

Language Policy for China's Minorities: Orthography Development for the Yi

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1. The Yi

The Yi nationality of southwestern China is a composite group of nearly eight million people speaking various related languages; a very small number also live in northern Vietnam and northeastern Laos. There are nearly a hundred languages of the Ngwi subgroup of the Burmic or Southeastern branch of Tibeto-Burman (Bradley 1997a, 2007). Of these, over sixty (and probably others still unreported) are spoken by people classified as members of the Yi nationality in China.

The term Yi was introduced in the early 1950s to replace the earlier Chinese term Lolo, now regarded as pejorative; it is said that Chairman Mao himself selected the character now used in Chinese for the Yi nationality, which is homophonous with another character formerly used to refer to groups speaking Dai languages and now classified as Zhuang and Buyi nationality. The nationalities classification was undertaken rather quickly in the mid-1950s, and simply follows the earlier Chinese practice of lumping numerous distinct groups with different languages into larger nationalities.

Four groups within the Yi nationality have distinct logographic traditions, Nosu, Nasu, Nisu and Sani. Like Chinese characters, the original basis of these systems was pictographic, but they subsequently developed into logographic systems by the use of pictographic characters in their phonetic value for homophones, and modifications to distinguish these characters from the original pictographs. Like Chinese, the Ngwi languages do not have affixal morphology and so each character represents a syllable with a meaning.

My term Ngwi is derived from the traditional autonym of many groups speaking Ngwi languages. In these languages, cognates derived from the Tibeto-Burman etymon *d-ŋul¹ originally meaning 'silver' are used as an autonym, and the etymon *plu² meaning 'white' elsewhere in Tibeto-Burman has generalised to mean 'silver' as well. In the Burmese cognate /ŋwe²²/ as in other non-Ngwi Burmic or Southeastern Tibeto-Burman languages, the cognates of this etymon reflect the original form and original meaning 'silver'. One of the older Chinese terms for minority groups of the southwest was Man, and there were Bai Man 'White Man' and Wu Man 'black Man' subgroups in what is now Yunnan Province, usually taken to be the ancestors of groups later called Lolo and now Yi; perhaps the descriptive term 'white' here also reflects the Ngwi autonym. The traditional autonym for the Nosu is /ni²¹/, for Nasu it is /nu²¹/ and similar forms, and for the Eastern Yi Sanguie language spoken just west of Kunming city, the autonym remains /sq²¹ ŋwe²¹/ or changes in some dialects to /sq²¹ ɲe²¹/ (Bradley 2005); we also see the same name and the same Chinese prefix in the Sani autonym /ni²¹/, in the second syllable of the autonym of the related Southern Ngwi group Hani and in the autonym Zani found in the traditional songs of the Akha, and so on. Like the Akha, the Nosu, Nasu and Nisu also have newer autonoms; all three literally mean 'black people'.

There is extreme confusion of Chinese names among groups classified as Yi. Hei Yi 'black Yi' often refers to various formerly unassimilated groups, Bai Yi 'white Yi' is a widespread term for formerly partly assimilated groups, and Gan Yi 'dry Yi' refers to various more fully assimilated groups with a lifestyle like that of the Han Chinese majority. Various other colour and descriptive terms are also combined to refer to specific groups, such as Huang Yi 'yellow Yi', Hong Yi 'red Yi', Shui Yi 'water Yi', Shuitian Yi 'irrigated field Yi'

and so on. Among the Nosu, the leading former aristocratic clans are known as ‘black’, while the former non-aristocrat but non-slave clans are known as ‘white’. Some of the most assimilated groups no longer have any remembered autonym other than a general Chinese term such as Bai Yi. Prior to the introduction of the new term Yi in the early 1950s, all these were Lolo: Bai Lolo and so on. Just to confuse matters even further, there is a very large group classified as Yi whose autonym remains Lolo, and another whose autonym is Lalo.

