SMARTPHONE AS RITUAL FAN: POACHING IN WEIXIN-MEDIATED (CYBER)SPACE WITH NUOSU-YI RITUALISTS OF LIANGSHAN, SOUTHWEST CHINA

Jan Karlach[a]

ABSTRACT

This article explores the engagement of the *bimo* – the Liangshan ethnic Nuosu-Yi literati-ritualists of Sichuan Province, China – with Weixin (WeChat), a ubiquitous Chinese all-in-one app. Utilizing a nethnographic approach – an ethnography of culturally conditioned simultaneous online and offline practices – I argue that by using the smartphones in ways unforeseen by their developers, the *bimo* are poaching the property of those who designed the app primarily for the Chinese-speaking majority. The usage of technology stipulated by the modernization push of the Chinese authoritarian state then transforms both the *bimo* and technology. The resultant techno-culture not only builds upon, reinvents, develops and reinforces the allegedly diminishing Nuosu-Yi folkways – especially inter-clan competition – but also feeds the state-approved Yi folklore. The dialogic reconciliation of the top-down computerization of society and the bottom-up socialization of technology reveals itself as intrinsically connected to the culturally conditioned use of technology in our everyday lives.

Keywords: Nuosu-Yi, Liangshan, Weixin, everyday life, nethnography

[a] Oriental Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences, Czech Republic.

1   INTRODUCTION

Throughout almost the whole of 2018, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork with literati-ritualists (Nuo. *bimo* ꑰꂪ) of the locally dominant ethnic Nuosu-Yi in Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. This administrative unit lies in the southwestern part of Sichuan Province, which belongs to the southwestern region of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The *bimo* I worked with used to gather in the large wholesale marketplace named "Shimazi" (Ch. 石码子). In a very loose literal translation, the name means "a construction made by putting one stone over another", which points to the embankment of the local river. The name has also been connected to a now non-existent stone statue of a "Water-stopping Bodhisattva" (Ch. *zhishui guanyin* 止水观音) that was erected at an elevated location above the riverbed to appease the natural elements and thereby protect the locals from harms caused by uncontrolled flash floods. For at least one century – but probably more – Shimazi was the region's biggest trading hub. It was located near the centre of Liangshan's prefectural seat, Xichang, next to its Old Town (Ch. *laochengqu* 老城区). Since around 2016, this particular part of the town has undergone a swift process of gentrification, and as a result the marketplace frequenters moved to the construction site on the opposite riverbank.

The Nuosu-Yi speak a Tibeto-Burman language distinct from Mandarin Chinese. Originally, the *bimo* used to have a monopoly on literacy in one of the unique ancient syllabic logographic Yi scripts. During recent decades, the new modern script derived from the ancient one became the standardized writing system for the Nuosu-Yi and potentially also for other Yi communities beyond Liangshan. Providing healing rituals and astrological consultations or invited to administer post-mortuary rites, the *bimo* of Shimazi mingled with vendors selling various commodities such as fruit, handicrafts, pets, or counterfeit DVDs, or even offering vernacular dentistry services. Coming mostly from the countryside, the motivation of the *bimo* was to cater to the increasing number of Nuosu-Yi folk in a similar situation to them: negotiating various stages of their temporary or permanent migration between rural and urban areas.

I engaged in discussions with the *bimo* on many different topics and observed their interactions with their peers, hosts, scholars and prefectural policymakers. In this article, I explore the previously virtually unaddressed engagement of the *bimo* with smartphones, which have swiftly permeated the everyday lives of a large proportion of Chinese citizens in the last decade (de Seta, 2015). In most narratives, the *bimo* are connected to Nuosu-Yi traditions. Since the 1980s, many Nuosu-Yi and other scholars have seen (and still see) the Nuosu-Yi culture's survival under the PRC's state push for modernization as being under threat (Harrell et al., 2000). The hasty folklorization of the culture, through which the Nuosu-Yi scholars perhaps unintentionally contributed to the perception of the traditional practices as a "living fossil" (Ch. *huohuashi* 活化石; cf. Mao, 2013, p. 77), reflects their anxiety.

Considerably less attention is dedicated to the question of how the *bimo* themselves creatively develop and actualize the Nuosu-Yi traditions.

To inquire into how the *bimo* utilize smartphones, apps and the mobile internet, and what this means for the everyday life of the Nuosu-Yi, I utilized a method I call "nethnography". Inspired by netnography, which exclusively researches online space (Kozinets, 2010, p. 60), the added letter "h" reconnects this form of research with its offline predecessor, the anthropological method of ethnography. Nethnography simultaneously inquires into the analytically divided online and offline spaces. Moreover, contrary to the initial popular view of the internet as the strongest tool of globalization, the concept presupposes that usage of the internet is locally and culturally conditioned. My nethnographic research did not only entail dwelling with the *bimo* in the Shimazi Marketplace and observing their utilization of technology. In parallel, I kept connected with them over Weixin (Ch. 微信, Eng. WeChat). Over the last decade, this native Chinese app developed by the Tencent corporation has grown into a ubiquitous, multi-functional platform combining messenger, social network, digital wallet and various services provided through mini-apps developed within its framework. We discussed the reflections of the *bimo* on their practices and debated my own. This para-ethnographic engagement between an anthropologist and the *bimo* – animistic "experts with shared, discovered, and negotiated critical sensibilities" – that shaped the directions, questions and findings of our research (Marcus, 2000, p. 3) thus gained another layer with the inclusion of digital technologies.

In what follows, I first lay out the particularities of the Nuosu-Yi culture together with the context of research on the Chinese internet and Weixin. The next three sections provide nethnographic data. These describe my entrance to the field, two types of differently conceived Weixin discussion groups, and an inquiry into how the *bimo* create their content. The following discussion reflects on how this newly conceived Nuosu-Yi techno-culture feeds into traditional Nuosu-Yi cosmology, especially their distinct hierarchical social order based on mutually competing genealogies (Nuo. *cyvi* ꀒꌦ), and what role the state-surveilled internet plays in the whole process. More broadly, the article also considers what the case of the Nuosu-Yi reveals about the nature of the relationship between the top-down computerization of society and the bottom-up socialization of technology (Lefebvre, 2014, p. 810) in everyday life in the contemporary PRC and potentially also elsewhere.

2 THE NUOSU-YI AND THE WEIXIN-MEDIATED CHINESE INTERNET

The designation for Nuosu-Yi consists of two components. "Nuosu" (Nuo. ꆈꌠ), literally meaning "Black people", is the autonym, which indirectly points to one of the principal features of their *cyvi* – an essentialist blood superiority of endogamous aristocrats associated with the colour black (Nuo. *nuoho* ꆈꉼ) in opposition to the

white non-aristocrats (Nuo. *quho* 𖌇𖌣) (Pan, 1997). "The Yi" is the Chinese state-conferred exonym for a broader ethnopolitical category originally called "nationality" (Ch. *minzu* 民族). However, in parallel with the call for de-politicization (Ch. *quzhengzhihua* 去政治化) and subsequent culturalization (Ch. *wenhuahua* 文化化) of the *minzu* concept (Ma, 2004), during the last two decades it has increasingly gained the meaning of "ethnic group". In the recognition of nationalities campaign (Ch. *minzu shibie* 民族识别) in the 1950s, the PRC created the Yi nationality (Ch. Yizu 彝族) and labelled it with a character homophonous to the pre-1949 imperial generic exonym for local "barbarians" (Ch. 夷). In contrast, the new exonym was supposed to de-stigmatize the group, since it carries favourable meanings of wished-for prosperity and abundance.

