



Environmentalism and Structuralism

The centrality of forestry in Nuosu
ethno-ecology

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Environment and Society in China

October 26, 2011

A Complex Series of Issues

- Rewriting Chinese history from an ecological perspective
- A new Weberian paradigm: ecologic ethics
- Resources as the key



- Bringing in Lévi-Strauss: Nuosu structural thought
- Why forestry is the center

Rewriting Chinese history from an ecological perspective

- Conventional political periodization

- 1949 PRC established
- 1966 Cultural Revolution
- 1979 Reform and Opening



- Experimental ecological periodization

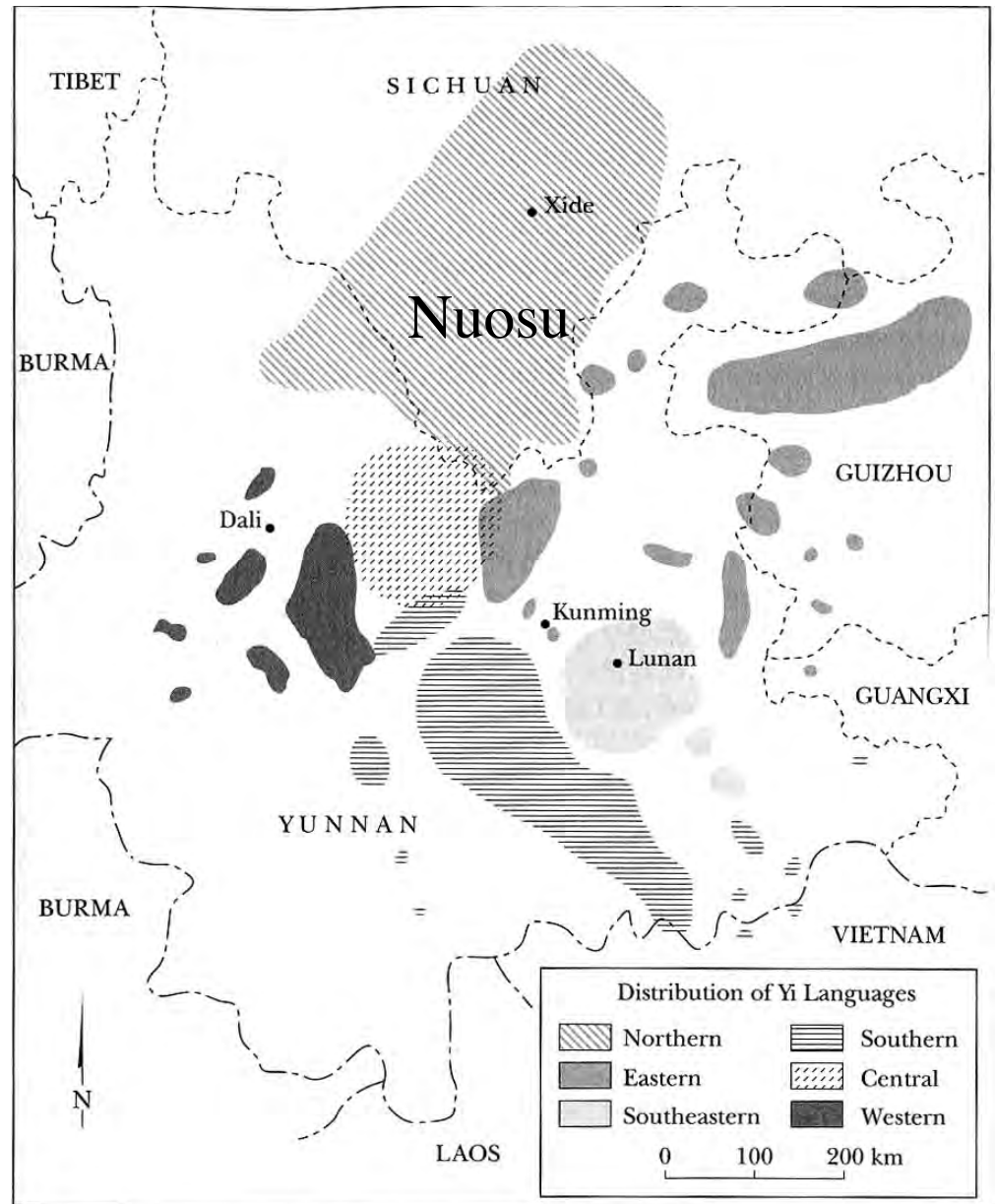
- 1957 Great Leap Forward
- 1971 Taking Grain as the Key Link
- 1979 Rapid Development
- 2000 Opening the West



A new Weberian paradigm: ecologic ethics

- Weber, **Economic Ethic**: the practical impulses for economic action which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of religion
- Examples: Protestant, Confucian, Hindu, etc.
- **Ecologic Ethic**: the practical impulses and behaviors toward the ecosystem which are founded in the psychological and pragmatic contexts of worldview.
- Examples here:
 - **Nuosu resource conservation**
 - **Confucian resource development for social harmony**
 - **Modernist development through resource exploitation (CCP version)**

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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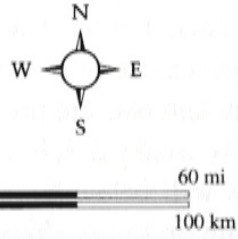


