

YI STUDIES AS A SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL FIELD: AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S VIEW

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提要：本文叙述彝学为学科的发展过程与其现在的概况和所面对的挑战。由参加过彝学的发展过程的外国人类学者的角度观察和分析，彝族研究有悠久的历史，但彝学作为学科的时间较短，1980年代中国改革开放以后，彝族研究才称为学科。原来的彝族研究有两种：彝族本身的古典系统只是和东亚主流文化对边缘人群的分类与描写。19世纪后期开始，国际性的人类学，加上传教士的纪录增加外面世界对于彝人的只是，20世纪中国的一些伟大的学者也出重大的贡献。新中国建国后，彝族研究颇有扩大与发展，但它当时仍然是民族学和民族史的田野，而没有自身的学科特点。虽然如此，1950年代的学术机关与学术成果打好了彝学为学科的基础。

改革开放初期彝学开始成为学科的过程，第一段在八十年代中国文革以后的综合比较自由化的趋向之下彝学研究机关的重建。当时中国政府也通过新宪法和民族自治法，同时也提倡“多民族国家”的国体观念。八十年代末，九十年代初，地方学者，干部，企业家用新打开的门口促进民族只是，民族文化。此时，除具体文化工作（如民族文字规范与推广）外，也开始建立各种学会，开始各地论坛与会议，由此可说彝学有研究范围，学者共同体，学术机关，换句话说，从研究对象沿边成正式学科。

同时民族地区对外国学者一步开放，引起国际人类学等学科的兴趣，建立彝族学者和外国学者的交流与合作，开通彝学国际化的条路，可成为彝学发展的第二段。到90年代中叶，中外学者开始组织国际性的学术论坛。第一，二届国际彝学会在美德两国开，因为经费有限，中国彝汉学者虽然占彝学人物德大多数，在参会者只占一般左右。因此，2000年的第三届和2005年的第四届国际会议必须在国内开，在中国地方机关财经情况转好的条件下，可让有代表性的多数彝族学者与中国其他民族学者参加。

在第五届国际彝学研讨会的开幕时候，可说彝学已经为成熟的学科，但是它如旧面对着三种挑战。第一，适应学术的新趋向。前期的彝学注重传统文化与传统只是，而因为传统文化也因社会现代化面对威胁，此种研究不许放弃。同时，假如只研究古典的对象，很容易误会现代彝区的重要问题。因此，彝学者需要同时加深对彝族传统文化的知识，同时加强各学科的认识，加强与各学科的沟通。这样，彝学不会失去其现在的有关性。

第二，保持社会和伦理的实用性。目前彝族地区面对着平困，边缘性，教育程度底，疾病多，中毒率，甚至于犯罪率高各种问题。我们并不能怪“民族落后”或“人口素质低”一类的假解释，而需要考虑结构性的问题。在这种情况下，彝族学者（也包括一部分外面学者）的对民族责任感需要使用在解决具体问题。彝学不但需要彝族文化知识深刻的专家，也需要同时认识彝族特点，同时认识如发展学，公共卫生学，环境科学，多原文化教育等学科的多学科的专家。

第三，趁新媒体所提供的机会。最近十年，出现了如《彝族人网》，《中国彝学网》的综合性关于彝族的网站。而且，除中文版外，也有一部分内容翻译成诺苏步玛，英文。此外，彝语，彝文电影，电视节目日益增多。我们应该考虑，彝学怎样最好使用这种新媒

体，促进与推广彝学对学术界和对广大社会的贡献与使用点。

I have been doing research and writing on Yi topics since 1987, but I first saw the term 彝学 in 1994, when I received a letter from Professor Bamo Ayi on the stationery of the 巴莫姊妹彝学研究小组, a name also translated as the Bamo Sisters' Research Group for Yiology and as batmop vytmop nyipmat nip mupmit nzyrvat xiopzup. I had not previously known that the Yi had an ology of their own. Since two of the Bamo Sisters will be visiting fellows at the Harvard-Yenching Institute in 2000-2001, I am glad to have the opportunity of using Harvard as the venue for these preliminary remarks both on how the Yi got to have an ology (or, more euphoniously after 1995, a studies), and how this moved from a field that only existed in China to a field that was part of an international scholarly discourse.

What is noteworthy about Yi Studies is that it is a field, not just a subject of study. It has its participants, its journals, its books and monographs, its international conferences, and most importantly its topics and questions. It has its factions and disputes, though fortunately these are mostly fairly friendly (but see Wu Gu 2000:), and it even has its in-jokes, which I will not bore anybody with here. This was not always true. Before 1956, there was no coherent body of works on the Yi, only scattered accounts by bimo, missionaries, explorers, and anthropologists of various sorts. Between about 1956 and the early 1980s, there was a coherent body of works on the Yi--perhaps too coherent--but it was part of a larger totalizing discourse of , or Chinese ethnology. Since 1980, Yi studies has taken on the characteristics of a field, first within China and since about 1995 around the world, and continues to evolve and mature in the present day. This paper is the story of the historical emergence of this field, told from my own perspective as an anthropologist, a translator, and a scholar of Yi Studies.

