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The Time of Red Snowfall

Steering Social and Cosmic Renewal in Southwest China

Each year the Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China, celebrate their Fire Festival with vibrant displays that evoke the myth-historical blunder of a hero killing a spirit. To atone for this blunder, they compete in arts and sports before spectators, judges, and the sky god, who receives their displays as ritual blandishments and expresses his satisfaction by sparing lives. These two-way displays typically continue until Nuosu pay their sacrificial debt to the sky god through the ritual for "the descent and exchange of the soul." But many Nuosu approach the Fire Festival differently in the northeastern Liangshan mountains, where they seek to avoid summoning red snowfall, a euphemism that refers to a generations-old war, extreme bloodshed, and perhaps even the origins of humankind. Here, Nuosu call their sacrifices to the sky god "turning back the enemy" and move their competitions to unconventional days that fall outside of the Fire Festival's celebratory window. By steering this season of social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction, Nuosu across Liangshan engage in worldmaking acts that show the conceptual value of the anthropology of display.

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Perhaps nothing illuminates worldmaking projects more clearly than the spectacle of display. During the annual Fire Festival (*Duzie* ꑍꑮ) of the Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China, a weeklong display of state-sponsored competitions is held in many towns and cities that builds up to sacrifices to the sky god, Ngeti Gunzy (ꑍꑟꑤꑷ).[1] Located across the Liangshan mountains of Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, the Nuosu—who are also known by their Chinese ethnonym of Yi—hold Fire Festival competitions in wrestling, singing, instrumental music, dancing, women's beauty, horse racing, traditional clothing, verbal dueling (*kenre* ꑌꑼ), and more in front of live audiences and judge's panels. Cadres and grassroots intellectuals typically organize the celebrations, which in many areas date back to the early 1980s and nowadays tend to culminate in Fire Festival extravaganzas that are multimedia song and dance concerts produced by event organizers from outside of the area (Swancutt 2023). But while the Fire Festival unleashes many lively and fun-loving displays, it is also a highly dangerous season of social and cosmic renewal. As the summer counterpart to the winter New Year (*Kushyr* ꒏ꑭ), which is the other major seasonal celebration in the Nuosu ten-month calendar, the Fire Festival unfolds around the annual harvest of bitter buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*), their dietary staple. According to popular Nuosu lore, Ngeti Gunzy sets out in the weeks leading up to the Fire Festival to imprison each person's soul in his netherworld jail (*shymu ngejjy* ꒐ꑦꑍꑟ). He does this in retaliation for the accidental killing of one of his spirit emissaries by a human hero during a wrestling match held in myth-historical times. Ever since this blunder, the sky god has only returned each person's soul in exchange for the payment of an annual debt during the Fire Festival, which typically takes the form of a large sacrificial animal. While some Nuosu say that Ngeti Gunzy may not manage to imprison every human soul, they tend to agree that human (and even livestock) souls are still made absent from their bodies during the Fire Festival. Lost human souls usually roam the nearby mountains or wilderness, but no matter where they go, Nuosu must recover them to avoid illness and eventually death. Anyone whose soul has not been retrieved by the end of the Fire Festival is considered unlikely to survive for long. Many Nuosu, then, unleash a variety of often personalized displays throughout the Fire Festival—from their competitions in arts and sports to the sacrifices they may make to a variety of spirits, including local land spirits (*musi* ꁯ), ancestors, guardian spirits of fate-fortune (*jjylu* ꑟꑴ), spirit helpers (*wasa* ꑪꑱ), certain culture heroes, and Ngeti Gunzy—all of which may be followed

by a smaller ritual that summons home the lost souls of livestock and concludes this season of social and cosmic renewal. In turn, Ngeti Gunzy signals his satisfaction or displeasure with these displays of ritual blandishment by sparing or taking human lives, while other spirits may respond with displays of prosperity or the lack thereof. Each of these displays, which Nuosu may defer or disguise in some parts of Liangshan, unfold as worldmaking acts.