Nuosu Quick Facts:

- 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



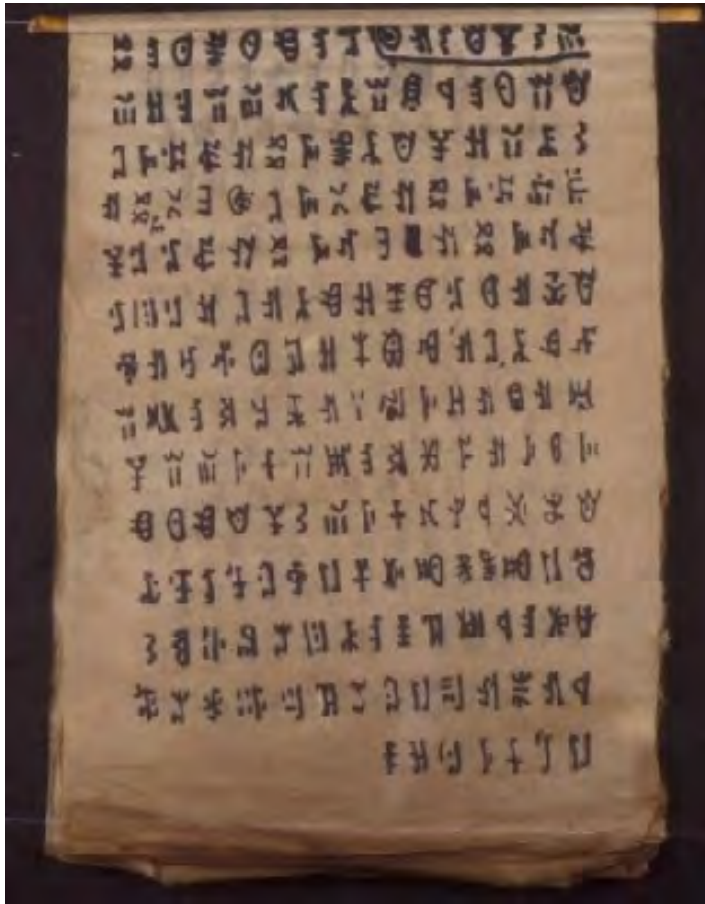
The Bimo Priesthood



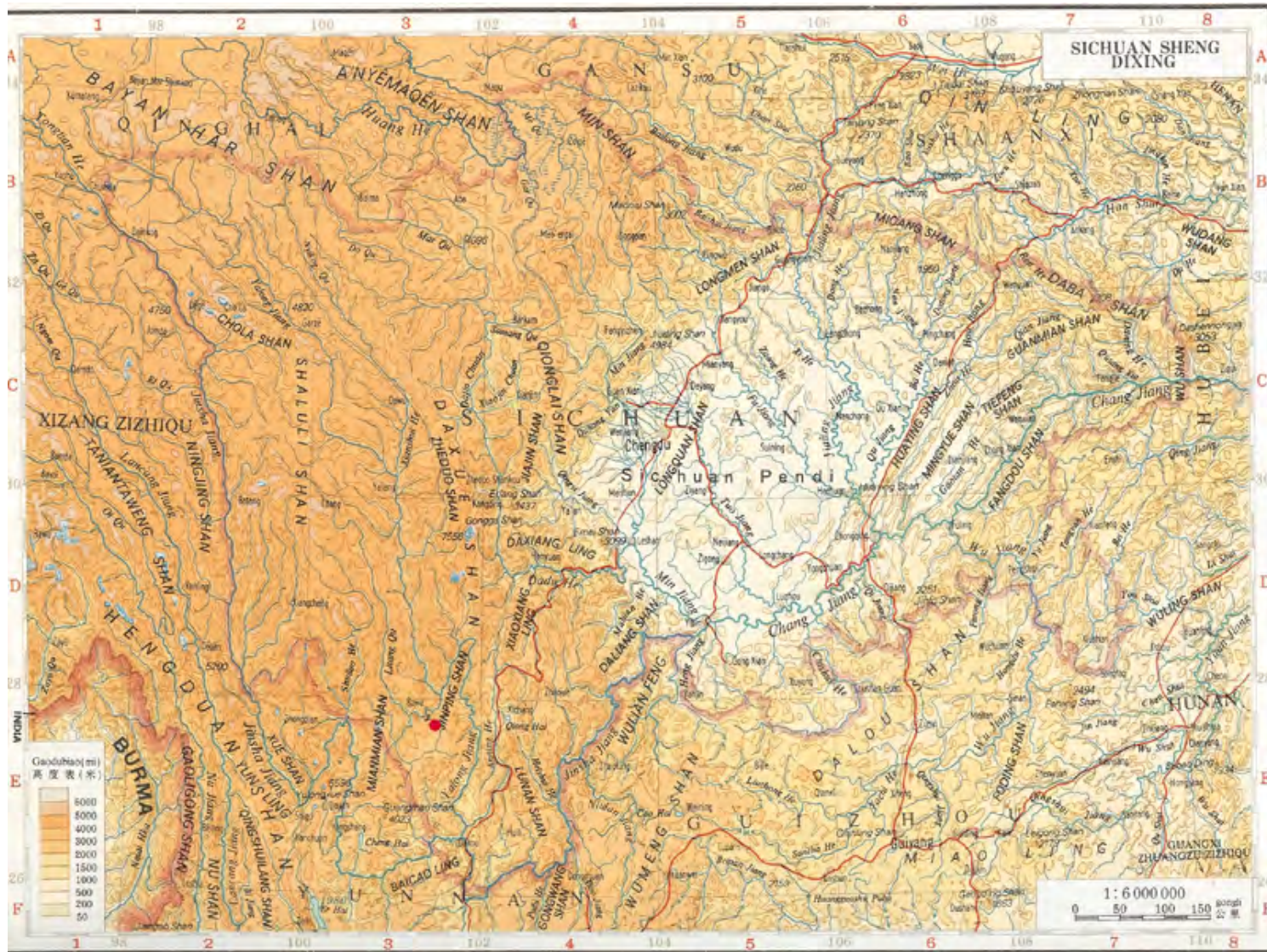
- Hereditary among males in commoner clans
- Rituals for the living and the dead
- Custodians of the traditional script