A. The Prehistory of Yi Studies:

The idea of Yi was solidified in the 1950s as part of the 民族识别 , or ethnic identification, program. Before that, there were a large number of linguistically and culturally related groups, with partly common historical origins, ranging over Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, who were the objects of scholarship from way back.

The earliest studies of the Yi (as opposed to Yi studies) were of three kinds. First, there were texts in the various Yi languages. These included historical texts, mostly from Guizhou and all but a few of them lost, dating from the early Ming dynasty (Ma Changshou 1987 Cuanwen book), various books of traditional wisdom and stories (Wu Jingzhong 2000; Feng 1986), and most importantly copious ritual manuals transmitted from generation to generation of priests (Taipei Ricci Institute 1998). Second, there were accounts by Chinese travelers and officials, beginning as early as the 史记 Historical Records of Sima Qian, and continuing through the works of famous scholars including 顾炎武 Gu Yanwu, who wrote and quoted copiously about Yi peoples in his magisterial 天下郡国利病书 (see Liu Yu 2000). Third, there were accounts by modern missionaries, explorers, and ethnographers. These include, in a very partial list, works on Liangshan by Baber (1882), Lin Yaohua (1947), Zeng Zhaolun (1945), and Feng Hanyi and John Shryock (1938); on Yunnan by Vial (1898), Lietard, and Pollard (1921), and on Guizhou by Samuel Pollard (1921).

Yi peoples were thus known to outsiders before 1956 from a large number of accounts in

various genres and of varying value. But none of these accounts was addressed to a field of Yi studies. The religious and legendary books of the Yi themselves were addressed to local Yi audiences (each with its particular language and script, so that they could not read or understand each other's books) and concerned themselves with the topics of their own Yi worlds, but they were not written with any self-conscious purpose of delineating the lives of Nuosu or Sani or Azhe from other, surrounding ethnic groups. They told not a Yi studies story of what was interesting about the Yi, but simply a Yi story of what was interesting about life, and particularly about death and the afterlife.

Accounts by premodern Chinese historians, officials and travelers were intended for wider audiences of literate Chinese, but they were not audiences who were interested in the Yi in particular. They were concerned for the most part with those things that rulers and administrators needed to know about various Yi peoples to rule, administer, or failing that fight with or ignore the Yi, and they were embedded in accounts of other southwestern peoples such as Miao, Tai, and Tibetans. They were part of a kind of field of barbarian administration, with a hefty dose of general barbarian curiosity thrown in.

Accounts by ethnographers in the late 19th and early 20th century were partly intended for the same purposes of administration and control, as were many ethnographies in the same period all over the world (Asad 1973). Insofar as Ming, Qing, and Chinese Republican administration in frontier areas was part of a colonial civilizing project (Harrell 1995), ethnography served the same purposes there as in other colonial encounters. At the same time, however, such accounts were also directed at an intellectual field of anthropology, which was dedicated to describing and analyzing the variety of human cultures and societies. In such a field of discourse, an account of one or another custom or practice of one or another Yi people served the same purpose as Boas on the Kwakwaka'wakw or Malinowski on the Kiriwinians. It did not speak, except in a very instrumental way, to others whose interest was inherently in the Yi themselves.

In the mid-1950s, the Yi became a 民族 minzu. This means that, in the grand project of 民族识别, which took from the early 1950s through about 1957, a large number of ethnolinguistic groups of various sizes and various degrees of coherence, all speaking languages in what later became known as the 彝语支 most of whom had previously been known by the pejorative term 罗罗 luo or the slightly kinder 夷, were grouped into a 彝族 minzu of several million strong, which included, for reasons probably clear at the time but not necessarily defensible, not only those groups with a written tradition in Yi-type scripts, but also some, such as the Lipuo, Lolopo, and Laluo, who were never known to have had a system for writing their own languages, and whose spoken languages were closer to those of the Lisu and Lahu than to those of the other Yi groups (Bradley 1979), but excluded the Lisu and Lahu, who were each given statuses as separate minzu.

For scholarship on the Yi, the consequences of becoming an official minzu were enormous; they began to fit into the great systematic grid of Marxist ethnology, whose horizontal rows, piled upon each other, were the inevitable historical stages or levels from primitive to slave to feudal (divided into manorial and landlord sub-stages) to capitalist to socialist society, and whose vertical columns were the history of each minzu as it passed through these stages. The Yi, like other minority peoples of the Southwest, were not only classified as a minzu at this time; they were also subjected to intensive ethnographic research which was known as social and historical investigation. Large teams of ethnographers compiled detailed reports based on stays

of several weeks in a wide variety of locations, taking copious field notes (still preserved in archives, in some cases), and writing up reports that are quite formulaic and thus not as valuable as the raw notes, but still crammed with information. On the basis of these reports, called 社会历史调查, different communities within the Yi and other minzu were placed in the proper squares on this grid. For example, some of the Yi, that is the Nuosu of Liangshan, were placed in a lower square in the Yi column, because they were stuck by their geographical isolation at the slave society stage, while other Yi, primarily the Nasu of Guizhou, were at the sub-stage of manorial feudalism, and some of the groups in Yunnan had passed on to the sub-stage of the landlord feudal economy (Chen Tianjun 1987).

