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Súčasný vývoj kastového systému etnickej menšiny Yi v oblasti Liangshan na začiatku 21. storočia

Changes in Caste System of Yi Ethnic Minority in Liangshan at the Beginning of 21st Century

Magisterská diplomová práce

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I declare that I elaborated this thesis independently, using only the sources listed in the References.

In Olomouc, December 10, 2018 ……

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Annotation

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The objective of the presented master's thesis *Changes in the Caste System of the Yi Ethnic Minority in Liangshan at the Beginning of the 21st Century* is to examine the development of the Nuosu-Yi caste system in the early 21st century. The analysis of the caste system development is based on data collected using the methodology of qualitative research – interviews, and observation. Data collection was conducted from February to August 2017 in Chengdu, Sichuan Province and the Autonomous Prefecture of Yi Ethnic Minority Liangshan. The target group of the field research has been young Nuosu-Yi University students. The paper describes the development of three cultural phenomena of the Nuosu-Yi society: Nuosu-Yi clans, the caste system, and caste endogamy. The paper offers an insight into the issue by displaying fragments of unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the research participants and a subsequent comparison of their testimonies with works of other authors who had studied the topic in the past, namely in the 1970s and 1990s.

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Contents

Editorial Note

The terms in Chinese language are transcribed using the official transcription of Standard Chinese Pinyin, the Chinese terms are put in italics and specified by stating the term also in Simplified Chinese Characters in the footnotes. Regarding the terms in Nuosu-Yi language the paper applies a Standard Yi Language Transcription into Latin and Standardized Nuosu-Yi script. To distinguish direct quotations from literature and primary sources (data collected in 2017 by the author of the thesis), quotations from the author's data are in italics, while direct quotations from works of other authors are not in quotation marks without italics. Direct quotations of the research participants' statements are also in an original transcript version in Chinese language placed in the footnotes. The respondents' names used in this thesis have been stated in accordance with the preference of the respondents themselves. The thesis uses the Sixteenth Edition of the Chicago Citation Style.

Introduction

This work is an attempt to get a deeper insight into the Liangshan Nuosu-Yi community and their social stratification system. I laid the foundations for this research while finalizing my bachelor's thesis, *Caste – a Term Concerning a Social Hierarchy of the Chinese Yi Ethnic Minority*, which focused on the concept of a caste system in the Liangshan Nuosu-Yi society. In said bachelor's thesis, I compared the Nuosu-Yi caste system with India's well-known and widely studied caste system. While conducting research for this thesis, what captured my interest most was the way in which various authors described power and resistance of the caste idea in a mentality of the Nuosu-Yi people. I, therefore, decided to continue exploring this topic and furthering my previous research with the aim of acquiring a more complex picture of the Nuosu-Yi people's worldview and understanding the importance of a social hierarchy in their community from a cultural perspective.

The Nuosu-Yi

The population of Yi *minzu*, according to official information published on a website of the State Ethnic Affairs Commission of PRC, is 8,714,393 people; it ranks as the sixth most numerous ethnic minority living in China. The population is spread across the provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi. Additional communities of Yi people can be found in Laos, Vietnam and Thailand as well (State Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China 2010). My research, however, is focused on a specific subgroup within the Yi ethnic group, known as *Nuosu-Yi*. Nuosu-Yi are inhabitants of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. Their population, within this region, is approximately 2 million individuals, who, in turn, make up 51.74% of the entire population of the region (Yi 2018).

However, I would first like to discuss the Yi *minzu* as a whole. The Yi *shaoshu minzu* (ethnic minority Yi) is a very specific minority consisting of various ethnicities. For instance, taking their language into consideration, there are six official Yi language dialects, that are to a great degree mutually unintelligible (Kraef 2013, 220). The subgroups that comprise the Yi *minzu* are a very diverse collection consisting of ethnic groups that differ in many aspects. This is a direct result of a project executed in the 1950s, *minzu shibie* (Ethnic Classification Project)

(Harrell 1995, 64). The criteria for Ethnic Classification from the 1950s were based on Marxist historic materialism; however, the most dominant idea of ethnicity for the project was proposed by Stalin. According to the idea, Stalin defines a nation as: "a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a common culture" (Wang 2015, 12). The problem was that various minority groups were at different stages of socio-economic development. While the Ethnic Classification Project was in force, many minorities according to the doctrine, continued to uphold primitive, slave or feudal systems as the building blocks of their social hierarchies. Paradoxically, it was basically impossible to accurately apply the criteria to such com munities. Therefore, the process of classifying and identifying minorities was incredibly flexible and prone to certain inaccuracies. This is how Wang Linzhu summarizes the results in his paper concerning The Identification of Minorities in China: "As a result, minorities were classified pursuant to various criteria with contingency. Some identification was based on language. For example, the ethnic classification in Yunnan province was essentially based on linguistic categorization. Some identification was made in accordance with history and ancestry origin, such as different Muslim groups in Xinjiang. Groups were also identified on the basis of religious beliefs. The Hui group was simply considered to be the Muslim Han. Others were recognized on the basis of national consciousness and ancestral heritage. The Manchu, for instance, were typically classified using this perspective. In practice, large groups, geographically or numerically, were very likely to be approved as minorities, whilst small numbered groups might often be ruled out or incorporated into other minorities. The selective application of a set of standards left enough space for the communists to control the identification process for political and/or economic considerations," (Wang 2015, 8). In conclusion, we can say the Yi *minzu*, essentially being an ethnic category rather than ethnic group, comprises of very diverse ethnic groups, including communities which openly decline any relation to other subgroups within the Yi *minzu*. There are cases where the subgroups are in some respects more closely related to other *minzu* than to the Yi (Harrell 1995, 66).

As has already been stated earlier, the Nuosu-Yi community adheres to a caste-based social system. Another fact worth mentioning is their tenacity in resisting the influence of other societies and cultures. We have heard many cases where minorities lost their sovereignty

relatively quickly, e.g. Native Americans, in less than two centuries (Wiens 1968, 399). Nuosu-Yi and few other ethnic groups of Southwestern China were able to keep their relative independence from Chinese imperial dynasties for more than two thousand years (Harrell and Fan 2003, 10).

Another essential feature of the traditional Nuosu-Yi society is a patrilineal clan. As Professor Harrell stated: "Whenever two people meet, one of the first things they ask each other is the other person's clan membership, and people believe generally that clan loyalty is the basis of social peace and order, as well as the cause of strife and warfare. Clans extend all over Liangshan, and marriage alliances between clans tie together society both within local areas and over vast distances," (Harrell 2001).

Liangshan – Poverty Stricken Region

Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture lies in the far south-west of Sichuan province. It is a mountainous region with altitudes reaching up to 6000 m. The region is divided into 16 counties and one prefectural city (Xichang; the Prefectural government is located here). Liangshan as a mountainous region is rich in mineral resources, such as copper, silver, gold, coal, etc. According to Heberer's study, *Doing Business in Rural China: Liangshan's New Ethnic Entrepreneurs,* it was also heavily forested, but the majority of the forest area was cut down within a period of approximately 40 years (between 1950-1990) (Heberer 2012, 9).

Even though the Liangshan region is very rich in natural resources, it is one of the poorest areas of China. There are 17 counties officially recognized as poverty-stricken regions in the PRC; 11 of these are located in the Liangshan area. According to official data, the living conditions have been gradually improving throughout the years. Between 2000 and 2010 a number of citizens categorized as *juedui pinkun renkou* (absolute poverty population) decreased from 3 830 000 to 1 460 000 (Yang 2013). Due to a series of campaigns, the Liangshan area is currently in the process of upgrading its infrastructure and boosting its housing and tourism industry (Dong 2018, 11).

Poverty in the region has led to many other social issues that have a huge impact on the local people's lives. The Liangshan region was well-known for the production of opium in the past.

After opium production was banned, however, "the tradition" slowly transformed into heroin consumption and trafficking. In 2001, international aid agencies carried out a nation-wide study investigating the spread of HIV infection. The results of this study highlighted a higher proportion of HIV-positive individuals in Liangshan. In early 2000s Nuosu-Yi were just about 3 % of Sichuan province's population, however, they constituted more than half of the province's HIV infection. According to the author of *Passage to Manhood*, the main reason for such high HIV-positive rates was due to the use of unsafe or infected heroin injections among young Nuosu-Yi men who had been migrating between rural Liangshan and big cities across the country since the mid-1980s (Liu 2011, 10). HIV/AIDS proved to be the gateway that, in turn, lead to other social problems such as a rise in crime, an increase in the number of orphaned children, migration, collapse of family units, etc. However, in the recent years, the problem was addressed by the authorities due to an increasing exposure of Liangshan in media, and the situation is allegedly gradually improving.

Research Goals

"In research among the Nuosu in Ninglang County, Yunnan Province, Wu Ga also recounts two specific cases. In one case a White Yi boy fell in love with a Black Yi girl. The latter's clan tied a stone around the boy and dropped him in a river, and then ordered the girl to hang herself. In another case a girl fell in love with a Han teacher and they escaped to the teacher's family. However, they were found by their brother/uncles, who pushed them off of the fourth floor of a building... The Nuosu prohibition of exogamy and its enforcement by death was extremely strict even among the world's caste systems, some of which (for example, India) have tolerated a certain degree of exogamy in some areas and/or punished exogamy less forcefully than the Nuosu." (Schoenhals 2003, 18-19).

This quotation from Schoenhals' study on a caste system in the Liangshan area initially caught my attention to the extent that I decided to dedicate a section of my master's thesis to it. Reading Schoenhals' *Intimate Exclusion: Race and Caste Turned Inside Out* prompted the same question in my mind: How an idea, created to maintain the supposed purity of a community, and passed from one generation to another, could evolve into such a strong belief system that violation of this rule forces people to take the lives of their own relatives? Of

course, I do not intend to answer this complex question. The decision to closely examine the caste idea of the Nuosu-Yi society in recent years derives from another interesting fact I had learnt while completing my bachelor's thesis. In 1957, a so-called Democratic Reform came in effect in the Liangshan area. From that moment onwards, the possession of slaves or enforcement of the caste system were officially banned by the ruling Communist Party. However, even though the law clearly stated that all individuals were equal, the concept of a caste system, developed many generations ago, persisted. During reviewing the literature, I have come across various authors who have claimed that the concept of a caste-based social system has never left the Liangshan area (Harrell and Fan 2003); (Schoenhals 2003); (Ma 2001). For instance, a Nuosu-Yi author, Lu Hui, claims that the caste idea is still alive in the Liangshan area, along with a collection of both Yi and non-Yi authors, who focus on various aspects of the Yi culture - *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China,* she states: "Marriage between castes was, and still is, considered a grave violation of social rules and punished severely, by death before 1956 and by exclusion from the clan or even caste today. The whole society, then, followed the principle of strict endogamy of caste and exogamy of clan. On the basis of this principle, bilateral-cross-cousin marriage was, and is, practiced and parallel cousin marriage was, and is, forbidden," (Lu 2001, 68). While examining literature concerning the Nuosu-Yi caste system and social stratification, I came across sufficient evidence that suggested that the idea is still present in the mentality of the people. This evidence led me to investigate how the caste system is currently viewed by people in the Liangshan Nuosu-Yi society.

Another interesting fact worth mentioning, based on literature on the Nuosu-Yi (Harrell and Fan 2003); (Schoenhals 2003) is that the people are very proud of being Nuosu-Yi, which is one of the most commonly used characteristics of the ethnic group. Even though the Nuosu-Yi is a nation of mountain dwellers living in poor conditions, the source of their ethnic pride is derived from their view of themselves as superior to other ethnic groups (Schoenhals 2013, 360). The authors studying the Nuosu-Yi culture often use the argument of the Nuosu-Yi ethnic pride to explain why the society is so resistant against external influences.

Questions of ethnicity, kinship, caste and endogamy discussed in the context of the Nuosu-Yi society have greatly fascinated me. This entirely unique facet of society is what has

attracted me to explore their customs and traditions further. I believe that studying such a distant culture and trying to understand their inter and intra-cultural relations could benefit not only the Yi *minzu* but also the scientific community interested in studying traditional societies that are on the brink of experiencing the effects of globalization. On a personal note, I am motivated to try and gain an understanding of a culture vastly different from my own.

Our current era of globalization is a particularly turbulent time for relatively isolated communities and ethnic minorities. In the context of how such communities are trading off aspects of their ethnic identities in favor of progress and prosperity, the goal of my research is to try and understand: **How young educated Nuosu-Yi people view a caste idea in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in recent years.** Using data collected via personally conducting qualitative research in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, I present my analysis in three chapters. The focus of my research is mainly on three core aspects of the social stratification in the region, namely: a clan, a caste and endogamy. My attempt is to offer an insight into the problematics associated with two stakeholders: the participants – young, educated people belonging to the Nuosu-Yi ethnic group and the literature dealing with topics related to the social hierarchy in the Liangshan area.

The first chapter deals with Nuosu-Yi clan organization and defines a clan as a fundamental and core unit of society. Using a combination of other authors' results and observations, as well as data collected in 2017, I attempt to demonstrate the importance of a patrilineal clan unit in the Nuosu-Yi society. The chapter contains a definition of a Nuosu-Yi patrilineal clan unit also in addition to examples of present-day Nuosu-Yi views on the importance, purpose and role of the clan organization in their society. I also touch upon the question of an individual and ethnic identity in the chapter, citing various Nuosu-Yi respondents who repeatedly expound upon how clan membership forms their individual identity. I try to illustrate that social processes, ranging from milestones in the life of an individual to resolving disputes, all fall within a clan's and clan elders' collective competencies.

The second core chapter initially describes the historical development of a caste idea, clan and ethnic endogamy and the role of marriage. A brief historical account is presented based on Western anthropologists' analysis portraying the Nuosu-Yi society as a caste society. The

discourse contrasts with the Chinese Marxist materialist approach which defines Nuosu-Yi society as a slave society.

The final third core chapter then focuses on the present state of the caste idea, cross-caste and cross-ethnic endogamy. It illustrates young Nuosu-Yi people's opinions and views on these three cultural phenomena, moreover there are some cases of violating the endogamy rule either from data gathered in 2017 or from other authors' literature. I also display the theory of *doxa* redefined by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1977, 167), that has been applied on the Nuosu-Yi blood superiority belief and a caste idea by some of the scholars focused on this culture. Finally, I demonstrate how my data show a slight shift in the Nuosu-Yi young people's worldview in comparison with the extant literature.

Methodology

Reflexivity

Pralagans et al. in an article concerning reflexivity in qualitative research claims: "…qualitative researches are prone to a degree of subjectivity since the 'interpretation of the participants' and collected data is influenced by the values, beliefs, experience and interest of the researcher," (Palaganas 2017, 431). I am a master's degree student; my background includes defending a bachelor's thesis dealing with the problematics of the caste system in the Nuosu-Yi society in Liangshan. A field research I conducted in the summer of 2017 was my first attempt to acquire a deeper understanding of the topic. I traveled to a region populated by the Nuosu-Yi ethnic group. I had no prior experience with conducting research, first-hand, in such a manner. I began with just the knowledge that I had gained while writing my bachelor thesis; this included studying academic articles that were focused on a qualitative research methodology, as well as frequent helpful advice that I received from my research supervisor and a consultant. Regardless of my diligence and enthusiasm for the research, as an inexperienced student, I initially delved into the research with a host of presuppositions based on my own subjective view of the world. Katryn J. Ahern states in her work *Ten Tips for Reflexive Bracketing*: "It is not possible for qualitative researchers to be totally objective, because total objectivity is not humanly possible," (Ahern 1999, 407). In this section I am going to present my assumptions, expound on parts of my research where my views may have been slightly compromised, as well as list weaknesses and problems I faced during the field research. Objectivity is not humanly possible, but in order to make the research analysis process more transparent, I will expand on all the latter factors and shed light on my personal value system, view and approach.