Bimo Books

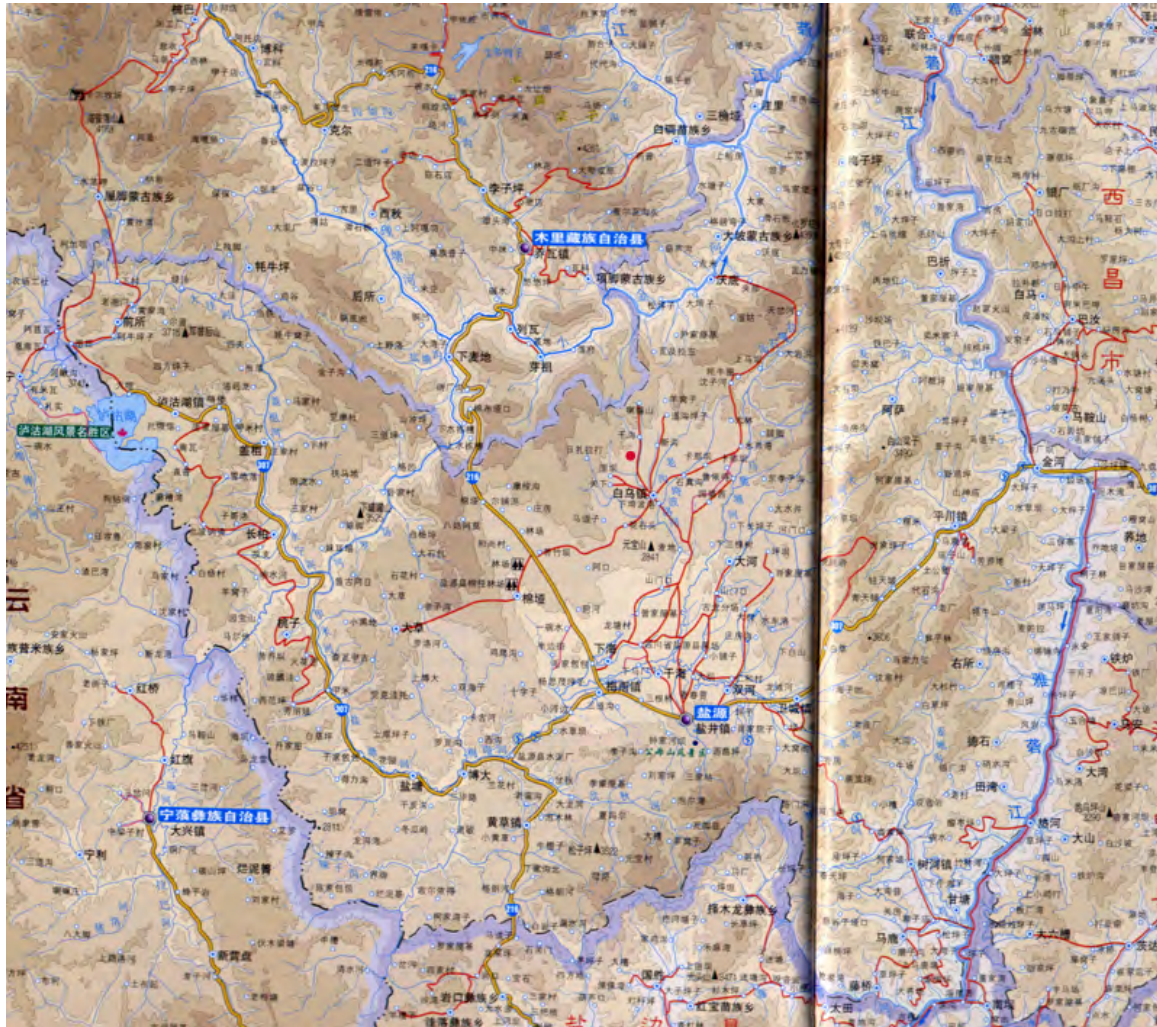
- All ritual or divinatory texts
- Locally made paper, pig-blood and pot-soot ink
- Over 2,000 known
- Use traditional script
- Copied when they get old and frayed, no “publication dates”