Chinese linguists classify Yi into six major clusters, including Central Yi (Lolo plus a few other languages) and Western Yi (Lalo and some related languages) respectively, neither of which has a traditional writing system. Of the four groups with writing systems, the Nosu are classified as Northern Yi, the Nasu are classified as Eastern Yi, the Nisu are classified as Southern Yi, and the Sani are one of various groups classified as Southeastern Yi. Chinese linguists call the whole Ngwi subgroup of Tibeto-Burman the Yi Branch. Bradley (1979) classified this into Northern, Central, Southern and Southeastern subbranches. The Ngwi languages linguistically classified in the Southern Ngwi subbranch are spoken by people mostly classified as Hani nationality in China. Speakers of languages in the Central Ngwi subbranch include groups classified as Yi such as the Lolo, Lalo and others, as well as all those classified as Lisu and Jinuo, nearly all the Lahu and some of the Nu. Most groups whose languages are within the Northern Ngwi and Southeastern Ngwi subbranches are classified as Yi, but one such group, the Kazhuo of Tonghai, is classified as Mongol.

The Nosu number over 2.3 million people, mostly in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture of southwestern Sichuan Province, but also in Ninglang County which is the continuation of the same mountain area in northwestern Yunnan. Since 1950, the Nosu have also spread widely across the rest of northwestern Yunnan. The Nosu are by far the largest group within the Yi nationality, their language is very well maintained among the population and Nosu leaders have frequently proposed that their language should be the standard for all Yi in all provinces of China. This was even agreed at a conference of Yi Studies held in Sichuan five years ago, but has not been implemented. Nosu has an extremely wide range of published research materials, including several dictionaries including bilingual ones such as Mahei et al. (1989) and monolingual ones such as Zhu et al. (1990), as well as numerous grammatical studies, but all are based on the new syllabic writing system, not the older traditional script (see discussion below in 3.1). While quite a lot of text material has been published, much has been edited so that it contains much less variation than was found in real traditional texts, or more often so that it conforms exactly to the new syllabic standard discussed below. One fortunate exception is Vermander (1998). There are still many traditional religious practitioners (hereafter ‘shamans’) who use traditional writing, including some younger ones in some areas, and many mother tongue linguists doing extensive research.

The Nasu are widely scattered across northeastern Yunnan and northwestern Guizhou provinces, and number about one million speakers and many more ethnic group members who do not speak the language. Not all Nasu subgroups have retained a literary tradition; two major clusters which have are in Wuding and Luquan counties just north of Kunming in Yunnan, and in various counties in northwestern Guizhou, notably Bijie and Dafang counties. A large number of traditional Nasu texts in original or edited form with Chinese translation have been published in China in the last twenty years, especially material from Guizhou but also from elsewhere. However, the number of fully literate shamans who can read traditional materials is small and rapidly decreasing, and there are few scholars working on Nasu. Notable dictionaries include Ma et al. (1991) on the Guizhou dialect, Bai et al. (1995) on the Wuding dialect, with further data on the Shuangbai dialect of Nisu as well as Lipo and Lolo, and Zhang et al. (1999) on the Luquan dialect. Apart from the literary dialects of Nasu, there are many other closely related languages classified within Eastern Yi by Chinese linguists.

Nisu or Southern Yi is also rather diverse; in addition to about 800,000 speakers, there are many nonspeaker members of the group. It has a wide range of dialects, with Northern and Southern dialects. Speakers of the northernmost Northern Nisu dialect in Yimen, Jinning, Hongta and northern Eshan counties or districts south of Kunming actually use the autonym Nasu (not to be confused with the Eastern Yi Nasu). The other subdialect of Northern Nisu is spoken in Xinning, Shuangbai, Yuanjiang, Mojiang and Shiping counties. Southern Nisu is spoken in Jianshui, Honghe, Luchun and other counties of south central Yunnan and in Vietnam. The main differences between Northern and Southern Nisu are in the reflexes of *ak which is /a/ in the Nasu subvariety of Northern Nisu, /i/ in the rest of Northern Nisu, and /ie/ in Southern Nisu; also the reflexes of medial *l clusters in words such as ‘white/silver’, Yang (Forthcoming), and retroflex affricates and fricatives, present in Southern Nisu, allophonically present before back vowels in northernmost Northern Nisu, and absent elsewhere. Traditional literate shamans are found in many of these areas, but their numbers are declining, and relatively few young shamans are being trained in the traditional way. There are also some Nisu scholars and intellectuals who have some literacy in traditional Nisu, but much less complete than that of the older shamans. A few Nisu live in Vietnam where they are known as Lolo; these Nisu had at least one literate shaman when they arrived in Vietnam more than 150 years ago, but by the time French colonial administrators visited in the 1880s, literacy had disappeared and the remaining manuscripts were collected by the French and eventually taken to Paris. A surprisingly large number of Nisu manuscripts is in overseas libraries in France, the UK and elsewhere, partly due to the colonial efforts of the French in southern Yunnan while building a railway from Hanoi to Kunming in the early twentieth century. There is an excellent Northern Nisu dictionary, Pu Zhangkai et al. (2005), which is very comprehensive and makes a systematic attempt to list all alternative forms of characters, and substantial scholarly publication of traditional texts.

