Journal of Chinese History (2025), 1–35
doi:10.1017/jch.2024.54

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Officialdom and Nativeness: Mutually Appropriating the State and the Nuosu-Yi Native Chieftain Clans in Southwest China

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(Received 06 December 2022; revised 26 August 2024; accepted 17 October 2024)

Abstract

Southwest China is a region that has been perhaps uniquely shaped over the *longue durée* by mutual appropriations of status, authority, land, material culture, genealogies, and cultural-historical identities. Drawing on both ethnographic fieldwork and the official and unofficial Chinese and Nuosu-Yi textual evidence, in this article I offer a new view of how, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, native officials were shaped by their efforts at appropriating elements of officialdom (responsibility towards the court) and nativeness (adherence to local customs). My historical textual-cum-anthropological analysis builds on C. Patterson Giersch's notion of the "middle grounds" between the Chinese state and its borderland peoples to reveal "further ways" of uncovering the history of their history. I show that mutual appropriations of officialdom and nativeness have led to specific forms of acculturation that are neither linear nor irreversible. Cultural hybridizations underpin the current Yi core identity and culture in Liangshan today.

Keywords: Liangshan; Nuosu-Yi; native chieftaincy; mutual appropriation; genealogy

Introduction

During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Chinese empire drew on past experiences of indirect rule to negotiate individual relationships with the malleable ethnic elites at its borderlands. Endowing them with Chinese surnames, hereditary succession rights, and military titles, it sought to influence the governance of local affairs in areas that its bureaucrats found hard or even impossible to govern. Despite being a rather "unstable

Nuosu-Yi italicized expressions and personal names that are alternative to Chinese ones are preceded by "Nuo." and appear in the standard transcription without tonal suffixes followed by the Nuosu-Yi script. Chinese italicized expressions and personal names that are alternative to the Nuosu-Yi are preceded by "Ch." Latin expressions are preceded by "Lat."

alliance,"[1] this approach came to be labeled the "native chieftain system" (Ch. *tusi zhidu* 土司制度). Ideally, these appointed elites served first as military native chieftains (Ch. *tusi*) and then, after becoming more knowledgeable of the court's etiquette, as bureaucratic (Ch. *tuguan* 土官) native officials-interlocutors.[2] Their domains lay in the gray area at the outer or inner fringes of the empire's borders. Appointing native officials put these lands and their rulers on track towards full membership in the Chinese state and its bureaucracy. Yet, as long as they remained "native" enough and their subordinates did not fully observe the etiquette, rites, and ideologies stipulated by the court—which often consisted of one or more shifting interpretations of Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist doctrines—they remained segregated from the core imperial bureaucracy. Instead of taxes, which they could impose on their subordinates and pocket themselves, the military native chieftains were obliged to provide the imperial court with both material and human military resources, known as the "native troops" (Ch. *tubing* 土兵), to assist the imperial armies in their various missions. From the viewpoint of the imperial court, the endgame was for the native chieftains to pass the *tusi* and *tuguan* stages so that their domains could be brought under the control of its own non-hereditary career bureaucrats (Ch. *liuguan* 流官), in a process called "changing the native unit into one governed by an official" (Ch. *gaitu guiliu* 改土歸流, shortened as *gailiu*), which turned native domains into integral parts of the empire (Ch. *neidi* 內地).[3] Theoretically, the native headmen who had been successfully transformed and enlightened (Ch. *hua* 化)[4] by accepting the court's rite-ideology, or by having one of their descendants educated in the state-sponsored borderland charitable Confucian schools (Ch. *yixue* 義學), could become full-fledged career bureaucrats. The *gailiu* process was often full of violent competition for power among the state and the various local populations, which caused many native officials to be deposed and many of their families to fall into oblivion; they thus rarely made it to the central bureaucracy, but were more often replaced by career bureaucrats of other ethnicities coming from other locations within the empire. However, as I will show, this process of so-called Sinicization was in many instances far from straightforward or irreversible.

The non-Chinese historical research on the relations between the state and the locals in Southwest China mostly examines the Chinese imperial colonial expansionist project in its borderlands. To a large extent, it describes this from the point of view of the imperial colonizers who left behind many Chinese-language bureaucratic records of their endeavors.[5] Within this broader analytical frame of Chinese imperial colonialism, Charles Patterson Giersch has drawn attention to the experience of Southwest China's indigenous Yunnanese Tai people who inhabited the "'middle grounds,' places of fluid

[1]Leo K. Shin, *The Making of the Chinese State: Ethnicity and Expansion on the Ming Borderlands* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 74–99.

[2]In the primary sources and the literature, the distinction between the two is often blurred, and the term "*tusi*" is used almost universally for all kinds and hierarchical levels of native chieftains.

[3]Gong Yin 龔蔭, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu* 中國土司製度 (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 1992), 1–168.

[4]William T. Rowe, *Saving the World: Chen Hongmou and Elite Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001), 406.

[5]John Herman, *Amid the Clouds and Mist: China's Colonization of Guizhou, 1200–1700* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); Laura Hostetler, *Qing Colonial Enterprise—Ethnography and Cartography in Early Modern China* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001); Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes: Expansion, Settlement, and the Civilizing of the Sichuan Frontier in Song Times* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, Council of East Asian Studies, 1987).

cultural and economic exchanges where acculturation and the creation of hybrid political institutions were contingent on local conditions."[6] In contrast, Chinese authors, such as Wen Chunlai, who works on the Yi communities of Northwest Guizhou Province and incorporates both Yi-language sources and ethnographic fieldwork into his historical analysis, rejects the colonial lens and argues that local communities interacted with the empire through trade routes that not only mutually benefitted the empire and local communities, but also facilitated the integration of the region into the unified structure of the Chinese state.[7] These are all valuable and valid points. However, more is needed to fully explain the events in the southwestern native domain of Mahu that are central to this article. The grand narratives of "imperial-colonizer vs. indigenous-colonized" have only limited analytical purchase among the slaveholding and expansionist Yi communities of Southwest China, who had their own colonial-like tendencies. Many Yi native headmen were, for example, joined by other sectors of their population in setting aside their shared penchant for colonial expansion in their own area so that they could better resist and/or participate in the colonial project of the empire. The same can be said for grand narratives of historical economic integration, which can only account for some of the cultural hybridization that has unfolded—and continues to unfold—in Mahu today.

The borderland micro-region formerly called Mahu Prefecture, which is now divided between three prefecture-level administrative units of Sichuan Province—Leibo County 雷波縣 (Liangshan 涼山彝族自治州), Pingshan County 屏山縣 (Yibin 宜賓市), and Muchuan County 沐川縣 (Leshan 樂山市) (see Figure 1)—is inhabited by the Liangshan Yi and the Han. The ancestors of people that appeared in various pre-modern textual sources under the exonyms Yi 夷, Lolo 猓玀, Man 蠻, Miao 苗, and their various combinations are nowadays recognized by the People's Republic of China (PRC) as the internally diverse Yi Nationality (彝族) that inhabits different vast regions of Southwest China. Their various communities speak in mutually related languages classed as Tibeto-Burman, while some of them write in different scripts and practice varied customs. Since at least the first millennium BCE, the kingdoms of their ancestors continually incorporated the lands and resources of smaller local ethnic communities and even of themselves through marriage or conquest, which eventually turned them into the Nanzhao Kingdom 南詔, a major, formidable, and feared force across a large part of what is now Southwest China.[8] The Liangshan Yi today self-identify as Nuosu ꆈꌠ (literally "Black People") and continue to follow their genealogy-based social order (Nuo. *cyvi* ꁌꁯ). Until the Democratic Reforms (Ch. *minzhu gaige* 民主改革) in the mid-1950s, they were known and feared for their slaveholding.[9] Their elites, who were endowed with the imperial insignia, were seen by the empire as native chieftains, but from the Nuosu-Yi perspective they were

[6]Charles Patterson Giersch, *Asian Borderlands: The Transformation of Qing China's Yunnan Frontier* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 3–4.

[7]Wen Chunlai 溫春來, *Cong "yi yu" dao "jiu jiang": Song zhi Qing Guizhou xibei diqu de zhidu, kaifa yu rentong* 從『異域』到『舊疆』:宋至清貴州西北部地區的製度、開發與認同 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, [2019] 2020); Yang Tingshuo 楊庭碩 and Zeng Huiyang 楊曾輝, "Lun Zhongguo tusi yhidu yu xifang zhimin huodong de qubie" 論中國土司製度與西方殖民活動的區別, *Guizhou minzu yanjiu* 35.2 (2014), 174–79.

[8]Charles Backus, *The Nan-chao Kingdom and T'ang China's Southwestern Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); John Herman, "The Kingdoms of Nanzhong: China's Southwest Border Region Prior to the Eighth Century," *T'oung Pao* 95.4 (2009), 241–86.

[9]In Nuosu-Yi language, the slaves were called *gaxy* (ꀋꑍ) and the serfs *ggajie* (ꑉꑟ). In the local language variant of Chinese, they were designated as *wazi* (娃子). Over generations, they could buy themselves out from their masters and become free commoners (*qunuo* ꀘꌠ).

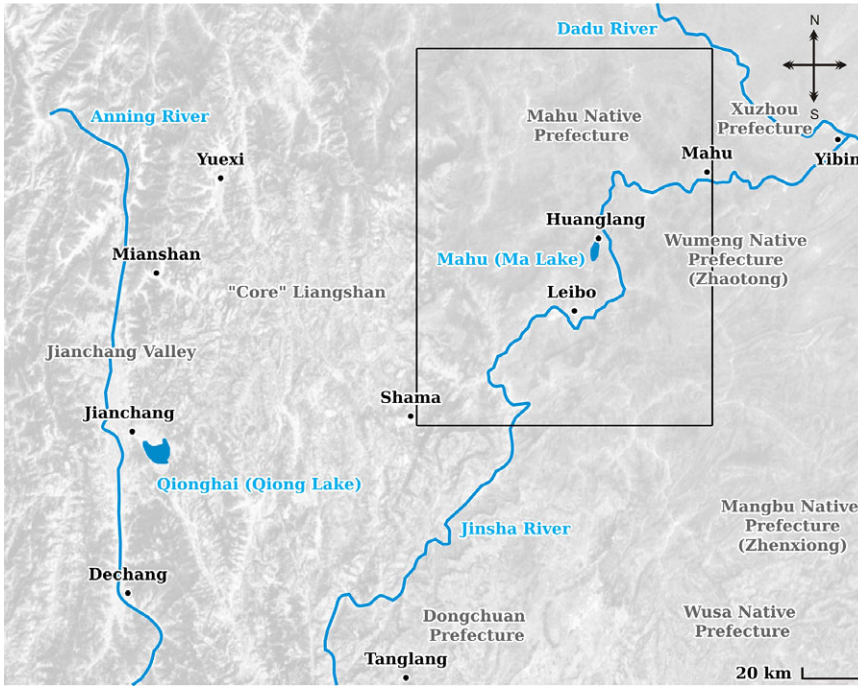

Figure 1. Location of the Mahu area in Liangshan and adjacent regions (Courtesy of the author, Google and TerraMetrics, 2022).

perceived as sovereign rulers (Nuo. *nzymo* ꆹꌠ) who existed alongside two main social strata: the endogamous aristocrats (Nuo. *nuoho* ꆀꉆ) and the non-aristocrats (Nuo. *quho* ꀋꀕ). The *nzymo* stratum members claimed to stand above all other social strata, but their position was often contested by the *nuoho* stratum. The people called *bimo* ꁈꂾ, who constitute a specialized vocational stratum of ritualists and genealogical record-keepers, in many respects also led the animistic-religious life of the Nuosu-Yi, and indeed of the wider Yi nationality. Across Southwest China, the Yi animistic cosmologies are flexible and open to absorbing many ideological, religious, and other concepts that lie outside of their purview.[10]

Among the Yi native chieftains, the Mahu clans stand out for having been deposed from their native offices and reappointed again several times over the *longue durée.* The Mahu clans' tendency to appropriate elements of both officialdom and nativeness allows us to take further the extant approaches to native chieftaincy, which emphasize Chinese imperial colonialism or trade between local communities and the empire. By officialdom, I mean the propensity for leaning into state policies, being a considerably loyal servant of the imperial courts, going with the empire and engaging with its ritual etiquette-ideology. In contrast, my use of the term nativeness points to the tendency to distance oneself, relatively speaking, from the empire and to show at least a supposed adherence to local Yi ways of life, customs, and rituals. Officialdom and nativeness do not constitute a

[10]Jihe Caihua 吉合蔡華, *Daojiao yu Yizu chuantong wenhua* 道教與彝族傳統文化 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2005).

dichotomy, but rather a sliding scale with the imperial court at one end and local Yi lifeways at the other. What we find in the case of Mahu when analyzed through the lens of imperial officials and natives (including their headmen), I suggest, are mutual appropriations of officialdom and nativeness.[11] These appropriations unfolded through various forms of competition, collaboration, or violent conflict among the people of native chieftaincies (including their subordinates) and/or between them and the Chinese state. Cultural, economic, political, and material resources were all harnessed to this end, so that officials and natives mutually appropriated each other's status, authority, land, material culture, genealogies, and identity-forming historical narratives. Most importantly, the case of Mahu's native headmen shows that while the road from nativeness to officialdom touches upon a stage that Giersch calls the "middle grounds"—a phase which produces hybrid spaces and cultures such as those that he described in the "Crescent" between the Mekong and Salween rivers in Yunnan Province—it is far from being a straight, unidirectional, and finite line running from indigeneity to Sinicization. In Mahu, the "middle grounds" were not a mid-way stage on the way towards an irreversible transformation of the indigenous Yi into agency-less Chinese subjects. The Yi often elided Sinicization by moving, expanding, and assimilating other local inhabitants in ways that call into question their own indigeneity in the region. The winding "further ways" unleashed by the interactions between the Mahu Yi native chieftains and the Chinese state over the *longue durée*, then, led to variously conceived and positioned hybridities, which speak to the reluctance of either the state or the native populations to commit to one side fully. Both sides have continued to mutually appropriate elements of each other's lives up to the present day, as a way of keeping their culture relevant and maintaining some authority over its history. The creativity underpinning their strategies of mutual appropriation, I suggest, even enabled a specific form of hybridization that probably underpins the current Yi core identity and culture in Mahu and Liangshan at large.

