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Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China

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CHAPTER 12

Language Policy for the Yi

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MINORITY LANGUAGE POLICIES IN CHINA

Since 1950, official language and other policies concerning the group called Yi have been consistent with other practices of the Chinese state toward nearby minorities who did not pose a threat to Chinese rule and were for the most part willing to accept the Chinese civilizing project, as discussed in Harrell's 1995 edited volume. The overall political and economic goal for most of the time up to 1950 was to consolidate and expand central control. Of course this was less true in times of instability and during the early parts of rule by dynasties whose rulers were not ethnic Chinese, such as the Yuan (Mongol) and Qing (Manchu). When direct contact between Chinese and Yi existed, such as during the former and latter Han dynasties and again during the Tang dynasty, the two groups were at first accommodated into the system of indirect rule through local tributaries, which meant that the elite began to use the Chinese language. With large-scale Chinese migration into the plains and valleys of the Yi area over the last millennium, this contact became more pervasive. Thus the Chinese language began to influence Yi languages more and more, even to the extent that the Yi developed a cluster of writing systems based on the same principle as Chinese and using some Chinese characters (though mainly different ones).

The Chinese classification of minorities was rather procrustean, especially for smaller and more remote groups in the southwest like the Yi. Different groups tended to be lumped together under one term, and the terms used to refer to these groups changed fairly frequently. For example, the name Qiang (with a couple of variants) at various stages referred to a range of different groups in what is now Gansu and northern Sichuan. In general the policy concerning the languages of small groups or groups within the core political orbit of China was to assimilate them, initially by using Chinese as a lingua franca and medium of literacy, and ultimately by replacing the mi-

nority spoken languages with varieties of Chinese. There is evidence that substantial populations of Zhuang-Dong- (Thai-) language speakers were thus assimilated into the Yuè (Cantonese) over several millennia, and in the last millennium many members of minorities in the southwest, including quite a few Yi, have amalgamated themselves into the Chinese population who speak southwestern Mandarin.

When the ruling dynasty was not ethnic Chinese, as during the Yuan (Mongol) and Qing (Manchu), there was a much greater recognition and use, at least early in the dynasty, of the language of the rulers. Nominally Manchu remained the official language of the Qing court until 1911 and again in Manchukuo from 1932 to 1945; but by the nineteenth century this was very nominal indeed.[1]

During most Chinese dynasties, the main language workers were officials in charge of dealing with outside visitors, most of whom came with diplomatic and trading missions, which the Chinese court usually chose to regard as missions of submission and tribute. These officials were themselves often members of such missions or semihostages from the ruling families of adjacent territories who were kept, sometimes against their will, in the capital to work as translators and interpreters. This practice was reported as early as the Zhou dynasty.

In 1407, during the Ming dynasty, a separate translation office, the Siyiguan 四夷馆, was established. Staffed mainly by the descendants of previous translators, its work seems to have been rather ineffective. This office continued to exist under the Qing dynasty, under the slightly revised name Siyiguan (四译馆). Wild (1945) provides a description of this office and its activities. It produced a series of 740-word vocabularies of the languages it worked with, including those of a few large minorities like the Yi, thus starting the lexicographical tradition that has continued in the post-1950 linguistic surveys of minority languages. The Yi vocabulary is of an Eastern Yi variety then spoken in Yongning (modern Xuyong) County in south-central Sichuan, adjacent to Weining in Guizhou; it has been reproduced and analyzed in detail in Nishida (1979). This follows the usual arrangement of these vocabularies, with the Yi characters, the Chinese gloss, and Chinese characters to represent the phonetic value of the Yi characters. Another attempt at recording Yi is found in d'Ollone (1912), which includes two Northern Yi varieties from Xide and Zhaojue and an Eastern Yi variety from Weining in Guizhou.

During the Republican period, minority language policy continued to be one of assimilation and neglect. However, during the anti-Japanese war, many scholars moved to the southwest, and a few started serious linguistic research

1. For an excellent survey of the decline and current state of Manchu, see Kane 1997.

on minority languages including Yi. Among these scholars were Professor Fu Maoji, who worked in Sichuan on Northern Yi, among other languages, and Professor Ma Xueliang, who worked in Yunnan on Eastern Yi (Ma Xueliang 1948) and on Sani (Ma Xueliang 1951). These two scholars were the founders of modern linguistic study of the Yi, and continued to lead minority language work after 1949. On his return after earning his Cambridge Ph.D. on Northern Yi (Fu 1998), Fu Maoji became leader of minority language work at the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (later renamed the Institute of Nationality Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences; its work on varieties of Chinese remained in the residual Institute of Linguistics). Ma Xueliang became leader of the minority language department at the Central Institute (now University) of Nationalities, where he trained successive generations of people working on minority languages. At first this was mainly young ethnic Chinese, including many senior scholars still active in Yi language work. From the mid-1950s, but especially in the last twenty years, more and more of those trained have been members of the minority groups themselves.

After 1949, minority policy was revolutionized, and minority language policy along with it. In the 1954 and 1982 constitutions of the People's Republic of China, the right of each national minority to use and develop its own language is specifically recognized (1982, article 4); in practice, however, these rights have sometimes not been asserted or implemented, especially during periods of political change. The first stage in the development of the new minority language policy was to replace many of the old and often pejorative names for minorities formerly used in Chinese, and to start training, in 1951, groups of mainly majority-group Chinese language researchers to study minority languages at the Central Institute of Nationalities. At this time, much of the Yi territory, like much of Tibet, was left partially in the hands of its traditional rulers, though an increased Chinese administrative and military presence moved into areas such as Liangshan.