Sani is the main speech form of the Yi nationality in Shilin ‘stone forest’ County, formerly known as Lunan but renamed after its major tourist attraction, and is also spoken in a number of surrounding counties by a total of about 120,000 people. The autonym of this group is actually Ni; Sani is a Chinese exonym containing the first syllable ‘sa’ so widespread in Chinese names for Yi groups around Kunming. The Shilin County government promotes the use of traditional Sani logographic characters and research on Sani topics, notably the Ashima and other traditional stories. There are fewer Sani manuscripts overseas, despite the fact that the French Catholic missionary Vial did extensive work on it starting over a hundred years ago. There are two dictionaries, Vial (1909) using a type font with only 450 characters, and Jin et al. (1984) with over 1300 distinct handwritten head entry characters and some alternative forms given. Vial was limited by the availability of a restricted font of Sani characters, while Jin et al., representing a slightly different dialect, shows some of the wide range of additional variant characters actually used.

2. Yi Writing Systems

The traditional writing systems were known to and used almost exclusively by shamans for life cycle, divination and healing rituals, keeping historical and genealogical records, and among the Sani for writing traditional semihistorical stories such as the well-known Ashima story. These practitioners are known in the ethnographic literature as *bimo*, from the romanisation of the Nosu word /pi³³ mo⁴⁴/; Nasu /pe⁵⁵/, Nisu /pu⁵⁵/ and Sani /pi²¹/ are cognate with the first syllable of the Nosu term. While these four writing systems are ultimately related, they differ greatly.

The original orientation of all four systems was most likely similar to Chinese: written from top to bottom. Most Nasu texts are written starting at the top right. The Nosu are relatively recent arrivals in Sichuan, having come from the east and thus across the upper

Yangtse River from the adjacent Nasu area of northeastern Yunnan only a few hundred years ago. At some point, the Nosu started to turn their texts 90 degrees counterclockwise, and now read them from left to right starting at the top. This means that Nosu characters are rotated 90 degrees counterclockwise, when compared to the characters of the other three traditions. Both Nisu and Sani are written starting at the top left.

Traditional books are hand-written on handmade paper, bound into books with handmade cloth covers, and usually stored rolled. Traditionally, each shaman would train a son or nephew to succeed him, and the successor would recopy all of the books of his mentor, and as many other books as he could find. All literate shamans were men; female religious healing practitioners did not use writing. There is also a small corpus of inscriptions on stone or on bronze bells, of hotly debated dates but probably no more than 600 years old. Some Yi scholars claim a 6000 year history for Yi writing, antedating Chinese, but this is implausible. The principle of logographic writing and the form of some Yi characters clearly derive from Chinese. The Chinese were a major force in the Yunnan area for over two millennia, long before any surviving datable Yi inscriptions.

It is easy to distinguish Nisu and Nasu manuscripts, because after each line of five, seven or however many syllables, there is a dividing mark (to mark the pause in chanting). The Nisu dividing mark is an equilateral triangle resting on one base, with a horizontal line going to the left from the top. This is often filled in in red, while the rest of the text is in black. The Nasu dividing mark is a small circle at the bottom right or left of the last character in a line, out of alignment with the characters. A similar mark is sometimes used in Sani, but the form of many Sani characters is quite different, so a limited familiarity with some basic frequent characters suffices to distinguish these. The manuscripts usually have section titles written horizontally in a colophon above the beginning of each section; thus a Nosu manuscript has the title and the text reading in the same direction, while the other three traditions have the text reading vertically but the titles reading horizontally, most often left to right. The end of each section of a Nisu manuscript is marked by an equilateral triangle standing on its apex, with ornamental lines, sometimes partly in red, radiating downward. Sections are also sometimes separated from the following section by a black line. Some Nisu manuscripts have ruled borders and even ruled lines between vertical columns of text. Manuscripts often contain pictures, and the orientation of the pictures also shows which way the text is to be read and thus whether it is Nosu or one of the other three.

