeder's (2005) "fuzzy fields" are "fields without clear boundaries with regard to many dimensions" (p. 4), where "the object of study is inherently fragmented and multiply situated" (p. 8). Even though they are elaborating on fields which are not "constituted by a geographically located space" (p. 5), Shimazi seemed as being in a process of ever-liminal (Crouch, 2012, p. 235) weaving of the Latbbu Oprro's fabric, yet at the same time broken into infinite, ever-circulating fragments of micro-places. The basic constituent of these could be an individual, or more precisely, her or his situated practice anchored within the intersections of many mental and material elements of the assemblage within a distance that could be surmounted by extended hand or a few steps. In the words of Wees (2017), Shimazi' "sitedness" was "less a site than a process of becoming, that is transitory, in transit, and potentially transformative" (p. 9). In short, the multi-sited character of Shimazi was productively confusing and rather rhizomatic, generating perspectives other than a binary opposition between the single-sited and multi-sited fieldwork.

When talking about distance in ethnography, it is either about the research of on-line communities (Bengtsson, 2014; Marshall, 2010) or, as Malinowski thought, "mainly a matter of the researchers' distance from their home cultures" (Bengtsson, 2014, p. 869). However, in Shimazi, the question of "distance" felt insignificant, only secondary to the intersubjectivities guiding the marketplace's social fabric. Initially, I felt I am staying in one place. Nevertheless, due to Shimazi's bricolage-like fragmentation – in this context transforming Lévi-Strauss' (1966) concept of bricolage as a structure engineered from "whatever is at hand" (p. 17) to a fluid, situated, inter-subjective, a context-dependent human-body-based assemblage of "whoever came to the marketplace" – manifested on the most basic level as animated by the bodies of the *bimox*, I was still able to call my practice "multi-sited" even though I did not significantly move "geographically" through space. The maximal distance from one ritualist to another counted for dozens of meters. In the end, I ended up hopping – *oscillating* – between ritualists' self-designated micro-places. The geographical dispersion became secondary since it was primarily the *bimox* who brought this dispersion through their individuality to Shimazi. As such, they turned the notion of the "multi-sitedness" on its head

by embodying their locality and bringing it to the Shimazi, instead of me, an analyst, having to travel between their ancestral places located in different counties. In short, instead of the measured distance, I emphasize relationality and the "value of returning" (Back, 2017, p. 35). Since I was practicing my "yo-yo fieldwork" (Wulff, 2002) not only between micro-places of the ritualists but also through physical returns to Nipmu from either Hong Kong, Chengdu or Prague, as well as mental, dialogic intersubjective inquiry between the data, theoretical and methodological concepts and various other utterances, in the context of multi-sitedness I prioritise the "returnings" (a motion in relation) over the notion of distance (a staticity). During the physical oscillations back and forth, I was able to undertake – together with a participatory *flânerie* (see 5.2) – a combination of what Tsing (1993) calls "walking fieldwork" (p. 65) and Schein (2000) coins as "itinerant ethnography" – "performing multiple arrivals and departures, collecting data from incidental conversations and encounters, which are going to fill the remaining blank spaces of my main research and provide equally relevant information" (p. 28). However, such itineracy should not be seen as a movement from point "A" to "B," but rather as a "part of dwelling, not its counterpoint" (Knowles, 2010, p. 374). Even "a snatch of conversation" (Gallagher & Prior, 2017, p. 166) constitute a singular, situated vignette, an irreplaceable component of the ethnographic assemblage.

3.1.4 Serendipity

Before proceeding further, I must acknowledge a crucial element of my research (and every research for that matter), which is in an overwhelming majority of anthropological works concealed by the promulgated control of the analyst over her or his tasks. Serendipity, a term coined by Horace Walpole, arises in one famous fairy tale from Persia – a far-away land when considered my birthplace and the field. In *The Three Princes of Serendip*, the characters move, oscillate through space to make fantastic and unexpected discoveries (Rivoal & Salazar, 2013, p. 178 – citing Bourcier & van Andel, 2011, p. 41). While such notion might seduce the reader to think that it is based only on pure luck, Walpole, apart from the "factor X," stresses the need of "sagacity" – the factor that can be influenced by individual knowledgeable (p. 41 – citing Merton and Barber 2004 [1958]) and sensitive enough to recognize an emerging or already emergent thread, path, or connexion to follow.

Serendipity might dwell in adversity, or discomfort (Giabiconi, 2013, p. 199) in the field when a researcher is confronted with ambiguity shattering the neatly developed models and assumptions of her or his predecessors. As was often my case, serendipity often might take

the shape of a pleasant surprise, for example at that moment I "accidentally" (or, as I would love to believe, sagaciously) "discovered" a thesis of Nina Vozková (2006) about the Nuosu-Yi in the Charles University's stuffy Far East Department library. Alternatively, during those moments when I took a friend or family member to the Shimazi, which, often through their involvement in conversations, opened new topics and spaces for the discussion, along with a set of new perspectives and information. Similarly, after "spatially leaving" the field (Dalsgaard, 2013, p. 221), a formation of new perspectives – purely through visual and/or haptic associations, or through the then-and-there connexion of the conceived or re-emergent ideas intersecting with other re-emergent and/or fresh thoughts –, all trigger the senses of the ethnographer, who "may (serendipitously) discover new themes in his or her material" (p. 221). This can happen not only in his "home society" (p. 221) but also anywhere else. It gives serendipity a scientific value (Giabiconi, 2013). In short, serendipity "saves one from dullness, routine, and the tyranny of the research proposal" (Harrell, 1995b, p. 728) and often produces unplanned, refreshing ideas (see Swancutt, 2016d, p. 53).

3.1.5 Fieldwork's Nature, Length, and Emotional Dilemma

González (2000) understands "pre-ethnography" primarily as a means of avoiding a culture shock (p. 642). However, in her understanding, the pre-ethnography seems to be treated as consciously deployed research-job-related method making a room for ethnographic practice which "is only possible if preparation has been adequately conducted" (p. 642). Dalsgaard (2013) suggests framing the fieldwork as "unfolding in time as a framework or a dimension," and the field as "defined as time or temporality" which then progressively "may itself be a variable of actions or events taking place at any given moment" (p. 215), as a network of relationships growing around a shared project with a result tentatively seen somewhere in the future (p. 217). Accordingly, Le Courant (2013) observes that "fieldwork is no longer considered the stage of data collection, necessary for subsequent analysis, but a place of real interaction and knowledge production" (p. 186; citing Tedlock, 1991). He then further defines the researcher's position as embedded in "the constant and successive oscillations between various ways of conceiving the data and the field" (p. 187). The more prolonged fieldwork, the more intense is the experience of uncertainty "induced by the distancing of the point of views in context and pre-existing discourses" (p. 195). In short, the focal point of ethnographic fieldwork lies in relations between numerous elements, be it humans, results, materialities, theories, methods, or variously developing relations(hips).

The question is, however, how to treat life in one's non-native place with only an uncertain prospect of research, which, at the same time, is not an ultimate motivation and a goal of such dwelling. I do not perceive my arrival, stay, and departure from Nipmu only as a fieldwork-purpose experience. I treat Nipmu as a significant part of my life. The academic fieldwork was a practice which helped me with reflecting on and appreciate Nipmu's everyday mundaneness, as well as with getting into more sensitive terms with my perception of myself acting upon the world. Along with every single dialogic engagement, both of these perspectives constitute bricolages of events staying around with me as an analyst as well as with the various collaboratively crafted relationships stretching into infinity since their emergence. Crapanzano (1980) suggests that "fieldwork must be understood within its temporal dimension as a process of continual discovery and self-discovery" (p. 9), leading to the feeling, as Li says, when one opens "the door of wisdom, 'the other' is yourself" (Harrell & Li, 2013, p. 25). Elaborating on the dialogic nature of the work of Denis Diderot, Pinette (2007) maintains that he also treated self-knowledge as "ultimate goal of ethnography" (p. 340). Along with the "self" embedded in relations within the field being "processual and changing, situated and open-ended" (Giabiconi, 2013, p. 207), the way I think about the ethnography and ethnographic fieldwork leads me to believe that ethnography should not be framed and separated away from the life, it is "just life itself" (Harrell & Li, 2013, p. 26).

There are significant problems in this situation. Paradoxically, a short-term anthropological engagement could produce much more clear-cut results (p. 11-12) – a contestable phenomenon of its own –, while the long-term fieldwork and emotional engagement with the site might cause other issues. Bamo Ayi (2007a) herself negotiated the strong emotional attachment and the considerable intellectual distance, a tension which pulled her "onto that path over mountains and across valleys, the road of no return that is fieldwork" (p. 5). My more than a decade-long engagement with Nipmu and gradual embeddedness within the relationships caused a feeling of futility of any research endeavours. The initial confusion was dispersed by the realization that I am not alone. Harrell writes about his returns to the field (Harrell & Li, 2013, p. 16-17), his identification with the Nipmu (p. 13), and his emotional attachment to individual people and the community (p. 14). "How does one analyze this? How does it become data?" he asks. "It is not impossible; it is rather that I do not feel any pressure, to the point that sometimes when I think of it I feel an aversion. (…) Attachment is more important than scholarship; doing practical work is more important than analysis" (p. 17). Similarly, in my case, I often felt that the emotions overcame the scientific or interpretive

enterprise and block any kind of urge for the construction of any kind of fieldwork narrative (p. 3). This was especially palpable when I realized that due to the frequent returns, "fieldwork is like an endless cave, the longer you stay in there the more likely you are to encounter limitless problems" (p. 19-20). The asymmetrical period of both – years of stay in Nipmu with no engagement in research *vis-à-vis* only four months to make a precisely carved-out ethnographic project dotted with new reflexive insights not only on the previous years but also on analyst's own biases and presuppositions – added only to the overwhelming feeling of confusion. I realized that my only way out of this situation lead through using my collaboratively developed ethnographic practice for presenting a particularly assembled fragments of all these positions – provisionally cut out from the social flow by the conscious halting of the research process and commencement of the textualization practice – as a coherent story fulfilling the requirement of the particular academic knowledge circles.

3.2 From Ethnographic Artefacts to Academic Product

The academic writing and the resultant text relies on citationality of the writer's intellectual ancestors. Therefore, the writing opens a simultaneity of perception and creates a specific, situated chronotope – "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 84) – by bringing together voices of different places and times. In the way how the final product relates to other written works on the subject – variously differentiating itself from them to identify gaps in the extant research, thus to contribute to knowledge –, the writing process is a performative endeavour which "does" rather than "describes." This is especially true in PRC, where theoretically any sociological or anthropological writing could be turned into an official policy. Moreover, ethnographic writing practice approached dialogically is closely interconnected with rhetoric: "No other literary form is as well suited to research and the art of persuasion – research because it is by doubting that one becomes sure of things, and persuasion because dialogue throws passion off the scent" (Mortier, 2013, p. 383).

"Unlike painting and drawing, anthropological writing is *not* an art of description," says Ingold (2008.) "We do not call it 'anthropography,' and for a good reason. It is rather a practice of *correspondence*. The anthropologist writes – as indeed he thinks and speaks – *to* himself, to others and to the world" (p. 87, italics in original). Description, in Clifford's (1990) understanding, is "a turning away from dialogue and observation towards a separate place of writing, a place for reflection, analysis and interpretation" (p. 52). To minimize the

dominance of description over correspondence, I had "write on the go" (Caron, Hwang & Brummans, 2013). This practice allowed the bits and pieces of the resultant work materialize already before leaving the field, letting the thoughts to sediment into elements already worth juggling. The "field" then moved together with me to different places. The process of thought fermentation often caught me "somewhere else" in the middle of "something else," and resulted in curious practices of, for example, trying typing volatile, ephemeral ideas into the phone while jogging in a hot and humid Hong Kong summer, or performing soundwalks and deep listening to the recordings from Nipmu while walking the streets of Hong Kong. It provided me with "means of simultaneously inhabiting multiple times and places, opening portals for imagined possible worlds" (Brown, 2017, p. 7), because returning to a soundscape "in the days, months or years after its composition is to encounter the passage of time, as residual sounds re-surface in combination with the ever-changing sounds in the present" (p. 6). I also came to see the process of writing as thinking (Hanley, 2019, p. 414), where I, as the researcher, "become in language" (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 1081). Writing is a method of inquiry, a process of oscillations between solidifying and further fragmenting the already disintegrated narrative.

Preferring correspondence over description, anthropologists then "tell stories with instances of human becomings" (Biehl, 2013, p. 591), where the single narrative then turns into a story of "life bricolage, what people make, often agonizingly, out of whatever is available to them to endure, understand, and desire despite all kinds of constraints" (p. 583-584). Without any ambition of composing another encyclopedia – since, as I have already stated, there are enough Nuosu-Yi encyclopedias in circulation already (see 2.4) – I once again turn to Diderot's heuristic dialogue which he used in his *Encyclopedia* intending to emphasize the curatorial practice extended towards the blocks of texts or voices. Pinette (2007) sees the Diderot's cross-referenced entries conversing with each other and nesting dialogues within dialogues (p. 339). Through seeing the cultural differences as dialogic opposed the "primitivist" mainstream of his times (p. 340), Diderot maintained that one of the goals of ethnographic writing is not a static "perfect representation of the other," but rather a process designed to "understand that other in relation to the European subject" (p. 349). Diderot wished "to dissociate himself from the Platonic model and other traditional forms of dialogue" (Mortier, 2013, p. 383). Dialogue "is still capable of teaching, but it is neither authoritative nor scholastic" (p. 383).

By cutting the dialogues into pieces and making them a backbone of the "data chapters" (Chapter 4-9), my practice of cobbling the resultant ethnographic product together draws on Diderot's work. The philosopher had been criticized by many viewing his non-linear style as "chaos of events and stories that take place anywhere at any time and for any reason" (Bailey, 2000, p. 51). Intentionally, sometimes even apologetically mixing heterogeneous elements, with the declared inability to proceed forward according to pre-designed plan, zigzag way of laying the ideas in front of the reader (Mortier, 1961, p. 288, 289), while, as an author, not identifying with "he" nor "I" position which permitted him to not grant a privilege to possesses an ultimate truth to none of these positions (p. 294-295), Diderot was able to reject a systematicity of thinking in the favor of seeing it as integral (p. 297), "incomplete whole" (Holquist, 2002). The last point made Diderot intellectually allied with Bakhtin.

What needs to be addressed next is the way how the final ethnographic product relates to the situated utterances in the field, and, how based on these utterances, the text materializes. In traditional human-oriented research, the collected material at the field is called "data." After the withdrawal from the place of research, the data are expected to be arranged into sense-making blocks often called "themes," which then become part of the writing explaining the problems encircling the research question in a resultant body of the text. Ryan and Bernard (2003) introduce almost a dozen terms which social scientists use to "talk about the linkage between themes and their expressions," among which are "codes," "categories," "chunks," or "data-bits" (p. 87). Due to the nature of the"data" *made* dialogically by my research partners, I prefer to call them "ethnographic artefacts." As a point of departure, I share the view of Dey (1993) that "there is no single set of categories waiting to be discovered." Instead, "there are as many ways of 'seeing' the data as one can invent" (p. 110-111). The ethnographic artefacts are part of the visceral life. On the other end, they are also constituents of the vignette, which Masny (2014) understands as *raw tellings* in a part of research assemblage – bodies of video clips, transcripts, websites, sounds (p. 352). Vignettes put together researcher, participants, computer (p. 353), or, going even further, "a hallway at work, a coffee shop, a clock, and sunshine" (p. 354). In a parallel with my research, these would be replaced by the places, trees, internet hotspot, ritual paraphernalia and other elements dwelling in the ecology of Shimazi Marketplace.

The way of arranging and transforming the ethnographic artefacts into bodies that *mean* something is achieved through coding, which line-up the information into parts "so that the data are manageable, with the result of rebuilding the data to tell a storyline" (Stuckey, 2015,

p. 10). However, the method through which I am treating the ethnographic artefacts possesses coordinates of a different direction than coding. The assemblage is a body that "has become decoded, that is, one in which the value of the coding parameter is low" (DeLanda, 2016, p. 23). The coding is a deeper, discursive part of articulation (or narrative), which follows the non-discursive territorialization (p. 38-39) in the process of stabilizing the identity of an assemblage (p. 15). In short, coding arrests a dynamic process. The code is antagonistic to context. As Bakhtin (2010d) stated: "A context is potentially unfinalized; a code must be finalized. A code is only a technical means of transmitting information; it does not have cognitive, creative significance. A code is deliberately established, killed context" (p. 147). The practice called "coding" *encodes* the ethnographic artefacts differently, arranges them into a different, allegedly more "meaningful" order. Frequently, this order then reflects something very familiar to us. It is rooted in the assumptions produced by the environment which surrounds us.

In line with Deleuze and Guattari, MacLure (2013) observes that coding "assumes, and imposes, an 'arborescent' or tree-like logic of hierarchical, fixed relations among discrete entities" (p. 167). She continues by defining the coding as an activity that "drags fixed, hierarchical structure from the proliferated surface of life, cutting its flows into 'limited and measured things,' and hanging them in bunches under their ruling ideas" (p. 169). The practice "does not recognize changing speeds and intensity of relation, or multiple and mobile liaisons amongst entities" (p. 169), taking the one who engages with it "'away' from the data – from their detail, complexity and singularity" (p. 169). Finally, coding "renders everything that falls within its embrace *explicable*" (p. 169, italics in original). In the course of the fieldwork and the subsequent coding attempts, I felt unsettled, uncomfortable with so many constituents rationalized as superficial, or mere accidents (p. 172). MacLure identifies this situation as the bodily matters resisting translation into codes, revealing the "routine machinations of representation" (p. 173).

In a radical ontological turn, St. Pierre (2017) calls for abandoning the humanist methodology (p. 1087), while Masny (2014) advocates for the rhizoanalytic approach, which drops coding and ethnographic narratives in favour of the "rawness of experience in context" (p. 352). It is supposed to be decentered and anti-representational. However, there is one significant problem with such incredibly liberating tendencies. They might seem extremely emancipatory, but at the same time there is always a danger of slipping into an essentialist practice, which would stipulate complete radical abandonment of one approach for worshipping of another.

Therefore, even though she harshly criticizes the practice of coding, MacLure (2013) concludes that coding can not be entirely abandoned, since language "in its conventional, representational 'dimension,' shares the fixative ambitions of coding" (p. 174). Alternatively, in her other words, "it is not necessary to abandon coding to glimpse stranger relations than those of the tree or the table, because these strange relations are coding's uncanny 'other'" (p. 180). This leads her to elaborate on the coding as necessarily *being done in a particular way*, to "relieve research subjects (...) from the banality and the burden of the ethnographic and other codes that hold them in place" (p. 173-174). The key is to observe the researchers' tendencies to exclude, or, in other words, "how far one is willing to ignore the stuff that does not fit" (p. 175). She calls for "slow[ing] down the facile machinery of interpretation" (p. 174), to realize the "shared entanglement" (Bal, 1999, p. 30) with the dialogic partners, to *feel* the data (MacLure, 2013, p. 174) and preserve as much context as possible.

Masny's (2014) rhizoanalysis takes a position of "a bloc of sensation that flows through connecting relations in an assemblage," which should put the researcher away from the appeal to interpretation and drag her or him closer to the raw tellings (p. 357). To perform a rhizoanalysis is to palpate – "to embrace uncomfortableness that comes with the loss of certainty, transparency, and fixed images" (Mazzei, 2010, p. 521), while being able to sensorily examine "an approximation of what could be in an open system" (Masny, 2014, p. 354 – summarizing May, 2005). Inspired by Stafford's (2001) "experiment with order and disorder" (p. 7), MacLure (2013) suggests to think of coding – or rather a certain contextualized practice of making sense of the ethnographic artefacts – "as the on-going construction of a cabinet of curiosities or *wunderkammer*" (p. 180, italics in original) rather than as something orthodoxly systematic. These cabinets of curiosities – liminal objects (Mauriés, 2002) of medieval Europe "informed both by the waning Gothic world of miracles, magic and relics, and by the growth of humanism and scientific reason" (p. 180) –, resembled the *bimox* chests containing scriptures, published academic works as well as many other objects coming from different times and places.

Such thinking then led me not towards representation (or orderly hierarchy), but to the "unholy mixture" (Lecercle, 2002, p. 53) of assemblage (MacLure, 2013, p. 178) – "a syntax of unanticipated associations" (p. 180 – citing Lugli, 2000, p. 3). To create "provisional and partial taxonomies," which can always undergo a process of metamorphosis (p. 180). After a reflection on these matters, and in partial response to these debates, I decided to compose my ethnographic product to contain three consciously palpable layers: context-situated exchanges

of utterances, assimilation of these into a reported speech, and my explanations placed side-by-side on the same level with those of the *bimox* ritualists. Approached and composed in rather non-linear ways described above, it builds its distinct chronotope.

3.3 Languages, Dialects and Translations

While walking down the road winding under the massive cliff on which the county seat of Lipmu Moggux sits, I met a person who was repairing a pothole with a fresh asphalt patch. With outsiders still being a considerably rare sight in the region, we talked a bit about who comes from where, and what job each of us does. To my impression, the gentleman looked very "Nuosu-Yi." However, this proved to be a false assumption, as he claimed he was Han-Chinese. Allegedly, his knowledge of the local language was only rudimentary, while he saw the local variation of Sichuanese Mandarin as his mother tongue. "*Ni zai zheli xiguanguan?*" ("Are you accustomed [to the life] here?") he asked me. At the very first moment, I did not understand at all. A few seconds later, I got the content, but not the grammatical structure. It took me another while to realize that his mother tongue was not Nuosu-Yi, nor the local Sichuanese dialect, but the Nipmu's characteristic mixture of both, with the word "to be accustomed" (*xiguan*) habitually re-duplicated in the way the Nuosu-Yi language forms a question.

The diversity of Nipmu's ethnicities, as well as differences within each ethnicity, all connect to a significant variety of languages and its dialects. It is difficult to generalize which tongue is dominant in the Cool Mountains. In lowlands such as the Jianchang Valley, where prefectural capital is located, it is undoubtedly one of the variations of Chinese – the local *lingua franca*. Apart from the Modern Standard Chinese (Putonghua), Nipmu features two quite distinct subbranches of the Sichuanese dialect (Sichuanhua) – the local Latbbu Oprro Sichuanese and the West Riverbank Language (Hexihua). Apart from these, the local pidgin mentioned in the opening vignette referred to as "Language of the Unity" (Tuanjiehua), which combines the Chinese and Nuosu-Yi vocabulary with the sentence structure typical for the Nuosu-Yi (Tsung, 2012), functions as a bridge between the Chinese and Nuosu-Yi dialects. The Modern Standard Liangshan Yi referred to as Nuosu ddopma is based on the Shypnra (Ch. Shengzha) dialect of the Xitddop Ladda area. Besides the officially standardized Nuosu-Yi language, there are four other dialects: Yynuo, Suondip, Adur and Tianba (Gerner, 2013). Concerning the written language, Simplified Chinese is overwhelmingly dominant, but the standardized Nuosu-Yi written script known as Nuosu bburma is visible almost everywhere in

Oprro as well as the Prefecture's counties. In many cases, however, they feature many orthographical errors and often serve as a mere phonetic transcription for the Chinese characters. Tibetan, Mongolian, and dozens of other local languages also belong to a remarkable linguistic universe of Nipmu. However, these languages are not relevant to my present research.

The *bimox* practicing in the Shimazi Marketplace came from various counties of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, as well as from the adjacent areas of Panzhihua Prefecture (in the south), and, occasionally also three Yi autonomous counties outside Nipmu – Jiezhyr (Ebian), Muphxop (Mabian), and Niplat (Ninglang in Yunnan Province). All of my research partners had at least a fundamental, in most cases an excellent command of one of the Sichuanese dialects (and even Putonghua) – a *lingua franca* of our exchanges. This feature makes my research different from that of Bamo Ayi, during which she used almost exclusively the Nuosu-Yi languages since very few of her *bimox* informants were able to converse in Chinese (Bamo, A., 2007c, p. 202).

My research practice brought even more confusion and diversity into this already complicated linguistic landscape. My mother tongue is Czech; English is the second language I learned when growing up. I am fluent in Modern Standard Chinese, have a good command of three varieties of Sichuanese Mandarin, and fundamental knowledge of standard Shypnra dialect mixed with the Yynuo. The latter I absorbed unintentionally due to the prolonged exposure to the Yynuo-speaking individuals. My field notes were always a somewhat chaotic amalgam of complementary analogue and digital accounts scribbled in Czech, English, Chinese, and Nuosu-Yi. The two latter languages were present in their original writing system as well as transcription to the Latin alphabet. The dissertation – written in English as stipulated by The Hong Kong Polytechnic University – is thus a meta-text featuring an assemblage of traces of different languages.

As Deleuze and Guattari (2005) accurately point out, "there is no language in itself, nor are there any linguistic universals, only a throng of dialects, patois, slangs, and specialized languages" (p. 7). However, within the terrain of this written work – especially on the level of information absorption and its subsequent encapsulation into the resultant text –, there are at least three dominant languages. Asad (1986) targets the problem of English language hegemony within anthropological writing, where language use is hierarchical – from strong to primitive. The most prominent danger is that "the result of half-transformed styles of life will make for ambiguities, which an unskillful Western translator may simplify in the direction of

his own ‘strong’ language” (p. 158). The overwhelmingly dominantly promoted language in PRC is Putonghua. On the level of Nuosu-Yi, the Shypnra-based Modern Standard Yi – referred to by many Nuosu-Yi as “mother tongue” (*muyu*) –, is the second aspiring dominant language, since it tends to overwrite all local variations along with the Yynuo and Suondip dialects. In the process of my ethnographic practices, the utterances of my research partners reached me predominantly through one of the Chinese language dialects interlaced with the variations Nuosu-Yi, which I partially rendered into the two aforementioned standardized forms and, subsequently, translated them into the global anthropological dominant language (English). Admittedly, this line presented fertile ground for discrepancies potentially emerging along the axis Nuosu-Yi – Sichuanhua and/or Putonghua – (academic) English.

Hobart (2015a) reveals the tangible linguistic evidence of different categorization and understanding of the words “truth” and “meaning” in Balinese (p. 7-15). Language is firmly attached to the local settings, and without a “close reading” of the field, the meaning might be misunderstood within the process of transposition between languages – be it on the side of the research participants or the ethnographer. To minimize this gap, I strived to progressively improve my Nuosu-Yi language proficiency by building upon the base I already had, with a focus on the language relevant to the topics of the dialogues, with particular attention to meanings and categories in the Nuosu-Yi. In this process, I felt with Stevan Harrell, who claims that his decades-long project of learning Nuosu-Yi “had failed” (Harrell & Li, 2013, p. 8), and even his listening skills of the Nuosu-Yi-tainted local version is Mandarin is not ideal (p. 10). Despite not being entirely fluent, and inspired by Harrell’s stubbornness refusing to give up (p. 8), I believe that in the given time-frame I did my best to decrease the need to force my participants speaking in their non-native language, and enable myself to offer my participants a possibility of choosing the means of communication according to their preference. I used the Nuosu-Yi as an instrument of mediation between the overtones of meanings emergent in Putonghua and/or Sichuanhua and English, dissolving the aspirations of any of these languages being entirely dominant. Vastly different articulations of events rendered in one of the local version of Mandarin *vis-à-vis* the Nuosu-Yi dialects never ceased to amaze me. Identifying this tension was crucial for many conclusions within my thesis. It reminded me of Hobart criticizing Geertz to investigate Bali only through Indonesian (Hobart, 2015a, p. 13), while himself could not only communicate directly in the local language but also distinguish the high and low Balinese (Hobart, 1991, p. 196).

A brief exploration of the Nuosu-Yi language reveals its various particularities. Apart from the already mentioned reduplication of the verb without the negative particle to form a question, there are many other specific features, such as the position of the verb towards the end of the sentence – followed only by a plethora of the modal words expressing various moods and tones of the utterance –, the inclination to the four-syllable construction, the existence of double negative, and the permeation of casual conversations with the Nuosu-style proverbs (*lubyx luji*) pointing to the wisdom of the ancestors from which the living should learn, as well as – similarly to Chinese proverbs (*yanyu*) or idiomatical expressions (*chengyu*) – manifesting speaker's level of erudition in the Nuosu-Yi culture. Many day-to-day situations are ritualized through language, which tends to touch upon things in a courteously indirect way – such as greeting of the guest by an expression "you must have lost your way" (*gga yot la*), for which the standard answer would be "[no,] I came straight here" (*ggax zie*). Visits without previous arrangements are usually followed by guest requesting the master of the house to put a dog on a leash (*ke lo da*), and holding it when leaving (*ke ssip da*). Many of the actions are "done" through speech, especially when handing an item to someone while uttering *chuop* – a verbal indicator of giving –, followed by the receiver's *kuop* signalling the reception. From these situations, the emphasis of reciprocity – also in a sense that one utterance is followed by another one – is evident. Many expressions are locally conditioned – an identical expression can habitually mean something else in Shypnra dialect of Xitddop Ladda, and Shypnra-Yynuo mixture of Vyttuo Lurkur: "*op nge xi*" means "at this very moment" in the former, and "how is that possible?" in the latter. Naturally, Nuosu-Yi features many loans from Chinese. To name a few significant ones used daily: *chexzy* (*chezi* – "a car"), *diepyyr* (*dianying* – "a movie"), *gachap* (*ganchang* – "to go to a marketplace"), *jieshat* (*jieshang* – "on the street", or "to go on the street"), *jiep* (*jia* – "fake"), *fat* (*fa* – "to send" or "to issue"), and *zytjie* (*ziji* – "myself," with Nuosu-Yi equivalent also in existence). Lawson (2017, p. 37) recounts 19th Century origins of some other loanwords. Many of these served as a hint of ruptures and/or reconciliations between the Nuosu-Yi world articulated in their mother tongue, and the local dialects of Mandarin. Oftentimes, it was this contrast between Nuosu-Yi expressions and those in the *lingua franca* of the whole PRC that proved crucial my understanding of the views of my research partners.

As for written Nuosu-Yi language, I strived to improve it since 2014, with the ability getting significantly better in August 2018 when I was able to read more than a half of the glyphs in the scriptures present in the hands of the Shimazi Marketplace *bimox*, and peaking in 2020,

when I had close to no problems of directly read anything written in the standardized script. I kept the practice of reading aloud as the means of establishing rapport with my partners in dialogue. In this way, apart from the mediation, my written and spoken Nuosu-Yi language skills served mostly as an ice-breaker and a trigger of my co-authors' curiosity towards me and my research since it was never on a level to have a lengthy conversation across the Nipmu's dialects.

I found the experience of previously working as a translator between Chinese, Czech, and English – with all its parallels to the ethnographic research – instrumental for my research practice. During the last decade, I translated everything from poetry to the technical descriptions of the factory assembly lines. Therefore, I am aware of the fact that no translation has a final reading. As Rorty (2009) points out, "final" words carry intrinsic doubt about their finality (p. 469-470). The opposite of such a stance is then the looming danger of "common sense" which I tried to avoid. Especially the journalistic writings on Nipmu and the Nuosu-Yi are currently thoroughly sodden by it, unreflexively using some dichotomies such as "tradition vs. modernity" or just notions of backwardness of Nipmu (see Jin, 2017). "Like translation," Crapanzano (1986) maintained that "ethnography is also a somewhat provisional way of coming to terms with the foreignness of languages – of cultures and societies. The ethnographer does not, however, translate texts the way the translator does. He must first produce them" (p. 51). The language environment of Nipmu along with my ethnographic practice complicated this double discursivity – "two assemblages of presuppositions – those of the analyst or current academic practice and those of the people under investigation" (Hobart, 2015a, p. 2) –, making it even more plastic and, at certain moments, hard to fathom. In the beginning, my inability to communicate fluently just in Nuosu-Yi seemed like a disadvantage. However, with my increasing ability in Nuosu-Yi, while maintaining significant parts of the conversation in the dialect of Sichuanese Mandarin, this setup proved very productive, because the ritualists increasingly arrange their life in Latbbu Oprro around the local dominant languages, which led to interesting permutations between the two languages. The amalgam fleshed out much more about how the *bimox* live in the contemporary Nipmu with additional layers of complexities, which I had to compile into yet another language – the language of anthropology – which I learned through reading anthropological texts. Without the ability to "talk anthropologically" (Swancutt & Jiarimuji, 2018, p. 132) – a skill which I partially obtained through the saturation of readings, many of which I read at the "field" – I lacked the self-confidence to even start writing. The specific "languages" of discipline(s) –

the “disciplinary literacy” (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2012) –, use all the other languages as a tool for written work’s becoming.

3.4 Validity and Truth

Relation to the truth, objectivity, and validity – the standard requirements for a piece of academic work to be acceptable – are often thought as achieved through the various designs of saturation. It is usually defined as a state when the research has reached the point of no new emergence of themes (Fusch & Ness, 2015, p. 1409), theories or even data. Widely and often commonsensically applied to any qualitative research, saturation – remarkably originating in the specific ontology of grounded theory (Saunders et al., 2018) – is often seen as the “gold standard” of qualitative research. It is a synonym for discontinuation, closing to the data collection and/or analysis (p. 1894). Walker’ (2012) review of the concept finds it embedded in research “in many different ways throughout all of the various methods” (p. 40). However, these occurrences always ended up being assumptions of “no new topics” and “repetitiveness.” Saunders et al. (2018) summarize that the saturation and its implications for the qualitative research are problematic as they “lend itself to thinking in terms of a fixed point and a sense of ‘completeness’” (p. 1901). He and his colleagues suggest that if one needs to engage with the saturation, the question should not be “when the saturation occurred,” but rather “how much saturation is enough” (p. 1901). Paradoxically, “[d]etermining that further data collection or analysis is unnecessary on the basis of what has been concluded from data gathered hitherto is essentially a statement about the unobserved (...) based on the observed” (p. 1903). This often unthought loophole poses a problem when dealing with permutations of fluidity innate to locations such as the Shimazi Marketplace. My decision to leave the field and cease with the “data” collection stemmed from everything else – most notably, internal institutional rules of my university – but the feeling that the data was saturated, and that the answers of my research partners were repetitive. On the contrary, in my opinion, the repetition and redundancy should bother the researcher with the question of whether s/he still engages in qualitative research, or unconsciously switched to the verbal, quantitative questionnaire. The field – and especially the dynamic environment such as Shimazi Marketplace – constantly keeps giving new variations and permutations of the situated practices. Therefore, the feeling that there is “nothing new to discover” would not indicate saturated research but rather incapability of the analyst to address these open-ended processes.

Bakhtin maintains that "we cripple ourselves unnecessarily by seeking truth in a hypothetical, static state of Being" (Emerson, 1996, p. 117). On the contrary, he deems "true," in photographic terms, only the negative of such perception, "only that which cannot be isolated and scientifically 'repeated' under controlled, identical conditions" (p. 118). Likewise, inhabiting the core of their concept of rhizome based on the philosophy of multiplicity, Deleuze and Guattari (2005) maintain that "[t]here is no longer a tripartite division between a field of reality (the world), and a field of representation (the book) and a field of subjectivity (the author)" (p. 23). The problem dwells in the nature of the language. The purpose of language "is not to *mean* or communicate meaning but to function and, especially, to enforce order, for example, to create dualisms" (St. Pierre, 2017, p. 1085, italics in original). To address this problem, Deleuze and Guattari "reject the privileged signifier, which represents the signified, and thus installs interpretation and representation in language" (p. 1086). In short, there is a tension between various layers of individual imagination, the ways how are these images expressed through language, and what is this expression's relation to something imagined as "reality." Bamo Qubumo (2004b) in her folkloristic research observed that the relationship between what had been recorded, and the original language and wording of the performance depends on the way of researcher's involvement in the whole practice (p. 147-148). In other words, through textualization and standardization, the original oral form takes a very distant shape called "academic work" (p. 148). Her views are resonating with those of Mark Hobart (1996), who states that the "textualization (...) transforms" (p. 4), and that the (con)textualization gives birth to blocks of culture, tradition, and history (Hobart, 2000a).

The notion of truth is often connected to a practice of "making sense." The sense is then "only the *formal condition of possibility* of truth" (Voss, 2013, p. 3, italics in original – citing Deleuze, 1990, p. 18). Deleuze was inspired by the stance of Nietzsche (1968), who mused: "'Truth' is (...) not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end" (p. 298). Similarly, nonsense and sense are no longer a binary opposition but are co-present to one another within a discourse (Voss, 2013, p. 21 – citing Deleuze, 1990, p. 107). With Nietzsche's conception of sense and truth being related to forces (Voss, 2013, p. 10), Deleuze (1995) maintains that "we always have as much truth as we deserve in accordance with the sense of what we say" (p. 154). Sense and truth remain detached, as the sense of the proposition does not tell us anything about its truth-value (Voss, 2013, p. 22). Therefore, while "sense" is constituted in the problem or the idea, the truth is the limit of the

production of the sense. Here, the limit is understood as something "continuously approached, but never reached" (p. 11). This statement is emblematic of my whole text and language games. Although I do use propositions of judgment, interpretations, explanations, and structure, limits of these techniques should be addressed in a reverse direction. Even these are still to some extent latently present in the text, I strive to distance from their limits in favour of the assemblage writing (Hanley, 2019). To sum up, truths are "always partial, and knowledge always 'situated' (...), produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, at particular times" (MacLure, 2013, p. 167). The research does not inherently make sense but should be understood as "an ongoing practice of *making* sense" (p. 180, italics in original), making in terms of actively acting upon the world – practices of crafting and putting together.

Addressing Derrida's usage of *aporia* concerning researcher's responsibility, Koro-Ljungberg (2010) advises the researchers about the vital role of decision-making: "The credibility of research or findings might have more to do with choices researchers make rather than established and documented procedures. (...) For the decision to be, initially, researchers *must not know what to do next*" (p. 607, italics mine). Similarly, Feyerabend (1993) observes that science – in his case physics, but it could be applied to the science in general – needs a violation of methodological assumptions to advance further (p. 261). Koro-Ljungberg (2008) rejects the binaries in favour of the multiplicity by stating that the goal of researchers "might include disabling existing binaries, such as good research and bad research and science and nonscience, as well as the separation between knowers and the known, by referring to the *situated* theories, experiences, and testimonies of ourselves and those who we accept and trust" (p. 988, italics mine).

The multiplicity of perception stems from the pluralism in the sense of researcher's positionality, critical subjectivity (Lincoln, 1995, p. 280, 283), flexibility, collaboration with her or his participants instead of their objectification (Herold, 2000; Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 987), the polyvocality (Chilisa, 2012, p. 173) emanating from the text, the responsibility (along with decision-making) towards the partners in dialogue (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010) and signature for her or his claims, along with the non-reliance on the search for the "truth" in favour of the viewpoints' diversity stemming from the dialogic exchanges. My research endeavour is a performative series of speech-cum-writing acts possessing clearly defined stances towards concepts (of saturation, making sense, theorization and methodology). It is in unison with a clear articulation of where I am coming from and to where I am taking this,

with honest intention. Its objective was not to uncover an external truth, it aimed to palpate possibilities. The validity then dwells within this "coherent chaos" which links together the genealogy of knowledge, theoretical and methodological orientations, and the evidence-revealing raw tellings.

3.5 Positionality

Jupp (2006) defines reflexivity as "the process of monitoring and reflecting on all aspects of a research project from the formulation of research ideas through to the publication of findings and, where this occurs, their utilization" (p. 258). While this chapter until now strived to integrate the methodological reflexivity into the conceptualization of the research methods which I sought to cobble together with my research partners, now I shift its focus on introspection and epistemology. Bourdieu suggests that before the researcher delves into studying others, he must perform epistemic reflexivity (Hancock & Garner, 2009, p. 159). Such reflexivity should be self-critical but not narcissistic (Bourdieu, 2004), uncovering researcher's point of departure (epistemological as well as geographical), relationship to the world, preassumptions, biases, and way of treating others. All these factors govern all words and deeds without even unfolding as spectacle (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 52). After addressing and reflecting on a personal history, it is essential to realize, as Hobart (2000b, p. 235) summarizes Collingwood's (1946) take on the history, that "reevaluating one's understanding of past actions and processes changes oneself, one's understanding and what one understands or knows about." The researcher can engage in a dialogic relationship only when s/he accepts and acknowledges her or his personality, recognizes her or his placement in the world, and affixes a personal signature to her or his acts and experience (Emerson, 1996, p. 109, 116).

I was born in the capital of socialist Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the '80s. Mostly originating in Moravia, coming from various backgrounds and pursuing different careers, my family members encountered different fates under the Communist regime. The family history, as well as the interpretations of the country's history, undoubtedly left a deep imprint in my ideological orientation today. I feel all offshoots of the so-called communism and socialism to be discredited and harmful approaches to state governance and a significant constraint to the everyday life of a person. Such preassumption inevitably influences how I approach the field and how I designed my inquiry into the problems I wish to address.

When I started being interested in ethnic groups of China, I consumed Western, mainly American academic literature on the topic. These depicted minorities as oppressed not only by

the Chinese state but in multiple cases, even by Han-Chinese individuals, who were more or less depicted as the primary agents of the state. Psychologically, even unconsciously, I tended to side with the minority ethnic groups against the Chinese state and Han-Chinese in general. This caused some of the *minzu* members to perceive me as their advocate against the chauvinistic Han. My position was somewhat a paradoxical mix of the East-European anti-socialist/communist/collectivist attitude with the overtones of support of the grassroots ethnic nationalism, all combined with a variety of the (non-)official Chinese state versions of history and ethnicity.

During my B.A. and M.A. studies, I was trained mostly as a historian of ancient, medieval, and modern China. Entering the discipline of social sciences, at the beginning of my Ph.D. I found it hard to contest the "historian's thinking," and in the following months and years, I had to reevaluate my understanding of both fields. My anthropological turn with all the theoretical and methodological orientations, which loomed above my orientation towards history already for some time, was put in motion by Stevan Harrell's (2001c) observation that "there are too many anthropologists and not enough historians studying ethnic relations in China" who "tend not to be respectful of written sources in the Chinese and Yi languages because they do not have time to read enough of them" (p. 5). From then on, I started to incline more towards anthropology, with a strong background as a historian.

Delving further into personal history, I have to uncover yet another layer. Even though the Czech Republic does not officially have a colonial history – apart from the fantasies performed on its own landscape through "Czech tramping" to which I was exposed through my childhood while dwelling in our family cottage on the confluence of the Vltava and Sázava rivers –, in the past decade, my approach towards the "subjects" showed traits of Western (post-)colonialism and arrogance. I have spent my early youth in front of a computer screen, playing role-playing games. At the beginning of the '00s, I abandoned the virtual worlds and started travelling in the "real" one, possibly as a form of early-adulthood rite of passage (Shaffer, 2004). Interestingly, my way of mobility could be seen as replicating the patterns of role-playing computer games. I was not going to explore and engage. Instead, I thought I am going to discover and, to a certain extent, perform personalized conquests. When I started to be interested in ethnic groups in general, I tended not to see them as people trying to live their lives, but as exoticised objects for "discovery." I thought that the fact I hold a university degree and possess sufficient knowledge stemming from the acknowledged academic sources, I understand them better than they understand themselves. I saw myself as

the revivalist who comes from afar to "save" the perishing culture and has to pass (or return) the long-lost vast knowledge or tradition to the miserable people forming ethnic communities, who do not even know who they are and how to live their lives properly. Although somewhat reminiscent to Czech National Revival during the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the main difference was that I did not wish to "save" my own culture, but one of the others. Remarkably, there are still academic works claiming to, for example, "save the Hmong civilization" (see Lee, 2015, p. xxii). In this particular case, the research participants tracked the work down and through the internet challenged the author (even on the book-selling website), accusing her of false claims, and sparking a controversy related to similar approaches. Strangely, my understanding of "disappearance" of cultures came from the internalization of texts of Marxist-Leninist ethnology with functionalist and PRC-specific overtones, specifically the localized version of Marxist historical materialism. I kept cherishing my perception even though I had an example of the Czech culture, which was once destined to assimilation, yet it never disappeared. I thought I knew what the "endangered other" was going to say even before uttering a single word. In many cases, I did not listen because I thought their opinions are just not plausible and infused with propaganda, but I kept silent about this when talking to them. This relationship between me and the "other" was narcissistic. In a personal conversation with Dr Anne Jarrigeon, she told me that for the anthropologist, "it is hard not to be a tourist" – a notion to which I can relate almost unconditionally. To "not be a tourist" – the "adventurous anthropologist with tenure in mind (...) no more or less self-interested than the tourist who wants an exotic selfie for Instagram" (Ochota, 2017) –, must be a fundamental starting point of any anthropological inquiry.

If I would perceive my previous engagement as a research endeavour (which I did to a certain extent back then), then it could be hardly considered as non-problematic in relation to research ethics. Being "a field of moral philosophy dealing with the standards by which behaviour should be regulated," and especially when seen through the lens of research practice as "rules, standards or guidance on what is and is not acceptable practice" (Sumner, 2006, p. 96), I would fail for not treating the people that enter the field of my gaze as equals. I unwittingly placed myself above them. Kuhn (1970, p. 175-210) argues that scientists as practitioners of a scientific speciality organizing themselves to guilds where they act as producers and validators of scientific knowledge. Regarding the craft and how I am pursuing it – before and during the "official" fieldwork –, I gradually realized that I am not different from my research partners. I can be considered living an ephemeral, "migrant" way of life

(although Caucasians are usually called “expats”): during the last decade, I lived in seven different places in Prague, four in Chengdu, three in Latbbu Oprro and at least eight in Hong Kong. I turned from part-time to full-time “research professional-to-be” – a label that includes an aspiration to be a “transmitter” of knowledge and heritage of my field(s) of study. I am a practitioner of the craft, a vocation, and I am by no means better or more knowledgeable than the (Shimazi) *bimox*. Through the operationalization of these pre-fieldwork self-reflections during the research process, I gradually (and naturally) found my way to – as Evans-Pritchard stipulated – mind my manners (Hobart, 2019, p. 10).

In a research-related mode, I see myself as a bricoleur. Lévi-Strauss (1966) assigns to the bricoleur a role of a dabbler, addressing himself “to a collection of oddments left over from human endeavours, that is, only a subset of the culture” in opposition of engineer, who can “question the universe” (p. 19). Derrida (2005 [1967]) then breaks this dichotomy by pointing out that the engineer, seen as “the one to construct the totality of his language, syntax, and lexicon,” presuming an “absolute origin of his discourse,” is a myth (p. 360). Deleuze and Guattari (2000) see the bricoleur as a schizophreniac (p. 7), who “goes crazy in misguided process” (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 681). Bricolage is inescapably connected to ambiguity. Bricolage “highlights the relationship between a researcher’s ways of seeing and the social location of his or her personal history,” it is “grounded in an epistemology of complexity,” promotes active rather than passive approach to the method (p. 324), seeks “sidestepping monologic forms of knowledge” (p. 326) and is process-sensitive (p. 333). Bricolage’s association with ambiguity defines my relationship to Nuosu-Yi academic writing. Even though I often argue against Nuosu-Yi academics, simultaneously, I find many of their viewpoints particularly inspiring. The dialogicity of this relationship then dwells in the fact that without their viewpoints, the birth of my text would be hardly possible. Bricolage is a tangle of relations *happening* and *being made* in between of researcher, his co-authors and all other utterances – naturally including those coming from academia – permeating the environment. Different from conceptualization of bricolage by Lévi-Strauss, my understanding replaces structure with fluidity. Bricolage is provisional, always containing potential to be shaped differently through the inclusion of differently situated utterances. I as a bricoleur originating from Eastern Europe – “Qikep’s capital of Buplage” – I stand somewhere between my own self, Nuosu-Yi state-sponsored academia, and various ritualists, equipped with some insider’s skills – constantly negotiating and revisiting my own position.

4. *Bimox* and the Exotic Other: Narrations of the Self

The extant works directly dealing with the *bimox* identity are not polyphonic texts. Instead, they seem to follow the Chinese tradition of exemplary biographies of outstanding personalities (e.g., Kang, 1995) or of a model, knowledgeable and old *bimox* (e.g., Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990). Both these approaches are rooted in didactics and unification, rather than diversity and subjectivity. Pack (2011) suggests that life history is constructed in a dialogue between a researcher and the participant. Hence, it is a collaborative, dialogic project. During my engagement with Nipmu and the research partners, I had a valuable opportunity to be seen as the "exotic other." On Shimazi Marketplace, a significant part of conversations concerned my otherness. Making this a two-way process, I followed the trajectories of research partners' questions and inquired into their lives with the same amount of curiosity. The way the *bimox* presented their "self" to me differed according to the situation, location, and differently clustered audience. In other words, the *bimox* told me different things when in a group, alone only with me, or with a presence of some of my friends and relatives. The conditions during which we put together their life piece by piece significantly differed. On the marketplace, in gated communities, rural homes, or a humble room on the fringes of the urban proper of Latbbu Oprro – these were the places where I followed them, or where they followed me.

If I have to call these encounters a "recruitment method," it then mostly resembled the snowball sampling, per gradual acquaintance with the *bimox* through their mutual relationships. Bernard (2002) sees snowball sampling as an excellent method to approach hard-to-reach people. The *bimox* on a public marketplace were certainly not hard to reach when speaking about physical accessibility. However, apart from the initial mutual curiosity before preceding the ice-breaking process, there were mutual suspicions and timidity which made us seem to be far away from each other even though we sat right next to one another. This tension relaxed after the locals inquired into my life and through my answers built their image of me and my ways of life as, from their perspective, exotic other. Furthermore, before engaging with the Shimazi ritual practitioners, I had to surmount another dominant bias which arose from a relationship with one of my best friends – Jjixke H. He is a considerably young *bimox* embracing urban lifestyle while simultaneously adhering to his way of interpreting the tradition. Jjixke H. did not frequent the marketplace. However, he engaged with many individuals or collectives directly condemning the activities of the Shimazi ritual practitioners through his personal network. Soon after knowing Jjixke H., I unreflexively internalized his

viewpoint that the marketplace *bimox* are not genuine. Only after the re-evaluation of my stands and careful critical examination of accessible sources, I was able to reconsider my standpoint and design the current research project featuring those I potentially silenced before. Since then, my approach also differed from the usual, administratively enforced practice of Western researchers in China, who are usually required to depend on local colleagues (see Bamo, A., Harrell & Ma, 2007). The locals designate research participants for their overseas counterparts, tell the research participants to conduct research with these guests, and constantly mediate between the two sides. Naturally, such an approach makes a strong proposition for many important variables. Academic gatekeepers give their guest-colleague the best possible research participants according to their best conscience as well as in the best interest of their own research. This is how the research omits, for example, voices of those perceived as "ordinary *bimox*" in favour of the revered "big *bimox*." This then leads to hierarchizing tendencies through promulgations such as the "only especially talented text-reading shamans gain enough recognition to receive an ongoing flow of invitations for follow-up ceremonies" (Swancutt, 2012b, p. 58), which are not incorrect *per se*, but might not always fully reflect the situated practices. With the plausibility of the exclusive position of "especially talented ritualists" – practically silencing and overwriting all those who are not seen as such – it is then surprisingly easy to put one of many Nuosu-Yi interpretations concerning the *bimox* frequenting the Shimazi Marketplace – those who allegedly "has come to act as a type of *minjian/minzu xinliyisheng* ('folk psychologist') in this public function" (Kraef, 2014, p. 169, italics in original) – as representative of a whole group of diverse individuals, potentially (yet probably unwittingly) causing various degrees of harm to every single one of them. By not relying on academic gatekeepers, I was able to enter a different world of the *bimox*.