The major research effort to describe the existing minority languages and cultures and establish an official classification of national minorities took place from 1956 to 1958. This was a very large team effort, with the first generation of mainly ethnic Chinese language scholars training and leading teams of middle-school graduates. Different teams from the Institute of Linguistics of the Chinese Academy of Sciences surveyed minority languages and varieties of Chinese in every part of China; at the same time, ethnographic surveys were undertaken by other similar teams. Some of the best Yi and other minority workers from these surveys later became the first generation of minority scholars working on their own languages and cultures. The linguistic part of the survey collected a word list of over nine hundred items and a substantial number of sentences in thousands of locations; some of these man-

uscript materials, of variable quality, still exist and are occasionally used by scholars. A few Russian scholars also took part in the surveys.

At this stage the general language policy was to develop new romanized scripts for those languages that did not already have a suitable script. The Yi in Sichuan were among the first to have a romanized script, starting in 1951; this happened despite the existence of the traditional Yi script in this area. The romanization went through a number of revisions in the mid-1950s. One of these included a few Cyrillic letters, under the influence of Russian linguists working in the surveys; but with the break between China and the Soviet Union, these were removed from Yi and nearly all other romanized scripts in 1958. These Yi romanizations of the 1950s were never very widely used, and with political upheavals in the Yi areas from the late 1950s their use stopped.

The 1950s classification of national minorities followed the Soviet criteria: small groups were to be combined into larger national minorities that share a language, culture, territory, and economy. The ethnic Chinese majority is now known as Han; within this group the linguistic differences are very great, but literary and cultural unity has long been supported by the Chinese writing system. In parallel fashion, many related small groups have been combined into national minorities and in some cases renamed; this is the case for the Yi.

In general the degree of linguistic similarity within a national minority is similar to that within Chinese; that is, there are various related but often not mutually intelligible spoken varieties. This is true of the Yi and of many other groups in Yunnan and elsewhere, including the Lisu, Lahu, and Hani nationalities, whose languages are historically quite close to Yi. Non-Chinese linguists often say that the linguistic varieties within the Han Chinese majority and within some other groups are separate languages, not dialects as they are usually described within China; but this is actually a matter of noncongruity between levels of linguistic terminology. The Chinese term *yuyan* refers to a higher-level group than indicated by the English term *language;* and similarly the Chinese term *fangyan* refers to a higher-level group than indicated by the English term *dialect,* which corresponds better to the Chinese term *tuyu.*

When pinyin became the official phonetic representation of Chinese in 1956–58, a set of principles was adopted for minority languages and scripts, as follows:

1. There should be a standard variety, which should be that of a central area, with the largest number of speakers, intelligible to speakers of other varieties and preferably spoken in an economically, politically, and culturally advanced area.
2. New writing systems should be romanizations.

3. The values of letters should be according to Chinese pinyin.
4. Any reformed writing systems should also be romanized.

In practice, some existing scripts, such as the old Lisu script using roman capital letters and Arabic scripts for Turkic languages and Tajik in Xinjiang, were replaced by romanized scripts according to principle 4; but in most such cases the minorities have subsequently chosen to revert to the traditional script.[2] Principle 3 was intended to assist the minorities in learning standard Chinese *(putonghua).*

The most difficult and controversial aspect of language policy was often the choice of the standard variety. This was done in the late 1950s at meetings of leading figures of each nationality, with extensive participation by the Chinese scholars who were involved in the survey work. As in most such meetings in China, the outcome was largely determined in advance, but the consultative process was seen to be carried out in full. In the case of some nationalities with great internal linguistic diversity, several different standard varieties were chosen; these often followed political boundaries, and the relevant writing systems were used in different provinces or regions, prefectures, and counties. For Miao, for example, three different new romanizations are used in different parts of Guizhou and adjacent areas of Hunan, Sichuan, and Yunnan, while a modified version of a missionary script is used by Christian Miao in other parts of Guizhou and Yunnan; see Enwall (1994) for further details.

From 1958 the anti-Rightist campaign and its minority counterpart, the Nationalities Unity campaign, had a very severe political effect in many minority areas; the traditional rulers were deposed, often rather violently, as in Liangshan, and slaves were liberated. This set minority language work back greatly, as did the Great Leap Forward, which further disrupted economic activity. After the initial preparation and trials of romanized orthographies, some school and adult literacy textbooks were published, but it is not clear how extensively they were used. All language work, and indeed nearly all education, effectively stopped during the Cultural Revolution; sadly, many dictionaries and other manuscripts were destroyed, and others languished unpublished until the 1980s. What did get published in minority languages in the 1960s and early 1970s was mainly political: *Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong* and similar treatises, using the romanized systems of the late 1950s; parallel editions of these were produced in various languages, using the same illustrations.

The original goal of the linguistic surveys of the mid-1950s was to produce a writing system, textbooks, grammar, and dictionary of each national minority

2. For details of the Uighur case, which is complicated by the use of Cyrillic scripts for this and other Turkic languages in the former Soviet Union, see Wei (1993); concerning Lisu, see Bradley and Kane (1981) and Bradley (1994).