The scarce and fragmentary records that I worked with are scattered among Chinese-language official dynastic histories, provincial and prefectural gazetteers, personal writings, tombstone and bronze bell inscriptions, Nuosu-Yi language genealogies, oral histories narrating the collective memories of living descendants, lively ethnographies produced by journeying through Mahu's landscape (as I did in 2011, 2014, 2016 and 2023), and academic writings. This eclectic assemblage of records is specific not only to Mahu, but to the whole of Liangshan, where records were repeatedly lost due to recurrent instances of turmoil. The silences that fill the vast spaces between these fragments are productive indications of intense nativeness. Over the several years I spent putting this information together, I often thought of Collingwood's vision of history as a compilation of phases coming together by a "scissors-and-paste" method,[12] and the importance of not falling into the trap, as Mark Hobart[13] puts it, of lacking the critical questioning that requires re-evaluating one's own thinking about the past. In 2023, I was able to finally meet an elderly Nuosu-Yi direct descendant of the major *tusi-nzymo* clan of Mahu, whom I call by the pseudonym of Hxala Shyge to protect his identity. His generosity in

[11]This relation between highland Liangshan and the empire was already somewhat indirectly suggested by Joseph Lawson; see Joseph Lawson, *A Frontier Made Lawless: Violence in Upland Southwest China, 1800–1956* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017), 5, 136, 156.

[12]R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), 33.

[13]Mark Hobart, "The Missing Subject: Balinese Time and the Elimination of History," in *After Culture: Anthropology as Radical Metaphysical Critique*, edited by Mark Hobart (Yogyakarta: Duta Wacana University Press, 2000), 235.

recounting the history of his own family, his advice and encouragement, and his reflections on my own historical and ethnographic findings which were gathered in the libraries and wider landscape of the former Mahu, were essential for pulling these fragments together. Working with Hxala Shyge enabled me to not only uncover some of the remarkable history of Mahu Prefecture, but also to tell, in Harrell's[14] sense of the term, "the history of the history" of the region as seen through the history-making of the local Nuosu-Yi native chieftain clans. Throughout this article, then, I reflexively evaluate the nature of these fragmentary sources for our understanding of the history of Mahu. When analyzed separately against the backdrop of a particular historical person, time period, or event, some of these fragments might give the impression of an "impossibility of translation, accommodation, or mutual interpretation"[15] between mutually antagonistic or even incommensurable discourses.[16] However, when put together over the *longue durée*, they tell the story of how massive social and political changes unfolded as two sides of the same coin in Southwest China. By pairing an analysis of Chinese and Nuosu-Yi texts with my ethnographic fieldwork findings, I set out to take the study of the micropolitics of cultural hybridity in Southwest China—as spearheaded by Charles Patterson Giersch, Jennifer Took,[17] and Jodi L. Weinstein[18]—a step further. The opportunity to collaborate with Hxala Shyge, a living inheritor of the *tusi* insignia, whose voice is intimately fed into my own historical textual-cum-anthropological analysis[19], opens up an important further way of researching native chieftaincies in Southwest China.

The article is divided into six parts. I start with the moment the imperial courts saw the native chieftains in Mahu in favorable terms and let them appropriate the court's own ideology of status and rites while bestowing various titles upon them. Then I narrate the circumstances surrounding their empire-initiated fall from officialdom and their retreat to nativeness deep in the mountains, where they contested the imperial appropriation of authority over their lands and people. After a century of silence, due to instability at its borderlands, the court was forced to reinstate the clans to their former positions, whereupon they took different sides during the Mitie massacre. This major historical upheaval took place between the locals and the imperial armies on both sides of the Jinsha riverbank in the broader context of a conflict over land appropriation. From here, I turn to the gradual disappearance of the *nzymo*—this time from the prominence of the official historical records—which I show through my analysis of the materialities, spatialities, and texts surrounding their tombs. These are material repositories of the ongoing cultural

[14]Stevan Harrell, "The History of the History of the Yi," in *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers*, edited by Stevan Harrell (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 63–91; Stevan Harrell and Li Yongxiang, "The History of the History of the Yi, Part II," *Modern China* 29.3 (2003), 362–96.

[15]Erik Mueggler, "Corpse, Stone, Door, Text," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73.1 (2014), 31.

[16]Erik Mueggler, "Lady Qu's Inscriptions: Literacy and Sovereignty in a Native Domain, Southwest China," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80.1 (2021), 40.

[17]Jennifer Took, *A Native Chieftaincy in Southwest China: Franchising a Tai Chieftaincy Under the Tusi System of Late Imperial China* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).

[18]Jodi L. Weinstein, *Empire and Identity in Guizhou: Local Resistance to Qing Expansion* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014).

[19]For a study of the "reflexive feedback loops" through which the anthropologist's research partners may feed their own voices, ideas, ethnographic examples, and even scholarly reflections into both the anthropologist's work and anthropology at large, see Katherine Swancutt and Mireille Mazard, "Introduction: Anthropological Knowledge Making, the Reflexive Feedback Loop, and Conceptualizations of the Soul," in *Animism Beyond the Soul: Ontology, Reflexivity, and the Making of Anthropological Knowledge*, edited by Katherine Swancutt and Mireille Mazard (New York: Berghahn, 2018), 1–17.

hybridization wrought by tendency of the *nzymo* to lean alternately towards officialdom or nativeness. In the penultimate part of the article, I discuss how the native chieftaincies and the imperial court mutually appropriated both the official and the Nuosu-Yi native genealogies, the entanglement of which is crucial to our current historical understanding of Mahu. Finally, I conclude by showing how all these events and their descriptions in official and native materials speak to the build-up not only of the local cultural-historical narrative of the Chinese nation-state, but also of its crucial role in forming what many Nuosu-Yi experience as their culture and identity today.

Status: The native officials of Mahu and their titles

Since the earliest official records, Mahu was a liminal area in which the Shu-Han 蜀漢 court gained a foothold by establishing it as a county (Mahu xian 馬湖縣). The toponym emerged in histories after Zhuge Liang's 諸葛亮 southern expedition in the year 225, where he allegedly confronted a strong local chieftain called Moho ꃅꂾ (also known as Legge Ashy ꀋꋍꂿꒉ; Ch. Meng Huo 孟獲) and his tribe-clan designated by the name of their leader. "Mahu" in fact seems to be a Chinese transcription of "Moho," as the local toponyms often derived from native clan designations. Tang and Song-Dynasty sources called the administrative unit the "Mahu tribal area" (Mahu bu 馬湖部). The Mongol rulers of the Yuan Dynasty restructured it as the Mahu Circuit (Mahu lu 馬湖路) ruled by a native chieftain, or *nzymo*, of the Hxala ꎺꀕ clan, under which six subordinate native offices were created in Nixi 泥溪, Pingyi 平夷, Manyi 蠻夷, Yidu 夷都, Muchuan 沐川, and Leibo, all lying westwards from Hxala *nzymo*'s seat. The westernmost Leibo office was held by the Azho ꂿꁯ clan. This whole setup created a buffer zone between the perpetually untamed anarchic area of Liangshan to the west, and the eastern empire-dominated region now known as Yibin, an important settlement on the axis of the local trading routes firmly under imperial control. Mahu Prefecture was thus a double periphery from the viewpoints of the court-dominated state and the Nuosu-dominated core Liangshan area, where everyone mingled, exchanged, traded, and fought with each other. At one point, the Yuan rulers moved the seat of the Mahu circuit to Yibu xikou 夷部溪口 and connected it to the southeastern bank of the Jinsha River (金沙江, Nuo. Ahuo Shyyy ꀀꃅꑱꌠ) that immediately bordered the Wumeng Circuit (烏蒙路). However, in 1305, the seat was moved back to the northwestern riverbank and shifted eastwards to the Nixi area,[20] which was easier to defend. In official Chinese records, the Hxala appear under the locally ubiquitous surname An 安 ("Tranquil," representing the court's hope for an appeased borderland), while the Azho are surnamed Yang 楊 (another widespread surname pointing to several kinds of trees, the local commodity). After the Yuan, the Ming Dynasty turned Mahu into a "native prefecture" (Mahu tufu 馬湖土府; see Figures 2 and 3).[21]

Sitting with Hxala Shyge in a smoky and stuffy teahouse in Liangshan's metropolis of Xichang 西昌, where we sipped green tea from Leibo, we tried to make sense of the history of Hxala/An in what used to be Mahu, and as seen through official and personal accounts. Hxala Shyge himself has written in an appendix to his unpublished document that the genealogical records of Hxala were lost three times. They were allegedly lost first in 1645,

[20]He Shen 和珅, *Da Qing yi tong zhi* 大清一統志 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuaguan, 1986), 302.2a–2b; Song Lian 宋濂, *Yuan shi* 元史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1976), 39.4a–4b, 60.26a.

[21]He, *Da Qing yi tong zhi*, 301.5b–8b; Yu Chengxun 余承勳, *Mahu fu zhi* 馬湖府志 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji shudian yingyin, 1992), 1.1a–6b.

Figure 2. View of the Mahu area during the mid-Ming (Yu, *Mahu fu zhi*, "Xu" 7a–7b).

Figure 3. Detail of the Mahu Area (Courtesy of the author, Google and TerraMetrics, 2022).

when the anti-Ming/anti-Qing forces of Zhang Xianzhong 張憲忠 pillaged Sichuan and burned the temples in Mahu, including the ancestral temple of the Hxala on the Jinsha's southeastern riverbank. Their second loss is thought to have occurred in 1730, when the

office of the Hxala clan was burned down by the rebelling Yi mob. Their genealogy then finally disappeared during the Cultural Revolution's campaign to "Destroy the Four Olds" 破四舊 in the 1960s.[22] However, an online website featuring an article written by two alleged descendants of the Hxala *nzymo* from Yunnan Province mentions a quasi-historical document called *The Record of Merits and Deeds of Mahu Prefecture's Hereditary Officials of the An Clan* (世襲馬湖府職官安氏宗籍功德實錄記)[23] written by Hxala clan member An Zhou 安洲 in 1868, which neither Hxala Shyge nor I have been able to get hold of. The historical credibility of both the website and this document remains unclear, not least because when the document was written in the nineteenth century, it was narrating events that allegedly happened two millennia earlier without providing any further sources for the author's claims. Similarly, a record from the Ming Dynasty's Jiajing-era gazetteer for Mahu Prefecture, written in 1555, claims that the Hxala had already resided in the region since the Han Dynasty for fifty-eight generations.[24] This assertion also does not seem to be based on any plausible historical records. Both accounts probably can be attributed to the snowballing of reproduced assertions from individuals of different time periods who wanted to impart their own clan with historical authority. There are far more authoritative records about the Hxala clan residing in the Mahu area since the Tang and Song dynasties, which, however, do not mention their Han-Dynasty origin.[25] Nevertheless, An Zhou's document, which Hxala Shyge never saw and quoted only from a second-hand account similar to that appearing online, sides with the gazetteer and claims that the history of Hxala begins in 135 BCE when the Han Dynasty established the local ancient trading route called Bodao 僰道. An Zhou's document also mentions Hxala clan members, who in the years 620 and 757, respectively, received the court's insignia confirming their authority over their lands and the local population.[26] The first date and name that I was able to confirm in the dynastic chronicle of the Song Dynasty comes from 974, when Dong Chongxi 董舂惜 (Nuo. Hxala Yydi ꆏꂷꃅꂵ), a "prince" (Ch. *wangzi* 王子) of thirty-seven tribes of the Mahu bu, brought horses as tribute to the imperial court.[27] More detailed records started to appear only in the early Hongwu era of the Ming Dynasty. Everything began with the ceremonial journey made by the Hxala officials of Mahu to the seat of the imperial court, where they presented tribute and received, in line with Confucian etiquette, valuable objects in the form of caps, belts, and other garments placed on top of their most important gift—their official insignia presented on documents and as seals. This was supposed to prompt them to continue learning court rituals and spreading them among their subjects.

Hxala Shyge's narrative coalesces with various official sources[28] claiming that, in 1371, the acting circuit native administrator An Ji 安濟 (Nuo. Hxala Boshy ꆏꂷꂱꉆ) sent his son An Ren 安仁 (Nuo. Hxala Bodi ꆏꂷꂱꂵ)[29] with a larger delegation of his subordinates—including, for

[22]Hxala Shyge, *Fuyan* 附言 (Unpublished, 2023).

[23]See An Dayin 安大銀 and An Daquan 安大全, "Mahu fu An shi suyuan" 馬湖府安氏溯源, *Zupuwang* (August 10, 2019), http://an.zupu.cn/yuanliu/306403.jhtml.

[24]Yu, *Mahu fu zhi*, 3b.3a.

[25]No author, *Ming Xiaozong shilu* 明孝宗實錄 (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2016), 103.9a–9b.

[26]Hxala Shyge, *Yunnan sheng Yongshan xian Axing tuqianhu Hala An shi tusi jianjie* 雲南省永善縣阿興土千戶哈拉·安氏土司簡介 (Unpublished, 2009), 1–2.

[27]Toqto'a 托克托 and Aruqtu 阿魯圖, *Song shi* 宋史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 496.20b.

[28]They slightly differ in dating. I am using the only dating that appears in two of these sources.