A partial exception is seen in some divination books, which may have full-page illustrations upside down facing the text, so that the person whose fortune is being told can see the picture while the shaman reads the text. These books typically have an even number of pages, 24 to 60 (and reportedly up to a maximum of 70, though no book of this size is currently known). Each page of these divination books has an attached string with a copper coin at the end; the person chooses a coin, and the shaman then reads relevant parts of that page to the person. Such books are fairly widespread among the Nisu where they are known as Baileshu, less frequently found among the Nasu, and not used by the Nosu and Sani; two collections of the illustrations from these divination books have recently been published: Zhang (2003) and Pu Xuewang et al. (2005); our translation of two such divination books in European libraries is forthcoming.

Books are sometimes dated, usually according to the Chinese emperor and the year of his reign in which the book was first written or when it was copied. It is said that the older style of ritual text has five syllables per line, while the newer style has seven, and indeed many of the texts with seven-syllable lines are recognisably derived from Chinese models, though usually still several hundred years old.

Due to the mode of transmission, the forms of the characters within each major tradition show substantial internal differences. Unlike Chinese, there has never been an

education system spreading and standardising these scripts. Also, as the shamans made their living by chanting texts, there was a desire to keep the texts as opaque as possible. For this reason, many frequent words have multiple alternative written forms. These are usually edited out of recently published materials, but not always.

In all four traditions, the texts have been transmitted for many generations by recopying, and so textual differences have developed. Also, various parts of the text can still be read phonetically but are ambiguous or impossible to understand, so even the most knowledgeable shamans cannot explain everything.

A local variant of the Nasu script has been used in some scholarly publications in Guangxi, where there are some Yi, especially in Longlin County in the northwestern corner. Nasu script has also been learned by a few shamans speaking other languages: there is a Sanguie shaman just west of Kunming who uses it for his Eastern Yi language, there were formerly some Samei shamans who used it to write their Eastern Yi language spoken just east of Kunming, and there are still a few Azhe shamans in Mile County southeast of Kunming who use it for their Southeastern Ngwi language. It is also reported that some Lolo who speak a Central Ngwi language but were in contact with Nasu formerly wrote using this orthography. Similarly, a few Pula and Muji shamans who speak their own Southeastern Ngwi languages, but are bilingual in Nisu, use Nisu script.

Various other Ngwi groups have retained traditional oral ritual texts which follow the same structural pattern as most Yi ritual texts: pairs of lines with parallel structure and meaning but alternative lexicon, mostly with five or seven syllables and always with an odd number of syllables; there is no requirement for internal rhyme or syllable structure constraints as in some forms of Chinese poetry, but pairs of lines often end with the same grammatical element and thus may rhyme, but this is not necessary. Divination, historical and story texts do not follow this fixed pattern, neither in the various Yi nonritual texts nor in the oral texts of other groups such as the Lisu, Hani and others speaking Ngwi languages but without old writing systems.

3. Standardisation of Yi

Language policy for minority languages in China follows the usual Stalinist model: each nationality in principle has one language, and one standard dialect should be chosen which is a central dialect intelligible to speakers of other dialects, with a large number of speakers who are socially advanced within the group. This one dialect should become the standard for the development or reform of writing, for educational implementation, and for wider use within the society. In China in the 1950s, there was also a push for the use of romanisations instead of traditional orthographies, for Chinese as well as minority languages, but this was dropped at the end of the 1950s.

During the 1950s, there were several attempts to implement romanisations to replace the Yi orthographic traditions. Vestiges of these romanisations survive in libraries around China, but none was ever accepted by any Yi group. It is interesting that indigenous literary traditions which were so restricted in their users and uses up to that time nevertheless were central enough to group identity that community members simply refused to accept these romanisations, intended to smooth the way for learning Chinese through its *pinyin* romanisation.