language, based on a standard variety selected after the survey and discussions. The cultural surveys were to produce a history and descriptive ethnographic materials on each nationality. In most cases the initial textbooks containing the new writing systems first came out in the late 1950s. Two of the grammar volumes (Lisu and Jingpo) appeared in 1959, published by the Academy of Sciences; publishing of this series resumed in the early 1980s. Dictionaries mainly did not appear until after 1978, which is also when the histories and ethnographic volumes, mainly compiled in the late 1950s and early 1960s, also started to be published. Where the original classification into fifty-five national minorities proved too coarse, additional materials were also prepared: for example, for two varieties of Monba and several varieties of Luoba in Tibet, for additional varieties within the Nu and Jingpo nationalities in Yunnan, and for the Yi in the three provinces where most of them live.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution, from 1975 and especially after 1978, language work restarted in earnest; many pre-1965 materials that had not been destroyed were finally published, and a massive new effort started. This involved training large numbers of young members of national minorities to do linguistic and cultural research on their own groups, and assigning them to work in language-related units, such as translation bureaus, language bureaus, and cultural offices; research units of nationality affairs commissions; nationalities-publishing offices at various levels; or at all levels of education from primary to tertiary. Publishing in minority languages expanded exponentially, and the use of these languages in education, the media, and elsewhere became fully established during the 1980s. Some nationalities whose leaders had chosen not to implement a writing system in the 1950s, such as the Qiang, Bai, and Naxi, moved to do so; others whose writing systems had been in abeyance for over twenty years, such as the Hani, revised and reintroduced them; and some, such as the Lisu, reverted quietly to their previous writing systems in many localities.

The initial leadership of post-1950 language policy for national minority groups such as the Yi was largely Chinese; some of these people are still active, but most are approaching or beyond retirement. The younger generation—including nearly all practical language workers at the national, provincial, prefectural, and county levels in the Nationalities Commission, Education Commission, language offices, translation offices, and so on—is made up of members of the group whose language they work on. These people worked with great enthusiasm during the 1970s and 1980s and produced truly massive amounts of material in and about their own languages. They have now assumed full control of language work.

Since economic liberalization, some of the impetus has gone out of language work, and a backlog of very valuable unpublished materials has again developed: dictionaries, transcriptions of traditional manuscripts, and a great deal of other valuable linguistic and cultural work is languishing in drawers

throughout China. What gets published usually has a more practical or popular orientation: health, agricultural and animal husbandry instructions, popular literature, and tourist-oriented picture books; such things are more likely to receive the publication subsidies from local government now required by most publishers in China, including the various nationalities publishing houses. Educational materials continue to be reprinted as needed, and a substantial linguistic literature in Chinese and in various minority languages, written by and for the new post-1978 generation of young minority scholars and their students, has started to develop.

THE YI AND THE YI LANGUAGES

Like many other groups, the Yi were called by a series of names through Chinese history. One early term was *Man,* which referred to a variety of non-Chinese groups in the southwest, including the Miao, Yao, Yi, and others. More specifically, the Yi were also sometimes referred to as *Wuman,* but this term included other groups of eastern Yunnan as well. Some more recent names for the Yi were derived from the names of dynasties, such as the Dian kingdom of the Kunming area, in close contact with the Chinese since the mid-fourth century B.C., and the Cuan kingdom (which later split into two) of the same area from the fourth to the twelfth century A.D. After this time, many Yi groups came to be known as Luoluo, written in various ways with characters containing the dog radical, *luo* 猡, or *luo* 猓, or the two together. Some Yi groups actually called themselves by these names, but most did not; naturally, these characters are pejorative. During the Ming dynasty, yet another collective term for southwestern non-Chinese groups, *Yi* 夷, became current. This was used for the Zhuang, Buyi, and other more or less Sinicized Thai groups, as well as for the more Sinicized subgroups of the Yi, but not for the more remote groups such as the Miao. With the establishment of the People's Republic of China, the old pejorative term *Luoluo* was eliminated, replaced by the new character *Yi* 彝, which is again homophonous with the Ming and Qing term; but it now refers only to the Yi, not to the various other groups previously included in those terms. When it is used as the former name of the Yi or in parts of names for certain subgroups within the Yi, the term *Luoluo* is now of course written with the human radical.

According to the traditional history, the Yi were divided into six clans, which migrated in various directions away from the Kunming area after the collapse of the Cuan kingdoms; modern linguists may have used this as one of the reasons for including six major *fangyan* groups within Yi. Several versions of these migration histories have been edited and published in Guo and Ding (1984). These relate to four subgroups of the Yi: the Southern Nisu, Southeastern Sani, Eastern Nasu, and Northern Nuosu.