Our research area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan



Our Research Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan



Yanyuan County 盐源县

- Basin and mountains
- 320,000 population
- Han 47%, Yi 45%
- Han in basin, Yi in mountains
- Official “poor county”

The Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan



Baiwu Township 白乌镇

- 16,000 population
- 92% Yi
- 8 Admin. Villages
- Daily Market



Our Research Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan

Villages:

Yangjuan 羊圈 91 households

Pianshui 偏水 88 households

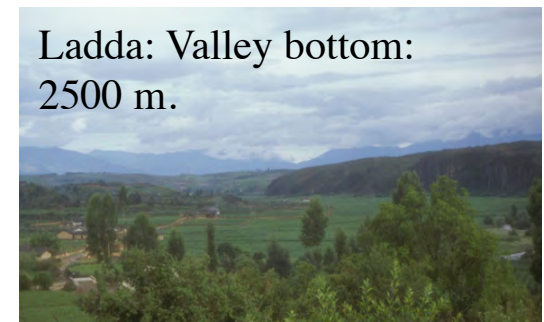
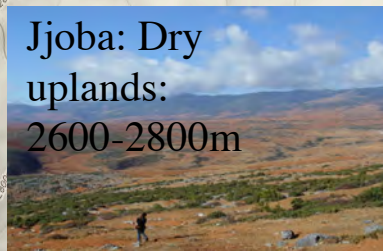
Zhuchang 猪厂 14 households

Gangou 干沟 15 households

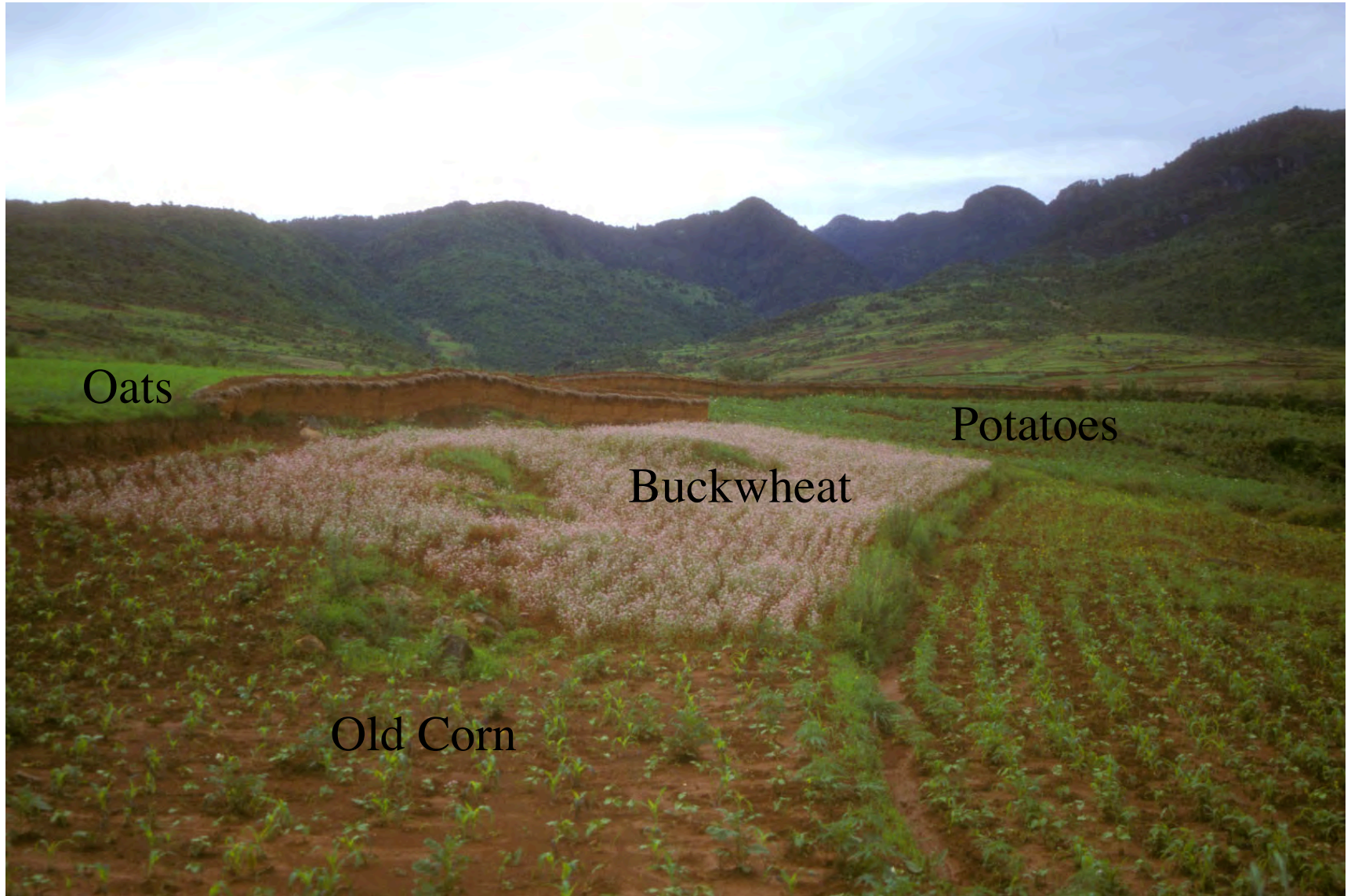


Ecological Zones

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The Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan Subsistence Crops