After the end of the Cultural Revolution and the fall of the Gang of Four in the mid-1970s, there was an explosion of work on minority languages. Firstly, a massive quantity of primary ethnographic and linguistic research material collected in the late 1950s was finally published. Secondly, the shamans who had managed to save their books from the Red Guards brought them out from hiding and started to perform traditional rituals again. Thirdly, a new generation of young scholars and shamans started to be trained. Finally, the new 1982

constitution clearly stated the right of each nationality to maintain and develop its language and culture. Many local governments in minority autonomous areas all over China took full advantage of this liberalisation. In recent years this push has slowed greatly, but local authorities still deploy their traditional culture as a tourist drawcard.

As in some other areas, the imposition of a single standard variety for an entire nationality has not really been attempted for the Yi; each province with a substantial Yi population has followed a different path.

3.1 The Nosu Syllabary

The first and most successful reformed writing system for a Yi language was the Nosu syllabary. Mahei (1985) provides a detailed account of the process of its development, from the perspective of a leader in the process. This syllabary was devised starting in 1974 and was fully approved on 17 December 1980. It selects one of the many alternative variant characters for each of the 819 syllables which occur in the speech of the Central variety of Nosu (also known as Shengza from its autonym) as spoken in Xide County, and uses only that one character, rather than different logographic or variant forms, for every other homophone regardless of meaning. It also adds a diacritic, a semicircle above the mid tone form, to indicate the lower-high sandhi tone found in that local dialect but not previously distinguished in the orthography; there is one additional symbol to indicate that a particular syllable is repeated. Not surprisingly, this syllabary is written from left to right starting at the top, like traditional Nosu script and like modern Chinese.

Thus this orthography is a phonetic syllabary based on one dialect, not a logographic system neutral between dialects. This of course means that speakers of other varieties of Nosu, including Northern Yino and Lindimu and Southern Sondi and Adur, must learn the Central Shengza dialect in order to become literate. As these other Nosu varieties, including the Southern ones not mutually intelligible with Shengza Nosu, have different tone sandhi patterns (Bradley 1997b) and other phonological differences, major lexical differences and some syntactic differences, becoming literate is much easier for the approximately half of the Nosu who speak a Central dialect, including all those in northwestern Yunnan.

Training for teachers of Nosu has long been carried out in the Nosu area at Liangshan University in Xichang and Zhaojue Normal Institute in Zhaojue, and elsewhere at the Southwest University of Nationalities in Chengdu and at the Central University of Nationalities in Beijing. In the early 1980s, the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities brought teachers from Sichuan to teach Nosu to students from northwest Yunnan, but since the mid-1980s Nosu students from Ninglang County have been sent to Sichuan to study Nosu instead. A huge number of monolingual books in Nosu, including textbooks at all levels up to university, original research on Nosu language and society, traditional and modern literature, health, agricultural, political and other materials translated into Nosu from Chinese, magazines, scholarly journals and many other things have been published, starting in draft versions in the late 1970s and since 1980 in really amazing quantity and quality, mostly through the Sichuan Nationalities Press. There is also a newspaper in Nosu, the Liangshan Daily, which started in January 1978 with three issues a month and has been a daily for many years. Initially all Nosu materials were typeset and printed at a plant in Xichang, but now everything is computer-generated and there is a Unicode standard.

Claims of literacy achieved in this Nosu syllabary range up to nearly 100% in the core Shengza areas where it is the local speech, and nearly as high in other Shengza areas with slight dialect differences, such as Yanyuan County where /h/ has merged with /x/. Signs in public places such as train stations, roads, signboards and notice boards throughout Liangshan are bilingual. Many members of other nationalities in Liangshan are also able to speak Nosu: some members of the Tibetan nationality with first languages such as Pumi and

Namuyi and the local Mongol and Naxi with first languages Na and Naxi can speak Nosu in addition to their own language. There are even some Han Chinese and a few foreigners who have learned Nosu and its syllabary.