In this chapter, I am introducing my research partners. For the sake of clarity, I divided them into three different categories. It is not to be misunderstood as a gauge of the "importance" of each respective research partner. Instead, it should be seen as a provisional arrangement to show a degree of presence and intensity of each research partner's voice within this particular research project. The life stories of the ritualists set a context for their practices which will be discussed in the following "data chapters." This chapter focuses on the reflection of the ritualists' relation to me. This relation is difficult to fathom, as it is anything but static. Using the "shifting goalposts" of mutual perception – oscillating between semi-unknown other, professional researcher and a trusted friend – like a painting brush, the result is a situated

account which might have been very different if the conditions of our engagement played out differently. Speaking about staticity, many of the stories were taken out from a distant memory, which is, again, fluid and transformative according to the present context. Crouch (2009) maintains that "in the doing, moments of memory are recalled, reactivated in what is done, and thus, while memory may be drawn upon to signify, it is made anew, drawn through performance, and thus flows in time with the other components of performance." Furthermore, he observes that it is "less that memory is performed, than it is 'in performance,'" concluding that while "individuals do not simply remember by picking the memory up momentarily, they return to it through performance and reform it" (p. 92). In the way this chapter unfolds and makes its presence in the following chapters, I hope that through remembering and reflecting on their life, the scriptural ritualists of Nipmu bring the reader into their ways of becoming as unique personages *vis-à-vis* the rigid representations utilised for various purposes.

4.1 Core Research Partners

4.1.1 Jjixke H.

"I can tell you the story of the *bimox*!" Such was probably the third or fourth sentence Jjixke H. told me after the necessary introductory phrases when we serendipitously met on the late-summer day of 2014 in one of the bars dotting the Lake-River Street in downtown Latbbu Oprro. Originally, I was there to see the performance of a friend whom I knew until that time only through the internet. Accompanied by the Nuosu-Yi traditional as well as popular music, the whole evening ended drowned in a series of toasts within a large group of people. Those countless empty beer bottles almost made me forget how I got back home that night. From then on, Jjixke H. established himself as a guide in the world of *bimox*, and, by extension, in Lipmu Moggux – the "Homeland of Bimo" – the native place of *bimox* Jjixke H. I thus became a "captive guest" (Swancutt, 2012a) of him, since he honorifically granted me his surname (accompanied with a name, it constituted a birthday gift) signifying affiliation with the Jjixke clan, and, therefore, becoming somewhat of Jjixke H.'s disciple. Listening to his stories was, indeed, like reading texts – be it the scriptures or books about the Bimo Culture. Apart from him being born in Lipmu Moggux, where most of the *bimox*-oriented research was taking place, there were different reasons for that.

During the following year, I repeatedly visited Jjixke H.'s village in Above the Sun Township located in a considerably remote, rural part of Lipmu Moggux. Exploring the hills around the hamlet, and accompanying every journey by the folk songs in the local Yynuo dialect, the

bimox showed me hundreds-years-old rock carving allegedly made by one of his ancestors. We walked through the old forests, where the wet leaves constantly rubbed against our clothes, and feet often disappeared in soft, ever-damp moss. We also walked treks for several days across Shuonuo – the highland part of Lipmu Moggux – all the way to its administrative border with Gatlyp Mopbbo. Many stories from Jjixke H.'s life were attached to seemingly mundane places. According to him, these places also played a role in how he remembered the content of scriptures: "It is not as if the language would exist in my heart… Some are connected to some places which I remember from my childhood. This," he declamated *mosimu,* allegedly a sentence from the beginning of an overwhelming amount of scriptures pointed to a plant, "is in my brain connected with this small plant next to me. And from this point on it goes… All these things have a certain beginning. When I start with declamation, I can immediately picture a place or a thing. This is probably because when I was small, I was not polluted by other thoughts, so even if I wanted to, I can't forget this. It stays in my brain forever. Every time I read aloud these lines [from the scripture], it all constitute one road. Here it begins and it leads to another place. All those things I memorized back then exist along this road. Now, some of them are blurred. But when I start with declamation, they re-resurface. Some people can study this, they can go to study the characters, but I do not have to… It all comes together in my heart – as a journey." His remark, that his first word as an infant was not "mom" or "dad," but *bi,* sounded believable when narrated in such context. "From a relational perspective," Ingold (2002a) writes, "knowledge subsists in practical activities themselves, including activities of speaking. And just as to follow a path is to remember the way, so to engage in any practice is, at the same time, to remember how it is done." Ingold further talks about how, for example, hunters and gatherers "following in the paths of their ancestors as they make their way through the terrain, remember as they go along." The importance then lies in the process, which needs to go on, and not in precise replication of the past performance (p. 147).

Jjixke H. kept sowing similar insights, or fragment of his understanding, into my mind. It was almost one year later when me, the *bimox*, my future wife and two of our friends were sitting during an early-summer day in the Old Teahouse on the shore of Oprro Shupmop. While chain-smoking cigarettes and sipping the green tea grown around another lake at Gatlyp Mopbbo, Jjixke H. systematically recounted his remarkable life-story. He was born in the early '80s. "I do not know how my grandfather died. However, I heard that he was doing this large-scale ritual, but the state (*guojia*) saw this as a wasteful behaviour. So they dragged him

to the streets for the criticism (*pidou*)." His father was not allowed to attend school, so he secretly studied the *bimox* craft. He also saved a lot of scriptures by hiding them in a hard-to-reach place near their hamlet, which Jjixke H. showed me during one of our walks. Around the age of five or six – Jjixke H. was not sure, as the exact dating of one's birth is not a big concern among the Nuosu-Yi –, he started to study from his father. When the young apprentice reached the age of nine, his father passed away. Therefore, he became a disciple of his father's another disciple, the male cousin on the male side (*tangge*). "The one we met in Lipmu Moggux," he remarked, looking my direction, and adding that now, this person is a member of local China's Meigu Yi Bimo Culture Research Center – an important fragment of the whole network of relationships, which explains the relationship between Jjixke H.'s attitude towards the "Bimo Culture," as well as the way this concept is constructed with its roots in the strain of the Lipmu Moggux *bimox* practice.

"Then we went everywhere – Jjiepggurx Galo, Vyttuo Lurkur, Njitla Buxte, Axhuo Tenzy, Lipmu Juojjop. This is called *bijyx* – to go far and to do a *bimox* [rituals], but also to learn things," Jjixke H. demarcated a territory (see Bamo, A., 2007c, p. 204) of his clan's *bimox* practice. I asked whether the *bimox* could universally learn from each other, to which Jjixke H. answered "not necessarily," and emphasized that they only visited clans which were somewhat affiliated with them. A breakthrough for Jjixke H. came at the age of seventeen when he was grazing sheep. He allegedly realized that kids in cities are going to schools, and he is still here, wearing the "big-bottom trousers (*da kujiao*)," and that he did not even have shoes. Meanwhile, an older brother of his teacher – the cousin, who meanwhile also lost his father – was already a *lingdao* in the Lipmu Moggux county capital. Already able to conduct rituals by himself, Jjixke H. took a truck for five *yuan* – an amount which he considered expensive at that time – to the county city, where the *lingdao* wanted him to perform a ritual of blessings for his family. Jjixke H. was astonished. "The kids there were like Han-Chinese kids – wearing all those nice clothes," he told himself, refusing to go back. However, to find a job, people told Jjixke H. that he should be literate in Chinese, which he was not at that time. He was eligible only for odd jobs or seasonal work.

Against the odds, and through his clan connections, Jjixke H. was able to secure a paid job in one of the local newly-built hydroelectric power plants. His main qualification was that he was able to conduct the auspicious rituals, and the leader of the power plant, a Nuosu-Yi himself, hired him. There he gradually learned basic Sichuanese and came to close contact with the Han-Chinese. He exchanged his *da kujiao* for jeans, wore shoes, and started paying

attention to grooming. In this way, Jjixke H.'s narration comes almost as a kitschy-ideal example of the PRC's "Development of the West" plan. "After three years, there was a lot of things going on around the Bimo Culture," Jjixke H. pointed out another milestone of his life. Suddenly, a lot of people – academics as well as pop-song figures as far as from Taiwan – started pouring into Lipmu Moggux. Jjixke H. took a part in a singing contest, where he allegedly mixed his *bimox* chants into known songs, which gained him a spotlight, and later a place in the local artistic troupe, which performed for academics as well as for the *lingdao*. Resigning from the job at the power plant, he joined the cultural bureau in Lipmu Moggux for the next six years. During this time, he got also involved in the riots of the Jjixke clan, which flared up after a grudge towards the local police (that is – people from different clans, and/or Han-Chinese officials) over the mistreatment of one of the Jjixke clansmen. Over twenty thousand people across Lipmu Moggux got involved in this, and many received severe punishments. Jjixke H. somehow avoided the repercussions.

In 2008, he took an opportunity to go to Beijing, the capital of the whole country. Initially, he worked as a cook in the local Nuosu-Yi restaurant. He was also engaged in the movie industry and certain music circles. In the end, he made himself a broker on construction projects, but due to some unfortunate development, he had to give up this position. Most importantly, he got acquainted with one of the most famous Nuosu-Yi poets after saving his mother's life through a healing ritual. After this, he allegedly became a legend among Beijing's Nuosu-Yi community. Unfortunately, Jjixke H.'s seemingly thriving career was interrupted by his eldest brother's kidney failure, which followed a poisoning during an attempt to heal his diabetes through an unlicenced, "miraculous" medicine. Eventually ending in exhausting all Jjixke H.'s financial resources, his brother's misfortune ended by his passing, which led Jjixke H. to return to Latbbu Oprro and our eventual encounter in the bar.

Towards his late thirties, Jjixke H. presented himself as an extraordinary example of a knowledgeable young *bimox*. "They were all surprised that such young person could do the *bimox* rituals" was his frequent catch-phrase, which debunked the dogmatic stance of the Nuosu-Yi, that the knowledgeable *bimox* should be an old, almost Confucian-like figure. Although being very traditional in terms of how the *bimox* vocation should be practiced, Jjixke H. performed in a way that would persuade his audience – me as well as anyone else – that the *bimox* should stick to the principles, preferably those of the Jjixke clan, while the age of the practitioner is not really important. He presented himself as such, despite his *bimox*-related skills kept gradually fading away as he got more and more involved in the local

culture-related politics, which were closely connected to the emergence of concrete policies. He kept admitting that his knowledge of characters is much weaker than before. The ritualist blaming it on the lack of the ritual practice and increasingly necessary alcohol intake during various work-related banquets. Relationships-wise, another feature of Jjixke H.'s attunement was his ambivalence towards the Shimazi Marketplace. On one hand, officially, he refused to see the *bimox* practicing in the marketplace as "genuine." Oftentimes, he criticized them for the fortune-telling and other "unorthodox" practices allegedly shed a bad light on the *bimox* craft as such. On the other hand, however, some of his outstanding *bimox* relatives were daily present in the marketplace – practicing on the spot, or being contracted to houses of their clients in Latbbu Oprro and beyond. Jjixke H. increasingly criticized me for engaging with the Shimazi ritualists. Simultaneously, however, he kept going there for chats, and even for advice. Except for our initial visit which happened when we were setting off for our Lipmu Moggux trip, on every instance he went there when I was not around. In this way, along with our long-term friendship, and him serving as a gatekeeper to a particular strain of *bimox*-ness, Jjixke H. played a significant role in my initial understanding of the *bimox* practice as well as Bimo Culture. Before he engaged with the cultural bureau of the Latbbu Oprro, Jjixke H. inclined more to the practice. Over time, however, he was worked on making his voice within the Bimo Culture concept heard. Even though Jjixke H. did not openly practice on Shimazi, he was always present in the background, and many of the Shimazi ritual practitioners knew about him – some vaguely, mostly through his involvement in the local politics as well as popular culture, while the others very vividly, since they were in a close relationship with him.

4.1.2 Yyhxox

During my early "fieldwork" visit to Shimazi in the late February of 2018, Yyhxox, a lightly-built, cheerful, Adur-speaking man in his early forties, silently overheard my conversation with Lalyr (see 4.3). Lalyr and I were familiar with each other from before, mostly through random encounters around the marketplace, and mostly through courtesies, which often took the form of random small talk. Once I bumped into Lalyr in the Latbbu Oprro city centre. That day, the sun was already burning as if it would be the middle of summer – typical weather for Latbbu Oprro, but quite special in the context of Sichuan Province. During this visit, Lalyr came to me with greetings. Curious about the topics of our conversation, a small crowd of individuals gradually surrounded us. Yyhxox was one of these. As most of the people around, after finding out who am I and where do I come from, he asked me a straightforward question: "What are you doing here?" I replied that I am trying to understand

what it takes to be a *bimox* around here. Yyhxox's immediate reaction was to identify me with another "foreigner," who was known around here by an honorific Nuosu-Yi name Hxietlie Muga, and who lived in Latbbu Oprro for many years. Muga and I knew each other from attending Nuosu-Yi classes at the local college. Therefore, I know that he already left Latbbu Oprro. Our conversation that day ended up with the obligatory "pleased to meet you" (*hxiemat kat jjy kat* – literally, to be "overjoyed in one's heart"), during which I introduced myself also by my Jjixke-related name.

The next day when I arrived in the Shimazi, Yyhxox made a welcoming gesture prompting me to sit next to him – on one of his stools, which he hid in the heap of the rubbish next to the debris of the old house right in the middle of Shimazi. Although my honorary clan affiliation probably might have played some role in other people being more or less willing to interact with me, this was not the case for Yyhxox. Although being a timid person who needed a bottle of beer to be able to start a conversation with those he was not so close with, towards me he was always very open and curious. Apart from me, he engaged on a deeper level with many local Adur speakers (one of whom was Biqu, see 4.3), and Ddisse (see 4.2.3) – Shypnra speaker from Xitddop Ladda – whom he respected for his extensive knowledge of not only *bimox* craft but also the Nuosu-Yi "culture" (*bburw*). Most of Yyhxox's clients were also Adur – mostly from Njitla Buxte and Yyxshy Pujjit – but he also attracted people from different areas of Nipmu. With some of them, he had to use Mandarin as *lingua franca*, because their Nuosu-Yi dialects allegedly differed too much.

Yyhxox spent hours, even days asking me questions about daily life back in my homeland. Later, he was very meticulous in explaining everything about me and our research to people who happened to join our conversations. Yyhxox's usual place was close to the side of the street dotted by the mud-brick and wooden buildings. He was often hiding from the sun in the shade of the roof overhangs. When the afternoon sun got milder, he resettled just opposite – to the middle of the rubble, where he enjoyed waning, but still warming sunrays. Apart from genuinely diligently gathering information about me, he often also shyly shared a very short-lived, narrow insights into his past. "I was too young, I liked to roam around," he often vaguely described his years outside of Nipmu – in Xi'an or Shandong Province – where he went for the seasonal work. "During one of these jobs, our boss did not pay us and just fled. Until this day, I am grateful to one Han-Chinese roadside grocery store owner, who helped us out," he recalled while turning to a darker side of his endeavours outside Nipmu. "I liked to gamble and drink. Therefore, I did not study well," he constantly downplayed his abilities to

be seen as a knowledgeable *bimox*. It took about three months when he invited me to his humble house, where he gradually kept uncovering the lineages of complexities that ran through his life in greater detail than in the marketplace. Yyhxox's narration started far – in times when a part of the Yyhxox clan split and formed another significant *bimox* clan – Shamat Qubi. "Originally, our clan branch came to Yyxshy Pujjit – a place where I was born –, from Xitddop Ladda. They needed to leave over a land dispute," he started his story, while we were eating delicious lamb in a room illuminated only by a dim lightbulb hanging above our heads on a thin wire with insulation almost completely peeled off. "Look, my grandfather did not recognize a single character," Yyhxox surprised me. "He studied it from his younger sister's husband." I knew that Yyhxox clan was a prominent *bimox* clan, but I found such story – learning the lines by heart and without the knowledge of characters – quite unusual, only gradually realizing the importance of the utterance over text. "He often went like this: 'this-character-I-do-not-know, dear-demon-go-away-and-do-not-bother-me-and-I-will-not-bother-you,'" *bimox* mimicked his grandfather's skill, surfacing into a burst of laughter, and uncovering the complex relationship between orality and writing (Bender, 2019, p. xlv). "Nevertheless, people still sought his service." However, over a time, Yyhxox's grandfather managed to accumulate a substantial amount of scriptures. "I am already the 11th generation of ritualists. Where there were gaps [in *bimox* education], [clan] relatives – even those from afar – were sought for teaching the next generation."

Yyhxox emphasized that his clan branch had long-term experience with Chinese-language education. "My uncle – younger brother of my father (*dashu*) – is from Lipmu Juojjop. There is a place up from the Liberated Creek – it is called Jjitpu Ladda. This used to be a land of a native headman (*tusi*) who established a school there." Zeng (2012) writes about the Nuosu-Yi from Lipmu Juojjop who were in the 1930s hired as contract workers to build the airport in Latbbu Oprro. "Most of the workers came from there. Why?" Yyhxox posed a rhetorical question as he often liked to formulate his explanations this way. "Because most of the people could write their name [in Chinese characters]." When he was small, Yyhxox attended elementary school. "But my parents died when I was young. The tuition back then was twelve *yuan*. Even at this rate, later, we were not able to afford it. Times were really hard. I attended for a few years, but I did not finish the school," Yyhxox added self-apologetically.

While attending classes at school during the day, in the evening Yyhxox initially followed his father to study *bimox*. "I started when I was seven years old. But after one year, my father died, and so I studied with one of my clan members. I followed him for four years. Back then,

in the ‘80s, it was hard – there was no reward for your services, but you were obliged to help the people. The only reward was the sacrificial meat. Oh how I loved to eat meat,” Yyhxox exclaimed while remembering the thrill. “Often, I sat by my uncle’s side, observing. The ritual usually started at ten in the evening, and often took four to five hours. That meant the meat was ready sometime between two and three in the morning. Also, I had to do my homework. Often, I could not stay awake,” Yyhxox’s face suddenly looked serious. “Those who could afford it wanted to kill a sheep [during the ritual]. Then, they called their relatives [for the feast]. Oftentimes, however, there was not enough left. There were too many people and not enough meat. Those who did not have the money killed a chicken. That was far from enough! They let us eat more, but if I did, their kids would have nothing to eat. I felt so sorry for them, so I often did not eat. Back then, it was too hard,” Yyhxox kept emphasizing the difficulty of his childhood. “Now, every day we can eat meat. However, my oldest son does not like to eat meat, because his generation is so spoiled. They want the barbecued potatoes, and other things,” Yyhxox pointed out to snacks sold mostly at the gateway of each Latbbu Oprro’s schools.

One month later, after moving to another place, Yyhxox invited me to his home again, and we plunged back to the conversation which we did not finish on the previous occasion. Different from others who had no problem recounting their life history publicly – often emphasizing the good parts of it, which made them look good –, Yyhxox preferred to do it in private. I asked him, whether in the ‘80s the Nuosu-Yi spontaneously wanted to study the *bimox* craft. “No way! Back then, it was too difficult to be a *bimox*. Nobody wanted to study,” Yyhxox once again surprised me, picturing the craft as a sheer necessity, not a desire to supposedly revitalize the culture after two decades of political turmoil. “If we do not do this… If our family, my wife, kids, got sick, then they cannot be cured… The hospitals… Cannot have a cure without *bimox*,” the ritualist added. “Between the age of nine and sixteen, I knew everything! Then, I loved to roam, to drink… I forgot a lot. There was no other way (*mei banfa*),” Yyhxox added another of his favourite catch-phrases. Here it needs to be noted, that Yyhxox’s “everything” in terms of the Nuosu-Yi script counted as knowledge of the new “glyphobet” of 820 characters standardized in the ‘80s. In this way, Yyhxox surpassed his grandfather, who did not know a single character. Between 1998 and 2000, Yyhxox worked as a teacher on a local school in his township in Yyxshy Pujjit. “I earned some 160 *yuan* per month. In the end, the [Nuosu-Yi language] program just ended. They said that everybody already knows enough about the nationalities culture. From then on, the state (*guojia*) did not

pay attention to it," he said quite bitterly, following by a remark that under the current chairman, the country starts to treat the language and culture seriously again. Yyhxox's experience was reminiscent to Bamo Ayi's (2007c) observation that towards the 1990s, villagers started a campaign to teach the script in a village where many of its inhabitants were from *bimox* clans (p. 200). However, this practice increasingly faded away around the turn of the millennium.

"Later, I felt I did not cherish [my knowledge]… Now, some of them learned a lot by themselves and now they can make big money [by *bimox* rituals]. But I did not make it [this far]," Yyhxox touched one of the reasons for which he decided to overcome his timidity and practice in Shimazi. "I am there for four or five years already," Yyhxox added. He did not consider this being a "job" – rather a necessity, where an income is something additional. Yyhxox believed he is helping people. This sentiment seemed to be closely interconnected with the sense of obligation to practice the vocation, which always made him go back to the practice after periods of escape from his responsibilities. The amount of reward (*bixrre*; ch. *xinkufei*) for his services Yyhxox always left entirely upon the client to decide. Although this happened rarely, he was practicing even for people who were not able to pay him. Navigating his complex situation, and seeing himself as unemployed, he was still able to generate an income for himself and his family. At the same time, Yyhxox was very punctual in his understanding of how the ritual should be conducted.

One of Yyhxox's escapes from the obligation of being the *bimox* and serve the community was closely connected to the motivation for leaving rural Yyxshy Pujjit and resettle to Latbbu Oprro. "My grandfather was criticized for practicing the superstition (*mixin*) – he was publicly criticized (*pidou*). Mao then burned a lot of his books… Such a pity!" Yyhxox remembered the times with an expression which suggested a suppressed grievance. "Second time I lost the books, it was because of this Mentuhui," he switched from long-buried inherited memories to a reality of his current lack of scriptures. Mentuhui – literally "Society of the Gate Followers" – is a millenarian, Christianity-based movement with around a half-million followers. It gained its momentum in the second half of the 1990s. The followers were awaiting the end of the world. The sect allegedly fell apart due to the massive intervention of authorities (Heberer, 2007, p. 56-57; see also Vermander, 1999, p. 39). Yyhxox moved to Latbbu Oprro after he got married – for Nuosu-Yi quite late – aged twenty-eight. His wife suffers from a chronic illness. Even though Yyhxox did not disclose his wife's condition, based on the description, it could be epilepsy. The state health system did not help the couple,

so they resorted to any alternative method. Since his *bimox* practice was unable to better her condition, he tried to go with Mentuhui. “It happened approximately sixteen years ago. They told me: ‘If you would join Mentuhui, your wife would get better.’ They told me that if I believed this, everything will be alright. They wanted me to study with them. They knew I have books at home, they told me that it is in my own best interest not to believe this *bimox mixin*. That I should not practice it! And so this is how I lost another portion of books. In the end, I saw that I got deceived,” Yyhxox narrated, quite reluctant to explicitly add that it was him who burned the rest of the books which were passed on to him by his father and other relatives. Yyhxox stayed with the Mentuhui for approximately three months, after which he lost faith in the cult, and returned to his *bimox* practice. “They told me to pray, so the spaceship can come and take all us believers away. Well, I told them: ‘You go, I am staying!’”

While residing in Latbbu Oprro, Yyhxox had five children. His old house is still in Yyxshy Pujjit, but, as Yyhxox noted, he gave the land to his relative, and now the state is working on the “poverty relief” campaign (*fupin*), so the house would be very probably torn down and turned to a field. The rest of the village will get resettled closer to the main road. With no place to return, Yyhxox had no other way than staying in Latbbu Oprro, while his household registration (*hukou*) was still making him a permanent resident of Yyxshy Pujjit. Even though Yyhxox did not consider himself as a “knowledgeable” ritualist, when interacting with others, he exercised humbleness as well as consistency in his understanding of how the *bimox* craft should be pursued. An explanation for his adherence to the ways he believed are the only proper ones were deeply rooted in his past experience with powers beyond his control: “Once, when in the Shimazi, I had a bell which was passed on to me by my father,” said Yyhxox when I asked about the plausibility of bringing the ritual paraphernalia to the marketplace since I saw many ritualists were bringing theirs deliberately. “I got a bit drunk, the bell was already in my bag. Then, there were some of my distant relatives who made me do a *sunyit* ritual for them. I did that, but then, almost immediately, I got a message from my family that my son suddenly started to vomit. I knew I made a mistake, so I had to do a ritual to make it right… From then on, I know how dangerous [such impersonation] is.”

4.1.3 Jjixke V.

Paradoxically, I got to know Jjixke V. many years before I met him on Shimazi in person. He played a major role in a considerably well-known documentary movie about the *bimox*. This movie was intended to be an ethnographic piece of work. However, in the end, it turned more

into a eulogy of the mysterious and hard-to-reach group of people hidden in between ridges and ravines of Southwest China rather than an account of their everyday lives (see Kraef, 2014). I was astonished and surprised when I recognized his face among those frequenting Shimazi. Before our first conversation, I noticed that the front cover of one of the *Nuosu nyipsi tepyy* versions – a "manual" used for counting the auspicious days (*kutsi*) for various kinds of activities – featured Jjixke V.'s portrait.

When asked for the most reliable *bimox*, almost every non-ritualist individual acquainted with the social composition of Shimazi – vendors, loiterers, or people spending the whole days drinking and subsequently singing or openly shouting around here – pointed towards Jjixke V. or the spot where he usually sat. Symbolically, this spot was right in the centre of Shimazi. However, this position seemed to be rather coincidental, and should not be overestimated in a way that might lead, for example, to thinking that Jjixke V. himself was "the centre of Shimazi." Nevertheless, his credit in the "economy of ordeals" (Swancutt, 2012b) – "ongoing flow of invitations for follow-up ceremonies" (p. 58) – seemed to be among the highest, as he seemed to be always busy, on or off the marketplace.

In his late forties, and hailing from Lipmu Moggux's Big Bridge Township, Jjixke V. – as his clan surname already suggests – was related to Jjixke H. "Yes, I know him. He is quite young – around thirty, right?" he reacted, when I brought up this possible connection. It was quite late in the afternoon when we stroke our initial conversation. Most of the ritualists were already gone or were about to leave. "I just returned from Lipmu Moggux where I attended a meeting (*kaihui*)," Jjixke V. told me in Sichuanse Mandarin tainted with Yynuo intonation while taking off one layer of his clothes because of the temperature change between high-altitude region, the air-conditioned interior of a vehicle, and the Jianchang Valley. He wore a turban-like *uotie* hat on his head. At the same time, he was organizing the content of his canvas bag which consisted of a few, mostly photocopied scriptures, a couple of fortune-telling manuals, two pencils, and a black marker. Jjixke V. landed in the marketplace to check whether there is someone who would need his services. Finding only me, we started to talk.

Similarly to Jjixke H., and contrary to Yyhxox, Jjixke V. was very confident about his *bimox* skills. "I am a direct descendant of Apsy Latzzi," was the first thing he told me after I asked about his clan affiliation, naming also several *nzymop* who ruled Lipmu Moggux in the past. Apsy Latzzi served to Jjixke V. as a point of reference through which he legitimized his exclusive position among the Nipmu ritualists. His father allegedly saw the legendary, long-lost golden Apsy Latzzi's ritual quiver (*vyxtu*), which mysteriously disappeared after the

legendary *bimox*'s "scripture tower" (*Asu Laze cang jing lou*) collapsed during the 1950s when nobody took care of it. Jjixke V. went through similar training as his younger clansman Jjixke H. Following his father, whom he called "old man" (*laotour*) when talking in Sichuanese Mandarin to me, he started with the study when he was nine or ten years old. "I started with small rituals. From the age of twelve to thirteen, I studied the big rituals. When I was fifteen, I was ready to do the rituals all by myself." Jjixke V. presumably started to absorb the *bimox* knowledge right after the turning year of 1976, the *de facto* end of the Cultural Revolution. "Mao hated [the *bimox*]," he uttered bitterly, adding that his father was affiliated with Nationalists against the Communists. "Therefore, we did [the rituals] in the evening… However, in some places, [they were conducted] even during the day! You just must not leak [the information] out. In a circle of people whose heart was the same, it could have been done! But [in front of] those people who would snitch on us – especially the slaves – we could not do it. Meaning, we did it sneakily," the ritualist narrated his observations, presumably preceding his actual *bimox* training, pointing out the difficult relationship between the considerably freshly liberated bondservants who were often recruited from the kidnapped Han and other nationalities (Swancutt, 2012a, p. 107) to their former owners. "However, my family was not designated as landlords (*dizhu*). [The Communist Party with its campaigns] targeted mostly them – especially the headmen (*nzymop*) –, because they possessed a lot of silver ingots," he presented his view of events, which showed a direct relation to Leng Guangdian's description of the Nipmu before the "Liberation," when – governed loosely by Nationalists and tightly by the local warlords –, it became a proxy-area for various, even external power struggles (Ling, 1988).

"My father had seen it all [when it comes to ruling the party] – Nationalist or the Communist Party of China." I conversations with Jjixke V., I felt his bitterness when he talked about Mao Zedong. On the other hand, however, he did not feel bitter to the Communist Party as such, let alone the current leadership, which he continually praised. About twelve years ago, Jjixke V. served as the Party Secretary in one quite remote village of Lipmu Moggux. However, as he conveyed to me, the career of a politician was not for him. His self-esteem within the range of the *bimox* practice sharply contrasted with his timidity in other areas. Frequent banquets with a lot of alcohol consumption connected to his former profession were rather destructive to his mind and soul. As he pointed out, he needs to drink during some of the rituals. Therefore, he did not need to be soaked in alcohol all the time, as he did not enjoy drinking.

Nevertheless, Jjixke V. did not cut himself off from the officialdom entirely. “So it is official? Was it already publicly disseminated?” he asked me, quite surprisingly, when approximately two months after our first encounter I showed him an article in my smartphone. It stated that he became a national-level representative transmitter (*guojiaji daibiaoxing chuanchengren*) within CICHP, the highest rank within this system that one could reach. Not possessing a smartphone, and with no means of connecting to the internet, Jjixke V. borrowed my smartphone. With genuine interest, he slowly spelt through a short message followed by a table including his name, while scrolling the page up and down. At that very moment, it was apparent how proud he was. Not only he got to be honoured with this title, the fame would be equally bestowed upon his clan, and would also add to the legitimization of Lipmu Moggux as the “Homeland of Bimo.” A couple of days earlier, we both talked about the Yi Studies Conference – one of the abovementioned academic events taking part in Lipmu Moggux –, where Jjixke H. also played his role. Jjixke V. inquired whether I took part. After an explanation that at that time, I still had no idea Nipmu and Nuosu-Yi existed, he looked at me with a smirk. “Why there were not many other conferences afterwards?” I inquired. “It took many years to settle this [Homeland of Bimo] down. But now, the Lipmu Moggux is the centre for studying of the China-Yi Bimo Culture, right? There is this research centre now (*Nuosu nrytvat dde)*. There is no need for any other conference,” was his answer.

Being close to the official sources, Jjixke V. also closely observed the terminology by which his heritage was addressed. While Yyhxox often identified the ritual practice through the expression “superstition” (*mixin*) being widely used during the Cultural Revolution and surviving until now, Jjixke V. – internalizing the trends of the Nuosu-Yi academia – got enraged at every occasion someone pointed out the practice being *mixin*. He immediately pushed Yyhxox to use the correct expression: “Culture!” – *bbur w* in Nuosu-Yi, or *wenhua* in Chinese – he often stated firmly. One of the officially promulgated purposes of the status of a heritage transmitter is to provide a carrier of this title with an income, so s/he could stay in the countryside, and devote herself or himself to keep the cultural heritage alive. However, some of the obligations bound to this position are contradictory with this goal. Namely, a stipulated attendance on the meetings, cultural events promoting the area, local businesses, etc. Paradoxically, these obligations took Jjixke V. away from the countryside and made him resettle to Latbbu Oprro, where all of his five offsprings gradually started to attend the public schools, and some of them left Nipmu for further tertiary education. “If you think that the stipend for my position of being national-level heritage transmitter [of approximately twenty-

six thousand of *yuan* per year] is enough to pay all my bills, then let me tell you – it's not! All of my kids are studying. Only in Lipmu Moggux, my daily expenses are about two hundred *yuan*," Jjixke V. suggested the main purpose why he keeps himself busy every day. When he was not around Shimazi, he performed rituals everywhere – in a mountain hamlet of rural Nipmu, or for a *lingdao* in Latbbu Oprro. His reputation preceded him.

4.2 Important Research Partners

4.2.1 Vuthop

With a fashionable haircut, sunglasses, one massive ring of rather Tibetan design around his pointing finger and the boar claws around his neck, Vuthop looked like at least a decade younger. In his mid-fifties and coming from Axhuo Tenzy – the eastern fringe of Nipmu –, his extravagant appearance and more than self-confident behaviour was – at least for me, before knowing him more than from occasional observations of his presence on Shimazi – misleading. His body language, the way he communicated with others, and his looks gave one a false impression that Vuthop might be a big-time crook, not serious about his vocation and obligations attached to it. However, along with Jjixke V., his knowledge of the ancient scriptures – language and characters – seemed to be most profound of the Shimazi's ritualists.

Although coming from the Adur area, he identified as Yynuo – most visibly through his garments –, subtly pointing out how immensely complex the Nipmu's demographics is. He started to learn the *bimox* craft when he was six or seven years old. At the age of sixteen, he "graduated" and was able to conduct all rituals by himself. He took pride in the fact that he never did anything else than being a *bimox*. "I never went for seasonal work," he stated self-confidently when we managed to sit down near his motorbike. The machine was cooling down, as he copied one of the scriptures in beautifully regular handwriting for his numerous disciples. He even preserved the "traditional" orientation on the script – gradually filling the scroll with characters, top to bottom and from right to left. Apyop Tiessyr conveyed to me that during the language standardization, the emphasis on the direction was mistakenly omitted which caused the alienation of the Nuosu-Yi way of writing from other Yi areas with literary tradition in Yunnan and Guizhou Provinces.

Vuthop was rarely idle, as he was busy serving his clients all over Nipmu. He was able to understand as well as speak most of the Nipmu dialects. For this reason, he was not present on Shimazi every day. This was the reason why getting acquainted with Vuthop took longer, and

never went as deep as with the two *bimox* of Jjixke clan or Yyhxox. Quite remarkably, Weixin – the Chinese super-app – played an important role in filling some gaps caused by Vuthop's ephemeral existence. He led a very rich on-line life in the Weixin *bimox*-related circles, which was always closely related to his offline day-to-day activities, as he created the on-line visual content spontaneously "on the go." He was able to do all this in spite of his relative illiteracy in the Chinese language. Apart from the videoclips, he relied on voice messages, partially also because the brand of his phone did not permit installation of the Nuosu-Yi input software. While he was literally "all over the place," I kept observing fragments of his "on the road" diaries through his visual content: travelling to his clients, scaling the winding, often misty mountain roads of Nipmu on his powerful motorbike; performing rituals in a home of an affluent client as well as in a seemingly impoverished mountain hamlet; eating noodles at a humble local joint, or entertaining himself and others on a lavish banquet together with the clan elders.

Probably due to boisterous personality, Vuthop had seemingly a difficult relationship with many of the Shimazi *bimox*. The person he seemed to respect was Jjixke V., and, to some degree, Ddisse (see 4.2.3). He seemed to look down on the rest. Another person than Vuthop who possessed a smartphone was Jitshy, a wife of ritualist named Jjimu (see 4.3). In December 2018, I visited my family back in my hometown for Christmas. I tried to form a Weixin group of Shimazi to share some of my photos as my research partners kindly requested before I left. However, nobody in the group was comfortable around each other and immediately reacted through private messages. Jitshy thought Vuthop looks down on her and Jjimu, while Vuthop thought the others do not treat him with enough respect. "The ritualists from Lipmu Moggux or Lipmu Juojjop are those who do the rituals in a standard way," Vuthop once told me. When on Shimazi, I often saw him at the Backyard, conducting the more complex ceremonies, mostly those for curing rheumatoid arthritis.

4.2.2 Shamat

Like Vuthop, Shamat came from Axhuo Tenzy; more precisely, from a place on the border between Axhuo Tenzy and Njitla Buxte. Being in his mid-sixties, he belonged to the generation of the ritualists born not long after the founding of the PRC. He had quite vivid memories of the turbulent '60s and '70s. By people around Shimazi – especially the *mopnyit* and some clients – Shamat was addressed as *axpu*, a "grandfather." He claimed that he was among the earliest batch of ritualists attending Shimazi. "For the first time, I came here in

1999," he told me when we sat close to one of the mud-brick walls with a red banner hanging above our heads urging the locals to move away. "Back then, there were no houses [around the Big Through Gate]," he said. I asked whether he was shy to practice publicly. "Not really. I knew all those people [who came to seek my services]," was his answer. Shamat's network was quite vast. "There were times I assisted to police [as a translator/interlocutor] even outside Nipmu, in Xinjiang. Quite a lot of Nuosu-Yi went there for seasonal work, and they stirred up some trouble." Shamat also showed a great interest in the Czech language. He prompted me to teach him some words and expressions, which he noted on a piece of paper, using the new Nuosu-Yi script as a phonetic alphabet for the Czech pronunciation.

Figure 4: Various bimox *scriptures along with* qipke, vyxtu, *and* biju *on a foldable table*

Shamat was usually wearing a thick sweater, over which he had his *durta* – "hero sash" dotted by the white discs now made of plastic but originally from white precious stones, and earlier, allegedly, made of the cut-off knee-caps of defeated enemies –, with an interesting set of hand-written and photocopied scriptures weighted down by the paraphernalia. The *qike*, *vyxtu* with the ritual arrows (*lotvy*) hidden in its body and the *biju* bell was clad on a small foldable table in front of us. Shamat's life was heavily influenced by the actions of authorities since his early childhood. "When I was around seven, I attended a [public] school for a while. However, after two or three years, the Cultural Revolution came and the school was demolished," Shamat recalled. "My family belongs to the rank of commoners (*qu*), but we were quite wealthy, and so we were designated as landlords," Shamat continued, changing the tone,

becoming more serious. “My father was then taken away to the street and severely beaten. After all this, we were allocated a stretch of land, on which we worked side-by-side with our former slaves,” Shamat continued in an already heavily bitter tone, manoeuvring towards an interesting conclusion. “With no education, and quite a lot of free time, I started to study this [*bimox* craft],” he added. Although coming from a significant *bimox* clan, Shamat was probably not designated as an heir of the vocation. The political circumstances eventually pushed him to become a ritualist. By his testimony, Shamat uncovered one very rarely studied part of the complex period, that of the “creative destruction” (Mah, 2012, p. 152). Shamat probably would not become a *bimox* if it would not be for the Cultural Revolution. This period is often understood as a complete halting of many social, cultural and religious practices. However, this view is based on scholarship, which, paradoxically, was one of the most affected areas. In the age of political turmoil, the people still had to somehow adapt and go on with their everyday lives, and many of these included some sort of continuation of practices which tended to be suppressed. Therefore, the cultural and religious revival (e.g., Wellens, 2010) following the end of the Cultural Revolution was more a revival of scholarship than of other day-to-day practices. The problem with the Cultural Revolution is not that people would not know what happened, they just do not talk about it that easily and often.

“When I was a young lad – in the ‘70s – I loved to roam around. Especially after the railway [directly connecting Chengdu with Kunming] was completed. I went everywhere – Kunming, Panzhihua, and Chengdu to name a few,” Shamat opened another chamber of his personality. This urge of his somewhat combined Jjixke H.’s *bijyx* and Yyhxox’s running away from the *bimox* responsibility. “Most of the scriptures got burned during the Cultural Revolution – there was nothing much left,” Shamat started to recount another often-quoted feature of that specific time. When I asked the source of those he possessed at that moment, he replied that he gradually got them “here and there” in the ‘80s and onwards. Shamat usually kept coming to the marketplace later than others, since he put a great emphasis on grooming. Usually, after eating rice porridge and putting the traditional Adur garments over his neatly ironed blouse matching with the trousers, he was ready to go. He usually stayed longer before returning to his apartment in the Four Union Township on his electric motorbike. “In the evening, I usually watch TV and eventually fall asleep.”

4.2.3 Ddisse

"Take your camera," Yyhxox suddenly turned towards me, interrupting the conversation which floated in between the members forming a temporary group surrounding his spot. Yyhxox pointed towards one parasol oriented towards the semi-dry riverbed, thus the opposite direction from us. Initially, I was not able to see the face of the person sitting under it. When I asked what is going on and why are we suddenly moving elsewhere, Yyhxox explained: "To document our Nuosu-Yi traditional culture." Making our way around the spots of other ritualists, we walked approximately fifty meters. To my surprise, it was Ddisse. That day was one of his not-so-frequent appearances on Shimazi since he was often busy elsewhere. "Well, we meet again," said Ddisse, adding that he hopes that in the future, we will meet at least one more time.

The first time I met Ddisse was one sunny early-spring afternoon of 2017, during the swansong of Shimazi on its original location (see Chapter 5). I got attracted by his computer-typed and printed-out scripture, which – apart from its "modern appearance" – imitated the way the old scrolls looked like. At that time, it was Ddisse's fourth year on Shimazi. The reason for him being part of the marketplace was rather unfortunate. "Originally, I was dwelling at Xitddop Ladda – I am Shypnra, you know," Ddisse identified with the place where the blueprint for the Modern Standard Yi language came from, putting those speaking comparatively the youngest Nipmu Nuosu-Yi dialect in a somewhat privileged position. "Since our [Nuosu-Yi] habit is to follow the youngest son – and my youngest son was working in Xitddop Ladda as an official – I thought I am going to stay in my homeland until my last days. Unfortunately, my youngest son left this world earlier than me," Ddisse added in a tone, which suggested that he already dealt with this situation, yet with palpable traces of sorrow. After his loss, Ddisse followed his older son to Latbbu Oprro. "I spent one year resting inside [his flat]. Then, I just started coming outside."

Ddisse's childhood was not easy. He never met his father who passed away early. When he was nine, his mother deceased too. He learned basics of the *bimox* vocation from his youngest uncle. However, not short after, the uncle left this world for good too. In 1966, Ddisse's grandfather was designated as a landlord, putting the future *bimox* into a similar situation with Shamat. Both could not attend state education. Both the Nuosu-Yi as well as the Chinese script he had to learn by himself. The latter he learned from the Han-Chinese when he worked in the warehouse of a cooperative set up in Xitddop Ladda. "My grandfather passed away

when I was eighteen. I have thoroughly learnt [the *bimox* vocation] at a quite late age of twenty-seven." Memorizing many by heart, Ddisse was an expert on *cytvi* lineages, and took great pride in the fact, that allegedly, from Yuan until Ming dynasty, his direct ancestors were one of the most influential native headmen in an area roughly comprising the modern Nipmu. After receding from this position, his clan allegedly turned to pursue a *bimox* vocation. In more recent history, his grandfather served as a *bimox* in the office of Ling Bangzheng – the last native headman from the gradually dissolved, but significant Luoluosi Pacification Commissioner – one of the highest *tusi* administrative unit, whose head wielded great power over his subjects (see Karlach, 2014).

Figure 5: The fading bimox "name card" on the face of the balustrade

Yyhxox saw Ddisse primarily as a person who "specializes in research of our nationality's culture (*zhuanmen yanjiu women minzu wenhua de*)," while he was reluctant to designate him as a *bimox*. Nevertheless, Ddisse came from a famous *bimox* clan. "These are the real, genuine scriptures (*zhenzhen de jingshu*)," said Yyhxox, quite conflicting his partial restraint in recognizing Ddisse's *bimox* status. He said it in front of Ddisse, pointing to the printed books, which Ddisse carefully unloaded from his back basket, and placed on a canvas he brought along with his other things to protect the prints from the dusty and often humid soil. Many of these he wrote by himself and saw them as his life-long achievements: "I wanted to publish them already in 1986. However, back then, my wife got sick, so I had to postpone it. In 2010, I wanted to publish it again, but my younger son got cancer. So… The chance to

publish them emerged only recently. I did not study, so I have to be diligent and only rely on myself."

When sitting by Ddisse, usually a discussion circle formed according to a topic of discussion. When the conversation diverted towards my existence, Ddisse, same as others, was keen on discussing my background, cultural as well as geographical. He kept asking me various questions which I gladly and honestly answered. Their questions came less systematically. Something happening right at that moment in Shimazi usually sparked them. For example, a gust of wind which almost took away Ddisse's parasol lead to a ten-minutes long debate about the wind in my native land.

The day we first met, we mainly talked about Apsy Latzzi, towards whom Ddisse meandered through recounting the stories of Yellow Emperor, Yu and other mythological figures from the mainstream Chinese history. Reclining towards the balustrade, which – right above his shoulders – featured his full name written in Chinese as well as in Nuosu-Yi script along with his phone number, Ddisse profiled himself as a teacher willing to pass his knowledge to anyone interested. His graffiti also featured the expression "studying" – *dushu* in Chinese and *tepyy hxep* in Nuosu-Yi – and covered walls and other platforms around Shimazi. Ddisse's position as a person of talents was legitimized by a remarkable anecdote involving Hong Kong: "In October 1996, I attended a big political meeting in Xitddop Ladda. A lot of those people were the aristocrats, the Black Yi. The debate revolved around Hong Kong, which was less than a year away from returning under the Chinese governance. [The Black Yi] were worried, because Deng Xiaoping was in bad health. They were afraid that the things will go far from smooth, that there will be a war. But I said: 'You guys are a reasonable people, how come you talk like that? Deng will take it back and in 30 years, life will be great.' They looked down on me because I did not have any education. They did not trust me and even scolded me. I was quite young back then, over forty… In 2013, I met again with some of these people. They all admitted that the events unfolded as I predicted them to happen," he stated proudly, describing a way how he broke free from his burden of "not having an education" (*meiyou wenhua*), a catch-phrase he often used as a part of many conversations with his audience. Remarkably, this story was very close to that of Yyhxox's involvement with the Mentuhui. According to Vermander (1999), there were "rumours, during the handover of Hong Kong, that there would be a war between Great Britain, and that English aircraft would come and get the believers" (p. 39). However, contrary to Yyhxox, Ddisse stood on the other side than Mentuhui and used the ritualists' skills of persuasion to provide

answers to this question, which later materialized into reality, which significantly added up to his reputation.

4.2.4 Ma

Only after my last visit to Nipmu, and after I went through the old photographs stored on my hard drive, I "identified" Ma to be the very same *bimox* I briefly met during one of my first visits to Shimazi almost a decade earlier. In a chilly late afternoon of November 2009, back then he sat wrapped in his *jietshyr vapla* cloak in front of the now non-existent shabby clinic. Shimazi was rather quiet, with only a few people around. Ma was genuinely surprised to see me coming, and was eager to share a bit of information about the scriptures, which – along with the tobacco pouch – he had placed on a foldable stool in front of him. With my mediocre Mandarin skills, it was the first time I interacted – in a five-minute-long gasping conversation – with a *bimox*.

Fast-forward to the present time, in a light-blue shirt with a small golden Buddha badge pinned to his lapel, and *durta* worn across his light-blue shirt, Ma occupied one of the comfortable armchairs which he managed to snatch from one of the dismantled houses. He was usually among the last to pack his things, hiding his umbrella in the tall-grown grass, and set on the way back home. "I am from the border between Lipmu Juojjop and Lipmu Moggux. I am a qualified *bimox* (*you zige de bimo*), related to Jjixke clan. I am not a fake one," Ma kept telling his clients and me after he finished one of the rituals close to the Big Bridge of Victory. He added that he is sixty-eight years old, and came to Latbbu Oprro with his wife to practice as a *bimox* almost two decades ago. "In Latbbu Oprro, there are many Han-Chinese who pretend to be a *bimox*," Ma stated to the circle of listeners. In comparison with neatly groomed Shamat and Biqu, Ma kept sticking to a more natural look. With his long, ruffled hair often tamed into a bun, he was closest to the stereotypical appearance of the ritualists dwelling in or coming from the mountains. That was why "Big Bro" Zhang – an anthropologist residing in Anhui Province, immersing himself in Guy Debord's (1967) conceptualization of the "society of the spectacle," thus localizing the French Marxist thinker into his contexts – immediately approached Ma and made him to "perform" for his lens during his sole visit to Shimazi. As if hit by a silver bullet, Ma turned from a rather introverted, quiet person, into material for a documentary movie similar to that Jjixke V. starred in. Paradoxically, for me, Ma's background remained a mystery, since he was not

eager to share more than a glimpse into his life. Nevertheless, he was much more open when inquiring into an actual ritual practice and usage of particular scriptures (see 7.5).

4.3 Other Significant Individuals Regularly Present in Shimazi

Even though the following individuals make a limited appearance in this text, they were still an important part of Shimazi, thus my research. Those individuals who are not mentioned here appear *ad hoc* in the text. Either they made an only one-time (yet significant) visit to the marketplace, or their presence in the broader landscape of Latbbu Oprro was important for me, despite they never visited the marketplace (e.g. my "landlord" Duane). Moreover, many of these individuals were eager to approach me for small talk but showed no interest to be deeply embedded in my research project.

This was a case of Lalyr from Njitla Buxte – a person somewhat paramount for my acquaintance with Yyhxox. The serendipity worked in such a way that, possibly, if I did not meet Lalyr that day, I might not have had developed such rapport with Yyhxox. I kept seeing Lalyr – a sturdy guy in his early sixties – sitting around and lively interacting with other Shimazi frequenters. Usually, he was leading small-scale rituals, or just played cards while using his *hlepvop* hat as a protection from the notoriously intense sun. His wife, a *mopnyit*, kept attending Shimazi with him, providing, in comparison with her husband, different ritualistic experience to her clients. Lalyr told me he followed the elders for studying the craft since his childhood. Later, however, he abandoned the craft for a different career path. He was stationed in Gatlyp Mopbbo as the People's Liberation Army soldier around the time when he was ready to conduct rituals individually. "Being a soldier back then, in the '70s and '80s, was a tough job with little advantages. But being the *bimox* felt much better. After those years in the army, I got back to practice." I kept occasionally meeting Lalyr and his wife around The House with Four Shields in the Latbbu Oprro's Old Town – *laochengqu* –, where they were renting a house for a price considered a mid-range in the local real estate market. Although we were familiar with each others' presence, I felt that Lalyr is much more comfortable without me being too close to him. He enjoyed emerging from his safe space for a very short chat, in which he occasionally shared a minuscule fragment of his life, but mostly only for the exchange of courtesies.

My acquaintance with Yyhxox brought me to be more acquainted with his friend Biqu – a merry man in his early fifties, always smiling, and, similar to Shamat, giving a strong emphasis on the way he dressed: regularly in a spotless, ironed shirt and jerkin. I met him

earlier than Yyhxox, during my short visit to Nipmu in October 2017 during my pre-ethnographic stay. He was conducting an anti-rheumatism ritual for a young Tibetan boy. Biqu was born in Njitla Buxte – the Adur region. When Ddisse was around, Yyhxox, Biqu and I went to sit with him and chat about the Nuosu-Yi history and the local *nzymop* lineages. Biqu was a *bbibi* type of ritualists dealing with the unnatural, "dirty job with dirty deaths" as Vuthop once remarked in conversation. However, Biqu was a proof that the stereotype about being ugly in appearance and a having a vicious heart pounding in their chest (see Bamo, A., 2007b, p. 81-82) was not often supported with tangible evidence. Similar to Yyhxox, Biqu also attended elementary school before his father finally decided that his son will dedicate his life to a *bimox* career.