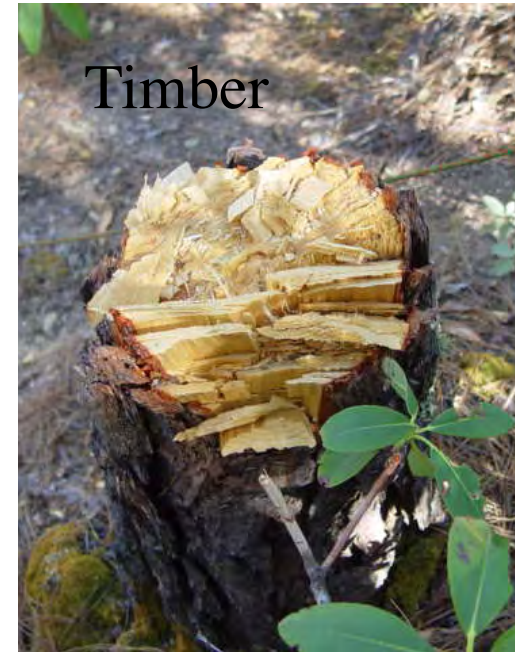
The Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan Livestock



The Area: Yanyuan, Baiwu, Yangjuan Forest Products



Firewood



Timber



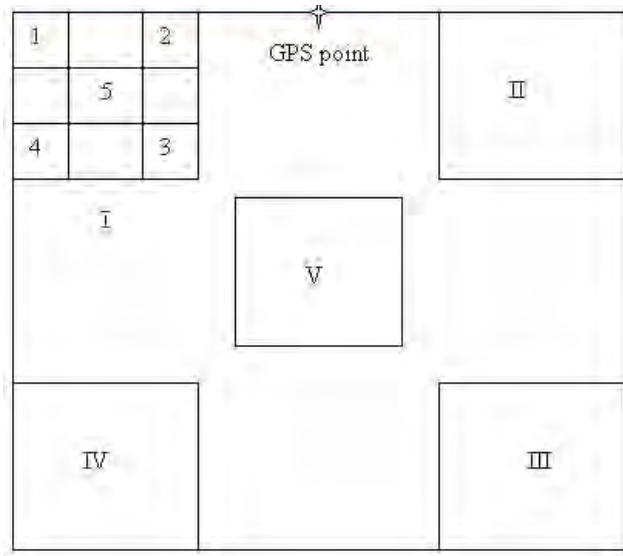
Bamboo



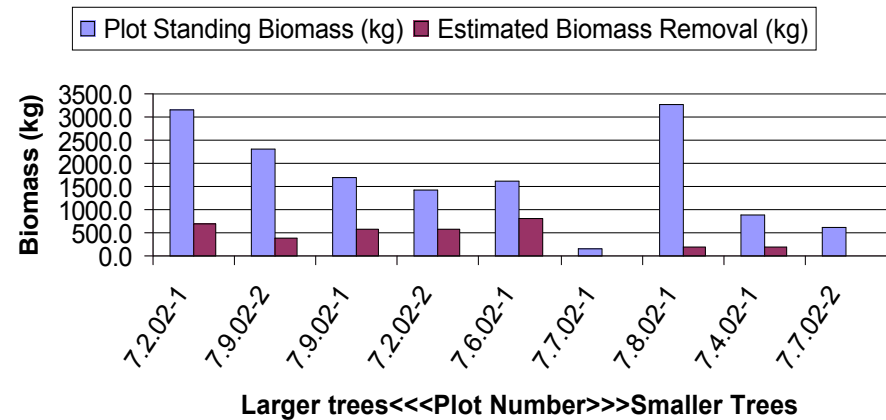
Foods and medicines

Interdisciplinary Research

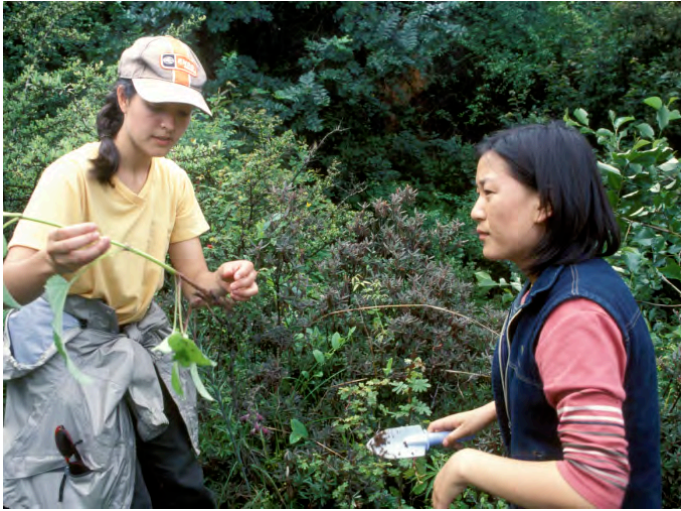