The social and historical investigations did more, of course, than enable different communities to be placed in their appropriate boxes; they also provided a place to publish much information on the details of social structure (the slave system of the Nuosu was a particular favorite), holidays and festivals, religious beliefs and rituals (though some ethnographers later got in trouble for writing about religion in too neutral a manner), and the folkloristic topics of music, dance, poetry, and myth.

Never again was there such a broad and systematic effort to record the ethnography of whole minzu, but ethnographic reporting on the Yi and others continued through the next three decades. It was stopped, of course, during the three hard years after the Great Leap Forward, revived in very tentative and incomplete ways in the early sixties, and then smashed (but not obliterated, even the manuscripts) during the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, as ethnographic institutes were restored in the newly independent Academies of Social Sciences, not only did work continue, but much of the work from the earlier periods, particularly the brief golden age of the mid-1950s, was published, culminating in the mid- and late- 1980s in the "five kinds of book series" 五种丛书, of which the most detailed and comprehensive were compilations from earlier and later social and historical investigations. There was one set of the social and historical investigations for each province, and Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou each published several volumes on the Yi.

Despite this flurry of valuable ethnographic and historical publication, these studies of the Yi still did not, however, constitute a field of Yi studies. Rather they included material on the Yi in the fields of 民族学 and 民族史, or ethnology and ethnohistory, both of which fields were inherently comparative, and whose purpose was to add color and texture to the boxes of the ethnological grid mentioned above. And just as there was yet no Yiology, there were no Yiologists, no scholars whose primary focus was specifically on the society, history, or literature of the one Yi minzu. Such great scholars as Ma Xueliang (1913-1999), Lin Yaohua (1911-2000) and Ma Changshou (1907-1971) worked on the southwest or on the ethnology of religion or on the history of a particular region; they did not work, as a primary focus, on the Yi, even though much or even most of their work was concerned with the Yi.

B. The Historical Conditions for the Emergence of Yi Studies

All this changed in the 1980s; three kinds of important social and ideational changes made Yi studies possible. The first two of these changes were primarily developments internal to China: from the top down there were policy changes meaning that China, once again, conceived of itself as a multi-ethnic state, and from the bottom up there were many ways in which ethnic elites asserted their identity within this newly pluralistic framework.

The Cultural Revolution had practically eliminated the possibility of ethnic expression in China. Schooling in non-Chinese languages was abolished; Party leaders such as Ulanfu who had been prominent in the 1950s and 1960s were attacked for separatism (Bulag 2002); administrative differences between regular and autonomous localities were reduced to a minimum; every ethnic or national conflict was re-interpreted as nothing but a reflex of class conflict; even ethnic arts, such as the three-color lacquerware of the Nuosu in Liangshan (Harrell, Bamo, and Ma 2000:), were condemned as expressions of feudal or bourgeois taste. But as part of their general and wide-ranging re-assessment of the radical policies of 1957-78, the Chinese leaders reconsidered everything they had been doing as part of their frankly assimilationist directions during those two decades. This perhaps started with such regionally specific phenomena as Hu Yaobang's appalled visit to Tibet in 1980 (Goldstein 1997: 63-64), but it culminated in new policies of ethnic pluralism, enshrined in the Constitution of 1982 and the Nationalities Autonomy Law of 1984.

Revised policy was accompanied by revised ideas, and China once again became portrayed in official and semi-official media as a multi-ethnic state. The editing and eventual publication of the aforementioned Historical and Social Investigations was part of this, as were the appearance of colorfully-dressed ethnic minorities on postcards, in art exhibits (the "Yunnan School" of very-soft porn is prominent here) (Gladney 1994), and the tradition of including more and more minority performances in the New Year's Eve television gala, which began in the 1980s. More systematically, a series of conceptions of the Chinese as a people with multiple origins was consolidated in Professor Fei Xiaotong's 1989 essay, 中华民族多元一体格局 (Fei 1989).

These developments, essentially revised formulas for nationhood imposed from the top down, left the way open for the bottom—local scholars, cadres, and businesspeople) to start agitating upward for the concrete expression of that newly granted autonomy and newly formulated diversity. It became possible for members of local ethnic collectivities (who by now were totally accustomed to the minzu model of diversity, with its 55 minority building blocks) to begin taking charge of the representations of their own culture. These representatives came from several walks of life, and approached cultural representation in a variety of media. For example, social scientists and other intellectuals who were members of minority groups began to think about ways of writing their own history and society that were more localistic, less dictated by the overall teleological grid of historical progress, and perhaps most significantly, less derivative of Han Chinese assumptions of minority inferiority. Often they drew directly on the implications of central policy changes. When an important Shanghai conference in 1984, for example, declared that "there was no fundamental contradiction between religion and socialism," Yi scholars and cadres quickly moved to change the official status of bimo and analogous priesthoods from "feudal superstitious practitioners" to "ethnic intellectuals." (Wu Gu **ref**) In other examples, several Yi scholars moved to question the models of slave society that had been imposed on Liangshan history by the grid of progress (Pan Wenchao 1987, Ma Erzi 1993, Liu Yu 2001).