3.2 Nasu Characters

In Guizhou starting in the early 1980s, the traditional Nasu logographic script was standardised and brought back into use, firstly with literacy primers and textbooks such as Guizhou Nationalities Commission & Guizhou Nationalities Research Institute (1982-83) and Language Office, Guizhou Nationalities Commission (1984) and subsequently with a great deal of traditional text material published by the Guizhou Nationalities Press and by the Sichuan Nationalities Press. This was intended to use the local pronunciation of each area, but with a single standardised set of logographic characters without graphic variation. That is, unlike Sichuan, the Nasu in Guizhou were not expected to learn to use another dialect in order to write, but only to learn a single set of standard characters. This is more analogous to the earlier Chinese situation, in which people used local pronunciation when reading, unlike the modern Chinese situation in which the standard *Putonghua* pronunciation is used for reading throughout China. Modern Nasu in Guizhou is written from left to right starting at the top left, as is modern Chinese, and not like traditional Nasu; even published versions of traditional Nasu books are printed this way.

The dissemination of this Nasu script has been led by the Guizhou Institute of Nationalities, training teachers, scholars and administrators in Nasu from the late 1970s. There is also an institute for Nasu writing at Bijie, which carries out much of the research work, and uses a slightly different standard as seen in Ma et al. (1991). As about half of the Yi nationality in Guizhou, especially younger people, do not speak Nasu or any other kind of Yi, chances for long-term success with this script are lower than in Sichuan.

The dialect differences within Nasu in Guizhou are not too large, but the speech of western Weining County is actually more similar to the speech of many of the Nasu in northeastern Yunnan, and the speech of Pan County in the southeast is much more distinct, though still considered Eastern Yi by Chinese linguists.

3.3 Yunnan Reformed Yi

As we have seen, all four of the traditional Yi writing systems are found in Yunnan. Thus, no one system could be implemented province-wide, unlike Sichuan and Guizhou where the internal linguistic differences between the languages included in the Yi nationality are much less substantial, and only one traditional Yi orthography was present.

In response to this, the Yunnan Nationalities Commission directed its Nationalities Language Commission to create a new composite logographic system. A work group representing the four literary varieties of Yi was set up, and worked from September 1983 to late 1985 creating a completely new composite logographic orthography of over 1600 characters, with some of its characters derived from each of the four established scripts. The Nosu work group member left after one year, and the Nosu component is small. Like modern Nosu and Nasu, Yunnan Reformed Yi is written from left to right starting at the top; unlike Nosu, none of the characters is turned on its side. A conference to report on and discuss this work was held in Kunming in March 1986.

The intention in this Einbau process (Fishman 2006) was to have majority rule: if a single character was used in three of the four scripts, or two out of four with the other two each different from each other, then the majority character was meant to be chosen. Given that Nosu, Nasu and Nisu orthographies are on the whole more similar to each other, and Sani is more distinct, this would have meant relatively few uniquely Sani characters would

have been chosen, so the work group attempted to give Sani characters somewhat greater representation than would have resulted from the majority principle.

Notice that this means that the Yunnan Reformed Yi characters are purely logographic; in principle they cannot be used in their phonetic value, as they have no inherent phonetic value. Each is meant to be pronounced according to local speech; thus it is also suitable for Yi areas where there was no traditional script, such as in western Yunnan among the Lolo and Lalo, or where there are speakers of more than one type of Yi; or for that matter where children do not speak Yi, and can be taught some variety using the materials provided.

The first stage was approved for implementation at the province level in February 1987. Over a further two years, the work group devised an additional 600 logographic characters and a syllabary to represent borrowed words or words for which there is no logographic character available. Initially, provincial Nationality Affairs Commission subsidies were available for educational implementation of the system in schools, and various textbooks were prepared. A literacy volume had the largest print run, with 6,000 copies printed in August 1991 from hand-written characters (Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission & Yunnan Reformed Yi Work Group 1991). A revised edition of 5,000 copies using a computer font for both Yi and Chinese came out in May 1997 (Yunnan Nationalities Language Commission & Yunnan Reformed Yi Work Group 1997) and an expanded edition (Bi et al. 2000) came out in December 2000 in a print run of 10,000. The total printing of 21,000 copies over ten years for a group with nearly five million people in the province shows how limited the actual implementation has been; if anything, the print runs exaggerate the extent of use, as in each case the new printing was made to improve the earlier edition, before that had been sold out.