[29]He is also recorded as An Ben 安本, while Hxala Shyge's document claims that An Ren and An Ben were two different people. See Hxala, *Yunnan sheng Yongshan xian Axing tuqianhu Hala*, 3.

example, Wang Qi 王麒 of Nixi, the chieftaincy closest to the Mahu administrative center—to officially submit to the court. As a result, the circuit was transformed into a native prefecture (Ch. *tufu* 土府) and the headman of An Ren's lineage was confirmed as both the *tuguan* bureaucratic native official and the holder of its native prefect title (Ch. *tuzhi* 土知, military rank 4a).[30] Officials from Nixi and five other sub-regions also gained the title of chiefs (Ch. *zhangguansi* 長官司, 6a). Two years later, An Ji informed the emperor that he was in poor health and requested his replacement by An Ren, which the court approved. In 1374, however, An Demin 安德珉, a nephew of An Ji from the same patriline, sent his younger brother to the court, possibly in hopes of switching the court's alliance to his intra-clan lineage. The imperial officer told him that his uncle had already sent his son three years earlier, who had been confirmed as successor. His actions were deemed inappropriate and the horses he had brought as tribute were refused. An Demin did not give up. The competition for the native prefect post continued for more than a decade. In 1379, he brought the precious timber of the local *xiang nanmu* tree 香枏木 (Lat. *phoebe zhennan*), and in 1383 he brought eighteen horses. For both, he received a reward of reciprocal value in clothing, money, and rations (rice). In 1403, however, An Ren re-emerged as the sole holder of the native prefect of Mahu, possibly coming out as victorious from this intra-clan struggle for power.

Horses and the rare wood of *phoebe zhennan* were the two most precious commodities of Mahu. The local timber was used to craft wooden pillars in the Forbidden City built between 1406 and 1420. Under An Ren, the Yidu Mountain (夷都山, today's Wuzhi Mountain 五指山) became a center of timber extraction. The Yongle Emperor issued an edict ordering it to be renamed as Spirit Wood Mountain (神木山) and to have the Spirit Wood Mountain Shrine (神木山祠) built on it for yearly magnanimous offerings,[31] which according to locals in contemporary Zhongdu Township (中都鎮), continued along with the timber extraction and trade until the Cultural Revolution in the twentieth century. At the very beginning of this centuries-long practice, the Hxala got very close to the court. They also extended this proximity to their subordinate chiefs through marriage. An Jun 安濬, who succeeded An Ren in 1407, together with Wang Feng 王鳳 of Nixi, built a Buddhist Temple of Heavenly Tranquility (天寧寺, also known as the Cooling Temple 清凉寺) on the northwestern bank of the Jinsha River. Other accomplishments are attributed to An Hong 安洪 who inherited the office from An Hao 安灝 in 1452 and significantly assisted the provincial governor of Sichuan in taming the borderlands, for which he received an official cap and a belt of the Grand Master of Palace Accord (中順大夫, 4a). Together with Nixi chieftain Wang Mingde 王明德, An Hong subsequently cast a bronze bell (see Figure 4) which was later placed in the Temple of Eternal Longevity (萬壽寺) located near the Nixi chieftaincy as another Buddhist place of worship. Yet, like his father, he died prematurely, and in 1470 the office ended up in the hands of his oldest son, An Ao 安鰲 (Nuo. Hxala Mynge ꒰ꓷꓰ꒱).

This development might have been an ideal example of the transformation process through which the Hxala and other native officials were ideologically incorporated into the Chinese realm by way of Confucian rituals that interconnected with the religion(s) that its rulers promoted. However, An Ao was described in the official sources as a cruel leader who inflicted great suffering on his people. He allegedly overtaxed them, behaved

[30]The scale of ranks ran from 1a to 9b. Every rank had a higher position (*zheng* 正—thus "a") and a lower position (*cong* 從—"b").

[31]See Hu Guang 胡廣, "Shenmu shan ci ji" 神木山詞祠記, in Zhang Jinsheng 張晉生, *Sichuan tongzhi* 四川通志 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu, 1984), 42.10a–12a.

Figure 4. One of the bronze bells of the Mahu area, now stored in Lengyan Temple (楞嚴寺, also called Leiyin Temple 雷音寺) in Zhongdu (Courtesy of the author, 2023).

obscenely towards the local women, and even sought to use a hundred-legged nightmare charm summoned by a "bad monk" (Ch. *yaoseng* 妖僧) to kill people. This anecdote is almost akin to some of the strongest cursing rituals conducted by the Nuosu-Yi *bimo* ritualists, who were notoriously present at the office of the *nzymo* and were responsible for rituals, ceremonies, and record-keeping. Whether some of them appropriated the dark sides of Buddhism and/or Daoism through the network of temples and integrated them into their own rites remains a practicably unanswerable question, due to lack of evidence, but one that cannot be ruled out. Harmonious relationships between An Ao and his subordinate chiefs also deteriorated as he sought to send an assassin to murder Wang Daqing 王大慶 of Pingyi. After Wang escaped, the assassin killed his younger brother. As a result, the vice-governor of Sichuan Province ordered An Ao to be executed by a thousand cuts (Ch. *lingchi* 凌遲).

A short report from a certain Liu Zhong 刘忠, preserved in the Ming-Dynasty's Jiajing-era gazetteer for Mahu Prefecture, portrays An Ao in a much more favorable light. According to the author, An Ao built houses, granaries, temples, and libraries, and again provided the "spirit wood" to rebuild Nanjing's Ming Xiaoling 明孝陵 Mausoleum of the Hongwu Emperor after it burned down.[32] One cave near Nixi hosted a statue of An Ao on a horse from 1488.[33] This could suggest that An Ao was respected by his own people and that the imperial court, which was the ultimate winner in this situation, had used him as an excuse to frame the Hxala and take their land. In 1495, the Mahu Native Prefecture passed through the *gailiu* process into the hands of the empire's career bureaucrats, erasing the "native" word from the name of the administrative unit. Thereafter, unlike those of their subordinate chieftaincies, the Hxala clan members were stripped of the

[32]Yu, *Mahu fu zhi*, 5a.4b–5a.

[33]Yu Chengxun and Pingshan xian wenhua guangbo dianshitai he lvyou ju 屏山縣文化廣播電視及旅遊局, *Jiajing Mahu fuzhi—baihuaben* 嘉靖馬湖府志•白話本 (Chengdu: Sichuan kexue jishu chubanshe, 2021), 37.

tuguan position and banished from the Mahu prefectural seat to the region's western fringe, closer to the untamed core of Liangshan.[34]

The different details and circumstances of An Ao's overthrow in many official records point to the utmost importance of this event. On Ming-Dynasty maps, the lake in the peripheral region to which the Hxala were banished—the biggest body of water in the area—is depicted as equal in size to those from different parts of the empire that are, in reality, much larger. According to Tan Ying,[35] the size of the lake on the map shows the importance of Mahu Native Prefecture to the imperial court as it lay in the vicinity of both the north–south overland and west–east river trading routes. Before Zhuge Liang's campaign, the lake was called "Submerging Pool" (Linchi Qian 临池潜) because its waters are carried by a rapid underground stream to the Jinsha River. Later, it carried the name of "Heavenly Lake" (Tianchi 天池).[36] The stories about the mythological creature with a dragon's head and a horse's body (Ch. *longma* 龍馬) living in its waters were possibly invented later by Han settlers coming from the inner fringes of the Chinese empire, who took the phonetic transcription of Mahu ("Horse Lake") administrative unit literally and attributed it to the lake, gradually forgetting the connection of the whole region to the Moho clan. Following An Ao's execution, the emergence of the Hxala as the dominant power in this peripheral region had, from the Nuosu-Yi point of view, overwritten the story of the Moho clan with that of the Hxala. This was, among other things, indicated by the fact that the lake is still called "Hxala Lake" (ꌧꁱꉆ) in Nuosu-Yi while many other local topographical features carry the Hxala clan's name. The imperial court played a significant role in this by granting the Hxala this territory.

Authority: Abandoning officialdom, embracing nativeness

Since the sixteenth century, Huanglang 黃螂, a settlement on the northern fringe of Hxala Lake, has appeared as a toponym in the records together with the Ningrong Police Office (寧戎司巡檢) title, which the court established there.[37] Huanglang is often considered to be a phonetic transcription of Hxala[38] and thus to mark the location to which the clan was banished, but many sources suggest that during the Han Dynasty, the broader Leibo area belonged to the somewhat phonetically similar Tanglang County (螳螂縣),[39] and that the two toponyms are related. However, the actual position of Tanglang was on the south-eastern riverbank near the contemporary seat of Qiaojia County (巧家縣), almost two hundred kilometers southwest of Huanglang as the crow flies.[40] In fact, Tanglang County

[34]Fang Zhuangyou 方壯猷, "Leibo Pingshan Muchuan deng xian tusi jiapu" 雷波屏山沐川等縣土司家譜, *Bianzheng gonglun* 4.4–6 (1945), 14a–15a; Zhang Tingyu 張廷玉, *Ming shi* 明史 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuaguan, 1983), 311.16b–17b; No author, *Tuguan dibu* 土官底簿 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuaguan, 1984), 2.68b–69b.

[35]Tan Ying 覃影, "Ditushi shang de 'Mahu xianxiang' kao" 地圖史上的"馬湖現象"考, *Minzuxue kan* 2 (2010), 73–83.

[36]Tan Qixiang 譚其驤, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji* 中國歷史地圖集 (Shanghai: Ditu chubanshe, 1987), 67–68.

[37]Qin Yunlong 秦云龍 and Wan Kejin 万科進, *Leibo ting zhi* 雷波廳志 (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 1992), 7.3b.

[38]Pan Yongliang 潘用良 and Hu Chen 胡琛, *Liangshan diming cidian* 涼山地名詞典 (Chengdu: Chengdu ditu chubanshe, 1992), 229.

[39]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 2.1a–1b; Sichuan sheng "Leibo xian zhi" bianzuan weiyuanhui" 四川省《雷波縣志》編纂委員會, in *Leibo xian zhi* 雷波縣志 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1997), 7; Zhang Shu 張澍, *Yangsu tang wenji* 養素堂文集 (Woodblock print, 1837), 9.2b.

[40]Tan, *Zhongguo lishi ditu ji*, 31–32.

most probably derived its toponym from Tanglang Mountain (堂狼山). Its ridges are perceived by the Liangshan Nuosu-Yi as Zzyzzypuvu ꆹꆹꆿꉆ, the legendary place of origin from which the six sons (Ch. *liuzu* 六祖; Nuo. *Jjumu sse fu* ꆏꊰꆹ) of the primordial ancestor Apu Jjumu ꀠꃅꆏꊰ—representing the six different historical branches (or original clans) of the Yi—all dispersed in different directions before establishing their domains in Yunnan, Guizhou, and Sichuan.[41] Equating Tanglang with Huanglang is thus problematic, and probably a result of a snowballing mistake made by authors in later centuries.

In 1523, the court bestowed the lowest military title of Native Police Officer (Ch. *tuxunjian* 土巡檢, 9b) on An Ao's son, An Yu 安宇. For many years, he served in the Sichuan army as a *tubing* native soldier, as a reward for his achievements during the pacification of the borderlands. However, such an appointment in Huanglang was not enough for An Yu, who sought to reclaim the lands and position that once belonged to his clan. The authorities discovered that he had even met with the native prefect Cen Meng 岑猛 in a far-off area of today's Guangxi, where An Yu once served, presumably to gather inspiration on how to reclaim the land under the rule of the Hxala clan. Three years after An Yu's appointment, Cen Meng led an unsuccessful rebellion against the empire, and the imperial officers kept an eye on An Yu to prevent him from doing something similar.[42]

One of An Yu's descendants, An Xing 安興 (Nuo. Hxala Shypo ꅐꀋꄷꑍ) was much more successful. Between 1551 and 1566, Pushur Yobo ꀧꅉꄷꀋ (Ch. Pushu Yuebo 普書約伯) of the Hnielie clan (ꑱꑳ; Ch. Ninai 膩乃), a subordinate of the Qiongbu chieftaincy (邛部長官司) in Liangshan's northwestern Yuexi 越嶲 area who traced the ancestry of his people to the primordial Moho chieftain,[43] rebelled against the Ming Dynasty. He was followed by his son Yobo Sanjie ꄷꀋꎸꏰ (Ch. Sajia 撒假), who in 1587 promulgated himself as King of the Western Lands and Peaceful Heavens (西國平天王). An Xing, who inherited the Native Police Office in Huanglang, along with the chief of the Azho clan, Yang Jiuzha 楊九乍 (Nuo. Azho Jjizha ꆏꂷꆹꋍ) of Leibo, supported the self-proclaimed local ruler. Their rebellion became known as the "Upheaval of Three Heroes" (三雄之亂).

All three families of the main perpetrators were related through intermarriage. "Mahu is my old home, I must retrieve it," An Xing allegedly stated when receiving the insignia, thus continuing the office and following the wishes of An Yu. The "heroic" deeds of the trio included killing almost three thousand local imperial military personnel, kidnapping men and women, and pillaging settlements. The description of An Xing in the official sources oscillates in style between his depiction as a crooked villain similar to An Ao, and his portrayal as tall, dashing, and courageous. Despite his being an enemy of the empire, the local gazetteer acknowledged his local heroism. Through Sichuan Province and with the help of Wumeng's native troops, the imperial court put together an army consisting of forty thousand soldiers. The army recruited people who could interpret between the Chinese and Yi languages and waged psychological warfare to quickly obtain the heads of

[41]Like Daqu 立克達曲, *Asu Lazhe* 阿蘇拉者 (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2011), 71–89.

[42]Wang Linxiang 王麟祥 and Qiu Jinsheng 邱晉成, *Xuzhou fu zhi* 光緒敘州府志 (Chengdu: Ba-Shu shushe, 1992), 30.5b.

[43]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 28.5b–6a. Moho was separated from Pushur Yobo by more than one millennium, so this might have been a rhetorical strategy to claim reputation, authority, and legitimacy for the Hnielie clan. For the accumulation of fame among the Nuosu-Yi today, see Katherine Swancutt, "Fame, Fate-Fortune, and Tokens of Value among the Nuosu of Southwest China," *Social Analysis* 56.2 (2012), 56–72.

the insurgents. However, the native officials and their native troops from the area often could not be reliably summoned by imperial command. For example, Wen Anmin 文安民 of the Manyi chieftaincy, who was formerly subordinate to the Hxala clan, was supposed to mediate between the imperial army and An Xing; instead, he revealed the army's plot to An Xing, enabling him to escape.

