



# Environmentalism and Structuralism

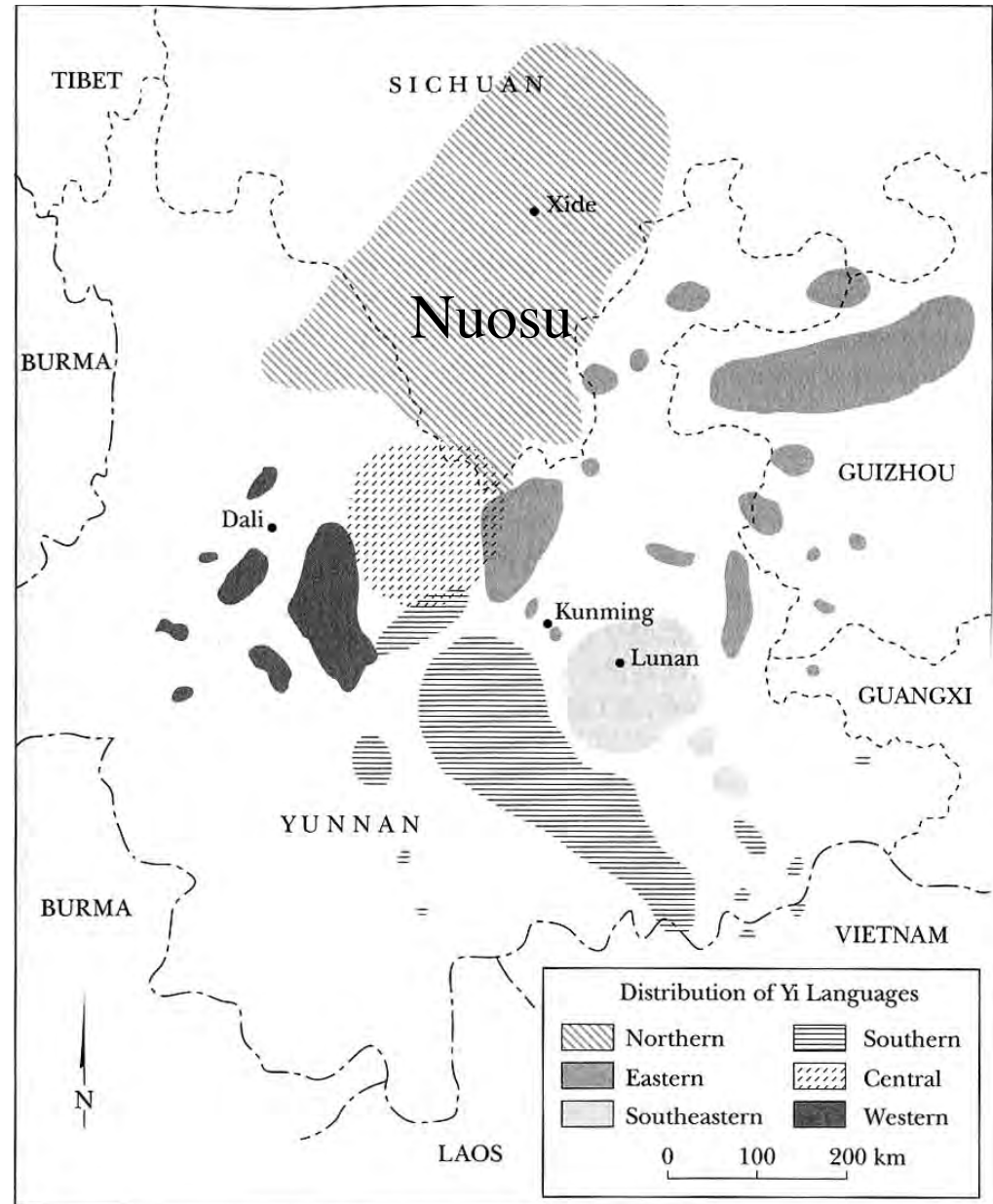
The centrality of forestry in Nuosu  
ethno-ecology