The other two groups now included in the Yi nationality, the Central Yi

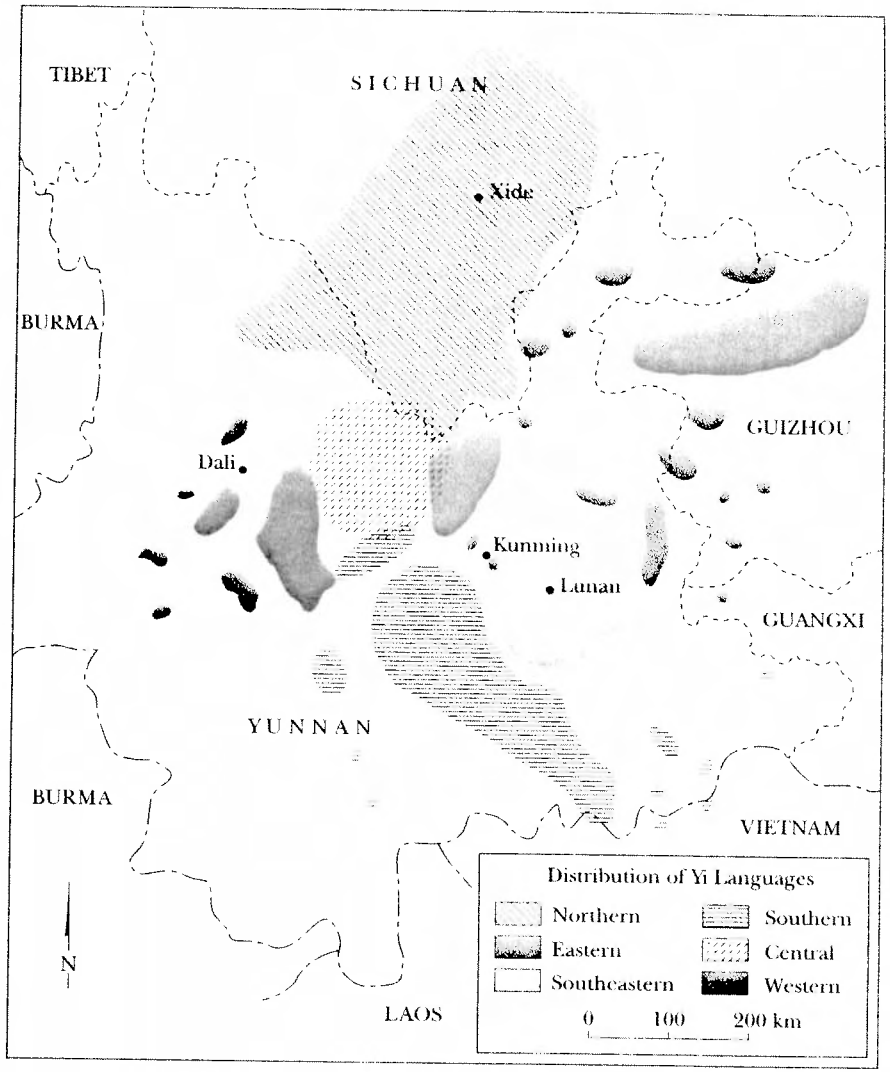
and Western Yi, do not have a traditional writing system and are linguistically more similar to related groups further to the west and southwest, such as the Lisu and Lahu. The Central Yi call themselves Lipo in some areas and Luoluopo in others (see Erik Mueggler, chapter 10 in this volume); their language is so similar to Lisu that over fifty thousand Lipo in Luquan, Wuding, and Yuanmou Counties, northwest of Kunming, changed their nationality from Yi to Lisu between the 1982 and 1990 census. The Western Yi mostly call themselves Laluo; their speech is also rather closer to Lisu than to the rest of Yi.

The modern names of the subgroups of the Yi are based on geographical location. Of the four subgroups who trace their origins back to the Cuan kingdom and traditionally use the Yi script, the most numerous is the Northern Yi, or Nuosu, who live mainly in southern Sichuan but also in northwestern and northeastern Yunnan. Very close to this group linguistically is the Eastern Yi, or Nasu, with many subgroups dispersed across northeastern Yunnan, western Guizhou, and a small part of northwestern Guangxi. The group classified as Southern Yi, or Nisu, of south-central Yunnan includes some subgroups with quite different names, including the Pula whose speech is distinct and who are recognized as a separate nationality from the Lôlô (Yi) in Vietnam. Concentrated in the area to the southeast of Kunming are the Southeastern Yi, with four major named subgroups: Sani mainly in Shilin County, Axi farther south in Mile County and surrounding areas, Azhe further south again, and Azha to the southeast. The "Southern Yi" Pula extend eastward, south of these Southeastern Yi subgroups.

Map 12.1 shows the approximate locations of these groups; but note that in many areas there is overlap: for example, there are some Lipo and some Nuosu in rural areas of Panzhihua (formerly Dukou) City and Yuanmou County, with the Lipo mainly to the south of the Jinsha River and the Nuosu mainly to the north. Similarly, there are some Lipo and some Nasu in Wuding and Luquan counties, with the former mainly but not exclusively to the west; and some Lipo, some Nisu, and some Laluo in parts of southwestern Chuxiong Prefecture.

Northern Yi or Nuosu is divided by speakers into three subgroups. The northern subgroup is the "large trousers," or Ynuo (Chinese, Yinuo),[3] with a fairly distinct northwestern variety around Lindimu (or Tianba 田坝, the Chinese name of the same place); the latter is the variety described in Fu (1998). The central "middle trousers," or Shynra (Chinese, Shengza), are the majority of the Northern Yi, and the type of Shynra spoken at Xide County was

3. Yi names are given in the romanization introduced in the 1970s; these are usually represented in Chinese by the characters shown in the glossary corresponding to their Hanyu pinyin form.



Map 12.1. Distribution of Yi dialects in Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou

selected as the standard.[4] The southern are the "small trousers," or Suondi (Chinese, Suodi), with a subdivision into western Adur and eastern Suondi proper. Of these varieties, Yynuo and Shynra are easily mutually intelligible, but speakers of Suondi must make a considerable effort to learn Shynra. There are a few villages in western Zhaojue County that are linguistically transitional between Suondi and Shynra. The trousers referred to are the men's; women's clothing, especially the headdress, also differs greatly. There are several hundred thousand Shynra in Ninglang and adjacent counties in northwestern Yunnan and a smaller number in western parts of Zhaotong Prefecture in northeastern Yunnan; and there are a few Suondi in Yuanmou and Wuding Counties, but most Northern Yi live in Sichuan.