After the initial conversation with Ddisse on the new Shimazi's location facilitated by Yyhxox, Ddigge – the Shypnra speaker from Xitddop Ladda in his late fifties –, started talking to me more often. He combined two vocations: that of the ritualist and *getmop*, the craftsperson. He often crafted the *bimox* paraphernalia right on the spot, offering a rare glimpse into how these utensils gradually took their shape. Ddigge was immersed in both practices every day, as the demand for his services and products seemed to be enormous. He took a pride in personally knowing the daughter of Wu Jinghua, the former Nuosu-Yi governor of Xizang Tibetan Autonomous Region.

Three days after knowing Yyhxox, he accepted an invitation to conduct a three-day-long ritual in the Four Unions Township. His absence led me to know Jjimu and Jitshy – husband and wife in their fifties, who spontaneously stroke a conversation with me. Originating from Panzhihua, Jjimu was a quiet person for whom his wife Jitshy – a native of Lipmu Moggux – did all the talking. Jjimu was a *sunyit*-cum-*bimox*, well versed in the modern Nuosu-Yi script. Jitshy was also literate in the Nuosu-Yi script, because she, similar as Yyhxox, used to work as a teacher of the Nuosu-Yi language and script in a rural elementary school. However, she conveyed this information to me only months after our first encounter, when I visited the marketplace with my wife – a Chengdu native – who seemed to be a crucial factor for obtaining this information. She reflected that Jitshy wanted to shake the label of "not being educated" off in front of the country's majority, which often held many stereotypical views about minorities, including the Nuosu-Yi. After this project ended, Jitshy went through many other vocations, including a precious stone seller, which made her travel all around the country. This, in turn, pointed to her abilities to accumulate wealth, which she possibly wanted to present in front of a foreigner. Now, however, when her daughter had an offspring,

she wanted to stay closer to her. Therefore, she accompanied her husband on the marketplace, and from time to time provided palm-reading (*lotgga hxep*) services for her clients. Moreover, the couple sold drums made from sheepskin and a metal rack. To diversify their income, they were also selling smaller ritual requisites, alcohol, cigarettes, and kept collecting plastic waste and wood around Shimazi. At the end of each day, they loaded everything on their electric tricycle and drove back home. Since they were "neighbouring" Jjixke V.'s spot, Jjimu and Jitshy also played a substantial role in the rapport which developed between me and Jjixke V.

4.4 Summary and Partial Conclusion

This provisional, sketchy and partial account of the lives already reveals the vast differences in their life trajectories, as well as presuppositions with which they entered a dialogue with the foreign researcher – an unexpected but, possibly, an amusing interloper. Their self-presentation were on every occasion context-specific – that is, dependant on where it happened and who was around – while the core of the vignettes, always tainted with different settings of the situation or event during which it was happening, was directed principally towards me as a researcher. This situatedness is evident, for example, in the way Jjixke H. and Jjixke V. were making use of Lipmu Moggux as a starting point for anything *bimox*-related, Yyhxox's way of talking on and off the marketplace, and Ddisse's proud identification with Xitddop Ladda as a birthplace of the Modern Standard Yi language. The ritualists in their practice of sharing bits and pieces of their past lives – memories animated by and within the given context – used a vast array of rhetorical tactics – logical, when elaborating on concepts and events from their perspective, with strong character projections accompanied with an emotional layer of joy, suppressed pain, or even anger.

Jjixke H. and Jjixke V. were making use of their origin in the "Homeland of Bimo" – Lipmu Moggux – to present themselves as the most legitimate, principal carriers of the *bimox* heritage. Each of them did this in their personalized way, using resources of politics, popular culture, or various ordeals. The political power stemming from the academic research was on their side, and the way they expressed themselves was very self-confident. Despite not being from Jjixke clan, with roots in the shared linguistic-ancestral space of Yynuo dialect, Vuthop used similar tactics. Yyhxox, Ddisse, Shamat and Ma used a different tactic – humbleness, diligence, and intriguing, very unusual life stories of how they became and maintained their *bimox* status. Their approach might have been habitual *vis-à-vis* their more powerful counterparts, a position they internalized from living in such an environment. Their "career

paths" were also different. While for Jjixke H., Jjixke V. and Yyhxox the reason for studying the *bimox* was more an "obligation" they had towards their clan and other members of the Nuosu-Yi social world, Shamat, and partially also of Ddisse, were pushed to the learning by their undesirable class background in the context of the political situation, and becoming a *bimox* became an alternative way to the state education.

As will become evident in the following chapters, the *bimox* maintained the exchanges of utterances in a dialogic way – assimilating elements of each others' as well as academic-political ways of speaking from which they then developed tactics on how to preserve their area for speech-based maneuvres. The border between the conscious performance and subliminal traces of performativity on many occasions became blurred and hardly distinguishable. This diversity among the ritualists – not only regarding the clan affiliation, area of origin or life trajectory, but also a way of formulating ideas, interacting with the environment, and backing the words with actions then – gives an initial idea of how important to reflect upon all these elements when constructing a polyphonic account of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists. These mechanisms will become clearer in the chapters that follow. However, first, it is essential to talk about the platform where most of our conversations took place.

5. Dwelling in Shimazi: *Bimox* Ways of Spacing

Zhitian Guo (2020) claims that there is "a hidden spatial difference in terms of (…) religious-like practices" in Latbbu Oprro. Recounting Buddhist, Confucian, Daoist and Christian (while excluding Islamic) landmarks of Latbbu Oprro, she claims that the *bimox* "seemed nowhere to be found." Followingly, she wonders at the paradox that even though the *bimox* are "an important component of the Yi's traditional culture, many still believe that some of its specific practices are 'superstitious.'" According to her, this is the reason for which it is important for the ritualists living in Latbbu Oprro to "keep a low profile," for which it is "almost impossible to find a *bimox*" without the help of the Nuosu-Yi. She finishes her short observation by noticing the ritualists near the Big Through-gate, who were allegedly forced to leave due to the "reconstruction work" (p. 100). However, from my point of view, the ritualists were much in evidence not only in Shimazi Marketplace but also in the streets of the city – as dwellers and/or by-passers. Some of them even hung advertisements from their windows offering their services. Guo's observation seems to follow the widely acknowledged dichotomies (e.g., religion vs. superstition, urban vs. rural, etc.) rooted in the context of the PRC and posits the *bimox* according to the common sense (thus rural superstition). Such approach, however, obfuscates, even silences a whole realm of social activity in a certain, from a perspective of those dwelling in some widely-accepted discourse "unexpected place" (Deloria, 2004) which might significantly contribute to an understanding of the vast and meandering, unyieldingly evolving trajectories of the *bimox* practice and vocation.

The principal factors motivating me to engage with the *bimox* in Latbbu Oprro – especially with those frequenting the Shimazi Marketplace – were three: relatively easy access, the possibility of not overtly rely on the local institutions, and my knowledge that in the overwhelming majority of the relatively scarce academic writing dealing with the ritualists' presence in Nipmu's urban and semi-urban spaces (see Luobu, 2015; Wu Da, 2016), their authors described the Shimazi Marketplace *bimox* – quite suspiciously and in the spirit of the aforementioned commonsensical representations – as a group of traitors to morals of their vocation. Firstly, I had to define where are Shimazi's boundaries. Ingold (2008) observes that "'the field' is rather a term by which the ethnographer retrospectively imagines a world from which he has *turned away* in order, quite specifically, that he might *describe it in writing*" (p. 88, italics in original). Approaching the aforementioned perspectives critically, I had to practice reflexivity even while delineating the marketplace. Soon I found out, that my

ethnography of the place added yet another subjective perspective to those already being around – some for a relatively short time, other for decades, even a century.

Marketplaces reflect the social interactions situated in time and space. For example, Canclini (1993) tries to freeze his Mexican marketplace as "a dramatic and temporary museum of everyday life" (p. 72; citing Malinowski & Fuente, 1957). In this chapter, however, the Nuosu-Yi ritualists show how they kept converting the "remnants of the past" into the "emergent," challenging expressions (Canclini, 1993, p. 84). Therefore, rather than a "museum," their conceptualization of Shimazi interconnected with their Nuosu-Yi-specific cosmologies, enriching the marketplace with their context. Simultaneously, it dragged the ritualists into its carnivalistic (Bakhtin, 1984a) ambience, among Nuosu-Yi previously present mainly during seasonal, rural festivities. This chapter aims to uncover Shimazi's embedment into ritualists' practices and, by extension, the whole cosmology *vis-à-vis* other perspectives and ideologies attached to the marketplace. Therefore, it examines various narratives of Shimazi: the basic, context-dependent historical perspective, the view of the Nuosu-Yi academics engaged in the project of the Bimo Culture, my research experience projected on its frequenters and, most crucially, the view of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists themselves. Towards the end, it explains how the *bimox* – in collaboration with others – performed the place following their presuppositions and actions in a form of persuasion directed towards the Latbbu Oprro's general public and authorities pointing to the *bimox* presence. Ingold (2002b) maintains that "the history of things – of artefacts, architecture and landscape – could be understood in terms of successive, alternating steps of co-option and construction" (p. 175-176). The following section thus explores the "becomings" which surround the main contextual platform for all the data chapters which draw upon variously, often perhaps surprisingly layered relations happening on Shimazi.

5.1 Shimazi Among Nipmu Marketplaces

As a military garrison for centuries (also with Vyttuo Lurkur, Yyxmu Diepcha and a trading city of Yyxmu Hopli – Zeng, 2012, p. 7-8), Latbbu Oprro saw the marketplace mechanism much earlier when compared to rest of the Nipmu. Following the PRC's reforms and opening in the 1980s, the marketplace system landed in rural areas. Being a loanword from Chinese, the expression in Nuosu-Yi for "going to the marketplace" (*gachap*) suggests that the concept of "marketplace" was not peculiar to the Nuosu-Yi world. Liu (2007; 2012, p. 42-45) and Long (1988) both claim that the rotation markets were a state-introduced institution to the

Nipmu "Yi culture core area" as part of the shift from collectivism to the market-oriented economy. If compared with the Skinner's research (1964a, 1964b, 1965, 1985) on the evolution of the Chinese marketplaces, those in Nipmu bear many similarities, especially when seen from a certain distance from the local context. However, the subtle differences prove to be significant, especially when thinking about the ways how the marketplaces were accepted as a new platform appropriated for the local practices, with the space of the marketplaces being re-designed – wittingly or subliminally – to serve the Nuosu-Yi purposes. Naturally, this was a two-way process, as the practices specific for the Nuosu-Yi loose social cohesion naturally adapted to some of the imported mechanisms of the marketplaces, but did not abandon their essence. Nowadays, the Nipmu markets are functioning in various modes – daily markets such as Shimazi, and/or the rotation markets (*jishi*) – a fair-like event circulating through the selected townships (*xiang*) of Nipmu counties. The rotation markets are held three times a month with an interval of a week to ten days. Gradually, ritualists became a natural part of these places and events.

Liu Shao-hua (2007) depicted the marketplaces in Nipmu as bringing modernity potentially harmful for the Nuosu-Yi's "traditional" ecology. Using the framework of the political economy, in her later work on heroin and HIV/AIDS in Nipmu (2011), she further develops this narrative as a root of serious problems in Nipmu – capitalism arriving to a place and among people who are potentially vulnerable and not ready for it. It is a paradox that her thesis to a certain degree fails to cope with the rooted resonances of the Marxist historical materialism. This manifests itself most by portraying the interaction between tradition and modernity as a linear shift, where the "tradition" often overlaps the pre-PRC period when slaveholding was still widespread. Moreover, Liu's earlier work on marketplaces does not address the effect on how the local frequenters act upon this import and interlace it with their daily needs. It examines a rotation market fair in Lipmu Juojjop, where the immediate desire for distant commodities might have obfuscated this aspect within her research. Shimazi Marketplace in Latbbu Oprro seemed principally the same to the rural markets, yet it was very specific in diverse personal, ethnic, temporal and spatial composition. In short, it would be essentialist to assume that every marketplace within Nipmu is the same.

During his visits of Latbbu Oprro in the late 1930s, Zeng (2012) observed the presence of various trader guilds from all over the country, banks, a cinema, local powerplant feeding the street lights, teahouses with elegant names such as "Tranquility Amidst the Bustle" (*Nao zhong jing*), and rickshaw filling the roads. Schools served its pupils the state-promoted

education since the end of the Qing Dynasty (p. 8-9), and elegant “modern ladies” kept leisurely strolling down the streets (p. 20). Zeng explains the arrival of the “modernity” to Latbbu Oprro through increasing presence of government employees (p. 8), who needed an infrastructure during the time of instability, making the city, as I have noted earlier, the last, unofficial capital of Republican China before the withdrawal to Taiwan. Furthermore, Zeng noticed trading Tibetans (p. 9) mingling with the flow of Western commodities through the newly opened road (p. 10), and the hard-working Muslims, who – in contrast with the local Han-Chinese among whom it was rampant – avoided opium (p. 12). Until very recently, rumours had it that deep in the mountains, a very small-scale production runs until now. Historically, one of the main sources of the opium business was Suijiang on the other side of Nipmu in Zhaotong (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 4) and, apparently, the Nuosu-Yi, apart from the native headmen (Ling, 1988), were generally less fond of consuming the drug (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 471).

Based on textual evidence, the trade between the area what now consists of Nipmu and its northern fringes gradually filled by the Han-Chinese settlers was in the full swing already during the Song Dynasty (von Glahn, 1987). More than one century ago, Legendre (1909b) described families inhabiting the mountain areas going to the market (p. 419). In his opinion, the Nuosu-Yi were not traders by nature, and they were lured into the whole business by the Han-Chinese, who were interested in the local horses and dogs. Therefore, they organized places to exchange these commodities (Legendre, 1909c, p. 632). Three decades later, Ma Changshou frequently saw Nuosu-Yi “going out to trade” (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 463) during his expeditions, especially aiming for the metal utensils used in agriculture and at home (p. 488), and also the paper and ink (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 24; Legendre, 1909c, p. 623) used to write and copy the *bimox* scriptures. In this perspective, the need for commodities was mutual. In Yunnan, the market meetings allegedly resembled the (intra-)clan gatherings (*mopmgep*) (Long, 1988), so the concept of trading places was not alien to the Nuosu-Yi since a long time ago. Also, Lawson (2017) concludes that the Nuosu-Yi “were active participants in the development of trade connections” (p. 108) already in the half of the 19th Century. Therefore, modes of trade, barter and socialization were present in the Nuosu-Yi everyday life even before the arrival of the periodic marketplace system to Nipmu.

The place in Latbbu Oprro where Shimazi Marketplace gradually materialized already saw large crowds of the Nuosu-Yi in the 1940s (Zeng, 2012, p. 38). Similarly, Gatlyp Mopbbo, now county neighbouring the Yunnan Province, saw bustling markets in its administrative

centre, in the walled township of Huanglang, and in several other points of commodity exchange (p. 288, 291, 309) designated as the trading places (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 12, 13, 16). Similar to the eventual set-up of the Shimazi Marketplace, the busiest markets in the walled cities usually took place right outside the city wall, in front of and around one of the gates (p. 13; Zeng, 2012, p. 309). Around the time the Republic of China replaced the Qing Empire, the "East River" (locally also known as "West Gate River") – in the eyes of local marking the boundary dividing the urban proper and the countryside – was as just a one-meter wide creek with a wooden bridge connecting the walled city with the West of River Township, now an integral part of Latbbu Oprro. Stalls kept emerging seasonally on both sides of the bridge. Vendors sold daily necessities such as firewood, salt, oil or vinegar. During the rainy season – usually from late May to September –, the water level grew. The river often took away the bridge, thus divided the two banks. With the massive deforestation of the Republican period, during these wet months, the small creek turned into a huge and violent ravaging river, which at the peak period was allegedly over two hundred meters wide. The rampant, unpredictable floods periodically claimed many lives and made damage to the buildings on both sides of the river. The riverbed kept gradually rising since the stream brought a lot of mud and boulders from the steep mountain slopes. The stones visibly dotted the riverbed during the dry months, when it was possible to cross the river on foot by jumping from one to another (which were colloquially called *shibu* – "stone steps"), and the stream, which calmed down into a small creek again, was scaleable through provisional bridges – a setup which was visible still during the 2010s.

During times between the drought and flood seasons when the stream was neither a creek nor a river, the water surface was scalable with the help of people colloquially called "carry-over-river craftsmen" (*beihejiang*). With the help of a special set of paraphernalia – a pole and a single floatable sheepskin "tyre" (*yangpitai*) –, and for the one-way price of five *fen*, they carried their clients "on their back" through the stream to the opposite shore. Such endeavours did not go by without occasional unfortunate accidents leading to deaths, e.g., when the craftsman was together with his client caught by an unexpected current, or somehow got dragged down the water surface where they got stuck in an interstice between the boulders. To preserve the trade of the nearby areas – especially in the Western Street –, the local Republican government eventually made an effort to regulate the flood situation by using the limestone gravel bricks to build the reinforced embankment on the side of the city proper, which gradually gave the place its current name. In the local Sichuan Mandarin, the name

"Shimazi" in very loose literal translation means "a construction made by putting one stone over another" (the verb *ma* points to this action, with *zi* being its "substantivizer"). Along with the embankment, a stone statue of "Water-stopping Bodhisattva" (*zhishui guanyin*) was erected to an elevated place with a hope to appease the natural elements and protect the locals from future harms done by the unruly water. The gradual re-forestation also contributed to controlling the situation. This development forced the "carry-over-river craftsmen," who gradually lost their job, to adapt to the new circumstances. They turned into local unofficial brokers facilitating trade of the agricultural products. Gradually, the Shimazi has grown into the city's biggest marketplace, and, therefore, the biggest marketplace in the whole Nipmu.

During the period of collectivism, it turned into an illegal, typical grey "free trade" area – the "tail of capitalism" (*zibenzhuyi de weiba*) –, which sutured over the ruptures in the system of rationed goods. During that time, the area on which these practices were happening was not paved – it was still only a muddy river shore – and as such was not considered as part of the city surface. With regular frequenters recruiting from the group of individuals designated as having "unfavourable class background" (*chengfen bu hao de ren*) – people who could possess no land and had not assigned a working unit –, the place got often chaotic and hard to control. Occasional raids of the Red Guards or other public-order manages captured individuals, who were then paraded as an exemplary case through the public criticism (*pidou*). However, this did not lead to Shimazi's decline. Quite the opposite happened. With such genealogy of events and practices, Shimazi became associated with the people on the bottom of society (*shehui diceng*) who had to sustain themselves on their own, since they could not rely on the collectivist regime. They then relied on activities such as fortune-telling or selling goods – often the surplus rations purchased for very low rates – with margin. Gradually, a lot of the "unofficial immigrants" – including the Nuosu-Yi – who led their lives outside of the household registration system (*hukou*) built their wooden and mud-brick houses here.

The population density in Shimazi kept growing. Following the local economic collapse in the 1980s and 1990s, Nipmu saw a return of its dark vice from the past – a drug trade. Shimazi became a point of exchange of the drug packets, an activity easily covered in a place with an increased flow of people and goods. Hence, along with similar trading places nearby (such as Nixzho), Shimazi was nicknamed as "Small Hong Kong" (Xiao Xianggang). Such designations are very popular in Nipmu, as one village near Puxop famed for the drug trade was called "Small Myanmar," since its inhabitants actively engaged in the drug smuggling overland directly from this Southeast Asian country – on foot through mountain paths and

during the night – prompting the drug-combatting forces to deploy the Nuosu-Yi policemen and military straight to certain areas of China-Myanmar border. In the new millennium, the city development caused Shimazi to be perceived as a "forgotten place" (*bei yiwang de difang*), since in comparison with the surrounding urban areas, aesthetically, it looked like a shantytown. Due to its problematic reputation, even the recent project of the Latbbu Oprro authorities to turn the area of the Shimazi Marketplace into a "wide and beautiful traffic road" (*kuankuo piaoliang de dadao*) sparked some backlash. However, it was eventually carried out anyway, to the joy of most of the urban residents and anger of those sustaining their lives through Shimazi for years, even decades. This account came together by combining information from a local TV programme (Xichang dianshitai, 2017a, 2017b) followed by a conversation with some of the Latbbu Oprro residents.

The presence of the *bimox* in the Shimazi Marketplace – a location imbued with overwhelmingly negative contexts, connotations and problematic memories – was constantly frowned upon by the Nuosu-Yi scholars. In the recent writings, the *bimox* who are *"*setting up a stall on the street" (*jieshang baitan de bimo*) (Mao, G. G., 2013, p. 75) – on streets of the Nipmu cities (Wu Da, 2016) as well as during the rotation market fairs (Liu, 2007) – are somewhat seen as those who are not adhering to the rules stipulated by the Bimo Culture project, and are presented as dichotomous to those who are not engaging in such behaviour. Furthermore, some of the conclusions were misleading presumably due to the lack of long-term observation. In one exception, Qubi (2015a) writes about this phenomenon in a more conciliatory tone. However, even he could not escape numerous essentialisms. Conducting his research in Lipmu Moggux and Xitddop Ladda, he maintains that the *bimox*, *mopnyit*, and *sunyit* occupying the fringes of the city are alienated from their native land, and as such are the mere onlookers of the city life, not participating in it. These assumptions, however, address directly multiple perspectives that I am going to explore in the rest of this chapter – namely, to what degree the *bimox* themselves perceive such behaviour as something disconnected from the past, and whether or not they consider Latbbu Oprro as standing out of their ancestral land.

From the outset, the presence of *bimox*, *mopnyit* and *sunyit* around Big Through-gate, and subsequently dotting streets around it, had two major reasons. Firstly, this gate was the majestic head of the Southern Road, business-wise historically the most lively place in Latbbu Oprro (Zeng, 2012, p. 6). During my walks, I initially tended to habitually separate the world outside and inside the gate. It might also be caused by the perception of the local history and

the urban-rural divide by locals, which I internalized: that the wall was originally built to stop the raids of the Nuosu-Yi from the nearby mountains. However, being one of the four ways (and the most exposed one) how to enter the city, the gate naturally turned to a place where Nuosu-Yi – especially those accustomed to the presence and some degree of co-habiting with the Han-Chinese – congregated and interacted with the dwellers living inside the wall (p. 6). Nowadays, the wall turned into a historical landmark, and people kept flowing through the whole city freely. Nevertheless, this example manifests how barriers – discursive or material – could shape one's thinking. Secondly, there were numerous private clinics near the Big Through-gate. While the marketplace was naturally a focal point of the local interactions, the clinics and its surroundings brought even more filtered clientele to the ritualists – those who sought medical services and wanted to interlace them with the ritual practice. The reason for this, as Liu's (1998) work suggests, were manifold, including the distrust towards or unaffordability of the mainstream medicine, or belief that some conditions could be resolved only with the help of the *bimox*.

5.2 Mapping the Shimazi

In the following section, I am presenting a deep map of Shimazi woven together through a mixture of ethnographic and autoethnographic narratives, which I "wrote" by my feet when walking through the city alone or together with my research partners. Under the influence of the previous map of Shimazi, it is perhaps too seductive to treat the marketplace as a cultural text, or, as in the case of Ma Changshou and Lin Yaohua, as "culture as travel." Instead of focusing solely on mapping – recording, documenting or representing – we also performatively engaged (Bissell & Overend, 2015, p. 478) with the Shimazi landscape long-term, in different times of its becoming, in shifting contexts, which were palpable during my fieldwork practice on a day-to-day basis. Drawing on the Nomadology of Deleuze and Guattari (2005), which stands as "the opposite to history" (p. 23) seen as static, we engaged in "performative 'counterpractices'" (Bissell & Overend, 2015, p. 479-480) that were "opened up to the creative processes of *becoming*" (p. 481, italics in original) of the Shimazi Marketplace as animated by the ritualists, other frequenters, as well as by the city authorities. Bauman (2006) wrote that the nomadism takes an act of revenge after being labelled as "backward," and becomes an elite ruling the sedentary majority (p. 12-13). What Bauman seems to mean is that with the globalization and interconnectedness of the world becoming a norm and even a desired trend, those who are mobile are gaining an advantage over those preferring to stay at one place. This, however, is only valid when performed by privileged

groups such as backpackers or international bankers, but still looked down upon when practiced by a group of people deemed as "underdeveloped." Our walks then blurred borders between these two, as well as gradually led to the abandonment of the rural-urban dichotomy.

Figure 6: The situation of Shimazi Marketplace in Latbbu Oprro; Source of the satellite image: Google Maps

Visiting Shimazi almost one decade ago, I was more interested in the city wall and the *laochengqu*. My "discovery" of Shimazi and Ma sitting near the Big Through-gate was a work of serendipity. Lacking knowledge about *bimox*, especially the academically determined ways of how the ritualists should conduct their craft and behaviour to preserve – or, rather freeze and fossilize – their tradition, I did not see their presence in Shimazi as something unusual, let alone not welcomed. The increasing activity on Shimazi between 2010 and 2015 – especially that of the various ritualists – suggested the exact opposite. From superficial observations, they seemed to be as holding the future of their vocation firmly in their own hands.

De Certeau (1988) sees walking as a central activity (or event) of place-making (Clark, 2017, p. 99). My site-selection, imagination, and eventual demarcation of Shimazi was done through walking. I "carved out" my personalized Shimazi from the Latbbu Oprro's complex fabric by my frequent strolls. Brown (2017) maintains that "walking is a political act, and, both philosophically and literally, an approach, a way of encountering the world" (p. 4). In such a way, walking might be understood as closely related to writing, as both practices leave traces, which entirely or partially follow those of one's predecessors. I have walked the *laochengqu* repeatedly for years, multiple times during my every visit. Gradually, I gave the marketplace

more and more prominence, I saw it as a "special place." This perception grew with the intensified relations and interactions happening with Shimazi's ground under our feet, all drawing more and more visible demarcating lines around the Shimazi's territory. This process kept cumulatively happening between my first arrival to Latbbu Oprro at the end of August 2009, through hot Hong Kong days of September 2017, when I was hastily finishing my candidature and preparing to set off for my long-awaited ethnographic fieldwork, and the entire fieldwork up until now. During my visits and walks around *laochengqu* and Shimazi, I had enjoyed "doing nothing" with all the "detours, dead-ends and chance encounters" (Ehn & Löfgren, 2016, p. 218) – randomly walking around with lines of thoughts racing randomly through my head. These thoughts mixed imaginations with the actual perception of the material as well as the mental world around me – the Nuosu-Yi ancient logographs, fresh tangerines, smoking pipes, VCDs with the documentaries representing and authorizing the Nuosu-Yi culture, and, perhaps most crucially, the fluid presence of Shimazi's visitors.

With rather short interactions, this practice was closest to Benjamin's concept of *flâneur* with her or his "unfixed status, poised between belonging to the urban and yet apart from it" and "preoccupation with observation, with the joys of watching" meaning attuning the focus "to the sense of existing between two worlds, both participant and observer" (Nash, 2018, p. 607). Nash sees *flâneur*'s aimlessness "in contradiction to the regulated movement of traffic and people in cities," becoming "a radical act" and offering "an extended, observant 'reading' of street life," returning "urban streets to the scale and tempo of the solitary walker." The *flâneur* is "a representative of early modernity who developed visual and spatial practices and methodologies of movement and observation which interpreted the city" (p. 607). Nash's take on *flânerie* – a radical with its ability of "being both insider and outsider, through the sensory method of walking and observing" being central to this practice – orbits closer to Bakhtin's way of understanding culture, and diverts further from the traditional picture of *flâneur* as "outside the text, not within it" and "listening to its stories, recording its narrative, but apart from them" (p. 607-608). In short, when performing the *flânerie*, Nash's approach emphasizes engagement through participation. The *flânerie* – possibly equally turbulent to once-deadly East River when seen through my and others' trajectories – brought me an unceasing flow of countless entangled images: a bloomless plant carelessly growing out of the deteriorating posters stuck to a red-brick wall mapping the household incomes near House with Four Shields; a hidden courtyard where the family of devoted Buddhists every early morning produced the *bingfen* – Sichuanese cold dessert jelly topped with fermented rice – of the

mellowest pattern; a bundle of infinite sun rays of the late afternoon illuminating a forgotten woodcarving hanging above the locked door, behind which was an area increasingly drowned in piling dust. This dust – omnipresent but the least noticeable – kept blurring the attempts of a strict division between order and disorder (Nieuwenhuis & Nassar, 2018, p. 501).

Figure 7: A process of destruction of the Shimazi's original location with ritualist facing the excavator (late summer 2016)

At the beginning of 2016, Shimazi's rhythm suddenly changed. The wooden buildings covering the space in front of the Big Through-gate were torn down, the heavy machinery along with the construction material temporarily took over the role of the local habitués. At least until summer of 2017, the *bimox* were still able to hold their presence in this place – practicing among all the construction havoc –, sitting by the machines, or on the soil uncovered by the torn off concrete surface. During my visit of 2017, I noticed a big sign forbidding anyone to "set up a stall," or loiter here. Increasingly, the previous setting left only minuscule marks, visible to those familiar with its former surface: a tangle of chicken feathers brought together by drying blood and a lick of flames, with the dark viny colouring at its tips. These suggested that some kind of ritual activity might be still present. However, only hastily and temporarily. The hand-written advertisements for the *bimox* services covering the balustrade were all fading away. On other instances, they were over-painted by a thick white colour. It was not an act of maintenance. This vernacular "ritualists' wall" was targeted by the

conscious hands. Running in the opposite direction with the decline of this Shimazi's former location, the Big Bridge of Victory – with its symbolic grandeur of connecting the *laochengqu* with Latbbu Oprro's newest housing development and antagonistic to the past means of scaling the river – was gradually finished. Its presence gradually erased the paths through the semi-dry riverbed. The provisional concrete pipes and rammed soil on top of them used as a temporary footbridge gradually fell apart, with their debris being slowly carried away by the water. The mud-brick and wooden houses on the riverbank opposite the *laochengqu* – a scenery replaced by the high-rising condominiums –, were torn down in the first wave of demolition, which preceded the "unbecoming" (Fraser, 2018) of the same type of built-up area around the Big Through-gate.

Figure 8: The former, tamed location of Shimazi

The taming and reconfiguration of the Shimazi's previous location into a hyper-mundane, an impersonal stripe of a traffic trajectory – a place with a tangible history turned into "a space that cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity" (Toldi, 2015, p. 99 – citing Augé, 1995), a non-place destined to be speedily crossed on a journey somewhere else –, was painful and at the same time fascinating to watch. Gone were the ritualized micro-conversations which I felt were resonating through the whole Latbbu Oprro and Nipmu. Previously unloaded right at the street, the trucks loaded with vegetables now supplied the newly-built, three-storey indoor marketplace beyond the narrow Big Through-gate. Latbbu Oprro's authorities did their best to turn Shimazi into a clean and organized place where the ritualists were indirectly not welcome to practice anymore. Paradoxically, close to the

riverbank, a scent of urine wafting from the public toilet mixed with the buzzing flies attracted by the odour of rotting garbage overflowing from containers next to it was all in evidence every day I walked around.

Monotonous stream of changing gears' rhythms, speeding up and slowing down, a shred of conversation or music heard through the opened car window or from a loudspeaker of the passer-by's smartphone replaced the former soundscape. Except for the network of crossings visually interrupting the tediousness of the concrete laid all over the places where people used to dwell and walk, the new four-lane road constituted a forbidden territory for a pedestrian. The warmth of the place – once lively and pulsating with activity – was substituted by a nauseating heat of the new surface emitted when bombarded by the sharp local sun rays. Not to overlook "the complex habitations, practices of dwelling, embodied relations, material presences, placings and hybrid subjectivities associated with movement through such spaces," Merriman's (2004) recommends treating Augé with sensitivity (p. 154). There was a transitory life here – just not the ritualists' life. On the grassy surface by the sidewalk and around the green bushes and trees, people often stopped by and hid from the scorching sun. Sitting around with nothing to do, they often fell asleep through the sultriness of the early afternoon. However, most of the pedestrians – including the *bimox* heading to the opposite bank – hurried through this corridor to their destination. The soundscape weaved together by the activities of ritualists did not disappear entirely. In a much lower volume, it emanated from an open space on the riverbank opposite to Shimazi's original location.

Figure 9: View of the Glade from the Big Bridge of Victory

Figure 10: The semi-dry riverbed of the East River with a shepherd (left) and a bimox *performing a ceremony for his clients*

Crossing the Big Bridge of Victory from the tamed area around the Big Through-gate then felt like an act of transcendence to the not-so-distant past. By the entrance to the bridge facing the city wall – with visible layers from Ming and Qing dynasties in the bottom and the bricks dating to Republican period reinforced through a restoration work conducted a couple of years ago – a group of women with back baskets usually gathered. Their or close family members' toddlers and kids were running and crawling around. While killing a spare time by meticulously working on the embroidered insoles, they also kept selling – underhand – small amounts of vegetables. Walking on the bridge and looking south-westwards, the riverbed underneath led me to see a deep space stretching within and beyond the concrete-reinforced embankment on both sides. The housing estate rising just above the heart of the new Shimazi's location. The Glade, as I called the space opened by the first wave of demolition and the most populated segment of the new Shimazi, was filled with parasols resembling colourful mushrooms in a forest of demolition and construction activity, was surrounded with the debris and remnants of the old buildings. The mountains covered by the green trees and bushes adorned the horizon. As if the whole scenery would want to present a proof that the spaces like this one – liminal spaces in a constant process of transition for which the Chinese

literature uses a polarizing expression “the common boundary between the urbanity and the rural area” (*chengxiang jiaojie chu*) (Shen, Guo, Li & Jin, 1982) – can be “not quite urban, not quite rural” (Meethan, 2012, p. 70). With the global fast-food brands just around the corner, the semi-dry riverbed under the bridge often featured grazing cows and sheep led there by the herdsmen from the nearby hills.

Figure 11: The bimox *practicing in the Backyard with the Dune in front of them and Glade behind the debris of the house*

Especially during the afternoon, our eyes often ended up filled with dust brought by the wind sweeping through the riverbed. Already traversing the riverbed, but still hanging above a ground beneath it, the further half of the bridge towered above the Backyard, a place used for practicing more complex rituals. It was separated from the Glade by the Dune, a liminal topographical element, a pile of cumulated soil and rubble. The Backyard was full of broken bricks, cones of soil, scraps of wood and plastic, and patches of weeds. Drivers treated it as a pop-up parking lot. There was also one partially torn down building, and one hut made entirely of plastic waste. On the other end of the bridge, the wage labourers gathered in a daily search for an odd job. There, turning right, through a corridor made of corrugated iron fence, and followed by another right turn, we had to walk approximately two hundred meters in the reverse direction – parallelly to the Big Bridge of Victory – to reach the Glade. Two vernacular dentists, whose work was visible in mouths of some of my research partners – the popular view prioritized the ritualists with the good teeth since the chants of those with

missing teeth might allegedly prove ineffective (see Bamo A., 1994, p. 144) –, and a couple of sugarcane and tangerine sellers, with a line of idle *modi* (moto-taxi) drivers and other nomadic vendors, were all dotting the rest of the walk.

*Figure 12: Discarded straw (*rybbur*) and mud (*zabbur*) effigies in the Backyard*

On the fringes of the Backyard, discarded ritual accessories – usually the straw (*rybbur*) or mud effigies (*zabbur*) used to lure the malicious spirits – kept disintegrating. These effigies still served "as lures for ghosts" (Swancutt, 2015, p. 137) until they completely disintegrated. However, these were not always at "safe distance from the home" (p. 137). Along with the demon tablets and other discarded ritual material, they were dropped off in frequented places such as crossroads – even right next to one's house, or, in case of Latbbu Oppro, near the Big Bridge of Victory –, to attract the hungry demons passing through these locations who look for a chunk of meat to feast on. This newly emergent, transitory location then arose from another act of destruction happening simultaneously here and on the original location of Shimazi. In weeks following this first wave of demolition of the old buildings on this riverbank, the groups of predominantly elderly people, who used to come to their favourite teahouses located in the rickety wooden buildings, refused to give up on their old gathering spots. They inhabited the ghosts of these buildings (Glass, 2016), which reminded them of the seemingly good old days (Holgersson, 2017, p. 76), and carried on as usual. While sitting

around a table with its legs fixed among chunks of bricks, wood, and violently separated breeze blocks, they played cards, smoked pipes, and engaged in friendly quarrels.

Figure 13: The "ghosts of buildings" inhabited by their former frequenters

In Merrifield's (1993) wording, places are anything but static – human activities imbue them (p. 520). Similarly, Massey (1994) sees such places as processes (p. 155). Despite the demolition, here the layers of activities were abundant. The rubble was later shipped away, making the surface smooth and suitable for the fresh sets of human activities, while the previous groups gradually gave up on their old spots. Being "processual and in a constant state of transition" (Andrews & Roberts, 2012, p. 2), Shimazi Marketplace thus extended its place-naming capability to another place – the old location ceased to exist and Shimazi moved here. When compared to its predecessor where the ritualists constituted and offshoot of the vegetable market – an adjunct to the massive buzz of all possible interactions –, the new Shimazi seemed to me as a ritualist-oriented marketplace. It were primarily the *bimox*, *mopnyit* and *sunyit*, who relocated there, only followed by the other vendors from the opposite riverbank. These vendors then re-arranged themselves around the ritualists, who overtook the role of the rhythm-makers of Shimazi.

"Hey, Jjixke! Here you are again," usually exclaimed one of the familiar voices, be it the *modi* driver, the lady with an old laptop selling DVDs and vintage-looking hand-radios equipped with a USB port. There was also the dog seller from the other bank and two Chinese-medicine

street doctors. The slurping sound floated from the nearby noodle shop, and a child cry often emanated from yet another clinic, which was later among the first local businesses that gave in to the gradual demolition happening through the course of my stay in Shimazi. A red banner hanging on the corrugated iron fence carried a message which was presumably not targeted towards the recent new marketplace's inhabitants: "If our construction company's demolition activities brought you a nuisance, please forgive us" (*wo gongsi zai ci chaichu dailai bu bian, qing liangjie*).

Figure 14: The Glade (or bimox nyix dde*) of the Shimazi Marketplace with the Big Bridge of Victory in the back*

Leaving the surface of the Upper Yushi Road, I stepped into the cartographic void. No map showed it, very few people in Latbbu Oprro – except those frequenting it and practicing here – talked about it. While walking around, the chunks of fragile soil, dried patches of grass, plastic bags, bottle caps, pebbles, and other "visible absences" (Croft, 2018, p. 5) occasionally found its way to adapt to the pattern of the outsoles walking over them, but most of the times were crushed with a crackling sound. South-eastwards, approximately ten meters from the riverbank's embankment, grew three tall trees. They often served as a source of shadow for those who sold the paraphernalia – drums, ritual fans and quivers – to ritualists, pop-up *majiang* tables surrounded by the gamblers, and the *bimox*, along with *mopnyit* and *sunyit*, whose fixed spots were intersecting with the mixed shadows of the tree crowns and trunks. On the Shimazi's original location, the ritualists often sat in one long-stretching line and by their backs leaned towards the balustrade. They conducted the more complicated rituals behind this imagined division between the street and wilderness – in the semi-dry riverbed –,

where the unyielding stream of a humble creek connected it to the mountains. Now, when the access to the riverbed was significantly constrained by the existence of the Big Bridge of Victory, the ritualists – after being for more than two decades part of the gradually urbanized Latbbu Oprro – as if regressed; or rather were, wittingly or not, washed away from the streets by the stream of the absolute truth of economic development to align with the historical representation of Shimazi as a grey area happening on the "muddy river shore." Partially unpaved, the "new" location of Shimazi inherited similar designation to the riverbed – a "free land" (*ziyou di*) ("Shimazi: Lao Xichang," 2018) – which formerly functioned as a highway of rhizomaticity winding through spaces tamed by the urban development's imperative of systemic order. Seen from this perspective, all this development seems paradoxical when placed *vis-à-vis* the way how the Bimo Culture was conceptualized as a showcase of the locally dominant Nuosu-Yi culture. The underlying tone of writings trying to decouple the Shimazi Marketplace ritualists from their allegedly "more genuine" rural counterparts – along with its timing copying the increased push for tighter urban management – make them "speech acts" in the service of the top-down policies of authorities disconnected from the voices "from the bottom." Here, the tension between the articulable and the visible kept materializing in various permutations in front of our eyes.

Figure 15: The Glade (or bimox nyix dde*) of the Shimazi Marketplace (facing the Upper Yushi Road)*

In comparison with the previous location, in the "new" Shimazi the ritualists formed more or less a circle. Following the local unwritten rules, each person possessed her or his signature spot, which should not be occupied by anyone else. The robust face of the *denghui* – a

decoration at the occasion of Chinese New Year covering the face and area around Big Through-gate on the opposite riverbank – a new feature to the tamed space –, shone through the bushes, parasols, and trajectories of the walkers. To the left of the trees, three unidirectional traffic cameras were pointing in an approximate direction of the gamblers' tables. Above the intersection of the Upper Yushi Street and its Lower twin, a three hundred sixty degrees traffic camera hung on a stand. It kept a remote eye on the whole area, especially a road leading to local 3rd Elementary School, further to People's Hospital and Eastern Bus Station – a transportation hub for the "Five Eastern Counties" (*wu dong xian*), the core area of the Nuosu-Yi demographics. The one-storey mud-brick houses – still standing because their inhabitants were not able to reach a settlement with the city authorities concerning their compensation fee – resembled lips of a gullet leading to the Latbbu Oprro's close periphery. In the beginning, grocery shops, noodle joints, and teahouses – or, more precisely, "*majiang* dens" – filled these buildings. The opposite side in which I was frequently standing, sitting with and oscillating between the ritual practitioners, formerly featured the same set of services. The building debris standing aside of the Glade served as a pop-up toilet, a facility that was provided for the marketplace in the original Shimazi location, but not here.

People selling the chicken of various feather colours, along with fruits and vegetables, bowls of rough beancurd with Nuosu-Yi sauerkraut, or barbecue, gradually became more numerous. Gamblers were taking their passion way more seriously than on the original Shimazi's spot. Tens of thousands of *yuan* were kept under the guard of other people who waited in the cars parked nearby. The gamblers kept coming and going, to refill their empty hands with fresh cash after a substantial loss or to store their small fortune after a glorious moment of victory. Quarrelling and violent exchanges were not uncommon. A loud whistle now and then interrupted a semi-muted omnipresent murmuring, and the gamblers' table immediately dispersed into four directions. Some individuals jumped into the riverbed from the embankment, which was about two and a half meters high, and disappeared for a day or two; others sat around with the ritual practitioners and pretended to be seeking their services. Dozens of seconds later, the police car threateningly passed through the area and sank into the Lower Yushi Street. With the sound of siren gradually fading away, the gamblers resumed their presence and carried on as usual. The *bimox* were never affected by such police raids. Towards the end of the day, a city cleaning service came to selectively sweep paved patches of the ground, making an unexpected visit to a territory that seemed not to be a part of the official city surface. They were, however, looking for concrete things but, usually, they came

too late. The most valuable "non-objects" – the plastic bottles – were already collected by the elderly, subtle Han-Chinese lady residing somewhere in the disappearing neighbourhood. Accompanying the one apologizing for the nuisance of the construction work, another red banner said: "Move Out Fast to Enjoy a New Life" (*jishi banqian xiangshou xin shenghuo*). It was attached to the facade of one of these houses and embodied the transitory and temporal nature of the new Shimazi.

5.3 Shimazi's Migrations

Within days of my sustained presence in the marketplace, I learned that between Shimazi's disappearance from the original location and its resurfacing on the Glade, there was one more stopover. During one late afternoon, I have met Shynzymop and her husband – a practicing *bimox*. It was their only appearance in Shimazi during my presence on Shimazi. Shynzymop told me about a place called "The Sacred Land of the *Bimox*" (Bimox pup) located in a northern fringe of the Latbbu Oprro's urban proper – a part of the town called "The Bridge of Distant Tranquility" –, standing aside from the main flow of crowds. The following day, I went to visit the Bimox pup. In comparison with the Nuosu nyopw pup – "The Sacred Land of the Nuosu Folk Songs" right next to the Torch Square in the city centre –, it looked like its impoverished relative. This contrast reflected the emphasis given to "Gesamtkunstwerk" (Bamo, A., 2007b, p. 88) – music and dance performances – over the still ambiguous, and somewhat ideologically problematic vernacular ritual practice which is hard to control. At the Bimox pup, a door guard required a registration – a full name and a phone number – of anyone who wanted to enter. Apart from the small houses with names and telephone numbers of those ritualists who get them assigned, there was a small open space with a banner pointing to the training session for the last year's Torch Festival (*dutzie*), one of the Nuosu-Yi most observed festivity-turned-tourist-attraction. No one was around. Beyond the Bimox pup which neighboured a large beer brewery were only green fields on a slowly ascending hill slope.

When asking Yyhxox about the Bimox pup, he replied that it is a private project of three people – some of them ritualists – who are running it together. "They did this project before the last year's *dutzie*, saying it is basically to separate the knowledgeable *bimox* from the rest. But what I think they are really doing is that they are using the *bimox*… It would function as a company for performances… For example, you need a *bimox* [for a staged performance], then it will cost you five hundred *yuan*. The one who performs gets two hundred, two of them go there as helpers, each will get fifty, and the rest goes to the company. They even wanted to

develop a mobile app for this," explained Muxgo – my friend who was familiar with the situation as one of his relatives was involved in the broader planning of this project – while eating a hot pot. "We once went there to have a look, but we were not willing to go there again. There is nothing there," Yyhxox told me adding, that the houses look like a pig shed. The Bimox pup project thus failed before it even started, resembling a project of a similar sort called "bimo culture village" in Lipmu Moggux (Kraef, 2014, p. 165-166).

Figure 16: Nuosu nyopw pup – the institution outsourcing the Nuosu-Yi folk songs performances

Apart from the failed experiment of Bimox pup, in the months I spent on the Glade I noticed that the Shimazi's original location – passively-repressively cleared only to be leniently governed by the city authorities –, became on occasions "fertile" again. The *bimox* were careful not to run into the *chengguan* – notoriously feared rough city management officers – and often took over sites only temporarily. Deleuze and Guattari (2005) cite Henry Miller, who claimed: "China is the weed in the human cabbage patch... The weed is the Nemesis of human endeavour... Of all the imaginary existences we attribute to plant, beast and star the weed leads the most satisfactory life of all. True, the weed produces no lilies, no battleships, no Sermons on the Mount... Eventually the weed gets the upper hand. Eventually things fall back into a state of China" (p. 18-19). Although implying rhizomaticity, ironically, Miller's metaphor of weed pointing to China is – given the development of the current global politics and PRC's role and trajectory within it – an utterly non-rhizomatic and rigid. Nevertheless, seeing Shimazi – the marketplace, the ritualists' spot of practice, a place where other vices of the day-to-day life materialize – and its movement through space working similarly as the night locally famous barbecue (*shaokao*) – cyclically, creatively and flexibly escaping series of crackdowns of authorities stipulating the project of "civilized city" (*wenming chengshi*),

only reemerging after the enforcement of the policies fell out of the agenda's main objectives – the "weed" metaphor keeps its plausibility.

Figure 17: Bimox pup – the institution outsourcing the bimox *performances*

The activities of the ritualists in these settings were "analogous to the guerrilla's surreptitious ruses or poaching raids whose operation is largely dependent on both the absence of the power in a place" (Tam, 2012, p. 247) – a behaviour vividly described in writings of the 19th and first half of 20th centuries which I quoted in Chapter 2, which concerned the raids of groups of the Nuosu-Yi to the lowlands to obtain captives. Apart from the metaphors of captivity (see Swancutt, 2012a), the agricultural metaphors permeate various Nuosu-Yi practices as well (see *yyrkut* in 2.4). While observing how the place changed its location multiple times, it seemed as if the *bimox* implemented a behaviour similar to the swiddening, only transplanting it from mountain slopes to Latbbu Oprro's plane. Defined as "an agricultural strategy of rotating fields which are allowed to go fallow for multiple years (...), requiring the cutting and burning of vegetation that grows during that period" (Schmitt, 2014, p. 98), the swiddening somewhat shadowboxed with the ritualists' escapes from the embrace of various policies. Pointing to a way of practiced space in the specific way to suit particular needs, the "slash and burn cycles" required finding a suitable place for "planting" the activity, which might or might not include dismantling the nationalized governance of the space in the name of the scientific projects (Schmitt, 2014, p. 106), which Latbbu Oprro's city management strived for through its development-oriented slogans found on exposed spots around the city. The governance – in this case, the "fallow period" – of newly developed spaces proved to be temporary, and the (re)claimed micro-fields kept circulating Latbbu Oprro in a way similar to the rotating colourful squares on Rubik's cube. Closer to the storytelling of the Nuosu-Yi themselves, these cyclical shifts also resembled rhetorics found in *Hnewo tepyy*, especially

those describing migrations sparked by the inability to dwell and eventually settle down in a certain place for a longer period (e.g., Bender, Aku & Jjivot, 2019, p. 76-85).

5.4 Temporality and Spacing "On the Go"

Close to The Promenade, a fragment of the marketplace left in the lower part of the street was the only reminder that Shimazi once occupied its original spot. I too kept forgetting way too quickly. The brick-and-mortar shops selling dried meat, spices, agricultural utensils, and other related products, which were allowed to stay, provided a psychological shelter to the stalls selling *bingfen* in their proximity. Through all the movements, dis- and re-appearances, more and more mixed and blurred memories of certain stages of Shimazi's existence added to the confusion and immense baggage of how to conceptualize Shimazi as a place for the *bimox* as well as a research field site. Even more confusingly, when I installed Baidu Maps, I was able to virtually walk in the original settings as I used to know them. The digital imprint was preserved in the cache memory of the software, resulting in unexpected time-transcending possibilities. I was able to walk through the already tamed environment and at the same time experience the same walk from the past through swiping the "street-view" mode on my phone. Shimazi was – for me as well as for others – "a physical environment in which many memories and meanings were already invested" (Pink, 2007, p. 243). Orley (2012) further observed that memory of place should be "thought of as fluid, transitory, and open-ended, activated only by those who pass through" (p. 40). The (re)activations thus happened daily and kept intertwining with each other.