The Fire Festival has grown rapidly each year in the Ninglang Yi Autonomous County of Yunnan, hereafter referred to in Nuosu as Nila (ꀉꉼ), where I have conducted fieldwork since 2007. I attended the Fire Festival in Nila—including in the capacity of a guest judge at the state-sponsored competitions—in the summers of 2015, 2016, and 2019 (Swancutt 2016, 59–60; Swancutt 2023). These official competitions are usually held on makeshift outdoor stages erected in the Old Square and New Square of Nila, just as they are held in other town squares across Liangshan. But many Nuosu in Nila consider that the ambience of the Fire Festival spills over to informal competitions, such as the basketball games played at the edges of the main attractions and youth league soccer games played on the outskirts of town. Local and national television coverage of the Fire Festival brings the official celebrations closer to the country villages surrounding Nila. Many Nuosu children in country villages also hold their own informal play-contests, which are probably one of the "traditional" templates on which the official Fire Festival competitions are based. There is, then, some fluidity to where the Fire Festival celebrations take place, who joins them, and in what capacity. Hundreds of spectators often attend the official competitions in Nila, which attract members of the twelve officially recognized nationalities (Ch. *minzu* 民族) that reside in the county, including the Han ethnic majority of China. People of any nationality may enter these competitions, which are judged by multiethnic panels of grassroots intellectuals from Nila, many of whom are teachers and ethnohistorians based at the local research institution in the county town. Yet the most important judge of all is arguably Ngeti Gunzy, whose omnipresence tends to be especially palpable during the verbal dueling events in which competitors formulate speech riffs on a variety of themes, including the Nuosu afterlife world or heavens (*shymu ngehxa* ꑭꀋꒉꑱ).

Many Nuosu hold their ritual for "the descent and exchange of the soul" (*yyrci hlaba* ꒉꉬꀋꃅ) on the final day of the Fire Festival, when a large livestock animal is sacrificed to Ngeti Gunzy to pay the annual debt owed to him by each household, or, as is the case in southern Liangshan, by the entire community.[2] This debt features in the name of the Fire Festival, which may be literally translated as "passing [a certain time of the year with the use of] fire" (*Duzie* ꓓꏂ), but which includes the term *zie* (ꏂ) that can alternately mean "celebrating a festival" or "paying a debt." The debt also evokes the blood compensation payments that Nuosu have long used to settle disputes with rival clans and lineages (cf. Qubi Shimei and Ma Erzi 2001, 96–103; Hill 2004, 678–82; Swancutt and Jiarimuji 2021, 187, see also 190–201). Once their sacrificial debts have been paid and Nuosu have retrieved their souls, they tend to settle into a celebratory day of cooking and eating their sacrificial meals. As day turns to evening, crowds of children, youths, and some adults congregate in the county town center of Nila to carry long torches made from dried artemisia (*hxike* ꑰ꒾), pine, or other easily obtainable woods that may be purchased from street vendors who also sell

light-up toys, costume headdresses, sweets, and snacks. Notably, this torch bearing is associated with another popular theory behind the origins of the Fire Festival: that torches were once used to drive away destructive crop-eating insects with fire and smoke. Torch processions have become so iconic of the Fire Festival that it is even glossed in Chinese as the "Torch Festival" (Ch. *Huobajie* 火把节).

In contrast to these vibrant displays, Ngeti Gunzy is not ordinarily visible, including to Nuosu priests (*bimo* ꂾ), male shamans (*sunyi* ꑭ), or female shamans (*monyi* ꑌ). He instead tends to be imaginatively envisioned as exhibiting the "invisible authority" that underpins his own "regime of visibility" (Feuchtwang 2011, 65). As an important authority in the Nuosu world, which is filled with numerous spirits and ghosts, Ngeti Gunzy is commonly depicted as being seated upon a throne surrounded by guards and a dog (figure 1). He also appears in popular legends and myth-histories about worldmaking events, accompanied by his wife, spirit emissaries, animal friends, and other beings (Bender 2008, 19, see also 25–26, 29–32; Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, xxxiv, lxvii–lxviii, lxx–lxxiii, 48–58). Each time Ngeti Gunzy takes or spares a human life, he displays his ordinarily invisible authority in visible and tangible ways. Many Nuosu therefore consider their good health throughout the Fire Festival to be a sign of Ngeti Gunzy's pleasure, while illnesses, accidents, or deaths are often a sign of his wrath.

All this gains an extra layer of complexity in northeastern Liangshan, which includes Meigu County of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, hereafter referred to in Nuosu as Limu Moggu (ꃅꑭꂷꆏ). While the Fire Festival tends to fall on different days across Liangshan due to how local priests interpret the lunar calendar, a pronounced anachronism is sought out in Limu Moggu and across the northeast. Here, Nuosu contend with a problem of cosmic proportions that many trace to an enormous battle that broke out in their area generations ago. No one seems to know who fought in this battle. But many Nuosu across northeastern

Figure 1. Wall panel depicting Ngeti Gunzy seated on a throne in the heavens, flanked by his guards and a dog, in a home located in the Nila county town. The god's name is etched in Nuosu script on the far right, 2016. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Liangshan say that when it ended, their landscape was covered in red snow that was eerie due to its color and its unseasonal arrival during the Fire Festival, which usually falls in the hottest and driest months of July or August.