Eastern Yi, or Nasu, contains a very large number of diverse varieties spread over northeastern Yunnan, western Guizhou, Longlin County in Guangxi, and parts of southern Yibin Prefecture in Sichuan. These actually form a dialect chain with Northern Yi, but dialects at the extremes are not mutually intelligible even within Eastern Yi. In Yunnan the main subgroup is the Hei Yi, or Nasu, as described in Ma (1948) but referred to in the Christian missionary literature as Nosu. A Luquan County variety of Hei Yi was selected as the standard for Eastern Yi in Yunnan. Other subgroups in Yunnan include the Gan Yi, or Laka, in the north, Hong Yi in the west, and Gepo (also referred to in the Christian literature as Kopu) in the east. In Guizhou the Nasu are divided according to former Yi kingdoms, Shuixi, Wusa, Wumeng, and Mangbu in different areas of northwestern Guizhou; several of these kingdoms actually overlapped into what is now Zhaotong Prefecture in Yunnan and Yibin Prefecture in Sichuan, and the same subvarieties of Yi are also spoken there. In Guizhou, as discussed below, several alternative varieties are accepted in educational settings; but the Shuixi variety of Bijie and Dafang Counties is regarded as the most standard. Two other types of Yi are also included in Eastern Yi by linguists in China. One comprises the various moribund varieties of the Kunming region of central Yunnan, including Samei, or Sami, just southeast of Kunming, Sanyie just west of Kunming, and Samaduo in one village in the southern outskirts of Kunming. The other is the rather divergent variety spoken in southwestern Guizhou around Panxian County and in adjacent areas of eastern Yunnan.

Southern Yi or Nisu also includes a large range of varieties spoken in a range from central Yunnan to northernmost Vietnam; many of these are quite different, and only very limited linguistic data are available about them.

Southeastern Yi is concentrated in the area immediately southeast of Kunming. Each of the four subgroups, Sani, Axi, Azhe, and Azha, feels itself to

4. All examples are given here in the standard romanization of the standard Xide variety of Shynra.

be a distinct group; only the Sani and Azhe have a literary tradition, and their characters are often quite different from those of the other three Yi literary traditions. The Sani call themselves Ni, which is of course also the traditional name of the Yi of several other subgroups. In the western literature, they are sometimes referred to as Gni or Gni Lolo, terms used by the French missionary Paul Vial, who published a great deal of material on them.[5] Though it does not really make sense to speak of a standard variety for these four groups, a local variety of Sani from the southeastern Guishan area was selected in the late 1950s; this is slightly different from the varieties described in Vial (1908–09) and in Ma (1951), and has been fully documented in Jin Guoku and colleagues (1983).

In the 1990 census the Yi were enumerated at 6,572,173. Of these, 4,060,327 were in Yunnan, or nearly 62 percent; just under 1.8 million, or over 27 percent, were in Sichuan; 707,275, or over 10 percent, in Guizhou; 6,074 in Guangxi; and the remainder scattered in various areas. The following list shows the estimated numbers of speakers of each type of Yi in late 1999.

Northern Yi (Nuosu) total	2,500,000	
Yynuo (N)	450,000	
Shynra (C)	1,500,000	(as first dialect)
Suondi/Adur (S)	550,000	
Eastern Yi (Nasu, etc.)	1,000,000	
Southern Yi (Nisu, etc.)	500,000	
Southeastern Yi total	500,000	
Sani	120,000	
Axi	100,000	
Azhe	80,000	
Azha	100,000	
Central Yi (Lipo-Luoluopo)	700,000	
Western Yi (Laluo)	500,000	

The above list includes the 6,500 Pula and 3,200 "Lôlô" of Vietnam in the Southern Yi total. Many of the Yi in China are bilingual in Chinese, and an increasing proportion of the younger Yi speak Yi less well than Chinese. In addition to the above totals, about 1.5 million Yi now speak little or no Yi. These nonspeakers are concentrated in Yunnan and Guizhou, especially among the Western Yi and also among the Eastern Yi. Quite a few Central,

5. See, for example, Vial (1908–09); for an account of Vial, see Swain 1995. For Sani society, see Swain 1995 and Swain, chapter 11 in this volume.

Southern, and Southeastern Yi, primarily but not exclusively the young, do not speak Yi; but most of the Northern Yi do. As previously discussed, the Central Yi and Western Yi speak varieties closer to Lisu and Lahu than to the other types of Yi.[6]

RECENT LANGUAGE POLICY FOR THE YI

In a truly impressive effort, Yi and Chinese linguists have preserved a large corpus of Yi traditional written materials. They have also developed three different revised versions of the traditional script and taught these very widely and maintained a fourth. Each province with a substantial Yi population has taken a completely different approach to script reform.

In Sichuan, the Shynra speech of Xide County was selected as a standard; a new syllabary of 819 syllables and one diacritic (representing a tone that arises mainly from sandhi) was chosen from the traditional characters in their Xide pronunciation. This new syllabary was officially approved on October 1, 1980, and has been very widely used ever since; up to 100 percent literacy is claimed in some areas. There is extensive publishing of school textbooks up to university level (see Harrell and Bamo 1998), adult literacy materials, traditional literature, new literature in traditional and modern styles, translated Chinese literature, agricultural and political materials, and even a daily newspaper. Regular radio broadcasts and public notices in the Yi areas of Sichuan are bilingual, and much of public life can be conducted in Yi. One result is rapidly increasing knowledge of the standard variety by speakers of other varieties, derived from its use as a lingua franca and language of education and the media. There are type fonts, including various ornamental ones, typewriters, and a computer font, for this script. In addition, a standard romanized phonetic form for Shynra has been agreed upon, though it is mainly used for teaching Yi to Chinese and others or in citing linguistic examples in scholarly literature.

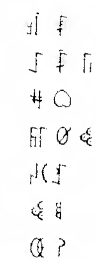
One curious feature of this script is that all syllabic characters have been rotated ninety degrees clockwise compared to other versions of the Yi script; this is perhaps because the Northern Yi read their books by holding them at a right angle to the way books are held by other Yi, and the unreformed Northern script is still read right to left rather than top to bottom as the others are. Since the mid-1970s, when drafts of the new syllabary came into use, writing has instead been from left to right starting at the top left, like other modern Yi and Chinese books; but still with the syllabic characters in the rotated position. Early stone and bronze inscriptions indicate that this rotation is a Northern Yi innovation; the materials in d'Ollone (1912) show that it has been in use for some time.