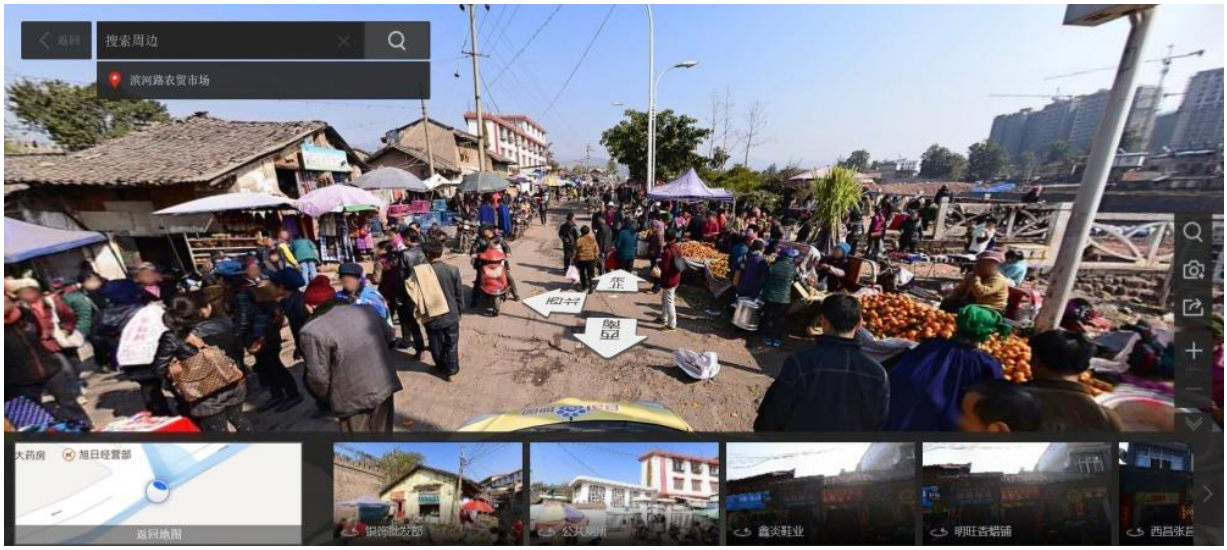

Figure 18: The retrospective view of the original site of Shimazi through Baidu ditu (Baidu Maps)

When space "is considered as a human process in spacing, rather than an abstract 'thing'" (Crouch, 2017, p. 2), spacing then points to the practice of "identify[ing] subjective and practical ways in which the individual handles her or his material surroundings." Furthermore, it is "positioned in terms of action, making sense (including the refiguring of 'given' space), and mechanisms of opening up possibilities" (Crouch, 2003, p. 1945). As such, spacing points to the "performative character of what people do" (p. 1946) which then "similar to expressive, embodied practices, can produce numerous hybridities, exemplified in the diverse interpretations and in the way individuals do, discover, and speak," therefore "through these hybridities new possibilities and connections may be made" (p. 1958). Each of the actants – ritualists, city authorities, me, and Nuosu-Yi academics –, however, held a radically different view of the marketplace. Each of these view to a certain degree disharmonized those of others. Crouch (2017) sees the spacing as an act which is "poetic and gently political, in an intimate way" (p. 5). While academics' and mine perceptions were (gently or callously) political, for the creative and political ritualists, the practice of spacing was rather subconscious, simmering under layers of their everyday life in Latbbu Oprro. In short, it was me – along with other academics – who was explicitly and consciously "making" the marketplace a certain way, which was, at least in the very beginning, not aligned with the perception of the ritualists.

After a short, incidental conversation with Atgamox, I realized that on Shimazi there are at least three different ways how to understand time. Atgamox, a lady in her late twenties with her infant children often playing around her stall, ran a profitable business selling plants, sticks, branches, and strings – implements necessary for knotting a proper *rybbur*. The raw material found its way to the marketplace in a van directly from her place of origin in Njitla Buxte. During the odd days when he had nothing else to do, her father, who worked as a night watchman, drove the van to Njitla Buxte and back to bring the material. Atgamox knew precisely the set of implements for each ritual, and also the differences in practices connected to different geographical areas of Nipmu. She was eager to answer any questions regarding her commodities in detail and at length. "Before, I was out for seasonal work. However, now, I have a kid, so I stick close to my birthplace. In the end, on a good day, I can make quite decent money," Atgamox explained what brought her to the business. Sitting near her stall – always stuffed with neatly pre-prepared natural commodities used during the rituals –, I could personally witness how different ritualists requested different materials for different rituals. One day, I greeted her with a courtesy question about her business. "Yesterday, the business

was good," she replied, "but today is not a good day," Atgamox added. "Today is..." she started replying my question about the reason. "Monday," I interrupted her. "No, the spirit..." she was about to explain. "You mean demon (*gui*)?" With this question, I finally realized how annoying I must have been. "No, not demon [*gui*], the spirit [*shen*]! Tomorrow it is horse-day, today is a day of the snake. Nobody does the superstition [*mixin*] today." The various calendars used here included the Nuosu-Yi time, the "traditional" Han-Chinese time, and the "foreign," Gregorian-calendar-based time. As Walters (2015) points out, Nuosu-Yi ideas of time "are connected to the agricultural cycle" with words "connected to seasons and the rising and setting of the sun," which "don't all overlap with chunks of time that English speakers use." This was also true about the speakers of Mandarin Chinese. There are no Nuosu-Yi words for "week or clock time" and to "talk about those concepts, Chinese words are borrowed" (p. 140). The longer time chunks are counted as generations, where one span over between twenty-five (Harrell, 1995a) and thirty (Wu, 2001) years. Since the day-to-day Chinese time-concept to great degree interlace with the Western one, in the end, all of these concepts interlaced. Apart from the agricultural cycles, the Nuosu-Yi time – especially concerning the *bimox* practice – consists of the more or less auspicious days for ritual performances. Moreover, there were also different indicators of asynchronically layered temporalities which did not hold to any structural concept: the red banners urging people to move out of their homes, the bulldozers demolishing the buildings, or the excavator building the weir in the semi-dry riverbed. All possessed time-making potential and each of these produced unique timestamps.

My long-term Shimazi memories and reflections on my observations were closely linked to the questions of temporality, which was not opposed to historicity, "but rather merge in the experience of those who, in their activities, carry forward the process of social life" (Ingold, 2002c, p. 194). Ingold conceptualizes these activities as taskscapes to which the temporality is intrinsic (p. 194), making them – in analogy to landscape seen as "an array of related features" – "an array of related activities" (p. 195). The temporality of the taskscape "lies not in any particular rhythm, but in the network of interrelationships between the multiple rhythms of which the taskscape is itself constituted" (p. 197). Ultimately, through the inquiry into time-oriented narratives which involved multiple conversations with the ritualists, I was able to unpack how the ritualists individually think about Shimazi. Yyhxox and Jjixke V. did not identify the marketplace in relation to their practice *a priori* as a "place." Yyhxox kept pointing out Shimazi's chaos (*luanqibazao*). "We will be gone soon," was the most frequent

one-liner, when facing the row of buildings being slowly eaten away by the excavator's or bulldozer's blade. Along with his memories, the time Yyhxox spent practicing here did not seem to be as important as the notion of his stay here being temporary. He made no difference between the original and current location, and whether or not the eventual end of Shimazi would affect his vocation as a *bimox.* Through this particular rhetoric, he treated Shimazi as a stopover on a journey with no demarcated beginning and end. Similar to the Jjixke H.'s understanding of learning as walking through the landscape, Yyhxox and others were spacing "on the go" – in a constant potential of movement.

The strong relation to a non-linear and not finite time became even more apparent after I tapped into a history of Shimazi through Jjixke V.'s narration. "Inside [the city gates] it is [called] *lurkur*. Outside is *lurhxi*. If you had some sort of conflict, you could go and sort it out [at the Big Through-gate] – it was a place for mediation. During the time of Apsy Latzzi, the name was [already] like that. The same is true for Vyttuo Lurkur [where there is a city wall]. Mao Zedong did not dare to appear here, he was afraid that he will die. Only after Nationalists fled to Taiwan. Also [the place served for] mediation with foreigners." I hope I would not spoil anything from the following chapters by saying, that this articulation was one of the most rewarding for understanding the Nuosu-Yi ways of individualized cosmology-crafting, which not only connected to the Nipmu but possessed a potentiality to an unfinishable expansion. Along with the way how Shimazi kept standing out, it echoed Bakhtin's (2010a) conception of "great time" (p. 5), which Holquist (2010) explains as "continuity in time (...) in which all utterances are linked to all others, both those from the primordial past and those in the furthest reach of the future" (p. xxi). Similarly, Deleuze (1990) understood Aion as a time extending indefinitely to the past and the future, the time of "pure events" (p. 15) which stands – somewhat untypically for Deleuze's thinking – as a binary opposition to Chronos, "the time of the present which encompasses past and future as horizons relative to the present" (Voss, 2013, p. 15). Adam (2006) maintained that "rhythmicity and the past, present and future are culturally malleable whatever the chosen means for telling a story" (p. 98). In this sense, Jjixke V. managed to blend legendary figure of Apsy Latzzi, politics of Mao Zedong, and people from outside China's border into one narrative constituting of elements without the necessity of caring about its direction.

In such a context, the "spatial" dimension of Shimazi seemed to have much lower importance when compared to its temporal aspect. There were no clear borders nor directions. Applying this view on spatiality, Shimazi possessed no borders even with the surrounding cosmos of

Nipmu. Therefore, the *bimox* on marketplaces would not necessarily agree with Qubi (2015a), who described them as living on the fringes of the city, alienated from their native land, and being mere onlookers – not participants – in the city life. Quite the opposite, they saw and treated Shimazi firmly as an integral part of their cosmology, by no means divided from the place beyond the imagined boundaries between the urban and rural areas. Frequenting the plain – the Glade of Shimazi –, their perception was not affected by "being on Shimazi." In the ritualists' view, the Shimazi was woven into the tapestry of Latbbu Oprro in the same way as this only metropolis of Nipmu was an integral part of the Cool Mountains as well as the world beyond.

5.5 *Bimox nyix dde* – Together but On One's Own

Over my stay on the Shimazi, the "puzzling coexistence of solidarity and individualism" (Fernández, 2018, p. 867) among the Shimazi's ritualists was increasingly apparent. My initial commonsensical assumption that the *bimox* – along with the other people present in Shimazi – constitute a community of practice, namely "a group of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger, 2002, p. 4), proved incorrect. It would be relatively easy to depict Shimazi as a community of the sidelined, urban-dwelling ritualists who consciously resettled here and cherished this place as a platform for their practices. When talking in Sichuanese Mandarin, the *bimox* still called the place Shimazi, adopting the colloquial place-designation from its original location. However, when asked for the Nuosu-Yi name, they referred to it as *bimox nyix dde* – a "place where the *bimox* are" – similar designation to rural dwellings with the presence of the known *bimox*. This difference in Shimazi's designation then provided a hint on how deep is the difference in the Nuosu-Yi conceptualization when contested to other perceptions.

Nuosu-Yi academic works strived to organize the ritualists into a "*bimox* collective" (*bimo gongtongti*) (e.g., Bamo, A., 2000, p. 4), a relatively monolithic community sharing the same perspectives, values and ways of doing things. This, however, proved problematic to take any shape on the Shimazi Marketplace. When contemplating how to address the way how Shimazi Marketplace worked, I turned to Turner (1974) who, however, developed the concept of communitas – contrary to the "community" an egalitarian, inclusive "anti-structure," a "spontaneous, immediate, concrete" congregation of individuals "not shaped by norms," which "does not merge identities" but "liberates them from a conformity to general norms" (p.

274) – on the binary opposition of ancient and modern societies. He works with communitas as with a group of people emergent in a liminal situation, which enables them to share the experience from an equal position. As he further elaborates, communitas later aspire to become the new order. However, during the interactions in Shimazi, before the communitas-in-becoming could build up its "protective social structure" (p. 78), they fell apart again, only to start again at a different time, settings and context, filled with a situated content. In certain moments, however, the *bimox* still saw themselves in terms of a community. "Where will you go, after this place ceases to exist?" I asked Jjixke V. "We will think about it by ourselves," he said and laughed. "We have [each others'] phone numbers, so… [We will go] probably somewhere where they sell vegetables and pigs – there it is possible," he suggested settings similar to the *modus operandi* of the original Shimazi. The closest view of Shimazi was related to Bakhtin's idea of carnival as a place where a plurality of relations prevails as opposed to a cacophony of voices (Holquist, 2002, p. 86), "a mighty life-creating and transforming power, an indestructible vitality" (Bakhtin, 1984a, p. 107). To Bakhtin, "carnivals were not only festivities, but were also the only time when powerless members of the society could interact as equals with the powerful" (Kolodziej-Smith, 2014, p. 86). Carnival is animated by heteroglossia, "the simultaneous use of different kinds of speech (or other signs), tension between them and their conflicting relationship" (Ivanov, 2008, p. 252). Such fragmented speeches then uncover "ideologies inherent in the various languages to which we all lay claim as social beings and by which we are constituted as individuals" (Park-Fuller, 1986, p. 2). This setup differs not only from monologue (monoglossia), but also from dialogue (polyglossia) (p. 253) because it facilitates an absence of hierarchy and an unyielding flow of voices from not only two but all possible sides. However, it was not entirely parallel either, since the carnivalesque features asymmetrically intertwined with the moments of the cacophony of, for example, the police raids, authorities' eyes trough surveillance technology, or the city-employed companies making the place increasingly narrow and hard to dwell. Furthermore, here, individual performativities collided and contained "the potential for numerous tensions that may or may not be negotiated, coped with, or realised in becoming," during which many unexpected things emerge "during and between the time spent in tasking" (Crouch, 2003, p. 1958). Returning to Ingold's (2002c) taskscape, the Shimazi's landscape "*as a whole must likewise be understood as the taskscape in its embodied form*: a pattern of activities 'collapsed' into an array of features" (p. 198, italics in original). The taskscape then relates to temporality through the social "not because society provides an external frame against which particular tasks find the independent measure, but

because people, in the performance of their tasks, *also attend to one another*" (p. 196, italics in original), and it "exists not just as activity but as *inter*activity" (p. 199, italics in original), "only so long as people are engaged in the activities of dwelling despite the attempts of anthropologists to translate it into something rather equivalent to a score – a kind of ideal design for a dwelling – that generally goes by the name of 'culture', and that people are supposed to bring with them into their encounter with the world" (p. 197). Dwelling – preceded by acts of worldmaking (Ingold, 2002b, p. 179) and fundamentally temporal (Ingold, 2002c, p. 208) – itself precedes the process of building, as Ingold learned from Heidegger (Ingold, 2002b, p. 186), and, finally, "it is in the very process of dwelling that we build" (p. 188). The *bimox* were not able to proceed to the long-term project of building, but they dwelt on Shimazi in a particular way.

Studying the *jornaleros* (day labourers) who "hang out together, but survive on their own," Fernández (2018) conceptualizes a "collective regulation of individualism." The inverted version, "individual regulation of the collectivity," might be a suitable way how to generally perceive the person-to-person relationships, the interaction happening under the Shimazi's "umbrella." For an outside observer, Shimazi constituted a platform operating on a basis of serendipity – unprecedented, chance-driven gatherings of ritualists, who – coming from different parts of Nipmu and beyond, constituting "ensemble of rhythms that interweave in and across a place to produce a mix of events of varying regularity" (Edensor, 2010, p. 71) – would otherwise have no chance to encounter each other. The ritualists constituted of multiple modes of being ephemeral – internally as a presupposed group, and externally in the mutual relationships heavily influenced by the *cytvi* system. They dealt with various situations similarly stemming from top-down urban governance. This ephemerality is probably best to imagine through Jjixke H.'s narration of his childhood experiences, when he was following his *bimox* relatives to the variously affiliated clans – always on the move, from mountain to mountain, hamlet to hamlet, door to door, from one family to another.

Wees' (2017) take on the activity of busking in the Montréal metro – from individual to a group of some sort – could also help to partially explain the way how Shimazi worked. The marketplace could be seen as "an assemblage-act, involving multiple participants – human and material – that emerges through the practices and creative tactics of an individual performer, in an ongoing process of cobbling together, of bricolage" (p. 15). Ritualists on Shimazi were a "bricollective" – a term inspired by the concept of bricolage, a combination of

heterogeneous elements which could co-exist "in a variety of improvised combinations to generate new meanings within them" (Hebdidge, 1997, p. 103).

5.6 Summary and Partial Conclusion

In the reconciliation of all takes on Shimazi discussed in this chapter, I conclude that even though the Shimazi Marketplace might seem to be put together by a more or less coherent group of people, the practices of it "spacing" is highly individualized and performative. Shimazi was a space to which everybody brought myriad of their own places. Shimazi manifested itself as a platform for the Nipmu-based micro-globalization. In serendipitous encounters, the ritualists were, perhaps unprecedently, mutually confronted with each other's singularity, and thus thrown into a previously improbable carnivalist settings. The ritualists cobbled together Shimazi through their individual "dwellings," the spots where they received their clients. In their rhetorics, the Shimazi is a temporal rather than a spatial entity. Jjixke V.'s account on the place might seem entirely ahistorical but, in fact, it just assembled loose temporal segments into an array of fluid building blocks, which together constitute a "great time" with the Nuosu-Yi characteristics, similar to the loose, open-ended assemblage found in *Hnewo tepyy*. In other words, Shimazi constituted series of stopovers on the neverending journey through the geographical as well as spiritual Nipmu, which kept broadening according to the way how it got increasingly integrated into the Latbbu Oprro as well as the whole country and the world outside its borders. Physically, the Shimazi was gradually being dissolved by the authorities. Cartographically, it became a non-place, and the ritualists were invited to participate within the Bimox pup project. They refused. Instead of becoming part of a hierarchical, top-down managed collective, the *bimox* preferred to engage in their Shimazi-based individual regulation of the collectivity. Seen as taskscape – a place full of interactions and other activities – the ritualists were not only frequenting this temporal site. They were dwelling in it.

Orley (2012) sees places as anthropomorphized entities (p. 36), but in a particular way – only when persons animate it (p. 37). In this resurrected Shimazi, none of the actors – authorities, dwellers or by-passers – were passive. To paraphrase Orley's standpoint, Shimazi was a constellation of lines, traces, and trajectories – mine, as well as of all those who were dwelling within it in the past, present, or future. Shimazi constituted "an ever-changing set of networks which are thrown together and dispersed again and again over time" (p. 39). However, the anthropomorphized entities animate back, as the process of persons animating places is

reciprocal and dynamic (p. 37). Naturally, Shimazi, as well as the hustle and bustle of Latbbu Oprro "animated back" – e.g. the way of dwelling on the Shimazi resembling the modes of subsistence of people animating Shimazi before them (see 5.1 and the "fortune-tellers"). The most significant amendment of their practice would be the extension of their services beyond their homes, where they, "traditionally," were supposed to dwell and wait for the clients' invitation. "Our family has an affiliated *bimox* who takes care of rituals. However, he lives far, and he is often busy. When I need a quick solution to my problems of those of my family, I come to Shimazi," told us one of the clients – a local elementary school teacher – seeking ritualists' services on the marketplace. While not hawking or actively attracting the passers-by, the *bimox* were engaged in a practice of "cancelling the difference between 'far away' and 'down here'" (Bauman, 2006, p. 117). In other words, they increased the convenience of the *bibbox* (the external invitation) for their clients with a *de facto* merging of their dwelling with their signature spot on Shimazi. Along with their ways of *flânerie,* this could all be considered as a locally crafted modern endeavour as an alternative to the narrative of modernity exclusively coming from outside and encroaching on Nipmu and the Nuosu-Yi way of life.

Latbbu Oprro is Nipmu's only metropolis. This, however, does not mean that Latbbu Oprro should be less "Nuosu-Yi" than other places in Nipmu and that it should be separated with Nipmu. It is not divided from it but rather in an unyielding, mutual process of hybridization. In short, when the spatial borders between Shimazi and Latbbu Oprro could be disabled, then the borders of city-Nipmu, Nipmu-PRC and PRC-world could vanish too. "*Bimox* can go to Yunnan, even to Chengdu now. Before, [they dwelled] in the mountains. But now, what is there to do in the mountains? Gatlyp Mopbbo, Axhuo Tenzy… You can go all over Nipmu. Before, Apsy Latzzi went to Yypnuo [Yunnan Province], and also abroad – to other countries," said Jjixke V. The Shimazi Marketplace ritualists were not a dichotomous opposite to those from rural areas, as the literature implied. They were not "the same," but "equally different" from each other. Hence, the proposed duality emphasized the ambiguities even more. Because of Shimazi and its academic treatment – going in the line with the Shimazi's unfavourable history, which was then unwittingly perceived as inherited through the presence of the ritualists, thus endangering the purity of those practicing in the "traditional" rural settings –, the *bimox* frequenting the marketplace suddenly found themselves to be simultaneously eulogized and reprobated. The authorities selected the only possible way of how to solve this situation: avoidance of the confrontation, thus letting the situation slowly die out. Shimazi was a body, unfixed and ever-changing (Orley, 2012, p. 40). Through its

animation, the ritualists to a certain degree embodied the marketplace as well, moving through, occupying and performing its space as much as they imposed and derived meanings from it (Meethan, 2012, p. 71). As Crouch (2003) points out, “both the performative and embodied practice are characterised in doing” (p. 1947). Through dwelling in Shimazi, they engaged in an act of embodied persuasion concerning their Latbbu Oprro belonging directed towards those who deemed their presence undesirable.

6. Real vs. Fake *Bimox*: Claiming Purity Through Dichotomy-based Rhetorics

The dichotomy of "real" vs. "fake" somewhat loomed already over the Chapter 5, where it was linked to the *bimox* practice in relation to particular places, also dichotomously divided between "rural" and "urban." Referring to Skinner (1977), Harrell (2001b) points out that the division between countryside and the cities – mentioned several times in sources recounting Shimazi's past in connection to the "East River" – was "not a feature of the traditional Chinese economic or conceptual landscape," but rather a Western import of "nineteenth and twentieth centuries" when "the city became equated with modernity and progress while the villages were seen as backwaters of tradition and superstition" (p. 144 – citing Pannell, 1992; Johnson 1992). During the recent decades, the previously "backward" countryside was increasingly portrayed as a source of cultural authenticities *vis-à-vis* the cities seen as dynamic centres of the development. Overburdened with work and responsibilities for PRC's economic rise, the urban residents keep fantasizing about the rural idyll and their roots. These tensions then frame a discussion about the authenticity of the cultural practices in a similar manner as the authenticity of the Nuosu-Yi relates to the allegedly long history of isolation from the outside influences.

The debate about authenticity formulated around the notion of space and related strongly to the increasing demand of the urban residents for experiences letting them taste the supposedly ancient traditions and original way of life gave birth to a concept of *yuanshengtai*. Literally translated as "original ecology," *yuanshengtai* started as ordinary daily conversations, from which it found its way into the debate on authenticity (Kendall, 2016), reaching as far as academia and policy-making bodies. The concept is useful as it fits the PRC's official ideology – thus the linear view of history and the development of society – as well as goals of counties, prefectures and provinces to develop through tourism. The binary division between "authentic" and "non-authentic" within the *yuanshengtai* debate almost exclusively copies the borders between rural and urban. Specifically, as Li (2019) pointed to the linear, unidirectional causality of the *yuanshengtai* as "fantasies of the urban residents about the pristine rural paradise" –, this line of argumentation primarily observes a location rather than the actual content of practices (Kendall, 2016, p. 100). Kendall further argues that the principal producers of *yuanshengtai*, in our case the rural ethnic population, tend to see the application of this concept on their day-to-day lives as artificial or commercialized (p. 102),

while the *yuanshengtai* somewhat inherited the notions of backwardness (p. 105), as the Mandarin expression for "original" (*yuanshi*) can also mean "primitive" in a very closely related context. Purely on the argument of location, this narrative excludes even the ethnic residents of the urban areas. The urban population is then forced to choose between *yuanshengtai* and modernity while especially the youth predominantly chooses the latter (p. 106). Remarkably, through internalization of this false polarity, the individuals then tend to abandon their own cultural practices which they deem as backward.

In this chapter, which deals predominantly with relations among the ritualists on Shimazi marketplace, I introduce how the aforementioned layout of debate on authenticity found its way among the *bimox* practicing on the Shimazi Marketplace, and how it was embedded into their categories and discussions about each other's orthodoxy. As I have shown in Chapter 5, the marketplace ritualists did not deem themselves different from their "rural" counterparts, since the genesis of the Nuosu-Yi group identity revolving around the recurring topic of migration and spacing "on the go" bridged the dichotomies with rather an all-encompassing narrative rooted in their mythology. They, however, made use of similarly designed distinction against each other through performative rhetorics situated in different contexts and concerning a great variety of topics. The chapter starts with evidence of how Jjixke H. who did not frequent the marketplace and at the same time internalized the dichotomies through their involvement in the local politics pushed the narrative of authenticity veiled with the *yuanshengtai* overtones against those ritualists dwelling on Shimazi. It goes on with a presentation of how this method was then taken up by the Shimazi *bimox* – namely Jjixke V., Yyhxox, and Vuthop –, who individually "weaponized" the authenticity-related dichotomy veiled in other wordings and present in different narratives to persuade – or prove their worth to – their audience (including me) about their exceptionality and legitimacy in the context of their take on the *bimox* vocation. This then leads to a discussion on how the ritualists graft these appropriated concepts on their own Nuosu-Yi-specific dichotomy related to the concept of blood superiority (aristocracy vs. commoners) in an attempt to carve out their individualized orthodoxy.

6.1 Nuosu-Yi Categories of Performance and Roots of "*Bimox* Schism"

In early autumn 2017, Jjixke H. got increasingly engaged with the cultural bureau of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, eventually becoming one of their employees. During

these two years, I mostly resided in Hong Kong. One day, Jjixke H.'s Weixin featured a short, ten seconds long video clip. It was already at the time when Shimazi got significantly reduced, and the ritualists occupied only the lower part of its former location. In the clip, I recognized the balustrade dividing the street from the river. The focus was on a *tepyy* scroll in making. Holding a black marker, a hand was writing columns of the ancient Nuosu-Yi characters: slowly, with a great emphasis on its aesthetic side, one after another. "This is the right way to write the characters," Jjixke H. wrote as a comment to this recording. I asked him, whether he visits Shimazi regularly. He answered, that just sometimes when he passes through. "These *bimox* are fake anyway – all they engage in is fortune-telling (*suanming*), and they make money from it," he did not omit to express his disdain, as he almost invariably did whenever our conversation spiralled towards the marketplace.

During an early autumn's chilly afternoon of 2017, I met with Jjixke H. on a crossroad near the Torch Square – one of the Latbbu Oprro's centres. Baseball cap on his head, the typical, ritualist's *hlepvop* covering a black backpack, he was holding a phone to his ear. The transparent phone cover revealed a five-pound bill with the portrait of the Queen of England. We boarded a bus and went to attend an international poetry festival on the shore of Oprro Shupmop lake. Jjixke H. took part in the opening ceremony. Dressed in the garments representative of Lipmu Moggux, with the *hlepvop* on his head, *jietshyr vapla* cloak over his shoulders, *vyxtu* hanging on a copper chain on his back, and *tepyy* held by his both hands, he stood on the stage under a massive screen featuring the expression "Silk Road" (Sichou zhi lu). Just for his performance, the screen ran a slideshow of pictures displaying the ritualists' paraphernalia in detail, along with photos of *bimox* variously engaged with scriptures. These were later replaced with video clips depicting the natural scenery of Nipmu, and the *bimox* embedded within it. Jjixke H. was alone on the stage, the audience was sitting on chairs with red covers, with a cup of tea in front of them along with the name tags printed on a light pinkish paper. Two cameramen stood under the stage and documented the whole process. Lights were pointed towards the podium with the microphone, and also towards the ceiling of the conference room. After rhythmically, cyclically chanting the onomatopoeic syllable to scare off the malicious spirit (*hxo*), Jjixke H. rolled up the scroll in his hands and took out the *biju* bell. Some of the spectators shot his performance on their mobile phones. The *bimox* chanted lines from the scroll by heart. With the ringing sound of the bell, Jjixke H. repeatedly chanted the auspicious words of blessing (*zzyrmuo*) for the event, wishing it a success. After five minutes of performing, Jjixke H. left the stage and joined me in the audience. Together,

we saw the selected foreign poets reciting their works and the performance of a group of women dressed in garments inspired by the local ethnic flavour. “These are wolves dressed in sheep’s clothing (*daizhe langpi de yang*),” Jjixke H. later remarked. “Retired cadres, most of them are not even Yi.”

In the following banquet, which took a place in the large dining room, I met the organizer – a famous and influential Nuosu-Yi poet. Jjixke H. knew him from Beijing, where he was at that time allegedly the only *bimox* and conducted rituals for organizer’s family. The guest-performers of this event – poets, sinologists, and other intellectuals from various European and American countries – were naturally very interested in Jjixke H. Many use translators to communicate and network with him, asking about the *bimox* practice, the content of the *tepyy*, and how this content could be translated and/or turned into some other form of academic or artistic expression. The Chinese guests debated with Jjixke H. about the best ways to save and further promote the Bimo Culture. One Chinese poet expressed an ambition to take on this responsibility, despite admitting he did not know anything about the *bimox*, and that he would need Jjixke H.’s help with translation of the individual lines of the text. The *bimox* courteously offered help, although it was more than evident that such a thing would never happen. Towards the end, in a circle of the main personages responsible for the whole event, Jjixke H. personally extended the *bimox* blessing – as he put it himself – to the prefectural head. Everything was permeated with a series of toasts and feasting on mostly Sichuanese dishes. The Nuosu-Yi food, seeing something of a boom in recent years in its re-designed form for the local gastro-business and exported also to cities like Chengdu and Beijing, was scarce.

In the evening, we separated from the group and went to an open-air coffee shop, where Duane, along with another friend of his, was responsible for the live music production. On our table stood a bottle of liquor. Jjixke H. and I sat down, kept drinking the bourbon, while I started to reflect on the event, leading to the *bimox* also expressing his views. “During the ritual on the stage, what did you feel? Was it the ‘real thing’?” I asked. “It was not a ritual, it was a thing that I only played with (*wanr*),” Jjixke H. began. “I know the organizer from Beijing. A few days ago, I was lying in a bed, and they called me. They said that they are doing this festival. Its objective was to teach students on how to produce poetry, and how it is done in different parts of the world,” Jjixke H. recounted and lit a cigarette. “There was a person, he directly said that this land – from Dadu River to the North, and Jinsha River to the south – belongs to us – Yi people. I think what he said does not make much sense. Everybody

knows to whom this land belongs, you do not have to say this directly. You can even get into unnecessary problems because of saying such things," he seemingly diverted from the topic. "Why did I do this?" he asked before answering. For the organiser. "To give him a face. My second motivation was that I can get closer to the people – the guests and others – and to tell them what I really think. That not everything is as perfect as it seems. I have my own thoughts," he said, slowly sipping the bourbon. "Also, I did this for those five thousand *yuan* – to pay my rent and to keep on living. But the most important was the organizer's face," he wrapped up his view. It was only a couple of years later – on my wedding – when Jjixke H. performed similarly. "This is the real thing, parts of it were the real ritual," he kept telling me after the ceremony.

Discussing staged performances by Naxi ethnicity's Dongba in Lijiang, Zhu (2012) sees the ritualists' own personalized perception of "becoming authentic" – even when performing for tourists or during an event – as depending on "personal memory, the constructed identity and the complexity of the contemporary by participating in the ritual performance as embodied practice"; these "ontological judgments" are performative, because they depend on the way how those who perform or those who are observing the performance present the meaning-making through articulation (p. 1510). In the case of Jjixke H., however, the debate on authenticity was meaningless, as he considered both types of performance as authentic, only belonging into different categories. For him, there were two distinct kinds of performances: *gumuhomu* (deriving from *guho*, which is an expression for "person's appearance"), as something done only for a show – and the ritualistic *bi* performance (discussed in Chapter 7) where words are considered as having a tangible impact on the world. Jjixke H. was able to seamlessly and selectively switch between these two categories, where the question of "authenticity" was irrelevant. What was relevant, however, was the purity of the *bi* performance, which derived foremostly from the legitimacy of the *bimox* who performed it.

During Duane's performance of Bob Marley's *No Woman No Cry*, I started to talk about my earlier visit to Shimazi that day. "So you are going there too, right?" I asked Jjixke H. "I actually think that not all of them are fake as you said," I looked for a potentially heated disagreement. "Of course," Jjixke H. shot back. "I saw your Weixin post. You made a video about a guy who wrote the characters. You know… That one who copied the book," I tried to keep the conversation in the line, but Jjixke H. diverted the conversation, shocking me by the information that the person died during a traffic accident while travelling late at night back home from one of his clients in upper Lipmu Juojjop on his motorcycle. Meanwhile, more

guests came to the coffee shop to listen to the music. “The Shimazi *bimox* are now on the second bank, on that construction site… Did you know that?” I tried to get back into the topic. “Yes… They are under that bridge now... They are waiting for the Bimo Academy (Bimoyuan) in Four Unions Township. The government has a plan now. They are not chasing away the *bimox*, it is actually quite the opposite. In that township, they are about to build one street, and each one of the ritualists will have a small room there. But to get there, there is an exam.” “Exam?” I asked. “Yes, an exam. This was decided on a meeting, I was present there as well. It was me who pointed out this thing. Why they would have an exam?” Jjixke H. asked again, immediately providing an answer: “If there is no exam, those cheaters would also get in, and that is what nobody wants. They asked how they are going to be examined. I said, that I am going to organize the exam. And find those excellent *bimox*,” Jjixke H. got excited. “And then,” he continued, “I will ask them: ‘What are you able to do?’ If you pass this exam, I will issue you a certificate. Then, you can proceed [with your practice]. Your serial number, your name, your telephone number – we will register these. This is how it will be done,” he stated proudly. “Now, there is this policy... Something like ‘changing city by the green culture’ (*lvse wenhua chengshi bianhua*). Around Shimazi – all those old buildings will be torn down. However, these *bimox* got already used to Shimazi,” Jjixhe H. pondered. Meanwhile, Duane ended his session, and his storming laughter came to our table. We spent the rest of that evening finishing the bourbon and eventually moving to a different place, full of Nuosu-Yi songs for a change.

6.2 Rejecting Representational Authenticity, Performing Purity

Apart from the prematurely deceased relative, a couple of other Jjixke H.’s clan members frequented the marketplace. In early April of 2018, I arrived in Latbbu Oprro by an overnight train. I have not slept very well. When passing through Jjiepggurx Galo and Vyttuo Lurkur, in one of the few places where the train leaves the long system of tunnels, I noticed a heavy snowfall in the flash of light coming from the headlights of the train going the opposite direction. I have just bounced to Duane’s place, changed clothes, drank a few doses of Pu’er tea and headed to the marketplace. On the way, I printed the Luobu’s (2015) article in a corner shop near Duane’s apartment. The fresh snow cap covered the mountain visible from the Big Bridge of Victory. It was an exceptionally cold day for this time of the year. Improvised hearths sprung up around the marketplace, the flames were dancing with gusts of cold wind, and those ritualists who were idle at that moment were sitting entirely covered

with *jietshyr vapla*, only with their heads sticking out. Hands became visible only at moments when another log needed to be put on the fire.

I greeted Yyhxox and sat next to him. The houses dotting the street were emptier day by day, but the flow of people did not decrease. A *bimox* next to us sat in front of a small, portable table, in which he had placed his *bimox* scriptures – all covered with his *hlepvop* hat – and a green plastic Thermos flask with the hot water. The row of such tables extended to the left, as the other ritualists also followed this setup, placing the lacquerware bowls – the cheap ones sold in nearby shops as well as antique ones, which they presumably carried with them from their homes – on the top, weighting down the scriptures. The building on the corner – the last one still quite densely inhabited –, which neighbored the debris of those where tenants already left, featured a big wreath with the word "offerings to the spirits of the dead" (*dian*). The piles of broken bricks and tiles kept filling Shimazi again. "We all should go there together and bow," Yyhxox commented. "Well, they do not need us. The Han habit is that they should not cry."

After a while, one of Yyhxox's daughters brought him his cloak of dark blue colour. "Also, the heavily intoxicated Shimazi frequenter –songs and shouts were his main marketplace commodity –, went to Xinjiang for seasonal work. "There, they can drink only during the evenings," Yyhxox remarked. "Well, that is good for him," I replied, noticing that Jjixke V. is consulting his book with another person. "I will go and have a look," I told Yyhxox. "Yes, go," he replied, and so I stood up and headed towards Jjixke V.'s spot. The person who sat next to the famous ritualist was his clan member from Vyttuo Lurkur. He came to Jjixke V. with a scroll that featured ancient characters which he was not able to recognize. Jjixke V. helped him with pronunciation. His relative then noted the pronunciation by writing standardized Nuosu-Yi characters above the ancient ones, which he was more familiar with. After a while, he was done for the day, and I was left with Jjixke V. alone.

After a short conversation, I handed him Luobu's (2015) article which I held in my hands. He began to read it, murmuring for himself one character after another as his finger slowly cruising across the paper guided his eyes on a journey through the lines of the text. He stopped at a place where Luobu criticized the *bimox* frequenting the marketplace. He pictured some of them as "having scanty knowledge" (*yi zhi ban jie*), "not having enough training," "starting their journey too late in their lives as a conscious, complete career change" (*ban lu chu jia*) or "not practicing according to standards and regulations" (*bu zhenggui*). Luobu even used an alleged Nuosu-Yi proverb (written only in Chinese) saying "Dogs [pretends to be]

bimox, cats [pretends to be] *sunyit*" (*gou zuo bimo le, mao dang suni le*), with an explanation that it means total incompetence, "filling a post without real qualifications" (*lanyu chongshu*) (p. 149).

"What does that mean?" Jjixke V. asked, spelling out these words. "I assume that he means that a certain part of the *bimox* here are not genuine," I replied. "You mean fake?" asked Jjixke V. and burst into laughter. "Well, he writes bullshit, that's what he does. There were four… No… Six people from other province coming to Lipmu Moggux to study [how to be a *bimox*]! The country [PRC] calls us to [teach] these things. What does he know? Can he do a similar thing for us?" Jjixke V. became suddenly angry and agitated. "He writes about Apsy Latzzi, who is a [good] spirit (*shen*) to us. [Only he is permitted to] write like this. [Luobu] knows shit. Lets us see how many [ancient Nuosu-Yi] characters he can recognize. Research… What kind of research [is this]?" he continued. I was still quite surprised because when I previously showed the article to Yyhxox, he was just laughing about these above-mentioned expressions, while Jjixke V. was very direct. "I am telling you. There are good ones too [on Shimazi]. Some of them know more, some know less. *Bimox* are different!" I kept silent, and let the *bimox* to continue. "He must mean *zzybi*. He does not know. Nowadays, the county [government] even do not use [the word] 'superstition' (*mixin*) anymore," Jjixke V. looked at the paper with his eyes squinting, skipping lines and randomly reading the rest of the text. "What a pundit (*zhuanjia*), huh… [A guy from] Jjiepggurx Galo. Let us see if he can beat me in the knowledge of the characters. There are many different *bimox*. Let us have a duel, he is a *zhuanjia* and I am the state level [intangible heritage transmitter]. We shall see!" I tried to brainstorm on a connection between such articles, and the disappearance of the Shimazi. However, Jjixke V., not interested in this parallel, kept his rant: "*Bimox* originally [divided from the social layer of] native headmen (*tusi*). Apsy Latzzi had this huge *vyxtu* [ritual quiver], he put everything inside. Call him [Luobu], tell him… Let us compare our knowledge. These people from that county, from Jjiepggurx Galo… Tell him to come!" he urged me with a notable pride in his voice. "The Bimo Culture (*bimo wenhua*) belongs to the *bimox*, we should [be the ones to] protect it. That is the meaning of the culture (*wenhua*). The script comes from the *bimox*, nowhere else. Very little came from elsewhere. Now, the country [officially recognizes] this eight-hundred-something characters. But the *bimox* know thousands of them… Five thousand, ten thousand. Then the country changed them. I know they know these… Eight-hundred-something. There are tens of thousands of characters. A lot of them are still not analyzed. These," Jjixke V. began to write down a row of ancient

characters, “these they do not know. This guy, Luobu… He even bought my books! You,” looking at me sternly, “change it!”

It became evident that Jjixke V. and Luobu knew each other. Luobu invited Jjixke V. to the library, where he paid him two hundred *yuan* per lesson of the ancient Nuosu-Yi characters. “He did not know anything. Now, he knows something,” said *bimox* and sighed. “I even sold him some of my [old and already hand-copied] books. He told me he is going to put this in his writing,” he said, seemingly regretting this. “I originate in Lipmu Moggux, now I moved here [to Latbbu Oprro]. I am the first one… He does not know anything,” he added. What followed was his advice on how I should “change” the Luobu’s article. “Write it like this… This place… A lot of *bimox* from Lipmu Moggux came here. They [- other *bimox* not from Lipmu Moggux -] all know. Then, from Vyttuo Lurkur… [The local *bimox*] know less, but still... All Nipmu is different. Some know ten, some four hundred [*tepyy* scriptures],” Jjixke V. suggested that apart from the count of the recognized characters, the *bimox* “evaluate each other’s work on the basis of the number of texts they possess” (Ma, 2000, p. 52). “Scriptures [which are used to cure the] rheumatoid arthritis (*fengshi guanjie*) has 120 kinds [of demons causing it, therefore, there are is a similar number to cure it]. Write my name inside, I am not afraid. Damn, every day [Luobu] brought a notebook with him containing those characters he does not know,” Jjixke V. returned in his memories a few months ago, becoming angry again. “Ask him, whether he is the country-level [heritage transmitter]. It is not only in Lipmu Moggux [where this status is recognized], it is in the whole world. I am expert in the *bimox* drawings. [I had] exhibitions in Chepdu [Chengdu], Bipji [Beijing], and also abroad. He knows nothing. Thirty different types of paintings. All people are calling me. Old scripts, [which] they do not know. What kind of expert is this?”

There were many remarkable passages in Jjixke V.’s rant. Even though he was from Lipmu Moggux and a member of the Jjixke clan, he was still visibly dissatisfied with the representation of his vocation not only in Luobu’s but also in academic writing in general. The *bimox* made a very clear distinction between the practitioners of the ritualist vocation and the rest of the Nuosu-Yi, including academics. Jjixke V. saw his position as exclusive. Using me as a proxy, Jjixke V. conversed with Luobu. He wanted to prove himself in front of him, challenging the author to a duel similar to *kepnrep* – the Nuosu-Yi competitive rhetorical disputations which showcase the competitors’ take on the Nuosu-Yi cosmology (see Bamo, Q., 2004b, p. 149-155), usually accompanied by bursts of excitement (agreeing or disagreeing with what competitors say), with each speech part ended with laughter and toasts from the

bowl full of alcohol. Jjixke H. on one occasion even described *kepnrep* as "Nuosu-Yi traditional rap" (*Yizu chuantong de shuochang*). Permutations of relationships between the *bimox* ritualists and the academic *zhuanjia* specialists are again addressed in Chapter 8, along with the re-connection to the Jjixke V.'s perspective.

A passage significant for this chapter is the one where Jjixke V. admitted that there are many different ways of how to be a *bimox*, and, subsequently, derived his sense of legitimacy from his belonging to the category of hereditary *bimox* as opposed to the group which acquire their skills through external apprenticeship (*zzybi*). In other words, while Luobu's dichotomy copied the rural-urban divide, Jjixke V.'s ran along the lines of (im)purity. However, while Jjixke V. saw *zzybi* as closest to the "fake" category, he possibly did not know that in Cemo Lurkur are clans whose members in several generations after obtaining the *bimox* skills through external apprenticeship managed to become the fully-fledged *bimox* clans (Zhang & Libu, 2015). The legitimacy of the vocation carriers thus relies on tactics of persuasion. Through the dichotomous division, however, Jjixke V. and also other ritualists emulated the "theory of blood superiority" (dividing the *nuohop* aristocracy from the *quhox* commoners, Swancutt, 2015) into their own vocation. Such emphasis on purity then endowed them with a vast array of power and leverage not only against possible intruders into their monopolized vocation but even towards the aristocratic *nuohop* clans and, indeed, the academics nowadays recruiting from all possible clans. Furthermore, according to a legend, one of Apsy Latzzi's descendant had an affair with a female bondservant, who then gave birth to a boy named Jjixke – the earliest ancestor of the Jjixke clan –, causing the predominant part of the *bimox* vocation carriers to fall out from the aristocratic bloodline followed by the contempt of its members (Chen & Cheng, 2002, p. 408-409). It is questionable how this well-circulated legend plays into endeavours of the Jjixke clan to "gradually raise themselves from the lower class to a higher position in society" (p. 409). Their origin in the relatively recently promulgated "Homeland of Bimo" extended their power over the *bimox* originating from other parts of Nipmu, whose "authenticity" – along with the legitimacy of the *bimox* vocation – Jjixke V. protected by saying that there are different ritualists with different level of knowledge. However, for Jjixke V., such setup worked only with him dwelling at the top of the *bimox* "pyramid." In this sense, Jjixke V., as well as the *bimox* clans from Cemu Lurkur, used performative rhetorical tactics to develop and/or maintain their stance as a legitimate (thus pure) *bimox*.

6.3 Gossiping at Yyhxox's Home: Individual Orthodoxy as Purity

Although Jjixke V. said that there are different levels of *bimox*, he still saw the other ritualists inferior when compared to himself. "All these are Han-Chinese bums (*Han baozi*)," he said laughing while pointing to a group of *bimox* playing cards, using one of the worst insults to a proud Nuosu-Yi person. In early May, Yyhxox took part of his family – his wife, and two of his youngest kids – to Shimazi. When I arrived in the marketplace, he sat with them on his usual spot. Ddigge, sitting on the left-hand side from Yyhxox, was working on the *qike* fan handle with the use of the fragment of the beam which he fished out from the rubble remaining after the torn down house. The pieces of wood and splinters were all around him, while his knife was smoothening the soon-to-be handle, where the three animals – pig, tiger and the eagle – started to emerge. What was still missing was the "head" made of the soft bamboo strips. It was quite late in the afternoon already. Atgamox was already wrapping up her stand, and two *bimox* from Lipmu Moggux were helping her to fold the parasol. The gamblers under the trees were still deeply immersed in their business. The red-coloured banknotes circulated the table and often mixed up with piles of *majiang* tiles. The sound of tile-shuffling was dominant across space, as the sounds of drums, bells, or murmur which randomly, chaotically carried fragments of lines from the *bimox* scriptures, became increasingly silent towards the evening. Yyhxox remarked to Ddigge, that these gamblers are "professionals" (*zhuanye de*), while when he, Lalyr and others play the cards, they invest only small amounts.

Quite unexpectedly, Yyhxox invited me for dinner to his place. I gladly accepted. On the way from the marketplace, he mentioned that most of the gamblers come from Mityip Rruonuo, are members of the aristocratic clans (*nuohop*), and that they tend to bully everyone around Shimazi. Such remarks often uncovered a long-term power struggle between the two main Nuosu-Yi "castes," which *bimox* tried to balance with the rhetoric of exclusiveness of their vocation. Carrying a bag of peas, and in the company of his family, Yyhxox already kept ritualistically apologizing that his house is very humble and that he does not have much to properly entertain me. First, we went to the pharmacy to buy some medicine for one of Yyhxox's kids, who suffered from a common cold. After a short scuffle, I managed to pay for it. We boarded a public bus and went to the outskirts of Latbbu Oprro, where Yyhxox and his family lived in a rented place for about three hundred *yuan* a month. After entering the small courtyard, which he shared with another family inhabiting the "block" next to Yyhxox family's room, we first sat on the stools that Yyhxox kept bringing to the marketplace for his

clients, and drank three cups of the best liquor of the house. We sat for a while and chatted. After this, we went to a nearby market to shop for vegetables. Yyhxox walked among the vendors, had the vegetables first weighted, packed in a plastic bag, and put aside. He told the vendors that he will pay for them later. Like this, he carefully examined the whole market's offer, and at the end purchased approximately one-third of what he let vendors already weight and pack, including a pork snout cut on thin slices, which he saw as the biggest delicacy. His wife who accompanied us got into a heated debate with one elderly seller about a cucumber Yyhxox refused to buy. "They make tiny holes in it and soak it in the water – like this, it becomes heavier, and they can sell it for a higher price," the ritualist explained.

We got back to Yyhxox's rented place. It was a building made of solid, concrete bricks with a flat corrugated iron as the roof. Between the walls and the roof was over a ten-centimetres-wide gap. However, as Yyhxox pointed out, it did not matter due to the notoriously warm climate of the whole Jianchang Valley. This building was primarily not designated as a housing estate. Yyhxox's family – the husband, wife and five of their kids – shared one room of about twenty square meters. Two of their kids were already attending the middle school, so most of the family's finances were channelled to this direction. Yyhxox's wife started with the meal preparation, while we were sitting outside over the crate of beer, which I, again, forced Yyhxox to let me pay for. Yyhxox's neighbours – especially their kids – were curiously observing us while standing on the threshold of the house rented by their parents. Yyhxox told me that recently, he had way too many odd dreams, and that tomorrow, he is about to do the soul-calling ritual. He invited me to participate, and I joyfully accepted.

"Look, now my level is really low, I could not stand up to them," Yyhxox switched to a different, but a related lineage of thought, wrapping it into his typical, apologetic tone. "Who do you mean by 'them'?" I asked. "Those…" Yyhxox said, making a mouth-sign of pointing towards something in the direction of the door. "On Shimazi?" I tried to guess. Yyhxox nodded his head. "But yesterday, you told me that many of them are fake," I recalled a moment while sitting on the marketplace, and asked Yyhxox for an elaboration on a ritual that Jjixke V. performed – spitting the *erguotou* liquor over the back of elderly lady's head. "That is correct!" said Yyhxox with much more confidence. "But Jjixke V. – he seems to be very knowledgeable," I tried to contest Yyhxox's point of view. "No, I also know [a lot of *bimox*-practice-related things] that they don't! Why? Because [the *bimox* practice] is all different. The way how they do it is different, the place is different. [Jjixke V.] says he comes from Lipmu Moggux. Why it is different?" Yyhxox getting increasingly agitated. "Well, I saw

those rituals are different," I tried to answer. "I do not know what they are doing. I really cannot differentiate among their rituals," Yyhxox confessed. "The rhythm (*diao*) is different as well," I added my observation. "Right! Apart from this, there are also diverse sets of sounds the *bimox* makes to scare off the demons during the process of chanting. In different places across Nipmu, there are different animals, so the *bimox* needs to imitate the sound of the animals of the place of his origin, so the demons originating at that place get scared off. The demons might not get scared, if they are not familiar with the sound one makes," Yyhxox explained. "I told you, we – Adur – [compared] with Shypnra… The language is different. Yesterday, there was a guy from Lipmu Moggux who came to look for me and wanted me to do some auspicious day computations (*kutsi*). In the end, I had to simultaneously interpret into Mandarin. You see. There are different styles [of chanting if the client is] a woman or a man," he explained. "Some of the *bimox* on Shimazi are doing a really good job, while others do not even reach my level. They cheat people to provide them with food and drinks (*pian chi pian he*)," said Yyhxox, using a usual expression for someone who is taking advantage of his clients while not doing a good *bimox*-related job, but still gets rewarded in a way that Yyhxox and others were used to especially in the past when financial resources were scarce. Because Yyhxox's and Jjixke V.'s ways of doing rituals were different, they designed each other as imposters at certain moments. However, these confrontations were rarely direct and were made through similar gossips – be it among the clan relatives, or between me – a foreigner affiliated with Jjixke clan. Remarkably, my affiliation did not stop people from other clans sharing their lives with me, which I initially feared.

Gluckman (1966) remarked that "the right to gossip about certain people, is a privilege which is only extended to a person when he or she is accepted as a member of such a group or set. It is a hallmark of membership only" (p. 336). In Gluckman's perception, apart from being honorary part of Jjixke clan, I also became an honorary frequenter of Shimazi, possibly seen as a source of power and/or as an overbridging proxy through which the individual *bimox* negotiated their individuality by trying to persuade me – through a logical or emotional projection – of their legitimacy and "purity," a dichotomy connected to the individual perception of orthodoxy related to their practices. Mostly, they emphasized the positive sides of their personalities or abilities. However, doing this in a criss-cross manner, they, often unwittingly, also gave a hint of other sides of their personality, which they possibly wanted to sideline in their statements. After the dinner, I left Yyhxox's home and headed to a bar to have a couple of beers with Jjixke H. He somehow knew I went to Shimazi that day. "Jan,

why are you engaging with these cheaters?" he asked me with a suspicious look and refused me when I was about to pay for his drink.