I was born in a small Slovak town, four days before the official dissolution of Czechoslovakia. Relatives from my father's side of the family are intellectual-minded individuals; my grandfather was an honored professor of Philosophy as well as a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Even though he never completely abandoned his predilection towards Socialist and Communist ideals, he devoted his life to the study of French and German Enlightenment Philosophies. My parents raised me to cherish the freedom that

comes with democracy. I was rigorously educated in the tragedies experienced by most Czechoslovakians during the country's socialistic and totalitarian regime (1948 – 1989). Moreover, being taught by American teachers at my bilingual high school also shaped my personal world view. This background inevitably influenced my ideological orientation. Once my interest in Chinese ethnic minorities, especially the Nuosu-Yi culture in Liangshan, began blossoming, it did not take me long to realize how difficult it is to relate to Chinese Marxist studies that deal with various ethnic groups in China. Hence, I got acquainted with this topic using Western, mainly American literature. All the above-mentioned factors certainly affect the way I approach my research, how I view the people I study and how I inquire participants of the research.

I clearly remember my first insight into the problematics of Chinese ethnic minorities. During my first year at Sichuan University's International College of Chinese Language as a Foreign Language, I chose an optional course called *Art of Chinese Ethnic Minorities*[1]. The subject was taught by a Han-Chinese teacher and the main aim of the course was to introduce ethnic minorities living in Sichuan Province. Every lesson, the teacher presented a Power Point slides focused on a particular ethnic minority and their cultural characteristic and specifics. I realized that her and most Han-Chinese people's point of view is that while presenting or publicizing a minority, it is of utmost importance to show the people's smiling faces in traditional costumes that have specific design, colors and accessories. Based on my own personal observations, I have concluded that the general understanding and official representation of minorities by official Chinese media outlets is more or less about exhibiting minorities in their colorful traditional costumes and presenting them as somehow "exotic" and separate from Han-Chinese culture.

From childhood onwards through high school, I was an active member of a traditional Slovak dance ensemble. Besides the dance trainings and singing classes, members of the ensemble were required to learn and understand Slovak local traditions and customs. We learnt about every corner of Slovakia, important characters in regional dance and music folklore, seasonal traditions, costumes and other cultural specifics. During this period, I also got to know more about the cultural specifics of ethnic minorities that inhabited the region I was born and raised

[1] 中国少数民族艺术

in. Afterwards, I enrolled at Palacký University to study Chinese philology. I then moved to Czech Republic and, two years later, arrived in China. Like other students of Chinese philology, I searched for a specific area of interest within the complex discipline of Chinese studies. Taking my background into consideration, it was natural for me to apply the experience I have gained to the field of ethnography and social sciences.

During my bachelor's and master's program in Chinese philology, I have been trained mainly in the language, Chinese history and literature. Therefore, my knowledge of anthropology and its complexity has been relatively limited. But the interest in various cultures that I developed in the early days of my youth have stayed with me; I have simply transposed them to a different geographical location. My first visit to the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Region was my first solo journey into the "field." I acted as a tourist, or, more accurately, like a backpacker. My interest in the culture was somehow superficial, maybe even arrogant. I did not think about the Nuosu-Yi as people who live their lives within certain conditions or limitations inside a relatively isolated environment. I rather considered them as an attraction; tiny villages, dirt roads, young, mud-stained children playing in the dirt; it all seemed as the perfect setting for taking rustic pictures of a community that somehow appeared to me as being out of place in our present time and age.

The second time I entered the area of Liangshan, I had a more concrete plan to carry out my research by getting genuinely acquainted with the Nuosu-Yi people, their environment, living conditions, traditions, etc. Before and during the time I was conducting the research, there were many instances when I asked myself "Why? Why am I doing this research, what are my intentions?" The answer that I settled on consists of a few reasons which can be divided into two categories: personal reasons and academic ones. While submitting my master's thesis is a necessary step to obtain an academic degree, I still consider it as one of my reasons, albeit a rather self-evident one. After considering this question for a little longer, I realized that my personal motivation for conducting this research is my own fear of stepping out of my comfort zone to interact with people in a certain way for a predetermined purpose. I must admit it has been an immensely challenging project; I was forced to analyze the behavior and worldview of a completely alien people from their own perspective and, at the same time, to reflect on my own subjective assumptions, fears and prejudices.

From an academic point of view, curiosity has been a leading motivation. This kind of project can offer an insight to a compact culture within a much greater heterogeneous multinational country that, until present times, had retained its own specific value system. This research hopes to contribute a fragment in the understanding of a complex deeply rooted idea of a caste system in a society existing in the era of globalization. There are various studies both by Chinese and Western authors dealing with Nuosu-Yi culture and the caste system idea, however a more current study that reflects the effect of modern technological breakthroughs such as the Internet, social media, cell phones and the impact of such technologies on this particular culture is missing.

I must admit, in the beginning I treated the field research as intensely burdensome. I had doubts about the notion of having to play the role of a scholar who carries out an academic research according to a very rigid scientific methodology and validates data in consonance wait a certain scientific knowledge. I consider myself a perfectionist; this personal characteristic, however, certainly has its disadvantages. Perfectionism did not allow me to relax; my interactions with interviewees were not easygoing. I could not free myself from a feeling that my approach and the way I inquire are not satisfactory. It was my first attempt to be engaged in this kind of academic activity and I was fully aware of it. I gradually understood that the inner uncertainty could affect my research.

My Research

I chose a qualitative research methodology for investigating the topic I defined in the Introduction section. Corbin and Strauss define qualitative research as: “a form of research in which the researcher or a designated coresearcher collects and interprets data, making the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data provide. Qualitative research utilizes an open and flexible design and in doing so stands at odds with the notion of rigor so important when doing quantitative research,” (Corbin and Strauss 2014, 4). Methods of qualitative research allow researchers to study a particular phenomenon in an open way and in a natural environment. I decided for the methodology of a qualitative research mainly because it allowed me to step into the “field” using methods such as observation, visual methods (photography in particular), and especially conducting

interviews with members of the society which I was researching. This allowed me to collect relevant data for further analysis.

At first, I selected a target group for gathering the data. I decided on young educated Nuosu-Yi people studying at universities in Chengdu, Sichuan. I state two main reasons for choosing this particular target group: first, I believe that the youth are the future of every society. Therefore, their ideas, observations, and views on life are essential for its development. The second reason is more practical: as Putonghua is not Nuosu-Yi people's mother tongue, young educated people have to learn it in school. I introduce language problematics in greater detail further along in this chapter; however, in general, young Nuosu-Yi can speak and understand standard Chinese clearly. Removing this language barrier made communication easier. Moreover, it was easier to emotionally connect with the younger, educated Nuosu-Yi and for them to open up to me since they considered me as their peer.

After the target group selection, I started to search for contacts. Chengdu is a diverse city. It boasts a substantial Tibetan population living next to Han and Yi people. The second highest ranked Southwest University for Nationalities is also located there. What's more, other universities in Chengdu have their own Yi students' communities. Therefore, it was very convenient for me to get to know Yi college students. Nuosu-Yi are very social and tend to gather with people of the same ethnicity. They highly value their own tradition and even young people are aware of the importance of retaining their culture and traditions. The Yi communities at the universities hold weekly meetings or organize other social gatherings where the students learn to write Nuosu script, perform traditional dances or sing their national songs. The Chinese government currently supports literacy in the state designated Nuosu language and script and funds education in minority regions (Harrell and Rehamo 2018, 1). Thus, the meetings are held on a weekly basis and many students attend them. This kind of occasion is a good opportunity to get to know potential participants of the research and also to observe the community and their social interactions. Nearly half my interviews come from either young Nuosu-Yi students who have participated in these gatherings or their families and friends based in the Liangshan area. Participants of the Nuosu-Yi language and dance classes were quite pleased to learn that a foreign student was interested in their culture and traditions. They were always willing to help me and respond to my inquiries. To sum it

up, while in Chengdu, I encountered little to no obstacles with regards to getting in touch with Nuosu-Yi people's culture.

While conducting field research in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, I spent approximately two months studying the ethnic group in the area. Unfortunately, because I was obliged to regularly attend Chinese language classes in Chengdu as a scholarship student, I was unable to stay in the region for the entire two months period without having to take breaks in between to return to Chengdu. Nevertheless, I visited most of main cities of the core area, where the majority population is of the Nuosu-Yi ethnicity: Butuo[2], Zhaojue[3], Puge[4], and Xichang[5]. Research participants interviewed in Liangshan area were usually friends or family of my Nuosu-Yi acquaintances from various universities in Chengdu. People of the Liangshan region are very proud to claim they are a hospitable nationality. The Nuosu-Yi society is famous for its hospitality, but sadly, people feel obliged to show off how hospitable they can be. This made the whole research process tedious and difficult to conduct because, first of all, the interviewee would go through all the formalities associated with a visit such as greeting clan members, dinners, festivities, etc. However, it was also worth to experience because it turned out to be a unique opportunity for in-depth observation that I could note down as a field research diary entry.

An official language of the Nuosu-Yi subgroup is called ‘the Yi language’, established after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The language is classified as belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family, and linguistic research claims that the Yi language is closely related to Burmese. Six major Yi dialects are officially recognized: Northern, Southern, Western, Eastern, Central and South-Eastern dialects (Kraef 2013, 220). According to a German sinologist, Olivia Kraef, the majority of these dialects are mutually unintelligible. The Nuosu-Yi, inhabiting Liangshan area speak the Northern Yi dialect. In the mid-1980’s the Chinese government launched a Chinese-Yi bilingual study program in Liangshan area. Rehamo and Harrell describe it in their paper dealing with Nuosu-Yi bilingual education as not being a fully successful effort (Harrell and Rehamo 2018).

[2] 布拖
[3] 昭觉
[4] 普格
[5] 西昌

According to their survey that 2,759 Yi students took part in: "…56.7% reported that they used only Yi language at home, 32.6% used both Yi and Chinese, and only 10% exclusively spoke Chinese at home," (Harrell and Rehamo 2018, 5). I have personally met with similar cases; most of the participants of the research were young Yi students, who claimed they speak Yi language at home with their families and Chinese in college. Thus, the language I used during my interviews was primarily Chinese and we, therefore, did not face any bigger communication barriers. Transcriptions of interviews in Chinese language I made under assistance of Southwestern University of Finance and Economics Chinese study partners, who, as volunteers, helped foreign students of Chinese language to practice Chinese language. Besides the interviews in Chinese language the data contain English recordings as well. I had the chance to also meet a small group of foreigners that have been residing in the Liangshan area for a long period of time. My interviews with them were conducted in English. To follow rules of the anthropology research ethics, before recording the interview I always introduced my goals and intentions to the participants, so that they understood the purpose of my work. I also wrote a field research diary during the time spent in the Liangshan region, which I also cite further in the text.

Limitations

The biggest obstacle I faced while carrying out the research was the very nature of the topic I chose. To inquire about endogamy, love and marital preferences is a very sensitive endeavor. On top of that, the concept of *lian* (face, accurately 'saving face', also called *mianzi*) is very strong in the Nuosu-Yi society. Hsien Chin Hu defines the concept of "face" in Chinese culture accordingly: "It is the respect of the group for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfill his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances shows himself a decent human being. It represents the confidence of society in the integrity of ego's moral character, the loss of which makes it impossible for him to function properly within the community. *Lian* is both a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction," (Hsien 1944, 45). Hence, a personal and intimate topic is very difficult to discuss openly and without any obstacles. Schoenhals, in his study on the Nuosu-Yi caste system, expresses the same concerns that I felt during my research: "I asked about cross-caste marriage in interviews with participants but did not ask

students on a large-scale survey questionnaire whether their parents were both from the same caste. This was a conscious decision on my part, made because I feared that asking the question in the open, public context of the survey might be too uncomfortable for students... I do not regret the extra sensitivity I exercised on the sensitive issue of caste," (Schoenhals 2003, 237). My expectations were similar, I was aware the conditions did not happen to be as favorable as I wished. Two months is a short time for building people's trust. I usually asked indirect questions in order to lead the discussion in the right directions and to my surprise many participants started to talk about the topic of Black Yi and White Yi without any significant problems. I have to admit the answers or reactions were in the most cases generalizations and I could not get very detailed responses; however, most interviewees admitted that endogamy and the concept of the caste are very alive in their culture. Not long after, I realized the participants are willing to speak about cases that do not affect them personally but offer an interesting insight into the problematics. After all these efforts, I was finally able to acquire useful information pertaining to the caste idea in the region of Liangshan.

I. Nuosu-Yi Clans

"A lineage is formed by brothers sharing common ancestors, centered on the father's surname. For example, there are two brothers, they share the same surname, so their sons inherited their surnames, not the mothers' surname, but the male surname, this way the surname - lineage is slowly, gradually growing, firstly it's just two, three (generations). Finally, it becomes a large group. That is a clan."

"[…] For example, I am from Sichuan, but I want to go to Guizhou, Guangxi or Yunnan, my surname is […] If there is someone, who shares the surname, they would show a special care for me. We are all of the same surname. If we go there together, I am a member of their clan, but she is not, so I would get a special (preferential) treatment, different from the other would get," (Xiaoqin 2017).[6]

The core of the traditional Liangshan society is a patrilineal clan. It is necessary first to introduce the concept of a clan system to understand the Nuosu-Yi caste idea. In this chapter, I briefly introduce all the important aspects of the Nuosu-Yi clan organization and its role in the society. First, however, it is important to discuss the historical development process that lead to the present-day organization of the Nuosu-Yi society. With the help of examples derived both from literature and from interviews gathered during my stay in Liangshan in 2017, I intend to emphasize on the crucial role that the clan plays in the lives of the Nuosu-Yi people and also talk about the correlation between a clan and their caste idea in society.

Legend says there was *Apu Ddumu* ꀉꁌꅋꃅ, an ancestral leader of the Yi people, who was a warrior during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period. The legendary *Apu Ddumu* was gifted with extraordinary abilities including superior navigation skills, a thorough understanding of the land, and leadership skills that enabled him to easily govern a clan. He had three wives who altogether bore him six sons; these sons are known today as

[6] "家族就是同祖先的兄弟就以父姓为中心的。比如爸爸的姓，比如两个兄弟，大概他们是同一个姓但他们所生的儿子特跟着他们姓了，不跟母亲的姓，跟男的姓，这样同一个姓就慢慢地，之前是两个三个四个慢慢地庞大。最后就成了一个很大的集团。这就是一个家族。"
"…比如我在四川我要到贵州去，广西去，云南去，我姓…如果他们也要那种姓的话他们都对我还是特别照顾的。因为我们都是同一个姓。如果我们同时过去，我是他们的家族成员之一，她不是，他会对我特别的关照，对另外一个人还是会有区别."

the “Six Ancestors” of the Nuosu-Yi. The Yi people believe that after the death of a person, the soul must return to the birthplace of the ancestors, that is, return to the "six ancestral branches." The records mostly point to the northeast of Yunnan and especially today's Qujing and Zhaotong regions, believed to be the birthplaces of the Yi culture (An 2009).