But celebrating ethnicity meant more than just scholarship, revisionist as it may have been. It also meant making money, and with the rising incomes of urban Chinese in the late 1980s and early 1990s, it opened up vast possibilities for ethnic tourism. Yunnan and Guizhou were at the forefront of this: they had the most innocuous varieties of ethnic diversity in the country (Oakes 1998, Schein 2000, Chao 2012, Chio 2014, Tibet was problematical because it was so far away, so unhealthy, and so separatist, and Xinjiang, while appealing in some ways,

had a reputation for danger and drug-dealing that made it less attractive to the potential tourist, compounded after September 2001 by a spurious association between “splittism” and “international Islamist terrorism” (Bovingdon 2010: 115-20).

But the Southwest had little if any separatism and a lot of color. Still, color had to be revived and revised after the repression of the 50s through the 70s, and the infrastructure had to be built to accommodate guests. And in order to make the ethnic tourism experience alluring, it had to have a thick cultural component to it. Minorities had to be different enough to make their areas worth the trip, and ever more remote places began to spiff themselves up as centers of cultural difference. In western Yunnan, for instance, this went from Dali and Shilin in the mid-1980s to Lijiang in the early 1990s to Lugu Lake and the scenic wonders of Zhongdian (Gyaltang) in the late 1990s (for comparable phenomena in Guizhou, see Schein 2000, Oakes 1998, Chao 2012, Chio 2014).

One thinks of scholarship as the province of scholars and of tourism as the province of entrepreneurs, but it is also important to point out the role of local cadres in this process of reemergence and validation of ethnic identity and difference. In the Yi areas, in fact, local cadres were instrumental in both the promotion of scholarship and the promotion of tourism and other kinds of popular culture. The standardization and popularization of the Nuosu script, for example, was strongly supported by Wu Jinghua 伍精华, later Party Secretary of Tibet and Chair of the Nationalities Commission, and by Feng Yuanwei 冯元尉, later vice-governor of Sichuan. Bamo Erha 巴莫尔哈, vice-prefect of Liangshan, promoted everything from standardized circle dances to a public statue of a Nuosu leader's pact with the Red Army in 1935. Naxi leaders at Lijiang in Yunnan went further, and after the disastrous 1995 earthquake not only got the town restored to its former splendor but had it designated as a Unesco World Heritage Site. Yi cadres in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture so far do not have U.N. support, but the Torch Festival in Chuxiong and Liangshan is on the list of China's national Intangible Cultural Heritage (非物质文化遗产名录), and they do have a large and splendid cultural plaza in the middle of town (Harrell and Li 2003).

All this concentration on ethnic identity, undertaken by local people with a local purpose of gaining pride and money from the fact of their ethnicity (and in my unverifiable opinion, the pride is at least as important as the income), has moved scholarship on the Yi from a branch of 民族学, intended to use the Yi as an example of universal laws and a piece in a puzzle of national unity, to a field of its own, where the purpose is to document, glorify, and above all clarify the history of the Yi themselves.

But internal developments alone were not sufficient to lay the groundwork for the development of Yi studies as a field. It might have happened this way, but in fact Yi studies is an international field, dependent in part for its visibility and financial viability on the participation of international scholars, including most prominently, among others Thomas Heberer, Erik Mueggler, Margaret Byrne Swain, Ann Maxwell Hill, Mark Bender, and Benoît Vermander. And international scholars would not have participated in Yi studies (as opposed to studies of the Yi) without the reevaluation of anthropological stances in the light of colonialist guilt, which preoccupied anthropology all through the 1980s and into the 1990s.

The outcome of this self-searching and re-evaluation (whose detailed process we need not re-re-recount here) was the realization that it was no longer possible to defend the model in which the anthropologist, either a Euro-American or someone else trained by Euro-Americans, spoke in an authoritative voice about the subject, who was most likely (though not always) from

someplace besides Europe or America, and had to be spoken for or about. Daniel (1987) referred to culture as a co-creation of locals and anthropologists; in my mind this is going a bit far, because it seems to me culture exists even if there is nobody there to name, systematize, and objectify it. But the realization that a native voice was necessary for a reasonably accurate portrayal of local knowledge meant that cosmopolitan anthropologists 国际学者 became actively interested in collaborating with native scholars 本土学者 in formulating the re-assessment of Yi society and culture that was itself prompted by the multi-ethnic image of China that was part of China's reforms.

At the same time that it became ideologically required to balance the previous role asymmetry between natives and outsiders, it became much easier to do so with the advent of modern communications technologies. Whereas in the early 1990s I had to wait three weeks or more for return mail to communicate with my Yi studies colleagues, by the end of the millennium I could communicate easily by email, fax, or phone. And the growth of middle-class incomes in China, along with increased state support for institutes of higher learning and research, means that they can visit me in the US almost as easily as I can visit them, so that collaboration began in the late 1990s to move from the field to the academy. By the 2010s, I no longer felt like the financial patron anymore than I have ever felt like the intellectual patron in this relationship. This made possible a field of Yi studies in which foreign and native participants, though they will always have somewhat different roles, can be very much equal partners.