6.4 Difference Between "New" and "Ancient" Script: Gauge of Purity

In the previous conversation, the "new" script, which Jjixke V. criticized so severely, also became a topic. "Yes, the script was different back then. Why?" asked Yyhxox, immediately providing an answer: "Back then, it was in common use as one pleased (*tongyong*), while now, it had been standardized (*guiyong*). I will show you," he took a *tepyy* scripture out of his bag and pointed to the *ma* 𐦍 – one of the most common characters. "Before [the standardization], this could be written by twelve different characters. But why did they do this?" he asked again in a didactic manner with an intent to immediately provide an answer, but I interrupted him, offering my explanation: "I think it is similar to the process of standardizing the Chinese language. Before, there were also many meanings behind one character. However, now the words are composed of many characters." "Yes, but why did twelve characters become one? Because if you do the *bi* [ritual]… Then you think: 'Oh, too many characters,'" said Yyhxox, meaning that the *bimox* might lose a track. "Also, the character *cox* 𐦏 – it looked more like a person before. But now? There was no other way (*mei banfa*), it changed," said Yyhxox, laughing.

The question of the difference between the "new" and the "ancient" script, towards which Jjixke V. as well as Jjixke H. both held a typical parochial view seeing users of the former as less "genuine," and the practitioners of the latter as the "real" *bimox*, was a constantly recurring topic in the conversation with various ritualists. Kraef (2013) suggests that most of the *bimox* refused the new script and tried to stick with the original writing system of the *bimox* scriptures. However, as I have already mentioned in Chapter 4, Yyhxox learned the content of the books through oral transmission. Only later he supplemented his knowledge with the "new" script, for which he advocated, as he was also teaching it to the kids of his village. He perceived the ancient script as chaotic. "The ancient people wrote whatever they wanted," he remarked. According to Jjixke H., the script deviated from its core (origins of which were unknown) because some "bad *bimox*" – meaning the non-hereditary, *zzybi* "outsiders" antagonistic to the "big *bimox*" – changed some of the characters as they liked. Jjixke H. and Jjixke V. both stressed that the script belongs to the *bimox*. Both felt theirs (and only theirs) script circulating among the Jjixke clan is a sole valid one. "If somebody ordinary

looks at out characters, he usually goes like: 'Huh, I have never seen this character,'" Jjixke H. differentiated between the "big *bimox*" and others. Both my research partners from the Jjixke clan praised their direct ancestor – Apsy Latzzi (Chen & Cheng, 2002) – whom they saw as a person with a great deed for the standardization of the ancient script, a contrast to those who, allegedly, over centuries, caused its eventual fragmentation. However, Yyhxox had another view of this problem.

"I heard Apsy Latzzi standardized the script," I asked Yyhxox when we were alone for a while. "Apsy Latzzi?" Yyhxox reacted as if without confidence. "Yes, he wrote all these books. I mean…. Copied. So, he, at his time, also standardized this writing system," I assumed the vital role of the famous historical figure, about which I kept reading in literature. "Ah, Apsy Latzzi… The legends differ so much [per who is telling them]. We heard from the elders, that…" Yyhxox began to explain his version but was interrupted by a ringing phone. He picked it up and talked to somebody in a heavy Adur dialect. "That time, I heard from elders," he reconnected to his thoughts right where the call interrupted them, "he did this superstition (*mixin*) – whatever he did, he wrote it down. Once, he went to the mountains and saw a flock of birds having a gathering, and doing a superstition as well. He started to observe them and write everything down. So he was writing and writing... But in the middle, the birds got scared and flew away. He was thus unable to finish his observation. Because he did not finish this… Leprosy, you know, that scary disease… Apsy Latzzi did not write down [the method of how to cure it]." The last part, Yyhxox spent almost whispering to me. He indirectly suggested that it was Apsy Latzzi's fault that the leprosy was still among the people of Nipmu. Such stance stemmed from Yyhxox's perception that even though Apsy Latzzi was indeed one of the great figures of *bimox* vocation, he was not Yyhxox's direct lineage ancestor. Therefore, Yyhxox had no problem of relying on the state-crafted script. Remarkably, for Yyhxox, the state seemed – at least in the role it played in the script standardization – to hold the same role as Apsy Latzzi.

After a while, Jjixke V. arrived. Since the previous week, I was prompting him to write down his family tree for me. "You want me to write it since the primordial *bimox* ancestor? That would take us very long," he said, laughing. "Or should I begin with Apsy Latzzi?" he asked. I chose the second option. He first tried to use my blue-ink pen, but he said it is too thin to write the characters. Therefore, he went to Yyhxox, and – in one of their sporadic direct interactions – he borrowed his pen. Its mark was equally thin, but it contained a black ink, which was somehow preferred, since it, as both of the Jjixke clan members explained to me in

different occasions, visually follows the appearance of the old scriptures written by the brush and ink. Using the ancient script and the former orientation of the writing, Jjixke V. slowly wrote his *cytvi* lineage into my field notebook, covering one whole page with it.

The existence of the "new" state-crafted script intended for the official use beyond the *bimox* practice and accessible to everybody beyond the *bimox* vocation was seen as a threat especially by the *bimox* clans, and especially by the Jjixke clan. It was endangering their own monopoly (see Kraef, 2013, p. 221). This became apparent in the 1980s when the demand for rituals followed the bankruptcy and disintegration of the barefoot doctor system which happened in parallel with the final introduction of the "new" script (p. 222). This was confirmed by Bbaqit, an individual from the *nuohop* aristocratic lineage who happened to visit Shimazi only once during my presence. He sat with us for a while, listening to our conversation. "A lot of people studied back then [to become a *bimox*], even those not from the designated lineages. They learnt a bit and then started to practice," he shared with us, contributing to the debate. Furthermore, for the people from *bimox* background such as Yyhxox, whose vocation was inherited through orality from relatives who did not have a deep knowledge of the script, the "new" script represented a gateway to obtaining more skills within their vocations. For the others – especially those from Jjixke clan – the new-ancient division posited a dichotomy – a strategic leverage –, in which the former was polluting the latter, thus making those using the script also "polluted." In my perception, however, the emergence of the new script along with the collapse of the healthcare system significantly contributed the surge of the *bimox* during the 1980s and 1990s, when the vocation was technically dying out already for many decades. This surge was not necessarily – as Bamo Ayi (2001) suggested – caused as a part of a wave of cultural resurrection prompting every Nuosu-Yi to take an active part through spontaneous work on its revitalization (p. 118). There were also other reasons. For Yyhxox it was a general distrust towards the health system, which fuelled the sense of obligation for preserving the *bimox* craft, and of necessity to pass it on to the next generation, for which – given script-related abilities of his ancestors – he deemed the use of the "new" script essential.

6.5 The "Correct" Legends

In the second half of June 2018, Vuthop's loud arrival on a motorbike interrupted our conversation with Jjixke V. concerning curse-imposing scriptures. Vuthop stepped off his machine and, obviously tired, joined us on Jjixke V.'s spot. About one week earlier, a friend

of mine whom I at that time knew only through the internet, added me to a chatting group called "Group to Exchange [ideas] about the Bimo Culture" (*Bimo wenhua jiaoliu qun*) on Weixin. It was founded by Yyhxox A., a powerful *bimox*-cadre from Cemo Lurkur – a relative of one of my Latbbu Oprro friends, as well as – given the clan affiliation – of Yyhxox. Neither Vuthop nor Yyhxox ever met him personally.

"I saw you in the *bimox* group," I started the conversation, while Vuthop was holding his phone and swiping its screen. I pulled out my phone and checked the list of group members. "Oh, you are not there anymore," I remarked, surprised. "I just deleted myself from that group," he said quite indifferently. "Why?" I, still surprised, asked. "I just observed [the situation inside] for a while. And then decided to leave," Vuthop answered, veiling the overtone of his utterance with a tint of disdain. "Oh, I see. Yesterday there were about one hundred members. And now, the number is significantly lower," I remarked. "Yes, [a few of us] left together. Those things… Their voice, it did not sound nice," Vuthop specifically pointed to the tone, flow and a pitch of some *bimox* chants in the form of voice messages posted into the group. "I told [Yyhxox A.] that he is a crooked (*wai*) *bimox*," Vuthop came up with quite a bold and direct statement. After another round of swiping, he put the phone in front of my eyes and showed me the Weixin group of his clan. It consisted of hundreds of members. I asked Vuthop whether I could join. He said that since I carry the surname of Jjixke clan, I cannot become a member. The group's name was entirely in the standardized Nuosu-Yi – a font unable to display on Vuthop's phone. Jjixke V., who did not own a smartphone, remained silent when Vuthop was playing the voice messages from Yyhxox A.'s group. "You," Vuthop then turned to me, "challenge him. Go to the group and directly ask him, whether he is the real *bimox*."

One day later, Vuthop covertly recorded me speaking Nuosu-Yi. After a while, he came back and euphorically told me that he sent the recording to Yyhxox A., to prove him, that "even the foreigners (*hxixdie cox*) could have a deep knowledge of the *bimox* chants," as he phrased it. "Actually, Hxixdie is also a clan name – it is a huge clan," Vuthop remarked on the inclusion of foreigners into the Nuosu-Yi *Weltanschauung*. This was quite a remarkable moment. In the recent translation of *Hnewo tepyy*, Mark Bender comments on the passage which acknowledges the existence of "Foreigners" (called "Yiery") in Nuosu-Yi, "who seem to be people other than those indicated as descendants of the three once-mute brothers." Bender further states that the origin of these foreigners "is unknown, although French, English, and American explorers had entered Liangshan Mountains by the early twentieth century," and

that their presence is "noteworthy as other published versions of the epic do not include the parts on 'Foreigners'" (Bender, 2019, p. xc). Along with Vuthop's observation, which he presumably gained through reading one of the *Hnewo tepyy*'s versions written in classical characters, one more important aspect of this whole situation is worth mentioning: the huge discrepancy in between what is published – or, in other words, selected for publication – and what is, at least theoretically, still circulating among the *bimox* in their day-to-day lives.

After Vuthop sent out the recording, which made me quite uncomfortable, he sat down to Yyhxox's spot right at the moment Yyhxox was sharing with me and a few other listeners one of the narratives on Nuosu-Yi's origin: "In the beginning of the world (*kaitian pidi*)… You know, we had the formation of the world (*shengxue*)… You guys," he pointed to me, "believe, that there is a God up there… Once, there was this great fire, during which everybody died. There was only one person left – Zhupmu Ssytnyo. He went to the skies… Then he went down, there was half of the people's soul on the sky, half on the ground…" Yyhxox's voice was joined by the clangour of the beer bottles, while he simultaneously interpreted bits of what he said into Nuosu-Yi language for some of the listeners.

He was about to continue but Vuthop interrupted him: "Wait, this is not accurate. Let me tell you… Because everything you do is seen by the heavens (*ren zai zuo, tian zai kan*)," said Vuthop, pointing out that everything that one makes up might have repercussions in his life. "Yes, it was like this! What are you talking about?" Yyhxox fired back. "I am just saying, that you are not telling how it was," Vuthop looked at Yyhxox while switching to the Adur-tainted Nuosu-Yi in a heated debate, accompanied with a lively gesticulation. "On this world, we are all the same," Yyhxox was first to resurface back to Sichuanese Mandarin. "Yes, we [in this world] are one nationality (*minzu*)," Vuthop linked in Yyhxox's reconciliatory tone. "In the beginning, there was one Tibetan, one Yi, and one Hxixdie," Vuthop continued, failing to mention the clan of Han, who is also part of the Nuosu-Yi understanding of the world. "We are already more than the seventieth generation. We went through many changes." After this, Vuthop started to talk about the origin of the demons (*nyitcy*), naming different regions of Nipmu, and presented a chronology of events through a stream of words, into which Yyhxox insert his "no, no, no" (*apnge*), followed with the various onomatopoeia and gestures of disagreement, meaning that the two of them yet again disintegrated into lineages of different interpretations. "We have all this in our books. However, we did not witness these things. Whether it is real or fake, we do not know. You see… This is what the scientists (*kexuejia*) extracted from all this, but we do not know," Vuthop, once again, resorting to a conclusion all

ritualists around could relate to – blaming the experts. “This is all just a theory (*lilun*), right?” I stepped in intending to elicit the response. Vuthop agreed. “Yesterday, I told you – in that chat group, Yyhxox A. and those other people… What they were talking about was absolutely nasty to hear (*nanting*). I could not listen to that anymore. I told them that whether these things are true or made-up, we will never know… That is why I told Yyhxox A. that he is a fake (*jiep*) *bimox*. I mean… Yeah, they are researchers or experts (*zhuanjia*), but they are not *bimox*,” he reasoned by a dichotomy, which hung in the air during most of the conversations during which the scholars and ritualists entered the stage as figures in the storytelling. The difference in the legends stemmed from the different, clan-determined overtones of the *bimox* scriptures’ content, along with the fragmentation of the script in the past. Regardless of whether Apsy Latzzi’s alleged practices sutured over these differences not, the script possibly played a role of the intra-clan “code language” which was not recognizable by the hostile lineages in the inter-clan feuds. However, most importantly,“new” and “ancient” script, “accurate” or “inaccurate” legends, “fake” or “real” *bimox*, “authentic” or “inauthentic” performance and, finally, remarkable antagonistic pair *bimox-zhuanjia* which I further address in Chapter 8 – these dichotomies were all operationalized as rhetorical tactics to gain leverage, recognition and legitimacy to an individual and his clan along the lines of the Nuosu-Yi discourse on purity.

6.6 Summary and Partial Conclusion

The various rhetorical events suggesting authenticity – a concept inherited through localization of Western, dichotomy-based thinking into the PRC’s official approach to politics and science, from which it settled among the Nuosu-Yi – was, in the end, used as a coating for encapsulation of the distinctive Nuosu-Yi concept, the indigenous dichotomy emphasizing purity related to and deriving from one’s belonging within the *cytvi* system. The contestation of polarities such as rural vs. urban, inherited through blood vs. acquired from the external apprenticeship, leading to views of real vs. fake (where the expression for “fake” – *jiep* – is itself a Nuosu-Yi loanword from Chinese), thus, by extension, pure vs. impure – a dichotomy of rather unknown and undocumented origin, but formative of the Nuosu-Yi “essentialist theory of blood superiority” (Swancutt, 2015) –, was boldly ritualized, tactically deployed and emulated far beyond the distinction of the two major Nuosu-Yi castes.

“Speech itself is a form of ritual,” said Leach (Bell, 2009, p. 73 – citing Leach, 1966). Butler argued that the performative “should be rethought as a social ritual,” in which the

performative manifests its force, because "speech acts are like rituals in their bodiliness, their constraining power (derived from that bodiliness), and their iterability" (Hollywood, 2002, p. 100 – citing Butler, 1997). As Bell (2009) observes, "the deployment of ritualization, consciously or unconsciously, is the deployment of a particular construction of power relationships, a particular relationship of domination, consent, and resistance," during which the "ritualized agents do not see themselves as projecting schemes; they see themselves only acting in a socially instinctive response to how things are" (p. 206). Remarkably, "purity" – with its objective to freeze, constrain and exclude, thus the "enemy of change, ambiguity, and compromise" (Douglas, 2001, p. 163) – in many of the exchanges manifested itself not exclusively as an "objective reality" verifiable through personal written or memorized genealogies (see Swancutt & Jiarimuji, 2018, p. 142), but with a potential of being generated dialogically, as the variously situated conversations between Jjixke V., Yyhxox, Vuthop and indirectly a member of the local policy-making body suggested. Through the rhetorical tactics, the ritualists wanted to look "as pure as possible," which then further legitimized their "being a *bimox*." This, however, was rather an open-ended process, turning the static "being" into ever-fluid "becoming."

In this way, the conversations between *bimox* – rather indirect than direct, and sometimes using me as an empowering agent and/or an interlocutor – constituted a "ritualized warfare" (Swancutt, 2016b) during which the various sides used the plethora of aforementioned dichotomies specifically as "speech bullets" (Swancutt, 2015, p. 136) shooting at each other to persuade those engaged – be it me, another ritualist, or anyone else – of the legitimacy of their original take on the *bimox* vocation, and the lineage of knowledge inherited within their clan. The *bimox* assimilated and weaponized the suitable concepts seemingly standing outside their cosmologies and effectively "hid" their distinction between "purity" and "impurity." This warfare was not symbolic. Through utterances, it had material repercussions in the day-to-day lives for all engaged sides of the conflict. Besides the "ordeal economy" (see Swancutt, 2012b, 2016a), such purity-based warfare then constituted other tactics on how to enhance the position of the individual ritualists, their clans or their region of origin *vis-à-vis* their competitors through indirect and rarely direct rhetorical confrontation in front of their audience.

7. Ways of *Bi*-ing as Individualized Persuasion: Gaining Authority and Control Through Ritual Performance

In the previous chapter, I have linked the expression "ritualized warfare" along with its principal weapon – the "speech bullets" – to the discussions between the individual ritualists coming from all corners of Nipmu about their individual orthodoxy *vis-à-vis* their *bimox* peers. Both expressions, however, were previously used in the context of an explicit *bimox* ritual performances – the *bi*. The expression "speech bullet" is, in Swancutt's (2015, p. 136) interpretation, derived from the expression *ddopma*. The *ma* syllable serves as a default classifier – similarly as in the actual word for "bullet" (*chotma*), which means "the lead piece that is fired from a gun" (Ma, Walters & Walters, 2008). Therefore, although Swancutt's metaphor is attractive and in a certain context of the complex *bi* practice is certainly applicable, the expression *ddopma* – in daily life an expression pointing to a spoken language – does not directly translate as a "speech bullet," but rather as a "speech bit" or "chunk of speech." When talking about *bi* – a Nuosu-Yi-specific ritual performance which is for the lack of a more nuanced expression often translated as "ritual" (*yishi* or *fashi* in Chinese) – Swancutt (2015) sees it a device for exorcism, which Nuosu-Yi ritualists punctuate with continuous chanting of the speech bullets (p. 136). While such use of speech certainly represents not only a significant part of the *bimox* rituals, but also – as I have shown in the previous chapter – the ritualized exchanges permeating the Nuosu-Yi day-to-day life, viewing the *bi* purely as means to battle demons with the speech used as a means to attack them might be unnecessarily reductive and could obfuscate the complexities and subjectivities within this multifaceted practice.

Academic literature on the *bi* presents various perspectives on its meaning and characteristics. In her authoritative work, Bamo Ayi (1994) sees the *bi* as a specific event (*teding de shijian*) during which at the specific space (*teding de kongjian*) one communicate with specific demons and ancestral spirits (*yu teding de guishen da jiaodao*) (p. 60). Furthermore, she sees the ritual (*yishi*) as possessing a two-fold time-space (*shikong*) function: the representational (*biaoyixing*) and prescriptive (*guidingxing*). The former points to the characteristics of temporospatial expression (*you biaoda shijian, kongjian yiyi de texing*), while the latter points to the characteristics of temporospatial limitations of the ritual behaviour (*shou shijian kongjian xianzhi, xianding de texing*). Apart from these, Bamo Ayi stresses that the ritual also creates its own chronotope, where the time could flow in an opposite direction, allowing the

clan past along with all ancestors being temporarily transferred into the presence (p. 60-62) – in a sense which I argued in Chapter 5 that the Nuosu-Yi inhabit the "great time" (or Aion – the "time of pure events"). Remarkably, despite the emphasis on the "specificity" of various aspects of the ritual, its representation in the written works seems to be rather didactic (e.g., Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990; Kang, 1995), especially when seen through a prism of these ceremonies being conducted by the "knowledgeable *bimox*." Recently published works describing the *nipmu coxbi* (Ji'er, Qumu, Ji'er & Bamo, A., 2013; Qumu & Bamo, A., 2017) thus resemble an authorized manual for the future generations. Instead of preserving the *bimox* ritual practice – a goal authors of such manuals often explicitly articulate – it may also very well contribute to the erasure of the individual differences between the distinct *bimox* practices, which could paradoxically orchestrate its faster decline and museumification.

To address these simplifications by focusing on what *bi* means for the ritualists and what are they achieving by it, in the following chapter, which is based on the relation between the ritualists and their clients, Shamat, Yyhxox, Jjixke V. and Ma all portray the *bi* as a complex, multifunctional, multidirectional, situated and deeply subjective process, which is deployed not only for exorcising demons with the use of speech bullets, but, perhaps more importantly, is utilized as means of emergence and maintenance of ritualist's authority. The authority significantly contributes to – in ideal, but not always successful scenario – the attraction of the ritualists' clients. When laid next to each other as the organization of the sections within this chapter permits, it becomes apparent that the subjectively performed rituals also serve for differentiation among the ritualist themselves, as each of them use the performance to make a space for his own take on the *bi* practice. Through a wide range of speech acts – tactics of persuasion animated by the ritualists not reduced only to a tactic of verbal assault – the *bi* performance possesses the potential to exclude and/or include the unknown, "outlying" elements – such as persons of different ethnicities and their ideologies – into the general Nuosu-Yi worldview, providing the ritualist a control over the ecology of his distinctive ritual performance. The effect of the *bi* thus reaches far beyond its immediacy during the situated performance.

7.1 Shamat's Performative Failure

The rhythmic sound of drums – sounding deep followed by vibration when the weather was dry and with a flat and curt voice during or after rain –, followed the jingling of *biju* bells, mixing with cyclical, pre-recorded announcements in both Latbbu Oprro Sichuanese

emanating from megaphones of food and poultry vendors. Some of the poultry ended as sacrifices during the rituals. All was tinged with intense spasms of demolition penetrating through windows and gaps between the mud-brick houses, together with a rattling sound of the excavator constructing new weir in the riverbed. The intimacy of the rugged terrain of ridges and ravines full of lush greenery, rapid streams, and a relatively low population density, which I experienced during my journeys through upper Nipmu, was dissolved in this flat and crowded place. The relatively simple rituals – on the level of sacrificing chicken – took place on Shimazi's Backyard *en masse*. Those of a bigger spatial or temporal scale were outsourced elsewhere. *Bimox* from the marketplace were often invited to somebody's home in Latbbu Oprro, to Axhuo Tenzy on the other side of Nipmu, or even to Altay – a place sandwiched between borders of Xinjiang, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Mongolia. Biqu went there with a family of an individual who died after being struck by a lightning during seasonal work. His soul needed to purified and prepared for *nipmu coxbi* on that very location.

The second day of April was slowly coming to its end and most of the ritualists were already gone. Two kids were sitting by a small, foldable table, and wrote their homework. Next to them was an empty cage. In the morning, it was full of a small chicken. However, now, all were running around and tweeting, pecking crumb of food lost among the rubble lying on the ground. I came to Shimazi very late that day. Yyhxox was called to someone's home in Four Unions Township, so I found myself sitting by Shamat. Wearing his deep-blue Adur-style garments with big silver adornments and still neatly combed hair, he started to recount his memories of trips to Yunnan Province and observing Naxi traditional ethnic performances. While excitedly reproduced the flow of the Naxi lyrics by imitating their language, a mother with a small child – accompanied by her own mother –, approached Shamat and required his services.

"He got cold (*cepyy*)," mother remarked before asking me whether I can speak Nuosu-Yi. To her surprise, I replied in her language. The rest of her questions, concerning my age and the place of origin, were answered by Shamat while he was preparing for a diagnosis of the boy. *Vaqip sha* – the basic, "egg-yolk diagnosis" method – could be done right on the spot, or remotely through a person, who rubs the egg towards the body of the patient, and brings it to the *bimox*. In this case, it does not matter whether the patient resides in Latbbu Oprro or Altay. "He ate some medicine, but it was ineffective. Recently, he does not want to eat," boy's mother told Shamat while holding her vigorously coughing son in her arms. "What is his name?" asked Shamat. "Nyofa," she replied, repeating it a few times since Shamat seemed not

to hear clearly, as the ritualist who sat next to him was immersed in a loud performance for another client. Shamat sent Nyofa's grandmother to buy an egg to the nearby shop, as Atgamox and others who sold ritual accessories on the market were already gone. He rubbed the egg to Nyofa's hands and chest. Shamat held the one-hundred *yuan* bill given to him by his clients and the egg in one hand, and a herb which he kept soaking into the bowl full of water (*ieqyt zzyyy*) placed by his feet in the other. He started chanting the lines he knew by heart. The flow started as calm and monotonous, peaking in the moments of agitation and deeply felt passages. It went from a clear recitation to a hard-to-intelligible mumbling, slowing down and speeding up. The blocks of the sentences were divided by Shamat's hissing – moments when Shamat exhausted the capacity of his lungs –, followed by a speedy inhaling of a fresh dose of air. In several moments, Shamat stopped the chants to reconfirm name of the child, which had to be integrated into the texture of the words and lines he kept weaving together.

Shamat then threw the whole egg into the bowl. At the beginning of the *vaqip sha* practice, the clients asked Shamat's place of origin, to which he replied "Adur." Now, when Shamat began explaining what is wrong with Nyofa, he asked the clients where do they come from. "Latbbu Oprro," was the answer. Meanwhile, Shamat was about to crack the egg, and pour the content of its shell into the water. "This egg… Is boiled," he remarked towards clients. He seeming a bit surprised. The egg was useless in this state for the *vaqip sha*, as the yolk had to be liquid. "Oh," the clients followed his surprise by their own, accompanying the situation with timid laughter, to which Bakhtin (1984b) would remark that it is particularly this kind of laughter which conquers a terror (p. 336). "It does not matter (*yot ap jjo*), just bring me another one," Shamat told the family, hiding his surprise, which gradually evaporated in between the cacophony of tweeting chicken, bits of non-related conversations, and Nyofa's coughing.

Shamat had to start anew. Meanwhile, the two women became suspicious and visibly worried. "*Hxo*," went Shamat, imitating the sound of an undescribed animal and trying to scare off the demons. Nyofa's grandmother started to gradually interfere into the ritual by her questions, all making Shamat uneasy and bitterly grinning. "*Abbe*," kept the grandmother commenting on the whole process, expressing discontent. Shamat cracked the egg and poured it into the water. He consulted the pattern along with the number of bubbles generated by the substance. While gradually stirring the whole mixture using the cracked shell, he made the content of the bowl increasingly blended. He concluded that Nyofa's health problems were caused by a heat

coming from a snake bite (*bushy tur*). Nyofa's mother seemed nervous. "A snake!" she repeated while checking Nyofa's feet. Child's grandmother was dissatisfied, while the sound of water pouring into the bowl kept breaking the silence. She then suggested that the spirit – in this case, expressed through the Chinese expression *Pusa* originating from the Buddhist canon – surely dwells within Shamat's *vyxtu,* which he had visibly placed on the scriptures in front of them. Questioning Shamat's conclusions, she demanded him to consult the scriptures. Shamat became enraged and started to talk in a very loud and authoritative voice. "I hated that old lady (*lao popo*)," he told me, visibly irritated, after the clients hastily left, dissatisfied with the result, but still keeping a certain amount of money with Shamat. "She disagreed with the diagnosis. I said one sentence, and she just said a different one [in disagreement]. Their relative recently died, because of the mental pollution (*jingshen wuran*). However, she thought differently," Shamat kept explaining. "Meaning that she does not respect your opinion while having her own?" I asked. "Yes!" Shamat replied. "You can have your opinion, but that's yours, not mine," he added.

It was obvious that the clients were looking for different ritualists. However, due to the lack of time and anxiety of the child's condition, they had no choice but to ask Shamat – a ritualist coming from a different area of Nipmu, with a presumably different set of skills. His performance was not persuasive to them since the family probably relied on services of a different *bimox,* who possibly gained their trust through repetition of a certain personalized practice. The fact that clients tend to incline towards *bimox* they know – presumably an individual coming from an affiliated clan –, had a reason. Such ritualist was already acquainted with the ancestors of his clients and can align and assign his protective spirits with theirs. In other words, such *bimox* already "captured" his followers (see Swancutt, 2016b, p. 77). However, in case of Shamat, his clients managed to escape him, pushing this concept which Swancutt and Jiarimuji (2018) attribute to former bondservants escaping their masters, as well as the Nuosu-Yi youth leaving to the big cities, on the level of the *bimox*-client relationship.

The whole situation resulted in a performative failure, which, according to Schieffelin (1996), reveals "the inner construction of the particular 'ritual' or 'theatrical' experience involved" and on a broader level provides "insight into the particular ways (at least performatively) a people construct their own social reality" precisely through the imperfections that bring them down (p. 62). Tapping into a failure of a medium during a rite in Papua New-Guinea, he later concludes that "performative authority is a fundamental condition of *emergence*" (p. 81,

italics in original). Shamat and his clients failed to establish "an interactive process that interconnects a whole range of actors" (Rao, 2006, p. 147). In other words, the clients opted for not being assimilated into the *bimox* practice of Shamat, all failing in the emergence of desired results on both sides. Even though its aim was defined beforehand, the effect of rites as Shamat's *bi* is thus never guaranteed, and always depends on the outcome of the concrete performance (p. 147) as well as on the persuasive skills of the ritualist towards their client, through which the sense of ritualist's authority emerges. Furthermore, every success of a performed rite allegedly increases the reputation of the particular *bimox* which then leads to further invitations (see Swancutt, 2012b, p. 64). Usually, after a certain time – usually three days (Bamo, 1994, p. 147) – the result of the performance should be known, which then allegedly adds to or takes from the ritualist's reputation. During the time spent in Nipmu, I have not encountered a single entirely unsuccessful result of the ritual. Even if problematic to a certain degree, the results always seemed to be interpreted in a way that prompted the client to request another ritual, or to make some adjustments of her or his life. However, close to nothing is written about what happens when the ritualist fails to deliver a persuasive performance except for labelling the ritualist as "not genuine" (Luobu, 2015). The performative failure due to the unfamiliarity with the practices followed by an escape then seems to a phenomenon emerging with the increased contact between various Nuosu-Yi clan clusters and following the overall decline in *bimox* authority in the first half of the 20th century (Ling, 1988). Members or particular clans were since their birth accustomed to ways of the ritualist who managed to persuade them, thus embed them into the orbit of his signature practices. Such "performative failures" seem not to lead to a loss of credit within the "ordeal economy," but rather to situated failure of the emergence of the ritualist as authority to the particular client. Such success or failure connected to the emergence of authority thus precedes the possibility of establishing a source of the reputation of the *bimox* through clients he acquires.

7.2 Yyhxox *Bimox* and Lama *Sunyit*: Contesting the Authority

The day Yyhxox invited me for dinner to his rented place, he brought his family – except for the older kids, as they were attending a school in Latbbu Oprro – for a specific reason. "When you are dreaming, it means that your soul just runs everywhere around. So you have to do a ritual to call it back. Then, you no longer have these nightmares," Yyhxox provided a simplified explanation of the soul-calling ritual during one of the late February days. "A couple of days ago, I dreamed about the ancestors. It is considered a bad dream when dead

people occur to you. So, I have to do the *yyrkut*," Yyhxox explained to me when, fast-forwarding to the present, we were shopping in the market for vegetables. On Shimazi, he was waiting for an elderly *sunyit* from the Lama clan. He decided to rely on his visions to determine how the future (including the ritual) will turn out for Yyhxox and his entire family. "I trust him," Yyhxox told me, at the same time visibly nervous. "How about the *mopnyit* over there?" I asked, imitating the mouth-pointing practice towards one of the shamaness. "Ah, women, they are all fake," Yyhxox immediately reacted, revealing a widespread gender-based stereotype. Cai (2006) elegantly veiled it in an observation that "spirit medium" (Wasa) of the male shaman (*sunyit*) is stronger than that of the female (p. 52). "They cannot count even the days. Men are genuine, the women are cheaters (*pian ren de*)." Most of the women used the *biju* bell, which was, according to many, problematic. "According to tradition, they cannot use this. They have to use a drum," told me Luo Jiaxiu, a close-to-ninety ethnology veteran, who once appeared in the marketplace and spent a few minutes with Yyhxox and me while waiting for his acquaintance. Due to his experience, Yyhxox seemed to have respect for the power of the *sunyit*. Along with the usual ideas of purity and revered ancientness, this attitude proved formative in Yyhxox's initial trust towards Lama – mainly because the *sunyit* was a male close to his eighties (thus old and knowledgeable), and, in comparison with most of the *mopnyit*, he used a drum. Yyhxox's bad experience with the *bimox* bell used for *sunyit*-related rite still seemed to haunt him.

Surrounded by random visitors, we sat down by Lama. As the *sunyit* picked up the drum, a clinging sound of the jingle bells attached to the dragon-designed, lacquered drum handle, cut the silence. The drum was further adorned with simple white cords attached to its other side, and decorative, colourful stripes of textile. It had a metal rack – a novelty allegedly better enduring the swings of weather. Similar drums were sold intensively around Shimazi. The skin of the drum was dotted by various marks, suggesting that the tool was frequently used for a long time already. Yyhxox went to buy a bottle of liquor, cigarettes and gave Lama ten *yuan*.

The *bimox* started to explain to Lama what brought him to his spot. Sitting next to us, Yyhxox's wife pointed out that her husband is a *bimox*. Yyhxox told Lama that he is about to do the soul-calling ritual back home. Lama reached for a bell. However, Yyhxox – even more nervous than before – requested him to stick to his drum. Despite sharing the Shimazi, it seemed that they are not acquainted with each other at all. Lama started to chant with a quickly changing pitch. At one moment, he stopped and asked Yyhxox for names of his family members. The complex tangle of sounds emanating from the drum – jingling, deep and

vibrating sound of the sheepskin hit by a drumstick, and rattling of the shells inside of the drum – interlaced with Lama's utterances and chants. The *sunyit* kept asking Yyhxox about more details, in turns entering the state of trance and resurfacing to his usual consciousness. Instantly, he kept narrating of what he saw during his "trip": dogs in the neighbourhood, T-shaped crossroad in front of Yyhxox's house entrance, and other vignettes. The *bimox,* and especially his wife, interacted with Lama during the whole process, asking more and more questions. They also kept confirming the location of their Latbbu Oprro home. Teeth clenched, head shaking – followed by his whole body –, state of trance alternated with moments of calmness during which Lama communicated with his clients.

After fifteen minutes, the process ended. Yyhxox and his wife were visibly dissatisfied. Asking further questions, Lama blinked his eyes speedily before answering. After a while, Yyhxox just left his ten *yuan* with Lama and prompted us to leave. "How was it? What was the result?" I asked Yyhxox. "He is not accurate at all. He used the new ways to deliver the result, not the old ways," Yyhxox said. "So this *sunyit* is no good?" I followed. "Not at all," was Yyhxox's reply. "He does not reach my level. I am really disappointed," he claimed, giggling nervously. "I told him, that my wife is sometimes [in a] good [shape], sometimes [in a] bad [shape]. He did not react to this." Yyhxox's stance towards Lama could be also influenced by the fact that the *bimox* are seen as more "orthodox" (*zhengtong de*) (Cai, 2006, p. 50) when compared with *sunyit*. Furthermore, *bimox* are seen as legitimizers of the shamans' entrance to the world of their vocation, which requires a *bi* to appease and establish the presence of Wasa spirit (p. 51).

Such stratification of power – along with the endless debates whether the vocation of *bimox* or the *sunyit* emerged first from the pool of history – also played into the motivation of shamans and shamanesses to establish their vocation as "different" from the *bimox,* since it did not rely on the scriptures, but on visions while in trance. *Bimox,* as well as shamans and shamanesses, tried to assimilate skills of both vocations – Yyhxox through "doing" the *sunyit* (see 4.1.2) which led to the unfavourable result, as well as, e.g., Jjimu, who managed to successfully merge both vocations and present oneself as a *bimox*-cum-*sunyit*. Lama's way of performing in front of Yyhxox, who was in a position of his client, but at the same time held an innate sense of superiority under an alleged rule of *bimox* always having to sit above the shaman when they both simultaneously perform a ritual (p. 51), gradually resulted in the dissolution of Lama's authority and led to a "performative failure." Initially, Yyhxox attributed the authority to Lama on the basis of *sunyit*'s reputation, age and gender. According to Yyhxox,

however, the shaman "polluted" of the "old" (or, perhaps, familiar) ways of doing things with the "new." Along with his wife interfering in the ritual, Yyhxox failed to "assimilate" Lama into his understanding of the practice and *vice versa*. Similar to Shamat's clients, Yyhxox chose to withdraw and escape.

7.3 Yyhxox Attracting Authority Through *Yyrkut*

The next day, around five o'clock in the afternoon, I met up with Yyhxox and his wife on Shimazi, and we went together to Hedong Gaai – at that time, the only stretch of the bricolage-style built-up area consisting of old, Republican wooden houses mixed with hastily built structures originating anytime between the 1960s and 1990s. According to many Latbbu Oprro inhabitants, it was the "last lawless place" in the city. We entered the narrow, winding alleyways behind the office of the local former native headman – now an ordinary-looking, mud-brick house –, and entered one of the buildings, which served as a pig-breeding station. Yyhxox had already reserved a small animal, weighing over thirty *jin* (approx. fifteen kilograms). The business owner put the pig into the plastic bag formerly used for fertilizer, and together with Yyhxox lifted it on the scale beam to confirm the weight. After this, the boss made a relatively small hole in the bag, from which the pig immediately stuck out its snout and breathed heavily. Yyhxox and the boss put the whole "package" into the back basket of Yyhxox's wife, and we walked towards the main road. The pig kept grunting and screaming. On two occasions it managed to jump out to the ground, requiring me and Yyhxox to put it back.

On the main road, Yyhxox hired two *modi* – the moto-taxi. One for his wife with the pig in the back basket, and the other for two of us. While riding the motorbike, I sat at the back. Yyhxox asked me whether I can hold his hat, books and paraphernalia. The roar of the engine suggested we are on the way, and the motorbike started mingling with the other vehicles in the dense, late-afternoon traffic. Our driver was speeding. When passing by the police station, we were expectedly stopped, ordered to step down, and the driver's bike was immediately confiscated. Yyhxox felt bad for the driver. However, he could not do anything for him. Therefore, we slowly retreated, since the police were interested only in the driver, and not in us. "This is the era of the rule by law (*fazhi shidai*)," Yyhxox remarked, "and Chairman Xi is the most enlightened one since he strives for equality, and punishing the bad people in the society, such as drug dealers," he repeated the information filling the local media. As we walked approximately thirty metres past the police station, Yyhxox called the driver who

already sent his wife to their home. He came to pick us up. In a couple of minutes, we were already standing in Yyhxox's courtyard.

Immediately after our arrival, Yyhxox opened a bottle of beer, forced it into my hand, placed a stool next to him, and urged me to sit down. He took a cleaver and started to process material for the *yyrkut*. First, he made four *mgu* twigs, all about twenty centimetres long, from the tree branches carried by his relatives from the bushes near the house. Amidst the preparations, Yyhxox tried to make a call, but the person whom he called did not pick up the phone. "[The people in the lands of] Yynuo and Shypnra use three [*mgu*]. We, Adur, in Lipmu Juojjop, Axhuo Tenzy and Njitla Buxte, use four," commented Yyhxox. When he started to talk about his kids and their mediocre grades at school, Mr Lu – a Han-Chinese resident – came to visit. "Come here, have a seat," Yyhxox urged his guest. "I am about to do a superstition (*mixin*) here," he told him, "and this foreign friend also came to my home to have fun (*shua*)," he added, somewhat proudly, offering the guest a cigarette, which I brought to Yyhxox from Hong Kong. Mr Lu immediately started to address an incident Yyhxox had with the owner of the place where he and his family lived. "That day, he came here and started to talk to me. A heap of rubbish (*feihua*). I was a bit drunk that day (*he ma le*). I did not want to listen to that, so I just threw him out. I told him – 'Let's talk about it tomorrow,' and I dragged him to the door," Yyhxox explained. "The owner told me, that after [some time], there are two families which need this place… For their business with potatoes," Yyhxox said, irritated. Mr Lu rented the place from the owner and technically served as Yyhxox's landlord because he sub-rented it to him. However, because Mr Lu's wife and kids went all to Zhejiang for seasonal work, he decided not to stay behind and planned to eventually follow them. Therefore, Mr Lu decided not to rent the place from the landlord anymore, causing a problem for Yyhxox and his family. More than ten days ago, the owner directly confronted Yyhxox with the new situation. However, communication between the two did not go well. Yyhxox summarized Mr Lu's concerns in Nuosu-Yi to his wife and others, causing a heated debate about the whole problem. In the end, everybody agreed that life is hard and that people should be less selfish. Yyhxox said that, eventually, they will move to a different place, not to give more trouble to the owner, thus saving the face of Mr Lu.

During the whole conversation, Yyhxox carried on with preparation for the *yyrkut*. After finishing the four *mgu*, he started to weave a rope-like object using the sturdy grass. I was not sure, whether this was *yyr yy* grass, allegedly traditionally used for this purpose (Bender, 2019, p. xxxii; Swancutt, 2015, p. 144). However, the ritualists proved to be very adaptable when

lacking some of the traditional material. The special wood for ritual paraphernalia, which Ddigge on Shimazi replaced – in a manner of bricolage – by whatever they have at hand (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17), or various other things. Reflecting on his trip to Xinjiang, Biqu told me that he did not bring any special material for rituals, even though Xinjiang lies in a significantly different climatic zone. "Even pigs were not a problem since the Han-Chinese raise them there," Biqu remarked. Therefore, Yyhxox was not particularly worried about the material. "This," Yyhxox pointed to the artefact he just made, "served the ancestors in the ancient times when they went from Yunnan to Guizhou. Afterwards, they flew here (*feiguolai le*). Since then… We need to use this when doing the soul-calling ritual," Yyhxox explained without providing any details. I immediately remembered Jjixke H.'s narration of the legendary origins of the *yyrkut* practice: "When we waded through the Jinsha River, we did not have any ropes. But we had this plant [on the riverbank] which was strong enough, so we made a rope out of it. We tied it to a stone, which we threw over to the opposite riverbank. A firm, stable place. So [the souls to be called] are coming with the help of this grass, which they follow back home. Then, the thread… When [the soul] gets here, we have a wooden lid… When it gets in here, we just cover it. It means that the soul is back," Jjixke H. described the practice of enticing the soul which Swancutt (2016b), with the help of her research participants in Ninglang, described with the help of a "spidery" metaphor. Such repetitions which produced a legend-based framework for such rituals. The emphasis on collectivity when talking about ancestors underscored the strong adherence to the clan with whom Jjixke dwelt in a "great time." However, since Jjixke H.'s originated from a different area than Yyhxox, and so their ways of *bi* differed.

"What are you going to do today? I mean, can you be concrete (*juti*)?" I asked Yyhxox in Chinese. "Concrete, I do not know… But this suckling pig… It is going to find the soul," Yyhxox replied. Simultaneously, he put all the wood-chips remnants from the cutting into an ordinary, metal bowl. He also thanked Mr Lu for helping him to resolve the problem Yyhxox initially did not handle well. However, another heated debate started between Yyhxox's neighbours with whom he shared the courtyard and Mr Lu. The argument cyclically copied the already discussed topics. Particularly the women spoke fast and loud and accompanied their words with lively body-language performances following every word in each sentence. Yyhxox kept switching between the *yyrkut* preparation and mediation of the debate. Suddenly, *bimox*'s phone beeped, announcing the SMS message. It came from the teacher in charge of Yyhxox's eldest son's class, requiring the *bimox* to pay a couple of hundred *yuan* as a

monthly fee for the living expenses of the young student. Yyhxox again diverted a topic and asked me whether in our society the close relatives can inter-marry. After replying that it is not possible, Yyhxox asked Mr Lu the same question. Gradually, the whole situation calmed down, Yyhxox switched increasingly into the Nuosu-Yi, and Mr Lu somewhat retreated into the background and eventually – with Yyhxox accompanying him to the door – left the courtyard. The *bimox* thus tactically deflected both sides of the smouldering conflict by diverting the attention from the words potentially escalating the argument elsewhere.

We were still waiting for one relative to return from work. Meanwhile, Yyhxox wrapped the four *mgu* into the *yyr*-rope artefact, put it in the bowl, and with the help of two relatives, he brought it along with the ferociously squeaking pig into the room. The ritualist remarked that they need to wear different garments because they are all soon going to face their ancestors. "These are not suitable, as they are of Han-Chinese," remarked the ritualist, pointing to the shirt he was wearing. "Also, you cannot go inside the room," he told me, urging me not to step over the doorstep. As he entered the room together with his family huddling together by his back, the relative came back from work and the *bi* could finally start. Facing the door, Yyhxox threw *jietshyr vapla* over his shoulders. By another overcoat, he covered the family. The loud squeaking of the pig mixed with the honking cars driving on the road leading to Lipmu Juojjo behind the door of the courtyard.

Yyhxox first lit dry stalks of grass. Keeping it in the smouldering state, he encircled the artefact he made from the bundle of *mgu*, and the *yyr*-rope by the smoking object. After this, he left the burning grass outside the door along with a preheated stone. He emphasized that I should keep away from the directions of the soul potentially coming in through the door, and the demons leaving their place. *Bimox* started to chant lines by heart without consulting the scriptures. He had two male helpers. One of them extinguished the burning hay by pouring water over it. When the water touched the stone, it made a strongly hissing sound followed by a thick, white vapour. Subsequently, the two helpers encircled the whole family (including Yyhxox) with the metal bowl containing the artefact along with the "wood-chip 'bullets'" (*tushymgur*) used for throwing at the demons (Bender, 2019, p. xxxii) in a counter-clockwise direction. Holding it by its front legs, one of the helpers was not sure what do do with a pig, whole simultaneously holding its mouth shut with his right hand. "You have to go this way," Yyhxox suggested to him, making a clockwise movement with his hand above his head while jumping out from and back into the lines he declamated. An elderly lady from the

neighbouring door came out to peek into the room and suggested the same direction by her hand. The pig then found its way to fly above the head of the *yyrkut*'s core participants.

The sound of a knife cutting vegetables came from the improvised kitchen located in the left corner of the courtyard. Yyhxox stood up, took off the cloak, untangled the artefact, put the *mgu* on the floor, and used the *yyr*-rope as a noose around the pig's neck – all while chanting. Adorned in this way, Yyhxox held the animal together with his helpers above the heads of his wife and kids, with the *yyr*-rope horizontally extended, moving back and forth. Subsequently, four people – Yyhxox, one of the helpers, Yyhxox's oldest son and oldest daughter, who brought the already emptied metal bowl – pressed the pig towards the ground. Yyhxox took out his knife and slit the pig's throat. His daughter caught the hot blood welling out from the pulsating wound into the metal bowl. *Mgu* twigs ended up on the floor. Yyhxox's wife was observing everything, while his youngest daughter sat in the background by the television set, covering her ears. Yyhxox then soaked the *yyr*-rope into the blood, and extended it over the doorsill, staining the floor and the immediate environment with the thick, red and sticky liquid. Again, he took out a couple of burning stones, and poured water over them, resting the blood-stained knife against the doorsill. "Sit down!" Yyhxox told all family members, and picked up yet another line to chant, gradually throwing the wood-chips out of the house. When finished, Yyhxox cut the *yyr*-rope in half by his knife, wrapped the *mgu* into it along with a piece of cloth, and threw the whole artefact over the wall. That was the end of the soul-calling *bi*, the core part of which took approximately thirty minutes.

"How did it go?" I asked. "Very smooth," Yyhxox replied. "The things you threw over the wall," I started my sentence. "You know, Yyjjurndipsa," Yyhxox first mentioned a sacred place in Yyxshy Pujjit which was closest to him, "and also Zzypzzyppuvut," continued with the geographical name. "When [the *bi*] got to these places, I threw all the dirtiness and illnesses away. It has to go in specific directions," Yyhxox explained, while the skies started getting dark. The corpse of the pig was already lying in the crackling fire started in the middle of the courtyard, and the guests – Yyhxox's clan members – started filling the place. With the coming night, we started to feast on the pork. Yyhxox, visibly relaxed, enjoyed that his job was done. He drank a bit of beer. Later, he had an agitated, emotional speech towards his relatives. "A relative of ours lies in the Latbbu Oprro hospital," Yyhxox started explaining the quite heated argument he just had. "But I do not have money… Sometimes, it is a question of face… You know, to be in the hospital for two days… Hundreds of *yuan* are going here, then there," he narrated with a cigarette in his hand, and pointing with fingers to different

directions. “But I do not have a choice. When I was little, I was seen as clever. Now, ‘doing’ the *bimox* (*zuo ge bimo*), I am, again, seen as clever. They all trust me,” said the ritualist.

There was another dimension to Yyhxox’s *bi* and the ritualist’s authority connected to it. Along with the feast and his rant, he – through performing a personalized purification rite combined with the *yyrkut* (see Bender, 2019, p. xxxii) – managed to deflect his clan members who came asking for money. To achieve this, he utilised and authority emergent through the iterative practice of his way of ritual performances conducted for his family as well as for this cluster of the Yyhxox clan. The clansmen, seeing Yyhxox as clever, legitimate *bimox*, then dwelt within Yyhxox’s lineage of practices. Holding onto his “hidden knowledge” (Swancutt, 2016b, p. 77), Yyhxox managed to use the *bi* and everything surrounding it for persuading them of the legitimacy of his stances stretching beyond the *bi* performances. This, however, had a limited effect on Mr Lu, whom Yyhxox had to appease by making certain compromises (such as paying the electricity bill). The contrast was stark. Nevertheless, the whole situation suggested how difficult it is to define the limits of the “ritual ecology” (McGraw & Krátký, 2017) – “the immediate context and environment of ritual – including the importance of objects, animals, places, colours, and time/timing” (p. 238) – or, in other words, what elements should be considered as part of the *bi*. In this context, these were, for example, Mr Lu, incoming SMS message, neighbours, the ritual implements different from the “traditional ones,” Yyhxox’s relatives. Through “careful coordination of people, objects, settings, and behavioural repertoires” (p. 246) as well as utterances, Yyhxox managed to at least partially appease Mr Lu. As an extension of this whole situation, later in the evening, Yyhxox was able to even accompany his clansmen to the hospital, without having to participate in the patient’s medical expenses. The power of the Yyhxox’s authority based on his performative as well as persuasive skills then extended far into those parts of day-to-day life which would without context seem detached from the concrete *bi* practice.

7.4 Jjixke V.’s Reputable Opinions

Yyhxox’s set of *bi* almost entirely consisted of purification performances, for which variegated clientele – including the shamans and shamanesses – sought Yyhxox’s services. Like most of the other ritualists, for the *vaxi* cleaning ritual, he made use of the Backyard. After finding a suitable spot, he had built his *mguva* “path” complemented by the stones heated up in the fire the *bimox* made aside, over which he kept pouring water and sometimes alcohol. The *mguva* was overarched by one dry grass-plant still carrying seeds. During each

of the more elaborated rites, Yyhxox made use of a circle similar to the *yyr*-rope, only made of dried grass, not a fresh one as during his *yyrkut*. Towards the end of the procedure, he cut this *yyr*-rope in half. In most of the cases, he used a small black chicken as an attraction for the malicious demons, which he killed by parrying it over its head by a heavy-bladed knife. A white chicken was present too, but it did not end up chopped to pieces. Instead, Yyhxox used them as a tool for purification of the client's body surface. They survived the routine. Subsequently, Yyhxox made the dead body of the black chicken a part of the demon-attracting grass effigy, and towards the end of the ritual, he instructed the helper to carry it away to the "effigy rubbish heap" close to the arch of the Big Bridge of Victory. "So, this was something like a shower (*xizao*) for the *mopnyit*," I used a literal purifying metaphor, which made Yyhxox burst into laughter while affirming the correctness of my observation. "These people encounter a lot of bad things every day. From time to time, they need to be purified."

Yyhxox's cheerful personality contributed also to a friendly and relaxed atmosphere during his *bi*, as the core practices were accompanied with laughs, smiles and jokes. Through such tactics, he was able to immediately establish rapport with his clients, who did not mind Yyhxox shifted them as figures on the chessboard during the ceremonies, and enthusiastically, actively followed his instructions. In early April, our seemingly mundane session with Yyhxox was interrupted by the arrival Jjixke V., who had bought long stalks of straw. "It is for a small *ritual* (*xiao yishi*)," he turned to Yyhxox, who used the word *mixin* again.