From the beginning, the Yi were an internally diverse category composed of dozens of more or less linguistically related communities across southwest China. In an ethnic categorization based on linguistic analysis, the Nuosu-Yi of Liangshan were designated as "archetypal Yi" (Mullaney, 2011, p. 112) from which the other Yi sub-groups allegedly derived. One of the Liangshan Nuosu-Yi's language variants was set to become Modern Yi (Ch. Xiandai Yiyu 现代彝语) – a standard for the whole ethnopolitical category. The categorization was also influenced by the ideological centrality of Marxist historical materialism to the PRC establishment and its presupposition of the five stages of societal development derived from social Darwinism, according to which the Nuosu-Yi dwelt in the second lowest stage of slave society (Ch. *nuli shehui* 奴隶社会). This caused them to be perceived as the most ancient group and the least affected by neighbouring cultures, contributing to their centrality *vis-à-vis* the other Yi groups. The autonym and exonym by which the Nuosu-Yi of Liangshan refer to themselves are both formative of their ethnicity and identity. They use them separately as "Nuosu" and/or "Yi" on different occasions, depending on whether they are talking in variants of the Nuosu-Yi or Chinese languages, but often also together as presented here.

In the period of high socialism, between the late 1950s and the late 1970s, the Nuosu-Yi were stigmatized as backward due to their low place in the social development ladder, and their cultural practices were ridiculed. Following the end of the destructive Cultural Revolution, during which the cultural representations of all ethnic groups in the PRC were under attack, the Yi were once again allowed to promote distinct cultural features. In the 1980s, the emerging Yi intellectual elite, which continued the legacy of the Han anthropologists and ethnologists, founded a branch of ethnology called "Yi studies" (Ch. Yixue 彝学). Through this field, they strove to promote the positive aspects of Yi culture. Simultaneously, they aimed to participate in the PRC's nationalist discourse (Harrell & Li, 2003, p. 384) by presenting their culture as the earliest founders of Chinese civilization (cf. Liu, 1986). This entailed the promotion of an internally coherent Yi *minzu* as a building block of the Chinese civilizational nation (Ch. *Zhonghua minzu* 中华民族), for which they created a pan-Yi folkloristic concept of "Yi Culture" (Ch. *Yizu wenhua* 彝族文化). Its crucial component became the "Bimo Culture" (Ch. *bimo wenhua*

毕摩文化), through which the *bimo* literati-ritualists with their scroll-books (Nuo. *teyy* ꆏꄰ) featuring the ancient cryptic script came to be portrayed as village intellectuals and carrier-protectors of Yi heritage (cf. Bamo, 2000; Kraef, 2014). With the highest percentage of practising ritualists (cf. Cai et al., 2015) and through the efforts of Nuosu-Yi researchers such as Bamo Ayi and Bamo Qubbumo, the Nuosu-Yi and Liangshan gradually became central to both concepts.

The overwhelming majority of the *bimo* ritualists, who pursue a prestigious, intra-clan, hereditary, strictly male-occupied vocation, belong to the non-aristocratic *quho* stratum (Harrell, 2001, p. 97). In a scholarly development of a holistic "new ethnic culture" (Bamo, 1994, p. 2), Bamo (2004, p. 4) called on the *bimo* to develop a new mindset she called "*bimo* fellowship" (Ch. *bimo gongtongti* 毕摩共同体). The ritualists would have to universally share their knowledge across clans and facilitate the fulfilment of a coherent and self-conscious cultural identity. Shortly afterwards, the internet started to play an increasingly important role in these debates. Originally, it was accessible almost exclusively through desktop computers (cf. Kraef, 2013), which were publicly available through internet cafés (Ch. *wangba* 网吧) when I first visited the PRC in 2006. For the Nuosu-Yi, this meant that only bicultural, urban-dwelling individuals in Xichang or the provincial capital Chengdu could access the internet. Wireless connections were rare. Not long after, the situation further developed with the availability of affordable smartphones and mobile internet data plans. Due to Liangshan's preceding long-term socio-economic isolation and marginalization, the arrival of smartphones *en masse* in the hands of the locals (including the *bimo*) was delayed in comparison with other Yi areas outside Liangshan. It followed the poverty alleviation efforts of previous years (cf. Karlach, 2023), which were also connected with the availability of digital infrastructure.

The case of the Lisu people in Thailand, who took advantage of unlimited calling plans and mobile network coverage to start improvising with genealogical-historical songs which are performed over several nights (Amazing People, 2015), is one great example of how even dumbphones can make people creatively reinvent their cultural practices. However, research on the topic of the Chinese internet published beyond the PRC's borders initially focused almost exclusively on the political activism contesting the power of the ruling Communist Party of China (CPC) (Liu, 2011; Ng, 2015; Wang, 2019), and the related topic of ethnic consciousness development, often with an emphasis on religion (Grant, 2017; Harris & Isa*,* 2019; Leibold, 2015). For a relatively long time, calls for a shift beyond this interest in politics (Herold & de Seta, 2015, p. 79) to focus on how the internet and local cultures mutually influence each other in the process of the production of new techno-cultures and techno-societies (Herold, 2009, p. 89) remained unanswered.

The situation changed with ethnographic works on how the portable internet through its various software and hardware infrastructure influences the lives of the majority Han population (Chen et al., 2018; de Seta & Proksell*,* 2015; Liu, 2017;

McDonald, 2016; Plantin & de Seta, 2019; Wang, 2016; Zhao, 2017). Studies looking at similar topics, only considering various ethnic minorities, quickly followed suit (Cabras, 2022; He & Tan, 2020). In fact, they were behind the already established trend in academic work in the PRC, where a significant number of studies discussed how Weixin influences, strengthens, preserves, transmits, or reinvents minority cultures. Through online non-participatory observation and offline interviews, these studies looked at how whole ethnic villages were transplanted to online spaces and how this shift influenced local relationships (Lan, 2018; Yang, 2019; Zhang & Wen, 2018). However, only a few of these studies initially noticed the fundamentally changing relationship between the online and offline spaces. Xu (2019, p. 59) observed that as a result of the extension of online space, offline (material) space shrinks (Ch. *suoxiao* 缩小) and undergoes fragmentation (Ch. *suipianhua* 碎片化), while Ji and Zhou (2017, p. 48–50) concluded that online and offline spaces had already merged (Ch. *ronghe* 融合) and that the border between real and virtual had been broken (Ch. *dapo* 打破) – effectively de-virtualizing the internet as a space and making it a part of the "real world" (Herold, 2018, p. 55).

Metaphors of mutual spatial appropriation strongly resonate with Liangshan's eventful history, especially within the poaching raids of the semi-nomadic Nuosu-Yi – who resided in the mountains free from state control and surveillance – into the fertile valleys inhabited by the state-supported agricultural communities of different ethnicities (cf. Lawson, 2017). During these raids, they abducted people and over a longer period of time integrated them into their social order. Over multiple generations, the enslaved people could buy their way out of captivity and become free commoners (Nuo. *qunuo* ꐥꑌ). Although these times are long gone, Swancutt (2012a) persuasively argues that the Nuosu-Yi reinvented the practice of capture as a particular form of social interaction between themselves and outsiders, who often become symbolic captive guests of their hosts who might even include them in their clan lineages as honorary members. In a similar vein, the Nuosu-Yi also reinvented their space-appropriating tactics, which were until recently visible not only around Chengdu North Railway Station in Chengdu (Liao, 2008, p. 316–317; Liu, 2011, p. 59–60) but also during my fieldwork in Shimazi Marketplace (see Figure 1), where they carved out a large chunk of urban space – otherwise controlled and surveilled by the authorities – for their informal economy. With the online space being part of the real world, I wondered by what tactics they could poach from the proprietary powers behind Weixin – an app developed for Chinese citizens who can speak, read and write in Modern Standard Chinese (Ch. Putonghua 普通话) – and escape their surveillance (de Certeau, 1988, p. 37), and how the app influences their everyday life.