The terrain around Huanglang was notoriously harsh and remains so today. The rugged karst hills full of caves, which the Yi knew thoroughly well and in which they often found refuge, forced the imperial army to use scaling ladders. The darkness of the caves, their eerie silence, and the cold wind emanating from their seemingly bottomless depths terrified those unaccustomed to them. The unyielding fog further hindered their visibility and contributed to the disorientation of the imperial troops in the terrain. The battles were extremely bloody, with the constant moisture preventing wounds from healing, which caused rapid infections and inflammations. Nonetheless, the imperial army captured Sajia and executed him by mincing (Ch. *hai* 醢). Meanwhile, An Xing and his younger brother retreated to the Qylemu area ꆏꁯꀠ (Ch. Qulimi 祛裡密), a sub-region of Tieggurmu ꑭꑴꀠ (Ch. Tiangumi 天姑密) in Leibo. While on the run, he tossed silver ingots on the road to slow down his pursuers. The army, however, captured his mother, Lady Yang (楊氏) of the Azho clan, and also his wife, Lady Sha (沙氏) of the Shama clan.

One morning, a few days later, several soldiers reported a collective dream in which the spirit of the Eastern Han general Guan Yu 關羽 advised them how to capture An Xing alive. They succeeded the same day when An Xing became stuck while clearing his way through a thick bamboo forest and, surrounded by imperial soldiers, surrendered. The biggest headache for the army was Yang Jiuzha. They sought to trap him through his captured wife, Lady Ma (馬氏). If Jiuzha would surrender, they promised, the rest of his family would be spared—a typical strategy that had also been applied to the Hxala after the episode with An Ao, so as not to alienate the rest of the local population. Jiuzha's and Lady Ma's young daughter, for whom the wife of the villain on the run had a special affection, was initially held hostage in Mahu's prefectural seat. The prefect returned her to Lady Ma. Allegedly touched, she secretly consulted an elderly *bimo*, who imitated the sounds of a black bear, used his fortune-telling books, and carved a ritual tablet which he splattered with (probably chicken) blood to track Jiuzha down. When on the verge of being captured, Jiuzha fiercely resisted. In the process, he got shot in his left rib. His injury was serious, and he succumbed to it on the way to the military camp.

Three heroes hence perished one after another. Hundreds of their followers were captured alive, and over one thousand of their accomplices were beheaded. Then in 1589, the Huanglang township was turned into a garrison that was reinforced by a new wall. A shrine for Guan Yu was erected, with sacrifices to celebrate the assistance of his spirit while chasing after An Xing. The Yidu chieftaincy that was closest to the principal extraction site of the "spirit wood" was renamed Zhongdu. To accommodate the souls of the fallen imperial soldiers, a shrine was also built in Manyi chieftaincy together with a high protective wall. The Hxala, along with their formerly subordinate chieftains of the Azho clan from Leibo, once again lost their insignia in their respective domains and their official positions as native headmen recognized by the empire. They retreated westwards, deeper into the mountains of untamed Liangshan, and out of reach of the imperial bureaucracy.[44]

[44]Fang, *Leibo Pingshan Muchuan*, 15a; Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 28.1a–8a; Zhang, *Ming shi*, 247.12b–13b.

Land: Back to officialdom, two Jinsha riverbanks and the Mitie massacre

As a result of their falling out with the empire, the genealogies of both the Hxala and Azho *nzymo* disappeared from the official records for more than a hundred years, as they embraced a native way of life—albeit one influenced by their collective memory of officialdom. Their retreat caused a significant gap in understanding the history of the Mahu area. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty (1644), the new Qing regime eventually tightened the rules significantly for the native officials' succession and education. Those native officials who did not observe them were threatened with an immediate *gailiu* process. Already during the Ming, the Hongwu Emperor wanted the succession to be patrilineal, so that only sons through the male line were eligible to hold the post of native chieftain. Furthermore, he heavily sponsored the buildup of Confucian charitable schools to spread the court rites to the borderlands, using a tactic similar to that unleashed in the Mahu area. However, Hongwu's orders were executed rather leniently. During the Qing, the Shunzhi (1643–1661) and Kangxi (1661–1722) emperors were notably more stringent in the implementation of succession rules for native officials, whose domains they wanted to integrate more quickly into the empire's inner borders.[45] The situation of the Yi, who practiced different customs of succession and alliance forming, became more precarious. Besides the fact that women could potentially be appointed as clan leaders or native chieftains, they often practiced both uxorilocal (Ch. *ruzhui* 入贅) and levirate (Ch. *di wang xiong ji* 弟亡兄繼) marriages that tied them to their own succession processes, which conflicted with the rules stipulated by the imperial court. In 1664, for example, the Yi native official An Kun 安坤,[46] referred to in the fieldwork notes of state surveyors from the late 1950s as An Gang 安崗—a possible phonetic transcription of his Yi name into Chinese characters—rose up from the influential Anre clan (ꀊꀋ) in northwestern Guizhou Province's Shuixi 水西 (located westwards from Wusa Native Prefecture (烏撒土府)) to initiate a large-scale rebellion. An Kun's rebellion was later subdued by the Qing general Wu Sangui 吳三桂, who went on to occupy the broader region during his own anti-Qing revolt. Allegedly, after An Kun's defeat, death, and the *gailiu* of his centuries-old native chieftaincy, one of his offspring named Anre Ayy ꀊꀋꂰꁌ (Ch. An Heji 安合吉) became heir to a native chieftaincy of the Shama *nzymo* clan residing in the depths of Liangshan. The transfer happened through uxorilocal marriage, which solved the Shama clan's problem of the absence of a male heir, as Anre Ayy continued the Shama *nzymo* chieftaincy.[47] Compared to northwestern Guizhou, and even central Mahu during the Ming where the Yi communities had long imitated imperial bureaucratic structures, Liangshan represented a leaderless environment without the firm grasp of imperial power. Here, the Yi *nzymo* often clashed with free aristocratic *nuoho*

[45]Gong, *Zhongguo tusi zhidu*, 121–22; John Herman, "Empire in the Southwest: Early Qing Reforms to the Native Chieftain System," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 56.1 (1997), 52–59.

[46]He was not directly related to An/Hxala. The Chinese surname granted to him, "An," was in fact ubiquitous among the native officials of Southwest China and very common across Liangshan.

[47]Chen Difang 陳棣芳, *Yi-Han wen he bi: "Shuixi An shi zupu" jian zheng yu jiedu* 彝漢文合璧《水西安氏族譜》箋證與解讀 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu chubanshe daxue, 2017), 315; Ddisse Vuho ꆏꉼꀋꌠ and Ddisse Vuga ꆏꉼꀋꎆ, *Nuosu bbaga sylu rege da su (Syjy najydde go ssi su)* ꆏꃅꎆꂷꀋꏦꆏꉼꁅꃅ (ꑭꀋꂷꑟꏦꃅ) [Compilation of the Nuosu folk knowledge—death and burial] (Labbu Orro: Orro nise, 2016), 210–12; Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽, *Qing shi gao* 清史稿 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1977), 158/302/4.11b; Sichuan shaoshu minzu shehui lishi diaochazu 四川少數民族社會歷史調查組, *Liangshan Xichang Yizu diqu tusi lishi ji tusi tongzhiqu shehui gaikuang: ziliao huiji* 涼山西昌彝族地區歷史及土司統治區社會概況：資料匯輯 (Beijing: Zhongguo kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo, 1963), 49–51.

and other regional *quho* strata, and succession patterns were less influenced by imperial rules and rites.

Huang explains that the possible reason behind the Qing's mounting presence in its southwest borderland was the court's increasing dependence on copper imported from Japan for domestic technological and military production.[48] When the Tokugawa regime began to put restrictions on copper exports in the early eighteenth century, the court was pushed to extract precious metal deposits in Southwest China. Parallel to this process was the large-scale dismantling of the large native domains containing these copper deposits, which enabled the court to access them directly and at speed. After dismantling the larger domains, the *tusi*—or military native officials—were re-installed in those native administrative units where the populations still resisted this development. However, these units were significantly smaller and more scattered than those of their predecessors. Through this gradual process of absorbing the native domains into the empire, their resistance was supposed to have been blunted and eventually brought to an end.

The copper mining areas were located in Dongchuan 东川, Wumeng, and Zhenxiong 镇雄 (formerly Mangbu 芒部) prefectures, all on the Jinsha's southeastern riverbank and all under the rule of native officials. The reappointed chieftains had to make another journey to the capital to submit to the new emperor, which gave the Hxala and Azho clans the chance to reclaim some of the insignia formerly held by their ancestors. While some of the lower chieftains of Mahu went to the court during Shunzhi's rule, the descendant of An Xing, An Yongchang 安永長, had to prove his loyalty by "civilizing" (Ch. *huayu* 化諭) local Miao natives living around his domain. For this merit, in 1695, he obtained the Qing-ubiquitous military title of Native Battalion Commander (Ch. *tuqianhu* 土千戶, 5a) and became a *tusi*, or military native official. Remarkably, the land where he operated, and over which he gained official permission to rule, lay in Huixi 檜溪 (Nuo. Agga lietuo ꀋꑟꉼ ꁅ) on the southeastern riverbank, just opposite Huanglang. This was because after An Xing's capture, the surviving members of the principal ruling Hxala clan lineage fled there. In official records, the territorial administrative unit in Huixi was even named after An Xing. According to Hxala Shyge, who drew on his clan's collective memory of their return to nativeness, his ancestors spent the century as Nuosu-Yi chiefs dwelling in the Liangshan highlands on the southeastern riverbank without the court's insignia but ruling over their population and developing their agriculture and pastoralism.[49] Eight years after An Yongchang, the Azho clan through Jiuzha's descendant Yang Lagui 楊喇哇 (Nuo. Azho Lagi ꀋꂷꌠꀊ), also submitted to the court. He was appointed as the newly established Leibo Qianwanguan Principal Chief (雷波千萬貫正長官司, 6a) in the southern part of the region.[50]

But the dismantling of native domains accelerated again with the ascension to the throne of the Manchu Yongzheng Emperor (1722–1735), whose loyal Manchu prince Ortai 鄂爾泰 turned his focus in 1727 towards the Wumeng and Zhenxiong native prefectures. However, Ortai underestimated the complex Yi blood relations that often stretched over numerous large Yi domains, as was the case for northwest Guizhou's Anre Ayy, when he later became *nzymo* of the Shama clan. The spiral of horrific violence into which most of the Liangshan Yi clans were drawn, including the Hxala and the Azho, began with a seemingly mundane event preceding Ortai's arrival. Lu Yongzhong 祿永忠,

[48]Huang Fei, "The Making of a Frontier Landscape: The 'Ten Views of Dongchuan' in Eighteenth-Century Southwest China," *Late Imperial China* 35.2 (2014), 63.

[49]Hxala, *Yunnan sheng Yongshan xian Axing tuqianhu Hala*, 6.

[50]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 30.1a–3a.

a minor native official of the Leibo chieftaincy on the northwestern riverbank,[51] which was probably recreated after the ousting of the Azho clan following Yang Jiuzha's capture, passed away. Following the levirate custom, his widow, Lady Lu 祿氏, was married off to his older brother Lu Yongxiao 祿永孝, who was at the time a native supervisor (Ch. *tumu* 土目) in Mitie 米貼, a region subordinate to Wumeng on the southeastern riverbank. Lu Yongxiao was involved then in an inter-clan feud with the lineage of Lu Dingkun 祿鼎坤, paternal uncle of the successor to the position of native prefect in Wumeng, and its current chief, Lu Wanzhong 祿萬鈡. However, Lu Wanzhong was still an infant and ineligible to inherit the office. Sensing an opportunity, Ortai and his subordinates investigated the poorly maintained genealogical documents of the native officials in the prefectural archives and found many gaps and breaches in their rules of maintenance and in the succession process. This gave Ortai a legal pretext for the deposition of the whole Lu native chieftain clan. Lu Dingkun also seized the moment to usurp power for himself and get rid of Lu Yongxiao by manipulating the documents for Lu Wanzhong's succession. He inscribed Lu Yongxiao into them as a successor, facilitating his arrest and transfer along with hundreds of other native officials to prisons in the provincial capitals of Sichuan and Yunnan for the alleged fraud of manipulating the succession rules. Further investigation revealed that Lu Yongxiao had nothing to do with Lu Wanzhong's case. The officials, however, refused to release him. Ni Tui 倪蛻, an aide to officials in Yunnan who left a firsthand account of the events through his personal writings, claims that Ortai's administration—in line with their objective—were able to conveniently charge Lu Yongxiao with illegal conduct (Ch. *bufa* 不法) for the possession of two chieftaincies and the abduction of his younger brother's wife. Lu was then executed by hanging.

These events naturally resonated in Liangshan. More so when Lu Dingkun escaped to the highlands surrounding Mianshan 冕山, relatively near to the Jianchang 建昌[52] Garrison, which secured another major trade route on the western fringe of the Yi-dominated Liangshan. On the cusp of spring 1728, Ortai's subordinates were sent to investigate Lu Yongxiao's people in Mitie. Lady Lu was meant to face a similar fate to her husband. After general Guo Shouyu 郭壽域 reached Mitie with five hundred of his men, he ordered the establishment of a provisional military camp near some uncannily quiet and empty settlements. Only at the door of Lu Yongxiao's house did they see a woman shouting: "Release my man, so he can return home!" Identifying her as Lady Lu, Guo's men went after her, but she managed to slip away. Later that night, around the third watch (between eleven o'clock at night and one o'clock in the morning), Guo's men were obliterated in an ambush set by the local Yi. Guo himself was stoned to death. Only one person managed to escape and provide testimony to his superiors. Lady Lu had forded the Jinsha to its northwestern bank and journeyed further into the depths of Liangshan. She sought help within the extensive network of her relatives, mostly lower-ranking official supervisors and members of the *tusi* genealogies (Ch. *tumu* and *tushe* 土舍) of the court-appointed native officials. These included not only people from Huanglang and Leibo—and especially the Qianwanguan Azho clan's chief Yang Mingyi 楊明義—but also those residing on the land governed by the Shama and the Dechang near Jianchang garrison. On the southeastern riverbank, natives from Tundou 吞都, close to An Yongchang's domain, were especially fierce when clashing with the imperial army. Unlike

[51]Referred to as Mopo zhangguansi 磨坡長官司, a phonetic transcription of the Yi toponym Galy Mobbo ꀉꂷꀋꃅ for the Leibo area.