Figure 19: Yyhxox practicing in the Backyard

Jjixke V.'s client was a lady in her fifties, who visited the city from the countryside. Jjixke V. spent a long time making three considerably tall straw effigies while telling me that he prefers watching TV to reading academic articles I copied for him. From the twisted dry grass emanated series of crackling sounds. Jjixke V. used the plastic strings sold by Atgamox to mould the grass into a desired resemblance of the demon. At the same time, he took a discarded roof tile and on its inner side modelled three mud effigies, among which he dispersed a handful of the white seeds representing the soul (*yyr*). The lady then sat in a space between Jjixke V. and effigies. She was accompanied by two other ladies, who kept sitting more in the background.

Jjixke V. told me to observe closely and reminded me not to obstruct the trajectory of the spirits. With a scripture in his hand – not hand-written but photocopied, still "sewn" together by a cloven dried bamboo stalk – he started with the performance. The *bimox* summoned forces from the past to help his client tackling the present problem – one of the dozens of demons causing rheumatism. In the continuous flow of lines full of ancient characters permeating his scriptures – at that moment turned into lively utterances –, Jjixke V. often referred to a mythological plant possessing a potential to cure all diseases. However, in the distant past, it was allegedly eaten by the animals. Therefore, during the process of the *bi*, the healing effect attributed to the herb had to be called back through manipulation with animals – sacrificing them, or using them as an element for diagnostic or purification. Otherwise, the whole *bi* would not work. "Prepare the knife," Jjixke V. interrupted his declamation and turned his head towards two ladies accompanying his client. After a few minutes of uninterrupted declamation, he started coughing – his throat got dry. Turning his head over his left shoulder, he got rid of the phlegm from his lungs and throat by one potent spit and carried on.

The afternoon wind came and blew into the effigies – two of which were connected by red, white, and blue strings – and turned them over. "Hey, *bisse*," the *bimox* looked my direction, prompting me to put them into the right place. "A bit in the back. Turn it to the right, its head should be in the right direction." Jjixke V. was very punctual about the orientation and position of the effigies. Referring to me by the expression for the "*bimox* apprentice" – considering me one kind of his followers –, I knew he was half-joking. Therefore, I returned the joke: "I am just a mere *zzybi*." "Ah, yes, *zzybi*. Right!" Jjixke V. corrected himself for the sake of the joke, as well as for solidifying his privileged position. Grinning, he caught up at a point where he interrupted the flow of his words. The sound of the *biju* bell came from the

Glade, and the client started to cough vigorously. "*Shobbo*," Jjixke V. shouted while spitting alcohol over the back of her head to scare the malicious demon off and prompt it to leave the surface of the client's body. Apsy Latzzi arrived, followed by the loud, demon-scaring "*hxo.*" After encircling the head of his client with the chicken in the clockwise direction, Jjixke V. started throwing the white *yyr* "souls" in the direction of the *bi*. Followingly, after killing the chicken, he pulled some of its feathers from the small corpse and let one of the ladies to adorn the effigies with them. Meanwhile, the other lady was about to start a fire. Its flames would had been the pre-final destination of the dead animal. Jjixke V. took the plate with the mud effigies, as well as the straw ones, along with the chicken feathers. After encircling the client with these artefacts, he threw them away in the direction of the *bi*. At this moment, Jjixke V.'s performance seemed to be interrupted, and everybody was about to take a short break.

Figure 20: Jjixke V. amidst a small ritual with laochengqu *and* denghui *on the opposite bank*

At that very precise moment, Wang emerged from the Shimazi's tumult. Approximately at the same time, Maria – my American female friend visiting the city – appeared and joined me in the observation. "Does he count [the days] right (*suan zhun*)?" Wang asked Maria and me. I only nodded, while Jjixke V. left the burning fire to the three ladies, and became interested in Wang and Maria. A few moments ago, Wang was walking around Shimazi and asked the frequenters for a reliable person who could help him to solve his problem. Almost unanimously, everybody pointed to the Dune with Jjixke V.'s *bi* in a full swing. Wang thus came here to seek Jjixke V.'s services at a moment when the *bimox* was still not done with his previous clients. The ritualists *bimox* performing for people of different ethnicities than

Nuosu-Yi was nothing previously unseen. One of the well-known textualized cases comes from the 1940s when Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo performed a ritual for the Han-Chinese warlord Deng Xiuting who was well-versed in Nuosu-Yi customs and language (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 54-71).

Without asking Wang any details, Jjixke V. pulled out his *Zhamop tepyy* – one of the most often used *kutsi* scriptures (the other being *Hxati tepyy*) – and asked Wang for sixty *yuan*. Wang tried to haggle, since he wanted to pay only thirty. However, he eventually gave in and handed the cash to Jjixke V. The *bimox* pocketed the money. "What is your zodiac sign?" Jjixke V. asked Wang. "A monkey," went his reply. "*Anyut* or *ahxi*?" further inquired Jjixke V., talking in Nuosu-Yi. "There are two types of monkey," followed the ritualist. "I was born in 1980," Wang added. "Monkey… The big monkey. Two types of a monkey," murmured the ritualist, looking into his scripture. "July, 1980," Wang replied, while *bimox* uttered something in Nuosu-Yi. "I do not understand you," Wang, puzzled, looked at Jjixke V. "How old was your mother when she gave birth to you?" was another question from the ritualist to his potential client. "I do not know," replied Wang, who originated from Zhaotong – the Zzypzzyppuvut. "How old are you?" Jjixke V. asked another question, which was followed by a reply: "Over thirty." "Almost thirty-eight," I entered the conversation. Jjixke V. turned to his text, frenetically leafing through it. "So, which monkey are you?" he repeated his initial question after a while. "There are two types – one, which lives on a tree, and a small one, which eats the grain on the ground," he tried to elicit the desired answer. "The Han-Chinese have only one monkey – the big one," I intervened again, while Wang agreed. "The small one, that eats… *Ahxi*…" the *bimox* said to himself while returning to the text. "So you are thirty-nine," Jjixke V. turned to Wang again. "I am almost thirty-eight," replied Wang, visibly confused. "Yes, I know. However, we Nuosu-Yi add one year – at the day you are born, you are already one year old. So that gives thirty-nine here," *bimox* uttered firmly, repeating his question about Wang's mother's age: "Do you know?" "No," was the expected answer.

Jjixke V. read aloud one line in Nuosu-Yi from the *Zhamop tepyy*. "I will interpret all this for you," said the *bimox*. "You need three people in the family to be stable. How many of you are there now?" Jjixke V. inquired. "Four," replied Wang. "Then you need five! Three or five are good – there is no difference. The odd numbers, just not the doubles. Add one!" Jjixke V. tried to persuade Wang. "I cannot make it (*zhaobudao*). I mean…" Wang started, but Jjixke V. immediately interrupted him: "You are only thirty-nine! You can still find one," *bimox* insisted. After a short pause and scripture consultation, the ritualist came up with another

directive: “You need three flats!” “I cannot afford that,” Wang jumped into the sentence of Jjixke V. “If you cannot… Then just rent them,” the *bimox* offered a solution. At this moment, the clients waiting in the background started to roast the chicken, and Jjixke V. picked up a phone call.

After he dealt with the person on the other end of the line, he asked whether Wang has any kids. “Now, there is the family planning,” Jjixke V. suggesting the relaxed policy allowing Wang to have more offspring. “Ideally two boys and one girl,” *bimox* added. However, Wang already had two young daughters. To this, Jjixke V. replied that the scripture finds one boy and two girls favourable as well. “But how can I make it?” Wang asked. “Don’t you have a wife?” the *bimox*, surprised, asked while looking at Wang. “I mean… She ran away. I mean, is there any way how to find her?” Wang finally got to the core of his problem. *Bimox* asked when this happened, and whether she was Han-Chinese or Nuosu-Yi. “She is Han. And she left last July,” Wang uttered bitterly. “Does she not have an ID? Just go to the police station,” Jjixke V. came up with rather a rational solution. Handing a photo-copy of his runaway wife’s ID card to the *bimox*, Wang told him that her hometown is in one of the southern counties in Nipmu and that she is nowhere to be found. “Nowhere to be found?” Jjixke V. repeated the message, followed by laughter. Wang nervously laughed back, without giving the reply in a situation.

Jjixke V. asked for the more precise dating of her disappearance, but Wang was unable to provide this information. When this happened, he was in Zhaotong, while his wife was allegedly at her hometown. She was supposed to return on the first day of August. However, Wang never heard of her again. “Ah, you Han people,” the *bimox* sighed. Wang told us that this was not the first time his wife ran away. However, before, she always returned. Nonetheless, this time she took all her stuff – a lot of Wang’s stuff as well –, leaving only their two children behind. Maria concluded that Wang is being honest and that his wife is evil. Wang speculated his wife is ill and possibly sold everything in order to use the money to cover her medical expenses. “You did not get me right,” said Wang, looking at Jjixke V. “I do not want you to do the fortune-telling [according to the birth dates] (*suan ba zi*), I want to know whether you can find her through this superstition (*mixin*). She might be ill, when she runs out of the money, she is done, right?” Wang continued. “So is she still ill?” Jjixke V. wondered. “I do not know. It is you who are doing this superstition, no?” Wang replied, a bit irritated. “The superstition (*mixin*) is different,” replied Jjixke V. perhaps unwittingly using

the term for the *bimox* practice he detested the most. “A lot of ill people come here for a diagnosis and a subsequent cure,” the ritualist tried to explain to his client.

Jjixke V. seemed to be running out of methods through which he would be able to help – or get rid of – Wang. Suddenly, he realized that there is one option left. He stood up and left to his spot on the Glade to bring the poker cards. Wang sighed. “Even the language is a problem in this process. Ah, this superstition... I can not say that I believe it. I just want to know, whether it might have some effect or not,” Wang told Maria and me, while Jjixke V. was still away. The repetitive voice from the megaphone in the background, which was attached to one of the portable stands, kept announcing that the boss sells all types of dumplings and soybean milk. While searching his bag, Jjixke V. urged the three ladies to bring an egg for *vaqip sha*, possibly to determine the result of the *bi* that preceded Wang’s arrival.

Wang handed his wife’s photocopied ID card together with her portrait to the ritualist. However, Jjixke V. said he does not need these, and asked for the name of Wang’s wife. “Li,” Wang replied. “Blow into the cards,” Jjixke V. prompted Wang, while comforting him that eventually, everything will resolve, only that the *bimox* does not know how much money Wang would be able to retrieve from his wife. Subsequently, Jjixke V. let Wang whisper to the cards, and then pulled three out. There was a result on each card. In general, the result was favourable, with some difficulties in the process, but with a promise of a happy ending.

Wang and his wife were working in the construction business. Because of her disappearance, Wang was unable to bear the expenses and repay the debts they had. On the positive side, Wang said his two daughters perform well at school, to which Jjixke V. hung to, urging Wang to be patient. The Zhaotong native expressed his hope that the mother of the kids can safely return home. “I even went to the police station in her hometown. To no avail,” Wang added. The *bimox* urged him to go to the police station once more. “I heard you Nuosu-Yi can find her,” Wang tried to push back. To this, Jjixke V. answered that his tracking skills work only within days after the disappearance of the missing person. In Wang and Li’s case, it had been already too long. “In the past… The thing was that if she does not reappear, we could had cursed her. However, according to the law of this country, it is illegal now. We are not doing [the curse rituals] anymore. Only two, three, or five days after she is gone, *bimox* still can do this, [the spell] pushes her to walk in circles, not to run far away. Eventually, she would return home… However, this is useless in this case, and the curse is illegal. Now you can only go to the police station,” said Jjixke V. Wang became particularly interested in the curse, thinking that if Li falls sick, she might be easier to locate. Bamo Ayi (2007c) explains that before the

Democratic Reforms, cursing was connected to clan feuding: “disputes over slaves, homicides, control of territory, stolen brides, unprovoked injuries, or large-scale pillage.” However, in the first years of 2000s, its use shrunk to thefts and robberies (p. 201). Jjixke V.’s words suggested that in the recent years, the stance towards the harmful rites became even more strict.

The conversation got cyclical. Wang kept pushing for the cursing ritual, and Jjixke V. persistantly refused to perform it since it was against the law. At the same time, the *bimox* repeatedly told Wang to be patient, and that he should wait for two or three years. Only then he would be able to see the result. However, Wang did not want to wait for so long. “The chicken meat is ready, let’s eat!” Jjixke V. turned to his former clients, who roasted the rest of the chicken and urged us to join all of them. He offered each of us a piece of meat, saying the *bi*-processed meat works as disinfection (*xiaodu*). Maria politely refused, Wang told the *bimox* that he ate already. However, eventually, he accepted his share. Smacking permeated our following conversation. “I cannot do it, there are no conditions for it,” Jjixke V. kept refusing Wang’s request for the curse. “Now, I am the representative heritage transmitter. I am paid by the government,” he added. “I did it once in my life. I know how to do it, but I do not dare. If she does not return after three years, I will find someone who will do it for you,” ritualist kept comforting Wang, while manoeuvering him to a position where he would cease to further push him. “Moreover, if you do it in the hurry, your heart will go bad (*xin bu hao*),” Jjixke V., using Sichuanese Mandarin rather clumsily to translate the Nuosu-Yi expression *hxiena* (literally “sick at heart”) pointing to a possible psychological problems caused by a hasty curse. In a similar observation, Bamo Ayi (2007c) states that the decision of a client to ask the *bimox* to curse someone does not come lightly, as the effect might effect not only the person cured, but also the client. A person resorts to curse after exhausting all other possible ways of the problem solution (p. 201). Wang’s light-hearted treatment of this matter thus made Jjixke V. to be defensive, as the *bimox* was aware of the potential effect of the curse. He did his best to avoid it. Towards the end, the *bimox* diverted our attention by a success story of his former client, who had similar problems, but at the end was able to find his justice through means different from the curse. Followingly, Jjixke V. offered alcohol to Wang. He corteously refused. Finally, Jjixke V. returned to his former clients and began chanting again.

The encouter between Jjixke V. and Wang was remarkable from many perspectives, especially when happening during, and later in parallel with another rite-like performance. Such overlapping did not seem to constitute a problem since the service to Wang was a mere

preparatory stage for something bigger, and did not directly deal with demons. However, the situation problematized the existence and nature of the borders between the Nuosu-Yi social life and its expression through the *bi*. The simultaneity of performances accentuated the contrast between rather receptive Nuosu-Yi clients who were familiar with the *bi* and a Han-Chinese who was confused by anything related to Nuosu-Yi. The desire for assimilation of the "outsider" into the Nuosu-Yi calendar manifested itself in the way how Jjixke V. took over Wang's timid request for his services and – led by his pressuposition – arbitrarily proceeded without asking Wang what it is that he wanted. The whole situation revealed various ruptures within the *bimox* practice which would otherwise remain unaddressed. It reminded me of Bakhtin's idea of the dialogue as a relation between the mutually other – in this case, between Nuosu-Yi and Han-Chinese. The question-answer session did reveal many conceptualizations innate to the Nuosu-Yi "common sense." If there was something in common between Han-Chinese and Nuosu-Yi, then it was an approach to the ritualist as a generator of the *endoxa*, the "reputable opinion," which carries out their function "irrespectively of their truth value," since they are accepted rather than believed (Spranzi, 2011, p. 34), which Wang expressed explicitly at one point. In a similar vein, Bakhtin (2010d) remarks that the rhetorical dispute is directed towards potential victory, and not to approach a truth (p. 152). However, while the Nuosu-Yi possessed a specific epistemic attunement – thus had not problem accepting their trusted ritualist's conclusions and align their lives accordingly –, Wang lacked such background. Therefore, he became suspicious and confrontational. Subsequently, Wang put Jjixke V. into defensive position after becoming interested in a curse, which was a sensitive topic for the *bimox*, who tried to slowly get himself out of the situation by using rhetorics of the Chinese state rather than that of the Nuosu-Yi ritualist. Jjixke V.'s self-perceived complex entanglement with the state-sponsored projects – some of which proved defiant to assimilation into their cosmology in a situation when facing a Han-Chinese not familiar with the Nuosu-Yi ways – made him worry about reprecussions from the forces he was unable to mediate. Therefore, he chose to opt out and withdraw from the whole situation. Ultimately, this time it was the ritualist who escaped the client.

7.5 Ma, the Party and Persuasive Cursing *Bi*

Twelve days after his first visit, Wang appeared in the Shimazi again, this time accompanied by two friends – one male, Dong, and one female, Zhang – from Kunming. During his last visit, he was dressed more informally. However, this time, he wore a clean white shirt, with the wireless headset in his right ear, expensive-looking watch, and the Buddhist-bead bracelet

on his right wrist. They were all sitting near Ma *bimox*, who was about to offer services which Jjixke V. failed to provide. The *bimox* tried to explain to Wang that all depends on the number of people he wants to curse, and the best way to do it is "one person at a time." Wang did not understand some of the explanations and asked Ma to repeat. Meanwhile, Zhang shared a story of the Miao shaman in Yunnan who was called to drive out malicious spirits after a group of people opened a grave which should never be opened. In the background, Ma, Wang and Dong discussed the ritual. "If this works, I want my wife killed too!" said Dong, expressing his surprise when inquired about the price, which seemed too expensive to him after he learned that in the normal situation – on the countryside –, such ritual takes a lot of time and costs anything between a couple of thousand to over ten thousand *yuan*. "But this also involves the use of poison," said Ma.

Everybody involved started haggling, eventually agreeing on the most basic rite – the sacrifice of one pullet. "We will kill the chicken along with that woman," Dong said, everybody laughed. "Brother… You really are not afraid to say anything (*ni shazi hua dou gan jiang*)," remarked Zhang. Dong, wearing a suit jacket and flipflops, took out a bottle of alcohol to seal the deal. "I do not want to drink," Ma objected. However, Dong pressed the lid of the bottle into *bimox*'s hands, not taking "no" for an answer. "Bottoms up!" ordered Dong. "Ai, brother, you drink again. One day, you will get poisoned by the alcohol," Zhang lamented, while Ma wished Dong good health. "My health is good, whatever! Let's drink!" Dong frenetically urged the ritualist. Ma took a sip, and the rest spilt over the ground. "Hey! What was that? Punishment – one glass (*fa yi bei*)!" Dong jumped up. "Let's drink! Then we will kill her!" he added. Ma did not want to drink. He could not take the alcohol anymore and shook his head with an ironic grin on his face when reacting to Dong's theatrical remarks.

"This is all fake, for sure," Wang expressed his doubts about the whole process, which prompted Zhang to tell him, that the *gu* – a Chinese expression originally pointing to a legendary venomous insect, but now related to many sorts of causing harm through witchcraft attributed to several ethnic groups of Southwest China – is a real thing. Shortly, Wang confessed that his wife is on the run for a way longer time than he told Jjixke V. before, coming home only when he is not around. "I want her to bring my stuff back," Wang said. "This is very unlikely to happen! You must be dreaming (*ni zuo meng ba*)," Zhang reacted immediately. In the end, the deal was set on a couple of hundred *yuan*, excluding the budget for ritual accessories. Wang shopped around Shimazi for usual *bi*-related commodities, including the dry *yyr yy* grass and firewood (from the discarded houses), the strings for

shaping the straw effigy, another bottle of alcohol, and one black chick. After finding a suitable spot on the Backyard – near to the pillars of the Big Bridge of Victory – several onlookers gathered on its construction towering roughly three meters above the ground. Ma prepared the grass and placed his hand-written scripture titled *Ssup o xit o jo su* – roughly translated "Bad deeds returning to those who caused them" – on the ground, weighing it down with his half-wooden and half-bronze *qike* fan.

"Write her name," Ma urged Wang, who was already holding the pixelated, printed-out portrait of Li, while Ma started to weave the straw effigy. "Also, write her date of birth," Zhang added. "Write that you do not want her!" Ma urged Wang while twisting the stalks into the desired shape. "I cannot," said Wang. "You have to write it!" Zhang added firmly. Even though the situation suggested that Wang's reluctance might have been spurred by some long-lost feelings, the reason for it was much more simple. Wang had problems with writing down the characters. He was able to copy the name and the birth date from the copy of Li's ID card, but the suggested expression "may your life turn into suffering worse than death" (*sheng bu ru si*) was beyond his abilities. Therefore, he had to ask Zhang to write it for him.

"What is this chicken for?" Dong asked Ma. "For killing," replied the ritualist coldly. "Oh, that is so cruel!" Wang's companion replied. Ma repeated that for a similar ritual there were clients who gave him between five and ten thousand *yuan*. After the *bimox* tied Li's photograph adorned with the requested text on its backside to the straw effigy, he proceeded to another step. "I am a master, and you are my disciples (*bisse*)," uttered Ma firmly, suggesting his privileged position. "Start the fire," he looked at Wang, untying the pack of wood. "Are we going to roast the chicken and eat it?" Dong asked, quickly learning that this is not possible in the case of this ritual. Ma collected grass from the ground. Soon after, the flames sprang up in the improvised fire ring. Wang and Dong remarked that all this is a really good business and wondered why they had to buy all these implements, instead of simply gathering them from the ground around the marketplace. Meanwhile, Dong was playing with Ma's *biju* – most of the Nuosu-Yi individuals would not dare to touch *bimox*'s paraphernalia – while the ritualist seemed that this fact does not bother him.

The fire gained momentum. Ma erected the effigy with the help of four stones. In the following moments, the *bimox* tied the tweeting black chicken to the pole, which he stuck into the dry ground behind the effigy. With the *hlepvop* and *vyxtu* on his back, golden ring and watch adorning his hands, Ma squatted with his face turned north-westwards, with Li's native place behind his back. In front of him was the burning fire, behind which – in the same

direction the ritualist was facing – stood the effigy with the chicken. “Now, curse her by your own words,” Ma turned to Wang. “I do not know how to do it, please help me to do it (*ni bang wo zhou ba*),” replied Wang. Zhang urged Wang to proceed but failed. “Could you, please (*mafan ni*),” Zhang turned to Ma with a soft voice. Wang ducked by Ma’s right hand. The ritualist picked up the *biju* and started chanting, which made Dong laugh. Wang kept recording fragments of Ma’s practice by his phone.

Figure 21: Ma bimox *in the process of cursing Wang’s wife Li*

Forcefully shaking the bell with his hand, Ma, with closed eyes, seemed to enter the trance. Suddenly, he stopped, turning his head towards the right side, where Wang got captivated by his screen. “What is the name of that wife of yours?” he asked. “And your name?” *bimox* followed. After a while, Ma took the scripture from the ground, leafed to a certain page, put it on the ground again, and weighted it down with *qike* – preventing the notably worn-out leaves of the scroll getting further damaged by the strengthening wind. Subsequently, the ritualist took a bottle of the liquor, which his clients provided him with, and took a sip. At this moment, Wang handed him two one-hundred *yuan* bills, which he slipped under the ritual fan. Bamo Ayi (2007c) observed that after concluding the cursing *bi*, the ritualist’s rewards consists of sacrificial animals, while the final compensation – usually very high – is given to the *bimox* after the result is known (p. 201). Ma, however, pocketed the money immediately. He picked up one of the stones under his feet and threw it into the fire. “Hey, *bisse*!” he shouted towards Dong, “help me to take out the other stone.” “I do not know how – I just entered the apprenticeship moments ago,” Dong sneaked out from his new responsibility. Ma poured water from a small hand-canister to the enamel bowl, stood up, and went to pick up the stone by himself. The short-lived hissing

sound of the stone touching the surface of the water cut the cacophony of other sounds – other ritualists' performances around Shimazi, cars, and chit-chat between Zhang and Dong – surrounding us. Ma went to the effigy, waved the bowl in front of it, and then splashed the water with the stone out over effigy's head with Li's picture in the northwestern direction.

Ma went back, squatted again, put on his *hlepvop* hat and picked up the scripture. Apsy Latzzi entered the scene. Ma urged him to stand by his side. "Quickly, take a video for me, so I can share it online," Wang urged me. After handing him the phone back, Zhang scolded him for not thanking me. Scrolling through the scripture, Ma supported his head by his right hand for a while. He started to call upon souls of the Jjixke Sseshy's clan branch to which Jjixke V. and Jjixke H. both belonged as well. While not interrupting his declamation, the ritualist turned one sheet and put the book on the ground together with *qike* again. The rhythm suddenly changed: from a prolonged, beseeching, almost hypnotizing protracted chant, into a rap-like flow. Ma asked Li's full name again, subsequently putting a strong emphasis on processing and pronouncing it correctly. Along with the *biju* bell, he took a bottle of *baijiu* in his hands again. Smoke emanating from the fire ring kept quickly changing direction, commanded by the restless breeze. His *durta*, fanny pack worn in the opposite direction, a small, golden Buddha sealed inside a transparent, plastic badge – all were shaking in a rhythm of Ma's shortened breath, as he, again, seemed to enter a state of trance.

The *bimox* returned to his scripture, poured some alcohol into his mouth, and spluttered it in the direction of the effigy. He accompanied the splutter by an audible "*hua ha*" shout. Followingly, he kept leafing through the scripture and cyclically repeated the spluttering of the alcohol. "It is still not here," Ma turned to Wang. "It was still not able to attract it here. As soon as it comes, we will send it back," the ritualist continued. "What are you talking about?" asked Dong. Suddenly, a gust of wind came, and toppled the pole with the chicken, but, strangely, not the grass effigy. Naturally, the animal got frightened and started frenetically tweeting. "Aha! *Shuo*! It is here," Ma exclaimed, nudging Wang's shoulder with his fingers. Simultaneously with this fragment, a massive cloud of dust swallowed the excavator in the riverbed.

"It is me who called it," Ma said, picked up the book, and resumed his declamation, only to place the book on the ground again, and taking a sip of the alcohol. "What is your name again?" asked Ma, further inquiring into names of Wang's two daughters. The client suspiciously looked at the *bimox*, reluctantly sharing with him the names of his children. One after another, Ma incorporated them between the lines of his text. Wrinkles on Ma's forehead

became more expressive as he focused on the meticulous declamations of the text – line by line, word by word – all amplified by the sun rays touching his heavily suntanned face. The ritualist stood up and went to pick up the chicken. He untied the animal, while, again, confirmed the name of Wang's wife, mispronouncing it completely. Wang – stuck to the screen of his smartphone again –, became notably irritated while uttering the full name of the person whom he hated for taking away most of his belongings.

Time had come for the final part of the whole process. Ma took one of the wooden planks, and – while holding the chicken by its feet –, used it to repeatedly to parry the animal over its head. The chicken started flapping its wings. Ma took out a bundle of his keys and opened a pocket "fruit knife" attached to it, quickly cutting the beak of the animal open. Doing so, he took away the rest of the life energy out of its distressed body. Killing it instantly, he spilt its blood over the effigy. The *bimox* went to his spot on the Glade to bring a bigger knife, giving his clients a while to reflect on the whole experience. Their murmur was unintelligible. Putting effort in his brisk walking pace, Ma came back almost instantly. While chanting, he took the wooden sheath off the knife. Again, the prolonged chants gained intensity and speed. With Apsy Latzzi re-emerging on the beginning of this part, the rhythm changed. The ritualist untied the legs of the dead chicken by cutting off the rope that tied them. While uttering "*shuo*," he continuously threw its body in the three directions – northwest being the first one.

Ma picked up the corpse of the animal. Returning to the long, almost hypnotizing chants, he took an effigy and placed it alongside the chicken on the ground. He, again, asked the full names of Wang, his wife, and their two kids, doing his best to keep those in the right order. Putting the effigy's head containing Li's picture in parallel with the mauled black chicken's head on a plank, he started to chop this whole bundle into pieces. The chicken's body proved to be harder to cut than the dry *yyr yy*. Due to the blunt edge of his knife, Ma had to use considerable strength to successfully penetrate the animal's flesh. Again, he asked for Li's full name, mentioning it several times. "*Dut! Dut*!" he shouted towards all of us surrounding him, pointing to the hearth, where the flames almost died out. Meanwhile, the wind almost carried away shreds of the Li's photograph. Ma meticulously picked them all up. He put the chopped grass on the fire. Instantly, thick smoke and the crackling sound indicated fire's resurrection, shortly followed by the orange flames. "Tell her: 'Now, I am killing you! I do not want you anymore!'" Ma urged Wang, after putting the chicken's corpse into the burning hearth. Wang, encouraged by Dong and Zhang – still somewhat reluctantly – repeated the words the *bimox* wanted him to utter.

Everybody went silent while standing around and observing the flames devouring Ma's artefact. After a while, Ma squatted again, took a big sip of alcohol, picked up his *biju*, and resumed his chants: "Hxietlie, along with Apsy Latzzi, come here…" The rest of the lines became unintelligible due to the ear-piercing sound of the bell. After a moment of trance, Ma looked at Wang and said: "She is dead. You will know for sure around August or September." The ritualist took another gulp of the cheap liquor. "She will die together with her new boyfriend," he said. "I called [the curse] from the northwest, and then diverted it to the southeast," he pointed to the direction of Li's hometown. Dong was holding Ma's *qike*. Suddenly, his phone rang – quite ironically, with the ringtone of crowing. "Great, this is magnificent (*tai hao le*)," Zhang exclaimed with pure joy. "I am from the Ma family, we are from here. We are a branch of Jjixke. We killed Yi, we killed Han [through such rituals]. Actually, such killing is illegal, you know," the *bimox* suddenly turned to everybody. Wang, Zhang and Dong nodded. Ma grinned and picked up the bottle again.

Bamo Ayi (2007c) claims that at the time invitation is made, "the time limit for the curse is set, whether one or two months or, at the most, one or two years" (p. 201). Now, in the second half of April, the proposed belated effect of the spell irritated Dong, who became very repulsive. "This is too slow! You did this today, why we cannot know [the result] tomorrow?" he asked the ritualist. "You need to be patient, brother," Zhang comforted him. "I do not have any patience," Dong said. "While doing business, you cannot have any patience. You have a million *yuan* in front of your eyes. However, if you wait too long, that money might be gone," he added. "None of this can affect my daughters, right?" Wang asked timidly. "No, the three of you won't be affected by this," the ritualist assured him. After taking the remnants of the corpse and effigies from the dead fire away – near the electric poles to the "graveyard" for the ritual-related material, where he threw it into the riverbed –, Ma pronounced the rite after one hour as successful and finished. "I have seen it all. I am not afraid of anything, except…" Ma was about to continue, but the noise of the overloaded truck above our heads made the rest of the sentence unintelligible. "Of whom?" I asked. "He is afraid of the Communist Party," answered one individual from his client's group my question for him. "No, I am not afraid of the Party. Actually, my family, we are all party members (*wo jia shi gongchandang de*)," he reassured himself as well as all of us.

The puzzling co-existence of the stipulated atheism among the Party members, and Ma's ritual practice serving his clients – a "successful synthesis between Maoism and Yi tradition" (Vermander, 1999, p. 37) –, suggested a complexly intertwined, personalized understanding

of a symbiosis of the worlds, which seemed to be mutually antagonistic. However, for Ma, this synthesis seemed to be completely commonsensical. “Just as spiders subsist daily on insects snared in their webs,” writes Swancutt (2012b) – quoting her research participant –, the *bimox* “dine on the sacrificial meat they attract with their reputations as great religious specialists” (p. 64). This “dining metaphor” has even further resonance among the Nuosu-Yi ritualists. In a different piece of writing, Swancutt (2015) maintains that the Nuosu-Yi ritualists “make effigies irresistible to ghosts by daubing them with raw flesh and the blood of sacrificial animals – which as they point out, is not a mere representation, but a real sacrificial meal” (p. 136). The corporeality of the sacrificial meat became apparent when Jjixke V. – after deflecting deflection Wang’s request for imposing the curse upon his wife –, prompted all of us engaged in the ecology of his *bi* to share a meal following his successful *bi* performance for other clients. This invitation had a purpose to include all of us into the orbit of his way of the *bi*. Jjixke V. thus prevented being “eaten” by Wang.

“To devour or to be devoured,” Vermander (2008), observing the Nuosu-Yi ritual behaviour, concludes, “are actually two sides of the same coin: the devoured spirit is one which has fallen prey to the ghosts and becomes itself a ravenous ghost, as it tries to compensate for being preyed upon” (p. 78). He sees the Nuosu-Yi rituals as a process of reassembling the bodies broken by the ravaging demons, or, in other words, dichotomously, as means of putting the disorder back into the order. The two opposite models he distinguishes is “the meal where the food is shared, where everyone finds his/her proper place” and “the gluttonous consumption of food performed by ghosts, a way of behaving that destroys the soul, the body and the community” (p. 78-79). The *bi*, ensuring the continuity of the first model, then allegedly leads to “the proper ‘consumption’ of the deceased” allowing him to “join a new community,” from which “the deceased can protect the community of the living from the improper gluttonous behaviour of the ghosts – those who have not been properly ‘consumed’” (p. 80). Jjixke V.’s remark about the chicken meat being a “disinfectant” might also be understood in a similar context, as well as Yyhxox’s childhood memories of not being able to share a meal with the client-family of his father due to the scarcity of the meat, suggesting a two-fold lack of the sense of security caused by the empty stomach together with the unfinished circle of the ritual feast. Vermander’s observations somewhat echo those of Vitebsky (1993), who maintains that among the Sora of Eastern India, “the dead seek to transfer to them certain experiences which they underwent at the moment of their deaths” through “‘eating the soul’ of the living victim in order to absorb him, thereby causing in him a

kind of symptom or of death which is analogous to that which was undergone by the attacker himself." Dialogue with these dead "is always associated with the performance or promise of a sacrifice by the living to the dead," and thus consists of "not only communication but also a feeding" (p. 5-6). Similarly, the Nuosu-Yi ancestors need to be continuously appeased through providing sacrificial meals on different occasions, some of them not necessarily connected to *bi*. This relationship is – contrary to Vermander's interpretation – not symbolic, it is strikingly corporeal.

Ma's and others' performance fully revealed the extent of the inclusive-cum-assimilative force exercised by the *bi* performer on its surroundings. As the cases of Shamat, Jjixke V. and Yyhxox showed us, the result of the assimilation is never guaranteed. Heavily based on rhetoric usage, the tactics deployed in the process, as well as the elements that should be included or excluded, are highly personalized and selective. Similarly, the ideas of "order" and "disorder" are not creating universal, but rather highly personalized, multiple orders and disorders, variously articulated mutually differentiated dichotomies. Neither the world of the deceased ancestors and the living beings could be seen as two separate realms since the border between the two is blurred even in day-to-day life, more so during the *bi*. Along with the Nuosu-Yi, the *bimox* are inhabiting the "great time" in which they constantly live with their deceased ancestors side-by-side, and the *bi* serves as an explicitation of their relationship – similarly when the living visit each other in their respective households.

Beyond the fact that Ma's performance of the cursing *bi* was very close to the notion of words and utterances "as action" due to its tangible impact on human lives (and deaths), there was also another, more general dimension of his practice. The assimilative property of the *bi*, along with the metaphor of the feast and the act of eating, finds its symbiosis when visualised through Bakhtin's carnival chronotope of the slaughter feast, which revolves around the exteriorization of the animal body's interior. Its innards "are torn out of animal body and immediately consumed and incorporated into human body, an act performed in the carnival by the gigantic mouth, the gorge" (Lachmann, Eshelman & Davis, 1988, p. 147). By his *bi* "gorge," Ma was able to "devour" not only humans – making all of us his "followers" complicit in the illegal cursing practice – and a plethora of material objects but also more or less abstract concepts. In contrast with Jjixke V. and his promulgated family inclination to Nationalists, Ma performatively embedded his Communist Party membership into his lineage of citational practice, thus assimilated the understanding of the Communist doctrine principles

into his pure "way of doing things," making otherwise atheism-obsessed political practice into something that could be treated as a guardian spirit.

7.6 Summary and Partial Conclusion

"Every person's orientation towards the stars is unique and unrepeatable," Yyhxox once told me reflecting on whether practices of the *bimox* differ significantly, somewhat complementing his confession about not knowing what the other ritualists were doing (see 6.3). Similarly, paths of the souls – those of Yyhxox's clan going through Yyjjurndipsa, while that of Jjixke H.'s passing through Shuonuo plateau – to the Zzypzzyppuvut differ, going through familiar places of the individual *bimox* or the whole clans. Equally, the *bi* practice constitutes of far more techniques and tactics than the deployment of the "speech bullets" (Swancutt, 2015) – it is a multi-faceted tactical usage of speech-related events combined with bodily performance. These tactics are all connected to persuasion: of the demons to go away (as they cannot be annihilated – p. 139), of the client whom *bimox* makes his follower (Swancutt, 2012b, p. 59-60; Swancutt, 2016b, p. 77), of ancestors coming to help, and of many other actants. Fernandez (2006) sees ritual as "one of the most interesting and powerful forms of persuasion" (p. 647). The Nuosu-Yi rituals are always dialogic, with the participation of ritualist's ancestors as well as his the clients.

As Shamat showed us, this attraction, however, does not always work, as the *bimox* looks for suitable followers, and the clients look for a suitable *bimox*. If this connection succeeds to materialize, the *bimox* then "*accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior and authoritative set of practices*" (Butler, 1995, p. 205, italics in original), and his reputation increases. However, when it fails, both sides can escape from each other. If this escape happens before the relationship is sealed, the reputation of the *bimox* seems to remain unharmed. Understood in such way, the ritualist through the *bi* performance – since these performances are ideally based on lifelong learning – keep repetitively weaving their "hidden knowledge" (Swancutt, 2016, p. 77), an individualized orthodoxy through the personalized way of inclusion, synthesis and exclusion of various elements. These can take the form of persons of one's own clan, as was evident from Yyhxox's performance, people of different ethnicities, as Jjixke V. and Ma showed to us, or even the concepts and ideologies, as Ma articulated his relation to the Communist Party. Even material objects like smartphones and on-line digital artefacts could be included, as Vuthop will reveal in the following chapter. Such amalgam then acts as a set of "reputable opinions" (Sprantzi, 2011, p. 34) with ritualist's

signature presented to the client. As Bell (2009) stresses, "ritual acts must be understood within a semantic framework whereby the significance of an action is dependent upon its place and relationship within a context of all other ways of acting: what it echoes, what it inverts, what it alludes to, what it denies" (p. 221). The ritualist engages in "strategic and predicative process of social figuration and re-figuration" (Fernandez, 2006, p. 655). The client accepts such presented "reputable opinions" if these are similar to what s/he was accustomed through the experience circulating within her or his lineage or refuses if s/he fails to be persuaded with ritualists' performance. If successful, each *bimox* broadens a space for his own lineage of thought, practice and performance. For a ritualization to work as social control, Bell (2009) maintains that it must be rather loose, as it would not work "if it is perceived as not amenable to some degree of individual appropriation" (p. 222). The presented vignettes suggest that we can perceive the *bi* – when seen as constituting of ritualist's utterances – as a complex, multi-faceted and multi-directional performance which attracts, persuades, and ultimately devours – assimilates – its environment, gradually dissolves the unfamiliar into familiar, constructs authority of the *bimox*, and reveals ritualist's individuality. As seen through the Yyhxox's interpretation of the *yyrkut* as partially connected to scaling the Jinsha River in the past –, the *bi* furthermore provides Nuosu-Yi day-to-day life with meanings derived from the personalized, performed interpretations of the fragments of the Nuosu-Yi oral legends, which allows the *bimox* to control past, present and the future of their clients.

"Intrinsic to ritualization," Bell (2009) pondered, "are strategies for differentiating itself – to various degrees and in various ways – from other ways of acting within any particular culture" (p. 90). This differentiation then manifests itself in the "way of doing things to trigger the perception that these practices are distinct and the associations that they engender are special" (p. 220). These practices are then "the very production and negotiation of power relations" (p. 196) and their construction and interplay define, empower and constrain (p. 221). Seeing social life as "much more than a code of or template for behavior," Fernandez (2006) maintains that "it is seen not only as regularly mediated by rhetorical strategies but also, in fact, as something kept vital by that continuous negotiation" (p. 653). Apart from the content of the *bi*, its form – the whole – also negotiates and contests the power among the *bimox*, especially in an environment such as Shimazi Marketplace where so many different ways of *bi* were laid next to each other. As in the previous chapter, the rhetorical victory in such "warfare" then constitutes of recognition of legitimacy, orthodoxy, thus a strain of purity. The

bi – especially when comparing practices in Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 – then fleshes out various aspects of the day-to-day ritualized life of the Nuosu-Yi by making it intensified, explicit and evident. The intensity and theatricality of the *bi* both blur the border between the purposeful performance and subconscious performativity within the everyday life of the ritualists.

8. Transmission and Assimilation of *Bimox* Knowledge: Emergence of Authorship Among Nuosu-Yi Ritualists

In the preceding chapter, the purity coated as orthodoxy-cum-legitimacy connected to the *bimox* ritual performances and practices allowed me to depict an emergence of the ritualists' authority as a force behind the attraction and persuasion of their clients. However, when seen as something that is being passed on from a master to a disciple, the technique of *bi* – depending on a combination of a written text in the form of scripture with its declamation (by heart of with the help of a written text) and bodily performance – is being perceived as a practice that should not be adjusted, but passed on in its immutable form. Kraef (2014) maintains that the young *bimox* "extend and ameliorate rituals to accommodate both clients' needs and hide the fact that they lack the expertise required for these rituals" (p. 169). While this statement might be plausible to some extent in certain contexts – as being even a "knowledgeable" young *bimox* does not guarantee an ability to conduct rituals persuasively enough and, as I have shown in the previous chapter, the practices, attunement and expectations of the clients differ as well –, the ideas of "extension" and "amelioration" are problematic. Not only we know close to nothing on how the ritual practices developed – thus, there are none which would be established as standard which could be extended or ameliorated –, but also these practices and attitudes towards them differ according to the allegiance to different clans as well as ritualists' individual preferences, as Chapter 7 suggested.

The fluidity within the scriptures, their content and it's interpretations – all forming a key segment within the *bimox* knowledge transmission – is often perceived similarly as the "extended," "shortened" or "ameliorated" *bi*. Researching the ways of knowledge transmission among the Nasu-Yi in Guizhou, Yang (2009) laments that the content of the books is now getting permeated by materialities like TV sets, washing machines, and smartphones (p. 39) which are appearing in various texts and rituals. Moreover, since the "most early texts and many later ones have no author" (Bender, 2019, p. L), they tend to be perceived as "technical instructions which are transmitted anonymously" (Foucault, 1981, p. 58), and thus are often resembling the Vedic mantras which were "orally transmitted without any change" causing a loss of their meaning (Staal, 1979, p. 12) when they gradually fell out of the context of the surrounding world. Oriented on the history of their ethnic group, most of the Nuosu-Yi scholars, however, are more concerned with the increasing partial incomprehensibility of

certain passages within the scriptures, which is allegedly caused by the gradual passing of the knowledgeable *bimox* who lacked enthusiastic followers (e.g., Ajiao, 2015). Generally speaking, apart from Qubi (2015a), who sees similar phenomena as "deconstructing tradition while establishing a new one" reflecting "the demand of the urban population" (p. 148), the majority of the Nuosu-Yi scholars see such development as a pollution of the scriptures' content and thus, by extension, a threat to the Nuosu-Yi way of life. However, as Yang's (2009) article suggests, similar to the content and ecology of the *bi*, the scriptures are far from being static, and the way of their transmission is anything but uniform.

When talking about *bimox* knowledge transmission, the scholars in their writing usually repeat the basic rules articulated by the original research of Bamo Ayi (2000, p. 5-7) that the knowledge is passed strictly to males (*chuan nan bu chuan nü*), preferably within the *bimox* clan, from one generation to another, and that the *bimox* should learn from each other (e.g., Gu & Badeng, 2010; Mao, G. G., 2013, Shen, 2015). In the beginning of his another article from the same year, Qubi (2015b) depicts the *bimox* as rural dwellers possessing the slowly disintegrating paper scrolls, while in the remaining, larger part of his text he recounts institutions and teams of academics which are set to dedicate their careers to save this Nuosu-Yi heritage. Because most of these accounts seem to be iterations of the previous research without any further analysis of the way how the *bimox* themselves nowadays transmit their scriptures to their followers, this last chapter of the dissertation aims to fill this gap. By focusing on the complex relationship between the *bimox*, heritage of their predecessors, the academics (including myself), their potential successors and general attitude to the ways – already known as well as newly emerging – of how the *bimox* knowledge should be transmitted and disseminated, I uncover a link between the knowledge transmission and emerging sense of authorship among the *bimox*. I perceive the authorship as tactics to bolster ritualists' take on the *bimox* knowledge – thus their and their clans' influence – by, among other methods, assimilating and synthesizing the content recorded in scriptures of their *bimox* peers.

8.1 (Not) Sharing Knowledge

"Well, how does the *bimox* live?" I asked Jjixke H. on one sultry afternoon when we were sitting on a sofa in his rented flat near Latbbu Oprro city centre. It became my new home after Duane quite unexpectedly left China with no prospect of returning. "As he pleases," the *bimox* replied, making me a bit confused. "Right. He has his own sheep, pigs, chicken, wife,

kids and parents. Normally, he is just an ordinary guy. However, when he does [the *bimox* practice], this changes. [Before he can do this] he studies. At four in the morning, the class begins," he replied, looking at my face. "At four?!" I reacted, spontaneously revealing that I am not exactly an early bird. "It is not easy… In the winter, there are no chirps of birds and buzzing of insects, also no women are around," he explained. "So, if you want to study a bit, I can come to Hong Kong in winter and teach you," Jjixke H. added. I tried to explain to him that there is no real winter in Hong Kong, that the sounds of birds and insect are omnipresent, with a lot of women around. Among other things, Jjixke H.'s testimony confirmed that most of the *bimox* residing in rural areas are peasants (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 5), while only a few – like Vuthop, who never did anything else than being a *bimox* – are fully professional. Shimazi, however, constituted one channel of vocation's professionalization – a feature allegedly common in the past (see Chen & Cheng, 2002, p. 408-409).

This debate happened while I was recollecting my memories of observing Latbbu – the *bisse* apprentice during the *nipmu coxbi* ritual for Jjixke H.'s deceased brother –, who was in the final stages of the learning. Along with Pugu – the *nipmu bimox*, a principal ritualist for Jjixke H.'s ceremony for the dead –, Latbu came from the neighbouring township. His *bimox* clan branch was mutually affiliated with that of Jjixke H., meaning they were in mutual "assimilative" relationship with each other. Their way of rituals was interconnected, as both branches exchanged their knowledge and mutually cooperated in *bi* performances. To expand the knowledge, Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo narrated that he kept visiting more than ten famous *bimox* (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 26). While there is a very scarce ethnographic evidence that would tell us why these ritualists were considered "famous" – possibly, as Swancutt's (2012b) research participant Fijy explains, due to the accumulated reputation "as great religious specialists" (p. 64) –, the more important question was why there was ten of them and what was the nature of their relationship with Jjixke facilitating such exchanges. On Shimazi, moments of interaction between the *bimox* possessing the knowledge related to various practices at different stages and levels of their learning were visible. However, the stronger ties existed only and among particular individuals. However, these ways were performed in a manner significantly different from what I have personally witnessed while observing Latbbu during the *nipmu coxbi*. It also differed from how Jjixke H. framed the learning process as stemming from his own experience.

A couple of days before – while observing such an exchange –, I was talking about this practice with Yyhxox. He copied the scripture in the old way – through handwriting – but

with the usage of the new script. I looked in the direction of the two *bimox* originating from Lipmu Moggux. “Do you consult each other’s scriptures?” I asked Yyhxox, who immediately replied affirmatively: “Yes, we learn from each other.” I pointed out that allegedly, the ritualists were reluctant to share their knowledge with anyone outside their clan. “Yes, but that was in the past,” came an unexpected answer. “Now, if you do not share your things, this [*bimox* practice] would die out,” was ritualists’ answer. After a while, when our conversation diverted elsewhere, Yyhxox came back to the topic: “Some people are nice and share with you, but some have a bad heart – they are selfish (*zisi*), so they do not let you [to consult their scriptures].”

Figure 22: Yyhxox copying scripture for his relative

Towards the end of February 2018, I found Yyhxox in the marketplace copying a *Zhamop tepyy* for another person who was squatting next to him. Sitting in a shade of a mud-brick building’s roof trussing right on the crossing of the two roads in Shimazi, and including me – an exotic element – to their practice, they naturally exposed themselves to the constant interest of people passing by. Many of them stopped for a while to observe the whole process. Yyhxox was deeply immersed in the scripture, and he seemed not minding the increased attention. One drunk person was lying on the asphalt on my left-hand-side, all covered in the cold and moist shade. Yyhxox was sitting on one of his stools. In one hand, he was holding a scroll of paper with sketched lines, which rested on his lap; in the another, he clutched a pen. Chants of *mopnyit* sitting in front of us flew through the hot and heavy afternoon air which filled the area out of the reach of the building shadow, while rhythmical strikes of a hammer towards the anvil were emanating from one of the abandoned shops, now turned into an improvised workshop of the local blacksmith.

The ritualist on Yyhxox's right side was holding another scripture. While smoking, he was reading aloud single words and clusters of sentences. Yyhxox was in turns looking on the scripture in his colleague's hands and on the blank piece of paper, which he gradually filled with Nuosu-Yi characters. Murmuring, Yyhxox repeated the sentences his companion uttered. Slowly, he kept writing them down – in lines, from top to down, and from right to left. "We are both Adur," Yyhxox's companion explained to me, "therefore the language is the same," he added after a while. "We are related [through *cytvi*]," added Yyhxox. More and more people got involved in the process. Some of them commented on individual characters Yyhxox wrote down and expressed their opinion about their correctness.

The moaning of the person who started to wake up from the crippling alcoholic intoxication mixed with the sound of passing electric motorbikes, along with exultation of kids, who were going home from school which stood just around the corner. This cacophony started to dominate. Still half awake and half asleep, the habitual drunkard slowly caught the rhythm of the *mopnyit* mixed with voices of Yyhxox and his companion declamating the scriptures. While still lying with his face touching the asphalt, he started to repeat after them. "*Nyitcy*," – the demon – uttered Yyhxox while looking into the template, looking for the verb. *Bbo*, to go away. Both men giggled when making it through these lines. "I have to leave now," suddenly said Yyhxox's companion. He marked the passage in the scripture serving as a pattern where the copying process halted with a little asterisk. He took both scrolls, wrapped them in a piece of synthetic cloth, put them in the bag, and walked away. I initially thought that Yyhxox was copying the scripture for himself. "I helped my friend here, as my hands are faster [in writing]. Both scriptures are his," he explained. The whole situation suggested that the closer the *cytvi* kinship was, the more likely and smoothly the engagement with the scriptures between the *bimox* took place. However, Yyhxox's testimony suggested that the idea of the universal "learning from each other" (*huxiang xuexi*) allegedly prevalent among the *bimox* emphasized by Bamo Ayi (2000, p. 7) and further iterative cited by the new generation of academics (e.g., Mao, G. G., 2013, p. 76) might be a novelty and not a tradition. If ever the universality was engrained into the *bimox* moral code, it seemed – especially due to the perpetual inter-clan warfare (see Swancutt, 2012b, p. 59; Lawson, 2017; Ling, 1988) – as a mere pious hope than anything else. Even though we know close to nothing about the practices of the knowledge-sharing among the *bimox* from different clans in the past, the Yyhxox's articulation suggests that the idea of universal sharing of the content of the scriptures is another prescriptive measure formulated by academics derived from an imagined ideal condition of relationships

between the ritualists. If not attached to an individual, the basic authorship of the scriptures possibly was in the past, and certainly is in the present primarily attached to clan lineages. Within the context of a lineage, space opens for individual authorship.