There was a serious attempt by Zhang Chunde of the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities to implement this script. He led and taught a two-year program for Yi cadres from all over Yunnan, with a few from other provinces, to learn it; this included participants from groups with and without traditional writing, and also trained participants in the Nosu script from Sichuan. Over a number of years, Zhang also taught Yunnan Reformed Yi to students of the Yi language class in the Yunnan Institute of Nationalities, using his own Luquan Nasu as the model pronunciation; students were also trained in phonetics so that they could represent their own speech and relate it to the characters. Since he retired at the end of 2001, this training has stopped. Another centre for learning this script was in Chuxiong, the capital of the only Yi autonomous prefecture in Yunnan, at the Chuxiong Normal Institute; it is claimed that this has produced 340 qualified teachers since 1987. Since most Yi in Chuxiong either have no tradition of literacy or are Nasu and prefer traditional Nasu script, teaching has not been well-received (Cao 2001). In the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southern Yunnan, a six-month class for teaching this script was held in 1989 with 36 of 74 participants passing, and six teacher training classes were run between 1991 and 1998 with 208 teachers trained. This was implemented during the 1990s in seven preschools and twenty primary schools (Liang 2001), but has now lapsed.

The Yunnan Reformed Yi writing system has encountered very serious problems. Some Yi in Yunnan Province, including some in areas with languages other than the four having orthographic traditions, have started to use the Yunnan Reformed Yi script for symbolic purposes such as public signs, letterheads and tourist-oriented materials, but its educational implementation has stalled, and authorities in Nisu, Sani and Nasu areas have strong reservations about its use, all preferring their own traditional scripts. Nosu in Ninglang have never switched to it, but continued to use the Sichuan Nosu syllabary.

While the Yunnan Nationalities Press continues to publish materials in Yunnan Reformed Yi, including new primary school textbooks in a province-wide series for all nationalities that have an established orthography, these Yi textbooks are hardly used.

4.4 Traditional Yi

In every area, printed versions of traditional texts are arranged as in modern Chinese; that is, starting at the top and going from left to right. Line breaks in ritual and other similar texts are not represented by the original diacritics, but by starting a new line of text. Nearly all of what is printed also has an introduction in Chinese and a translation of the text into Chinese, sometimes with phonetic transcription of each syllable, word-by-word glosses and extensive footnotes to explain cultural background and other information. Most such books are printed in fairly small press runs and quickly go out of print. Sometimes the publication of a volume is supported by a local government, in which case that government may take almost the entire press run and gradually give it out to visitors, and such books are almost immediately unavailable from the publisher.

In Yunnan, local authorities in the Nisu, Nasu and Sani areas have attempted to document their traditional orthographies and publish materials in traditional characters, usually through the Yunnan Nationalities Press. There is also a lot more material internally published by various universities, teaching institutes and research institutes; in principle this is meant to be for restricted use inside China. Some of this appears years later in openly published editions; for example, Guo & Ding (1984) which eventually became Guo et al. (1993), with very similar content.

The most extensive efforts to teach a traditional system to new shamans have been in the Honghe Yi and Hani Autonomous Prefecture in southern Yunnan. There, many Nisu shamans have taught informal classes since the early 1980s; a more formal program was run in primary schools of one village in Xinping County of Yuxi Prefecture in the mid-1990s, but stopped when funding from the Ford Foundation ran out. Many Nosu shamans in Sichuan also run informal classes, mainly for their male relatives. In addition, extensive study of traditional Nosu, Nasu, Nisu and Sani written materials is carried out by scholars at what are now the Central University of Nationalities, the Southwest University of Nationalities, the Yunnan University of Nationalities and the Guizhou Institute of Nationalities; all of these institutions have also trained many students in traditional scripts.