Harrell states in his study that the society was formed as a reaction to tensions from neighboring states. The Nuosu-Yi shaped themselves to a clan-based society where the clans called *cyvi* ꏸꃅ in the Nuosu-Yi language are patrilineal; consanguinity is passed patrilinealy, on the male side. Harrell explains the significance of the clan by a simple illustration: “Whenever two people meet, one of the first things they ask each other is the other person’s clan membership, and people believe generally that clan loyalty is the basis of social peace and order, as well as the cause of strife and warfare. Clans extend all over Liangshan, and marriage alliances between clans tie together society both within local areas and over vast distances” (Harrell 2001, 10). The Nuosu-Yi in the Liangshan region keep strict genealogical records. Even in the past when the majority of the people were illiterate, they recorded lineages by memorizing clan genealogies. The family tree consists just of male descendants, however, females are not contained in “the oral genealogies”. In brief, this social structure also reflects a position of a woman in the society, that gains a clan identity not before a marriage; according to Nuosu-Yi author, Lu Hui: “[…] married women do not move into their husbands’ households before becoming pregnant,” (Lu 2001, 68-69).

To discuss the Nuosu-Yi caste system, we first need to understand the importance of kinship in the view of the Nuosu-Yi people. Harrell in a study called *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China* describes it very clearly: “Everyone’s primary identity is a clan identity, and that clan identity indicates not only ethnicity but also caste membership […],” (Harrell 2001, 144). In the view of the Nuosu-Yi people, being a member of a clan means being an ethnic Nuosu-Yi and being a part of the society. The majority of my respondents emphasized this fact while explaining what their clan means to them. A Nuosu-Yi student from the Sichuan Normal University in Chengdu says:

"If a person does not belong to a clan, then in the Yi point of view he is equivalent to a foreigner, basically not a Yi person." (Muqie 2017)[7].

Two Nuosu-Yi classmates studying their first year at the same university also highlighted the importance of the role that their clan affiliation plays in their own view of a personal ethnic identity: *"He is firstly is a part of a clan, only after is a part of minzu. First, he is a Yi and only then is a member of a Chinese nation."* (Xiaoqin 2017) [8].

In the view of Nuosu-Yi people, clan is a family, thus the clan members use kinship terms such as 'a brother,' 'a sister,' 'an uncle,' etc. to refer to each other. These kinship terms are used according to the clan member's generation. Schoenhals describes the phenomenon by referring to one of his informants. This Nuosu-Yi respondent's clan has approximately 13 male members of the same generation, therefore the respondent refers to all these male members as 'brothers' (Schoenhals 2003, 32). I noted down a similar case that I personally witnessed in late February 2017. At this time, I was in Xichang, Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture where I was supposed to meet with my informant. This Yi person had been waiting for me and he offered me a place to stay. He lived in an old apartment of his family's near the city center. However, none of his other family members supposedly lived there. On the way to his home, he mentioned in passing that his older brother is staying in the apartment as well. The brother had apparently arrived in the city to manage a personal affair some three days before I did. Since they were family, there was no doubt that the brother would stay at my informant's home. A few days later, while I was interviewing my informant and a Yi friend of his, I got to know by chance that this man staying in my informant's apartment was a complete stranger. The friend's father had met him in the street and started conversing with him. Soon, they realized they had a common ancestor, which meant that they belong to the same clan. After realizing they were family, the father was obliged to help his fellow clan-member in need; thus, he offered him a place to stay in his own home.

Schoenhals points out: "Having a clan, and especially a large and unified one, gives an individual a real sense of pride," (Schoenhals 2003, 32). Another informant, a Han translator

[7] "如果没有家族的话在彝族里面你就相当于一个外族人，就不是彝族人了。
[8] "他首先要自己有家族的这个观念，他才有民族。他才有彝族，才有中华民族，"

of Yi language who has devoted a great portion of his life studying Yi scripts and working as a Yi language translator for government workers, gained a lot of useful Yi contacts throughout the years. He allegedly even won the Nuosu-Yi disputation contest called kepnrep ꇱꅉ, astonishing his fellow contestants and the judges. In July 2017, I happened to visit one Nuosu-Yi clan leader living near Xichang city with him. The clan leader was introduced to me as a wise man, whose knowledge about the Nuosu traditions was considered very broad and deep. We discussed the Nuosu-Yi culture from a variety of angles. Once, when I inquired about the concept of a clan, he enthusiastically started to explain how genealogy is vital for the people. For instance, when a man dies, his brother or even his father marries his wife and so on. He highlighted how the family trees are prone to errors. He also mentioned how Nuosu people are willing to lie about the genealogy of their clan to make it "cleaner".

At this point, it is imperative to ask: how do the Nuosu-Yi people rationalize the role and the necessity of this phenomenon in their society? Historically, Hao Yi defines the importance of the clan organization from the context of the absence of the state. In this case, as we know, Yi people historically have been a considerably isolated nation, the clan has been the unit that offers Yi people security and defense against the "outside world". Internally, it forms social security mechanisms, coordinates various conflicts and resolves the difficulties that the members themselves are unable to solve. The clan guarantees security and offers a sense of belonging (Hao 2017, 65).

Based on my research, I can confidently state that the reaction to this question by various respondents was mostly similar. A clan provides help to an individual. (Schoenhals, Harrell, Li Shaoming, data gathered in the Liangshan). To state an example, according to Schoenhals, Nuosu proudly claim that there are no homeless people in Liangshan (Schoenhals 2003, 34). Members of clans have a duty to help the other clan fellows, which results in all persons being included into society. The author of *Breeze from Liangshan* summarizes a significant role that a clan plays in the lives of the Nuosu-Yi people in these words: "The lives and properties of a clan member's family are protected by the clan. …If disaster or poverty occurs, a member could be aided by the clan without being reduced to begging. When marriages and funeral occur, other members should offer free aid," (Huang 2013, 156)

All of the respondents whom I interviewed while discussing a concept of the clan stated that the foundation of the clan idea is in mutual help. There was a Nuosu-Yi teacher working in a primary school of a small village near Butuo County town. He brought us to a cattle market, and, while people bartered livestock, he tried to explain the Nuosu-Yi clan structure to me:

"It is simply about the surname […] (within a clan) it's about a mutual help and an unconditional help. A clan unity is formed in order to help each other. This still exists even now. For example, something happens in the family that you can't solve on your own, then if the family asks the clan for a help. The other members of the clan will help unconditionally, as much as they can," (Laoshi 2017).[9]

This is just a fragment from the interview transcription, however, it clearly shows how the Nuosu people view a role of the clan. When I tried to inquire about the clan, I usually got to know that a clan organization has slowly developed to a system, which offers an individual a social insurance and a help. Even young people explain the concept on a rather abstract example of solving disputes between clans or even homicides, which occur, but does not affect their current lives spent at the colleges in Chengdu. Two male students from Southwest University of Nationalities gave a more practical example of the clan aid:

"When a member of a clan gets accepted to university, but s/he can't afford to pay a tuition fee. The first thing they look for is the clan members. They will collect the money for him/her to solve the problem. But if you don't belong to any clan, there is no way to fix the problem. If something goes wrong, the clan members search for a solution together," (Jiaba and Senuo 2017)[10].

These two students also admitted the importance of a help from relatives is necessary in the Nuosu-Yi society also because of harsh living conditions these people live in. Discussion with these two boys clearly showed the lack of a living standard and facilities in the Liangshan area make the clan organization very important even nowadays.

[9] 就是把你姓什么… 这些都是相互帮助，无条件地帮助。为了相互帮助，团结力量是这样产生的。他们现在依然存在，比如说你家出了什么事情你一个人不能解决了，那么象整个家支求助，求得帮助，那么家支中其他成员无条件帮助，能帮助多少就帮助多少，

[10] "家族里的人考上了大学，但交不起学费，肯定最先找的就是家族里的人，他们会凑钱给你解决问题。但不属于家族的话肯定就没有办法。如果出了事情，家族就会一起解决问题，"

A social group, so called clan, where members are related by blood gives the foundation to the Nuosu-Yi society. Before the Democratic Reform (before 1956) the slaves or serves, who were kidnapped members of other ethnic groups were not considered a part of the society. After the change of the social system former slaves in most of the cases have not become a part of the system. Even though they are living among Nuosu-Yi, they stand out of the clan system (Huang 2013, 155).

A clan has developed its own unique hierarchical structure, three clan elders or chieftain stand on the top of the structure, namely (names in the Chinese Standard Transcription Pinyin) *Xipo, Degu* and *Zhagua.* The one who is acquainted with the customary law and etiquette, who is able to mediate disputes is called *Degu*. The chief, who enjoys the highest position and is also recognized outside of the clan as a leader, is called *Xipo*. Both Sunyi or Degu could lose their prestige if a decision they make in a dispute is considered as unfair (Huang 2013, 156). Zhagua was in the past a leading warrior (Eds. 1985, 129). Nowadays, *Degu* and *Sunyi* are recognized as the leading figures in a clan.

Clans are exogamous units, which means an individual must marry outside of the clan. The rule of clan exogamy is strictly obeyed because it is believed clan members are consanguineous relatives. A marriage represents a means of establishing clan alliances and developing a clan genealogy (Harrell 2001, 92). During doing my research I had chance to realize the phenomenon of a clan exogamy is one of sensitive topics for Nuosu-Yi people. Asking respondents to explain the Nuosu-Yi clan idea to me as a foreigner, none of them forgot to emphasize the exogamy, stressing the fact no one would dare to marry a blood relative. When I asked two students for Southwest University of Nationalities in Chengdu if a clan is still so important nowadays, this was their immediate reaction:

"It's definitely important. At the beginning there is just a single ancestor, and then the clan gets bigger, forms lineage branches, where everyone is a family. These family members cannot marry each other because they are related by blood," (Jiaba and Senuo 2017)[11].

[11] "这个肯定很重要。一个家族大概以前是一个祖先，然后这个祖先就会有很多的分支，大家都是一家人，这个家族里边是不能通婚的，因为他们是有血缘关系在的。"

The Nuosu-Yi people developed a special law system – customary law that is valid and exercised until present times. The Nuosu-Yi people's customary law is gradually formed in the long-term process of practice among the members of the Liangshan Yi ethnic group. A lack of a legal state system caused a continuous complex development of a regional customary law that regulates moral and behavioral norms of the property relations and personal relationships among the members of the traditional Yi society. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, many elements of the Yi people's customary law have been persisted. In the present Nuosu-Yi society, it still plays a pivotal role in a social stability and social regulation, and more or less affects the ideology of the Nuosu-Yi people until today (Hu 2015). The author of the *Breeze from Liangshan*: "The clan restricts and regulates the member's daily behaviors or activities according to ethnic customary law," (Huang 2013, 156). Harrell additionally states: "Nuosu costumary law is based on the differential obligations of people of the same clan and different clans," (Harrell 2001, 91).

As we already know the significance of kinship for the society, it is also helpful to briefly introduce a mechanism of a clan genealogy and Nuosu-Yi names. In the Nuosu-Yi people inhabited region, there is a considerably low number of large clans, yet clan names, the members of these clans use, are countless. According to Ma Erzi's study focusing on Nuosu-Yi names and a genealogy structure there are not many clans having all-clan name. He states one example of all-clan name, *Jjike* (Ma 2001, 81). An individual's name is formed by three names in this order: a clan name, a birth-order name and a personal name. Regarding the birth-order names, they are gender differentiated and counted separately (Ma 2001, 83). "To sum up, if a Nuosu person did not have a birth-order name, then there would be no way to express these kin relations. In the Liangshan Yi society, in which the clan corporation is the main structural form of society, term of address have to fit with it, and the three-level system of naming—clan name, birth-order name, and personal name—realize it in a comprehensive way," (Ma 2001, 91). The Nuosu-Yi name structure offers a deeper understanding of a value system developed in the mind of the Nuosu people. Memorizing and reciting a clan's genealogy or asking for a clan name as a first-contact question shows how vital role occupies a clan idea in the Nuosu-Yi people's worldview. The birth-order name also represents the significance of an age hierarchy in the society (Ma 2001, 93).

Another evidence that indicates the clan idea is a core of the Nuosu society the emphasis on clan as “a human matrix of social organization” (Harrell 2001, 92). Harrell compares it to the Han culture that stresses an attachment to a place. As it was already described when two Nuosu-Yi people meet, they initially ask for a clan name. As soon as they get to know they share a common ancestor, they change an attitude towards the person and shows filiality. This behavior exists regardless of a territory or a place they meet (e.g. two Nuosu meet in Beijing and find out they share a common ancestor, they act as a family immediately). I observed this kind of behavior also while spending time with Nuosu-Yi students at colleges in Chengdu. In case a student discovered another student is of the same clan, they referred to each other using family terms and described to me how they help each other under any circumstances. Harrell explains this phenomenon by reminding a reader of Nuosu-Yi migration history. The people historically did not occupy any territory and led a semi-nomadic way of life, that is the foundation for this social characteristic persisting until today (Harrell 2001, 92-93).

In conclusion, a brief outline of a clan organization in the Nuosu-Yi society described above was an attempt to illustrate the importance the clan idea possesses within the Liangshan culture. The clan is a core of the Nuosu-Yi society, a clan membership defines a personal identity. In other words, an individual is first a part of a clan, only under this condition s/he is also a part of the society. What kind of correlation then exists between a clan and a caste? Every clan belongs to a caste, either the Black Yi (nuoho ꆈꉼ) caste or the White Yi (quho ꐚꉻ, qunuo ꐚꆈ) caste. Schoenhals also mentions and illustrates on a case of a large clan, that a part of a kin group can belong to the Black Yi caste and a part to the White Yi caste. In any case, a caste is a larger unit than a clan, the caste is a set formed by smaller units – clans (Schoenhals 2003, 33). To discuss a function of these two elements of the Nuosu-Yi society, according to Schoenhals and also to data gathered during the summer 2017 in Liangshan, the caste is significant regarding a marriage and a choice of a future spouse because a matrimony is a tool how to form interclan alliances. However, a clan and its commitments are present in daily lives of members of the society.