6. For a detailed survey of the historical linguistic relationships among the Yi Group languages including Yi, Lahu, Lisu, Hani, Jinuo, and others, see Bradley (1979).

The Northern Yi or Nuosu syllabic script is now extremely widely known and used in Sichuan and parts of Yunnan. This is especially so in Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan and in Ninglang County in Yunnan. This syllabary has been in use since 1978 and has had official approval since 1980. One problem with this script is that it is based on the phonetic form of the standard Shynra dialect. In the Shynra dialect there is a semiproductive tone sandhi process that changes a midlevel [33] tone and in some environments a low falling [21] tone into a lower-high [44] tone; see Bradley (1990b) for further details. Other varieties of Northern Yi do not use this tone sandhi process in the same way; in Suondi and Adur it is almost completely absent, and in Yynuo it is used less, and another process that creates a higher-low [22] sandhi tone is used instead. There are other sandhi processes as well; for example, the morpheme *nyi* (many) occurs in all four tones and with two different vowels; and the morpheme *mga* (buckwheat) shows two tones and two vowels, as shown in the list below.

Shynra nyi (many), *mge/mga* (buckwheat)

many	*axnyi*	[a^{44}ɲi^{33}]
very many	*cypnyixnyip*	[tshz^{21}ɲi^{44}ŋi^{21}]
many slaves (a name)	*jjinyot*	[dzi^{33}ɲo^{55}]
buckwheat	*mgabie, mge*	[ŋga^{33}pe^{33}], [ŋgɯ^{33}]
bitter buckwheat	*mgapnuo*	[ŋga^{21}nø^{33}]
buckwheat chaff	*mgepu*	[ŋgɯ^{33}phu^{33}]
buckwheat flour	*mgepmop*	[ŋgɯ^{21}mo^{21}]



A speaker of Yynuo, Suondi, or Adur (or even a speaker of a local variety of Shynra where the rules are slightly different) must learn standard Shynra as a second dialect to achieve literacy, and will have considerable trouble learning all these arbitrary extra forms and their correct phonetic spelling; this problem would not have arisen if the characters had remained semantic rather than syllabic.

In the northwest of Yunnan, where Northern Yi is spoken, the Sichuan Yi orthography was introduced in the early 1980s, and continues in use in Ninglang County, though apparently not in Lijiang Prefecture as seen in the Yi village depicted in the television series *South of the Clouds (Yun zhi nan)*. At first lecturers were sent from the Southwest Institute of Nationalities to train teachers and other language workers at the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities, but now students are sent from Ninglang County to study in Sichuan.

In Guizhou, the decision was to retain and standardize the traditional characters, but not to impose a standard pronunciation. This solution is similar to the traditional Chinese situation prior to the introduction of the *putonghua*

policy, in which characters were read with a local pronunciation not necessarily intelligible to speakers of other varieties of Chinese. After publishing a provisional version of six school textbooks (Guizhou Nationalities Commission 1982–83) giving eight alternative local pronunciations, as well as adult literacy materials, the Guizhou Nationalities Commission textbook (1984) came out in early 1985, giving ten alternative local pronunciations, of which the former Shuixi standards, Bijie County and Dafang County, are listed first as the default. Several groups of Yi have been trained in this script at the Guizhou Institute of Nationalities, with the first group graduating in 1988. A recent dictionary, by Long Zhiji and colleagues (1991), gives four local pronunciation alternatives: first listed is a Weining County variety, second is a Dafang County variety, third is the divergent Panxian County type, and fourth is another Weining County variety. The two Weining varieties are both Wusa, but are substantially different from each other. All published materials in this script have been reproduced from handwritten versions, using a traditional style of characters with curves.

In Yunnan the policy is somewhat unusual; a completely new compromise script called "standard Yi" *(guifan Yiwen)* was devised between 1982 and 1987 by a committee of Yi working at the Yunnan Nationalities Commission, and approved for use from 1987 in most areas of Yunnan.[7] This is based on a character-by-character compromise between Eastern, Southern, Southeastern, and Northern Yi characters; some seventeen hundred characters were agreed on in the first stage by 1987, and a further five hundred by 1990 for a current total of over twenty-two thousand. The choice was by majority rule: the version of the character used in the majority of the four literary varieties of Yi was chosen. The original orientation as still used in Southern, Eastern, and Sani/Azhe—but not Northern Yi—is kept, but written from left to right starting at the top left. Since the Sani and Azhe characters are often somewhat different, few were chosen; on the whole, characters tend to come from Eastern and Southern Yi varieties. Compared to traditional handwritten Yi, these characters are usually written in a more squared-off form. Up to 1996, published materials in this script were produced from handwritten originals, but since 1997 there is a computer font.

Curiously, the first book to appear in this script was a collection of proverbs (Yang et al. 1989), followed by a word list (Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission 1989), and an adult literacy book (Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission 1990b), reprinted six months later (1990a) with identical Yi title and text, the same International Standard Book Number (ISBN), but a different Chinese title. More recently, the same commission prepared a children's textbook (1991), which has been put into use in

7. This is not to be confused with the Nuosu script based on the Xide Shynra variety, which is also referred to by the same name *guifan Yiwen*, or *Nuosu bburma* in Yi.

some Yi villages, including some near Kunming where the children speak no Yi at all. This textbook was reprinted in mid-1997 using the computer font, with a few errors corrected. This script has also begun to be used for public signs and banners and alongside Chinese on the covers of publications from the various Yi autonomous prefectures and counties in Yunnan other than Ninglang, which uses the Sichuan syllabary, and Lunan, which uses Sani. In the language policy debate, the government of the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the only autonomous prefecture in Yunnan solely designated as Yi, weighed in with a dictionary in the traditional Nasu (Hei Yi) characters (Wang et al. 1995), which gives the pronunciation in two Eastern Yi varieties including Nasu, as well as two Central Yi varieties, Lipo and Luoluopo.