Red snowfall evokes the kinds of transformation that may steer Nuosu either toward social and cosmic renewal or toward disaster. Myth-historical tales about the potential life-giving and life-taking qualities of red snow are recounted in the Nuosu Book of Origins (*Hnewo Teyy* ꆹꌦꂷꀋ), which traces humankind to red snowfall (cf. Bender 2008, 15–16; Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, lxviii–lxix, 22–23). According to the Book of Origins, the human maiden Pumo Hniyyr (ꀋꁅꃅꑱ) was lured away from her weaving under the household eaves by eagles cavorting in the skies during the days when the world was taking form. These eagles splattered her with three drops of blood that impregnated her and caused her to give birth to the legendary half-human, half-spirit hero, Zhyge Alu (ꂰꆏꌠꀠ). The drops of blood are notable for "foregrounding the later fall of red snow resulting in the snow tribes" that became the forefathers of Nuosu people, animals, and plants (Bender 2008, 15; see also Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, liv, lxxx–lxxxiii). However, the transformation of red snowfall into living beings was neither easy nor automatic. It was preceded by batches of yellow and red snowfall that Ngeti Gunzy "sent to the human world" but was initially "unable to change into living creatures," despite long efforts at "transforming, transforming" them (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 32). Only when fertility (*ge* ꉆ) fell from the sky to earth, rotted for three years, and sent white mist back up to the sky did red snow fall again—this time thrice over—and eventually become the "ancestors" and "progenitors" of today's Nuosu (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 35, see also lxx–lxxi).

Blood and red snow that fell from the sky may have secured the origins of Zhyge Alu, humankind, and other creatures. But these vital red substances also presaged the later destruction of the world at the hands of the sky god, who sent the rains to wipe out the then-current generation of humans, animals, and plants with a massive flood (Bender 2008, 32). Ngeti Gunzy sent this rain in revenge for the myth-historical wrestling match that took place after his spirit emissary Ddiwo Layi (ꄓꆹꑌꀊ) went to earth to harvest crops and grains (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 48–49). While setting about his task on earth, Ddiwo Layi sought to challenge the human hero Ssedi Shuofu (ꂾꂱꃅꉼ) to a wrestling match but did not find him at home. Later, Ssedi Shuofu learned from his mother that a spirit had visited in hopes of wrestling with him. Excited to take up the challenge, Ssedi Shuofu raced out to find Ddiwo Layi in a forest. But when he found no one waiting for him, he smashed up the "piece of wood" in which Ddiwo Layi had hidden, accidentally crushing him there (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 49). Variations on this myth are in routine circulation, and I learned a somewhat different version from the Nuosu anthropologist I call Tuosa, who is from Nila and explained that Ssedi Shuofu had wrestled three times with Ddiwo Layi. Their first wrestling match ended in the spirit defeating the hero, while the second match ended in the hero defeating the spirit. But the third and final wrestling match ended in the hero throwing the spirit down so hard that it cracked its head open against a stone or tree and died. Although Ssedi Shuofu was mighty enough to have killed a spirit, he feared the retribution that would come his way and

so placed Ddiwo Layi inside a hollow piece of wood, which, as the seasons changed, became covered in snow. Eventually the snow melted and carried Ddiwo Layi's body out of the piece of wood, exposing it to the view of Ngeti Gunzy.

Enraged at the death of his emissary, Ngeti Gunzy retaliated by causing an enormous flood, from which only one lone man survived (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 50–52). Through the help of clever animal friends, this man managed to marry Ngeti Gunzy's youngest daughter and propagate humankind into the future through their union (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 52–56). But to Nuosu familiar with any version of this tale, the difficulties in rescuing humankind are all too apparent and suggest that care should be taken in all matters related to Ngeti Gunzy, who depending on his mood may seek to generate, transform, destroy, or renew life. Red snowfall is, then, an allegory for both the generations-old battle in northeastern Liangshan and for the dangers of setting large chains of social and cosmic events in motion—from the earliest snowfall that could not transform into living creatures, to the red snowfall that became today's Nuosu, or to the flood that Ngeti Gunzy sent to wipe out humankind. To avoid summoning dangers of this sort again, many Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan now disguise or defer certain elements of display during the Fire Festival season. They reclaim their souls from Ngeti Gunzy in the usual summer months but refer to their household-based sacrifices as "turning back the enemy" (*jji jo* ꉬꆹ),[3] a turn of phrase that highlights the desire to ward off battles at this dangerous time of year. Their competitions also tend to be moved to the autumn sheep shearing season (*chursha* ꀭꀠ), which is a vivacious time of play for children that takes place outside of the Fire Festival's celebratory window, although some may port their competitions to the state-sponsored "Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival" (Ch. *Meiguxian Yizu Jianyangmaojie* 美姑县彝族剪羊毛节) that is held during the summer in Limu Moggu.[4] Crucially, this change of name and date enables Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan to atone for the myth-historical wrestling match without risk of ushering in a disaster that could end the world as they know it.