II. Historical Development of the Nuosu-Yi Caste System

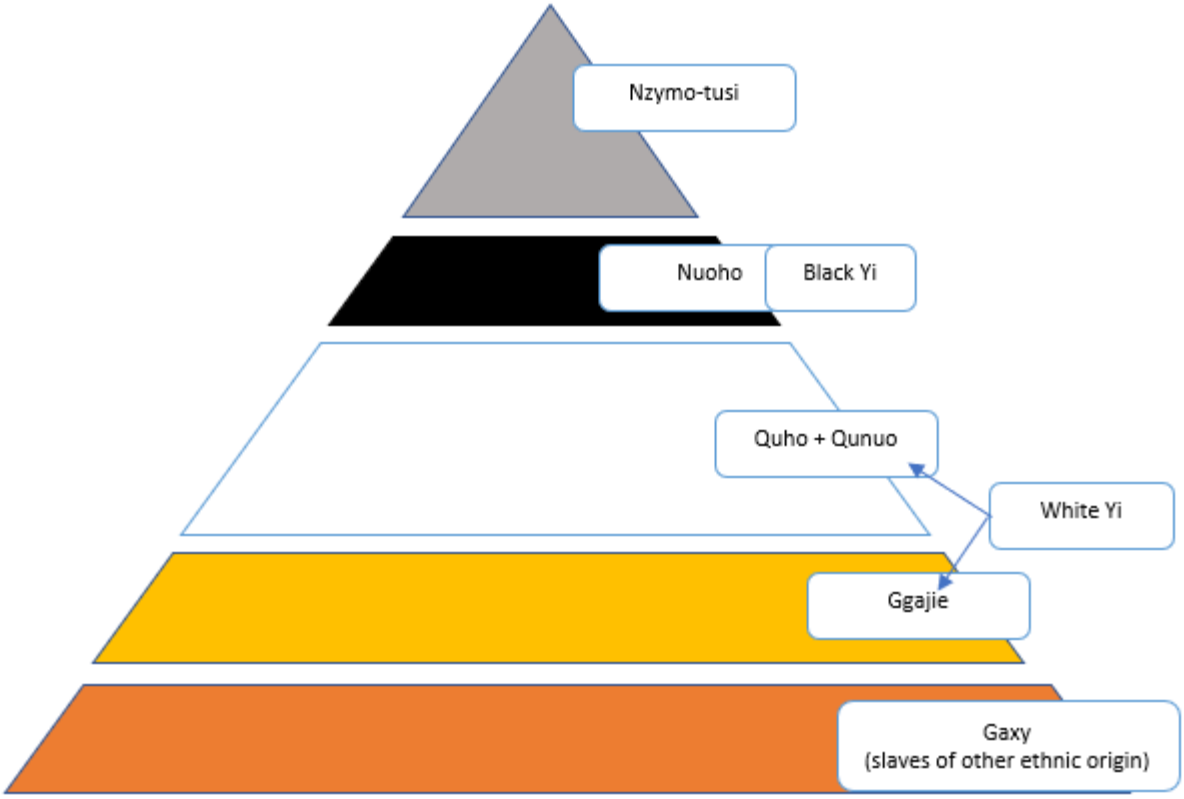

Figure 1: Nuosu-Yi Traditional Hierarchy Structure

The second significant aspect of the Nuosu-Yi society is their adherence to a caste system. While studying literature pertaining to the Liangshan Yi society, I noticed two distinct perspectives that scholars utilizes in order to understand the workings of traditional Nuosu-Yi society; Chinese and Nuosu authors, in accordance with Marxist ideas, focus on the importance of a slave system. Contrarily, Western authors such as Schoenhals, Harrell and Ann Maxwell-Hill put more emphasis on the caste system the major role that it plays in traditional Nuosu-Yi society. A significant number of Western anthropologists define the kind of social stratification found in Liangshan as a 'caste system.' The way in which endogamy is strictly enforced between the two ranks (Black and White Yi) and the concept of blood purity leads to the conclusion that the stratification system of the Nuosu is a caste system. However, Chinese scholars consider the society before the Democratic reform as a social system based on slavery. Western anthropologists disagree with this term; they argue

that it is a simplistic approach that Chinese scholars utilize in order to apply the Stalin criteria during the Project of Ethnic Classification. John Lawson states this problematic in an introduction of his book *Frontier Made Lawless*, he points out how the Chinese ethnography and the official narrative made from the Nuosu-Yi society and their slave-holding custom a "a living relic of the slave mode of production in the Marxist understanding of history (Lawson 2017, 18).

In order to analyze the caste system in the Nuosu-Yi society, it is important to first understand its historical development. The Nuosu-Yi people, for generations, have passed down a legend concerning the emergence of social hierarchy in the Liangshan region; more precisely, this legend deals with the differentiation between Black and White Yi. "Some say that the Black Yi and White Yi were originally two brothers with the same ancestors. The elder brother was smart and capable and the younger one was honest and simple; the elder brother accumulated wealth and became the Black Yi, the younger brother was poor and became the *qunuo*," (S. Li 2003, 39). Winnington, who came to the Liangshan region as a pro-Communist journalist at the time of a slave liberation (launching the Democratic Reform, 1956), claims that there are probably only a few dozen large clans of Black Yi in Liangshan. He talks about a common ancestor shared by every member of the Black Yi clans (Winnington 1962, 34).

Disregarding age-old legends, Harrell assumes the origin of a caste system traces back to 18 or 20 generations back. In our personal correspondence, he refers to a Nuosu author, Ma Erzi, who has pointed out that *bimo* ꀘꂾ books (whose age we can only guess, because they are not dated, but judging from the archaic language contained within, they are probably more than a few centuries old) have no reference to the caste system. So, it means that Harrell assumes the bimo books precede the cast system. The other fact worth mentioning is that most White Yi clans have traditions that are ultimately descended from Black Yi clans (or, more accurately, from the same ancestors as Black Yi clans) about 18-20 generations prior to the current generation, dating back approximately 500 years (Harrell 2016). Then he closes the thought: "In other words, there was a historical process, perhaps immediately after the introduction of New World crops that seems to have enabled rapid population growth in Liangshan as well as elsewhere in East Asia, where certain clans were able to assert dominance over others, perhaps because there was more competition for territory. As that happened, the dominant clans formed alliances with each other, solidified by marriage ties,

and attempted to strengthen their dominance by excluding the subordinate clans. They did so, presumably, by prohibiting marriage with subordinate clans, and reinforcing the prohibition with an ideology of hardness of bones," (Harrell 2016).

Nzymo

A hierarchy in the Nuosu-Yi society has been determined by the phenomenon of "hardness of bones". Members of the highest social stratum called *nzymo* ꆹꌠ in the Nuosu language have traditionally possessed the "hardest bones" (Lu 2001, 69). The first syllable *nzy* means "power, authority"; the second part of the word *mo* is an expression of respect, meaning "great, amazing"; therefore, the connection means "people who possess the power or authority" (Pan 2003, 64). In Chinese writings, a term *tusi* or *tuguan*[12] is commonly used to refer to the highest social stratum.

Since the Liangshan area was historically administered in a relatively independent fashion by the Nuosu-Yi society, throughout history there are recorded instances of endeavors by various Chinese Empires to take control of the area. The Liangshan area was, for instance, a subordinate tributary state. The Chinese Empire attempted to build ties with the Nuosu-Yi elite clans in order to promote their own interests in the region. The Chinese intervention formed a new social rank, called *tusi-nzymo* (Karlach 2016, 12). The term *tusi* was the status of a local representative nominated for a minority region by a feudal dynasty since the reign of the Yuan Mongol dynasty. The Ming and Qing Dynasty continued this tradition of awarding local nobility with a right to reign in the regions (Pan 2003, 64). The Emperor Court selected the *tusi* from the most powerful clans in the Liangshan, yet it did not necessarily have to be clans belonging to the elite caste. There were even cases when the position was held by a non-Nuosu-Yi individual. The rank *nzymo* occupied the highest position in the Liangshan traditional society, enjoying both a privileged position in the Liangshan society as well as the status accorded to them by the Empire Court. The rank *nzymo* was also endogamous, therefore, when an individual of this rank married a person from *nuoho* rank (Black Yi), the *nuoho* got a new identity and had to follow new rules (Karlach 2016, 12). Marriages, therefore, were established within the *nzymo* group, which

[12] 土司 or 土官

means spouses could also belong to a different ethnicity. Karlach's informants claim, many of the *nzymo-tusi* married individuals from another ethnic group, so their social and symbolic position gradually diminished. Until present times, this group somehow stands outside of the society and its hierarchy.

Black Yi

The English term Black Yi refers to a category called *nuoho* in the Nuosu language. In the past, the power was concentrated between - *nzymo* and *nuoho*, Chinese texts commonly uses *heiyi* (Black Yi)[13] to refer to this social stratum (Harrell and Fan 2003, 4). Winnington describes Black Yi as cool-headed individuals with a strong conviction of their superiority in society. The author also emphases a similarity between Black Yi proclaiming a possession of "hard bones" and a way of expressing superiority used by European aristocrats, who claimed to have "blue blood" (Winnington 1962, 33–34). Data gathered in 2017 also supports this statement; while discussing caste endogamy, two Nuosu teachers from a primary school and later a Nuosu student from Sichuan Normal University used a term *ouzhou guizu*[14] (a member of the European nobility) to bring me into a context of viewing the social status of Black Yi in the Liangshan society (Laoshi 2017, Cindy 2017).

A publication by Chinese author states that 7.4% of a Liangshan Nuosu-Yi population was Black Yi (C. Li 1977, 12). According to one Chinese study, Black Yi were a political and economic elite who had very close kinship ties (C. Li 1977, 12). In the Nuosu culture black often symbolizes "dignity", "self" and most of all "nobility". The Black Yi are then the elite of the society, the rulers, the dominant members. Black Yi believe their blood is the purest, it is not mixed with any other ethnicity (J. Pan 1997, 108-109). Therefore, they have been the masters of the society, they could not be enslaved by anybody, under any circumstances (J. Pan 1997, 108). The author of a publication *Breeze from Liangshan* on account of the Black Yi clans states: "Accounting for 6.9% of the total population before liberation, they ruled all Qunuo and possessed 60% of Ahjar [ggajie] and 80% of Gasi [gaxy]. With noble blood and purified descents, they ruled their people through clans. A minority of Nuohor [nuoho] had

[13] 黑彝
[14] 欧洲贵族

economic declines, but this did not change the dignity or privilege of their class status," (Huang 2013, 153).

White Yi

On the other hand, "quho" are the White Yi; "qu" means "white" and "huo" stands for "group". White often signifies something strange, "out of society". This group of lineages has formed the majority of Nuosu society. It is important to acknowledge that there used to be three ranks within the "quho", namely "qunuo", "ggajie ꇤꐥ" and "gaxy ꇬꑟ". They were all commoners or the "dominated" ones. According to Pan Jiao "qunuo" are the highest of the three subordinate groups (J. Pan 1997, 108-109). Lin Yaohua states they made over 50% of the Nuosu population (Lin 2003, 46). However, there is no precise date indicating when exactly the data was gathered. Hence, in the Chinese text relating to the Nuosu in Liangshan, the authors use a label *baixing* "commoners" referring to a social rank of *qunuo*, so it corresponds to the statement claiming the majority of the population belongs to the *qunuo* group (C. Li 1977, 12-13). *Qunuo* differed from the other dominated groups mainly because of their relative freedom. They have formed their own lineages, they could own slaves or possess the land and they enjoyed a relative amount of freedom. However, they were still responsible for performing a set of duties toward Black Yi nobles. Pan Jiao admits they could be considered as vassals to Black Yi, too (J. Pan 1997, 110). Interestingly, White Yi also have had the strong belief of a pure Nuosu blood superiority. That is the reason why they strictly avoided marrying a member of *ggajie*, *gaxy* rank or even Han and other ethnic groups (Schoenhals 2003, 21).

The economic situation of White Yi in the Nuosu-Yi society had a large variance. There were cases when a certain White Yi clan was economically so strong that they even could afford to own slaves. Li Shaoming admits that the opium trade used to influence the economic well-being of members of the Nuosu traditional society. The opium trade could increase the economic status of the clan, but also lower it. Therefore, there were cases when a White Yi could be enslaved due to debts toward Black Yi (S. Li 2003, 10).

Slaves (Ggajie and Gaxy)

Until 1956 the Nuosu had slaves; sometimes, however, in literature we can find the term "servant" used instead. This is the third significant aspect of the traditional Nuosu-Yi society (Hill and Diehl 2001, 53). The terms *ggajie* and *gaxy* refer to "slaves" in the Nuosu language, ggajie were serfs, who had a certain independence from their masters. They were usually married and lived separately from their masters. A survey from the late 1950s showed they made up approximately 30 % of the Nuosu population (S. Li 2003, 43). Pan Jiao defines their duties as:

1. They were obliged to perform services for their masters.

2. Their children served their masters as domestic slaves (*gaxy*).

3. Their masters had the right to sell them. *Ggajie* had the right to rent land from their masters, therefore they made their living by cultivating the allotted piece of a field (J. Pan 1997, 110).

The lowest rank is called *gaxy* in the Nuosu language. The term basically refers to domestic slaves. The reason why this rank is the lowest in their social hierarchy explains the ethnicity of the members. The rank was made up of primarily Han or people of other ethnic group, neighboring the Liangshan area. Nuosu-Yi usually kidnapped and enslaved children of a different ethnic origin (C. Li 1977, 15). They were so called slaves in the household, who took care of the household chores of their owner (Ma 2001, 95). According to the Chinese author, Li Chao, shortly before the Democratic reforms, the lowest rank made up around 8 % of the Nuosu-Yi population (C. Li 1977, 15). The boundary between *ggajie* and *gaxy* is very hard to define because if a *gaxy* slave gets married under the master's arrangement and approval, he automatically becomes a *ggajie* with a separate household (Schoenhals 2003, 17).

Nuosification in the Past

With regard to the culture and ethnic identities of ethnic minorities in China, the term *sinicization* is often times used in conjunction. *Sinicization* is a process through which

societies of a non-Chinese origin come under the cultural influence of Chinese society (Horálek 2013, 159). This term is also frequently used when discussing the present-day Liangshan society. Interestingly, there is also a term, *nuosification*, referring to the cultural influence of the Nuosu-Yi society on other cultures. *Nuosification,* however, is used far more rarely than the term signifying the cultural influence of the Chinese culture, even though this phenomenon has been present in the Liangshan area for centuries.

An archeologist, Anke Hein, who also conducted a seven-month ethnographic research in the Liangshan region, writes about this phenomenon in her paper, *The cultural other and the nearest neighbor Han–Nuosu relations in Zhaojue County, Southwest China,* written in collaboration with her Chinese colleague. She lists a few cases of Han families living in the core areas of Liangshan region. In all the cases, we can observe the phenomenon of *nuosification* to a certain extent. I selected one of them to illustrate the slaveholding custom in the Nuosu-Yi society in the pre-reform period (before 1956). Hein describes an example case, when a Han tries to assimilate into the Nuosu-Yi society. The case's storyline starts with the kidnapping of a Han 8-year old boy to become a slave. He could not speak Nuosu language, but as time passed, he learnt it and over time he was also able to climb the social ladder and become a *ggajie* by marrying an enslaved Nuosu-Yi woman. After the Reforms came to practice, he attempted to return to his hometown, but his family had died by that time, and he felt alienated from Han culture and also the language. In the end, he came back to Liangshan and settled there until his death. Hein adds that he was buried in the Nuosu-Yi way, by cremation. The locals nowadays know about the case and are aware of his descendants' Han origin; his son, however, cannot speak Chinese and uses just a Nuosu-Yi name. This is an evidence, that the system does have a certain level of permeability. However, there is little assurance that a person of non-Nuosu origin becomes a permanent part of the Nuosu-Yi society, a part of a Nuosu-Yi lineage (Hein and Zhao 2016, 281-282).

Marriage and Endogamy

The main characteristic of the Nuosu culture's marriage tradition is caste endogamy, which means that an individual is obliged to marry within their caste. A strict clan exogamy, on the other hand, signifies a practice of marrying outside of one's own kinship group (D. Li 2009, 310). All the respondents I interviewed in 2017 emphasized the clan exogamy rule using an argument that clan members are all consanguineous relatives, sharing a common clan name and ancestor, so they must marry outside of the clan. The endogamy rule was obeyed in order to maintain Black Yi's hierarchical status and the so-called "purity" and "nobility" of the Black Yi lineages. Besides the implemented caste endogamy and the clan exogamy rule, the marriage system strictly prohibited intermarriage with other ethnic groups (Schoenhals 2003, 20-22).