Stevan Harrell

Environment and Society in China

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# The Yi in China



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

# A peripheral example: Liangshan and the Nuosu

## 凉山与凉山彝族

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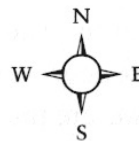
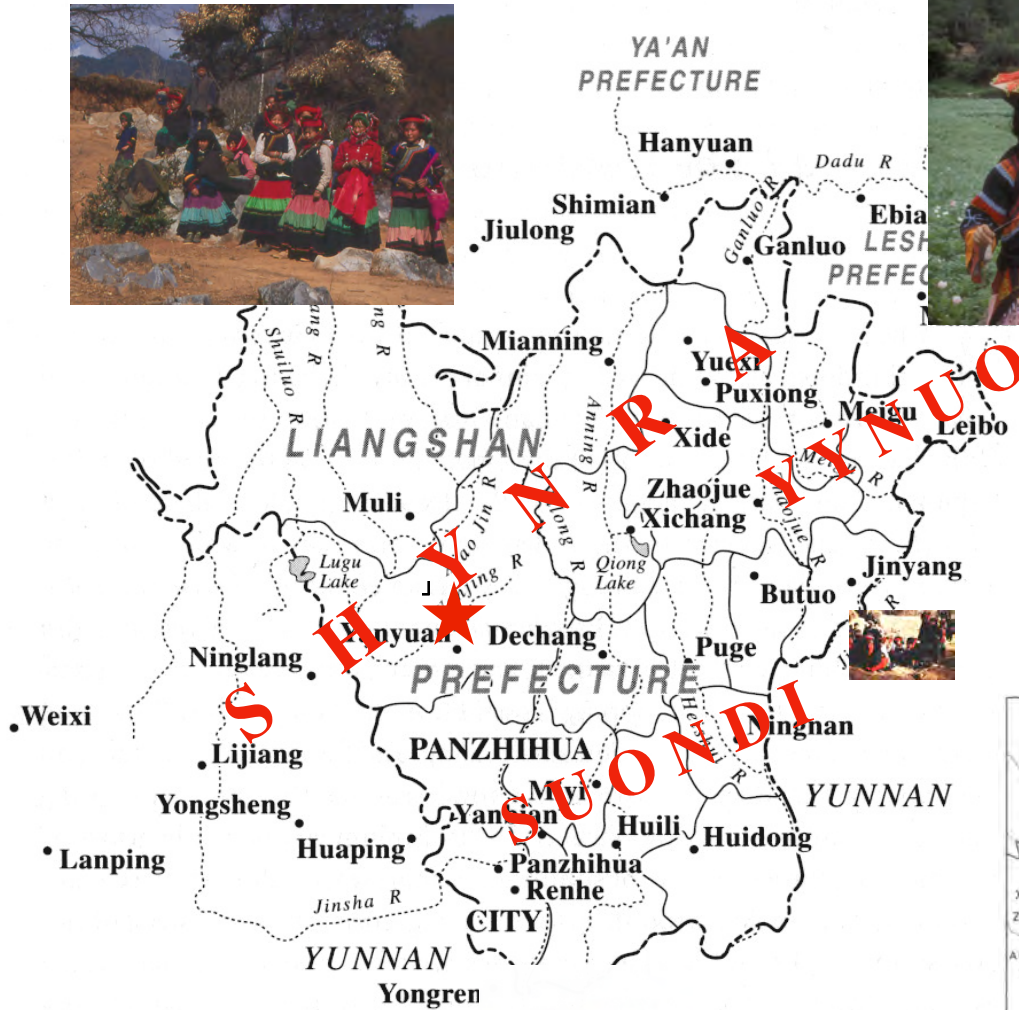
### Nuosu Quick Facts:

- 2,000,000 population
- Of 7.5m Yi 彝
- Most in Liangshan
- “Independent Lolo”
- Patrilineal organization
- Caste stratification
- Tibeto-burman language
- Syllabary script