[52]Today's Xichang 西昌.

his ancestor An Xing, in this conflict, An Yongchang of the Hxala clan stood firmly on the side of the empire and assisted its armies, thus going against Yang Mingyi of the Azho.

Views on the following events differ. Ortai and his administration saw the native officials in a similar light to the official depiction of An Ao, as evil barbaric villains who through blood alliances conspired against the emperor, hid traitors, and blocked rations for the imperial soldiers. Their subordinates, Ortai maintained, were stupid, and were capable only of following their leaders. Infuriated by the events surrounding Guo's failed campaign, Ortai ordered the generals Zhang Yaozu 張耀祖 and Ha Yuansheng 哈元生 to drown the locals in their own blood. Ni Tui's unofficial personal account lays out unbelievable cruelties and sides with those affected. Soldiers allegedly cut off the limbs and cut open the stomachs of all those who inhabited the area, regardless of whether they were Yi natives, Han settlers, or people of other ethnicities that were coined much later. Their campaign left over thirty thousand dead, with others surviving only by crossing the river in places stretching dozens of kilometers and vanishing in the landscape of Liangshan. In May of 1728, Lady Lu was captured and executed. Ortai maintained that the locals got what they deserved. He blamed the Tundou natives, who allegedly provided the main support to Lady Lu, without which she would never have dared to hurt imperial soldiers. The end of the principal phase of the uprising was followed by years of aftershocks.

An Yongchang showed great skill in subduing the Tundou. Symbolic respect for his deeds from the imperial court was, however, outweighed by the harsh reality that followed two years later. During another upheaval, An Yongchang was murdered together with most of his nuclear family by a member of genealogy of the local Yi chief from Tundou, Muggur Syge ꃅꎧꌠꒉ (Ch. Mugu Sige 木谷四哥). During this obvious act of revenge, his office was also burned to the ground, leaving only one heir alive. Other people who had previously fled to Liangshan and had been involved in this act were massacred by the imperial army, which arrived at the scene right at the moment when its enemies attempted to wade the river back onto the Liangshan side. Countless dead bodies floated on the river's surface, turning its brown waters red.[53]

Some years after the Mitie massacre, all lands of the former native prefectures on the southeastern riverbank were transferred from Sichuan's administration to that of Yunnan Province. Wumeng was turned into Zhaotong Prefecture (昭通府), Mitie was renamed Yongshan 永善 ("Eternal kindness"), and Mahu Prefecture was made a part of Xuzhou Prefecture (徐州府) with its center in Yibin. Nominally under the governorship of career bureaucrats since 1495, the western fringe of what had formerly been Mahu remained volatile for centuries. In the relatively isolated garrisons of Huanglang and Leibo, the provincial government established the Anfu 安阜營 and Pu'an 普安營 permanent military camps[54] that kept attempting to keep the region in check. Mimicking the acts of his predecessors, after the "Upheaval of Three Heroes" in Huanglang, in 1731 general Huang Tinggui 黃廷桂 erected the Guan Di Shrine (關帝廟) in Leibo.[55] The stepmother of Yang Mingyi, Lady Yang Sha (楊沙氏), took over the position of Qianwanguan chief. Later, she even obtained the title of Native Supreme Battalion Commander

[53]Ni Tui 倪蜕, Dian yun li nian zhuan 滇雲歷年傳 (Kunming: Yunnan minzu xueyuan, 1999), 12.6b–21a; Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 28.8a–9a. Yongzheng 雍正, Yun Lu 允祿, and Ortai 鄂爾泰, *Zhu pi yu zhi* 硃批諭旨 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuaguan, 1984), 123.7b–9a, 123.11b–12a, 125/7.15b, 125/7.37a, 125/7.74b–75a, 125/16. 28b–30a, 125/17.4b–5a.

[54]Liu Wenwei 劉文蔚, *Leibo suoji* 雷波瑣記 (Taipei: Huawen shuju, 1968), 12a–13b.

[55]Wang and Qiu, *Xuzhou fu zhi*, 11.98a–98b.

(Ch. *tuqianzong* 土千總).[56] A woman holding the title of chieftain represented a clear breach of the Qing succession rules. However, due to the instability of the region, the Qing court had to, again, become flexible when some of its rules proved incompatible with the social order of the Yi. Following the Mitie massacre, the Hxala clan members of Tieggurmu on the northwestern (Liangshan) side of the Jinsha River reappeared on the stage through the submission of An Bao 安保. Initially, his submission did not result in the issuance of insignias. In Huanglang, the small Ggaha 𐀀𐀠 clan related to the Hxala with whom it shared a common ancestor, obtained similar recognition through the submission of Guo Bao 國保.[57] Yet, the Qing court made relatively small concessions that broke the authority of the native chieftains over their vast lands and shrank their domains where necessary. All the court did was make exemptions to some of its succession rules and reappoint some chieftains in the borderlands of their formerly much vaster administrative units. Nevertheless, the non-rebellious members of the Hxala, Azho, Ggaha, and some other clans managed to reappropriate their *tusi* status and authority—especially over their own people—on account of their long-term loyalty to the imperial court and their historical influence in the area. Following this, and throughout the second half of the Qing rule, the official records offer very little detail or even mention of the Mahu native officials.

Material culture: Tombs facing the sky

After the Mitie massacre, the tombstones for the native chieftains of Mahu became nearly the only source of information about them. Nonetheless, the design and layout of the chieftains' tombs reveal their appropriations of both officialdom and nativeness—and they do this even more eloquently than the inscriptions on the tombstones themselves. To make this clear, I devote several paragraphs here to the broader context of the burial rites, as seen through the eyes of the imperial court and local Yi communities across Southwest China.

The official imperial rites throughout the Ming and Qing stipulated that the dead body of an official should be buried in a coffin placed inside of a proper tomb adorned with a tombstone. However, many of the Yi communities practiced cremation and did not erect tombstones. The precise origins of cremation among the Yi, who were not the only ones in the area to practice it, as Buddhists also cremate, is unknown. Cremation has remained essential up to the present, especially for the Nuosu-Yi, because without it the souls of the dead cannot return[58] to their place of origin, called Zzyzzypuvu, through a complex post-mortuary ceremony (Nuo. *nimu cobi* ꀉꂿ), and from there ascend to the ancestral heavens of Ngemu Puggu ꁧꂿ (also called Shymu Ngehxa ꂿꁧ). Burial without cremation was habitually reserved for those sick with leprosy,[59] who could not reach the heavens and whose souls would turn into various malicious ghosts.

However, the Yelang Kingdom (夜郎; in sources also known as Zangke 牂柯), which was the earliest locally recorded greater polity, might have imitated some of the rites of the neighboring Chinese empire at various stages of its own formation and expansion. Active

[56]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 30.1b. The title was equal to *tuqianhu*.

[57]Yun Lu 允祿 and Hong Hua 弘晝, *Shizong xian huangdi shangyu neige* 世宗憲皇帝上諭內閣 (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuaguan, 1986), 81.21a–21b.

[58]Liu Yaohan 劉堯漢 and Lu Yang 盧央, *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu shi yue li* 文明中國的彝族十月曆 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 122.

[59]Wu Da 巫達, "Bianyi zhong de yanxu: Liangshan Yizu sangzang wenhua de bianqian ji qi dongyin" 變異中的延續:涼山彝族喪葬文化的變遷及其動因, *Minzu yanjiu* 2017.2, 71.

from the third to the first century BCE, and gradually expanding across the Yunnan-Guizhou plateau, the Yelang Kingdom is often considered a proto-state polity of at least the semi-sedentary ancestors of the Yi, who seemed not to have exclusively cremated the bodies of deceased elites but buried them in the ground.[60] After the conquest of the Han Dynasty, the Yelang declined and many of its former inhabitants possibly took refuge in the vast Wumeng mountain range, which spans from northwest Guizhou to northern Yunnan and runs along the Jinsha River that borders Liangshan. There, they may have started to practice cremation to leave minimal traces of themselves, as they were practically on the run from the empire. In his *Book of Southern Barbarians* (蠻書), the Tang-Dynasty author Fan Chuo 樊綽 talks about the cremation practice associated with the "Black Barbarians" (烏蠻) who had spread across the highlands of what is today western Guizhou and Liangshan to resist the state control. The more empire-oriented burial customs were associated instead with the "White Barbarians" (白蠻) who lived at least partly within the reach of the court's power.[61] Perhaps attracted by the numerous advantages of interacting with the empire, the so-called White Barbarians either stayed in the lowlands after the fall of the Yelang or were lured back there from the highlands, to which they might also have escaped. The Ming, the Qing, and even the Republic of China repeatedly sought to ban cremation among the Yi.[62] While the pressure to abandon cremation eventually pushed numerous Yi communities in Southwest China to adopt a coffin-and-tombstone burial[63] at some point or another, some sought ways of accommodating both the ritual requirements of the imperial court and their own local cosmological visions of the world and afterworld. The highland Liangshan Nuosu-Yi chose to continue practicing their migratory lifestyle and cremation. But many of the Yi staying or returning to the lowlands neither returned to the Yelang's or the empire's soil-burial practice, nor did they exclusively continue cremating without a tomb.

The appropriation of two distinct burial rites that adhere to both officialdom and nativeness produced a hybrid approach to sending off the dead, whose remains were deposited in a specific round-shaped tomb called *xiangtianfen* 向天墳 in Chinese, which literally means "a tomb facing the sky." This name was derived from the theory that in certain parts of Southwest China, the tombs were built with the Yi lunisolar calendar in mind, as a way of connecting the land to celestial beings.[64] Whether adorned with a gravestone or not, *xiangtianfen* tombs usually did not contain a coffin with a body, but rather the cremains (Ch. *guhui* 骨灰) of one or often multiple bodies. In some instances, the cremains contained whole bones or their fragments, which did not completely burn to ashes during the cremation process. Interestingly, the Nuosu-Yi language does not have a direct translation for *xiangtianfen* and therefore refers to them as *coqyrho* ꃅꂾꉔ, "a cremation site," or by the more specific and poetic expression "nzymo qyrfur" ꀸꁎꂾꌠ, which captures both the sense that these round tombs were reserved for the *nzymo* elite and the notion that their ashes were "married" (Nuo. *fur* ꌠ) both to the land they ruled and to the Ngemu Puggu/Shymu Ngehxa afterworld.[65]

[60]Wang Ziyao 王子堯, "Yelang kaogu yu gudai minzu zangsu quyu wenhua yanjiu" 夜郎考古與古代民族葬俗區域文化研究, *Guizhou Minzu xueyuan xuebao* 2005.1, 8–18.

[61]Mueggler, *Corpse, Stone, Door, Text*, 21.

[62]Ling Guangdian 嶺光電, *Yi wang xi: Yi ge Yizu tusi de zishu* 憶往昔:一個彝族土司的自述 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1988), 149; Wu Da, *Bianyi zhong de yanxu*, 70.

[63]For elaboration, see Mueggler, *Corpse, Stone, Door, Text.*

[64]Liu and Lu, *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu.*

[65]This conclusion came about through discussions with the Nuosu-Yi experts Yoqy Qubo ꑱꃅꀋꑍ (Ch. Ma Qubo 馬曲博), Ajji Lazzi ꑌꀕꀠꑟ (Ch. Aji Laze 阿吉拉則), and Yoqy Zoxi ꑱꃅꄮꄗ (Ch. Yueqi Zuoxi 約其佐喜).

The absence of an exact Nuosu-Yi equivalent term for *xiangtianfen* suggests that they were extremely rare in the core of Liangshan, with most of them being found in the transitory region of Leibo. Cremation in Liangshan is still undertaken today on pyramid-like structures made of wood, which somewhat resemble the tumulus-shaped *xiangtianfen*, but leave no traces behind since the cremains are often placed, left, scattered, or even interred by a tree in the forest close to the dwelling of the deceased or in a bamboo grove behind the house. Perhaps, though, a remarkable exception emerged from the aforementioned case of the uxorilocal marriage of Anre Ayy, originally from the Shuixi of Guizhou, into the Shama *nzymo* clan that resided in the core area of untamed Liangshan. In today's Animi Village (阿尼米村; Nuo. Anyimu ꀀꀠꀋ) of Guli Township (古里鎮; Nuo. Ggunyi ladda ꒉꀉꀠꆹ), close to one of the former offices of Shama *nzymo*, are two clusters of considerably old round *xiangtianfen* (see Figure 5). Despite lacking a tombstone to verify the origin of the cremains contained within their inner rings, which are made of stone blocks, the existence and position of these *xiangtianfen* speak volumes. Being the burial sites of important people, perhaps even the *nzymo*, they appear to confirm the orally transmitted genealogy of the Shama clan that mentions Anre Ayy's arrival as well as the origin of many of Liangshan's inhabitants further to the east, which was the source of the major waves and flows of migrations that filled the area's ridges and ravines. Going by this orally transmitted genealogy, it appears that these migrants brought their hybrid burial rite with them. This long link to the east testifies to the expansion of local Yi polities, which had Liangshan as their westernmost limit. With the weakening power of the native chieftains during the Ming and Qing, Liangshan turned from a buffer zone into an ideal hideout.

Besides *xiangtianfen*, the hybrid and "in-between" nature of their associated burial practices was recorded in a story about the troublesome and long-term burial of Yang

Figure 5. A tomb in one of the two tomb clusters known as the Guoaonaiju Stone Block Tombs (果奧乃居石板墓) and the Longgou Stone Coffin Tomb Cluster (龍溝石棺墓群), located near the former office of Shama *nzymo*, which I associate with the story of Anre Ayy (Courtesy of the author, 2023).