8.2 Offline and Online Authorship

Towards the end of June 2018, I was sitting with Jjixke V. on his spot. We talked about a scripture called *Opzzup jjix bur rre* – literally translated as "All the Bad Things Shall Be Returned to Tibetans." It was a scripture similar to Ma's *Ssup o xit o jo su*. Both scriptures were used for imposing a curse over the individual, or the whole group of people (e.g., a clan). "There are three versions – big, small, and the middle-sized," said Jjixke V., utilising the expression for the "bottom of the trousers" (*kujiao*) as a quantifier. Such articulation pointed to a vernacular way of using the aesthetical difference in Nuosu-Yi garments for distinguishing between various Nipmu regions and practices connected to them. "Using the small one, you need to sacrifice a chicken," Jjixke V. explained, suggesting that Ma's scripture used for Wang's wife curse was of this sort. "The middle one requires a sheep, and the big one a cow. [The last one] is a large-scale ritual. The name of the scripture points to Tibetans. Inside, however, there are not only Tibetans. It is about all people living in Sichuan [outside Nipmu], to whom all the bad things should be returned." Jjixke V. possessed the books but was reluctant to share them. Bamo Qubumo's (1998b) fieldwork conducted in 1992 suggested that cursing rites which are based on these scriptures are comparatively rare (p. 114). The Nuosu-Yi customary taboo theoretically forbade such practices along with the relevant scriptures to be presented publicly (see Luobu, 2015, p. 149).

Vuthop also claimed to possess this scripture when overhearing our conversation with Jjixke V. I asked him whether he would be willing to let me look into his *Opzzup jjix bur rre* scripture. He reluctantly agreed. The next day, I found him sitting by his motorbike. Apart from a can containing an energy drink, Vuthop put layers of blank, yellowish scroll sheets held together with a large office paper clip on an improvised table consisting of wooden planks. He used a felt-tip pen to neatly write columns of ancient characters – from left to right, top to the bottom, one after another. While looking on the template – a stack of papers, the body of the photo-copied *tepyy* –, which was weighed down by the worn-out *Nuosu nyipsi tepyy* strengthened by the adhesive tape, Vuthop routinely declamated the part which he was about to hand-copy to verify the correctness and, perhaps, to revise or strengthen the knowledge of the characters. Unlike in the traditional texts, he used interpunction. "If there

would be no interpunctuation, the disciples could not do it. I can do it, us – the older generation – can do it, but they would not be able to do it," Vuthop remarked between moments when he held his phone close to his mouth and chanted lines to Weixin. "They are not able to do it," Vuthop replied to my question why the disciples would not copy the book themselves. As Vuthop released the virtual button on the glass-made flat-screen of his smartphone, the line was sent to an individual or a group of his disciples. In comparison with how I observed Latbbu, during the process of Vuthop's sharing there was one step missing – the connection between chant and the practice. In such settings, the disciples were not able to follow the chants of their master. When the scrolls took a digital shape and got merged with the stream of chants divided in the separate, multiple sixty-second-long voice messages, the punctuation surely helped when utilized together with Vuthop's explanations.

Subsequently, Vuthop let me glimpse briefly into his *Opzzup jjix bur rre* scripture. Some of the other ritualists around us, including Yyhxox, expressed interest in the text and asked whether they can photocopy it. However, Vuthop remained true to the alleged "traditional" way of dealing with such scriptures. After demonstratively chanting two clusters of lines to us, he wrapped up the scroll and promulgated that the only person to whom he would pass it (*chuan*) would be his son. "But I can pass (*chuan*) you these materials," he turned towards me, using identical Chinese vocabulary as for transmitting the scriptures, and sent me two video clips he shot for his disciples. Vuthop's stance toward the sensitive scripture differed Ma's. After finishing the cursing *bi*, Ma permitted me to leaf through his *Ssup o xit o jo su*. Its protective "boards" were cut off from the advertisement printed on a rough canvas. All pages contained Arabic numerals. According to Bender, "dates in texts are (…) rare, though are encountered, sometimes in a mix of Chinese and Yi dating systems" (Bender, 2019, p. L). The last page carried Ma's name and the date when the *bimox* hand-copied the text from either his older copy or from someone else's scripture. The last page contained a typical year-month-day date written in Chinese characters, which indicated the completion of the transmission process. These, the numerals, and a few Latin-alphabet syllables scribbled above some of the Nuosu-Yi characters – e.g., *chu, ndop, ndep* – were the only "foreign" elements in Ma's scripture. Its body consisted of a personalized mixture of the "ancient" and "standardized" characters. It is hard to determine the source of Ma's openness *vis-à-vis* the standoffishness of Vuthop, the only difference being Ma's signature on the back of his scroll, while Vuthop's scripture lacked this.

Figure 23: Bimox *scriptures circulating the digital space of Weixin and resurfacing on the paper*

Later in the afternoon, Vuthop was finishing a rheumatism-curing ritual. The wind, not as fierce as during the early months, caressed the colourful papers wrapped around each of the effigy, which together formed a humble crowd. Before cutting feathers of the sacrificial chicken and burning it, Vuthop took out his mobile phone, entered the Weixin's interface for quick video capture, and held the video-recording button for fifteen seconds while still declamating lines with the help of the scripture held in his left hand. As he tried to capture as much as possible, he waved the phone from right to left, covering the one-hundred-eighty degrees angle in front of him. Despite not using any paraphernalia, the hand movements resembled those when holding the ritual *qike* fan. After a while, my phone vibrated, and I found out that Vuthop immediately shared his recording within the group established by the Yyhxox A. from Cemo Lurkur. "I thought you and others left the group," I asked Vuthop, "and now you are back." "Well, they begged me to join again, to teach other people. They trust [my knowledge]," he replied, proud of his re-gained on-line authority.

"Starting to *bi*… Ah, starting to *bi*," Vuthop told us through one of his ten-seconds-long digital artefacts in a mixture of Sichuanese Mandarin and Nuosu-Yi, where he, notably tired, first pointed the phone camera into his face, subsequently turning it towards the space in front of him, showing a room of his client, three chicken lying tied on the floor, and bundles of *mguva*, some of them jabbed into a cardboard plate covering the cold, neatly clad tile floor. Perhaps it was the grassroots of explicit authorship that connected Ma's authorized scripture (along with his "guardian spirit" of the Party) and Vuthop's video clips – most of these featured his face shot in a selfie mode as a "signature." The signatures – literal or visual, each

of them in their own way, since Ma did not possess a smartphone – might have worked as a re-assurance of the particular content's ownership, since "the author is what gives the disturbing language of fiction its unities, its nodes of coherence, its insertion in the real" (Foucault, 1981, p. 58). In other words, the credibility of the particular practices – among other means, articulated through digital-cum-visual, spoken, and/or written means and produced in the form of scriptures, books, video clips, movies or political statements – depends on the authority (thus authorship) of its initiator and her, his or its signature. The author could be an individual, a clan, or a state. The *bimox* have the capacity to "overwrite" their peers for extending their personal and clan influence, and – as one of the main arguments of this authorial work of mine goes – the academics could easily plaster over the practices of the *bimox* for the promulgated higher purposes of the ethnicity or nation-building. In this way, even one interpretation among many might gradually become an axiom.

With such authored artefacts, the probability of sharing the content of the *bimox* scriptures increases, since the act of sharing carries features of citationality of ritualist's positioned and situated *bimox* knowledge. In the performative, the "I" is referred to – in case of Vuthop – "*by his being the person who does* the uttering" (even in the case of the performance as a visual artefact such as the video clip) and – in case of Ma – "*by his appending his signature*" (Austin, 1962, p. 60, italics in original). Furthermore, the already complex situation of the layered modes of scripture (non-)sharing along with (non-)observation of the taboos in favour of freshly acquired skills – such as utilising Weixin for dissemination –, opened an array of possibilities enhancing the information flow. All happening in parallel, it brought "additional layers of complexity" as the "traditional texts" started moving "by various avenues into the print and digital world" (Bender, 2019, p. xlv), inevitably broadening the perspectives and context for the transmission and conceptualization of *bimox* knowledge(s).

8.3 Between Ritualists and Academia – Authorship as Source of Power

In the evening of the same day, Vuthop posted another video to Yyhxox A.'s group. This time, it featured his luxuriously furnished home and offered the group members – some of whom Vuthop knew personally, and many of which he did not – a glimpse into his workroom. On a neat white sofa, the table and the bookshelves rested a remarkable bricolage of hand-written and photocopied scriptures along with the officially published Nipmu *bimox* scripture compendiums. The fact that the ritualists often interacted with the academic works became

apparent to me already almost a decade ago when I randomly visited one ritualist of the Shamat clan in the mountain hamlet in Lipmu Moggux area. Along with the scriptures, he pulled out a book edited by Mose (2002) from his storage chest kept in a damp, dark corner of the typical old-style rural Nuosu-Yi house. However, since "there is no specialist vocation for the 'scholar' per se," and even though the position of the scholar was somewhat aligned with that of the *bimox* (Swancutt, 2016c, p. 150), there was still a sharp, almost dichotomous divide between the ritualists and the "experts" (*zhuanjia*). This became apparent already in a dialogue where Vuthop tagged Yyhxox A. as a researcher and not as a *bimox* (see 6.5), or a sudden flare of Jjixke V.'s animosity towards Luobu after reading his article (see 6.2).

Around the time when sitting with Yyhxox on Shimazi and subconsciously trying to make sense of all the trajectories and contexts of the *bimox* knowledge transmissions, Vutsa appeared. It was his only visit to the marketplace during my presence. That day, he just returned from a work trip to Guizhou's local Yi Studies centre known for meticulous work on the scripture translation. Vutsa graduated with a master's degree from the Southwest University for Nationalities, where, as he proudly stated, he worked with all the important scholars in Yi studies, including those coming from abroad. Subsequently, he got a job in Latbbu Oppro at the local department of Yi literature as a translator of the *bimox* scriptures.

"We translate some [of the scriptures] to Chinese, some of them to Standard Modern Yi. Rendering them to the Chinese language is hard. It is not about your level of Chinese, but the translation of a language of one nationality to another one – especially the ancient language –, inevitably creates a gap in the understanding," Vutsa revealed to me during our introductory conversation. Remarkably, during his infancy, he was also an apprentice of a famous *bimox*. "But I was kicked out of the studies by my *bimox* master. Because I was stupid. I slept all the time [during the classes]. And then the master told my father that if I was about to become his follower, he would be ashamed to have such a disciple. My mistakes would become a part of his identity," Vutsa self-critically explained. In this way, Vutsa's master escaped – in a manner discussed in Chapter 7 – his disciple's incompetence, while Vutsa had to find a different way to make up for his failure: not only a rationalization for the career he did not achieve (Žižek & Daly, 2004, p. 23) but also a way to regain a prominent place within his clan, as well as elevating the clan's reputation. Therefore, he became an academic along inverted lines of how Shamat and Ddisse – under the political climate of their young age barred from the state-run education – were "forced" to become a *bimox* (see Chapter 4).

As the conversation went on, Vutsa gradually landed within the usual dichotomic configuration prevalent within the Chinese academic discourse. Through the division of the ritualists into "traditional" (*chuantong de*) and "profit-oriented" (*jingji de*), Vutsa engaged in similar "schism" as Jjixke H. (see 6.1). He spent quite a few minutes trying to persuade me not to lose time with the *bimox* in the marketplace, as they are not genuine (thus pure) enough. Instead, he told me to go deep into the mountains to search for the "old" *bimox*. In that very moment, Vutsa acted as a validator of knowledge similar to, for example, Ma Changshou, who was even more direct. In a passage of his writing, he dubbed the level of one of his *bimox*-translator as shallow because he "could not explain [to Ma] the content of the books" (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 72). As if Ma was a gauge for the *bimox* knowledge. Even though his writing – perhaps unwittingly – suggests the difference in the positioned and situated *bimox* knowledge, he – again, maybe subconsciously – hierarchized them. This hierarchy then became embedded into the foundation of the "Yi culture." To these outsiders, the so-called knowledgeable *bimox* were those who were somehow willing and able to communicate – often through the middle-men –, with academics (p. 114-150), missionaries (e.g., Vial, 1898), travelling businessmen, and foreign explorers (e.g., d'Ollone, 1910). The "specialists" (*zhuanjia*) – academics or people involved in the conceptualization of Nuosu-Yi culture in general – placed themselves into a position of validators of the knowledge related to the Nuosu-Yi. Being agents of their respective states and promoting themselves as such, they possessed a significant power over the ritualists, who shared their knowledge with them. This is how they took the role of direct competitors to the *bimox* upon themselves. Vutsa somewhat "inherited" a similar position.

"I am not able to conduct the *nipmu coxbi* by myself," he confessed after I intentionally used the umbrella designation for the complex set of rituals as a gauge for the depth of one's knowledge, a strategy often used in academic writing (e.g., Shen, 2015, p. 105). Other *bimox* did it the same way, implying that *nipmu coxbi* can be conducted only by a knowledgeable *bimox*. On a different occasion, Yyhxox honestly stated that he was "helping" during *nipmu coxbi* once, but he would never dare to act as a *nipmu bimox*. "However, I know the whole process. Some of those small rituals, like *yyrkut*, I would be able to do, since I learned [the craft] for one year in total," boasted Vutsa and performed some of the chants present in his version of the soul-calling *bi* to back his words. Seemingly disapproving of the marketplace ritualists, he still came to Shimazi to search for one of the marketplace-frequenting *bimox* to consult particular meanings in the scriptures, which he would later implement into the

translation with his signature. Similar to the *bimox*, Vutsa tried to assimilate the worlds of others into his own lineage of thinking, dissemination of which would lead to the increase of his reputation as an outstanding scholar through authorship he would claim. Remarkably, such tactics as if mirrored with the accumulation of the prestige and authority among the *bimox*.

Referring to Harrell, Swancutt (2016d) maintains that "there is a formidable prestige in Nuosu circles surrounding the craft of Nuosu scholars qua 'Yi intellectuals' at state-financed institutions in China," increasingly equal to the literary accomplishments of the *bimox* (p. 55). A number of her research participants, such as Fijy, doubled as "an ethno-theologian at the local institute" (p. 55); Tuosat – a Nuosu-Yi anthropologist based in Kunming (p. 55) – used to practice as *sunyit* and "obtained a reputation (…) for having an affinity to tigers" (Swancutt, 2016c, p. 144). Vutsa thus fitted in these oscillating juxtaposition between the Nuosu-Yi ritualist vocation and *zhuanjia* expert, projecting himself more to the latter role while utilising the knowledge stemming from the former. His set of insider's skills equipped him with a tremendous advantage. He was also able to reflect on the translation between languages, and, by extension, the problems of translation between cultures. Vutsa presented the opposite end of Vuthop's way of processing of the presumably synthetic *bimox* knowledge orbiting around ritualists' as well as academic lineages of thought. While Vuthop (along with the similarly resourceful ritualists) supplemented his *bimox* knowledge with that produced within the academic collective, Vutsa embodied a synthesis of the knowledge he obtained from his clan members (including his unsuccessful *bimox* apprenticeship) and other research participants with the one absorbed through various stages of the Chinese education system. Sooner or later, Vuthop's and Vutsa's perspectives would begin circulating through their various followers, potentially snowballing further, inevitably meeting one another at some point. For similar phenomena, Swancutt and Mazard (2016) developed a concept called "reflexive feedback loop." It explains how anthropologists and their research participants reinvent various concepts during a process within which the "abstract ideas about practice and belief are appropriated and recirculated by research participants" (p. 1). This process is not, however, unidirectional, as "anthropologists are often as eagerly indoctrinated as any native thinker might be" (p. 11). After briefly addressing my position within this setup, I proceed to explain why I think such process could be presented and theorized in a broader context of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists' social life without necessarily narrowing it to a dichotomy of researcher and a participant.

8.4 The "Shimazi Samizdat"

"Those who write the articles are really impressive (*xiong de*). Articles are made of your own thinking, they are not [like the scriptures, which are] passed down to you," remarked Jjixke V. during one of our conversation, making a somewhat essentialist division between the two practices. Even though Jjixke V. got angry with Luobu for misrepresenting the Shimazi's ritualists, he was still able to give recognition to the way how the *zhuanjia* amass their power and reputation through their authored works. The *zhuanjia* then formed two groups – the despicable such as Luobu, who placed himself above the authority of the *bimox*, and the ones like me, who possessed the potential to become leverage for returning the authority into the hands of the *bimox*. This was evident in the moments Jjixke V. wanted me to "change" the (outcome of) Luobu's article (see 6.2) for what he labelled me as "the good *zhuanjia*," and Vuthop used me as a weapon during his on-line skirmish with Yyhxox A (see 6.5).

The relationship set in such a way had further development. Towards the end of the summer, Jjixke V. asked me whether I would be willing to help him to edit a new version of *Nuosu nyipsi tepyy* – (in)auspicious time-counting manual. Thick and heavy, multiple kilogram editions were available in the Latbbu Oprro's Xinhua Bookstore. Years they covered spanned far into the future. In the Shimazi, however, the ritualists usually used a pocket version of this manual, which usually spanned over four years. Different editions of these circulated in the marketplace – one edited by Ddisse, and other by Jixke V. himself. While Ddisse's was authored by him, the other one, featuring Jjixke V.'s portrait, carried the name of Jjixke V.'s clan member – a Party Secretary in the Latbbu Oprro government. In one rare example of an "experimental ethnography," where the author voluntary let his informant paradoxically ghost-author researcher's anthropological study (Li, 2009), Liu Yaohan put names of his research participants onto the final product above his, quite untraditionally accepting his role as a co-author. However, Swancutt's (2016d) observation recounts a far more common practice: Nuosu-Yi ethnologists "may appear as the main or single author of their works," but in many cases the "ethnologists often also have their works appear within larger compilations, in which the current leader of their institute appears as the 'lead' author, no matter how much (if at all) he or she contributed to the volume" (p. 55). Jjixke V. was not ethnologist, and his close relative was not a leader of an institute, but rather a politician with an influence on the negotiation of the Nuosu-Yi cultural resources within Latbbu Oprro's discursive space. Jjixke V., however, craved for being recognized as a leading author. For this, he "employed" me as well as Ddisse to tackle the scriptural power of his clan relative in a move that could be

perceived as an intra-clan power contestation. Lin (1961) writes that Nuosu-Yi have great admiration for individual abilities. These individuals – remarkably, regardless of gender – then achieve a leader status through a demonstration of their power (p. 29, 34-35). Jjixke V. seemed to engage in a demonstration of such abilities *vis-à-vis* his "competitor" from within the lineage.

Leafing through the manuals, I found out the determination of the range to what extent a day counts as auspicious or inauspicious – apart from the officially recognized days unfavourable for rituals, such as the day of a snake (*bushy nyip*) –, was entirely upon the individual interpretation of each ritualist. Furthermore, the astrological data in those pocket manuals often shifted and did not correspond. Unable to use a computer and not very versed in the standardized Nuosu-Yi script, Jjixke V. instructed me that I should compile the Ddisse's and his version, but include his take on which days are auspicious. He also marked some of the changes directly in Ddisse's version, which was still valid for three another years, while that of Jjixke V. was expiring relatively soon. He said that some of Ddisse's views are simply "wrong" (*cuo de*) and should be "changed" (*yao gai*). Since Jjixke V. did not possess a smartphone, he handed me both books and a USB flash disc. I triangulated the two books with some of the officially published compendiums and managed to accommodate everything in this brand new edition. I completed most of the work "on the go," in free time when travelling between Prague, Hong Kong, Chengdu, Guizhou and Nipmu. In December 2018, after some four months, I was ready to triumphantly hand the material to the *bimox*. Returning to Shimazi, I found Jjixke V. amidst his *bi* practice. In one hand, he held a white rooster. I handed him the flash disk during the small intermission of the ritual. A couple of months later, a book emerged on Shimazi sold for fifty *yuan* apiece. "You made some mistakes in the astrology," Jjixke V. told me. "But it does not matter, he corrected it," pointed to the picture inside of the book, which depicted Ddisse's older son. The front matter contained Jjixke V.'s name on the first place as "organizer" (*zup go co*), Ddisse's on the second as "calculator" (*mu nyip mu hxot sot su*), and my Nuosu-Yi name on the third as the "book creator" (*tepyy ddie su*). The issuing place (*tepyy ddie dde*) was set to a nondescript Latbbu Oprro office. Like this, Jjixke V.'s personal "samizdat" – self-published work, usually in a certain political climate which would not permit the official publication – landed in the marketplace and will presumably circulate until the end of 2023.

8.5 Ddisse's Worshipped Workshop

Swancutt (2016c) observes that the "importance of being attached to a prominent Nuosu lineage is underscored by the fairly new practice in Ninglang of publishing books, financed by lineage members, which record the names of all their men," and, even that everybody knows their lineages by heart, "the books are coveted for the prestige of finding one's name or that of an important ancestor inside of them – and for the fact that they (ironically!) impart a 'scholarly written' quality to Nuosu genealogies, like that enjoyed by Han-Chinese who keep written records of their ancestors" (p. 141). Even though there are similarities, Jjixke V. and Ddisse took this "publishing" to a different level – way beyond genealogical record and much closer to the *bimox* knowledge. Ddisse's back basket contained many different books, but only roughly one-third of them featured his name among the authors. He explained that for publishing many of them, he forms a group with two other people: the aforementioned Party Secretary from Jjixke clan and Ddisse's son, working in Latbbu Oprro as a public servant. In his wording, Ddisse creates the content, his son takes care of the technical part, and the Party Secretary puts a signature on everything, usually omitting the former two. The books are then distributed to the counties for free to those who need it, and authors are allowed to sell the rest themselves to various individuals. While most of the books including Party Secretary's name went even to bookstores, none of the books exclusively written under Ddisse's and his son's name entered any official place, as Ddisse remarked that this endeavour would be too costly for him. "A very few people read Nuosu-Yi language books anyway," he remarked. Naturally, for the Party Secretary, this was a convenient platform on how to disseminate his name and increasing the reputation of him and his already famous clan. Same as Jjixke V., Ddisse also wanted to make use of similar channels to promote his perspectives eventually leading to spread and recognition of his fame. He had these ideas already in the 1980s. However, due to certain circumstances (see 4.2.3), he was able to turn them into reality only in the 2010s.

I have noticed that some of the *bimox*, in particular those coming from Shypnra region of Xitddop Ladda, possessed printed-out scriptures similar Ddisse's. "Those are mine. I made them," remarked Ddisse. Similarly, with the *Nuosu nyipsi tepyy* which we edited together, these were materials for which Ddisse did not seek any official approval. Ddisse elaborated that since he does not know how to use the computer, he dictates, while his son writes his words down. Followingly, the scriptures are then printed in the local library, the place where Jjixke V. taught Luobu the ancient characters. However, Ddisse's misunderstanding of my original question about "how these books are made" – or my inability to formulate it

unambiguously – prompted him to briefly explain how his texts were put together: “First, you have to do the research (*yanjiu*), then you have to unify the language… You know, there is a lot of ancient characters which many people do not understand. Well… And then you print it out. These things consist of many scriptures compiled together.”

Figure 24: Ddisse on the original location of Shimazi with his printed scripture and books for sale

When inquiring into the lives of the Nuosu-Yi, Ddisse was able to function as a vernacular ethnographer despite never attending school, receiving any training, and not working for a particular institute. Although possessing these characteristics of a *zhuanjia*, Ddisse was not resented by Vuthop nor Jjixke V. as a “*zhuanjia* and not a *bimox*” (see 6.2 and 6.5). He managed to persuade those surrounding him that he embodies both roles simultaneously. Moreover, Ddisse’s dialogic approach habitually merged with the Nuosu-Yi “face-to-face society,” copying a situation when two strangers meet each other and mutually recite their family trees to find a common ancestor (Swancutt & Jiarimuji, 2018, p. 142). To Ddisse’s advantage, he was familiar with a large number of lineages permeating his life and unyielding encounters. These lineages and stories attached to them then formed capillaries of knowledge through his texts. When sitting in a circle around Ddisse with his books clad on the ground in front of us and exploring various bits and pieces from the Nuosu-Yi history narrated through the clan affiliations, we were usually joined by curious by-passers who overheard parts of our conversation. “What is your clan name, and where do you come from,” Ddisse asked directly two individuals from Mityip Rruonuo. “How about your father? Did he come from Vyttuo Lurkur?” more specific question followed. Like this, Ddisse was able to trace their heritage hidden deep under the surface of the present era – into the time of the Hxietlie *nzymop* – a powerful clan of native headmen. Ddisse did so by climbing the ladder of names which these

by-passers shared with him. When frequenting Shimazi, Ddisse – apart from serving to the needs of his clients as a *bimox* – was simultaneously achieving two important matters: absorbing the knowledge through more or less random visitors and embedding the synthesis of the information into his writings. This amalgam was then ready to be disseminated further.

"All of the observations are about experience," Ddisse said, reflecting on a lot of his thinking he embedded into his writing. The ritualist also imbued his texts with data he collected during his self-motivated study trips (*kaocha*) to Guizhou and Yunnan. The *bimox* maintained that a lot of the books were written hundreds, possibly thousands of years ago. Therefore, they are unable to reflect modern times and that some thinking from the recent era should be interlaced with the already extant content. His thinking was not only manifested through the compilation of the scriptures, which were later printed out and distributed primarily to those *bimox* who came from the same geographical, linguistic, or clan-based environment (such as his Shypnra "colleagues"), it was also projected onto his hand-written book – the *Zhamop tepyy* containing Arab numerals placed on a foldable chair.

Ddisse's most recently published "personal version" (*wo de banben*), as he called it himself, was *Hxati tepyy* – "Scripture of One Hundred Big Matters." Only his name was mentioned in the front matter suggesting that for this edition he did not have to seek anyone else. It was "covered" – presumably through his son's connections – by the Department of Nationalities' Religion of Xitddop Ladda, and printed by the Latbbu Oprro Forestry's Printing House. However, he complained that not many people can use it since this book require a certain level of *bimox* craft proficiency, which many do not have. Therefore, they are unable to understand the meanings in this book. Saying so, Ddisse covertly implied that his level of such knowledge is quite broad. "*Hxati tepyy* was very well-known in the past," said the ritualist, and dragged some smoke into his lungs from a cigarette smouldering in his hand. "It also has a connection to Apsy Latzzi. In the past, half of this scripture was lost, and only this half got re-discovered. It came through different families – books of Apsy Latzzi, Shamat *nzymop,* and Adur origin in general."

"He really wrote this all by himself… His own thinking! That is not easy (*zhen bu rongyi*)," remarked Biqu who often sat with us. "If everything goes well," Ddisse stated during one of our unrelenting conversations after he came back from a hospital, "I am planning to publish a book about Apsy Latzzi – in a similar manner how I put together this version of *Hxati tepyy*. A lot of *bimox* speak about him, and yet they know very little from his story," he said while wiping sweat from his forehead during one of the hot summer days. "He is portrayed to

mythologically (*bei shenhua*). A lot of people interpret it differently, they put a lot of creativity (*chuangzao*) into this," said Ddisse – similar to Vuthop (see 6.5) – expressing doubts about the immutability of the scriptures over time. "A lot of it is an artistic creation (*yishu chuangzao*) of the descendants. Can you see back one thousand years? You cannot! A lot of things were added. For example, The Romance of the Three Kingdoms is a similar case. It was written five hundred years ago, describing events which happened eight hundred years ago at the time of writing. It is the same thing, it is artistic polishing (*yishu jiagong*)," Ddisse continued with his explanation, invoking Chvatík's (1996) "human aesthetical *activity*" (p. 164, italics in original) and Bakhtin's (2010d) thoughts how life-shaping processes are ritualistic, even if only 'aesthetically' so (p. 154). Based on such "scientific" view, Ddisse interpreted the *bimox* practice as a way of psychological relief (*xinli anwei*) which should be treated more metaphorically rather than blindly believing in it. "Nobody ever actually saw the demons," he said towards the end, adding a surprising point: "Those who believe in the existence of the demons are backward."

Ddisse's hyperreflexivity when dealing with his "participants" (Swancutt, 2016d, p. 53) and his "semiconversion" (Swancutt & Mazard, 2016, p. 7) to the "scientific" thinking about his own and others' *bimox* practice possibly obtained through his life-long active, as well as passive engagement with various discourses, revealed the way how the *bimox* assimilated not only uttered speech but also writings into their thought lineages over a prolonged, non-specific period. This "great time" without borders presumably extended much further beyond the frame of "unprecedented social and institutionalising changes among Nuosu in the past 60 years" (Swancutt, 2016c, p. 150). Ma Changshou recorded the incorporation of Tibetan elements into scriptures containing Buddhist lamas and other beasts from the mythology of the Sinosphere (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 523-530), which were seen as demons. Furthermore, the anthropologist witnessed the *bimox*-teachers in the elementary school founded by the native headmen (p. 92) – similar to d'Ollone (1910) who personally met and spoke with the *bimox* who were teaching the "old" Nuosu-Yi script to the Shamat *nzymop*'s offsprings (p. 103, 106). Finally, reflecting on the presence of "foreigners" in *Hnewo tepyy* (see 6.5), Bender (2019) maintains that due to its many oral and written forms and the way how these were hand-copied by the *bimox* clans, "it is possible that fairly recent content could find its way into the epic" (p. xc). Finally, Lawson (2017) observes that texts of *Hnewo tepyy* "were not static" and quotes a part which "one scholar describes as likely a late addition to the corpus" in which two *bimox* "offer alternative methods for performing the ritual, one drawing on

forest animals, the other on domesticated animals" (p. 42) – a striking example of how the texts reflect the transformation of the environment surrounding those who had written them. I have experienced a similar process personally when listening to Jjixke V. cobbling together Nuosu-Yi mythological and recent history – all in the context of Shimazi Marketplace (see 5.4). In this way, the potential, all-encompassing "complete cosmology" as the construction of a system of ideas (Whitehead, 1978, p. xii) is based on "acts of experience" (p. 143), thus closely related to the question of authorship and assimilation. These are iterated by individuals through their lives, who pass this mechanism to their trusted heirs, who add another layer and, again, claim authorship. The wider the dissemination, the more permutations stemming from the various authorships and individualized amendments the text gains. The authorship is connected to one's authority: the more authoritative the ritualist is, the more persuasive (or even "pure") are his works.

These additions and amendments were not to be seen as elements "polluting" the Nuosu-Yi world, it might well be the other way around. Content of scriptures or the state institutions, the tendencies to assimilate them and/or align them all with the Nuosu-Yi worldview were palpable. Considering the former, Ma's (2000) observation that "those who can understand texts written in many different hands are esteemed most highly" (p. 52) suddenly gains a new context: those who can read more can "quote" as much. Therefore, the "reflexive feedback loop" is only another, more specific Nuosu-Yi practice resembling Bakhtin's (2010b) concept of speech assimilation: "Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others' words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of 'our-own-ness,' varying degrees of awareness and detachment. These words of others carry with them their expression, their evaluative tone, which we assimilate, rework, and re-accentuate" (p. 89). The further dissemination through the reproduction then not necessarily detaches the work from the domain of tradition (Benjamin, 2008, p. 221) – emancipating it from its "parasitic dependence on ritual" (p. 224) –, but rather iteratively (thus ritualistically) attracts consumers of such reproductions into a particular form of "authored tradition," and specific way of "doing" of the ritual, which both inflates and enriches the arena of the practices not only of the *bimox* but also for the Nuosu-Yi as such.

8.6 Summary and Partial Conclusion

Strains of the *bimox* knowledge do not exclusively circulate from one generation to another in a form of written scrolls. This, however, is not due to the unprecedented changes happening

during recent decades. On the contrary, this process runs in the background for a much longer time. What differs now are the speeds and intensities (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 4) of the transmission, which, as Vuthop and Ddisse showed us, after the hybridization and adaptation, enable the previously hand-written scriptures to be disseminated through emerging channels – such as the internet – and in new forms – as video clips, voice messages, and printed forms of increasingly personalized versions. Swancutt (2016d) recounts that the ways of engaging with the academia, dissemination of positioned and situated knowledge, and an individual prestige are "not specific to Nuosu, but reflects the long-standing protocols of ethnological publishing in China" (p. 55). On Shimazi, however, the ways I have observed could be considered intrinsically specific to the Nuosu-Yi. They were not "polluting" those means of transmission perceived as traditional but, quite to the contrary, they were proactively incorporated and creatively, individually utilised by the *bimox* in their daily lives.

The *bimox* scriptures are hardly static. If I would have to name two reasons, the first would be the fact that they are a second-order behind the orality. Even though we know very little about how the scriptures were compiled in the past, they might have been put together on a principle which Collingwood (1946) calls "scissors-and-paste" method (p. 33) – thus through selection and exclusion –, which notably accelerated with the technological advance making this method more convenient. The second reason – also connected to the simultaneity of orality and writing – would be that the scriptures are constantly conflated with the growing family trees of each *bimox*, who calls his ancestors during the battles as allied spirits to help him against demons. Authorship, which Bakhtin (2010d) sees as depending on hierarchized genres, where one (genre or author) can devour – assimilate – another one and as situation-dependent are renewable according to the context of their usage and/or emergence (p. 152-153), plays an important role in how the knowledge is transmitted and disseminated, and at the same time make the borderline between scripture (*tepyy* or *jingshu*) and an (academic) article (*bburcip* or *wenzhang*) if not invisible, then blurred. According to my observation, it was and still is a common practice among the particularly elderly *bimox* to leave their scriptures to slowly disintegrate in a hard-to-reach cave before their death – paradoxically similar places where they hid them during the Cultural Revolution. This was for a good reason – that the scripture won't get into "unauthorized" hands, as the hand-copies of the scriptures were exclusively in hands of the ritualists' disciples, who then contested them with versions in the hands of other ritualists originating from allied, kindred clans. Moreover, the fact that the scriptures had been originally copied by the hands of disciples as a part of the learning then adds validity to the

"assimilation" story – what is the better way to assimilate than to craft the object from the pattern by yourself. Nowadays, it seems that the *bimox* without an ability to make use of the rich means of dissemination of their thoughts and/or insignificant reputation are more likely protective of their scriptures in front of strangers (or competitors) of the similar levels, while those wielding significant power in both aspects not only attract the knowledge of others but – to the contrary – are more eager to disseminate the knowledge through their authored versions, be it hand-written, photo-copied, published as a book, or stay entirely digital. Vermander's "devour or be devoured" (see 7.5) rule – or "assimilate or be assimilated" – thus resonates in the (re)production of the scriptures as well. It is at least a two-way dialogic process since the authorship is simultaneously dependant on and constitutive of an authority. The emerging *bimox* authorship is then a very important element in preserving the diversity within the *bimox* practice, and at the same time serves for spreading of the influence of each of the individual *bimox* lineages of thought and accumulating followers, as practices of Ddisse and Jjixke V. suggested. In short, the transmission turns into dissemination, and authorship is a newly emergent tool for it.

Every act of disseminating the knowledge – be it forwarding a written or voice message, a static picture, a video clip under one's name or nickname in the on-line world, or giving/selling the authored book to anybody else – can be seen as a performative act of persuasion. Ddisse's way of being a *bimox* – in a perpetual process of "becoming" through unyielding absorption of new knowledge exactly according to the ideal of the *bimox* life-long learning – is a particular example of how the line separating the *bimox* and *zhuanjia* materialized. What remained is ambiguity: while Yyhxox (and others) were reluctant to see Ddisse as a *bimox*, they simultaneously praised his "scriptures" – the printed books – as the "only genuine scriptures" (see 4.2.3). This accommodation of the perception of *bimox* not only as a "village intellectual," but also the ritualists' appropriation, assimilation and reconfiguration of the academic practices such as the authorship then might lead to a deeper professionalization of the ritualists. However, there is always a great danger of being "devoured" by the side one tries to assimilate. If one of the strains would finally become dominant over all of the other – e.g., the academically crafted *bimox* canon would become the only "correct" way to practice –, such situation would finally lead to the vocation's disappearance outside of the academic circles. It is up to the ritualists, how creative they can be to maintain their position and cope with the pressure from the demons and spirits inhabiting the parallel as well as the corporeal world, and how successful can they be in

persuading academics, policymakers and others that the *bimox* themselves are more than capable to retain and find new ways how to disseminate their heritage without the need of "experts" armed with various rhetorical tactics concerning "science" and "development" to do it for them.

9. Epilogue

The evening Yyhxox conducted the *yyrkut* ritual at his home (see 7.3), he conveyed to me that he wants to publish his books too. The question of whether he was or was not inspired by Ddisse's endeavours remained unanswered. "I try to write every evening," he told me, "but most of the evenings, I am either tired or drunk… Or both," he added jokingly. Previously, he cherished a hope that his youngest infant son would carry on his way of conducting rituals: "We need to pass this on. What would our descendants do if they got sick without a *bimox* around?" However, during that evening, the urge for having a disciple was even more immediate. "I need followers, and I do not want any 'tuition' (*xuefei*)," he went on. A moment of reflection with a cigarette in his hands followed. After a while, Yyhxox added: "Or maybe it is that I am poor, and, therefore, I have a thinking of a poor man."

Roughly sixteen months after our first encounter, I went to Shenzhen to meet up with Yyhxox. A seemingly infinite forest of skyscrapers coated with glass and glittering under the scorching sun of the Chinese south replaced the towering mountains on the Latbbu Oprro's horizon with their trees elegantly swaying to the rhythm of the wind. Yyhxox was working in a small speaker-producing factory. All drowsy, on the last day of July I travelled from Kwun Tong – a former industrial part of Hong Kong where I stayed – into the heart of the Shenzhen-Dongguan factory abyss, mostly by a system of partially interconnected subway lines. We met at the front gate of the complex Yyhxox worked and lived in. We set up the meeting through Weixin, as Yyhxox bought a smartphone to be able to stay in touch with his family in Nipmu. In the humid heat, we were happy to see each other again. Yyhxox followed here some of his closest relatives to provide for his family, for which he interrupted his *bimox* career. There was also another reason for this. Around early July 2018, closer towards the end of my fieldwork, Yyhxox – drunk by a few bottles of beer from a crate he shared with everyone around, as was his habit – got into a conflict with one of the Shimazi's *sunyit*. The conflict escalated from verbal to physical. Yyhxox ended up with a fairly severe injury – a fracture of his skull – preventing him from visiting the marketplace for a prolonged period time. His recovery did not go well, as he complained about dizziness and a partial memory loss. At this difficult time, he and his family were dependent on the income of Yyhxox's wife, who worked odd jobs around Latbbu Oprro – in a carwash, or as a collector of recyclable material.

"I do not hold any grudges," Yyhxox returned to the incident suggesting that the relationship between him and the shaman went back to normal, invoking somewhat innate Nuosu-Yi "hero"

nature (Liu, 2001) where "eloquence and ability to mediate quarrels" (p. 114) is equally important as physical skills such as fighting. At that moment four of us – the *bimox*, two of his relatives and I – finally found a decent Sichuanese joint and ordered food of a familiar taste. Yyhxox's chopsticks were somewhat clumsily slipping across the slimy surface of the fish with Sichuanese pepper and chilli, prompting one of Yyhxox's relative to jokingly comment on his effort. "Your house was not near the river, was it," Yyhxox turned to him. "No – we are from the mountains, not from a ravine," he replied. "Right. Then you do not know the invigorating feeling when you feel the fish's skin surface while it is wriggling in your hands soaked in the ice-cold, fast-running stream," Yyhxox replied. Invoking memories from his young age, Yyhxox promptly started to talk about how Shenzhen is different, and how the Nuosu-Yi are not used to the local climate. The debate turned to the marketplace. "I think that the Shimazi is not suitable for what we are doing," all of the sudden, Yyhxox told us. He saw it as too polluted by the traces of different religions – especially Buddhism, but also Islam and Christianity. "I would suggest moving to Qiliba," the *bimox* proposed a place in Lipmu Juojjop, right above Latbbu Oprro when one leaves the Jianchang Valley for the Greater Liangshan. "All I need is a *lingdao* [to persuade him about my idea], but I do not have any connections," he added. "Anyway, I am staying here until the end of November. After I get back to Nipmu, I can start working on the things I want to realize."

Yyhxox once told me that he attended several meetings (*kaihui*) organized by Batmop Lurhxa, the former mayor of Latbbu Oprro. One of these meetings was allegedly oriented towards the "solution of the Shimazi problem." The result was a proposal for a project which would later materialize into the Bimo Academy (Bimoyuan) in Four Unions Township, which would give the *bimox* an all-encompassing shelter, and at the same time would serve as a recruiting organization for the ritualists' performances – for the political leaders, events connected to the official ethnic displays, or for the gaze of tourists. It was somewhat an upgraded version of its predecessor, the Bimox pup. The head of the Bimo Academy would be a local eulogized *bimox*, a relative of Shamat and Vuthop, whose experience would serve as a blueprint for all the practices within the organization. From ethnic clothing, through the design of rituals, and ending with the way the scriptures should be presented – written on the bamboo slips mutually tied together – such stipulations caused confusion. Ma (2000) writes that the *bimox* scriptures "were originally written on leather or white silk, but now almost all are written on paper" (p. 52), which puts this form of presentation into a new light, as if the *bimox* scriptures would imply their relatedness to the scarcely preserved Han Dynasty medium for

philosophical and historical writings (Chang & Owen, 2010, p. 66). Interpretation of this could be two-fold: it could be seen as Hanification, or, more likely, the often-seen association and gradual assimilation of China's history into its Nuosu-Yi appropriation. While Shamat and Vuthop were quite positive about such development – the curriculum of the Bimoyuan would probably run along the same lines with their heritage –, Yyhxox was fiercely opposing this setup, stating that such management would "preserve the degree of freedom" lived in Shimazi. Remarkably, it was the very same Shimazi Yyhox perceived as chaotic and non-suitable for the *bimox* practice which still seemed to be a much better choice than anything organized by a scriptural ritualist overwriting the personalized knowledge of other *bimox*. This perspective, however, would have probably played out differently would it be Yyhxox entrusted with the leading role. Another, more indirect, yet the typical strain of critique came from Jjixke V.: "Apsy Latzzi is from Lipmu Moggux. Here in Latbbu Oprro, it is the government who is doing this. Through relatives! You are my relative, you are an official in the city, so you are going to do it. The Bimo Culture come from Lipmu Moggux." Not only Bimoyuan would "normalize" the *bimox* practice according to a specific lineage of thought, it would also probably entirely exclude the *sunyit* and *mopnyit* – probably the most silenced group in the quest for the Nuosu-Yi ethnic identity –, as they would not be seen as worthy representatives of the Nuosu-Yi text-based culture.

*Figure 25: The extension of a kitchen (*huofang*) in Shimian hospital – a designated place for the* bimox *rituals*

During one of the series of my post-fieldwork visit, everybody knew that I visited Yyhxox in the Pearl River Delta. Many showed me our selfies in their mobile phones. The Shimazi gradually vanished also from its "second" location. Similar to its first disappearance, it happened indirectly – the construction company claimed the "non-place" after the last of its

residents left their mud-brick houses. Locals said they did not want to leave, but the authorities managed to plot them against each other, and at the end, every tenant agreed to a meagre compensation. The ritualist moved to a deserted land further down the road, to a place surely serving as another construction site in the future. Ironically, it resembled the first location, as the ritualists used the discarded material from the torn-down houses to build provisional shacks which shielded them from sunrays as well as from the rain. "If only they would build an open-air place here where would we be able to stay... That would be enough," sighed Jitshy. The similar setup worked in Shimian – a county adjacent to Nipmu from the north – on the backyard of the local hospital considered as the best in the cluster of five mutually neighbouring counties. Because the hospital saw a substantial number of Nuosu-Yi patients, it allowed *bimox* to conduct rituals on its premises, in a designated place designed for this purpose. "Don't you think that this city is extremely tolerant (*baorong*)?" asked me an elementary school teacher who came to Shimazi to seek a service of the *bimox*. At that moment, I was not sure whether it was tolerance, *laissez-faire* approach, or (non)purposeful blindness towards what was happening in what used to be one of the most bustling parts of the town. However, the unfolding of the situation went in the opposite direction with Shimian. The capital of Nipmu had not provided a place where the *bimox* and others could carry on with their ways of craft; it had an elaborated, concrete plan for the ritualists about how the prestigious vocation should be conducted. This plan did not listen to all those potentially affected by it, but only to one individual powerful enough to officially make Shimazi a forgotten history. During the writing of these lines, my smartphone beeped. It was Yyhxox saying that he finished one of his scriptures and that he wants to share it with me.

Figure 26: The second location of Shimazi "disappeared" by the construction site

9.1 Being a *Bimox* in Contemporary Liangshan

This dissertation provided an insight into how the individual Nuosu-Yi *bimox* ritualists live while practicing their prestigious vocation. It stemmed from the self-presentation of the ritualists in front of various audiences including a foreign analyst, various individuals of the Latbbu Oprro's public space, other ritualists, clients seeking for *bimox* services, the Chinese (and, specifically, the Nuosu-Yi) academics, and, finally, the ancestors and possible successors. The audience was always mixed and the performances of both sides intertwined with one another. Each data chapter highlighted one of these relations, while I as the researcher was always present and acted as a "curator with voice" whose insights ran alongside the viewpoints of his research partners. The principal aim of this thesis was to challenge the extant top-down genesis of the "Bimo Culture" crafted in the scholarly environment by individuals, who worked on the intersection of the state-promoted, domesticated Western doctrine of Marxism-Leninism and their clan-based relationships, which tend to neglect the individual voices of the *bimox*. Hence, the principal contribution of this dissertation is the inclusion of the Nuosu-Yi ritualists' own voices.

Due to its aim and nature, the thesis does not bring a universal answer to "who are the *bimox*" or how the model *bimox* identity should look like. Instead, it departs from the premise that the most important factor for determining these are the individuality of each *bimox* rooted in his personal history, his clan affiliation, the environment in which he became a ritualist in Nipmu, and his ability to attract resources feeding into his reputation and authority. He then uses these for persuasion of more people to become his followers. For accumulating the power, the *bimox* possess a substantial toolbox of rhetorics-based tactics through which each ritualist assembles his own individual becoming, developing his unique lineage of thought. "Being" the *bimox* thus consists of a set of processes of "becoming." The *bimox* identity is never complete but is perpetually in the state of absorbing (or being absorbed by) elements of its surrounding environment. The dissertation presented this in a form of "labyrinth" of ritualists' rhetorics veiled in and constitutive of their presuppositions, which contain a web of detours and even blind alleys, in which, as Diderot said, the reader must first get lost, but eventually find a way out (Mortier, 1961, p. 293). The unique lineage of every ritualist (as well as the "curator") thus permeates through this text.

The research took place on a special location of Shimazi Marketplace. Initially thought of as a place where one strain of "*bimox*-ness" might come together, the place – to the contrary –

fleshed out an incredible fragmentarity and polyvalence of the *bimox* "canon" so complex that even the ritualist themselves (along with their clients) were to a great degree unaware of their own diversity. Would this research happen somewhere else (e.g., in a village with a *bimox* from one or more allied clans) or using different recruitment methods (e.g., separate interviews without context and/or reliance on the academic gatekeepers), I believe the result would not only be entirely different, but the constantly evolving polyvalence would remain hidden. Shimazi provided an inverted environment: not one particular village which would accommodate the research along with the analyst, but many places on one spot actively and continuously challenging many conclusions assumed about the *bimox* and their craft. Shimazi thus turned out to be a condensed, miniaturized and accelerated Nipmu, a place inheriting a part of its "in-betweenness" from the typical *modus operandi* of any other marketplace, where one side comes to offer and the other to purchase. The variability of these two sides as well as often asymmetrical ways of negotiation – thus the interaction happening in-between – then provided a platform for the simultaneity of voices. It was a dialogic place in a sense of adapted Wegerif's (2013) "dialogic space," where no ritualist was able to assert dominance over another one or all, even though every single ritualist held this aspiration. Different from the large clan gatherings, Shimazi offered a randomized permutation of Nuosu-Yi cross-clan and *bimox* cross-rank encounters which would not otherwise happen. It was a very unusual place of learning masked by its aesthetics of the "shantytown." The marketplace also represented the increasing frequency of interaction between previously more distant, variously composed clusters of clans. Naturally, this interaction was facilitated through constantly improving information-based as well as physical infrastructure, which enhanced means of the mobility of thoughts, ideas and bodies.

The identification of the three linchpins – purity, authority and assimilation – simultaneously present in every conversation through particular, tactical deployment of the performative rhetorics emerging from the productive tension between what can be seen (or what is visible and observable) and what can be heard (what is utterable and articulable), then highlighted the only commonalities of the contemporary *bimox* vocation which could be within the context of my situated research practice distilled as answers to the research question:

1. **Lack of a unified system, doctrine or canon**. The Nuosu-Yi academics tried – and, to a certain extent, are still trying through their legacy which started to live a life of its own – to create a unified "canon" of the *bimox* vocation. As I heard from many conversations, they presumably strive to shift the "bimoism" closer to the official

recognition as a religion. They see this step as a means for gaining leverage for the Nuosu-Yi culture to be treated more seriously on the national and international level. However, such categorization might immensely backfire since the current political climate in the PRC does not favour any worship other than of the Communist Party and its leadership. The *bimox* practice is far from being monolithic. Instead, there is a myriad of positioned and situated "systems," all theoretically competing for becoming a blueprint for one single doctrine. It is, however, this "competition" and fragmentation which provides vitality for the *bimox* vocation.

2. **Exclusion and Dichotomy**. Instead of the stipulated collegiality, the *bimox* attach much more importance to their clan affiliations. Currently, there is also a remarkable surge of individualism. The ritualists make space for their individual strain of practice by attempting the exclusion of individuals or even whole clans through rhetorical tactics, into which they integrate concepts appropriated from various areas Lloyd (1966) argued that dichotomy is a more or less unique feature of European argumentation (thus rhetorical tactics). Nuosu-Yi, however, seem to possess their own affection for the dichotomy. It is most evident in debates on their personalized orthodoxy which tend to replicate the pattern of the Nuosu-Yi "essentialist theory of blood superiority" (Swancutt, 2015) based on the dichotomy between purity and pollution. Whether this dichotomy predates the arrival of the European missionaries and/or colonists, or whether it was adopted through the European thought indigenized in China through the late 19th and 20th centuries might be an interesting topic for the following study.
3. **Appropriation and Control.** Related to the previous feature, the way of various appropriations – of concepts as well as followers – are prevalent among the Nuosu-Yi, and even more so among their most important mediators, the *bimox*. If the establishment of patron-client relationship materializes (which is not always the case), an individual becomes ritualist's honorary or genuine apprentice-follower. The words and utterances of other *bimox* become selectively embedded into ritualist's speech and even texts, and the concepts become part of his personalized doctrine. The more ritualist followers have, the mightier is his "centripetal force" bringing him more clients. The more scriptures he possesses, the louder is his voice, and the more likely he deploys his assimilationist tendencies over various other lineages of thought. This is best observed through the personalized, iterative *bi* performances. They provide the *bimox* with a mechanism for integration of various, even non-human elements into

their individualized cosmology along with a way to performatively differentiate their lineage of thought from the others. Moreover, the *bi* through the ritualist adorns the day-to-day life with the situated performances and interpretations of the fragments of Nuosu-Yi legends, which help the *bimox* to appropriate not only clients' presence and future, but also their past.