Forest Ecology



**Plot Standing Biomass vs Estimated Removal.
Yangjuan, Sichuan 2002.**



Interdisciplinary Research Biodiversity

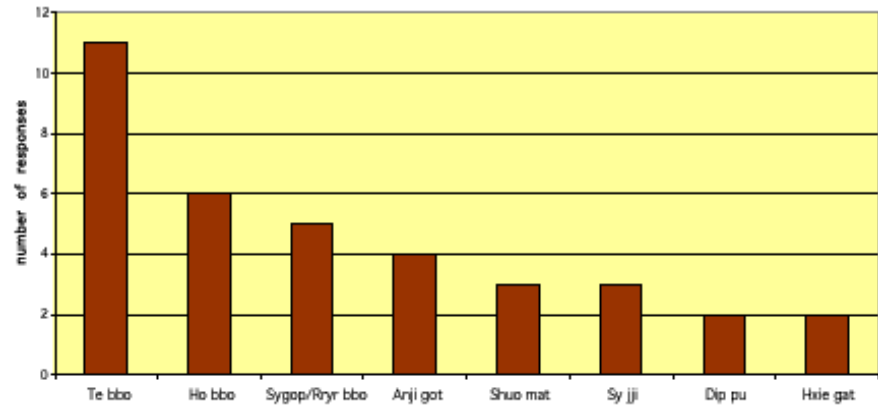


Interdisciplinary Research

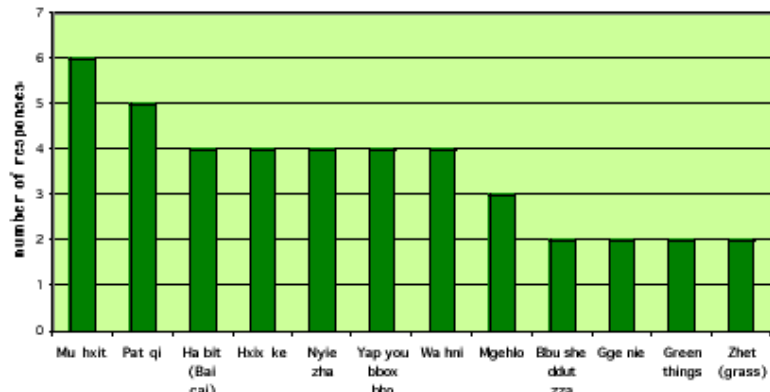
Ethnobotany



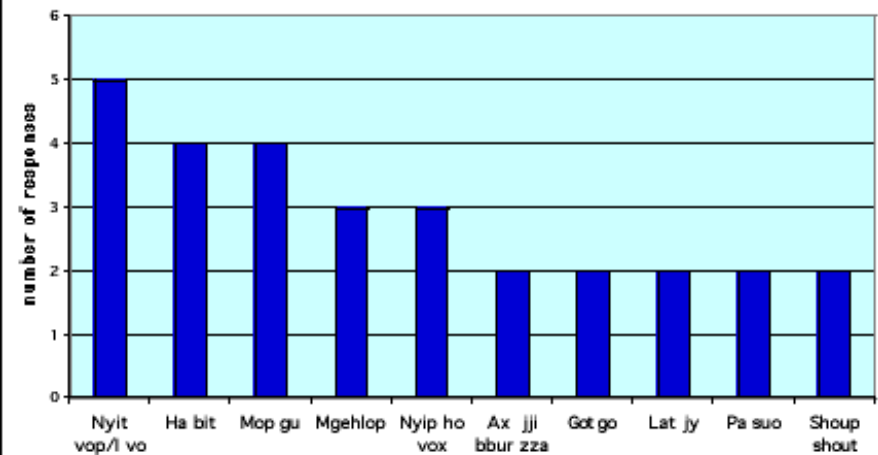
Most commonly collected firewood s



Most commonly collected animal feed plants