# Nuosu Muddi and its Geographic Divisions

★ Baiwu Township, Yanyuan County



60 mi  
100 km





# The Bimo Priesthood



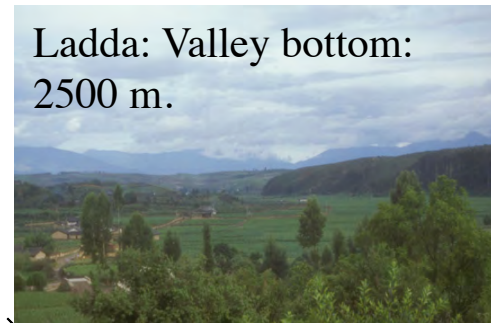
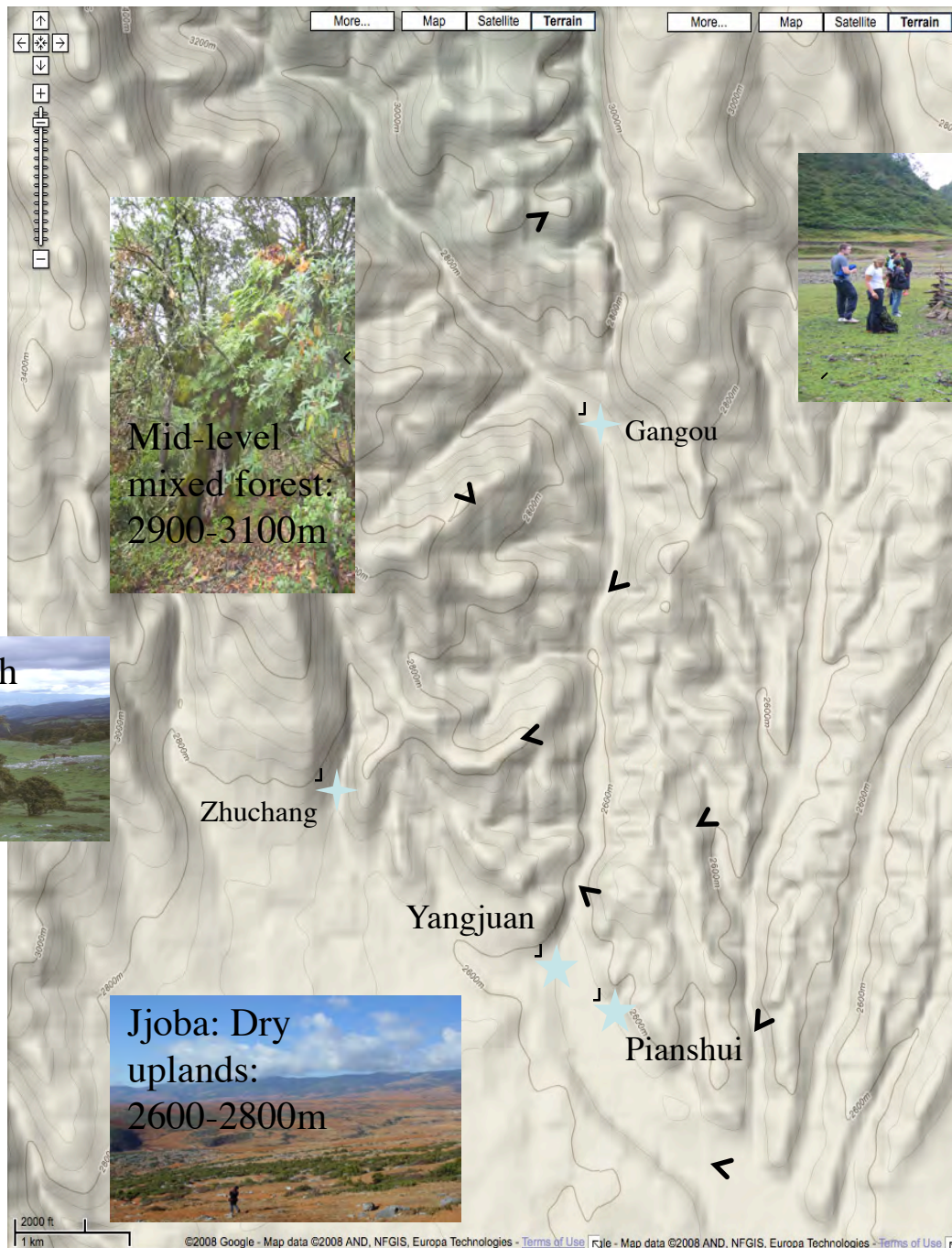
- Hereditary among males in commoner clans
- Rituals for the living and the dead
- Custodians of the traditional script