According to the Chinese publication, *Yizu Jianshi*, the Nuosu-Yi customary law did not only prohibit Black and White men and women from marrying men and women of other social ranks; even an extramarital sexual relationship must have been severely sanctioned by the clan (D. Li 2009, 310). Schoenhals argues with this statement when he mentions that extramarital sex was forbidden, but he further presents cases where the men's affairs were tolerated in the past (Schoenhals 2003, 30). Two teachers I discussed the caste endogamy with also acknowledged the tolerance by saying:

"Having a love affair and not getting married, it was tolerated. It must have been kept quiet, as a secret; it could not be publicly known. A marriage is a more important institution, getting married implies making the relation openly known to all," (Laoshi 2017).[15]

In the past, before the application of the Democratic reforms that I introduce later on, a punishment for exogamy or cross-ethnic marriage was death. Schoenhals claims that it was even stricter than in other well-known caste societies such as the ones in India (Schoenhals 2003, 222). Lu Hui states: "Marriage between castes was, and still is, considered a grave violation of social rules and punished severely, by death before 1956 and by exclusion from the clan or even caste today," (Lu 2001, 68). Schoenhals describes a case from before the Democratic reforms, when after a Black Yi made an attempt to marry a White Yi, two clan

[15] "如果谈恋爱不结婚是允许的。悄悄的，没人知道，不公开。结婚了就说明你是公开了。结婚那是多大的一件事啊，结婚了都公开了。"

representatives gathered together and discussed a form of punishment for violating the caste endogamy. The two clans' representatives agreed on a death penalty, however, the family relatives enforced the couple to commit suicide, according to Schoenhals' informant, because the family did not want to kill their own relatives (Schoenhals 2003, 96).

Democratic Reform

The Liangshan society had been more or less independently developing for hundreds of years as there was not much interest between the ruling dynasties in this region and the Nuosu-Yi people to mingle together. According to Winnington the first significant interaction in the modern era is noted in the time of the Long March of the Communist Party between 1934 and 1935. At that time, the Communists allied with the Nuosu, who allowed them to cross the Liangshan region (Winnington 1962, 59-60). There was much more evidence of contact between Hans and Nuosu-Yi people recorded. Olivia Kraef for example points out the contact and relations between Liangshan and the Chinese authorities were maintained thanks to Chinese anthropologists such as Ma Changshou and Lin Yaohua, who stayed and studied the ethnic group in the early 20th century, during the pre-reform period (Kraef 2013, 11). A Taiwanese anthropologist, Liu Shaohua states the relations between Han and Nuosu-Yi people was maintained also because of goods barter. Opium was introduced by Hans because Liangshan was a remote region, well-hidden before anti-opium campaigns. The opium trade strengthened the interaction between Han and Nuosu-Yi. The early 20th was also the time when deadly weapons, such as guns, were newly introduced to the Nuosu-Yi (Liu 2011, 30).

After the founding of The People's Republic of China in 1949, the ruling Communist Party intended to take control of the entirety of China, which included the Liangshan region. This followed years of turmoil, resulting in increased influence of Communist cadres in the Liangshan region and negotiations that eventually led to a significant change in Nuosu-Yi society. The hierarchy I tried to sum up above is a system that was officially abolished by

carrying out a campaign known as the Democratic Reform, *minzhu gaige*[16] (Luo 2008, 21–25).

Liu Shaohua illustrates the effect of the Democratic Reforms by citing an example from a township of Limu near Zhaojue: “To this end, they abolished the traditional social hierarchy and prohibited kinship organizations and related cultural practices. Traditional authorities faced vehement attacks in the name of egalitarianism. […] the majority of nuo (Black Yi), save a handful of "progressives" who had been placed as tokens in high positions in the local government, had been classified as "enemies of the people" and were barred from their role as traditional leaders. The Communists declared that nuo were exploitative "slaveholders" and "landlords" (dizhu). Even now, older people in Limu who lived through those political campaigns use the Han Chinese terms dizhu and tufei to refer to nuo,” (Liu 2011, 34).

In her study about AIDS/HIV diseases in the region of Liangshan, she also admits that the ruling Communist Party viewed the Traditional Liangshan Society too compact and capable of forming an independent state unit due to having a developed and complex clan organization and a unique religious system of beliefs. Democratic Reforms, then was a result of a Chinese Communists’ fear, the Liangshan society would have had tendencies to form a separate state unit (Liu 2011, 34). This policy came into Chinese history records as *jiefang*[17] or *Liberation* a term that has been used as Communist jargon in order to refer to policies, which bring ethnic minorities under the control of the ruling Communist Party.

The Democratic Reforms did not simply bring about the establishment of a new official social system claiming equality for the people; it also served as an opportunity to set up a new administration created by the Communist local authorities. The Reforms were one of the follow-up actions of CCP after establishing a Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefectural People’s Government in 1952. An official website of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture states: “The Democratic Reform was carried out in 1956, marking Liangshan’s “One Step Over One Thousand Years” into the socialist society from slave society,” (Gov Liangshan.China 2016).

From that moment on the Nuosu society has been shaped and affected by the ruling Chinese Communist Party. Black Yi became targets of various campaigns during Mao Zedong’s era.

[16] 民主改革
[17] 解放

Schoenhals explains that the official Chinese propaganda viewed the Nuosu-Yi society more as a class-based society than a caste-based one. During 1960's Black Yi as a former slave owners and certain White Yi clans that also were slaveholders were pursued as enemies and lost their superior position in the society. These political campaigns hugely influenced the hierarchy of the society for a few decades until Deng Xiaoping came to a power. The former elites faced persecution, could not hold a representative office, their children were denied access to free education and so on (Schoenhals 2003, 188). Peter Van Der Veer and Wu Da summarize the impact of the Chinese government on the Nuosu social stratification in the following words: "The slave-owning families in Nuosu society have been targeted and discriminated against. To be of uppercaste origin in Communist China was a huge disadvantage in obtaining an education or a job. Land reform has given the former slaves their first land under communal conditions, and later, with the re-introduction of private property, their own land. Many people of all strata have moved away from agricultural villages to the city. At the same time the nationalities policy of the Chinese state has created an Yi ethnic identity for all strata," (Veer van der and Wu 2011, 13).

Prominent authors, writing about the Nuosu people, agree that the clan and caste organization, even despite the years when the Communists took control and used various campaigns to chase the Nuosu-Yi elite, has not vanished (Schoenhals, Harrell, Maxwell Hill, Pan). The Nuosu-Yi feel that their ethnicity dates back thousands of years are an ancient ethnicity, their history spans over a period of more than two thousand years. Professor Harrell assumes the caste system itself has been around for more than 800 years (Harrell 2016). Such a deep-rooted idea, therefore, cannot be just abolished. Even though the law says people are all equal, the caste system, along with the tradition of endogamy, has managed to survive until the present.

III. Caste System and Endogamy in the Present Days

During my stay in Chengdu and the Liangshan area, I mainly focused on two phenomena concerning Nuosu-Yi culture: I made inquiries regarding caste endogamy and cross-ethnic marriages, both of which are directly related to the topic of a caste system. In this section, I shed light on some of the views and opinions held by young Nuosu students attending colleges in Chengdu or Xichang, the capital of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, as well as two primary school male teachers from Butuo County-town, a core area of the Liangshan region.

When I started my field research there was no doubt the caste system had survived to present day, building my presumptions on available literature which demonstrates evidence the Nuosu people still strictly adhere to traditional concepts of social stratification. The research question I wanted to formulate was how people's view on the phenomenon has changed in recent times. The research, based on observation and unstructured or semi-structured interviews, is focused on investigating a present state of the caste idea, marriage and endogamy in the Nuosu-Yi society.

As I have briefly mentioned earlier Western anthropologists studying the Nuosu social stratification understand the Liangshan people more as a caste society than a slave society. What is then the essence of the caste system in this region? My bachelor thesis investigated the term 'caste' in the Nuosu-Yi society, attempting to compare the Nuosu-Yi caste system with the one practiced amongst Hindus in India. The core part of the work analyzes certain aspects of these caste systems to understand their similarities and differences. According to the analysis, and thanks to other authors studying the Nuosu caste system, we can say the system's core idea is in a caste endogamy (Zigova 2016). Important to emphasize is the fact that the endogamy rule in the Nuosu-Yi society has been followed even more strictly than in India (Schoenhals 2003, 222). However, caste boundaries in the Nuosu society are strictly set just at the time of marriage; unlike in India, the Nuosu-Yi of different castes can freely interact with each other. An individual can marry just within a caste, but outside of a clan. Besides endogamy, the next important aspect defining the Nuosu-Yi caste is social status at birth. An individual's social status in society is traditionally inherited and determined at the time of one's birth. There is no way to acquire or abandon one's social status; an individual's

social status, throughout the entire span of their lives, is completely immutable (Schoenhals 2013, 350).

The third and the last core aspect determining the Nuosu-Yi caste organization is a concept of blood-purity. The concept represents a legitimation of the dominant social status of Black Yi. The Black Yi believe they are the only caste with pure Nuosu blood because, thanks to caste endogamy, they have managed to preserve their pure blood status. Meanwhile, White Yi are believed to be potentially mixed with non-Nuosu since there have been documented cases of White Yi marrying their *ggajie* slaves (Schoenhals 2003, 187-188). What is then the social status of descendants of slaves? Peter Van Der Veer and Wu Da use terms "insiders" and "outsiders" to describe the principle that the society is built upon. Black Yi and White Yi are castes belonging to the Nuosu-Yi society, therefore, Black Yi do not doubt that White Yi are a part of the Nuosu society. However, former slaves, sometimes called servants, by no means belong to the society; hence, they are "the outsiders" of non-Nuosu blood (Veer van der and Wu 2011, 11). This is also the reason why Nuosu-Yi people not only deny a cross-caste marriage, but also a cross-ethnic marriage.

Marriage in the Present Times

Marriage holds significant value in the Nuosu-Yi society. As previously stated, a marriage is a tool that can be utilized to form or strengthen alliances between clans. According to Schoenhals' study, a caste is a phenomenon present while getting married (Schoenhals 2003, 33)**.** Harrell also states the role of marriage in Nuosu-Yi society: "Clans extend all over Liangshan, and marriage alliances between clans tie together society both within local areas and over vast distances," (Harrell and Fan 2003, 10). During the time I spent in Liangshan, I tried to find out how people explain the significant role that marriage plays in their lives. My attempt was to find out what would their immediate reaction to this topic be, and as I already roughly described the role of a clan in the lives of Nuosu, a natural presumption was that the answers would be based on the matter of clans. When asked why marriage, even in present times, is still so vital in society, respondents did not forget to state it is crucial with regard to ensuring the development of one's lineage. Many of the interviewees were a little startled by the question at first, since it forced them to consciously

reflect on a self-evident fact. Thus, the majority of respondents initially referred to the Nuosu traditions and customs. After thinking it through, most of them stated that marriage is important because of their clan; it is also a means of showing deference to one's ancestors by giving birth to the next generation and carrying on a clan's ancestral line. Worshiping ancestors is a core idea of a unique Liangshan traditional system of beliefs. Bamo Ayi defines ancestor worship in the Nuosu society as: "Nuosu people believe that ancestors are the source of disaster, fortune, prosperity, and disease, and thus they often require that ceremonies be performed to propitiate the ancestors. They cannot do these ceremonies themselves; the *bimo* [a religious figure] must perform them." (Bamo 2001, 121).

Two Nuosu-Yi students from Sichuan Normal University see the importance of marriage in their culture as follows:

"The reason is to carry on the family lineage, and the clan; it is a clan matter. If we are speaking of Nuosu people and ideology, generally they have not obtained any ideology, the generation of my parents did not get proper education. They just think in one way; marriage is a tool to carry on the family lineage. After getting married, you can give birth to a child, or, the next generation. This is their thinking [...] If you get married in your 40's or 30's, you cannot find a wife that would satisfy your parents' expectations. What's more you are considered too old to marry and other people can look down on you. They think like this. In the past, Nuosu married when they were 17; the parents' generation's thinking has remained unchanged, stuck in this old-fashioned way of thinking. [...] Nowadays, it's the same. If I had not started to attend university, my children might have been of pre-school age right now. But because of new circumstances such as education and studying in college, parents are more willing to accept our own choice to pick our own life partner. Before, there was no such free choice; it was the parents' duty to introduce a future spouse. But now that we have left home to study, if we find a person, we like we ask our parents for permission; in case they agree, we can marry the person of our own choice... Look, if you do not marry, do not find a spouse, who would then continue the family line ? Who would then develop the clan lineage?

After getting married you can give birth to a child, the next generation. This is their idea," (Xiaoqin 2017).[18]

The Nuosu-Yi people say: "A marriage affair needs a three-year settlement," (Huang 2013, 149). The saying also illustrates how important the ceremony is for Liangshan Nuosu. Huang Tao, in the book *Breeze from Liangshan,* defines three stages of the marriage ceremony: rituals before a wedding ceremony (matchmaking, engagement, etc.), a wedding ceremony itself and completing a marriage by taking a bride to bridegroom's household, usually at the time she gets pregnant (Huang 2013, 149-150). A collection of authors writing about the Liangshan Yi society state that, traditionally, the age to get married is between 15 and 18 for boys; regarding girls, the age can be even lower-between 13 to 17 years of age. They point out that marriage in an early age is equivalent to performing a ceremony. It is a formal matter and the newlyweds do not share a household immediately after getting married; as mentioned earlier, the bride moves in with the bridegroom only after the she gets pregnant (D. Li 2009, 313).

A Nuosu-Yi youngster of 24, whom I interviewed during a visit to a Nuosu-Yi children's summer camp in Zhaojue, also conceded that the age for marriage is still relatively low in the Nuosu culture. The boy was one of the music teachers at the camp. Discussing Nuosu-Yi marriage, he said:

"*Regarding generations of our parents and grandparents, women could marry at the age of 17, so Yi girls married between the ages of 17 and 20. But then as our literacy (culture) level improved, the marriage age has increased. The reasons are: 1. Studying at a university 2. we also try to persuade parents, resulting in some parents even allowing their children to choose their spouse freely. In the past, a couple got married but the partners had never met*

[18] "因为要传宗接代，还有家族的，这个事情要扯到家族的事上来。就如果是我们那边的人的话，因为一说到思想啊各种，他们受到的思想文化根本上都没有，像我爸妈那一辈他们就很少受到教育。他们就一个思想，他们就觉得结婚是为了传宗接代。结婚就可以生小孩，可以有下一代，他们的思想就这样。…如果你四十多岁，三十多岁结婚，这样你就娶不上一个父母满意的老婆。而且你老了，别人也会看不上你。他会这样想。所以说我们彝族以前是 17 岁就结婚的，他们的思想就还停留在那个年代，就是以前很古老的年代。…现在的话，像我这样的，如果我不读书我的小孩肯定都已经很大了。但是现在因为有这个条件，像读书的话就会自己，现在爸爸妈妈，父母都也会同意你自己自由恋爱。之前的话，自由恋爱是不行的，必须是父母介绍。现在就是我们出来读书，如果遇上自己喜欢的人，跟父母说，然后父母觉得可以的话就可以结婚了。…如果你看你也不娶，我也不娶媳妇之类的，那谁来传宗接代呢？这个家族还怎么发展呢？…"

each other before the marriage. Matchmakers always managed the marriage. It's different now. It is open now, and parents let their children freely choose a spouse," (Cindy's clan 2017)[19].

Few of the other respondents also mentioned the possibility to "choose a future spouse freely". They stressed that the generation of their parents did not have this option and the majority of them got their marriage arranged. The respondents also stressed the importance of respect for parents' opinions. In other words, they can marry a spouse of their choice unless parents raise an objection against their choice.