Figure 1. The author, one of his bimo *research partners (wearing a felt hat) and the surrounding audience. Photo credit: Renata Mirková.*

3   SHIMAZI, WEIXIN AND RITUALISTS

3.1   Connecting @ Shimazi Marketplace

For the first couple of months of my stay in the Shimazi Marketplace, Vyvy *bimo* and I did not have many interactions. He either followed hosts (Nuo. *visi* ꆀ꒙) who invited him to perform various rituals at their homes, or got to Shimazi and, looking drowsy, fell asleep on his motorbike. With a specific (body) language, fashionable haircut, shades, fingers adorned with Tibetan rings and a wild boar claw pendant around his neck – an amulet collected in the forest from the sacred wild animal serving as protection against the attack of wild ghosts – he gave an impression of arrogance. However, he was also considered one of the most knowledgeable *bimo* around. "I never went to school, never had any other job," he proudly stated during our first short exchange. As a member of a famous *bimo* clan, Vyvy started absorbing the skills of his prestigious vocation from a close relative at the age of six or seven. Ten years later, he was able to accept invitations and conduct rituals on his own, and he had continued to do so until now, when he was fifty-one.

150

One mid-April day, the roar of Vyvy's motorbike filled the place where other *bimo* were waiting for their invitations. He had arrived straight from one family living in a settlement near Xichang. "Can you install the input console (Ch. *shurufa* 输入法) for Yi language into this?" he asked me, handing over his smartphone. He had somehow got to know that one day earlier, I had helped one of the locals fix his dumbphone. Vyvy's new smartphone, including the registration of the Weixin account, had been set up by the vendor right at the shop where he purchased it. However, the seller was unfamiliar with the Yi language input console. I did my best, but the smartphone's operation system kept refusing to display Unicode Nuosu-Yi characters for some reason. Nevertheless, in the end, Vyvy and I exchanged our Weixin contact details.

Vyvy was illiterate in Chinese. In addition to multiple local Nuosu-Yi language variants, he was – like most of the *bimo* on Shimazi – fluent in spoken Sichuanese Mandarin heavily tainted with the phonological and grammatical features of his mother tongue. With his device unable to display Nuosu-Yi characters, the names in his Weixin contact list written in the Nuosu-Yi script remained blank. Vyvy thus oriented himself only by avatars. Every message he sent out was either a static image, a video snippet, an emoticon or a voice recording lasting up to sixty seconds. "We have our clan's *bimo qu*," he told me when I looked at a nameless element in his contact list displaying only "188", representing the number of group members. For the word "group", he used the Nuosu-Yi loan from the Chinese language (Ch. *qun* 群, Nuo. *qu* ꒭). "Can I join?" I asked enthusiastically. "No way! You are from a different clan," Vyvy replied resolutely. This was because my friend Jjihxa, also a *bimo* from a very prominent lineage, granted me his clan surname years ago, thus practically capturing me within his clan lineage as an honorary member. By doing so, he had effectively barred me from entering similar exclusive spaces of another clan.

Two months later, a friend added me to an all-Liangshan *qu* called "Bimo Culture Exchange Group." It was founded by Amu, an influential *bimo*-cadre on a governmental mission (Lan, 2018, p. 21) to collect knowledge relevant to the folkloristic "Bimo Culture" project. It was conceived as a bilingual group, where communication took place in written and spoken Chinese as well as Nuosu-Yi. In the beginning, it contained over one hundred members: scholars, Yi culture enthusiasts and *bimo* ritualists, or people with various permutations of these vocations. It was a trans-local and multi-clan group. A couple of days later, Jjihxa *bimo*, who generously hosted me in his rented Xichang flat, permitted me to enter "our" clan's *bimo qu* containing close to a hundred members. Besides the visual elements, the communication was conducted exclusively through voice messages in Nuosu-Yi. It was a trans-local but exclusively uni-clan group that mostly contained people of Jjihxa's lineage. Jjihxa's beginnings as a *bimo* were similar to those of Vyvy. However, in his late teenage years, Jjihxa became involved with the cultural institution in his home county within Liangshan. Thereafter, he moved to Beijing for a couple of years. After coming back, he started to work as an artist and advisor

for the prefectural cultural bureau. As a result, Jjihxa could write and speak in Modern Standard Chinese and its Sichuanese variant in addition to modern spoken and ancient written Nuosu-Yi. Leading more of an urban than a rural lifestyle over several years, he increasingly became bicultural.

To my surprise, Vyvy suddenly appeared in Amu's group. From that moment, I was able to talk with him about the content he shared there. Naturally, coming from a competing lineage, Vyvy was not able to join Jjihxa's clan lineage group. None of Jjihxa's group members was in Amu's group. However, not all *bimo* of Jjihxa's lineage were present in his group. Therefore, Amu's group contained members of many different lineages of Jjihxa's vastly branched clan. Originally, Amu stipulated that every newcomer to the group must send a self-introductory voice message stating his name, residence and *cyvi* seniority (Nuo. cydde ꆐ ꍒ or cyr ꋅ). This demand was somewhat in line with one of the basic Nuosu-Yi habits related to their social order. When two individuals meet for the first time, in order to determine their respective seniority and place within the *cyvi* hierarchy, they declaim their genealogies to each other (Harrell, 2001, p. 91). Without an ancestor in common, one or another person could potentially be taken captive. Amu's directive equally spoke to the rhetoric of convenience (Bahroun, 2018, p. 3) by which Weixin had been promoted by its developers since the app made this Nuosu-Yi habit faster and more efficient by putting the newcomer in front of potentially hundreds of listeners at once.

In parallel to a trend already prevalent for a couple of years in Weixin groups of the Nasu-Yi from neighbouring Guizhou Province (cf. Zhang & Wen, 2018, p. 129), Amu's directive was replaced by another one after a couple of weeks. Everybody within the group was told to make their clan surname, *cyvi* seniority and dwelling place part of their Weixin nickname. Due to the relatively large difference between their language variants and those of Liangshan, Guizhou's Nasu-Yi did not want to use the Liangshan-based Yi-language standardized script. And since they lacked their own standard along with an input method, they had to rely exclusively on Chinese when transcribing all this information, including their Nasu-Yi names. Members of Amu's group presented the required information in Chinese, standard Yi script, or a combination of both. It swiftly became common sense to check the nickname field without the necessary ritual to determine each other's place in society. The list of group members gradually resembled those scroll-books of *bimo* which contained compilations of genealogical trees that represented ancestors of various clans and their relations. Only this digital version was more fluid due to individuals entering and leaving the groups, or oscillating between several groups.

3.2 Two Kinds of Weixin Groups

Over the following days and weeks, the screen of my smartphone turned into a palimpsest of the lively media practices (Hobart, 2010) of the different *bimo*. Amu's

group had strict rules on what to post, when to speak and what to discuss, which he as the admin (Ch. *qunzhu* 群主) reiterated to all members every morning by re-posting a bilingual notice. No sensitive (meaning political) debates; no quarrels; no sexually explicit content; no swearing; no discrimination based on a *bimo*'s native place; no interrupting when one of the *bimo* in the group chanted his texts over numerous voice messages; no chanting when drunk. Topics were determined either by Amu or by the unfolding, mediated conversations. There were also mp3 and m4v audio recordings, as well as pdfs containing digitally adapted or rewritten fragments of *bimo* texts and formulations of governmental culture-related policies.