In sum, three things coincided quite auspiciously to plow and harrow the field in which Yi studies would grow. One was a worldwide phenomenon: the partial decolonialization of cosmopolitan anthropology and the turn toward collaborative and nativist approaches to anthropological research. The other two were the partial liberalization of scholarship in China and the rapid economic growth that allowed for more personal and institutional equality between Chinese and foreign researchers and research institutes.

C. The establishment of Yixue as a field in China

In the circumstances described above, Yi studies could become a field, rather than just a topic. It began internally in China, with the international component added later on. From the early 80s to the mid-90s, the institutions of a scholarly field were constructed by scholars, cadres, and scholarly cadres, with occasional help from entrepreneurs and cadre-entrepreneurs.

The first step in establishing Yi studies in China (and, I suspect, the first step in establishing just about anything, academic or otherwise, in China) consisted of conferences, that particular late 20th-century PRC version of the institution through which people traveled to someplace (often a very nice place) they have all been before to walk slowly around the grounds, read reports whose content they all know already, and eat three huge meals a day (see Ma 2007: 211-12). In this process, they validate formerly reached conclusions by stamping them with the consensus of a group of scholar and cadre experts.

Before Yi studies themselves were established as a field, the conference tradition for studying matters exclusively Yi was already flourishing, in Sichuan at least, in the form of study groups for the standardization and regularization of the modern Nuosu script (Harrell and Bamo 1998). But Yi studies conferences proper began in the 1980s, with the Kunming conference (**need to get details**) in which it was decided, among other things, that the Nuosu term bimox would be adopted to refer to the priesthoods in all the diverse Yi written traditions, and that their

knowledge, now defined as that of ethnic intellectuals rather than superstitious practitioners, was a legitimate topic for study and writing. This, to my knowledge, was the first instance of a major research effort that was directed specifically toward Yi concerns, rather than with using the Yi as a case study for some larger or more general theory.

After this, Yi studies conferences were regularized through the efforts of the Society for the Study of Southwest Minorities (西南民族学会), which has a conference every year, but devotes one year in four to specific study of the Yi. The meeting in 1986 (check) was particularly noteworthy, because it produced a massive volume (Zhongguo Xinan Minzu Yanjiu Hui 1987) that set the groundwork for a series of debates on such topics as the ancestral groups who later became the Yi, the historical evolution of modes of production among Yi peoples, and nature of the stratification system of the Nuosu of Liangshan, a system that was considered to be primitive or prototypical of the nature of Yi society relatively un-influenced by outside forces (see Pan Jiao n.d.). In recent years, these conferences have included some foreign participation, but they are mostly internal Chinese affairs, including both Yi and Han scholars, unlike the international conferences described in the next section.

In addition to conferences, specialized institutes have become important institutions in the construction of the Yi studies field, through the research that they sponsor and particularly through the journals they publish. The first of these was the Institute for Yi Cultural Research 楚雄彝族文化研究所 in Chuxiong, established in 1982 under the leadership of the redoubtable Liu Yaohan 刘尧汉. Liu (1922–2012) was a tireless leader in promoting the idea of the antiquity and priority of Yi culture in China, going so far as to maintain that many of the calendrical and ritual institutions of archaic China were Yi inventions, adopted only later by the Hua and Xia people who became the Han (Liu 1985, 1986). The journal published by Liu's institute, 彝族文化, however, has been much more inclusive of dissenting views, and has become a forum for Yi and Han scholars, and to a limited extent for international scholars, to publish on a large number of Yi topics.

Not long after the founding of the Chuxiong Institute, Liangshan Prefecture in Sichuan followed suit. Originally, in 1991 when the Institute was first established, it was called 凉山州彝族研究所, but since the population of Liangshan Prefecture after 1978 included about 5% classified as Tibetan, Naxi, Lisu, Hui, and other minorities, in addition to the Yi and Han, the institute was quickly renamed 凉山州民族研究所, to the continued disappointment of some local promoters of Yi identity. But it does conduct research on ethnic groups other than the Yi (who in Liangshan are almost exclusively Nuosu), though the vast majority of the work concerns Yi topics, both in Liangshan and to a lesser extent elsewhere. Their journal, 凉山民族研究, has been published annually since 1992, and quite early on began to include translated works by foreign authors in each issue.

The maturity of Yi studies as a field is perhaps best indicated by the fact that by the turn of the century not all institutes and journals were local to Yi areas. Centered on 中央民族大学 in Beijing, there developed a network of ethnically Yi scholars, most of them faculty members at that institution, in the areas of language (岭福祥, 曲木铁西), literature (朱文旭), comparative religion (巴莫阿依), history (黄建明), ethnology/anthropology (潘蛟), and folklore (巴莫曲布嫫) who began in 1999 to published a thick, book-like annual entitled 中国彝学. In other words, Yi studies by 2000 was enough of a field, because of its subject matter, to be legitimized in an area--the capital--where there are very few Yi, and with a journal title that claims national

relevance for its researches. Counting the Liangshan journal, then, which is overwhelmingly if not exclusively Yi in its content, by the beginning of this millennium there were three journals, each published by a different institution, devoted to Yi studies.