# Bimo Books

- All ritual or divinatory texts
- Locally made paper, pig-blood and pot-soot ink
- Over 2,000 known
- Use traditional script
- Copied when they get old and frayed, no “publication dates”

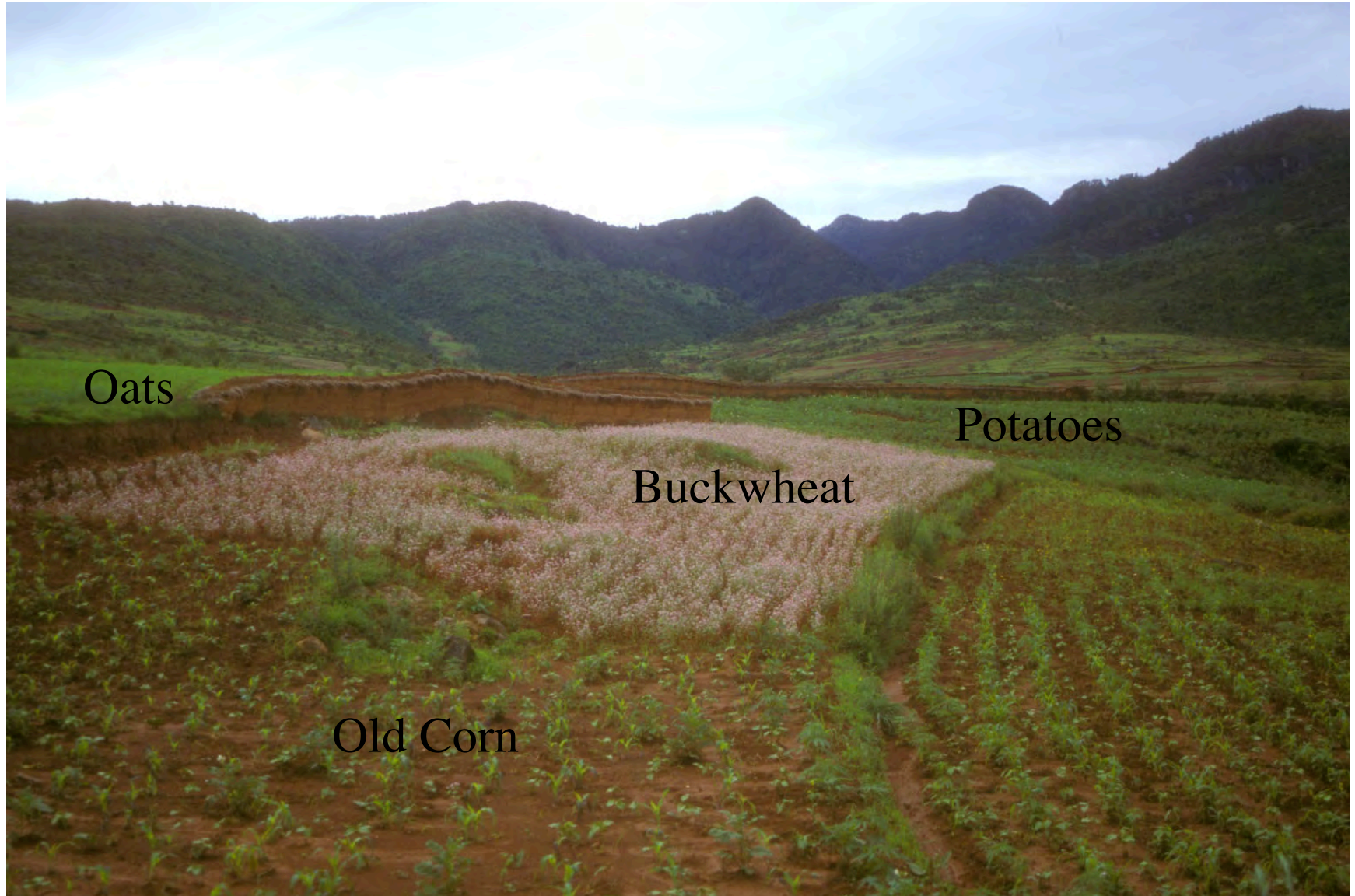


# Ecological Zones in Baiwu, Yanyuan County





# Subsistence Crops



Oats

Potatoes

Buckwheat

Old Corn

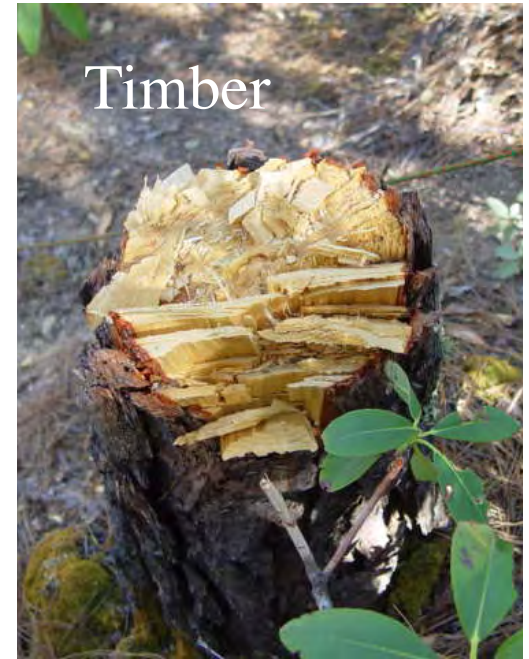
# Livestock



# Forest Products



Firewood



Timber



Bamboo



Foods and medicines

# The Contrast of Two Ecologic Ethics

- Nuosu ethic of resource conservation
  - Inclusion of humans in nature
  - Limits on resource use
  - Values sustainability over maximization: “Paleo-Pinchotism”
  - Harmonious landscape aesthetics
  - Parallels of production and reproduction: structuralism



- CCP ethic of development and resource exploitation
  - Exclusion of humans from nature
  - No limits on resource use
  - Values maximization
  - Constructed landscape aesthetics
  - Parallels of production and reproduction



We will have a lot more to say about this contrast on Feb 19.

# Nuosu Resource Ecology in *lurby*

## 1. Soil

- Bbo ggut mu a nde      ㅈㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅ  
pu nyo jjy wep a zze      ㅌㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅㅅ

“Don’ t neglect thanks for a gift given to you  
Don’ t allow the fertility of land to decline”

# Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism and structuralism in

*lurby*

## 1. Soil

- Pu nyo mu su vi  
vi ke she su vi

𐄂𐄃𐄄𐄅𐄆

𐄇𐄈𐄉𐄊𐄋

“Land belongs to those who work it;  
Affairs belong to those who commit them”

As you are responsible for your actions, you are  