Castes in the Present Times

Once, when conversing with a Black Yi young male in Xichang, the capital of Liangshan Autonomous Prefecture, I asked when he first heard or realized there is a difference between Black and White Yi. He proceeded to tell me a story: while he attended junior high school, he became good friends with a girl in his class. Until that time, he had not been aware of the existence of different castes just that majority of people he knew were the Nuosu-Yi people. When he mentioned the girl's name to his mother, she stopped him and explained he could speak with the girl, but they "could not get very close". She told him they are Black Yi, she got married to a Black Yi because she is from a Black Yi clan and they are "royalty", therefore getting close with the girl was out of the question (Li 2017).

A student of Mathematics from Xichang College, a White Yi, while explaining, the caste endogamy and difference in the social status of Black and White Yi also adopts the official narrative:

"The difference between Black Yi and White Yi is not based on appearance, but how their social status varied in the past. Now, according to the Chinese Communist Party's rules, the people are the masters, the people take responsibility for their decisions. It is not just, us, the Yi people; it is the whole China. For instance, in every case, equality, fairness and openness is pursued; for example, equality in employment. Therefore, the Liangshan cannot be an

[19] "我们爸爸妈妈爷爷奶奶那一辈，女性 17 岁就可以结婚，所以我们彝族的女孩结婚的年龄都在 17-20 岁之间。但是后来随着我们的文化水平提高了，在外面读大学后，我们的结婚年龄也会随着变大。原因是：1、读书。2、我们也劝家长，还有的家长让孩子自由。以前都是双方结婚但是双方却没有见过面。都是之间的媒婆接洽。现在不一样了。现在很开放，都是会让孩子自由恋爱。"

exception, the Black Yi and White Yi in these days should not have any differences between themselves. But there is one concept, the local Liangshan clan's concept, the concept is a little stronger in Black Yi's view than in White Yi's. The reason is, if I had been a Black Yi in the past, then my ancestor would have been the influential ones, having ruled so many people and acquired wealth. Since the Yi people believe (worship) their ancestors, I would certainly consider myself as the superior one. The White Yi were commoners in the past. Therefore, nowadays, if I were to confront a White Yi, as a Black Yi, I would still feel like a former aristocrat, there would still be a sense of superiority. The cohesion within Black Yi clans is stronger than the White Yi's; the White Yi's clans' cohesion is slightly weaker in comparison with the Black Yi's clans', this is the only difference," (Ale 2017)[20].

He emphasizes, nowadays, the difference or the caste idea is mainly maintained by the Black Yi clans, who preserved the sense of a symbolic dominance.

Martin Schoenhals, in his book *Intimate Exclusion: Race and Caste Turned Inside Out*, sought an explanation for what the source of Black Yi's sense of prestige is. He found an answer in the Black Yi's non-acceptance of a cross-caste marriage. This is how they ensure their dominance in reference to a social hierarchy (Schoenhals 2003, 200). Referring back to one of my respondents, the young White Yi music teacher from the summer camp near Zhaojue: while trying to familiarize me with the differences between Black and White Yi castes, he confirmed that the Black Yi are the ones impeding cross-caste marriages. In his words:

"Because there is a gap between Black Yi and White Yi, it feels like one group is on top and the other below. I am not saying we look down on each other because of personality, but it is the way our ancestors lived. The ancestors are either Black Yi or White Yi. Black Yi view

[20] 那么白彝和黑彝不同之处不是说他们的外貌不同，而是说他们的阶级层次不同，在以前来说。现在是共产党的天下，或者按共产党的话来说，是人民的天下，人民大家做主。不仅是我们彝族，就整个中国来说，比如说所有的事情都是追求平等、公正公开，比如说就业要平等。所以说凉山不可能例外了，就白彝和黑彝之间就目前来讲是没有什么不同的。就有一个观念，就凉山这个地方的家族观念，黑彝的家族观念稍微要比白彝强一些。因为，假如我以前是黑彝，那么我的祖先以前那么辉煌，管理那么多人那么多财产，因为彝族信仰自己的祖先，那我肯定就觉得自己是高人一等。那我和现在的白彝，就是以前的平民，我跟他的时候，就是感觉黑彝就是，他们目前来说还是有一点点观念觉得自己是贵族阶级，有一种人种上的优越感。黑彝相对于白彝的凝聚力是更强一些的，白彝家族的凝聚力稍微比黑彝的家族凝聚力弱一些，其他的话没有什么不同。

themselves somehow higher in the hierarchy, they would not lower their position by marrying White Yi," (Cindy's clan 2017)[21].

He basically admits that the White Yi accept that the Black Yi occupy a higher social status; at the same time, the White Yi accept the refusal of Black and White Yi intermarriages, thus legitimizing the concept of caste endogamy. The thought also corresponds with a statement that the caste idea is present at the time of marriage that anthropologists such as Schoenhals, Harrell or Pan Jiao talked about and that is reflected in my data as well.

In the previous chapter, *Historical Development of the Nuosu Caste System,* I briefly explained how the ideology rationalizes the Black Yi superiority and a "taboo" of cross-caste marriage. The ideology is based on a belief that the Black Yi, the Nuosu elite or nobility has the "hard bones" that signifies their blood purity and endogamy is what allows them to preserve the purity of Nuosu clan lineages and their social status (Schoenhals 2003, 24). This is how their ideology is defined. Even though I gathered data proving the Nuosu explain the phenomena using the discourse defined above, the majority of the respondents did not mention the purity or the "hard bones". The Black Yi make up just around 7 % of the Liangshan Nuosu population (Veer van der and Wu 2011, 12), so the data I collected naturally reflect, that a majority of respondents are White Yi clans' members. Asking them whether nowadays the Black Yi cannot intermarry White Yi, the most frequent answer consisted of an initial hesitation expressing they can intermarry, followed by admitting the Black Yi would still not be willing to marry White Yi. The interviewees most often were not able to rationalize it. They most often came to the conclusion that the Black Yi basically feel they are of a higher social status and the clan would not accept to marry someone, who would eventually lower their status and simultaneously affect the status of the whole clan. First, I was disappointed by these answers, but then I found support for my observation in Schoenhals' study on the same topic, who in 1993 witnessed similar situation and came to the conclusion that the caste idea is not highly ideologized (Schoenhals 2003, 201).

In another one of Schoenhals' studies, he describes a conversation with his friend, a Han scholar, with whom he cooperated on a research: "My friend, having grown up during the

[21] 因为黑彝和白彝之间还是有差距，感觉一个在上面一个在下面，虽然说不是从人格上看不起彼此，但是我们祖辈是这么的生活下来的。我们的祖辈就是从黑彝或者白彝过来的。黑彝会感觉自己高级点，不能够低下姿态和白彝结婚。

Cultural Revolution, was of course well-schooled in a materialist paradigm, and I tried giving the anthropologist's idealist answer: Black Yi may not be wealthier or more powerful than Whites any more, but they have nonmaterial prestige—a prestige which both they, and White Yi, acknowledge they have," (Schoenhals 2013, 356). This citation clearly demonstrates the essence of the sentiment the Black Yi have maintained to date.

Besides the fact that the Nuosu-Yi take caste endogamy for granted, and do not question it, the White Yi, as I already foreshadowed**,** present their inferior position in the hierarchy by acknowledging that the Black Yi refuse to marry them in order to maintain their superior status. To illustrate this narrative, I selected one of the answers as a representative example of the White Yi's attitude. I am stating a reaction of one of the Nuosu-Yi primary school teachers I interviewed in a small village near Butuo town, in the core area of the Liangshan:

"The Black Yi were a nobility; a ruling class and the White Yi were ruled by them. Therefore, the Black Yi view themselves as superior to the White Yi, so they do not marry their inferiors. They handed down this tradition and maintained it till present times. Nowadays they still do not intermarry. So, this is the difference between Black Yi and White Yi, there is no other," (Laoshi 2017).[22]

The White Yi explain the difference between two Nuosu castes by presenting the Black Yi's worldview in the third person, saying, *"They view themselves superior towards us, White Yi…"* or *"[…] they would not marry the White Yi […]".* After studying the data repeatedly, I decided to confront the White Yi with a question of endogamy. When confronted with this question, they for unspecified reason state the Black Yi's marriage preferences and indicate that they passively accept them. Once, while discussing the topic with two Nuosu-Yi males who were students at Sichuan Normal University, I noted down how they were joking about how quite a few White Yi would be lucky to get married to a Black Yi, because then their social status would improve. These are all evidences showing how the ideology of endogamy is created and primarily maintained by the upper Black Yi, who insist on guarding their "pure" blood status.

[22] "所以，黑彝是统治阶层，白彝是被他们统治的。所以他们自认为比白彝高贵，所以不和下面的白彝通婚。他们就流传、保持下来。现在还仍然不通婚，现在还有，现在也是。这就是黑彝和白彝的区别，没有别的了。"

The teacher's statement also reveals the nature of the caste system in the Liangshan area. As I already mentioned, the caste system consists of three core aspects: a social status acquired at the time of a birth; a caste endogamy; and, blood purity. However, regarding interaction among castes, there are more-or-less no limits, except for a strict boundary that defines endogamy at the time of marriage.

Cross-Caste Marriage Cases in the Present Times

Searching for examples of Black and White Yi cross-caste marriages in literature, I found one worth mentioning in Schoenhals' publication, where he describes a case of his friend's, a Black Yi called Wang: "Wang, a teacher at Minzhong (the school where I was based), explained that his current wife, whom I knew, was his second wife. Originally, Wang had refused the two women his mother had arranged for him to marry and he instead married a woman he loved. She was an educated Nuosu woman (quite rare) who was an official. Unfortunately for Wang, however, she was not a pure Black Yi, since her father was Black Yi, but her mother was rumored to have mixed blood. Despite the fact his wife was educated, and was an official, both important status attributes in China and in Liangshan, Wang's powerful clan persuaded him to get a divorce and find a new, pure Black Yi wife. After 2 years of marriage Wang divorced his wife, even though they were on good terms (and have remained on good terms to this day). His clan relatives then found a pure Black Yi woman for him. She was young, attractive, and pure Black, but she also had little education and lived in the countryside as a peasant," (Schoenhals 2013, 351-352). Schoenhals then portrays how Wang had a hard time to move his new wife from a village to the city because of a complicated bureaucracy. Afterwards Schoenhals points out an interesting fact which I also sensed during interviewing two young Black Yi siblings. The author mentions Wang did not complain about his fate, did not show any sign of disappointment (Schoenhals 2013, 352).

Once, back in May 2017, I interviewed two Black Yi people, siblings, a boy, whom I call Li (his Chinese surname) aged 25 and his 19-year old sister. It was the young man, who told me about his first memory encountering the concept of Black and White Yi caste hierarchy. After the interview, when I casually asked the younger sister about her university studies in Chengdu, she talked about her school and life in the big city. Then she stated that after her

graduation, she will go back to Liangshan, as per her parents' wishes. As the conversation went further, we started to discuss "love affairs". She revealed to me in a matter-of-fact way she does not have a boyfriend; she is a Black Yi, so she will have to marry a Black Yi. On top of that, her parents and clan elders most likely will decide about her future husband. She expressed a positive attitude towards us "Westerners" having the freedom to choose their partner. However, while she was describing her own situation, I did not notice any sign of revolt against this reality (sister 2017).

Considering academic literature concerning the Nuosu caste system either studying data from pre-reform period or the post-reform era, it is very rare to find a Black and White Yi cross-marriage. I state data gathered by Ma Erzi and Stevan Harrell, which Schoenhals uses in his further study (Schoenhals 2013, 354). The data show exogamous marriages rarely occur in the society, especially in the case when Black and White Yi intermarry. Having been familiar with Nuosu culture for more than two years, I tried to find at least some evidence of this sort of violation of the endogamy rule among my Nuosu-Yi contacts.

226 total marriages

9 exogamous marriages:

1 Black Yi with White Yi (latter was qunuo)

5 White Yi with non-Nuosu (for example, with Han)

2 qunuo with mgapjie

1 Black Yi with Nzymo

After a long and tedious search, I found one case, when a Black Yi married a White Yi. I became familiar with this case thanks to my friend, Mgr. Jan Karlach, a postgraduate student at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, who is engaged in the research of Nuosu-Yi Liangshan society. In our personal correspondence he stated that he had encountered a case where a Black Yi man, an educated one, married a White Yi woman from one county in Leshan Prefecture, adjacent to Liangshan. The Black Yi man was expelled from his clan by the clan fellows, but on the other side, the members of the woman's clan felt proud to improve

their social status via this cross-caste marriage. My informant, with a slight amount of uncertainty, claimed that the Black Yi's parents, even after two children were born to the couple, have refused to keep contact with their son (Karlach 2018).

Cross-Ethnic Endogamy in the Present Times

"…even if the Queen of England were to try to marry a Black Yi man, he would refuse her in favor of a Black Yi peasant woman," (Schoenhals 2003, 189).

During the pre-reform period, any attempts to marry a member of another ethnic group were treated in the same way as a violation of the caste endogamy rule. The couple was killed, or more likely to commit suicide. In the post-reform era the Chinese government does not permit this form of punishment (Schoenhals 2003, 19). Therefore, the treatment of cross-ethnic marriage transformed into a form of rejecting the violators; the clans cut off contact with the individuals, meaning that they are ostracized and symbolically lose their Nuosu-Yi ethnic identity (Harrell, Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China 2001, 69).

An ethnic endogamy in the contemporary Nuosu-Yi culture was the second core phenomenon I focused on in my research. It was again, a sensitive topic to inquire, especially for young people, who are of marriageable age since the topic directly pertains to them. So, the data are relatively chaotic as they reflect the young people's worldview that is developed in both the boundaries of the local tradition as well as the official state propaganda. I used an adjective "chaotic" to describe the respondents' statements on cross-ethnic marriages because very often they were not consistent overall. There were certain answers when the respondents stated that nowadays, they can, indeed, intermarry with a spouse from a different ethnicity. However, as the dialogue went on, many of them reached the conclusion that the Nuosu-Yi do not intermarry with Han or people of other ethnic groups.