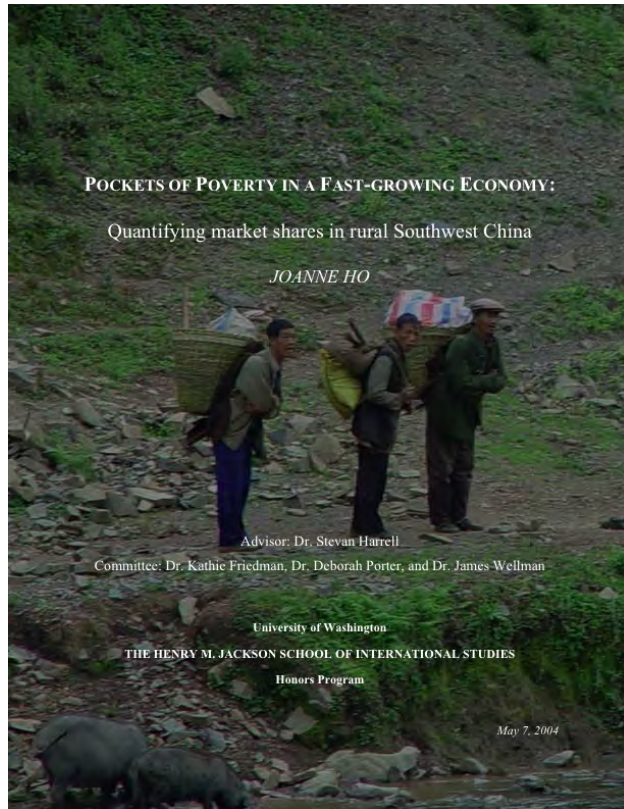


Most commonly collected wild food plants



Interdisciplinary Research

Economic-Agricultural Anthropology



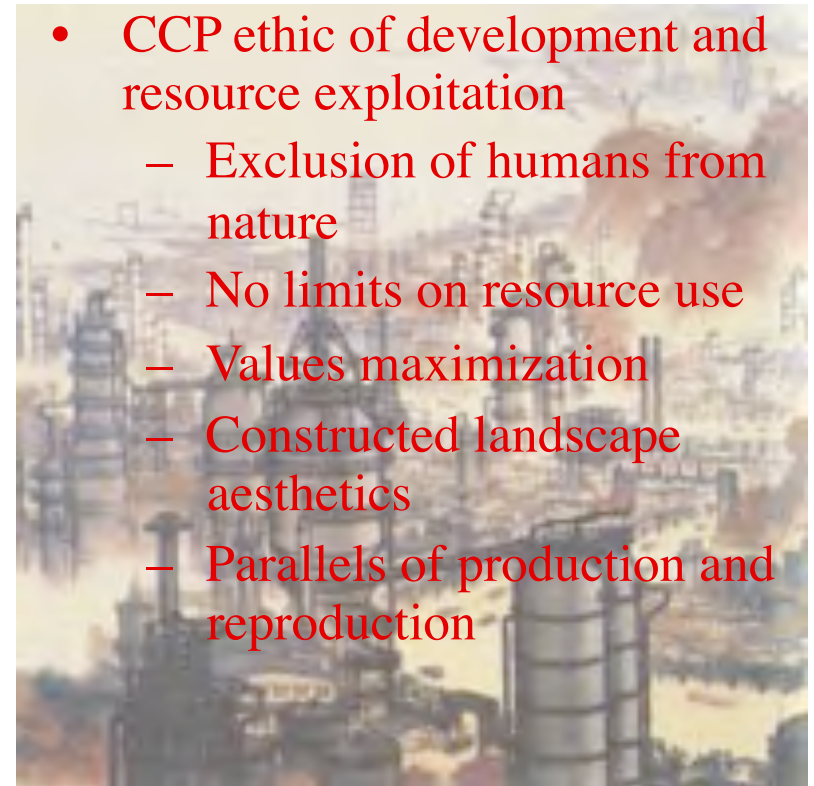
Apples



The Battle 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 Nov 9.

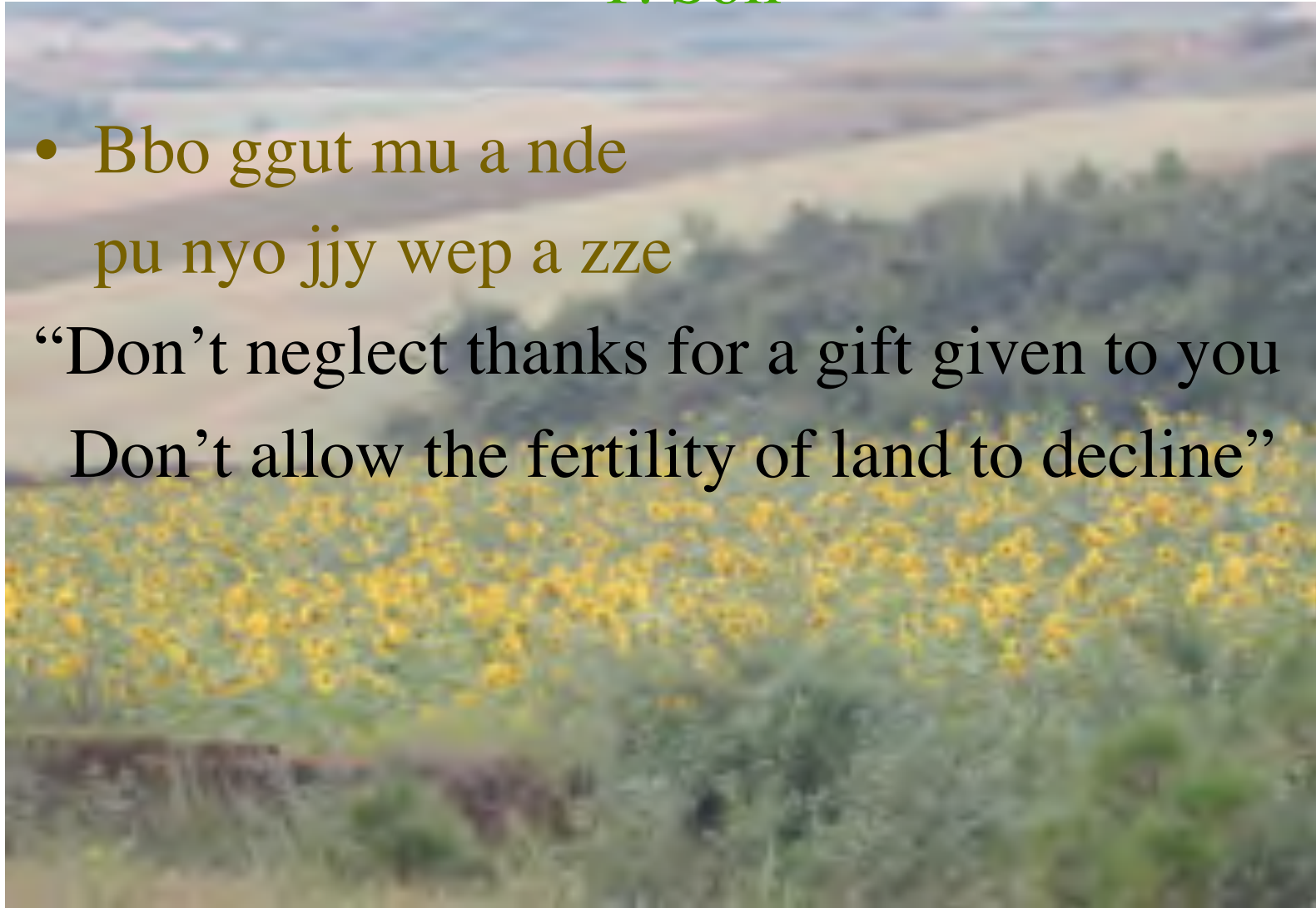
Nuosu Paleo-Pinchot-ism and structuralism in