Shijin (楊石金; Nuo. Azho Mabo ꆏꂰꃅꌠ), the Azho clan's most officially celebrated hero who accomplished great deeds for the empire. Already adorned with a fifth-grade military rank, in 1867, Shijin perished in Huanglang while assisting the imperial army's punitive expedition against the notorious Ggenra ꑱꑴ clan, which fiercely resisted the oversight of other clans and the Qing court alike.[66] Shijin's body was carried away from the battlefield in a litter, later put into a coffin, and remained on display on (or in) a local mountain (or cliff). According to the Yi custom, until revenge was taken, the burial could not be finalized. The son of the deceased, Yang Deshou 楊德壽 (Nuo. Azho Hoho ꆏꂰ⓪⓪), was an infant when his father died. He was not only too weak to take revenge on the Ggenra clan himself but, allegedly, also did not have enough power to keep his slaves, who absconded in great numbers. Two years later, a delegation of provincial officials arrived to resolve the matter. Different clans and their various lineages submitted to them, in an attempt to gain the recognition of the court, appropriate some of its power, and project it upon their local subjects. However, the Ggenra clan chose to follow the different Yi custom of seeking mediation with the officials, and they offered one thousand silver ingots as well as numerous cows and sheep to the Azho clan as a settlement. For Deshou, this was not enough. He wanted five hundred slaves and more ingots. The matter dragged on. The officials lost their patience and left, obviously lacking sufficient leverage to resolve the problem to their satisfaction. After Deshou's premature death, his son Yang Zhongting 楊忠廷 (Nuo. Azho Sizu ꆏꂰꁨꀋ) was, again, an infant, and hence too weak to settle the matter. Deshou's older brother, who had been delegated to settle this matter, failed as well. All these years, Shijin's body still lay in the coffin, which made the clansmen very uneasy. In 1877, after a decade, his body was finally cremated as per the Yi burial custom.[67] The location of Shijin's *xiangtianfen* remains unknown. According to Yi sociologist Liu Yaohan, a *xiangtianfen* standing south of today's Leibo county-town does belong to the Azho clan, but not to the branch that acted as native officials, because its design does not feature a slot for the insertion of a tombstone.[68] The presence or absence of a tombstone slot, then, also says something about the position of the deceased within the local hierarchy, where the deceased with a tombstone leaned more towards officialdom, and those without it or without a grave leaned altogether to nativeness.

In Leibo's Tieggurmu on the northwestern riverbank, where some of the Hxala clan members resided after the "Upheaval of Three Heroes" in 1589, many *xiangtianfen* and their tombstones have succumbed to the passing of time. Along one of the roads from Huanglang to Leibo, which passes through Tieggurmu, the landscape opens onto a handful of vistas to the opposite, southeastern riverbank. Sheltered by a grove close to the area of the present day Yatang Village (堰塘村), several such tombs are falling into oblivion with empty tombstone slots and pillaged inner rings. Through brush, ink, and woodblock prints, however, some of the information and epitaphs on the tombstones made it into the pages of local gazetteers, where they are preserved. The scarce records suggest that members of the Hxala clan occupying lands on both riverbanks were in close touch, as An Zhenji 安貞吉 (whose Nuosu-Yi name is unknown, suggesting his distancing from nativeness) attended a military school in Yongshan. His successor An Guoxi 安國璽 even obtained the court-issued insignia of the *tuqianzong* military title for pacifying the borderland.[69] In nearby Qylemu, two well-preserved *xiangtianfen* rest in the field (see

[66]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 30.2a–2b.
[67]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 25.2a–2b.
[68]Liu and Lu, *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu*, 114.
[69]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 30.3a–3b.

Figure 6. Hxala tomb in Qylemu (left) with a bi-lingual tombstone (right) (Courtesy of the author, 2014).

Figure 6). Although not containing any of the names of the aforementioned native chieftains, their tombstones display Nuosu-Yi as well as Chinese characters for both surnames under which their inhabitants were known—Hxala and An—which points to their membership in the local *nzymo* genealogy and their position in between officialdom and nativeness.[70]

In Huixi on the southeastern riverbank, where the main *nzymo* lineage of the Hxala clan migrated after 1589, their presence is considerably more palpable. The graveyard is hidden together with the native chieftain's office in the old city amid the newly built blocks of flats and a playground. It is designed in the sumptuous style typical of imperial officials, with monolingual, Chinese-language tombstones showcased at the center and framed by ornate archways (see Figure 7). The only sign of nativeness in this design, typical of officialdom, is a massive round *xiangtianfen* that stands behind each tombstone. Local historians, again, managed to copy some of the information from the sandstone tombstones before the characters faded away. The records reveal that after An Yongchang's death, his son An Tianzhu 安天柱 inherited the office, which he resettled from the mountain slope to the lowland near the Jinsha River. Hxala Shyge's material offers a supplement to these terse records, with the claim that in 1738, the inheritor of his office, An Qingchao 安慶朝, built and ran a Confucian charitable school to educate the local population. Later, in 1802, An Qing 安清, whose tomb dates to 1823, inherited the local office. Like his relatives in Tieggurmu, he eventually gained a hereditary military rank. In 1811, he and several other prominent Hxala clan members erected stone pillars (one of

[70]See also Liu and Lu, *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu*, 113–15.

Figure 7. Hxala tomb in Huixi (Courtesy of the author, 2016).

which still stands) to commemorate the deeds of his ancestors. Hxala Shyge further claims that since 1822, starting with the rule of An Xiangheng 安像恆 and later An Ruitu 安瑞圖, Huixi became a market town, where the incoming Han population was welcomed to settle because the local Yi were keen on trading with them. The construction of a caravan station along with a city wall and numerous shrines and temples marked these developments. In 1870, An Shaoyang 安少陽 was the last one to officially inherit the office. Towards the end of the Qing-Dynasty's rule, most of Mahu's native chieftaincies started to slowly slip out of existence, officially due to the absence of suitable male heirs. The Qianwanguan's chieftaincy, for example, produced a locally famous female chieftain Yang Daidi 楊代蒂 (Nuo. Azho Dadi ꆏꋍꃅꆏ), who in later life saw herself as a symbolic inheritor of the chieftaincy. The Hxala clan did not have problems with their heirs. However, the swansong of the office came with the decline of the Qing Dynasty and the rise of an entirely new, Eurocentric republican political system. The diminishing influence of the office under the new regime symbolically passed to An Shizhen 安世珍, then An Jiazhen 安家珍, and, finally, to Hxala Shyge's father, An Dazhang 安大璋, who was known locally as an elementary school principal. He died in 1941 when Hxala Shyge was only three years old.[71] Paradoxically, however, when putting aside the waning political influence of the Hxala clan and focusing on its culture, it appears to have come full circle. Under the republican system, the Hxala clan returned to the state it found itself in at the beginning of Ming Dynasty, when it was acculturating itself to the Confucian, Buddhist, and Daoist rites that were culturally so close to officialdom that they may have significantly suppressed many elements of Hxala nativeness. Yet as evidenced by the Hxala clan history, when necessary—and especially in times of defense—they could reconstruct and reignite their nativeness, provided there was space for it to take root. With the exertion of a little will and creativity, and acts of appropriating the court's material culture, a space could always be produced. This remained true of the cultural-historical heritage of the native chieftains even after the collapse of the empire.

[71]Long Yun 龍雲 and Lu Han 盧漢, *Minguo xin zuan Yunnan tongzhi* 民國新纂雲南通志 (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 2009), 174.34a; Hxala, *Yunnan sheng Yongshan xian Axing tuqianhu Hala*, 8.

Genealogies: Entangling the official and the native

Under the Republic of China, and over the course of its first three decades, all offices of the former Mahu region gradually lost influence in terms of governance over the land or population. However, their long-term ties to the borderland areas made them interesting for the kind of anthropology conducted under the Kuomintang-ruled Chinese state, which inherited the colonial-explorative, theoretical, and methodological *modus operandi* of its Euro-American contemporaries. The Republic of China needed to tap into its resource-rich borderlands, and Southwest China was no exception. Two of the many scientists and explorers that visited Mahu were Ma Changshou, a sociologist by training, whose objective was to survey the customs and habits of the Nuosu-Yi in the perilous and virtually impenetrable Liangshan, and Fang Zhuangyou, an ethnohistorian in the field of borderland studies, who was interested in the genealogies of the ruling families.

On his way to Leibo, Ma Changshou traveled in the company of a teenage Yang Daidi and her family members, the only remaining direct offspring of the Azho *nzymo* clan. Ma managed to obtain the Azho genealogy in Yang Shijin's now non-existent ancestral temple, which had been built inside the walls of the Leibo garrison, and phonetically re-write it from Nuosu-Yi into Chinese.[72] More or less by coincidence, during his stay in Leibo, Ma met the opium-sodden Hxala Tiehxa ꆏꀋꌠꆏ (Ch. Hala Tiha 哈拉提哈), who presented him with an oral performance of his lineage's genealogy that he knew by heart. Hxala Tiehxa mentioned to Ma that the earliest history of his clan was connected to a clash with the imperial army that took place in caves. Ma thought he was referring to the era of Zhuge Liang's southern expedition and concluded that, given the timespan covered by the genealogy and the paucity of names it contained, the records must contain vast gaps.[73] But Hxala Tiehxa's genealogy, which Ma recorded, began with An Xing. So when Hxala Tiehxa referred to the clash with imperial armies, he meant the events surrounding the "Upheaval of Three Heroes," which became the earliest collective memory of the part of the Hxala clan that had remained in or returned to Tieggurmu after 1589—that is, those clan members who were dwelling between officialdom and nativeness. Ma's record, which to my knowledge is the only recorded orally performed genealogy of the Hxala clan of the northwestern riverbank, was thus mistakenly—perhaps due to Ma's lack of access to the Guangxu-era Leibo gazetteer—represented by the sociologist as incomplete.

Fang Zhuangyou's work, which was carried out a couple of years after Ma's, somewhat emulated the compiling practices of the Chinese historians and bureaucrats of the past. Like his predecessors, Fang used the available genealogies of the native chieftains to uncover some of their interpretations of local events. However, the major difference was that Fang strove to work with the official records as well as the written and oral histories of the Nuosu-Yi, which brought local perceptions into play. Some former chieftain families, such as those of Manyi and Zhongdu, were willing to share their genealogical records. But Fang started to encounter problems at Nixi, where he got into a heated verbal exchange with a family member who returned home in the evening just as Fang was rewriting the genealogy of his ancestors.[74] Not long after, he arrived at the Azho ancestral temple in Leibo at a time when everybody was busy with some local festivities, and was ignored by

[72]Ma Changshou 馬長壽, Li Shaoming 李紹明, and Zhou Weizhou 周偉洲, *Liangshan Luoyi kaocha baogao* 凉山羅彝考察報告 (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2006), 21–22.

[73]Ma, Li and Zhou, *Liangshan Luoyi kaocha baogao*, 17–19.

[74]Fang Zhuangyou 方壯猷, "Manyisi Wen deng jiu tusi jiapu" 蠻夷司文等久土司家譜, *Bianzheng gonglun* 4:7–8 (1945), 28a.

Yang Daidi's closest family members who claimed that they had no written genealogy to share. Nonetheless, over the following days and with the help of the local council secretary, Fang gathered four people (including one *bimo*) in a local teahouse facing the council building, where they made a collective effort to put together the Azho genealogy, albeit in the absence of any Azho clan member.[75] Ignoring the Hxala clan members from Tieggurmu on the northwestern riverbank, Fang chose to visit some of the living descendants of the Hxala clan from Huixi on the southeastern side at their homes. Yet they also told him that the genealogy was not in their possession. Hxala Shyge's claim that the genealogy was lost during the Cultural Revolution, which happened roughly two decades after Fang's visit, suggests that the Hxala clan did in fact have the genealogy at this time, but that like the Azho clan, they were unwilling to share it. Because Fang did not find it in the prefectural archive either, he had to cobble it together like his imperial predecessors with the help of temple merit steles (Ch. *gongdebei* 功德碑) and tombstones.[76] After finishing his work, Fang compared his results with those of some of his predecessors and lamented. All the recorded genealogies—not only the official bureaucratic Chinese and Nuosu-Yi versions but also the individual accounts from each of these two sides—significantly differed from each other.[77]

Since genealogies were necessary to verify the ruling family's legitimacy, and their existence was a precondition for succession, whenever they were missing it was up to clerks, historians, or the Nuosu-Yi *bimo* record keepers to reconstruct, if not reinvent, them[78]. These reconstructed genealogies were often based on the creative reinterpretation of collective memories. Both Ma and Fang were nevertheless fortunate, as some of their predecessors had failed to obtain any information, as evidenced by the personal writings of Assistant Prefect Liu Wenwei (劉文尉) from 1832, who was stationed in Leibo in the first half of the eighteenth century and had investigated the situation and records of the Azho clan. "When Yang Yinglong (楊應瀧) was inheriting the office, the order was given to investigate his genealogy. His family, however, already had disappeared from the official records. Somebody from their clan [was therefore asked to] write it down [from memory]," Liu begins his remarks. "The Yi do not study Chinese characters. I also heard that in the past, the Yi characters appeared in a column on the right and resembled the foot[prints] of a crow," the author adds, indicating that some official records might have been bilingual. "Nowadays, the characters are carved into a wooden tablet," he continues, indirectly pointing to the script's shifts between ritual and bureaucratic usage when seen in the context of the recorded wooden tablets used by Yang Jiuzha's wife, Lady Ma, during the "Upheaval of Three Heroes." Liu disappointedly notes that "All Yi whom I know and asked told me they do not have [a genealogy]," before concluding that: "Those who submitted to the imperial court's governance did not learn their own script or Chinese. Therefore, they cannot recognize a single character."[79] Liu's account brought to light another paradox of being caught between officialdom and nativeness—forgetting or abandoning the native Nuosu-Yi form of writing (or going without it if there were no knowledgeable *bimo* at hand) while also failing to absorb the Chinese official one. His

[75]Fang, *Leibo Pingshan Muchuan*, 16a–17a.

[76]Fang, *Leibo Pingshan Muchuan*, 14a.

[77]Fang, *Leibo Pingshan Muchuan*, 17a.

[78]See David Faure, "The Tusi That Never Was: Find an Ancestor, Connect to the State," in *Chieftains into Ancestors: Imperial Expansion and Indigenous Society in Southwest China*, edited by David Faure and Ts'ui P'ing Ho (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013), 171–86.