One day, Vyvy asked me to read aloud four ancient Yi characters from a scroll-book he had brought to the marketplace. I recognized two, and so he advised me on the pronunciation of the rest. He shot a video snippet of me trying to read the characters and sent it to Amu's group. Then he switched to Amu's profile and sent him a personal message, giggling: "Look, Amu, even this foreigner can pronounce these few words better than you!" Amu could speak Nuosu-Yi, but Vyvy always ridiculed the flow of his chants (Nuo. *bifu bihxa* ꃚꀕꃚꑙ) and his accent. After a couple of days, suddenly, the number of members in Amu's group dropped by thirteen. Vyvy and some other *bimo* ostentatiously left the group together. "I observed the situation [in Amu's group] for a while… The voices… It did not sound nice," Vyvy explained during our chat in the marketplace, targeting Amu's content. Meanwhile, Amu was working on a project of "*bimo* papercutting" (Ch. *bimo jianzhi* 毕摩剪纸), with which he wanted to become registered as a "representative transmitter" (Ch. *daibiaoxing chuanchengren* 代表性传承人) within China's Intangible Cultural Heritage Protection Program (Ch. Zhongguo feiwuzhi wenhua yichan baohu 中国非物质文化遗产保护). This PRC-localized variant of UNESCO's intangible heritage program acted as a super-structure for local folkloristic projects such as "Yi Culture" and "Bimo Culture". Becoming part of it was evidently seen as prestigious. Amu's intention was apparent from the content and conversations he maintained in his group.

After a few days of sulking, however, Vyvy was tempted back. "Well, they begged me to join again, to lead the other people. They trust me," he replied with notable pride when we watched the video he had posted to Amu's group earlier that day. Through my smudged screen emerged a misty forest with a narrow, paved road slowly winding up the mountain. A ravine was on its left side and a rock face on the right. The loud sound of the motor emanated from my speakers with a loud crackling. I could almost smell the kerosene. Sounds of rustling wind interlaced with the rattling engine found their way around Vyvy's palm, in which he held his device when recording the snippet, into the aperture in which the microphone sat. There, these interfered with Vyvy's voice. "Dear friends, I am going to see my hosts," he said with his mouth close to the device. After finishing his short message, he turned the front side of the device's body with the camera lens to the left. Before the end of the clip, it provided a detailed look at the lush vegetation in the small valley, where the white vapour emanated from wet stalks and tree trunks. "Blessings

(Nuo. *zzyrmuo* ꀨꎮ)!" – a rain of messages containing this omnipresent wish flooded the wall of Amu's group where the ten-second snippet landed and was instantly consumed by the audience through their screens.

Amu strove to make the group simultaneously scholarly and educational. Some images and videos were shot not as fragments of everyday practice but rather as planned performances. Some were periodically re-circulated, suggesting that people were saving them in the memory of their devices. Streams of chants of *bimo* texts through voice messages overwhelmingly outnumbered photographs of pages of the scroll-books filled with Nuosu-Yi ancient or standardized characters. Some of the ritualists shared these, but the majority seemed to be reluctant to do so. Another visible element in Amu's group was the electronic red envelopes (Ch. *hongbao* 红包). They featured the names of their addressees and contained symbolic amounts of money. By placing them in between the other messages, the senders publicly showed an appreciation for whatever contributions their recipients had brought to the group. This was also competition between senders for the attention of addressees. However, even the relatively small differences between various regional and clan-based audiovisual representations of the *bimo* knowledge (Nuo. *sylu* ꌧꇐ; see Figure 2) – similar to those that prompted Vyvy to temporary sign off from the group – generated tensions between the group members. Endless debates raged around what kind of requisites – such as plant species, twigs of different amounts and sizes, or the colour of animal skin, fur or feathers – were suitable for specific *bimo* rituals. Moreover, they discussed which design is acceptable for which piece of *bimo* ritual paraphernalia – ritual fan (Nuo. *qike* ꆀꄙ), quiver (Nuo. *vytu* ꃮꄮ) and bell (Nuo. *biju* ꀕꐯ) –, how to set up a proper ritual space and what gestures attached to the pitches and flows of chants are acceptable. Amu sought to mediate these potentially heated exchanges with more *hongbaos*.

Figure 2. Still images captured from the video snippets posted to Amu's group by its admin and other members (from left to right): ritualist chanting from a scroll-book; Amu in the middle of the bimo *papercutting session; setup of a ritual space; a scholarly-political meeting related to "Bimo Culture". Photo credit: Amu and his group's various members + the author.*

Theoretically similar to Vyvy's exclusive clan group, which I was able to discuss only from an external, etic position, Jjihxa's group was actually managed in a completely different manner. It lacked tension, clear leadership, a central topic or stipulated rules. It served as a pool for any content imaginable shared between its members, who carried identical clan surnames and shared close blood ties. It was often flooded with a couple of thousand messages per day. There were no *hongbaos*. As in Amu's group, the first-person photographs and video snippets – often shot in selfie mode or by the outward-facing lens through Weixin's camera interface – depicted various *bimo* rituals. Along with voice messages containing chatter, these were by far the most dominant content in Jjihxa's group. Lengthy consecutive chants divided into several voice messages were rare, as members shared them only at someone's request. As for photographs of the scroll-book pages with *bimo* texts, they were also shared when requested, but in much greater numbers than in Amu's group. Some of them even carried page numbers – written in Arabic, Chinese or Nuosu-Yi numerals – that were added in post-processing to determine their order. Unlike Amu's group, this one contained myriad fragments depicting the mundane activities of a normal, everyday life. Also much in evidence were viral comic videos, heavily edited clips of allegedly supernatural events, and conspiratorial, outright illegal anti-governmental videos inspired by Falun Gong or locally present Mentuhui (Ch. 门徒会), a Christianity-based millenarian cult. Finally, although this was less in evidence, the group saw its fair share of pornographic content.

Figure 3. Visual representations in Jjihxa's group (from left to right): video snippet shot while strolling outside; ritual preparation in a rural household; visiting the traditional wrestling competition; photograph of one page of a scroll-book shared with the clan-exclusive audience. Photo credit: various clan members of Jjihxa's group + the author.

Apart from the fragments of *bimo* rituals, the video snippets of random length and photographs (see Figure 3) included: a skyline with mountains and clouds; a short countryside walk by a newly built brick wall; a long shot facing downwards on the

grass with a muffled voice in the background; a view through a front car window above a glowing speedometer at night. Some had more tangible micro-plots: a 6-second snippet depicting legs stretched on a grassland belonging to someone who was smoking and greeting other group members; a smartphone-wielding herder shouting "*sho… sho*!" while chasing a flock of black sheep, throwing small stones against their backs; a series of yawning workers on a running production line in a factory somewhere in the Pearl River Delta, where many Nuosu-Yi worked as cheap, unskilled labour; "*qobo gge su, yieyo zza la o*! (Nuo. ꆀꐗꑭꌠ ꑴꑸꋠꆶꀉ)" – a *bimo*-farmer jokingly inviting everybody in the group to eat Liangshan's cheapest but most beloved meal, the fire-baked potatoes. Pointing his smartphone's scratched and greasy lens towards the ploughed ground of his small field, the creator of the last snippet showed his audience a hoe that he held in his other hand, his muddy trousers and "Liberation sneakers" (Ch. *jiefangxie* 解放鞋) worn without socks. Resembling the classic Converse All Star shoes, only designed more simply with the use of military khaki-colour materials, the "Liberation" became iconic in Liangshan and generally in the whole of the Chinese countryside. Inexpensive, hence relatively affordable, they were seen as contributing to an effort to liberate Liangshan from rampant poverty that began decades ago. The poverty was epitomized by the lack of footwear seen not only in century-old photographs but also in some from the early 1990s. Forming a stream of Liangshan's visceral mundanity, these snippets often flew through Jjihxa's group as if unnoticed. They served as a "clock-in" method for its members, who were perhaps looking for a distraction from their daily routines, to announce their presence and availability for a short chat.