As in Guizhou, speakers may use their local pronunciation for the Yunnan standard Yi characters; but the only indication of pronunciation in any printed materials on this script is in a 1989 word list that uses Nasu (Hei Yi) of Luquan County, just north of Kunming. This had been the standard variety for Eastern Yi in Yunnan prior to the promulgation of the new standard, and several of the most active promoters of the Yunnan standard Yi are in fact Nasu from this area just to the east of Chuxiong.[8] There are serious problems with the new script, since it is a newly constructed compromise with no defined standard pronunciation and is derived from four distinct written traditions used by subgroups within the Yi whose speech is not mutually intelligible. For this reason it is very difficult for any Yi already literate in any existing variety of Yi to use. It is mainly being taught to young people, and many of them have limited speaking knowledge of their own variety of Yi. One must wonder how they will pronounce it!

In mid-1994 a two-year joint training class was started as a combined effort by the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities, the Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission, and the Southwest Institute of Nationalities; the students were forty Yi already working in language-related areas at the local level from all parts of Yunnan (and one participant each from Sichuan, Guizhou, and Guangxi). They were trained in the new Yunnan standard Yi, Sichuan Yi, and in Yi traditional scripts. These graduates have now returned to their work units. Since 1988 new classes of Yi-language students at the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities have all studied Yunnan "standard Yi" in addition to their own varieties. The Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission decided in 1996 that Yunnan "standard Yi" should be taught in all Yi areas and gave subsidies to places that started immediately. By 1997 this decision was reversed, and at present it is still very difficult for anyone, even the people who

8. The most active of these is Zhang Chunde of the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities, who has been involved in most efforts to train language workers and students in this script.

devised it and those who have taught it or studied it for several years, to read this script aloud.

In cooperation with the Institute of Nationality Literature of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, I have been conducting a survey of varieties of Yi in Yunnan and producing textbook materials using a romanization parallel to pinyin to help speakers of some varieties of Yi when they wish to learn this script.[9]

The fourth variety of Yi currently in use is the traditional Sani script of Lunan County southeast of Kunming. A comparison of the versions of this script given in Vial (1908–9), the Sani migration story in Guo and Ding (1984), and a Sani dictionary (Jin et al. 1983) shows the degree of difference often seen within traditional Yi scripts: each religious practitioner had a slightly different version of many characters, which he transmitted to his chosen successor, usually a son or nephew. The recent Sani dictionary indicates that for nearly 90 percent of syllables there is only one character, and thus Sani appears to use considerably more characters phonetically with different meanings than other traditional kinds of Yi. On the other hand, the dictionary also gives a large number of alternative forms used for many characters by different religious practitioners. Various traditional stories, including that of Ashima, have been published in this script with Sani phonetic form and Chinese translation, as well as in Chinese and English translation only. The county government at various levels makes some limited use of this script in signs, banners, and letterheads, but it appears not to be taught in schools and is thus learned only by the successors of traditional religious practitioners, by scholars, and by Sani students who study their language at the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities or the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing.

In cooperation with several Sani scholars, we are collecting several versions of the traditional Sani death ritual text; this is particularly interesting because it traces the migrations of the Sani around northeastern Yunnan over many centuries.[10]

The list below exemplifies the degree of difference between the four currently used Yi scripts. The rotation of the Northern Yi variety can be noted, also the differences in rounding and shape between the Guizhou and Yunnan scripts and the greater divergence of the Sani script from the other three. The examples are the characters for the numbers one and two (whose origins from Chinese are clear), and the traditional name the Yi use for themselves. Also given are the different phonetic forms of this autonym.[11]

	Sichuan (Shynra)	Guizhou	Yunnan ("Standard Yi")	Sani
1, 2				
Yi autonym				
	[ni^{21}]	[nuɪ^{21}][ɲi^{55}][no^{55}]	[ni^{21}], etc.	[nɪ^{21}]

In addition to the efforts to promote literacy in Yi among the Yi and to translate practical materials into Yi and Yi literature into Chinese, there are extensive efforts being made at the national, provincial, prefectural, and county levels to preserve traditional Yi literature and culture. County, prefectural, and provincial language offices, mainly within the Nationalities Commission, collect, transcribe, and translate manuscripts into Chinese (and in Sichuan into the new standard Shynra variety as well). Some of this material is published, mainly by the Sichuan Nationalities Publishing House but also by the Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House, the Guizhou Nationalities Publishing House, the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing, and by some prefecture and county governments as well as various scholarly journals.