lurby

1. Soil

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

“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

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𐄈𐄉𐄊𐄋𐄌𐄍

“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 འཇམ་ལྗང་ལྗང་ལྗང་ལྗང་
“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
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

“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 in *lurby*

- Ahlo njike ggule rry a zze
Jjuonuo njike ggule a qy



A rabbit does not eat the grass around its own den

An eagle does not poop around its own nest

Nuosu Landscape Aesthetics: A Nuosu Poetic Pastorale

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.

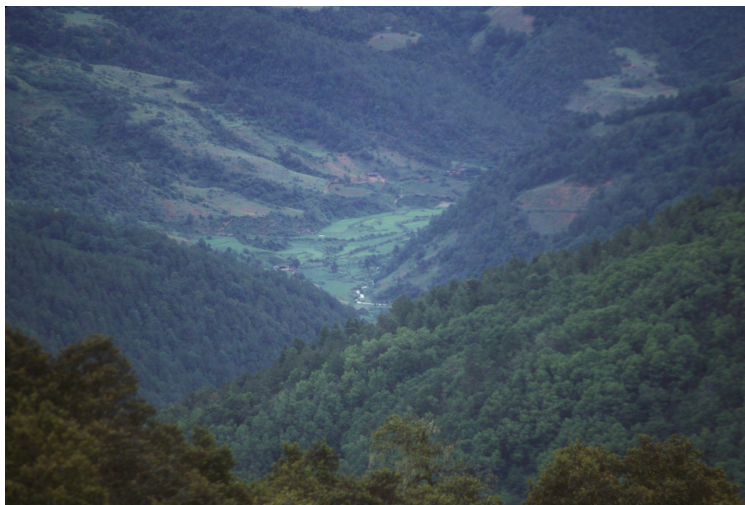


Nuosu Landscape Aesthetics in a *bimo* *teyy*: Kepu Jjyplup Shy a Te

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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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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.

𐄎𐄏𐄐𐄑𐄒
 𐄓𐄔𐄕𐄖𐄗𐄘
 𐄙𐄚𐄛𐄜𐄝
 𐄞𐄟𐄠𐄡𐄢



𐄣𐄤𐄥𐄦𐄧
 𐄨𐄩𐄪𐄫𐄬
 𐄭𐄮𐄯𐄰𐄱
 𐄲𐄳𐄴𐄵𐄶



Nuosu Structuralism: 1. Seasonality

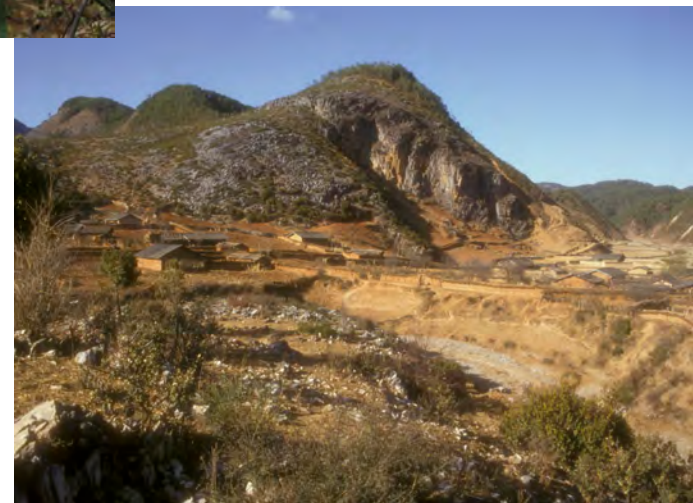
- Growing Season

- 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
 - Eating vondi
- Consequences of violation
 - Hailstorms
 - Hailstorms
 - Loss of visitors
 - Loss of calendrical knoweldge
 - Rats!**
 - Bugs!**
 - Return curse
 - Need to ask

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