3.3   Content-making Practices of the *Bimo*

Vyvy was one member of Amu's group who provided recordings of his rituals that were clearly distinguishable from the more educationally conceived content. Similar to the videos in Jjihxa's group, his visual representations of rituals were posted as if "clocking in" to a particular time, space and practice for others to see. When it came to the digital representation of the *bimo* texts, the behaviour of Vyvy and Jjihxa revealed just as many similarities as differences. Well before the mobile internet permeated Liangshan, one of Jjihxa's uncles borrowed a not insignificant part of the scroll-books he inherited from his masters and other relatives. Allegedly, Jjihxa's mother had a soft spot for his uncle. When Jjihxa was not at his ancestral home in the countryside, she allowed him access to Jjihxa's *bimo* chest (Nuo. *jysse* ꐚꌦ), which contained the texts. Over time, the whereabouts of Jjihxa's uncle and the scroll-books were forgotten, and so he treated them as irreversibly lost. When I asked Jjihxa whether he regrets this, he replied that it was not possible to refuse a relative. However, the idea of his texts ending up in the hands of somebody from outside his clan made him anxious whenever he thought about it. Over several years, Jjihxa's work-related responsibilities gradually took him further away from the *bimo*

vocation and related obligations. He conducted rituals only occasionally, for his relatives and close acquaintances. In his Weixin group, Jjihxa now and then asked for photographs of various scroll-books. He utilized excerpts from them not only in his increasingly rare *bimo* practice but also for a *bimo*-themed play performed in Chengdu, in which he played one of the leading roles.

Figure 4. In the Shimazi Marketplace, Vyvy chants lines of his text for his disciples working in the Pearl River Delta. Photo credit: the author.

Vyvy was in a somewhat inverted position to Jjihxa. He was so preoccupied with pursuing the *bimo* vocation that he had no time for anything else. One hot, early July day, Vyvy and I caught up in the marketplace. I found him leaning over an improvised table made of an old wooden crate. On its surface, he had placed a scroll-book and a fresh scroll of blank paper on which he was hand-copying its content. "For my followers," he pointed to the smartphone with an opened Weixin

chat window that connected him to one of his apprentices (Nuo. *bisse* �). After the ink of his lines written with a felt-tip pen had permeated the yellowish paper, he chanted the perfectly regular, errorless matrix of characters to the smartphone. He held the device close to his mouth with both hands, as if he wanted to whisper into it (see Figure 4). Pressing the long, rectangular voice-recording virtual button on the bottom of the Weixin interface, he chanted the whole text over several voice messages. Subsequently, he took a picture of the freshly written page and sent it not only to the apprentice but also to his clan-exclusive Weixin group, which I was able to glimpse over his shoulder. "They would not know how to do this," he added, pointing to the writing as well as to the chanting. "Some of them work in Guangdong Province, they need to keep studying."

"I would never do that," Vyvy reacted when I inquired whether he would also share photographs of his scroll-book pages with the members of Amu's group. Sharing some of Jjihxa's sentiments, Vyvy stuck to the old ways, and thus shared his text only with his disciples and with the people in his exclusive *bimo* clan group. However, in Amu's group, Vyvy shared short video snippets of his scroll-books without their protective cloth and laid out on a conference table. From there, Vyvy usually grabbed a book and held it against the lens for a few seconds. Sitting in his workroom, further equipped with a grandiose-looking sofa and a cabinet with piles of rolled-up scrolls and his *bimo* paraphernalia he only demonstrated to his audience his possession of the texts, sharing a negligible part of their content. This way, the heritage of Vyvy's clan lineage remained protected while he simultaneously accumulated fame (cf. Swancutt, 2012b) and authority by showing off his treasures to his audience in Amu's group. From Amu's point of view, all of Vyvy's content was potentially instrumental for his own folklore-constructivist purposes.

Several hours after we discussed the scroll-book sharing, Vyvy accepted an invitation from members of a family who personally came to search for him in the marketplace. The healing rite for one of its elderly members was to be carried out on the spot. We stopped by an improvised stand, where the hosts bought the requisites necessary for the ritual under the supervision of Vyvy and his smartphone camera lens. After finding a suitable spot by one of the pillars supporting the arch of a recently built traffic bridge, Vyvy sat down and started twisting the purchased dry Ophiopogon grass (Nuo. *yyryy* ꈚꑸ) into the shape of three different effigies (Nuo. *rybbur* ꎷꃰ). They represented a set of malicious ghosts causing Vyvy's elderly host to be afflicted with rheumatism. After the effigies took shape, he hung the red, white and yellow strings of paper over them. "They look better like this," Vyvy said, offering no further explanation of the deeper meanings underlying the usage of this material.

The wind caressed the paper, while Vyvy took up a live chick and plucked several feathers from its body. He sprinkled the feathers over the effigies to attract the ghosts to them and started to chant the strings of text he knew by heart from the relevant scroll-book placed on the ground in front of him, into which he occasionally glimpsed. In his right hand, he held his *qike* ritual fan. The host sat on

a small metal stool in between the effigies and Vyvy, while I squatted just behind the ritualist. Without interrupting his chants, the *bimo* suddenly put down the *qike* and reached into his pocket for his smartphone. Still chanting, with a few swipes, he entered Weixin, then Amu's group, and tapped on the icon of the photo-taking and video-recording interface. He hastily pressed and held the round digital button while directing the smartphone's lens towards the scene in front of him. Keeping the button pressed with his thumb, he waved his hand from left to right and back, as he would do with the *qike*. The ten-second recording time limit came to an end, and the recording button was replaced by one to confirm or cancel the posting of the video snippet to the group. After Vyvy's last tap on the confirmation icon and a short processing period, the snippet landed among other messages in Amu's group. Almost instantaneously, my pocket vibrated. Vyvy put the device back into his pocket, picked up his *qike*, and carried on with the ritual.

During the seconds in which Vyvy's snippet was taking shape along with its subsequent arrival in the digital territory, I was a bit surprised by the whole situation. I did not anticipate that the smartphone would temporarily replace the *qike* in Vyvy's hand. After taking out my own device to check the result a couple of minutes later, I realized that the aesthetic pattern of the snippet – and especially the swinging from one side to another – is similar to dozens, perhaps hundreds of those I had watched in Jjihxa's group. Vyvy's video snippet embodied the moment of transversality – a form of communication bridging two objects through unconventional routes (Guattari, 1995, p. 23–24) – shared by the *qike* and the smartphone through their affordances, the possibilities of an action on an object. The *qike* fan was used for diverting the paths of malicious ghosts that intersected with the space Vyvy had set up for the ritual. Due to its flat shape and the possibility to be held in one hand, the smartphone for a moment gained this function as well. In comparison with *qike*, the smartphone was further endowed with the capacity to record and store the habitual gesture of the *bimo* into a short video snippet. With its culturally unique cinematographic aesthetics, the recording became a result of the distinctly Nuosu-Yi way of using technology.

I realized all this only months after I had left the field, following repetitive analysis of these para-nethnographic episodes through fieldnotes scribbled into my notebook right on the spot and re-typed on my computer during the evenings. However, did I really leave the field? Even today, I am still consuming Vyvy's (see Figure 5) and others' content regardless of my whereabouts. I can be with Vyvy when he sits on the ground and switches the front-facing selfie camera to the rear-facing one to take in the space of the freshly decorated urban flat of his host, where he records a basket full of one-hundred-*yuan* bills. His feet extended forward, he continues to transmit *bimo* paraphernalia, ritual requisites and sacrificial animals such as chickens, goats and suckling pigs to the Weixin group through his lens. "The *bi*-ing [chanting] is about to begin… Ah, let's do this," he utters, with a notably tired voice. The fur of sacrificial animals soaked with their fresh blood and dragged around the white-tiled floor resembles a giant brush whose strokes paint