In most cases, the traditional Yi religious practitioner (in Nuosu, the *bimo*) who wrote a text, or one of his trained descendants, is needed to read it with any certainty, so many of the manuscripts in official hands cannot be fully read. Also, as these texts have been transmitted for many centuries, there are many archaic and obscure passages. The texts also refer to historical and semihistorical places, events, and people for which there is no other source or that are known by other names in Chinese sources, and rituals that in some cases are not now fully understood. Furthermore, the manuscripts are traditionally regarded as secret, and payment for performing rituals was one of the main sources of income, so many religious practitioners are unwilling to help in transcribing them. The worst thing is that when the religious practitioner dies, his manuscripts are usually burned with him. As the traditionally trained religious practitioners are now mainly rather old men, recording and translation work is extremely urgent; but some of their sons and nephews have studied with them, and many of the religious practitioners of this generation, now aged in their twenties to forties, have been or are being trained in Yi linguistics at the Central University of Nationalities; at the Yunnan, Guizhou, and Southwest Institutes of Nationalities with various other Yi scholars; or at some of the leading research and translation bureaus, such as the Liangshan Translation Bureau in Xichang, Sichuan, the Yi Lit-

9. I am very glad to acknowledge the financial support of the UNESCO Endangered Languages project and the very able assistance of Li Yongxiang, Maya Bradley, Deng Qiyao, and many local officials and speakers of Yi in various parts of Yunnan.

10. Again, I am very pleased to acknowledge the financial support of the UNESCO Endangered Languages project and the participation of Tseng Kuo-pin, Ang Zhiling, Maya Bradley, and a number of Sani religious practitioners.

11. For a discussion of the historical connection of this autonym with those of the Hani, Lisu, Lahu, and other Yi Group languages, see Bradley, Bradley, and Li (1997).

erature and History Institute of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences at Chuxiong in Yunnan, the Yi Translation Bureau at Bijie in Guizhou, and elsewhere in numerous other language offices and other units.

The Lipo-Luoluopo and the Laluo have no tradition of using a script; rather, they share the widespread traditional story of the loss of writing: that it was given by god to every group, but that their group lost it through carelessness. Either the script fell out through a loosely woven basket, or it was written on some edible medium such as buffalo hide and eaten on the way home by the person carrying it or by some animal that stole it.

CONCLUSION: SUCCESSES AND PROBLEMS

In summary, very extensive efforts were made from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s and again since the mid-1970s to standardize, teach, and use various versions of the traditional Yi script. There are now four varieties, one each for Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, and one used in Lunan County in Yunnan.

In Sichuan there are hundreds of Yi who do language work: in the Provincial and Liangshan Prefectural Translation Bureaus; in the Sichuan Nationalities Language Commission; in the Southwest Institute of Nationalities, which has a large Yi and Tibetan language department that teaches Yi to Yi, to Chinese speakers, and to a few foreigners; in teachers' colleges in Xichang and Zhaojue; in language offices in every county of Liangshan; in the Sichuan Nationalities Language Commission; and in the Liangshan Nationalities Commission, among other places. The Shynra syllabic script is very widely seen and used throughout Liangshan Prefecture and to a lesser extent in Ninglang County in northwestern Yunnan.

In Guizhou the new script is being introduced slowly as teachers become available; since the only Yi autonomous county in Guizhou is Weining, the other local governments are not promoting it as extensively as in Sichuan. Also, a rather high proportion of the Yi in Guizhou no longer speak any Yi. The Yi language workers in Guizhou are not as many as in Sichuan or Yunnan; they are concentrated in the Guizhou Nationalities Commission, both in the Research Institute of Nationalities and the Guizhou Nationalities Publishing House; in the Guizhou Institute of Nationalities at Huaxi; at Bijie in the Yi Translation Bureau; and scattered elsewhere in various government offices at the prefecture and county levels.

In Yunnan, the province with the largest number and greatest diversity of Yi, the Northern Yi script is used in Ninglang County, the Sani script is used for some official purposes in Lunan County, and the new Yunnan standard Yi script is starting to be introduced through the education system. The Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House has Yi staff who prepare and edit books in all three of these scripts, as well as in publishing old traditional texts. The Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission also has Yi staff from various

backgrounds; those formerly involved in devising the new "standard Yi" have retired or moved elsewhere, but young colleagues continue the work. The Yunnan Institute of Nationalities has a substantial Yi-language section in its Department of Nationalities Languages and Literatures, and there are some scholars in the Yunnan Academy of Social Science in various institutes at Kunming and Chuxiong and scattered in various levels of local government.

It remains to be seen whether the very diverse Yi of Yunnan will accept the new Yunnan standard Yi script, and if so whether it will be possible to teach it successfully. The task is difficult, especially as there is no one who can comfortably read or write this script and no agreed-upon pronunciation. Indeed, many of the literate Yi in Yunnan are opposed to it, including most of the people who now work in language-related areas.

There is some cross-province coordination in Yi-language work. For example, the three main publishing houses printing Yi materials, those of Sichuan, Guizhou, and Yunnan, have regular meetings; and the Yunnan, Guizhou, and Southwest Institutes of Nationalities have exchanged staff over more than ten years and regularly meet at conferences. Yi-language scholars also meet at the more general Yi-studies conferences held every few years and at Nationalities Linguistics conferences. The most recent example of such cooperation is the sending of a Guizhou, a Sichuan, and a Guangxi participant in mid-1994 to attend the two-year Yunnan Yi traditional and Yunnan standard Yi script course. Of course, many Yi-language scholars also participate in general conferences on minority language and other issues and know each other well.

The commitment to Yi and other minority languages in China is much more than superficial. It has become an important part of the developing Yi identity. In many cases the children of cadres who have grown up in towns and cities do not speak Yi, but now some of this young elite wants to learn to speak it. Special classes for such students have been started in some of the institutes of nationalities. Furthermore, it is now expected that good Han Chinese cadres should learn some of the minority language of the area where they work, and teaching materials have been developed to help them do so, especially for Sichuan Shynra, but also for many other minority languages. I have also met many hardworking Yi cadres who speak not just their own variety of Yi but also one or more other varieties used where they work.

In general, the Sichuan syllabic script is a great success, the Guizhou revived traditional script is only starting to spread, and there may be problems ahead for the Yunnan standard Yi script.