5. Conclusion

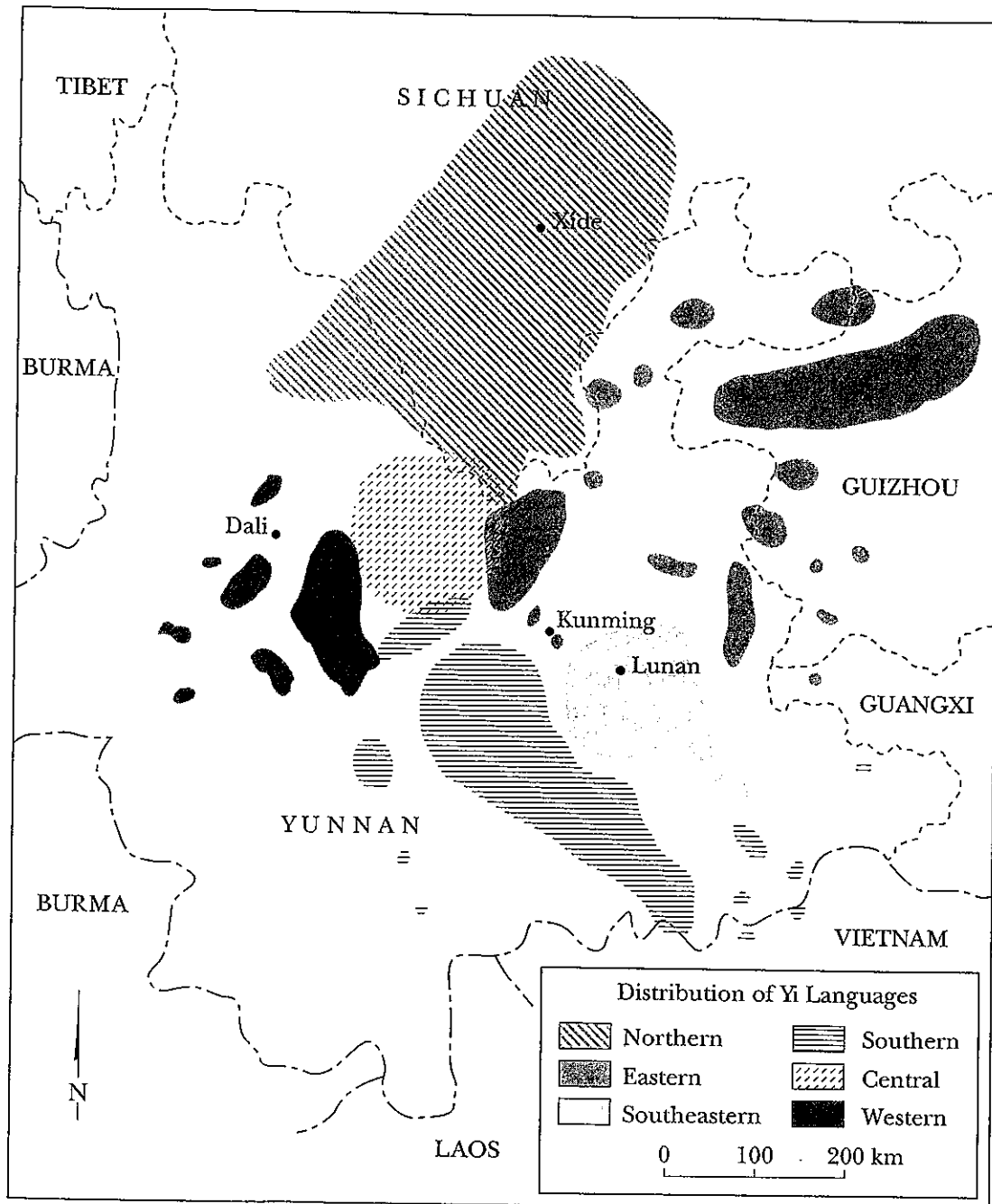
The Yi orthography reforms have been very successful for Nosu in Sichuan, less so for Nasu in Guizhou, and rather unsuccessful in Yunnan. At the same time, efforts are being made to document and preserve traditional written materials, and in some areas to continue to train traditional shamans.

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Yi Locations



Yi Characters

Meaning	Chinese	Nosu Shengza	Yino	Nasu Yunnan	Guizhou	Nisu	Sani	Yunnan Reformed
'one'	一	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'two'	二	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'three'	三	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'four'	四	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'five'	五	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'six'	六	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'seven'	七	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'eight'	八	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'nine'	九	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'ten'	十	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'hundred'	百	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'thousand'	千	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇
'not'	不	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇	𠂇