the ground red. In an open landscape, on the edge of the cliff behind the dwellings of his hosts, or in the semi-dry riverbed by the Shimazi Marketplace, Vyvy models straw as well as mud-clay effigies (Nuo. *zabbur* ꆈꏅ) to expel malicious ghosts. While trying to keep up with streams of similar content and make sense of it, I reflected on the whole process. At one point, I failed to draw a clear borderline between the animistic practices of the *bimo* and the scientific endeavour of scholars, including myself, especially when knowledge-making is conditioned by local meanings that arise from one's relation to a unique environment, and the result leads to the accumulation (or waning) of authority.
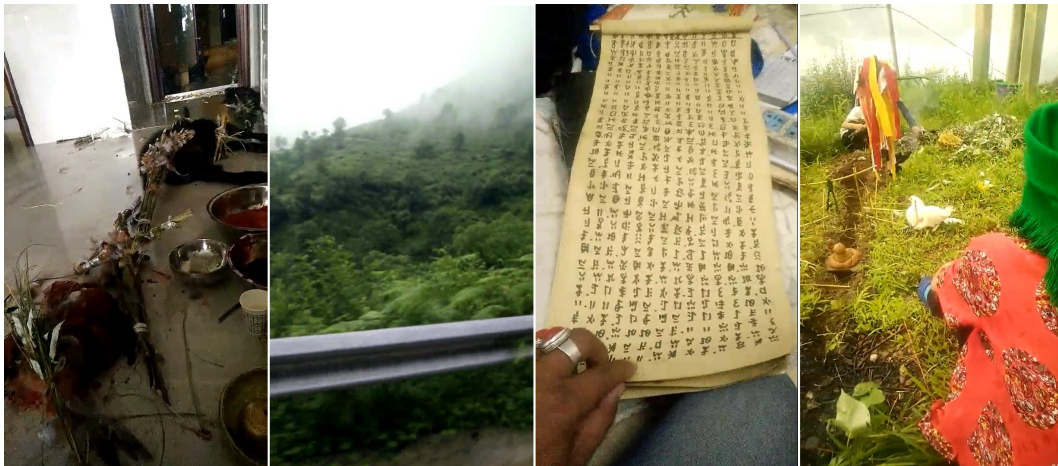

Figure 5. Still images captured from Vyvy's video snippets posted to Amu's group (from left to right): conducting a ritual in a flat in Xichang; on the road to his rural clients; showing off his scroll-book; conducting a ritual in the open-air area. Photo credit: Vyvy + the author.

4   DISCUSSION: FEATURES OF THE NUOSU-YI INTERNET

In her short article, Kraef (2013, p. 30) asked whether a "specifically Yi" internet would be possible. One decade later, the possibilities of accessing the network significantly changed with the spread of a widely accessible internet, smartphones and multi-function apps such as Weixin. One's presence online is no longer equated with one's presence in front of a desktop computer's heavy monitor. Even without literacy in Modern Standard Chinese, some of my research partners "raided" the space of the state-controlled internet through Weixin. The radical simultaneity of, as Liu (2017, p. 32–33) put it, "being there" (Ch. *zai bi* 在彼), "being here" (Ch. *zai ci* 在此) and "being at hand" (Ch. *zai shou* 在手), combined with the traits of Nuosu-Yi culture, permitted the genesis of a specifically Nuosu-Yi internet. The fact that we carry our connection points in our pockets effectively cancels spatial distances, as evidenced by the *bimo* apprentices working in different urban areas across the PRC and still being able to remain in touch with their masters and their teachings.

The media practices of Amu, Vyvy, Jjihxa and many members of their Weixin groups revealed that the *bimo* not only poach from the proprietary powers behind the app – namely, the CPC-ruled Chinese state and Tencent – but also poach each other's content. For example, Amu poached Vyvy's visual representations for the purpose of the folkloristic projects of "Yi Culture" and "Bimo Culture" – both still developing since the 1980s – in which he was involved. Through the conversations and the content of his group, Amu had a vested interest in becoming a powerful figure in the folkloristic scheme, which would endow him with significant power over the other *bimo*. Similarly, Jjihxa somehow poached the fragments of scroll-books from his own clansmen so he could include them in his theatre play. Vyvy, in turn, made use of the proprietary powers of Amu as the group admin, through whom he was able to expand the network of his admirers. In one instance, he even used me (also a poacher – namely, of the content that constitutes the lynchpin of this article) as his pawn.

The culturally conditioned use of Weixin – often seen as a form of infrastructure that enhances Tencent's and the PRC's governance (Plantin & de Seta, 2019, p. 9; 12), an app that sticks to the hands of its users (Chen et al., 2018, p. 10), where its presence becomes seamless (Bahroun, 2018, p. 3) – did not *a priori* turn the *bimo* into digitally-obedient Chinese citizens. With smartphones serving as an epistemic wallpaper (Thrift, 2006, p. 584–585) plastered over the segment of life beyond their rear-facing cases, the state-driven internet and the *bimo* are mutually appropriating, transforming each other. In this context, the *bimo* vocation shifts from the stewardship of anxiously guarded clan secrets to something to be shown off for the accumulation of authority by an individual, a lineage or the whole clan. This is achieved through the particular form of digital authorship, where one's avatar next to the posted content or face within the visual representations serves as a signature. This seems to lead halfway towards the promulgated goal of constructing a *bimo* professional fellowship, which could then serve the ruling CPC as an example of how it promotes and develops rather than represses minority culture.

Although Herold (2018) persuasively points out that the Chinese internet has recently begun to be more regulated, especially during the second term of Xi Jinping's presidency, there were still spaces open for digital anarchy. Jjihxa's group contained a lot of unwanted or even illegal material, yet it has survived until today. When it comes to religious content, which is often regulated or outright suppressed, it needs to be kept in mind that Nuosu-Yi spiritual practices are not treated as an official religion in legal terms but rather as state-supported folk belief, a "culture" (cf. McDonald, 2016, p. 180–181; Wang, 2016, p. 159–160). Therefore, unlike the cases of Chinese Christians, Uyghurs, Tibetan and Mongols, whose religious content is heavily regulated and even repressed online, the Nuosu-Yi have been virtually unaffected by a series of governmental crackdowns (cf. Chang, 2018, p. 43). As a result, they are probably also less surveilled by the proprietary powers for other potentially harmful content, and the digital sanitation personnel cannot find

a legal justification for deleting video snippets of *bimo* rituals, which often resemble scenes from everyday life in the Chinese countryside, regardless of ethnicity. The gestures that those who potentially oversee them are unable to decode give the *bimo* much more leverage to appropriate digital space through their culturally conditioned and unconventional use of smartphones, the internet and apps.

The Nuosu-Yi internet has also proven to be a tool for the simultaneous reinforcement and subversion of the decades-old folkloristic projects of "Yi Culture" and "Bimo Culture". Firstly, all the Weixin groups provide a fragmentary glimpse into the everyday life of the *bimo*. Many of them simply do not resemble the eulogized otherworldly figure of literati-ritualist that their folkloristic image suggests. Their content reveals the mundanity of their lives, which are indistinguishable from those of the Nuosu-Yi laypeople. The recorded and circulated fragments of ritual then provide, as Zhao (2017, p. 7) puts it, a "non-encyclopedical knowledge" (Ch. *fei baike quanshu shi de zhishi* 非百科全书式的知识) of *bimo* practices. Far from presenting a standardized picture, they come out as slightly mutually differing heritages of clan lineages. Secondly, since the 1950s, the PRC government has painstakingly sought to replace the Nuosu-Yi's *cyvi* genealogical social order and its essentialist notion of blood superiority (Pan, 1997) with an emphasis on cultural markers. After the economic reforms and opening up in the 1980s, these markers were supposed to be transformed into the cultural capital of increasingly tourism-oriented local economies. However, this did not turn out as expected, because the *cyvi* and the cultural markers collapsed into each other and maintain a complex co-existence to this day.