One other organization, influential when Yi studies was beginning to develop as its own field, bears mentioning because of its unusual structure: the Bamo Sisters' Research Group for Yi Studies. In 1991, as the story goes, vice-prefect Bamo Erha suggested to his daughters--Ayi, Qubumo, and Vusamo--that they in Liangshan, like the Brontë sisters in England, ought to become known for their scholarly accomplishments, and encouraged them to form a formal organization devoted to Yi studies. They were active in scholarly publishing (they co-authored their first book in 1992) and in sponsorship of other projects such as recording of folk and popular music and collection of artifacts.

By the mid-1990s, then, Yi studies was a field. It had its topic--the documentation, preservation, analysis, and promotion of Yi culture, defined in terms of the culture of that group of groups that had entered the consciousness of a generation of schoolchildren as the Yi minzu. It had its participants, a dedicated group of Yi scholars as the core, but importantly also a dedicated group of cadres who provided institutional, political, and sometimes financial support for the institutions of scholarship. There were also Han scholars and a few from other Chinese 民族, and foreign scholars, though small in number, played a key role.

D. The internationalization of Yi studies

Foreigners have been studying the Yi for a long time: as mentioned earlier there were the explorers, missionaries, and occasional academics from the 1880s to 1949, and after a hiatus they began again in the 1980s; the first two I know of were Nancy Dowdle, a geographer from the University of Hawai'i, and Thomas Heberer, a fieldwork-inclined political scientist who has been affiliated with several universities in Germany. Both Dowdle and Heberer did short-term field research in Zhaojue and Meigu, the heart of Liangshan, in the early 1980s. Into the late 1980s and early 1990s, a large number of foreign scholars followed in both Yunnan and Sichuan; these included primarily anthropologists (Stevan Harrell, Erik Mueggler, Margaret Swain, Ann Maxwell Hill) but also very significantly the linguist David Bradley and the folklorists Sano Kenji of Tsukuba University and Mark Bender of Ohio State. But until 1995, they were in no way participants in the emerging field of Yi studies; many of them collaborated with Yi partners and counterparts, but they were not yet connected to their Yi counterparts as members of a scholarly community.

At the same time, a limited number of young Yi scholars began studying abroad, conducting studies of Yi topics in the context of disciplinary departments at American and European universities. Three daughters of Wu Jinghua studied at the University of Michigan: Wu Ga 伍岬 in anthropology, Wu Jie in political science, and Wu Guo in art history; Wu Ga remains very active in Yi studies. Liu Yaohan's daughter Liu Xiaoxing 刘小幸 studied anthropology at the University of Illinois, and Lu Hui, 卢汇 granddaughter of Yunnan lieutenant governor Lu Han, received a Ph.D. in anthropology from the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. But as with their international colleagues, they were not until the mid-90s members of an international Yi studies community.

This changed somewhat in 1995, when I organized the grandiosely-titled First International Conference on Yi Studies, held in Seattle, with 11 Yi participants, 8 international scholars, and two Han Chinese. That conference appears to have been a turning point in the history of Yi studies, because we spent four days discussing a variety of topics of common

interest, including history, social structure, and religion, and for the first time conducted broad conversations on these topics that included Yi scholars with purely domestic training, Yi scholars who were trained outside of China, and scholars of non-Chinese origin. Barriers between these categories of people, in terms of the topics discussed, began to be broken down, and domestic scholars recognized that some of their localistic concerns, particularly their attempts to break down the hegemony of the ethnohistorical grid, were shared by their international colleagues. It is also perhaps significant that the volume resulting from that conference (Harrell 2001) was published by a major international publisher, the University of California Press, in its series “Studies on China.”

The second International Conference, with a somewhat larger attendance (about 35 people) was organized by Thomas Heberer and held at the University of Trier, Germany, in June 1998. Many more Yi scholars were able to participate this time (though there were many, many more who wished to attend and could not), and many of the same themes were taken up. As with the first conference, the organizer attempted to set a theme--the revival of ethnic identity--but was unable to hold participants to it, and in this case decided against trying to assemble a conference volume. But I think the reason why it was impossible to keep people to a single theme had less to do with laziness or scatteredness and more to do with the fact that the specific theme was beside the point--the main reason for the conference was the continued legitimation of Yi studies as an international field of endeavor.

The third International Conference in September 2000 marked a further maturation of the field, for two reasons. First, it was held in Yi territory, specifically at the famous Stone Forest 石林 in the newly renamed Shilin County to the east of Kunming. Second, it was much larger than the first two conferences. About 140 scholars attended—100 domestic, mostly but not entirely Yi, and 40 foreign—and the organizers, in this case most importantly Professors Bamo Ayi and Huang Jianmin, succeeded in organizing an international style conference, including substantive discussion of pre-distributed papers, rather than a old-style P.R.C. style affair with ritualistic readings of findings already known.