To illustrate the narrative of the contemporary Nuosu-Yi, I point out a frequent way in which they approached the question. They used a Chinese language idiom *mendanghudui*[23] which, according to *Encyclopedia of China*, means: "[...] the social status and economic situation,

[23] 门当户对

occupation, work ability or living habits of a man's, woman's or both their families' is quite suitable for relationship or marriage," (Yu 2010, 231).[24] This is a term deriving and illustrating the Han culture and its value system, albeit the Nuosu-Yi use it to depict the institution of Nuosu-Yi marriages that is, in the opinion of authors researching the Nuosu-Yi, based on a social status or, to put it differently, a caste membership; the economic situation of the couple does not play the main role. The reason why I consider it worth mentioning is because of a dialogue I had with two students from Sichuan Normal University in Chengdu, which I have already cited previously. The female student very clearly and openly presents how the marriage system works in the society. Moreover, she demonstrates the way the Nuosu-Yi use the idiom *mendanghudui,* in the sense of searching for a partner fitting a social status, not the economic one. The student, Xiaoqin, reacted to a question concerning marriage preference in current times in these words:

"There is a problem with matching partners [the Chinese idiom]. I want to say the Nuosu are still divided in ranks […] There are Black Yi, White Yi and tusi. The tusi are the highest, then the Black Yi and White Yi. There is one more, called gaxy, a lower stratum, which is the equivalent of a servant. It refers to servants in the past. But now everyone is equal, we cannot say it like that. I'm just telling you to let you understand it. So, the older generation still has such a view, Black Yi cannot marry White Yi. If you are a Black Yi, you cannot marry us White Yi. ... But in the present day, we actually do not have freedom of choice […] If I had a boyfriend now and wanted to get married, I would have to ask whether he is White or Black Yi. If I am a White Yi, it is fine to marry a White Yi, but considering a marriage with gaxy, because gaxy is of a lower rank than White Yi, we are not willing to marry them," (Xiaoqin 2017).[25]

[24] 指男女或双方家庭的社会地位和经济情况、职业或工作能力、生活习惯相当，很适合交往或结亲。
[25] "有一个门当户对的问题。就说彝族还是要分等级的… 有黑彝和白彝，土司。土司最高，然后是黑彝、白彝。还有一种叫做呷西，就是下层，相当于就是下人。以前下人的那种意思。但现在人人平等，不能这样说了。这是为了让你理解才这样说的。所以说老一辈还是会有这样一个等级的看法，黑彝不能娶白彝。如果你是黑彝，不能娶我们白彝。… 但是现在其实是没有像婚姻自由这样… 如果说我现在有个男朋友，我要结婚的话要问清楚是白彝、黑彝还是呷西，如果我是一个白彝。跟白彝结婚是可以，但白彝跟呷西的话，因为呷西比白彝低一个等级，所以白彝就不想跟呷西结婚。"

Gaxy is a term referring to a former slave rank, that is the social stratum made up of members of other ethnic groups, especially the Han. In other words, she openly claims that the concept of ethnic endogamy still exists in the Nuosu-Yi culture and people until today have perceived an individual's social background as an important criterion to consider during the time of marriage. The statement *"If I had a boyfriend now and wanted to get married, I would have to ask whether he is White or Black Yi,"* also shows us the unique characteristics of the Nuosu-Yi caste system that is unlike other world-known caste systems; it is manifested mainly at the time of marriage.

I did not intend to perform any kind of quantitative statistical analysis during my field research; however, listening to various Nuosu-Yi people's stories and explanation of their culture, I encountered many more cases where the Nuosu-Yi mentioned a Nuosu-Han intermarriage rather than a cross-caste one. I will, therefore, discuss cross-ethnic cases further along in the text.

On one occasion, I was introduced to one of Nuosu-Yi *bimo,* a priest-shaman, a leading religious figure in Nuosu-Yi culture. The *bimo's* skills and knowledge is passed from generation to a generation. This *bimo* was trained to become a Nuosu-Yi "priest" from early childhood. He did not receive an ordinary education; instead, he spent his early age in the mountains learning *bimo* skills and traditional Nuosu scripts. Then in his 20s he left Liangshan for Beijing, where he learnt the Chinese language while working in a restaurant A key reason why I mention this *bimo,* a member of a large White Yi clan, who nowadays, in his 30s lives in Liangshan and went back to practice *bimo's* skills, is that he has not yet married. To paraphrase his words: in the past, unmarried men in their 30s would likely commit suicide by this age. Interestingly, the other problem, a less serious one, is that he dates an American girl, living in the area. The *bimo's* mother would rather accept him marrying a non-Nuosu woman than being not married at all. According to him, his family was more willing to accept the fact that, even as a *bimo,* he chose a non-Nuosu partner, rather than remain unmarried and single in his 30s (Bimo 2017). This was the first time, as late as in February 2017, when I encountered a case where a Nuosu man dated a non-Nuosu woman. It is a very interesting case, albeit it does not entirely prove that endogamy is not as strict in society as before. This is because *the bimo* is historically a significant religious figure who

enjoys a high degree of recognition from both the White Yi and Black Yi. Therefore, *bimos* stands somehow outside of the strict social hierarchy, Peter Van Der Veer with Wu Da even compares a *bimo* to the role of an Indian Brahman (Veer van der and Wu 2011, 11).

When I asked him whether his family approves his choice of a partner, he said:

"My father died early, he does not know. My mother definitely hopes that her son will marry a Yi girl to help her with her work, to do the house work. But when we both returned home, she also liked it, and she also approved of it. She thinks she is someone [literally, in Chinese language, she has a face], and my son is marrying a foreign woman, that makes her very happy," (Bimo 2017)[26].

I also inquired the American girl for her opinion regarding the matter. She said the *bimo's* mother accepts her and they have a nice relationship, in spite of not being a Nuosu. What she noticed was that the mother is more concerned about the fact her son is still not married, yet. It seems the matter also burdens him as well. The girl revealed her worries to me, when she said that the *bimo* repeatedly claimed he would commit suicide unless she marries him (Lucy 2017). These threats regarding a marriage are common in the Nuosu culture. Schoenhals also notes cases comparable with this one. He states: "Informant #44, Black Yi, had a relative who fell in love with a White Yi woman, but #44's relative's mother said, "If you marry her, I'll kill myself," (Schoenhals 2013, 353). In any case, the most frequent threat for an exogamous marriage currently is an expulsion from a clan, which means an actual loss of the Nuosu identity (Schoenhals 2013, 353).

There were a few more cases concerning Nuosu-Yi persons intermarrying foreigners that I became acquainted with during my time spent discussing my research topic in Liangshan. I encountered a Black Yi woman married to a French man who works for a software company. I met with another Black Yi woman who tried to explain the fact that to intermarry with a foreigner is not such a huge issue. This kind of marriage, according to her, is tolerated mainly because of a cultural distance from Liangshan. The foreigners are culturally very distant, and the local narrative cannot comprehend them. Therefore, the Nuosu-Yi slowly accept the

[26] "我爸爸去世的早，他不知道。我妈妈觉得，她的希望肯定是娶一个彝族姑娘，帮她做事儿，干活儿这样的。但是我们两个回到家里她也很喜欢，她觉得也可以。她觉得她的面子很大，我的儿子娶一个外国媳妇儿。她很高兴。"

interaction, as according to their belief it cannot harm a clan's face, *mianzi.* According to this woman, the Nuosu-Yi generally view the foreigners to be well-educated, open-minded and capable people. This opinion proved most of the other respondents, I had an opportunity to speak with. During the interviews the respondents very often tended to compare Westerners' behavior, worldviews or actions with their, Nuosu-Yi one's. There were students, as well as the teachers whom I met with in the Butuo Township, who expressed a positive attitude towards Westerners and their capabilities. In many cases, they show a respect towards me, being able to live independently in a distant country. Generally speaking, their stereotype regarding Westerners is positive, and at the same time relatively vague due to their lack of experience and interaction with foreigners. Other rather randomly encountered female summed it up that the foreigners in the eyes of the Nuosu-Yi automatically have a big face, *da mianzi.* She herself, is single in her 30's because she does not want to marry a Nuosu-Yi, but at the same time she respects her parents' wish forbidding her to marry a foreigner.

Qi Xiaoying describes the concept of *mianzi* present in Chinese culture as: "Mianzi or face is an inevitable and unavoidable aspect of interpersonal encounters, connections and relationships in almost every aspect of social life in China, ranging from informal personal interactions to the most ordered and formal elements of organizational and institutional relationships," (Qi 2011, 281). While this explanation illustrates how the term is understood in Han culture, the way the Nuosu-Yi comprehend *mianzi* is quite similar to this definition. Respondents very often used the term to explain, why for instance, their parents and the other clan members would not accept controversial forms of marriages (that is, Black Yi-White Yi intermarriages or Han-Nuosu intermarriages). They emphasized how such marriages would result in the clan losing their face, *mianzi.* This phenomenon is further supported by another statement made by a male Black Yi that was conveyed to me through one of my informants. The Black Yi male claimed he would consider marrying a foreigner unless the woman is of African descent. Interestingly, the rationale that the Nuosu-Yi offer to support their unwillingness to marry persons of African descent is similar with their rationale for refusing to marry Hans: they claim that persons of African descent are former slaves or descendants of slaves and therefore unsuitable for marriage.

Nuosification in the Present Times

Speaking of a relationship between Westerners and Nuosu-Yi I found very interesting examples of how the process of *nuosification*, which I described in a previous chapter has transformed nowadays. Katherine Swancutt describes her own case, when she was a target of this process. She stayed in the Liangshan region to conduct her anthropological research. For the time she spent in the area, her closest informant gave her a Nuosu-Yi name, that she started to use. To possess a Nuosu-Yi name, however, does not just allow for an easier interaction with the local people, it also signifies she officially became a part of one Nuosu-Yi lineage and the system as a whole. Using a Nuosu-Yi name and a clan name means being a part of the clan organization, being a part with all the privileges and duties, too. Even though many Nuosu-Yi ridiculed the fact she as a Westerner is introduced by a Nuosu-Yi name, in general they accept her as a part of the clan (Swancutt 2012, 110-111).

The Czech sinologist Jan Karlach, whom I mentioned previously, encounters the same situation. Since he already has spent approximately two years doing research in the Liangshan region, to make the interaction with the locals easier he also got his Nuosu-Yi name, which offers a whole new identity, that of an honorary Nuosu-Yi clan member (Karlach 2018).

More Cases of Cross-Ethnic Marriage

A next case of a cross-ethnic marriage I encountered during my stay in the region was a marriage of a Black Yi man and a Han woman. The Black Yi young man, using Chinese surname Li, as mentioned earlier, studied English language at Xichang College. While he explained the social hierarchy and the difference of Black Yi and White Yi's social status, he used English terms such as "nobility" or "royalty" to refer to the Black Yi. In the end of a recorded interview, when I asked how he sees the future of the special social stratification that has survived in the Nuosu society, Li mentioned his uncle's case. He moved to Chengdu to study at Sichuan Normal University, where he obtained a university degree. Afterwards, he decided to marry a Han woman and settle in Chengdu. There were just 6 members of their clan, including my interviewee, attending his wedding. The wedding was not even held in

Liangshan, but in Chengdu. His uncle's parents have never seen their own grandson because their son broke the customary law requiring caste endogamy (Li 2017).

As I already stated before, Nuosu-Yi and Han people have had a very complicated relationship. Before 1956 Nuosu-Yi kept slaves, who were generally ethnically Han people. Considering how the Nuosu-Yi often captured and turned Han into their slaves, and thus exploited the Han, my data show that the Nuosu-Yi historically view themselves as the exploited ones. The customary law in the Liangshan society forbids marrying a Han ethnic spouse. On the other hand, Liangshan is a region inhabited also by some other ethnic groups, such as Mongols or Tibetans. Regarding the Hans, the Nuosu-Yi still believe until today they cannot marry Han people due to their former subordinate position in the traditional Nuosu society. A part of the respondents stated they can marry Han as they belong to a Chinese nation after all. However, they also admitted that marrying a Han spouse would not be acceptable to clan members because the Nuosu-Yi still view them as former slaves occupying the lowest social status (Ale 2017, Bajiu 2017, Cindy's clan 2017).

I also met a Nuosu-Yi man in his late 50s, who used to be a soldier in the People's Liberation Army back in the 1980's. It was at the time I was interviewing a young man in Zhaojue, who was a member of my Nuosu friend's clan, a student of Sichuan Normal University. The older man joined our conversation and told us his life story. He claimed that, as a White Yi, he is willing to accept his daughters should they choose to marry a Han. He himself, after a long period of struggle, got divorced with his White Yi wife. It was an arranged marriage, as is the norm in Nuosu culture. After he came back from abroad, where he served in the PLA, he managed to get a divorce and marry a Han woman he had loved for a long time. I was not able to find out what was the reaction concerning his cross-ethnic marriage from the side of his clan fellows. Hence, he was very convinced in his claim that he would not oppose if his daughter decided to marry a Han man (Cindy's clan 2017).

There was just one case of a cross-ethnic marriage without causing any negative consequences or ostracization I heard of. In the summer of 2017, I met with a student of Mathematics at Xichang College; his female friend joined him as well. She was a student of Economics, who hailed from Xiao Liangshan, literally translated to 'Lesser Cold Mountain' in English; it is an area inhabited by a mixture of ethnic groups. Moreover, according to the

girl's statement, the Nuosu living there have been sinicized. She stated that one of her relatives, mainly because of the unfavorable economic situation of her family, married a Han. Her family approved of the marriage since it led to an improvement in their living conditions. The girl concluded the story by confessing her own personal preference, stating that she had never considered marrying or dating a Han and she will certainly marry a Nuosu-Yi (Ale 2017).

There was one more young Nuosu-Yi man, a White Yi, who explained endogamy using a narrative about blood purity and the Black Yi's superiority contrasting with the supposedly inferior status of Han people, according to traditional Nuosu discourse. He admitted that a White Yi, including himself, might marry a Han as long as she is not from a family of former slaves (belonging to the *gaxy* rank) (Afa 2017). I touched upon the topic of ethnic endogamy using a citation from the Schoenhals' research conducted in the early 1990s, illustrating how strictly the caste system is maintained. After presenting some cases I observed or got acquainted with during the stay in the Liangshan, I can sense a slight modification of the Nuosu-Yi people's view on the endogamy. It is a mixture of an initial hesitance followed by admitting the tradition of endogamy is still manifested at the time of marriage.

Endogamy Rationalization Discourse in the Present Times

In the previous section I stated a few cases of either a clan or ethnic endogamy, I got acquainted with the cases throughout statements of the respondents who were willing to share it with relative openness. On the other hand, there were also respondents who approached my inquiries concerning this phenomenon in a more general or more cautious manner. There were three cases where the young people answered the question saying the Nuosu-Yi and Han people can intermarry, but the Nuosu-Yi would not do so due to a different worldview, a system of values, language, traditions, etc. Right after claiming a language barrier could be an obstacle, they stated *a burial method* traditionally used by the Nuosu-Yi is different from the one that the Han use. Young people stating that a major obstacle in marrying a Han spouse lies in the varying manner of performing burial rites certainly represents a rather unexpected form of rationalization. It is worth noting that young people between the ages of 21 and 24 present the example of not sharing the same rituals when it comes to burial ceremonies as a

major issue and a relevant reason for not marrying a member of a different ethnicity. A young Nuosu-Yi student, studying at Sichuan Normal University, whom I interviewed together with his friend, a female-student studying law, stated:

"It is because of our saying: Our life and death are guided by fire. A life is spent in the presence of fire and after death your body is buried in flames, this is what we believe in. Huobajie (The Torch Festival - the most important traditional festival of the Nuosu) is also about fire, so the fire is inevitably linked to a culture of the Nuosu... If you are buried there, it feels like you are still there. It does not feel for us that you died and left for real. But a cremated dead body, after a cremation the body is wholly gone, the people feel more peaceful with the idea. In case the dead is buried, we would have to offer a sacrifice every year, this way it would feel the dead is still here, in our minds. This is what the elder generation does not like, they would not stand the idea of us buried in coffins, so that's why they are not willing to accept an intermarriage with the Han," (Bajiu 2017).[27]

Why do the young Nuosu-Yi people attach such importance to a burial ceremony in their early age? Certainly, it is not an individual opinion of a student since three more students independently used the same argument to rationalize their reluctance to marry Han people (Bajiu 2017, Cindy 2017, Mary 2017).