4. **Nuosu-Yi way of ritualization.** Since most of the communication in any society is ritualized, it is not surprising to find out that the Nuosu-Yi life is heavily ritualized as well – in a close relationship with their environment and their activities, mostly stemming from semi-agricultural and semi-pastoral life. The *bimox* are the prominent mediators of these ritualizations. The *bi* serves also as an intensification and explicitation of the Nuosu-Yi everyday life. This was visible through Chapter 6, where the behaviour of the *bimox* towards each other resembled the exorcism of demons through the ritual practice in Chapter 7. The ritualization in the hands of *bimox* functioning as social control is closely connected with the appropriation, which must be done individually and loosely enough to provide a space for the client to identify with its ways. In this way, the ritualization shapes the day-to-day practices not only of the *bimox* – by its reflexive as well as unreflexive integration back into their practice –, but, more crucially, of their clients.

9.2 Contribution and Implications

The theoretical circle of performativity (iteration) – rhetorics (persuasion) – assimilation (multidirectional dialogic process) along with methodology learned together with the *bimox* has uncovered Nuosu-Yi worlds which were for decades partially obfuscated by the equally performative, iterative application of the Marxist-Leninist and other theories. This has implications for how researchers practice their craft and how they treat the results of their research. The *bimox* on and off the Shimazi marketplace taught me that not only our practices do not stand out of our lives, but also that the research – being a performative endeavour aiming to persuade its audience with the usage of certain rhetorics and, ideally, assimilate it to become analyst's "followers" – should be "always and only provisional" (Butler, 1995, p. 205), as there are always unexplored paths and directions. By putting certain theoretical concepts into dialogue, the dissertation helped to suture over some of their weak spots. Nelson (2014), for example, criticizes Butler for "inability to theorize a subject that is discursively constituted (not existing prior to discourse) but potentially capable of critical reflection and purposive action that might intervene, shift, or even openly challenge those very same

discourses," positing "a subject abstracted from lived experience, from intra-subjective dynamics, as well as from historical and geographical embeddedness" (p. 62). Bakhtin's (2010b) theory of utterance assimilation together with the *bimox* with their day-to-day lives – their historical, genealogical and geographical rooting – advanced Butler's concept further beyond this problem. When approached dialogically, Yyhxox, Ddisse, Vuthop and others were able to perform critical reflections as part of their lived experience. They did it in different contexts, places and times. Furthermore, their practices often blurred the boundary between dichotomic polarities present in the theoretical concepts. In Butler's case, Edensor (2009) maintains that "performance is characterized as self-conscious and deliberate, whereas performativity is conceived as reiterative and unreflexive" (p. 544). Bakhtin (2010c) claims that "text is the unmediated reality" (p. 103), suggesting that there is also "something" lying beyond the text and speech. By their ritual and day-to-day performances, along with the relation of the text (scriptures) to the declamation (chunks of words/speech/utterances) specific to the realm of Nuosu-Yi, the *bimox* blurred these boundaries to a degree that they became indiscernible. The text kept becoming speech which was turned again into text, and conscious performances kept oscillatively intertwining with unreflexive iterations. In this manner, the very notion of the *bimox* is slippery. Naturally, many *bimox* internalized and keep following the prescriptive ways of "how to be a *bimox*" articulated by the academics: they serve as translators of the ancient texts to the Modern Standard Yi and/or Chinese, they take part in projects related to the promotion of Nipmu and the Nuosu-Yi culture to tourists and visiting *lingdao*. However, aside from this, the *bimox* are also actively adapting to the surrounding world and produce meanings connected to the phenomena, which they assimilate into their cosmologies. In this way, the *bimox* as a vocation, as well as a lived experience inseparable with individuals' everyday life, dwells within the unyielding currents of multidirectional "becomings."

Moreover, the dissertation contributes to a conceptualization of the theory of "nuosufication" – a term probably used for the first time by Hein & Zhao, 2016, p. 285 – or rather set of "nuosufications" through different lines of the *bimox* knowledge whose carriers "capture" (Swancutt, 2016b) not only the Nuosu-Yi individuals but also state-crafted concepts and other material or abstract elements. This process is complementary to "hanification" or other types of similar cultural assimilation prevalent in the academic as well as media discourse on the PRC national policies. Most importantly, it contributes to the conceptualization of the multi-

directionality of such processes by highlighting the often overlooked agency of the minority group within the asymmetrical set of relationships running between minority and majority.

Apart from picturing the ritualists as individuals with their everyday joys and struggles, the ethnography uncovered the importance of the diversity prevalent between and even within the *bimox* clan lineages and their attachment to various environments of the topographically, climatically and linguistically variegated Nipmu as well as the increasingly accelerating world which always was, but recently is even more interconnected with Nipmu. Such areas should not be researched in isolation. The existence and the *modus operandi* of the clans are both, however, increasingly politically sensitive. This is because the *cytvi* often functions as a parallel institution to those run and promoted by the state. The existence of *cytvi* is not compatible with the campaign of "nationality solidarity" (*minzu tuanjie*) as well as internal cohesiveness of every ethnic category (*minzu*). The Nuosu-Yi still seem not to "care so much for a collective identity as for rejecting the one that the higher political authorities want to assign to them" (Vermander, 1997, p. 9). The ritualists undoubtedly sense this climate and their accelerated "battle for resources" might stem from the urge to preserve a strain of their own *bimox* lineage which possesses the potential of becoming an artery of the standardized "Bimo Culture." In this context, the Nipmu's *bimox* cannot be divided according to the same pattern which Névot (2014) observed among the Sani-Yi in Yunnan – on those collaborating with the government in exchange for maintaining the power (p. 295), and the "commoners" who avoid this collaboration as well as these *bimox* (p. 291) – since the desire for the power and fame is intrinsic to if not all, then a great part of the *bimox,* and they do not hesitate to use all possible means to get their share. Simultaneously, there is not one power centre which would be able to minimize the diversity (p. 295-296). Instead, there are multiple centres always rooted in the heritage of one or more powerful clans: Lipmu Moggux as with its designation "Homeland of Bimo" supported by academics; the slowly materializing Bimo Academy in Latbbu Oprro; the recently unveiled Bimo Valley (Bimogu) lying right on the inter-provincial road between Cemo Lurkur and Ninglang; a whole tertiary-education institution in Guizhou's Weining; the pop-up *bimox* skill training sessions (see He, 2017; Wu, Wang, & Luo, 2016; Wu, 2018) in multiple provinces. These are always under the leadership of someone with a distinct, individualized *bimox* knowledge, who is ready to compete for the influence and authority over the rest.

The *bimox* are anything but a living fossil. As the carriers of the epitomized Nuosu-Yi vocation, they are often "precarized." The presence and continuity of the *bimox* craft is being

often seen as slowly fading away. Contrary to this perception, the Shimazi ritualists had shown me a different trend. They presented themselves as resilient, active and creative individuals who are able to negotiate the so-called "modern" world, the same world many fear might eventually destroy them. Swancutt and Jiarimuji (2018) contrasts the Nuosu-Yi face-to-face society "which revolved around codes of decorum that no noble or higher ranked commoners could (or would wish to) escape" with the contemporary times which brought "improved roads and the advent of infrastructure that enable an easier escape from the highlands," leading to the disruption of the "purported face-to-face quality of Nuosu society" (p. 142). "These unprecedented changes" (p. 142) presented in the majority of the relevant research I quoted in this dissertation presuppose a frozen, static form of "being" – e.g., Nipmu as sealed off from the outer world and carrying on according to its own rhythm until the Democratic Reforms –, which is being disrupted by an incoming force through the inclusion of Nipmu and its ethnic inhabitants to the Chinese state and the subsequent arrival of the non-indigenized modernity. The "changes" – obviously the most feared spectre in the *bimox*-oriented academic world – are nodes on the trajectory of the bulk of processes, which were always present, and in an overwhelming majority of instances were also unprecedented to a certain degree. Therefore, pointing out the quality of any changes as "unprecedented" is essentially meaningless. What matters, however, are speeds and intensities (Deleuze & Guattari, 2005, p. 4) of these processes. As the ethnography revealed, the *bimox* can assimilate whatever coming their way into the Nuosu-Yi "face to face qualities" as well as to adapt this very concept to the emerging circumstances. In short, the change should not be seen as a fluid intermezzo between two static conditions. Instead, it could be seen as an unyielding exchange of emergent elements which are then imbued with new meanings as soon as they land in the environment they were not endemic. This brings me to an anecdote in Leng Guangdian's memoir about him – the well-known *nzymop* from Jjiepggurx Galo educated in the coastal city of Republican China – introducing the glass transparent roof tile in order to bring light into the notoriously dark Nuosu-Yi houses. The glass-made tile brought many worries among the people: that the demons would see what is happening in the house; the young people could not get intimate; the glass could melt like snow, so it should not get in contact with water; the cat slipped after stepping on its surface because the tile wanted to kill the cat; it displayed the demons raging outside of the house during the starry night (in fact, they were owls); it made the dog naughty because it urinated all over the dishes near the cupboard (in fact, it just shed a light on its usual behaviour) (Ling, 1988, p. 132-135). Instead of disrupting the local social order, eventually, however, the glass tile became an integral part

of most of the Nuosu-Yi households across the Nipmu. This lets me think in parallel with Bakhtin's (2010d) view of the dialogue's finiteness: by designating *bimox* as a living fossil, overtly emphasising the text over a situated speech or other tactics of the research, the authors expel not only the *bimox* but also themselves out from the sphere of a living word.

Yyhxox's case is a remarkable example of the resilience of his *bimox* vocation. While simultaneously studying the *bimox* curriculum, as a child, he also attended a state education. Later on, he left Nipmu and "ran here and there" (*daochu pao*) around greater China. He was drinking, gambling, and working odd jobs. Later, he converted to the teaching of the millenarian sect. He practiced on a marketplace, attended meetings on the Bimo Culture, and later went to Shenzhen. However, he never ceased to be a *bimox*. His escapes from his responsibilities as well as from Nipmu were never definite, the *bimox* vocation always dragged him back. His endeavours outside Nipmu did not constitute a mere "rite of passage" (Liu, 2011). Instead, they were a constant negotiation – a dialogue – with the surrounding world. Similar to the description of the Brazilian shaman Prepori, Yyhxox was not a backward ethnic inhabitant that would "retard the embrace of modernity" (Oakdale, 2018, p. 56). Instead, he produced it in at least two ways – through the various means of working for the state (p. 57) as well as assimilating his life experiences into a personalized way of the *bimox* practice. Through such negotiation, Yyhxox – as well as others – pulled the *bimox* out of its predominantly academic designations associated with the "long-forgotten childhood of humankind," and showed that the ritualists bear all signs of being modern. They "survived" until today not because they were inhabiting a remote and isolated area, but because they developed very elaborated techniques and tactics of persuasion leading to gradual assimilation. These might also be the reason why so many of us – domestic as well as foreign anthropologists – became so emotionally attached to Nipmu.

It was especially the storyline of Yyhxox – a *bimox* who would otherwise hardly attract the academic attention since he would not be considered "knowledgeable" enough to be worth engaging with – that revealed significant ruptures prevalent within the desired image of what does it mean to be a *bimox* in the contemporary Nipmu. Essentially, it disrupted the pious hope of many attached to how the *bimox* should look like with the praxis of how they carry on with their lives. Moreover, it emphasized another important feature of the *bimox* vocation – its oscillative quality. Apart from the conscious decision of some individuals to give up the ability to pursue the craft within their whole lineage altogether through a specific set of rituals or neglection of the craft for three or more generations (Bamo, A., 2000, p. 5), the trajectories

of being a *bimox* – distancing away from the vocation followed by the convergence back towards the practice – are with the broadening possibilities and contexts more tortuous. Heberer (2007) describes a person, who from being a *bimox* on a day-to-day basis "converted" to become a successful entrepreneur, only to express a wish to return to the practice as soon as he accomplishes his business-related responsibilities (p. 103). Yyhxox, Lalyr and to a certain extent also Jjixke V. and Jjixke H. had similar tendencies: they practiced the craft, then left it at different stages of their lives, only to eventually come back. Therefore, instead of a fear of losing a tradition – often based on a superficial quantitative survey of the active *bimox* in Lipmu Moggux and its sharply declining numbers (see Cai, Ji'er, Gaha & Zimo, 2015; Kraef, 2014, p. 169) –, it might be a good idea to re-evaluate what does it mean to be a ritualist in contemporary Nipmu, or, in other words, not to be obsessed with the past, and rather look towards the future. Vuthop – a traditionalist, but with a strong will to learn new things – might be another good example. Although illiterate in Chinese, he still explored innovative ways of transmitting *bimox* knowledge. In resonance with "words as action," I claim that if we keep saying how precarious the lives of the *bimox* are, then they might become precarious and, eventually, the vocation might even die outside of the academic circles.

It is questionable to what degree the idealized image of the past stems from the "storytelling around a firepit," three decades ago still a very prominent source of information for the Nuosu-Yi youth while listening to their elders. Bamo Ayi claimed that most of the *bimox* she interviewed "clearly remembered the oppression and injury that they had faced during the Cultural Revolution" and "they had became concerned only with their own fame, the glory of their own (…) lineage, and they worried only about whether the government might one day prevent them from carrying out their rituals again" (p. 204). She points to an assumption that in comparison with the past, the *bimox* became selfish. I do not have the same confidence as others to evaluate how the Nuosu-Yi went about their day-to-day lives in the proximate or distant past, while especially about the latter we know close to nothing. How could we then know the past was exactly as it is being narrated around the *gakux*? Related is the ritualistic eulogization of the *bimox* who "don't steal, don't rob, don't take drugs, and don't do bad things" (p. 203), while Ma Changshou mentioned a *bimox* from Ggetnra clan boasting he had killed *tusi* as well as a foreigner in 1930s (Ma, Li & Zhou, 2006, p. 34), and Lawson (2017) introduces his whole work with an anecdote connected to a *bimox* robbing the Han household in March 1925 (p. 4). Moreover, as I have discussed, there are special designations along with a place in the social order for the *bimox* who committed wrongdoings in the past. The

nostalgia for the good old days is, at least partially, a practice of the myth-making which I connected with the Nuosu-Yi inhabitation of the "great time" in Chapter 5 and onwards. In a way, Nuosu-Yi inhabit such defined "great time" not only when its existence is made explicit during the *bi*, but also latently in every moment of they everydayness. The *bimox*, as Jjixke H., Yyhxox and other showed us (in 7.3), are significant mediators of this "great time," animators of the relevant narrations, which they iteratively re-transplant into the Nuosu-Yi day-to-day lives through certain segments and practices within the ritual performances. During these, they provide their subjective interpretations, which feed back to each ritualist's lineage of thought. The anecdotes from the past were then often uncritically replicated by the authors writing about the Nuosu-Yi history and, most importantly, about the present, taking the stories away from the viscerality of their situatedness among different actors and chronotopes to the realm of authorized scientific knowledge. The firepit stories in the hands and pens of people with a scriptural power extending far beyond the geographical Nipmu – that is, the intellectual elites nurtured by the state education – were designated as the building blocs of the "new" culture. This practice, however, led to overwriting of the complex presence by the "artistically polished" past. Essentially, in case of this particular practice, the *zhuanjia* somewhat imitated the role of the *bimox*, causing ambivalent feelings of ritualist towards them: on one hand, they promoted the Nuosu-Yi culture, but on the other hand, disrupted the ritualists' monopoly on storytelling. Among the Nuosu-Yi, the orality had presumably always been dominant over the text. Therefore, when researching the *bimox*, the application of Bakhtin's approach to utterance assimilation convinced me that it could be a good starting point for the reconceptualization of the Nuosu-Yi approach to history. This is why my conclusions bring a set of snapshots different from those circulating the firepits. Meanwhile, the *bimox* in my stories continue with active assimilation of their environment. This assimilation is speech-based and is possibly the most evident manifestation of the Nuosu-Yi ritualization.

Placing the voices of the ritualists on the same level with mine as well as those of other academics and, perhaps more importantly, treating them as people inhabiting the same world as all of us – meaning not the exotic other from a "recently discovered" mountain hamlet or an isolated island – proposes a direction for answering the question of how to possibly reconceptualize the framework through which we could approach the *bimox* vocation. I believe that Bamo Ayi's idea of the "*bimox* collective" (*bimo gongtongti*) (Bamo, A., 2000, p. 4) was conceptualized with good intentions. However, failing in giving a space for each ritualist's difference, it went out of control and became a tool for the canonization of the

bimox knowledge as well as the knowledge about the *bimox*. Naturally, ethnographers deciding what does and does not count as a culture are not autochthonous to Nipmu (for Southern Moravia, the land of my own ancestors and nowadays a part of the Czech Republic, see Solaříková, 2020), since culture itself "is a complexly interesting form of persuasion" (Fernandez, 2006, p. 647). The fundamental problem is that in this setup, the *bimox* can never be homogeneous, they cannot be flattened into a cohesive collective with unified, canonical practices since their becoming as a *bimox* originates – or is by them currently presented as originating – in personalized, individual lineages of knowledge. Instead, I would propose an approach based on Bakhtin's (2010b) conceptualization of speech genres. The categories and presuppositions of such an approach would, however, need to be, as Hobart (1991) points out, "reworked comprehensively for the society in question" (p. 215-216). Inspired by Toner's (2015) treatment of Dhalwangu *manikay* as "a distinctive speech genre" (p. 181), handled even more carefully, the *bimox* craft could be seen as relatively temporarily stable but ever-evolving types of utterances which "is individual and therefore can reflect the individuality of the speaker (or writer); that is, it possesses individual style" (Bakhtin, 2010b, p. 63). In short, within this genre, each *bimox* – and every Nuosu-Yi clan from the different region of Nipmu for that matter – could be seen as possessing his style, while these, along with genres, could be constantly "renewed in new situations" (Bakhtin, 2020d, p. 153). The perspectives on the *bimox* could then go in a way of how Ouattara (2018) writes about the West African griot, whose word is "always reinvented, reincarnated, which edifies and leads one to self-consciousness of being" (p. 155), not belonging to only one place but everywhere (p. 160), keeping alive his people through the verbal art, while his voice restores the past and at the same time commits the society to its future (p. 165).

9.3 Limitations and Further Research

Apart from the work on the "*bimox* speech genres" sketched in the last paragraph, there are several significant threads in this dissertation which remained unfollowed but are very well worth attention and further research. Even though some of my observations oscillated through the chapters, the ethnography still contains traces of material which was inseparable from the given context, but at the same time could constitute multiple separate chapters. While addressing only the major directions, most of these I leave for the reader to uncover. It would be interesting, for example, to conduct similar research in Lipmu Juojjop – or any larger rural area also considered as a "melting pot" of rural Nipmu – and test the plausibility of my

conclusions. Apart from Lipmu Juojjop, the engagement with different settings could go further, as the main limitation of my research paradoxically lies in the aspect I criticized in Chapter 2, namely that the Nuosu-Yi are considered the most "ancient" among the Yi and, therefore, are the most researched Yi category member. From the short-time visit to other parts of Southwest China as well as regions in surrounding countries, I gained a very superficial insight into differently situated settings and context concerning the people mashed into the umbrella Yi ethnic category. It would be worthwhile to conduct similar research in these bodies seen as groups or communities to test the approach I utilized in Nipmu.

More crucial limitation, however, is related to exclusion and silence. While talking about "Nuosu-Yi ritualists" in this dissertation, I have pointed exclusively to the *bimox*. Although occasionally mentioning the presence of the *mopnyit* and *sunyit*, I deliberately did not grant them a principal role in the text. As Kraef (2014, p. 149-150) points out, they are neglected and excluded from the "Bimo Culture" probably because the *bimox* are seen as literate, therefore more cultured. Indeed, Vutsa (see 8.3) held this stance, expressing that the shamans are "not important at all for the cause of the Nuosu-Yi since they lack culture." Kang (1995) calls the *bimox* as "high-class shaman" (*gaoji wushi*) and the *mopnyit* and *sunyit* as "inferior shaman" (*ya wushi*) (p. 3). During informal conversations, certain Nuosu-Yi academics debated which role came first, whether those of *bimox* or the shamans. Chronologically, they predominantly placed the *bimox* before the shamans, perhaps because the notion of "ancientness" in their perception legitimizes the higher stance of the *bimox*. However, it is this glaring hierarchization which should encourage the researchers to provide a platform for the voices of *mopnyit* and *sunyit*.

The last two threads I would like to mention here are related to education. As I have mentioned, several institutions are offering standardized *bimox* education: the Weining school in Guizhou and the pop-up classes around provinces in the Southwest. Vuthop was ambitious of having such school in Latbbu Oprro. This is another exciting phenomenon to follow. It potentially represents a strong future trend of *bimox* knowledge transmission. Related is also a question of the symbiosis of state-run education with *bimox* learning. At one point, Jjixke H. lamented that nowadays, the kids do not want to study the craft. Approximately one year later, he told me that he has a few young followers. However, another problem emerged – they did not want to attend the public state-run school. While Yang, Tian, and Jiang (2015) do not see many possibilities on how the *bimox* practice could be transferred to people attending secondary or tertiary education, I perceived Biqu and Yyhxox as two examples making

thinking in this direction possible. Even Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo – proficient in Latbbu Oprro's Sichuanese Mandarin and Tibetan along with the Nuosu-Yi – told Liu Yaohan that he used to memorize *sanzijing*, the basics of Confucian education (Jike, Jike & Liu, 1990, p. 123). These "realms" were never entirely separate. Studying the interaction between them could yield a valuable contribution to the emerging possibilities related to the *bimox* vocation.

Appendix – Glossaries

Nuosu-Yi Glossary

Expression	**Original Script**	**Contextual Meaning**
Adur	[illegible]	Regional variation of the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity (points to the area, garments as well as a Nuosu-Yi dialect)
abbe	[illegible]	Expression of surprise or discomfort
ahxi	[illegible]	Monkey (in Jjixke V.'s interpretation: small, on the ground)
apnge	[illegible]	Expression of disagreement
anyut	[illegible]	Monkey (in Jjixke V.'s interpretation: big, on a tree)
Apsy Latzzi	[illegible]	The ancestor of the *bimox* ritualists
Apyop Tiessyr	[illegible]	Ayu Tieri (Nuosu-Yi expert on the *bimox* writing system)
Atgamox	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi female name, in this dissertation a seller of the ritual accessories on Shimazi
Athxop Nyoyy	[illegible]	Anning River
Axhuo Tenzy	[illegible]	Jinyang County
Axhuo Shyxyy	[illegible]	Jinsha River (the upper stream of Yangzi River)
Axpu Jjutmu	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi mythological, primordial ancestor
Batmop Ayit	[illegible]	Bamo Ayi, Nuosu-Yi linguist/anthropologist
Batmop Qubbutmop	[illegible]	Bamo Qubumo, Nuosu-Yi folklorist
Batmop Lurhxa	[illegible]	Bamo Erha, Nuosu-Yi former mayor of Latbbu Oprro
bbuxddur	[illegible]	East
bbujji	[illegible]	West
bbur w	[illegible]	Culture (connotations to written text)
bburcip	[illegible]	Written article
Bipji	[illegible]	Beijing City
Biqu	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name + one of the significant research partners
bi	ꀘ	The practice of declamation; the Nuosu-Yi ritual performance
biju	[illegible]	*Bimox* paraphernalia – ritual bell
bijyx	[illegible]	*Bimox* journeys through his territory – both for learning and for practicing
bimox	ꀘꂷ	Nuosu-Yi scriptural ritualist
Bimox nyix dde	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi expression for Shimazi Marketplace
Bimox pup	[illegible]	"The Sacred Land of the *Bimox*" – an institution in Latbbu Oprro
bisse	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi ritualist's intra-clan hereditary apprentice
bixrre	[illegible]	The reward for the *bimox* after a successful ritual
Buplage	[illegible]	Prague

bushy nyip	[illegible]	The day of the snake
bushy tur	[illegible]	Snakebite
Cemo Lurkur	[illegible]	Yanyuan County
cepyy	[illegible]	A common cold
Chepdu	[illegible]	Chengdu City
chexzy	[illegible]	Car – loan from Mandarin
Chopqip	[illegible]	Chongqing
chotma	[illegible]	Bullet
chu, ndop, ndep	[illegible]	Random syllables transcribed in Ma's text
chuop	[illegible]	A verbal indicator of giving
cytvi	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi social order based on the entanglement of patriclans / a lineage / a patriclan
Ddipbox Hxoyy	[illegible]	Dadu River
Ddisse	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the important research partners
Ddigge	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the significant research partners
diepyyr	[illegible]	Movie – loan from Mandarin
durta	[illegible]	"Hero sash" – nowadays a fashion accessory
dut	[illegible]	Fire
dutzie	[illegible]	Fire Festival (or Torch Festival) – a major Nuosu-Yi festivity, usually celebrated between June and August every year
fat	[illegible]	To send or to issue – loan from Chinese
Fijy	[illegible]	A name of Swancutt's research participant
gachap	[illegible]	"Go to the marketplace" – loan from Chinese
gakux	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi indoor firepit (hearth)
Gatlyp Mopbbo	[illegible]	Leibo County
gaxy	[illegible]	Hard-labour bondservants (usually translated as "slaves") within the *quhox* stratum
getmop	[illegible]	Craftsman – one of Nuosu-Yi traditional vocations
ggapjie	[illegible]	Light-labour bondservants (usually translated as "servants") within the *quhox* stratum
gga yot la	[illegible]	"You must have lost your way" – a way of greeting of a host towards a guest
ggax zie	[illegible]	"I came straight here" - a way of ritually respond to host's greeting by a guest
Ggetnra	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan
Gguho	[illegible]	One of the two Nuosu-Yi primordial clan branches which entered Nipmu
guho	[illegible]	Appearance
gumuhomu	[illegible]	Performance without a serious impact meant just for an effect
hlepvop	[illegible]	*Bimox* paraphernalia – a hat
Hnewo tepyy	[illegible]	The Nuosu Book of Origins, a versed myth explaining Nuosu-Yi genealogies and cosmologies through its many versions
Hxati tepyy	[illegible]	"Scripture of One Hundred Big Matters" – a *bimox* scripture used for consultations of one's future

		decisions and life trajectory
hxiehxilio	[illegible]	"The phallus is coming" – a shout during a certain stage of *nipmu coxbi* ceremony
hxiena	[illegible]	To be annoyed, also to suffer from the side-effect of a curse
Hxietlie	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan
hxixdie cox	[illegible]	Foreigner
hxo	[illegible]	Onomatopoeic syllable
Hxobbu liettuo	[illegible]	Houbonaituo Township in Lipmu Moggux
ieqyt zzyyy	[illegible]	Bowl with fresh water used during a purifying ritual
jiep	[illegible]	Fake – loan from Chinese
jieshat	[illegible]	Street, to go on the street – loan from Chinese
jietshyr vapla	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi cloaks – *jietshyr* points to the lower fringes while *vapla* to the upper part covering the shoulders
Jiezhyr	[illegible]	Ebian Yi Autonomous County (Leshan Prefecture)
Jitshy	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi female name + one of the significant research partners
Jjiepggurx Galo	[illegible]	Ganluo County
Jjimu	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the significant research partners
Jjitpu Ladda	[illegible]	Place name in Lipmu Juojjop
Jjixke	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + two of the core research partners
Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo	[illegible]	Famous *bimox*, research participant of Liu Yaohan (Ch. Jike Erda Zehuo)
Jjixke Sseshy	[illegible]	Sub-branch of Jjixke clan
Jjutmu sse fut	[illegible]	Legendary six sons of the Nuosu-Yi primordial ancestor
ke lo da	[illegible]	To control a dog by tying it to a chain or rope (a guest telling host before entering the premises of his or her house)
ke ssip da	[illegible]	To hold a dog when a guest is leaving
kepnrep	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi competitive disputation
Komip	[illegible]	Kunming City
kuop	[illegible]	Verbal indicator of reception
kutshyr	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi new year celebration
kutsi	[illegible]	The practice of calculation of auspicious days often translated as "fortune-telling" (*suanming*)
Lalyr	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name + one of the research partners
Latbbu	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name
Latbbu Oprro	[illegible]	Xichang City
Lipmu Juojjop	[illegible]	Zhaojue County
Lipmu Moggux	[illegible]	Meigu County
lotgga hxep	[illegible]	The fortune-telling practice of palm-reading
lotvy	[illegible]	*Bimox* paraphernalia – ritual arrows (inside the ritual quiver)
lubyx luji	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi proverbs and folk wisdom

lurkur	[illegible]	City (lit. "inside of the wall")
lurhxi	[illegible]	Outside of the (city) wall
Ma	[illegible]	Minor Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the important research partners
maddu	[illegible]	Spiritual tablet (see also *nipddu*)
mgu	[illegible]	Piece of a branch or a stem used during the ritual
mguva	[illegible]	"Path" or "arena" for the soul during a ritual
mguva co	[illegible]	One constituent of the *mguva* path – a thin stick usually jabbed to the ground or a material keeping it erected
Mityip Rruonuo	[illegible]	Mianning County
mohmat	[illegible]	The person guiding the way during a certain stage of *nipmu coxbi* ceremony
mopmgep	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi clan gathering (e.g., to discuss important inter- or intra-clan affairs)
mopnyit	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi Female shamaness
mopsat	[illegible]	Mediator of personal or inter-clan disputes – one of Nuosu-Yi traditional vocations, Niplat version – loan from Chinese
mosimu	[illegible]	Jjixke H.'s the first sentence in *bimox* (according to Jjixke H.)
mu nyip mu hxot sot su	[illegible]	The person who calculates auspicious days
Muphxop	[illegible]	Mabian Yi Autonomous Country
Niplat	[illegible]	Ninglang Yi Autonomous County
Nixzho	[illegible]	Lizhou Township
Ndapssypbbo	[illegible]	Lushan Mountain in Xichang
ndepggup	[illegible]	Mediator of personal or inter-clan disputes – one of Nuosu-Yi traditional vocations
Ngemu Puxggu	[illegible]	Mythological (cosmological) Nuosu-Yi place of origin
Niepsha	[illegible]	Liangshan (Nipmu) – loan from Chinese
nipddu	[illegible]	Spiritual tablet (see also *maddu*)
Njitla Buxte	[illegible]	Butuo County
Nip	[illegible]	Primordial autonym of the Nuosu-Yi
Nipmu	[illegible]	The Nuosu-Yi toponym for their historical territory (different from administrative boundaries)
nipmu bimox	[illegible]	The major ritualist in *nipmu coxbi* ceremony
nipmu coxbi	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi ceremony for the dead
nuohop	[illegible]	The Nuosu-Yi aristocracy (possessing the "pure" blood)
Nuosu	ꆈꌠ	Autonym of Nuosu
Nuosu bburma	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi written language
Nuosu ddopma	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi spoken language
Nuosu muddix	[illegible]	"Land of the Nuosu-Yi" (see also Nipmu)
Nuosu nrytvat dde	[illegible]	China's Meigu Yi Bimo Culture Research Centre (per Jjixke V.)
Nuosu nyipsi tepyy	[illegible]	"Manual" used for counting the auspicious days (*kutsi*)
Nuosu nyopw pup	[illegible]	"The Sacred Land of the Nuosu Folk Songs" - an

		institution near Torch Square in Latbbu Oprro
nyitcy	[illegible]	Demon
Nyofa	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name
nzuptip	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi "hero's horn" - a floccule of hair at the top of one's head
nzy la bi ap dep	[illegible]	*Lubyx luji:* "When the *nzymop* enters a house, the *bimox* does not have to stand up"
nzy syp dur lyp lyp, *mop syp hxax vo vo,* *bi syx ap vup shop*	[illegible]	*Lubyx luji:* "The knowledge of *nzymop* counts on thousands, the knowledge of *ndepggup* counts for hundreds, but the knowledge of the *bimox* is limitless"
nzymop	[illegible]	One in charge of affairs – an elite among the Nuosu-Yi clans (to a certain extent overlapping with *tusi* – a court-appointed native headman)
Oprro shupmop	[illegible]	Qionghai Lake
Opzzup jjix bur rre	[illegible]	*Bimox* cursing scripture
Pugu	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name, the principal ritualist for Jjixke H.'s *nipmu coxbi*
Puxop	[illegible]	Puxiong Township
Qikep	[illegible]	Czech Republic
qike	[illegible]	*Bimox* paraphernalia – a ritual fan
qoyuo	[illegible]	Stand for the *bimox* during the *nipmu coxbi* ceremony
Qotniep	[illegible]	One of the two Nuosu-Yi primordial clan branches which entered Nipmu
quyix	[illegible]	Model of a house (a "jailhouse" – Swancutt, 2016b)
quhox	[illegible]	The Nuosu-Yi non-aristocrats (outsiders with "polluted" blood)
quxnuo	[illegible]	The free commoners within the *quhox* stratum
rybbur	[illegible]	Effigies made of straw used during the ritual
Shamat	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the important research partners
Shamat Mothxobbo	[illegible]	Shizi shan (Lion Mountain)
Shamat Qubi	[illegible]	Sub-branch of Shamat clan (the main source of the *bimox* from the Shamat clan)
shobbo	[illegible]	"Go away" – an exclamation used during the exorcism
Shuonuo	[illegible]	The plateau between Lipmu Moggux and Gatlyp Mopbbo
Shuonuo Apjjubbo	[illegible]	Longtou shan (Dragon Head Mountain)
shy nyip	[illegible]	The day of a snake (according to Nuosu-Yi calendar)
Shynzymop	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi female name
Shypnra	[illegible]	Regional variation of the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity (points to the area, garments as well as a Nuosu-Yi dialect)
sippo	[illegible]	Clan leader

ssakuo	[illegible]	Distinguished heroic warrior
Ssup o xit o jo su	[illegible]	*Bimox* cursing scripture
Suondip	[illegible]	Regional variation of the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity (points to the area, garments as well as a Nuosu-Yi dialect)
sunyit	[illegible]	Male shaman
surgat	[illegible]	Respectful address of a person within the Nuosu-Yi social order who accumulates wealth without obstacles
tepyy	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi book/scripture
tepyy ddie dde	[illegible]	The issuing organization (of a printed book)
tepyy ddie su	[illegible]	"Book creator" (of a printed book)
tepyy hxep	[illegible]	To read / to study
Tuosat	[illegible]	Name of Swancutt's research participant
tushymgur	[illegible]	Wood-chip bullets which are thrown at demons during the ritual
vaqip sha	[illegible]	Disease diagnostic method using the egg yolk and the bowl full of fresh water
vaxi	[illegible]	Purification ritual (using a chicken)
Vuthop	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name + one of the important research partners
Vutsa	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi male name
Vyttuo Lurkur	[illegible]	Yuexi County
vyxtu	[illegible]	*Bimox* paraphernalia – a ritual quiver
Wasa	[illegible]	Spirit medium of *sunyit* male shaman and *mopnyit* female shamaness appeased by the *bimox* during the initiation disease of a person in a liminal stage of becoming the shaman(ess)
wobu	[illegible]	"Vessel" for a soul
Xitddop Ladda	[illegible]	Xide County
xymu lotmu	[illegible]	Assistants during the rituals
Yiery	[illegible]	Designation for "foreigners" in Hnewo Tepyy
yot ap jjo	[illegible]	Expression: "No problem."
Yyhxox	[illegible]	Major Nuosu-Yi clan + one of the important research partners
Yyjjurndipsa	[illegible]	Place-name in Yyxshy Pujjit (Ch. Ridudisa)
Yynuo	[illegible]	Regional variation of the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity (points to the area, garments as well as a Nuosu-Yi dialect)
Yypnuo	[illegible]	Yunnan Province
yyr	[illegible]	One of the three Nuosu-Yi souls
yyr yy	[illegible]	Ophiopogon, "Lilyturf" (Swancutt, 2015)
yyrkut	[illegible]	Soul-calling ritual
Yyxshy Pujjit	[illegible]	Puge County
yyxo	[illegible]	North
yyxmy	[illegible]	South
Yyxmu Diepcha	[illegible]	Dechang County
Yyxmu Hopli	[illegible]	Huili County

zabbur	[illegible]	Effigies made of mud used during the ritual
Zhamop tepyy	[illegible]	*Bimox* scripture used for consultations of one's future decisions and life trajectory
Zhuoto	[illegible]	Zhaotong Prefecture
Zhupmu Ssytnyo	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi mythological person
zhypzot	[illegible]	Heir-praying pine (used during the *nipmu coxbi* ceremony)
zipmo	[illegible]	Sacrificial animal
zup go co	[illegible]	Organizer (of a printed book)
zytjie	[illegible]	Myself – loan from Chinese
zzybi	[illegible]	Nuosu-Yi ritualist's extra-clan apprentice, seen as "practicing and inappropriate craft" or "uncategorizable person"
Zzypzzyppuvut	[illegible]	Mythological (geographical) Nuosu-Yi place of origin
zzyrmuo	[illegible]	Wish of health, wealth, and peace
zzyrmuo bi	[illegible]	Blessing ritual

Chinese Glossary

Expression	**Original Script**	**Contextual Meaning**
An Ye	安邺	Unknown French "Scientist" imposing racial tags on Jjixke Ludda Zzihxo
Anning he	安宁河	Anning River
Asu Laze cang jing lou	阿苏拉则藏经楼	Apsy Latzzi's library which allegedly collapsed at the end of the 1950s
baigutou	白骨头	"White Bones" – a designation for *quhox* with a reference to the bone colour as a marker of purity (black being the purest)
baorong	包容	To be tolerant and inclusive
beihejiang	背河匠	"Carry-over-river craftsman" – people carrying people through East River near Shimazi
bimo	毕摩	The Nuosu-Yi ritualist
bimo gongtongti	毕摩共同体	"Bimo Collective" – the concept of Bamo Ayi bringing the *bimox* together regardless of their clan affiliation
Bimogu	毕摩谷	Bimo Valley – an institution
bimo wenhua	毕摩文化	Bimo Culture (a concept)
bimo zhi xiang	毕摩之乡	Homeland of Bimo – a designation for Lipmu Moggux
bimojiao	毕摩教	Bimoism – a religion conceptualized from the bimo practice

Bimoyuan	毕摩院	Bimo Academy – an institution to market *bimox* craft in Latbbu Oprro
bumo	布摩	Nasu-Yi ritualist (in Guizhou and Yunnan)
Cen Jiawu	岑家梧	Historian and Ethnologist of Republican China
chengguan	城管	City Management Officer
chengxiang jiaojie chu	城乡交界处	"The common boundary between the urbanity and the rural area" – an expression describing a place where urban and rural polarities border each other
chuan	传	To pass on – used in the context of transmitting knowledge as well as to repost a digital artefact through Weixin
Chuanda	川大	Colloquial designation for Sichuan University
chuantong de	传统的	Traditional (as a polarity to anything modern)
chunwan	春晚	"New Year Gala" - Chinese popular TV variety show aired during the Spring Festival
Dadu he	大渡河	Dadu River
daibiaoxing chuanchengren (xianji, zhouji, shengji, gguojiaji)	代表性传承人（县级、州级、省级、国家级）	Representative heritage transmitter (county, prefectural, provincial and national level)
Daliangshan	大凉山	Topographical or demographical term (depends on the context) pointing to a particular part of Liangshan (Nipmu) and its inhabitants
Deng Xiuting	邓秀廷	Han-Chinese warlord well-versed in Nuosu-Yi culture
denghui	灯会	Lantern Festival
Di, Yi, Man, Rong	狄、夷、蛮、戎	Cardinal points (north, east, south, west) overlapping with ethnonyms in Ancient China
dian	奠	Make offerings to the dead (character usually)
dizhu	地主	Landlord
Dong	东	Chinese surname (a companion of Wang)
Dongguan	东莞	City in Guangdong Proince
Donghe	东河	East River (flowing by Shimazi)
Ebian	峨边彝族自治县	Ebian Yi Autonomous County (Leshan Prefecture)
Fanyi ju Yiwen shurufa	翻译局彝文输入法	Android smartphone app for the input of Nuosu-Yi characters

fashi	法式	Ritual
feihua	废话	Non-sense
fen	分	One-hundredth of *yuan*
gu	蛊	To bewitch, a poison
guojia	国家	Country (a synonym to Communist Party or government)
fazhi shidai	法治时代	An era of rule of law
Fei Xiaotong	费孝通	Chinese anthropologist
fengjian mixin congyezhe	封建迷信从业者	Feudal superstition practitioner (accusation during the Cultural Revolution)
fengshi guanjie	风湿关节	Rheumatoid arthritis
fuhao	符号	Mark or marker (e.g., ethnic marker)
fupin	扶贫	Campaign of Poverty Alleviation
guanfang wenhua	官方文化	Official culture
gui	鬼	Demon
guiyong	规用	Standardized use (of Nuosu-Yi characters)
Guizhou	贵州省	Guizhou Province
guizhu (da, xiao)	鬼主（大、小）	Spirit Master (big, small)
Han baozi	汉包子	Racial slur towards Han Nationality
Hanren	汉人	Han People (colloquial)
Hanzu	汉族	Han Nationality (a majority of PRC inhabitants)
he ma le	喝麻了	Sichuanese Mandarin to
heigutou	黑骨头	“Black Bones” – a designation for *nuohop* aristocratic class with a reference to the bone colour as a marker of purity (black being the purest)
Hexihua	河西话	The unique (sub)dialect of Sichuanese Mandarin
hukou	户口	PRC’s household registration system
huohuashi	活化石	“Living fossil” – a rhetoric concept pointing to allegedly ancient, primordial cultures or practices which somehow survived until today
huxiang xuexi	互相学习	To learn from each other
Jianchang	建昌	The historical name for Xichang
Jianchang gudao	建昌古道	Historical trade route through Liangshan (Nipmu)
jianshi	间史	“Concise history” (e.g., of PRC’s *minzu* ethnic categories/nationalities)
Jiang Yingliang	江应梁	Chinese ethnologist, active predominantly during Republican China
jichengren	继承人	Heir, the successor (of the craft)

jieshang baitan de bimo	街上摆摊的毕摩	The *bimox* who practice in the urban areas or the rural market fairs – usually used with negative connotations
jin	斤	Chinese weight unit (0,5 kg)
jingji fazhan	经济发展	Economic Development (policy/campaign)
jingshen wuran	精神污染	Spiritual pollution (Shamat's interpretation of the condition of one of his clients)
jingshu	经书	The scripture, translation of Nuosu-Yi *tepyy*
Jinsha jiang	金沙江	Jinsha River
jishi	集市	Rotation market fair circulating rural and urban townships of counties of Liangshan (Nipmu) on a 10-day interval (market arrives in the township every ten days)
juedui pinkun	绝对贫困	Absolute poverty (at the time of writing defined as income equal to or below 2300 *yuan*/year)
kaifang	开放	To be open, open-minded
kaihui	开会	To hold a meeting
kaitian pidi	开天辟地	"At the dawn of history" – a phrase usually appearing during the narration of legends and myths
kaocha	考察	To investigate (through research or other means)
kexuejia	科学家	Scientist
Kongfuzi jiushu wang	孔夫子旧书网	Website connecting Chinese antique book shops
kujiao (da, xiao, zhong)	裤脚（大、小、中）	"Bottom of the trousers" (big, small, medium) – ethnic marker pointing to different regions of Liangshan (Nipmu) – Shypnra, Yynuo, Suondip/Adur – based on garments
lao popo	老婆婆	Old lady
laochengqu	老城区	Old Town (of Xichang)
laotour	老头儿	"Old man" – Jjixke V.'s way of referring to his father, a predecessor of his *bimox* craft
Leng Guangdian	岭光电	Nuosu-Yi native headman (*nzymop* / *tusi*), a modernizer
Leibo	雷波县	Leibo County
Leshan	乐山市	Leshan Prefecture (north of Liangshan)
Li	李	Chinese surname (Wang's wife whom he cursed)
Liangshan Yizu nuli	凉山彝族奴隶社会博	Museum of Yi Nationality's Slave

shehui bowuguan	物馆	Society
Liangshan Yizu zizhizhou	凉山彝族自治州	Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture
lilun	理论	Theory
Lin Yaohua	林耀华	Lolopo-Yi ethnologist, a native of Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, one of the founders of the modern Yi Studies
Ling Bangzheng	岭邦正	Ling Banzheng – an influential native headman, heir of the domain of Lili *nzymop*
lingdao	领导	A "leader" - could point to the influential official under the Communist regime or a person
lingpai	灵牌	Soul tablet (translation of *maddu*/*nipddu*)
Liu Wenhui	刘文辉	Warlord of Xikang Province from Republical Era
liuzu	六祖	Legendary six sons of the Nuosu-Yi primordial ancestor Axpu Ddutmu
Long Yun	龙云	Warlord of Yunnan (native to Jinyang County)
Lu	卢	Chinese surname
Lugu	泸沽镇	Lugu Township
Luo Jiaxiu	罗家修	Nuosu-Yi scholar of ethnology, linguistics, literature and astronomy
luoluo	倮罗	Obsolete and pejorative ethnonym for Nuosu-Yi
minzhu gaige	民主改革	Democratic Reforms
minzu	民族	The Chinese concept of Nationality (ethnic category)
minzu shibie	民族识别	Campaign
minzu tuanjie	民族团结	Campaign of "Nationality Solidarity"
minzuzhi	民族志	Ethnography
Ma Changshou	马长寿	Han-Chinese anthropologist of the Republican era
Mabian	马边彝族自治县	Mabian Yi Autonomous County (Leshan Prefecture)
majiang	麻将	Mahjong – a popular Chinese tile-based game
Mentuhui	门徒会	"Society of the Gate Followers" – is a chiliastic, Christianity-based sect
mixin	迷信	"Superstition" (under Communist rule used as antagonism to Religion or Science)
modi	摩的	Mototaxi (Sichuanese Mandarin)
Muli	木里藏族自治县	Muli Tibetan Autonomous County
Ningyuan fu	宁远府	The historical name for the

		administrative unit, similar to Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture
Panzhihua	攀枝花	Panzhihua Prefecture
pidou	批斗	Publicly criticizing and denouncing an individual during the Cultural Revolution
po si jiu	破四旧	"Destroy Four Olds" - a campaign during the Cultural Revolution
Putonghua	普通话	Modern Standard Chinese
Qiliba	七里坝	Grassland above Xichang (Latbbu Oprro) in Lipmu Juojjop (Zhaojue County)
quzhengzhihua	去政治化	De-politicization (Ma Rong's concept)
Sanxingdui	三星堆	Sanxingdui – a major archaeological site near Deyang, Sichuan Province
shehuizhuyi xin nongcun jianshe	社会主义新农村建设	The Construction of New Socialist Countryside – a policy of the PRC's central government
shen	神	Spirit (positive connotation)
shen yao liang jiefa	神药两解法	To cure by medicine as well as spirits – mixing the so-called Western medicine with ritual practice
shenfen	身份	Identity
sheng bu ru si	生不如死	"May your life turn into suffering worse than death" – a sentence written on Li's photograph by her husband Wang
shengui xinyang	神鬼信仰	"Belief in ghosts and spirits" – a belief in supernatural beings
shengxue	生学	Physiology
Shengzha	圣乍	Shypnra
Shenzhen	深圳市	Shenzhen City
Shimazi	石码子	Shimazi Marketplace
Shizishan	狮子山	Shamat Mothxobbo – Lion Mountain
shua	耍	To have fun, to play (in Sichuanese Mandarin)
Sichou zhi lu	丝绸之路	Silk Road
Sichuan	四川省	Sichuan Province
Sichuanhua	四川话	Sichuanese Mandarin dialect
suanming	算命	A practice of counting of auspicious days (seen as "fortune-telling"
Tianba	田坝	One of the Nuosu-Yi dialects
tongyong	通用	Universal use (of Nuosu-Yi characters)
Tuanjiehua	团结话	Pidgin mixing Sichuanese Mandarin with several Nuosu-Yi dialects
tusi zhidu	土司制度	Native Chieftain System
wai	歪	Fake, not genuine (Sichuanese

		Mandarin)
Wang	王	Chinese surname (Jjixke V.'s client, cursing his wife Li)
wanr	玩儿	To have fun, to play (in Putonghua)
Weixin	微信	China's multi-purpose smartphone app
wenhua	文化	Culture
wenhuahua	文化化	Culturalization (Ma Rong's concept)
wenming chengshi	文明城市	"Civilized city" – a title bestowed on cities with good governance by the superordinate administration
wenzhang	文章	Article
wu dong xian	五东县	Five counties seen as the core area: Lipmu Juojjop (Zhaojue County), Lipmu Moggux (Meigu County), Njitla Buxte (Butuo County), Axhuo Tenzy (Jinyang County), Gatlyp Mopbbo (Leibo County)
wuge zaichang	五个在场	Bamo Qubumo's theoretical-methodological concept related to textualization of the performance
wu zu gong he	五族共和	Republican concept of Five Races Under One Union
xiang	乡	Rural township
Xiaoliangshan	小凉山	Administrative or demographical term (depends on the context) pointing to a particular part of Liangshan (Nipmu) and its inhabitants
Xichang	西昌市	Xichang City (Latbbu Oprro)
Xinhua	新华书店	Xinhua Bookstore
Xinjiang	新疆维吾尔族自治区	Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region
xinli anwei	心理安慰	Psychological relief
xinyang	信仰	Belief
xinkufei	辛苦费	The reward for *bimox* for his services (translation of *bixrre*)
xiong de	凶的	In this context similar as *lihai* – pointing to somebody with extremely strong capabilities
xipo	西婆	*Sippo* (a clan leader)
Xishuangbanna	西双版纳傣族自治州	Sipsongpanna (Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture
xuefei	学费	Tuition
Yanbian	盐边县	Yanbian County
yangpitai	羊皮胎	"Sheepskin tyre" – a tool of *beihejiang* (the carry-over-river craftsmen)
Yanyuan	盐源县	Yanyuan County (Cemo Lurkur)
Yi	彝族	One of PRC's fifty-six state-crafted nationalities
yishi (xiao, da)	仪式（大、小）	Ritual (big, small)

yishu chuangzao	艺术创造	Artistic creation (related to *bimox* scriptures)
yishu jiagong	艺术加工	Artistic polishing (related to *bimox* scriptures)
Yixue	彝学	Yi Studies, Yiology
yizu wenhua fuxinqu	彝族文化复心区	Core Area of Yi Culture (Lipmu Juojjop, Limpu Moggux, Njitla Buxte)
yuan	元	PRC currency unit (at the time of writing, 1 USD = approx. 7 CNY)
yuanshengtai	原生态	"Original ecology" – a concept pointing to an unspoiled, "green" environment as a polarity to the modern cities
yuanshi	原始	"Original" or "primitive" - depending on the context
Yuanxiao	元宵	Lantern Festival
Yunnan	云南省	Yunnan Province
Zhaojue	昭觉县	Zhaojue County (Lipmu Juojjop)
zhishui guanyin	治水观音	"Water-stopping Bodhisattva" – a statue erected near Shimazi Marketplace to help safeguard the city from the devastating floods
Zhang	张	Chinese surname (a companion of Wang)
Zhongguo Meigu Yizu bimo wenhua yanjiu zhongxin	中国美姑彝族毕摩文化研究中心	China's Meigu Yi Bimo Culture Research Centre – an institution researching the Bimo Culture in Meigu County (Lipmu Moggux)
Zhonghua minzu	中华民族	A political term connected to Chinese nationalism which encompasses discussion on nation-building, ethnicity and race of the Chinese nationality, which is nowadays composed of 56 ethnicities (*minzu*).
zhiye	职业	Profession
zhuanjia	专家	"Expert" or "Academic" - depending on the context, could be used as both respectful and pejorative designation
ziyou di	自由地	"Free land" - referring to the semi-dry riverbed of East River
zongjiao	宗教	Religion

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