At the same time, the Third Conference might best be described as an international-style conference with Chinese characteristics 有中国特色的国际式研讨会, because in addition to its genuinely rich scholarly content, the conference was concerned with the further legitimation of Yi studies and Yi topics in China, and this meant participation by officials in addition to foreigners. In order to serve the interests of local Yi leaders (who provided much monetary and other support for the conference), there had to be a lot of ritualistic activities, ranging from speeches and toasts to dances and bullfights, and foreigners were to attend and participate in these events in addition to the purely scholarly activities. The organizers, Huang Jianmin and Bamo Ayi, thus have to perform a balancing act that allowed the scholarly legitimation of the field as a serious area of research at the same time as it promoted the local political legitimation of Yi studies as one contributor to the larger project of promoting Yi identity in multi-ethnic China. This is why the third conference could not be held overseas, no matter how many Yi scholars would like to use it as an opportunity to travel.

The fourth conference, held in 2005 in another Yi area, Meigu in Liangshan, confirmed the direction set by the third. The strictly scholarly format very much followed that of the third conference, with the added improvement that through the immense efforts of the primary organizer, Professor Bamo Qubumo, the conference was thoroughly digitized, with not only a website but also the entire content of all the papers distributed to participants on a CD (remember CDs?) rather than through bulky stacks of papers. The content continued to include a lot of

traditional anthropological, linguistic, folkloristic, and literary topics, but there were more papers dealing with what topics of contemporary society, including development and environment, which had only a small presence at the third conference. The local significance of the Fourth Conference was perhaps greater, however, as Meigu, unlike its predecessor Shilin, was just beginning the attempt to develop a tourist industry, and as a result local officials combined the scholarly conference with a cadre conference on tourism development as well as a real Yi-culture extravaganza, with a mini-Olympic style opening ceremony in the local stadium, as well as beauty contests and trips to recently developed tourism sites, including the now-defunct Bimo Culture Park 毕摩文化园, complete with rituals performed especially for the benefit of visiting scholars, domestic and foreign.

All the first four international conferences were part of Yi studies' coming of age as a scholarly field, a process whose most important component was uniting local with cosmopolitan concerns and thus tying together local and international scholars in relationships of true collaboration. The list of collaborative projects and publications is now very long, and I will not review them here, other than to point out that they have encompassed projects in linguistics, education, religion and ritual, material culture (including several museum exhibits), public health, labor migration, and the history of scholarship on the Yi. In addition, there are an increasing number of translations of works by foreigners into Chinese, and vice-versa, meaning that access to both primary and secondary sources on Yi studies is becoming more egalitarian, though it will never be totally equal given the respective linguistic abilities of Yi and outside scholars.

What this all adds up to, in my opinion, is that since the millennium Yi studies has become not just a field but a community; though of course maintaining and developing a field of study depends on there being a community of people doing the studying, writing, reading, and teaching each other's work. Maintaining Yi studies as a field depends on Yi scholars primarily, but the field really could not exist through the work of Yi scholars alone; if it is to become a significant field, it must continue to cross the lines between native and outside scholars. The community must continue to include minorities Han Chinese, Chinese of other ethnicity, and foreign scholars who are interested in the topics of ethnology and ethnohistory as they continually evolve in China. We can thus talk not only of a field as a topic of study, but of a field as a community of scholars and researchers who have their social as well as their scholarly connections with each other.

E. Recent developments and present challenges:

As we convene in Chengdu for the 5th International Yi Studies conference, we should first note that it has been eight years since the 4th conference. There was a small gathering in Oslo in 2012, but it was hampered by the inability of many Yi scholars to get official permission to travel to Norway, and even if they had gone, they gathering would not have been truly representative of the Yi studies community: foreign scholars would have been over-represented. Now that the efforts of the Southwest Nationalities University have born fruit and we are able to meet after this long interval, I would like to outline some of the recent developments and current challenges that we face if Yi studies is to continue to adapt to changing intellectual and social circumstances and continue to develop as a field. I will focus on those aspects of Yi studies that are closely connected to anthropology, but I will mention other disciplines as they are pertinent.

1) *Adapting to new trends in scholarship.* Although there is still considerable valuable scholarly activity in recording what is commonly known as Yi culture or Yi traditional culture,

such activities are taking on more and more of a flavor of “salvage scholarship” as the efflorescence of Yi tradition that was made possible by the liberalization of the 1980s and the growth of resources in the 1990s gives way to both Chinese nation-building and worldwide globalization. As more and more Yi people are educated in Chinese, as they customarily continue to high school and college, or engage in labor migration to make money for their families, or move to large cities to take advantage of permanent employment, there is a feeling among many Yi elites that “Yi culture is being lost,” or even that “Yi language is being lost,” and there is a corresponding rush to document things before they disappear. This is a laudable effort that will be much appreciated by future generations, and ought to be supported. But if Yi studies is nothing but writing down and translating old things before they disappear, it will not have much future once those things disappear.