responsible for the land that you work.



# Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism and structuralism in *lurby* 2. Water

- Yy ge ge a hxi 𑄎𑄏𑄐𑄑𑄒𑄓  
“Don’ t ruin the source of your own water”



# Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism and structuralism in *lurby* 2. Water

- Onyi abbo mi; yy ki lo ji she

- 𐌲𐌹𐌰𐌶𐌰𐌵𐌰𐌶𐌰𐌵; 𐌲𐌹𐌰𐌶𐌰𐌵

Mother's brother gives to father  
Water flow is maintained

“The gift of the the wife-giving  
affines is like the gift of flowing  
water”

This is an analogy between the  
structure of reproduction of the  
clan as human resources, and the  
structure of production of food  
resources.





# Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism and structuralism in *lurby*

## 3. Trees

- Aqu mu, aqu zze
- ႱႱႱႱ, ႱႱႱႱ

“Do the white, eat the white”

If you cut white trees (pine etc), then  
you are consuming the white trees

If you consume non-renewable  
resources improperly, you are using  
up the resources that you depend  
on.



# Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism in *lurby*

## 3. Trees

- Sy zzu i pa mu; yy  
zzu i pa mu
- ᚱᚲᚱᚱ; ᚱᚲᚱᚱ

“Trees are parents;  
water is parents”

Again, analogy  
between the origin  
of production in  
watersheds, and the  
origin of  
reproduction in  
parents.





# Nuosu Landscape Aesthetics: A Nuosu Poetic Pastoral

We come to the mountains behind  
our house to raise sheep;  
The sheep are like massed clouds.

We come to the plains in front of  
our door to grow grain;  
The piles of grain are like  
mountains.

We come to the stream to the side  
of the house to catch fish;  
The fish are like piles of firewood.