[79]Liu, *Leibo suoji*, 6b–7a.

account also points to the possibility that the Nuosu-Yi script might have fallen out of its original official use (presumably in some of the former Yi kingdoms) only to have been appropriated later and exclusively for native rituals. Most importantly, though, his account shows just how flexible the (re)inventing and passing on of genealogies was in Leibo during Ortai's investigation in Wumeng and Zhenxiong native prefectures. This flexibility in fact contributed to the partial illegibility of native genealogies to the officials of the bureaucratic Chinese state.

The cases of Fang Zhuangyou and Liu Wenwei fleshed out the difficulties faced by many when cobbling together historical records. Liu Wenwei's record testifies to the fact that the Azho native chieftains either did not want to share their genealogy with Liu or the clerks in the archives or that they had lost their genealogy and perhaps even the ability to record it at one point. This opened up a space for the Azho clan to manipulate the succession process. Unlike Ma Changshou and Ma Xueliang 馬學良, who both managed to obtain quite a lot of texts during their research, most scholars and bureaucrats who went to Liangshan a century earlier, such as Liu Wenwei, had to make do without the knowledge that genealogies imparted. Many Nuosu-Yi clans remained relatively secretive about their genealogies and texts, and especially those kept by the *bimo*, until the 1950s. This changed after the 1980s in particular, when the branch of Yi ethnohistory ("Yiology," *Yixue* 彝學) run by scholars that included the emerging Yi academic elites, turned the sharing of the texts from a matter of intra-clan transmission to one of public dissemination through vernacular and scholarly academic writing. Within the last few decades especially, the practice of publishing clan genealogies in both Chinese and the Nuosu-Yi language became a means of boosting the prestige of a clan or its lineage.[80]

Yet, the individual and regional versions of these genealogies have long differed from each other within the Nuosu-Yi language accounts. The discrepancies between them become more pronounced when looking at the overlaps between the Nuosu-Yi and Chinese-language materials. Take, for example, the Nuosu-Yi language records of the Hxala *nzymo*'s clan. In the local government-sponsored volume of the Sichuan Nuosu-Yi clans and lineages edited by Qomo Chyho, for which a large team of Nuosu-Yi fieldworkers have conducted an in-person survey that dates back to the 1980s and has run across multiple years in various parts of Liangshan, the Hxala clan is represented exclusively by the *nzymo* lineage of Huixi. It begins with a handful of ancestors carrying Nuosu-Yi names. However, from the early Ming Dynasty onwards, the names in Qomo Chyho's edited volume match the Chinese names quoted in numerous official historical sources. The monikers for the native prefect An Ji and all those who come after him are, then, only phonetically transcribed from Chinese into the Nuosu-Yi script.[81] Another source makes use of a reconstructed Hxala genealogy in which certain names are supplemented with their Nuosu-Yi equivalents.[82] As Hxala Shyge admitted, his Nuosu-Yi language skills are only rudimentary because he grew up mostly with the Chinese language. So when the people conducting Qomo Chyho's survey came, he simply recited the Chinese names of his ancestors found in the official records that he put together when working as a researcher in Liangshan's Museum of the Slave Society of the Yi Nationality

[80]Katherine Swancutt, "Freedom in Irony and Dreams: Inhabiting the Realms of Ancestors and Opportunities in Southwest China," in *Irony, Cynicism and the Chinese State*, edited by Hans Steinmüller and Susanne Brandtstädter (London: Routledge, 2016), 141.

[81]Qomo Chyho ꒰ꀋꂿ, *Zhoguo Nuosu cocy siddie—Sychuo zzi su* ꀕꁮꆹꀋꃅꀠꑭ—ꍏꀕꀋꃅ [Selected genealogies of China's Yi nationality—Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan minzu chubanshe, 2007), 386.

[82]Ddisse and Ddisse, *Nuosu bbaga sylu*, 385–91.

(Ch. Liangshan Yizu nuli shehui bowuguan 涼山彝族奴隸社會博物館) located in Xichang.[83] The Nuosu-Yi language transcription done by Qomo Chyho's team and later reproduced by others is another example of the kind of mutual appropriation that may lead—in a snowballing manner—to the creation of hybrid forms of officialdom and nativeness.

Histories and identities: The localized state and the Nuosu-Yi over the *longue durée*

Official and native genealogies are the principal lines along which the history and even the hybrid form of the still-inherited chieftain's identity in Mahu unfolds. It is therefore not surprising that the (re)construction, (re)presentation, and (re)positioning of official and native genealogies shapes the ways in which local histories are being written and told. One of these histories is the official narrative connecting the Mahu area to Zhuge Liang's southern expedition. While the historical sources dedicated only one short sentence to the clash of the famous Shu-Han general and the local chief Moho,[84] the Ming-Dynasty novel *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (Ch. *San guo yanyi* 三國演繹), which came out one millennium after this historical event, stretched this brief mention into a relatively long, eventful chapter.[85] Echoing this story, the Leibo gazetteer and the gazetteer of Sichuan Province, both of which date to the Qing Dynasty, mentioned a place called Wumasi 五馬寺 that lies in the mountains above Hxala Lake, where in 1732 a local stonemason discovered four bronze drums hidden in a karst cavern. The drums are thought to originate from Zhuge Liang, who allegedly gave them to Moho and his people as an insignia permitting them to keep ruling their lands after he and Moho allegedly befriended each other. The discovery happened immediately after the Mitie massacre, and the drums were stored in the newly erected local Guan Di Shrine in Leibo.[86] This official story in the Mahu area clearly combines narratives from official historical sources and popular literature. However, the snowballing of stories happened several times over the *longue durée* and is still ongoing.

Traces of these events are found today just in front of Dahai Village (大海村), where the local Ggaha *nzymo* had his office, and where a few dozen meters into the spectral mist, calm, and light blue waters of the lake, there is a small islet colloquially known as the "sea hump" (Ch. *haibao* 海包). Yuan-Dynasty official sources claim this islet was a stronghold of the "barbarian king" (Ch. *manwang* 蠻王).[87] Nowadays, the islet hosts a Buddhist Hailong Temple (海龍寺), which features statues of Moho and his people in the main hall, while a statue of Guanyin dwells in the innermost hall. The pillars of the main hall are adorned with the Nuosu-Yi script (see Figure 8). A recently erected stele made of concrete claims the temple was built in 1589, immediately after the "Upheaval of Three Heroes" was subdued, and that it was the Hxala clan that hybridized their cultural practices with that of the empire and built this as the sole Yi temple in all of China.[88] However, there is no

[83] An Jixian 安吉賢, "Mahu Manyi xuanfusi ji tuzhifu xingshuai kaolve" 馬湖蠻夷宣撫司及土知府興衰考略, in *Guizhou yixue* 貴州彝學, edited by Li Pingfan 李平凡 (Beijing: Minzu chubanshe, 2000), 55–62.

[84] Chen Shou 陳壽, *San guo zhi* 三國志 (Shanghai: Guoxue zhengli she, 1935), 5.2033.

[85] Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中, *San guo yan yi* 三國演義 (Taipei: San min shuju, 1976), 546–69.

[86] Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 34.4b–5a; For their depiction, see Zhang, *Sichuan tongzhi*, 1.39a–40b.

[87] Beilanxi 孛蘭肹, *Yuan yi tong zhi* 元一統志 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1966), 5.547.

[88] Zhang Guozheng 張國正, "Tantan Meng Huo guli" 談談孟獲故里, *Mahu yiyuan* 馬湖藝苑 21 (2017), 72. The appropriation of this story went also the opposite way. Zhuge Liang found its way between the natives closer to the imperial domain during the Song Dynasty, who turned him into a patron deity of horse breeders —see Richard von Glahn, *The Country of Streams and Grottoes*, 15.

Figure 8. Hailong Temple with statues of Moho and his people (Courtesy of the author, 2011).

record in the official sources for the year of the Hailong Temple's alleged establishment.[89] Only a bronze bell similar to those cast by Mahu chieftains in other temples confirms that the place was "rebuilt" in the late eighteenth century during the rule of the Qianlong Emperor—although the temple was absent from all official and non-official records at that time.[90] Notably, the Guangxu-era Leibo gazetteer lists it among its "ten views," maps, and leisure historical sites (Ch. *guji* 古跡), but does not present it as an official state-run temple (see Figure 9).[91] A brief mention in a writing from the Republic of China also mentions a "villa" (Ch. *bieshu* 別墅) on the islet, but not a temple.[92] It seems, then, that a much bigger player entered the stage who wanted to make use of Moho's story centuries after Pushur Yobo of the Hnielie clan claimed ancestry to him during the "Upheaval of Three Heroes."

Examining some of the recent writing in local periodicals, it becomes evident that both the connection between Moho and the alleged kingship of *manwang* and the later design of the temple are recent embellishments to the narrative on the part of writers and policymakers[93] with no grounding in historical evidence.[94] This story, which purports a

[89]Wang Tongyin 汪通胤, "Hailong si yu Meng Huo dian" 海龍寺與孟獲殿, in *Meng Huo wenhua yanjiu wenji* 孟獲文化研究文集, edited by Leibo xian yuyan wenzi gongzuo weiyuanhui 雷波縣語言文字工作委員會 (Kunming: Yunnan minzu chubanshe, 2012), 236.

[90]Liu, *Leibo suoji*, 29a; Zhang, *Yangsu tang wenji*, 9.3a.

[91]Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, 0.19b; 34.12a.

[92]Zeng Zhaolun 憎昭掄, *Da Liangshan Yi qu kaocha ji* 大涼山夷區考察記 (Beijing: Zhongguo qingnian chubanshe, 2012), 308.

[93]Zhang, *Tantan Meng Huo guli*, 71–74.

[94]Ben lanmu bianzhe 本專欄編者, "Jiazuo xinshang" 佳作欣賞, *Mahu yiyuan* 馬湖藝苑 21 (2017), 75.

Figure 9. An illustration of Ma Lake with its "sea hump" and the temple from the Guangxu era (Qin and Wan, *Leibo ting zhi*, "Tu kao" 20a–21b).

historical reconciliation and harmony between an important Chinese historical figure and the local ethnic population, was most probably written to promote the PRC's ethnic policies concerning the "unity of nationalities" (Ch. *minzu tuanjie* 民族团结). The story has also contributed to the development of the local tourist industry. Some of the local sticky stories even reached the opposite riverbank, where they have clung to an extraterrestrial object. During my visit to the now insignificant and small village of Mitie, the older villagers claimed that a meteorite found on the premises of their settlement was in fact a cannonball that landed there during Zhuge Liang's campaign in Mahu. Here, the Moho (hi)story—which had been previously overwritten by Hxala-derived toponyms—managed with state support to both resurrect and sideline the remarkable events surrounding the local Hxala, Azho, and other clans. The reconciliation story of Moho and Zhuge Liang serves the desired goals of the PRC state better than the convoluted history of how the Hxala and Azho clans appropriated elements of officialdom and nativeness.

Despite being somewhat bitter that the Hxala clan's glorious past has not attracted more fame in today's China, and that its deeds are falling into oblivion even in the region the Hxala formerly governed,[95] Hxala Shyge sees his family and himself as having been good servants of the Chinese state throughout the *longue durée.* He firmly rejects that his history is the product of Chinese imperial colonialism. In so doing, he takes a similar stance to many Yi intellectuals, who tend to position themselves as an integral (and even

[95]Hxala, *Yunnan sheng Yongshan xian Axing tuqianhu Hala*, 9–10.

co-founding) element of broader Chinese civilization,[96] albeit for reasons that go with (rather than against) the recent political and ideological attunement of the PRC.[97] Hxala Shyge's own life journey is similarly complicated. As a teenager, he participated in the Democratic Reforms in Liangshan that freed all the people formerly enslaved by the powerful Nuosu-Yi. His Hxala *nzymo* clan was among those who owned many slaves. Later, and much like its imperial predecessor, the Communist Party of China appointed some of the *nzymo* who pledged their loyalty to the new regime to local government positions. Hxala Shyge therefore worked in government offices, schools and research institutions. In his writing, he tends to downplay the parts of his clan's history in which his ancestors were seen as villains rather than heroes and to emphasize the parts where they practiced orderly officialdom. Interestingly, he entirely omits the Hxala clan branch from Leibo's Tieggurmu since they were much closer to Liangshan's anarchic nativeness and may even have sided with the rebels during the Mitie massacre. Despite being fluent only in the Sichuanese Chinese language variant, Hxala Shyge proudly observes most of the Nuosu-Yi customs, including the art of reinterpreting his genealogy. He has appropriated elements from the Chinese state's officialdom and his own Nuosu-Yi nativeness into the story of his clan and lineage.

Numerous local (hi)stories underpin the ideological positions of the PRC over the *longue durée*, while others problematize it. Some aspects of the Hxala clan history, including the fact that they inhabited both banks of the Jinsha River where they acquired their official insignia and clung to officialdom and nativeness, go against the grain of a core concept in the current PRC ideology—Marxist historical materialism and its evolutionary model of social development. Evoking the inner and outer borderlands of the empire, which became especially visible after the Mitie Massacre, the Yunnan riverbank was called "inside of the river" (Ch. *jiangnei* 江内), while the riverbank in Sichuan's Liangshan was referred to as "outside of the river" (Ch. *jiangwai* 江外).[98] Everywhere inside of the river was considered closer to officialdom, order, and authority—the purported evidence being the monolingual *xiangtianfen* tombstones in Huixi—which the PRC portrays as having been part of the "feudal stage" of society. By contrast, everywhere outside of the river was considered closer to nativeness, as shown by the bilingual *xiangtianfen* tombstones in Tieggurmu and Qylemu. Beyond this point, and further to the west, lay an illegible and untamable realm of chaos that allegedly dwelt one step below feudalism at the stage of a slave society. The Jinsha River in this vision serves as a time-space divide between feudalism in much of Yunnan and a slave society in Sichuanese Liangshan.