As witnessed through the mutual poaching of all actors, the internet has further reinforced the inter-clan competition for fame and authority. Paradoxically, this cultural marker prevents the *bimo* from approaching the final stage of the "*bimo* fellowship" project. While some have reluctantly shared fragments of their scroll-books, others have refrained from doing so altogether. This competition prevented the "liquefaction" (Ch. *yehua* 液化) (Yang, 2019, p. 138) of the *bimo* practices, which would lead to a greater cultural homogeneity. The digital artefacts of Vyvy conceived in the "vernacular" (de Seta & Proksell, 2015, p. 8) manner and those staged using Amu's practices of digital folklore (de Seta, 2019) have circulated through all the groups. However, although they could perhaps have been used as building blocks of "Yi Culture", they keep disintegrating into an unfathomable cacophony of related but practically irreconcilable representations of individualized ritual practices. As such, they serve as a currency within the local ritual economy for each separate ritualist and their lineages and clans. In such an environment, the dichotomies of offline and online, folk and folklore, minority and majority, science and animism, and tradition and modernity keep visibly collapsing into each other only to re-emerge in unexpected and often equally volatile forms.

5   CONCLUSION

I have shown that the Nuosu-Yi internet emerged as a result of mutual appropriation and transformation of the technological infrastructure – smartphones, apps and state-driven internet governance – and its users. Using the technology in unforeseen ways, the *bimo* literati-ritualists manage to poach on the property of this infrastructure to extend themselves into (cyber)space, which at one point constituted a largely untapped territory for them. This encounter permitted the *bimo* to develop and reinforce some of their cultural traits and also proved to be instrumental in the further construction of Yi (digital) folklore. Simultaneously, by providing a glimpse into the everyday lives of different *bimo*, it problematizes some of the stereotypical descriptions of the (Nuosu-)Yi literati-ritualists within the decades-long and ongoing folkloristic projects of "Yi Culture" and "Bimo Culture". Inter-clan competition, one of the Nuosu-Yi cultural traits the usage of technology has reinforced, prevents homogenization of the individual *bimo* clan heritages. Every *bimo* strives to promote his vision of the ritual practices that often (to a greater or lesser extent) differ from those of his peer competitors.

Nethnography, the simultaneous inquiry into previously separated and now increasingly indistinguishable online and offline spaces, is instrumental in social digital research for uncovering complex relationships that problematize simplistic dichotomies. Furthermore, by promoting the para-nethnographic approach, during which researchers and their research partners collaboratively influence (or appropriate) each other, the method can work towards the de-orientalization of the ethnic (minority) cultures inhabiting spaces beyond the Global North and the presuppositions attached to their usage of technology the whole world increasingly shares. Connected to one network, people can merge their online and offline existence through their mobile devices and create their own techno-cultures and techno-societies. Not only in places with authoritarian regimes but also in states with a more liberal approach to governance, the ability to do so depends on the creativity of those living within reach of the surveillance capabilities of technology's proprietary powers – be they corporations, governments, or variously conceptualized tangles of both. Thus, the case of mutual appropriation among the Nuosu-Yi provides one of the possible answers to the question of the relationship between the top-down computerization of society and the bottom-up socialization of technology. The *bimo* teach us that depending on creativity, this relationship can be dialogic rather than universally dialectical.

Academy of Sciences (no. LQ300211901). It is an outcome of the Oriental Institute's *Power and Strategies of Social and Political Order* research platform. This paper would not materialize without the inspirational dialogues the author had with Allan Bahroun in Hong Kong between 2016 and 2017. The author wishes to thank the two anonymous reviewers, who helped to significantly improve this paper. Equally important was the input of James Raymond, who bettered its language. All the remaining errors are exclusively the author's responsibility.

REFERENCES

Amazing People. (2015, August 14). *The Zuckerberg Tribe: Stupid Phones Social Network* [Video]. YouTube. https://youtu.be/wL8YmYcbWWE

Bahroun, A. (2018). *WeChat wants to become the everyday: an ethno-semiotic study of computerized media, between industries and practices, in Shanghai and Chengdu (2015–2017)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.
https://theses.lib.polyu.edu.hk/handle/200/9305

Bamo A. 巴莫阿依 (1994). *Yizu zuling xinyang yanjiu: Yiwen guji tantao yu yizu zongjiao yishi kaocha* 彝族祖灵信仰研究：彝文古籍探讨与彝族宗教仪式考察 (Research of Ancestral Spirit Beliefs of the Yi: Exploration of the Yi Classics and Observation of the Yi Religious Rituals). Sichuan minzu chubanshe.

Bamo A. (2000). Zhongguo Liangshan Yizu shehui zhong de bimo 中国凉山彝族社会中的毕摩 (Bimo of China's Liangshan Yi Nationality's Society). *Xichang shifan gaodeng zhuanke xuexiao xuebao*, 2, 1–10.

Cabras, G. (2022). Technology-Mediated Communication and Representations of Islam in Northwest China: Insights from Visual Postings on Weixin. *International Journal of Islam in Asia*, 2, 70–98.
https://doi.org/10.1163/25899996-20223003

Cai H. 蔡华, Ji'er T. 吉尔体日, Gaha S. 嘎哈史者, & Zimo W. 子莫伍果 (2015). Dui Yizu bimo zongjiao xianzhuang de diaocha yu sikao 对彝族毕摩宗教现状的调查与思考 (Investigation and Thoughts on the Current State of the Yi Nationality's Bimo Religion). *Lantai shijie*, 22, 5–8.

Chang, K.-M. (2018). New Wine in Old Bottles: Sinicisation and State Regulation of Religion in China. *China Perspectives*, 2018(1–2), 37–44.
https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.7636

Chen, Y., Mao, Z., & Qiu, J. L. (2018). *Super-Sticky WeChat and Chinese Society*. Emerald.

de Certeau, M. (1988). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. University of California Press.

de Seta, G. (2015). Postdigital wangluo: The Internet in Chinese everyday life. *Anthropology Now*, 7(3), 106–117.
https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2015.1103621

de Seta, G. (2019). Digital folklore. In J. Hunsinger, M. M. Allen & L. Klastrup (Eds.), *Second international handbook of internet research* (pp. 167–183). Springer.

de Seta, G., & Proksell, M. (2015). The Aesthetics of Zipai: From Wechat Selfies to Self-Representation in Contemporary Chinese Art and Photography. *Networking Knowledge*, 8(6), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.31165/nk.2015.86.404

Grant, A. (2017). 'Don't discriminate against minority nationalities': practicing Tibetan ethnicity on social media. *Asian Ethnicity*, 18(3), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2016.1178062

Guattari, F. (1995). *Chaosmosis: An ethico-aesthetic paradigm*. Indiana University Press.

Harrell, S. (2001). *Ways of Being Ethnic in Southwest China*. University of Washington Press.

Harrell, S., Bamo Q., & Ma, E. (Eds.). (2000). *Mountain Patterns: The Survival of the Nuosu Culture in China*. University of Washington Press.

Harrell, S., & Li, Y. (2003). The History of the History of the Yi, Part II. *Modern China*, 29(3), 362–396. https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700403029003004

Harris, R., & Isa, A. (2019). Islam by smartphone: reading the Uyghur Islamic revival on WeChat. *Central Asian Survey*, 38(1), 61–80. https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2018.1492904

He, H., & Tan, Ch. K. K. (2020). Strangers in the Borderlands: WeChat and ethical ambiguity in Yunnan, China. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 14(2), 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2020.1769701

Herold, D. K. (2009). Cultural Politics and Political Culture of Web 2.0 in Asia. *Knowledge, Technology & Policy*, 22, 89–94. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12130-009-9076-x

Herold, D. K. (2018). Xi Jinping's Internet: Faster, Truer, More Positive and More Chinese? *China: An International Journal*, 16(3), 52–73. https://doi.org/73. 10.1353/chn.2018.0025

Herold, D. K., & de Seta, G. (2015). Through the Looking Glass: Twenty Years of Chinese Internet Research. *The Information Society: An International Journal*, 31(1), 68–82. https://doi.org/10.1080/01972243.2014.976688

Hobart, M. (2010). What do we mean by 'media practices'? In B. Bräuchler & J. Postill (Eds.), *Theorising media and practice* (pp. 55–75). Berghahn.