# Nuosu Landscape Aesthetics in a *bimo* *teyy*: Kepu Jjyplup Shy a Te

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## An Ideal Environment

- On the high mountains, firs grow luxuriant
- Offer an ox to the souls
- The animals will flourish
- This is the history of the spirits
- Nine kinds of water creatures come in abundance
- This is the ancestry of the Spirits

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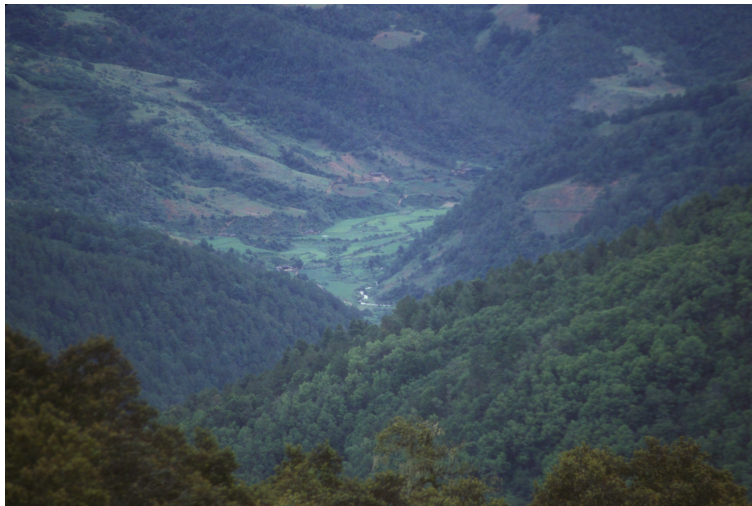
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𐄶𐄷𐄸𐄹𐄺



# Nuosu Landscape Aesthetics in a *bimo* *teyy*: Kepu Jjyplup Shy a Te

𐄎𐄏𐄐𐄑𐄒𐄓𐄔𐄕

## An Ideal Environment

- Depending on herding stock
- Exhausted from many chores
- Cattle are like constellations in the sky
- The historical spirit of riches



- In former times, powerful people
- In the plains, good grain hangs in the houses
- Fortunate in the plenty of their grain
- The Spirit of wealth on earth.

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𐄓𐄔𐄕𐄖𐄗𐄘  
𐄙𐄚𐄛𐄜𐄝  
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𐄎𐄏𐄐𐄑𐄒  
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# Nuosu Structuralism: 1. Seasonality

- **Growing Season**

- Starts with rhody bloom (or beginning of rains)
- Crops in fields
- No hunting
- No cutting trees
- Ends with last harvest (or end of rains)



- **Killing Season**

- Starts after harvest
- Fields bare, then dry or snowy
- Hunting allowed
- Tree cutting allowed
- Ends with rhody bloom



# Nuosu Structuralism

## 2. Prohibitions

- Prohibitions on
  - Cutting out of season
  - Hunting out of season
  - Killing magpie
  - Killing cuckoo
  - Killing owl
  - Killing frogs
  - Killing crow
- Consequences of violation
  - Hailstorms
  - Hailstorms
  - Loss of visitors
  - Loss of calendrical knoweldge
  - Rats!**
  - Bugs!**
  - Return curse



# What's “missing” from Nuosu conservationism?

- No forest commons: forests held privately
- Reasons it works?
  - Ritual enforcement?
  - Little pressure on resources?
  - Clan-based sanctions?
  - Threat of warfare?
- Need to investigate further

# What's “missing” from Nuosu conservationism?

- No conservation ideas about domestic animals or pasture
- Reasons why not
  - Source of wealth and prestige in a tribal system
  - “Animals take care of themselves; no human prohibitions needed”
- Need to investigate further



# The Centrality of Forests

- Forests are the habitat for culturally valuable animals and birds
- Forests are the watersheds that preserve water and soil
- People are nostalgic, even weepy, when they talk about the forests that once were
- Lurlur Gaga: The key to preserving land is preserving forests



# The Centrality of Forests

- Literature talks about Nusu as agriculturalists or agro-pastoralists
- Both etic and emic views of Nusu ecology make the third element, forestry, into the keystone. It is forests that are the origin, and that tie everything else together, and that provide the material, ecological, and aesthetic benefits that allow the rest of the system to function