In this respect, Yi studies is undergoing a crisis very similar to, and which indeed we might see as part of, the crisis undergone by anthropology with the disappearance from the earth of “uncontacted” peoples who could be vehicles for our study of human cultural diversity. But anthropology, having run out of “cultures” to study, has not run out of subject matter. Rather it has changed its focus to look at the ways in which local communities all over the world have interacted with the trends of nation-building, globalization, and neo-liberalization, the ways in which they have become part of the process of interaction between the global and the local. Yi studies needs to keep up with this trend. It needs more research like Liu Shao-hua’s 刘绍华 *Passage to Manhood* (2011) or the works of activist scholars like Ma Linying 马林英 and Hou Yuangao 侯远高, who are conducting research on the problems facing Yi communities today, or like the work of Thomas Heberer (2007) on Yi business owners. These problems, of course, are shared to some degree by all rural, poor, or peripheral communities in China and elsewhere. But they are also peculiar to the particular situation of Yi areas, and this is why they can be studied effectively only by scholars who know the background of Yi cultures and history.

Another challenge is to engage constructively with disciplinary scholarship. I was struck by the first email invitation for this conference that we received from Lama Ziwo last spring. As a highly-educated linguist and a native speaker of Nuosu Yi, he admitted that he was new to Yi studies. By now, of course, he knows a lot about the field, but my point is that Yi studies must strike a balance between disciplinary scholarship in specialized fields such as linguistics or medical anthropology or ethnoecology, on the one hand, and deep knowledge of particular cultures and societies on the other. Yi studies, to put it another way, needs to guard against both irrelevance (if it becomes purely antiquarian and culturally-specific) and superficiality (if it becomes nothing but a vehicle for disciplinary arguments). Now that our host institution, the Southwest University for Nationalities, has recruited the first class of candidates for a doctorate specifically in Yi studies, it faces both a challenge and also, given the breadth and depth of Yi-specific knowledge among its faculty, an opportunity to combine scholarly depth with disciplinary sophistication.

2) *Maintaining social and ethical relevance.* As I mentioned above, Yi studies has no dearth of social, economic, ecological, and ethical issues with which to concern itself. Many Yi communities are among China’s poorest, most peripheral, and least educated, with low life expectancies and high rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases, drug addiction, and in some cases crime. These unfortunate social phenomena are not attributable to any kind of intrinsic “backwardness” 落后性 as we used to say, or lack of human quality 底素质 as is more fashionable to say nowadays. Rather they are structural problems, occasioned by the

peripheral position of most Yi people in the economic and social geography of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou, by a history of uneven social and economic development, and by China's increasing rural-urban and class inequality. Despite praiseworthy programs recently implemented by national and local governments, and despite the heroic work of social activists in some areas, these problems are not going to disappear quickly. In this situation, the dedication of so many Yi scholars to the welfare of their people is something that has to be put to good and practical use. Yi studies can preserve, protect, and promote the glories of Yi culture, but it also has to confront the realities of Yi society in the early 21st century. And again, deep social and cultural knowledge, along with dedication to local welfare, are necessary if programs to address social, economic, and public health concerns are to be made locally relevant and thus effective. We need experts in development studies, epidemiology, criminology, environmental sciences, and multicultural education who also have this deep local knowledge and this ethical commitment.

3) *Taking advantage of new media for scholarship.* One of the most encouraging trends in Yi studies in recent years is the development of web-based and visual media. In the last decade, we have seen the emergence of comprehensive websites like [彝族人网](#) and [中国彝学网](#), as well as localized ones like [云南楚雄彝文化网](#). These sites, which began rather humbly early in the millennium, have now grown to considerable size and variety, and include some documents and features in Nuosu and English as well as in Chinese. In addition, there are a growing number of films and a small number of regular television programs about Yi topics and in Yi language. All of these are valuable repositories for knowledge and dialogue about both traditional culture and topics of current social concern. I wonder, however, who reads them. It would be very informative to know who is going online to these sites, and whether they read the Chinese or the Nuosu language versions, or even the English. How can Yi studies take advantage of these resources?

F. *A Final Question*

As our host institution, 西南民族大学, has just admitted its first class of doctoral candidates in Yi studies, and as our fifth international meeting convenes, unfortunately without my being able to attend, I want to close with a final question. At the time I convened the first international meeting, very few people knew what Yi studies might be, and very few people outside of China even knew who the Yi were. More importantly, most Yi people still lived in somewhat traditional communities—even though they had been through the rigors of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, most of them were still farmers and herders, and many had little or no education and not much contact with the wider society in China or in the world.

That has now changed. The study of the Yi is on the map, and Yi communities are no longer isolated. In this changing world, it seems to me the question for us to decide here is whether it is going to be about traditional culture or about contemporary society, or whether it might be possible for Yi studies to encompass both. Studying traditional culture alone poses the danger of becoming mere antiquarianism, more and more irrelevant to today's world. But studying contemporary society alone poses the danger of losing any reason for having Yi studies at all—we could just use our tools from linguistics, literature, anthropology, political science, or geography to study the Yi. Whether we go on from the fifth conference to a sixth and seventh and beyond depends on how well we can answer that question.

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