According to beliefs of the Nuosu-Yi people, death is an end of an individual's life, but it is certainly not the end of the life of the soul. A burial ceremony is a very important rite in the Liangshan traditional culture. The Nuosu-Yi worship fire because it symbolizes life and passion. Historically, the Nuosu-Yi have been buried by cremation and this tradition is followed until today in the region of Liangshan (Huang 2013, 150). I also met with four students from Southwest University for Nationalities in Chengdu, which my Nuosu-Yi informant Mary helped me to organize. These four students of the Yi Minority Culture Study Program also stated that mainly around Xichang, meaning the surrounding areas of Liangshan, Nuosu-Yi marry Han people. However, right after that, they claimed that the

[27] 主要原因是"生亦火，死亦火"。因为生的时候是在火旁边生的，死的时候你要葬在火堆上，我们信仰的就是这个。还有个那个火，火把节也是火，火跟彝族是离不开的。... 你埋在那里就感觉人还在那里，就没有他已经去世已经不再的那个想法，如果烧掉的话，烧完之后，这个人完全走了，心里面也会舒服一点。如果你埋下来的话，每年还要去祭拜他，就觉得他一直在脑海里面走不掉。家里面，就爷爷奶奶那一辈就不喜欢这样，他们就想如果以后我们嫁过去了，我们也会被放在棺材里面，他们就很难想象这个场面，就不喜欢我们嫁给汉族，就是这个原因。

Nuosu-Yi are still not willing to marry Han using the argument of a difference in a burial method (Mary 2017). Initially the argument presents itself as strangely paradoxical-young people worrying about their deaths? But on the other hand, it is evidence that the ethnic Nuosu-Yi identity and mentality is still present and significant in their culture. As we already know, the clan organization is manifested in every-day life, a daily life of the Nuosu-Yi is entwined with rituals related to the Nuosu-Yi "bimoism" and clan organization. A funeral ceremony, like a wedding, is an affair of crucial importance. It is not only a manifestation of the Nuosu-Yi people's unique culture, but also an opportunity for a clan or inter-clan meeting and interaction (Harrell 2001, 149-150).

The problematic character of the discourse of young people went on. Inquiring a caste endogamy, the participants' narrative was greatly influenced by a Chinese Communist propaganda jargon. While interviewing Nuosu-Yi respondents I had a chance to observe the impact of official Chinese propaganda on the Nuosu-Yi. As I stated above, I tried to ask similar questions, that I personalized according to the situation and nature of the dialogue with a participant in order to conveniently compare the answers. To my surprise, the Nuosu-Yi respondents gave me somehow structural answers, sometimes even using the same words. The majority of participants used phrases or paraphrased the official propaganda showing the Nuosu how to live in a socialistic world. Since we used Chinese language as our medium of communication, the propaganda was even more evident, and the official discourse significantly shaped the participants' answers. Below, I am using a part of the interview with two Nuosu-Yi teachers while visiting the cattle market located in a Nuosu-Yi village near Butuo County-town. I already used a smaller fragment of the statement above to demonstrate how the Nuosu-Yi justify the caste endogamy; the teacher's statement provides an illustration of the impact of the state propaganda:

"Black Yi and White Yi still cannot intermarry, in the past, we were a slave society, you know, a capitalist, a feudal and a slave society, so we, the Nuosu directly jumped from the slave society to a socialistic one. The Black Yi were a nobility, a ruling class and the White Yi were ruled by them. Therefore, the Black Yi view themselves as superior towards the White Yi, so they do not get married to their inferiors. They handed down the tradition and maintained it to the present times. Nowadays, they still do not intermarry. So, this is the difference between Black Yi and White Yi, there is no other. It is like the European aristocracy and the ordinary

people, they did not intermarry. It still exists, here. Even though people are now equal, they still feel the pride of being a former member of the nobility. They still view themselves to be in a superior position. They would not intermarry members of an inferior caste that they had ruled in the past." (Laoshi 2017)[28].

The teachers tried to explain the endogamy phenomenon precisely according to the Chinese official understanding, which, in other words, means that they interpreted the current situation by adopting the Chinese propaganda and narrative. I attempted multiple times to set the participants to think about the questions individually or explain the phenomena by giving examples, but many of them stayed within limits of the official discourse.

Respondents naturally tended to explain the Nuosu-Yi society characteristics applying the official propaganda and terms in Chinese used in academic studies about the Nuosu-Yi by Chinese scholars or the official propaganda. Talking to the Nuosu-Yi people I wondered several times how the data gathered in Liangshan would differ if I could conduct the interviews in the Nuosu-Yi language? Would the participants approach my questions more personally, would they be more open, or would they still use official Chinese terminology to explain inquired phenomena?

There is a paper dealing with problematics of *the Liangshan Yi Slavery Society Museum* in Xichang that also analyzes how Chinese official propaganda interprets and displays the history of the Liangshan traditional society. This is a passage of an English translation of a permanent exhibition introduction article translated by the author of the study from 1988: "The Yi and other national groups in our country have created a great history of the motherland. More than 1.4 million Yi live in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture, the largest Yi settlement area, at the size of more than 60, 000 square meters. Under the ruling of the feudal imperial dynasties over the two thousand years, the Yi people in Liangshan were repressed relentlessly and stayed at the social development stage of the slavery system prior to Liberation. In 1956, the Yi people in Liangshan, under the leadership of the Chinese

[28] "白彝族和黑彝族不能通婚还存在，因为我们彝族以前是奴隶社会，就资本主义社会，封建社会，奴隶社会，我们彝族是从奴隶社会直接跨越到社会主义社会。所以，黑彝是统治阶层，白彝是被他们统治的。所以他们自认为比白彝高贵，所以不和下面的白彝通婚。他们就流传、保持下来。现在还仍然不通婚，现在还有，现在也是。这就是黑彝和白彝的区别，没有别的了。像欧洲的贵族和我们普通的民众，他就不通婚。现在依然存在。现在虽然人人平等，但现在还为以前他们是统治阶层而骄傲。所以他们心理上觉得高人一等。他们就不和下面的以前受过他们统治的人通婚。"

Communist Party, carried out the magnificent democratic reform, abolishing the dark slavery system and moving forward onto the bright socialist road, with the great support of the People's Liberation Army and the assistance of the Han people. Since then, the history of the Yi people in Liangshan has begun a new chapter," (Hai 2013, 55-56). The reason I cite this paper is to show how the scholars, predominantly Han but also Nuosu-Yi themselves, interpret Nuosu-Yi history. As the Nuosu-Yi nowadays have been a part of the Chinese culture and the education system, therefore this is a form of the interpretation the Nuosu-Yi have access to.

Nuosu-Yi traditionally view their history genealogically, that means the Nuosu-Yi narrative centers its attention to lineages themselves. On the other side, Harrell in his paper *The History of the History of the Yi II* writes about a whole new interpretation of the Yi history, that was formed during 1980s by Nuosu-Yi scholars, mainly Professor Liu Yaohan. This new approach became known as Yi Culture School and sees for example origins of Daoism or the yin and yang concept in the Yi culture (Harrell and Li 2003, 365). This discourse celebrates the Yi history as an ancient culture, older than the Han culture. To illustrate the discourse Harrell points out: "Scholars have linked the origin of Yi writing with the symbols on the Neolithic pottery at Banpo in Xi'an and have therefore placed the origin of Yi writing at 6,000 years before the present, 3,000 years before the earliest Han writing, " (Harrell and Li 2003, 366).

Bourdieu's *Doxa*

From the data I demonstrated above and the literature on the Nuosu social stratification, we see the caste and ethnic endogamy has survived and exists until present times. There is another question then, deriving from here: how do the authors focusing on the Nuosu rationalize or define the symbolic caste idea of Nuosu-Yi culture? Before I had started the research, I got acquainted with an author Pan Jiao and his study *The Maintenance of the Lolo Caste Idea in Socialist China.* The study examines the Nuosu-Yi caste idea and the belief of the Black Yi's blood superiority. The author concentrates on the changes of the caste system with historical and social development as the backdrop. The idea that caught my interest and has impacted my perspective on the Nuosu-Yi respondents' discourse was a

statement, when Pan Jiao applies Bourdieu's definition of *doxa* on the Black Yi blood purity argument (J. Pan 1997, 109).

Pan Jiao, referencing on the Black Yi blood superiority, says: "In Bourdieu's term, it existed as a *doxa,* that is, the natural and social world appears as self-evident when there is a quasi-perfect correspondence between the objective order and the subjective principles," (J. Pan 1997, 115). Bourdieu redefines the term *doxa* and uses it to refer a phenomenon or experience in a society that is taken for granted. Bourdieu analyses the term in his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Bourdieu 1977, 164-165). Using the words of this French sociologist, the essence of this principle "goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu 1977, 167). Pan Jiao's thought to examine this term in the context of the Nuosu-Yi caste idea inspired me to conduct further examination. While interviewing the young Nuosu-Yi students, I noticed their answers to my questions on endogamy or the rationalization of the social hierarchy were similar; they generally responded using structured answers within limits of the Nuosu-Yi discourse of "hard bones" and the blood superiority. I cannot admit the endogamy rule has been universally undisputed or undoubted. I encountered a few attempts of questioning the rule and I displayed a few cases of its violation. Schoenhals also writes about the Nuosu-Yi who acted against the endogamy (Schoenhals 2003, 196-199). But to a certain extent, the majority of the Nuosu-Yi I communicated with, would simply not marry outside of a caste or ethnic group, yet they could not explain why, expressing it is a practice inherited from their ancestors.

Conclusion

The objective of this thesis has been to examine the current state as well as ideological changes in the minds of the educated youth of the Nuosu-Yi people with respect to the traditional caste idea. Data collected from February to August 2017 in the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and Chengdu were used as a basis for the analysis. I also attempt to compare the data collected during the past year and the statements of the respondents with works of other authors, who focused on the same topic. One of them is Martin Shoenhals, who analyses data from the last decade of the previous century and Pan Jiao, who studied the problematics in 1970s.

I can say each and every Nuosu-Yi interviewee, without exception, admitted that the caste endogamy rule between Black and White Yi people exists to date. However, I must draw attention to the fact that the majority of respondents belong to the White Yi caste; four of my respondents identified themselves as Black Yi. As is demonstrated in the subchapter *Present State of the Caste Endogamy*, to explain and get me acquainted with the caste endogamy rule, both the Black Yi and White Yi use the rationalization of the Black Yi's blood superiority. Then it is relevant to claim, as the data shows, that the caste idea is mainly maintained by the Black Yi and their narrative. The fact that White Yi people willingly agree with the rationale offered by Black Yi shows that they accept their subordinate position in the social hierarchy in the Liangshan region. In short, they accept the Black Yi's ideological hegemony.

After spending a reasonable amount of time in the Nuosu-Yi region, discussing this topic with members of the society, mainly the youth, and observing their daily life, I can confidently state that the society, including their youth, strongly appreciate their cultural heritage. The clan unit plays an important role in their lives and self-identity and they accept clan members, especially clan elders, as authorities with ultimate decision-making powers. The majority of respondents admitted they would marry within their caste, or, at least according to their parents' and clans' wishes and preferences. I also present a few examples, both from data gathered by myself, as well as from other authors, mainly Schoenhals' works, demonstrating how the violation of the caste idea and the endogamy rule still leads to punishment in most cases. However, the data also show that the ability to freely choose a future spouse has to a certain degree become a new reality in the Liangshan society. I noted

a number of participants, who claimed that nowadays more and more youths can choose a life partner on their own unless parents or clan elders disapprove of their choice.

I devoted the last section of the third core chapter to Bourdieu's theory of *doxa*. Both authors Pan Jiao and Schoenhals use the term in their works concerning the Nuosu-Yi caste system to explain the phenomenon scientifically. They both applied the term *doxa* to illustrate how blood superiority and caste endogamy are self-evident and strictly obeyed rules within society. Blood superiority and the caste idea are unquestionably strong beliefs that have survived centuries in the Nuosu-Yi people's worldview.

Moreover, the data that I gathered in 2017 shows a shift in the Nuosu-Yi people's view on the cross-ethnic endogamy. Schoenhals' statement which I opened the subchapter the *Cross-ethnic endogamy in the present times* with is not fully valid nowadays. The attitude towards the intermarriage between a Nuosu-Yi and a foreigner has slightly transformed. According to my observations, there is a slight chance one could find a Black Yi man willing to marry the Queen of England over a poor Black Yi peasant woman. The data shows that present-day Nuosu-Yi people see Western foreigners as well-educated, open minded or progressive people, which in other words, using a Nuosu-Yi narrative, also means they possess "a big face", *da mianzi*[29]. What also plays an important role is the cultural distance; Westerners do not possess any negative label or association in the eyes of the Nuosu-Yi, therefore they cannot have an unfavorable effect on a clan's genealogy or clan's pride. In contrast, I also mention the current Nuosu-Yi attitude towards intermarriage with persons of African descent. I gathered this information from a young Nuosu-Yi male. In his opinion, her people are not open to this kind of marriage mainly because of the historic connection of African people with slavery. The Nuosu-Yi are generally against marrying a Han precisely for the same reason: the Hans have historically functioned as former slaves to the Nuosu-Yi.

Relating to the topic of foreigners and the Nuosu-Yi society in present times, I implemented the term *nuosification.* The Nuosu-Yi culture is currently undergoing rapid social changes as a result of increased interaction with the outside world along with technological development. Characteristic features of the Liangshan society such as the clan organization and caste idea

[29] 有大面子

with a caste endogamy are all being influenced by ideas from other cultures. Although my data was mainly acquired over a short period of time and is limited by the sensitiveness of the topic itself, it, nevertheless, clearly shows that the Nuosu-Yi society and its characteristic features are dynamic. These features and the Nuosu-Yi narrative possess the flexibility to adapt to the ideas of a new era. As I demonstrate in the third core chapter, the Nuosu-Yi narrative absorbs and works with the Chinese official propaganda and discourse while interpreting its own culture. Nowadays the Nuosu-Yi have much more opportunities to encounter foreigners than in the past. The new experience has also had impact on the local narrative and view of the cultural phenomena. I demonstrated this on the cases of two Western scholars who, by obtaining their own Nuosu-Yi name, became honorary members of the clan. The research clearly shows the society reflected in the young Nuosu-Yi, whose worldview and opinions form a basis of this thesis reflect the changes in the world and we can see a few instances of evidence of the shift in the Nuosu-Yi view on the caste idea, cross-caste and cross-ethnic endogamy. These concepts are not "living fossils", but dynamic features of the culture. Therefore, no matter if we are talking about history or anthropology, culture essentially being a practice rooted in everyday life should never be viewed as a static concept, but rather as a necessarily processual one (Hobart 2000).

Resumé v slovenskom jazyku

Predmetom magisterskej diplomovej práce *Súčasný vývoj kastového systému etnickej menšiny Yi v oblasti Liangshan na začiatku 21. storočia* je analýza vývoja kastového systému u etnickej skupiny Nuosu-Yi na začiatku 21. storočia. Analýza vývoja kastového systému je realizovaná na základe dát, pri ktorých zbere bola využitá metodológia kvalitatívneho výskumu - rozhovory a pozorovanie. Zber dát bol realizovaný v období od februára do augusta 2017 v čínskom meste Chengdu v provincii Sichuan a v Autonómnej prefektúre etnickej menšiny Yi Liangshan. Cieľovou skupinou terénneho výskumu sú mladí Nuosu-Yi študenti vysokých škôl. Práca je zameraná na sledovanie vývoja troch aspektov nuoskej kultúry: nuoských klanov, kást a kastovej endogamie. Práca ponúka pohľad do problematiky prostredníctvom ukážok z neštruktúrovaných a pološtruktúrovaných rozhovorov a následnej komparácie ich výpovedí s dielami iných autorov, ktorí sa vedecky tejto téme venovali v minulosti, konkrétne v 70. a 90. rokoch minulého storočia.

Kľúčové slová: Nuosu-Yi, kasta, klan, endogamia

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