However, this notion of (historical) time is problematic. Although the people on both riverbanks inhabited different, even if often entangled, worlds, as shown by their burial practices and genealogical recordkeeping, they were contemporaries, and they sometimes came from the same clan. People on the two riverbanks often interacted with each other and traveled back and forth across the Jinsha, especially in the nineteenth century. It would even have been possible to have come eye to eye with each other across the Jinsha gorge. The Yi certainly enslaved people on both sides of the river, as the gazetteers have vividly portrayed on numerous occasions. Yet deterministic assumptions about their

[96]Liu Yaohan 劉堯漢, "'Yizu wenhua yanjiu conghshu' : zongxu" 彝族文化研究叢書:總序, in *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu shi yue li* 文明中國的彝族十月曆, edited by Liu Yaohan 劉堯漢 and Lu Yang 盧央 (Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 1–15.

[97]See Harrell, *The History of the History of the Yi*; Harrell and Li, *The History of the History of the Yi, Part II.*

[98]Zhao, *Qing shi gao*, 104/75.4a.

so-called phase of social development deny their coeval status.[99] This perception of the Yi continues to cause a whole range of social problems today, including their stigmatization and discrimination as people who are allegedly backward.

Remarkably, the banks of the Jinsha River and the collective memory of catastrophic violence associated with them probably contributed to some of the most distinctive features of Nuosu-Yi culture, society, religion, and everyday life in Liangshan. As Swancutt[100] points out, the lives of Nuosu-Yi are filled with thresholds that need to be crossed, often with the assistance of *bimo* ritual specialists. A case in point is the popular *yyrku* ꆹꌠ ritual, in which the *bimo* calls back the soul of a person that became detached from the body of its carrier when attacked by ghosts. Many of these ghosts include the souls of the deceased imperial soldiers and other non-Yi who died violently in Liangshan and did not receive proper death rites. Soul loss tends to cause a plethora of problems related to health and other matters for the Nuosu-Yi, which I often saw *bimo* address by weaving a *ryji* ꈤꉆ rope made of fresh grass and placing it over the household threshold of the person hosting the *yyrku* ritual. These *bimo* pointed out that many kinds of grasses they use during their rituals grow only on riverbanks and that in ancient times these ropes were used to wade the Jinsha River, including in moments when people had to flee from their rivals and/or larger conflicts. The blueprint for the abstract Nuosu-Yi "threshold of the cosmos," as Swancutt calls it, which resonates with other thresholds in the landscape—from the household thresholds crossed by lost souls in the *yyrku* ritual to the Jinsha River crossed by countless Nuosu-Yi over time—could well be found in the accumulation of past historical events. That said, without the role of the empire in the Mahu borderlands and elsewhere in Liangshan, the Nuosu-Yi of today wouldn't possess the same, in their words, "excellent culture" (Ch. *youxiu wenhua* 優秀文化).

Conclusion

I have come full circle in discussing the many further ways of unpacking the history of people such as the Nuosu-Yi and their native headmen. By combining the historical and textual-cum-anthropological sources, I have shown that besides the expansion of the Chinese Empire into its southwestern borderlands, there is a less-often told story of how the locals appropriated some of the state's cultural, political, and material resources. Their stories of mutual appropriations did not end with the empire and have continued up to the present. My analysis has therefore problematized the official and native origin stories by pointing to more than the records of the early and often fractious relations between the Mahu Nuosu-Yi native headmen and the Chinese state. I have shown that these origin stories were shaped by the back-and-forth migrations of the Nuosu-Yi native headmen and their clans over the Jinsha River between Yunnan and Sichuan, their *xiangtianfen* and other mortuary practices, and the creation and interpretation of their genealogies. Each of these histories of migration and hybrid death rites call into question the Nuosu-Yi claims of indigeneity to Liangshan following the mythological-historical split of their primordial

[99]Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014).

[100]Katherine Swancutt, "The Threshold of the Cosmos: Priestly Scriptures and the Shamanic Wilderness in Southwest China," in *Dynamic Cosmos: Movement, Paradox, and Experimentation in the Anthropology of Spirit Possession*, edited by Diana Espírito Santo and Matan Shapiro (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 119–31.

clans. Getting to the heart of these claims, though, requires coming to grips with how the Nuosu-Yi native headmen and the Chinese state have conceived of and positioned their own cultural hybridities over the *longue durée*.

Certain cryptic and undated Nuosu-Yi orally transmitted stories of their past migrations (Nuo. *hnewo* ꉆꌦ), and their practice of narrating the genealogies of things, concepts, and other elements of this world (Nuo. *bbopa* ꁾ ㅂ), offer a further window onto history-making that is instructive in this regard. Nuosu-Yi ethnologists, ethnohistorians, and cultural enthusiasts compiled many of these migration stories during the second half of the twentieth century into various editions of the *Book of Origins* (Nuo. *Hnewo teyy* ꉆꌦꀋㄐ).[101] Yet these stories of migrations—which in their genesis and usage are similar to the genealogies that appear in the *Book of Origins*—most likely form a palimpsest that developed over the *longue durée* from countless different migratory (hi)stories. In Liangshan, the Nuosu-Yi probably pushed out and/or enslaved an original population, and then over time kept enslaving, being enslaved by, or forming alliances with the Yi coming from the directions of Yunnan or Guizhou. Responding to their own regional conflicts with each other and/or with the imperial court, they seem to have kept pouring in waves into Liangshan, where over time they became its only inhabitants. Just as the Chinese state sought to expand what is now Southwest China while tapping into its natural resources, the Nuosu-Yi native headmen sought to exploit the state's human resources by enslaving its incoming settlers and by using the official insignia to wield authority over their people.

Seen in this light, the Yi who later became highland Nuosu can perhaps be viewed as carriers of a culture created alternately through histories of expansion (e.g., possibly from Northwest Guizhou to the Mahu domain) and collaboration (e.g., between the Hxala and Azho clans who joined forces with each other during uprisings and who cooperated with the state when providing it with "spirit wood"). These histories were shaped further by competition (e.g., when the Hxala clan members competed with other clans and with each other for the state's resources), conflict (e.g., the battles in Huanglang and Mitie) and escape (e.g., to highland Liangshan). All of this is evidenced by how the Nuosu-Yi (re) gained status, their authority over people and land, the designs of their tombs, and the (re) invention of their genealogies under the pressure of the imperial court and other Yi competitors. Both the institution of native chieftains in Liangshan and the empire succumbed to the greater social changes unfolding from the late-nineteenth century deep into the twentieth century. These events still inform the many (re)constructed and interpreted histories of the PRC, as the inheritor of the official position, and the Nuosu-Yi as the local currently native ethnic population, in former Mahu Prefecture and its broader surrounds. Revealingly, these events also continue to unsettle the Eurocentric colonial narrative of an "Independent Lololand"[102] that was once proclaimed to be one of "the only portions of the globe which are to-day unexplored."[103] At first internalized by the Chinese state and the Nuosu-Yi through the works of Chinese republican anthropologists, the narrative of an isolated Liangshan has been increasingly called into question

[101]Mark Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu, *The Nuosu Book of Origins* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2019).

[102]W.N Fergusson, John. W. Brooke, and C.H. Meares, *Adventure, Sport and Travel on the Tibetan Steppes* (New York: Scribner, 1911).

[103]Vicomte d'Ollone, *In Forbidden China: The d'Ollone Mission 1906–1909* (Boston: Small, Mynard, and Company, 1912), 12.

by the scholarly works of people such as Hxala Shyge, who prefer to envision history through the lens of the *longue durée*. As these Nuosu-Yi works suggest, the so-called "Lololand" was forged by mutual appropriations of political, economic, and cultural-historical elements that were brought into being as the Nuosu-Yi clans and their various lineages, the imperial court, the Kuomintang, the PRC ruled by the Communist Party, and a raft of officials, gazetteer-writers, bronze bell-casters, tombstone-carvers, scholars, ethnographers, and others sought to pursue further ways of balancing the often-competing forces of officialdom and nativeness.

In Mahu, the "middle grounds" of its hybrid institutions and cultural elements were not a mid-way point in a presumed transformation from indigeneity to Chineseness. There was no straight, unidirectional, and finite line between officialdom and nativeness, as the case of the Hxala *nzymo* clan in particular has shown. The mutual appropriations of officialdom and nativeness that I have discussed throughout this article amounted instead to a "further way" of exploiting the valuable forms of status, authority, land, material culture, genealogies, and identity-forming historical narratives of others. This kind of exploitation is particularly clear in the case of the Hxala *nzymo*, who were Sinicized *tuguan* bureaucratic native officials during the Ming Dynasty but re-nativized themselves on at least two occasions during the Ming and the Qing, after the *gailiu* of their terrain, when they became reappointed as *tusi* military native officials, albeit governing smaller areas. Some of these *tusi*, such as Yang Shijin of Azho, were even celebrated as heroes by the imperial court, although they and their kin lived a strictly native way of life when it came to negotiated appeasement and mortuary practices. Echoes of the power struggles between the Chinese state and the chieftains of the Hxala and Azho clans in Mahu also resonate with some of the major Nuosu-Yi rituals of today. A case in point is the *yyrku* soul-calling ritual that evokes the use of the *yyryy* grass ropes that the Nuosu-Yi used to pull themselves to safety across the Jinsha River. Running parallel to this is the absorption of the distinct ideologies and etiquettes of Confucianism, Buddhism (Mahayana and also Vajrayana further west), and Daoism into the flexible Nuosu-Yi animistic repertoire. Traces of the Nuosu-Yi animistic-religious world are found in the temple design of the Chinese state in Huanglang, while the *xiangtianfen* compromise shows that the imperial religions influenced the mortuary practices of the Nuosu-Yi. Further evidence for the mutual appropriation of ideologies and etiquettes appears in both the written and oral genealogical (re)constructions of Chinese bureaucrats, the Nuosu-Yi *bimo*, and other individuals. Even the ongoing Nuosu-Yi inter- and intra-clan rivalries, and the riverbanks of the Jinsha, point to how the histories of the Nuosu-Yi, the local Chinese state in Mahu, and others were almost always built on mutual appropriations and unstable forms of hybridity. Similar history-making, I believe, happens in different regions of Southwest China and Southeast Asia beyond Mahu.

Mahu, and broader Liangshan in particular, is one of those places in the Chinese borderlands that lacks a coherent Chinese bureaucratic historical record describing local events over the *longue durée*. This lack of coherence might pose a significant problem for historical research. But it also pushes researchers to stretch beyond their archival work and seek out further ways of combining historical and textual research with ethnographic fieldwork. Perhaps more often than expected, these further ways lead to the uncovering of previously untapped texts, such as the many textually and orally transmitted Nuosu-Yi genealogies, *xiangtianfen* gravestones, and bell inscriptions. More importantly, these further ways may give voice to the living descendants of the people of study. What historical textual-cum-anthropological analyses may enable us to uncover, then, is the

history of the history of people like the native chieftains of Mahu,[104] as told by local researchers and inheritors of the *nzymo* legacy, such as Hxala Shyge. He is, after all, one among many in Liangshan who can show us firsthand how their own history-making has long been envisioned.

Acknowledgements. The data-gathering phase of this research was supported by the Hong Kong PhD Fellowship Scheme (no. UGC/GEN/456/08, UGC/GEN/456/5/09, PF15-16536) and its initial write-up was funded by both the Lumina Quaeruntur Fellowship for Prospective Researchers of the Czech Academy of Sciences (Grant no. LQ300211901) and its *Power and Strategies of Social and Political Order* research platform at the Oriental Institute, Czech Academy of Sciences. Additional fieldwork and the final reshaping of the article happened as a part of—and is therefore the outcome of—the "Cosmological Visionaries" (COSMOVIS) project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (Grant Agreement No. 856543).

After more than a decade and multiple instances of abandoning this project, it finally materialized in 2024. This is because of all the people the author kept meeting along the way, who helped him find a balance between cautious certainty and healthy skepticism regarding the historical and ethnographic materials they interrogated together. There are several outstanding and excellent individuals to whom the author would like to extend his heartfelt thanks. To Hxala Shyge, the direct descendant of Hxala *nzymo* born in the turbulent late 1930s, for filling in numerous gaps in my understanding, providing me with important unpublished materials and encouraging me to work on my own history of Mahu, which his ancestors administered. His input gave the author a much-needed dose of confidence to stand behind his conclusions. To scholars and cultural enthusiasts Yoqy Zoxi ꀊꉼꁧ (Yueqi Zuoxi 約其佐喜), Yoqy Qubo ꀊꉼꀠ (Ma Qubo 馬曲博), and Ajji Lazzi ꀃꊿꌠ (Aji Laze 阿吉拉則), who not only facilitated the author's encounter with Hxala Shyge in summer 2023 after so many years of failed attempts to get in touch with him, but also engaged in conversations about the particularities of Nuosu-Yi culture and accompanied him to visit some places that he would have had great hardships visiting alone. To Molo Yygumo ꁌ꒐ꄊꀘ (Mao Xiaoying 毛晓英) and Jjivo Yyzu ꊿꑚꄊꁌ (Jiwu Yizuo 吉伍依作), for their ongoing mentorship in all things Nuosu-Yi since 2014 onwards, when the author studied their language in Xichang College, and they helped him to reconstruct the Nuosu-Yi-language personal names and toponyms that appear in Ming, Qing, and Republican writings transcribed into Chinese characters. My gratitude also goes to Jakub Hrubý for his mentorship as I wrote my Czech-language master's thesis on the native chieftain system in Liangshan and for his invaluable help with navigating the thick historical material on it, to Katherine Swancutt for reading, commenting on and thus significantly improving the final manuscript, and also to two anonymous reviewers. Finally, the author is grateful to his wife and best friend, Liu Xinyi, for her help with the source material and numerous late-evening conversations that brought invaluable perspectives on my thought process and writing.

[104]Jan Karlach, "Mythogeographies of Anthropological Knowledge: Writing over the Lines and Footsteps of History in Southwest China," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* (2024), https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.14242.

Cite this article: Jan Karlach, "Between Officialdom and Nativeness: Mutually Appropriating the State and the Nuosu-Yi Native Chieftain Clans in Southwest China," *Journal of Chinese History* (2025), 1–35 https://doi.org/10.1017/jch.2024.54.