Ji G. X. 姬广绪, & Zhou D. M. 周大鸣 (2017). Cong "shehui" dao "qun": Hulianwang shidai renji jiaowang fangshi bianqian yanjiu 从"社会"到"群"：互联网时代人际交往方式变迁研究 (From "Society" to "Group": Changes In Ways of Interpersonal Contact in the Internet Era). *Sixiang zhanxian*, 43(2), 53–60. http://www.sxzx.ynu.edu.cn/CN/Y2017/V43/I2/53

Karlach, J. (2023). Hearths, Mythologies, and Livelihood Choices: Exploring Cultural Change under Poverty Alleviation with the Nuosu-Yi of Liangshan. *Modern China.* https://doi.org/10.1177/00977004221141051

Kozinets, R. V. (2010). *Netnography: Doing Ethnographic Research Online.* Sage.

Kraef, O. (2013). The Yi and the Internet: Promoting Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity in Chinese Virtuality. *Pacific Geographies,* 39(1), 26–30.

Kraef, O. (2014). Of Canons and Commodities: The Cultural Predicaments of Nuosu-Yi "Bimo Culture". *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs,* 43(2), 145–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/186810261404300209

Lan Y. J. 兰叶剑 (2018). Weixin qun: minzu cunluo de "zai shequhua" – jiyu yige Yizu cun de Weixin qun guancha 微信群：民族村落的"再社区化"——基于一个彝族村的微信群观察 (The Weixin group: "Re-communization" of Ethnic Village – Based on Observation of a Weixin Group in One Yi Village). *Xinwen chuanbo,* 2018(2), 21–23.

Lawson, J. (2017). *A Frontier Made Lawless: Violence in Upland Southwest China, 1800–1956.* UBC Press.

Lefebvre, H. (2014). *Critique of Everyday Life.* Verso.

Leibold, J. (2015). Performing ethnocultural identity on the Sinophone Internet: testing the limits of minzu. *Asian Ethnicity,* 16(3), 274–293. https://doi.org/10.1080/14631369.2015.1015252

Liao, Y. (2008). *The Corpse Walker: Real Life Stories, China From the Bottom Up.* Pantheon Books.

Liu, J. (2011). Picturing a green virtual public space for social change: a study of Internet activism and Web-based environmental collective actions in China. *Chinese Journal of Communication,* 4(2), 137–166. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2011.565674

Liu, S.-H. (2011). *Passage to Manhood: Youth Migration, Heroin, and AIDS in Southwest China.* Stanford University Press.

Liu Y. H. 刘尧汉 (1986). "Yizu wenhua yanjiu conghshu": zongxu 《彝族文化研究丛书》：总序 (Collection of Research on the Yi Nationality's Culture: General Preface). In Liu Y. H. & Lu Y. 卢央 (Eds.), *Wenming Zhongguo de Yizu shi yue li* 文明中国的彝族十月历 (The Ten-Month Calendar of Yi Nationality in Civilised China) (Pp. 1–15). Yunnan renmin chubanshe.

Liu Z. W. 刘忠魏 (2017). Weixin minzuzhi: XT shuizai de Weixin minzuzhi gouxiang 微信民族志：XT 水灾的微信民族志构想 (Weixin Ethnography: The Concept of Wenxin Ethnography on the Background of a Flood in XT). *Sixiang zhanxian,* 43(2), 32-45. http://www.sxzx.ynu.edu.cn/CN/Y2017/V43/I2/32

Ma R. 马戎 (2004). Lixiang minzu guanxi de xin silu – shaoshu zuqun wenti de "quzhengzhihua" 理解民族关系的新思路———少数族群问题的"去政治化" (The New Way of Looking at the Ideal Relationship Between

Nationalities: "De-politicization" of the Problem of Minority Groups). *Beijing daxue xuebao*, 41(6), 122–123.

Mao G. G. 毛呷呷. (2013). Liangshan zhou Meigu bimo chuancheng xianzhuang diaocha 凉山州美姑毕摩传承现状调查 (Investigation of Current Situation of Bimo Knowledge Transmission in Meigu County, Liangshan Prefecture). *Minzu luntan*, 2013(1), 74–77. https://doi.org/10.19683/j.cnki.mzlt.2013.01.017

Marcus, G. E. (2000). Introduction. In G. E. Marcus (Ed.), *Para-Sites: A Casebook against Cynical Reason* (pp. 1–14). The University of Chicago Press.

McDonald, T. (2016). *Social Media in Rural China: Social Networks and Moral Frameworks*. UCL Press.

Mullaney, T. (2011). *Coming to Terms with the Nation: Ethnic Classification in Modern China*. University of California Press.

Ng, J. Q. (2015, July 20). *Politics, rumors, and ambiguity: Tracking censorship on WeChat's public accounts platform*. The Citizen Lab. https://citizenlab.ca/2015/07/tracking-censorship-on-wechat-public-accounts-platform/

Pan, J. (1997). The Maintenance of the Lolo Caste Idea in Socialist China. *Inner Asia: Occasional Papers 2*, 1, 108–127.

Plantin, J.-C., & de Seta, G. (2019). WeChat as infrastructure: the techno-nationalist shaping of Chinese digital platforms. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 12(3), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/17544750.2019.1572633

Swancutt, K. (2012a). The captive guest: spider webs of hospitality among the Nuosu of Southwest China. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 18(S1), 103–116. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2012.01766.x

Swancutt, K. (2012b). Fame, Fate-Fortune, and Tokens of Value among the Nuosu of Southwest China. *Social Analysis*, 56(2), 56–72. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2012.560205

Thrift, N. (2006). Movement-space: The changing domain of thinking resulting from the development of new kinds of spatial awareness. *Economy and Society*, 33(4), 582–604. https://doi.org/10.1080/0308514042000285305

Wang, X. (2016). *Social Media in Industrial China*. UCL Press.

Wang, J. (2019). Tiptoeing along the red lines. On Chinese Muslims' use of self-censorship in contemporary China. *Terrain: Anthropologie et Sciences Humaines*, 72. https://doi.org/10.4000/terrain.19439

Xu H. S. 徐何珊 (2019). "Weixin qun" yu Daizu cunzhai shehui de bingjie – yi Xishuangbanna Manlie zhai wei li "微信群"与傣族村寨社会的并接——以西双版纳曼列寨为例 (Merging "Weixin group" and Society of Dai Nationality's Village – Case of Manlie Village in Xishuangbanna). *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao*, 2019(1), 44–51.

Yang J. 杨姣 (2019). Kuajing shaoshu minzu de Weixin shiyong yu "minxin xiangtong" de zhaihua xiaoying 跨境少数民族的微信使用与"民心相通"的窄化效应 (The Narrowing of Interpersonal Ties Among the Minority Nationalities Engaged in Cross-border Communication Through Weixin). *Keji chuanbo*, 2019(1), 137–138; 187. https://doi.org/10.16607/j.cnki.1674-6708.2019.01.071

Zhang Y. 张媛, & Wen X. 文霄. (2018). Weixin zhong de minzu yishi chengxian yu rentong goujian: jiyu yige Yizu Weixin qun de kaocha 微信中的民族意识呈现与认同构建：基于一个彝族微信群的考察 (Emergence of Nationality Consciousness and Construction of Identification on Weixin: Based on Investigation of One Yi Nationality's Weixin Group). *Guoji xinwenjie*, 40(6), 122–137. https://doi.org/10.13495/j.cnki.cjjc.2018.06.008

Zhao X. D. 赵旭东 (2017). Weixin minzuzhi shidai jijiang lailin – renleixuejia duiyu wenhua zhuanxing de juewu 微信民族志时代即将来临——人类学家对于文化转型的觉悟 (Imminence of Weixin Ethnography Era: Anthropologists' Awakening to Cultural Transformation). *Tansuo yu zhengming*, 2017(5), 4–14.