Given this, I propose that Nuosu across Liangshan use their local logics of display to steer the Fire Festival in their preferred direction. I show how this works by comparing the Fire Festival in Nila, which is part of western Liangshan, to the apparent absence of the festival in Limu Moggu and across northeastern Liangshan. Many Nuosu in these areas "model" and "mirror" their social and cosmic orders during the Fire Festival, but do so in ways that push differently at the edges of their ontologies (cf. Handelman 1981, 331, see also 340, 344; Handelman 1992, 11; Handelman 1998, 5, see also 49). Whereas Nuosu in Nila produce ostentatious displays that invite the sky god to signal his satisfaction with them, Nuosu in Limu Moggu tend to defer any competitions until the autumn sheep shearing and disguise their sacrificial ritual to Ngeti Gunzy with an unconventional name. Across Liangshan, then, the Fire Festival unleashes different and often personalized ways of engaging with, unsettling, and even stepping outside of this season of social and cosmic renewal.

Let me be clear here at the start that my ethnography of the Fire Festival is fuller in Nila than it is in Limu Moggu. This is for a couple of reasons. First, while I have conducted fieldwork regularly in Nila over the course of fifteen years, I have only briefly visited Limu Moggu in 2019. Second, the Fire Festival goes largely uncelebrated

across northeastern Liangshan, to the extent that many Nuosu even characterize it as a place that lacks the Fire Festival altogether. Still, my discussion of Nila and Limu Moggu is enough to show that many Nuosu in these parts of Liangshan use display to accomplish worldmaking acts. My argument here unfolds through several related paths. I start with a brief discussion of how two-way displays may enable people anywhere to evoke—and even mirror—the sentiments they hope to instill in invisible authorities such as Ngeti Gunzy. Then I turn to my ethnography of the Fire Festival competitions and sacrifices that many Nuosu in Nila make to their land spirits, ancestors, guardian spirits, spirit helpers, Ngeti Gunzy, and sometimes even culture heroes like Zhyge Alu. This leads me to a comparative discussion of how Nuosu in Limu Moggu defer their Fire Festival competitions and disguise their sacrifices for it. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that these different approaches to the Fire Festival throw light not only on how people, spirits, and gods collectively revitalize the cosmos but on the value of analyzing their worldmaking acts through the lens of display.

Two-way displays

Communicating with gods and spirits is nearly always a delicate act, which is why many Nuosu go to great lengths to initiate two-way displays in the form of Fire Festival competitions, sacrifices, torch bearing, and other entertainment. Two-way displays open up a social space where people try to win over the spirits in the hopes that they will reciprocate. These displays often mirror the invisible authority of gods and spirits, serve as a form of ritual blandishment to them, and enable a "powerful visual manifestation of [their] presence" (Kendall and Ariati 2023). But what two-way displays ultimately accomplish depends on how they are made in the first place.

A good example of how two-way displays unfold as moving, lively, performative, and deeply communicative engagements with the spirits is found in the Mongolian shaman's mirror, which is composed of two surfaces. Whereas Mongols often "inspect the mirror's outer shiny surface" to gain a window into the spirit world, the spirits "who operate from the realm behind or inside the mirror" gaze out from its rough surface onto human beings (Humphrey 2007, 173). The shaman's mirror, then, "catalyses, as a technology of producing visibility," an especially rich "imagination" of the invisible authority of the spirits (ibid., 174). This is particularly evident in a form of divination in which Buryat Mongol shamans ask their spirit helpers a question, pour vodka (or some other distilled clear liquor) onto the surface of their mirrors, and wait for their spirit helpers to shape the vodka's evaporated residue into a thin film, the image of which is interpreted (Swancutt 2006, 344–45). Divinatory outcomes are based on the premise that Buryat spirits "are the ultimate creators and purveyors of information" and may freely observe everything in the human world, while Buryat people can only imaginatively interpret the images that the spirits display to them on the shaman's mirror (ibid., 338). These two-way displays are shaped by both the power relations between Buryat people and spirits and by the different optics of worldmaking available to them. So, while Buryat people must rely heavily on their imaginations to envision the worldmaking prospects that the spirits show them,

they can harness two-way displays to steer these same prospects in their preferred direction (Swancutt 2012a, 79–80, 84–91).

Similar power relations, optics, and opportunities to steer worldmaking are at play in the two-way displays that Nuosu hold with gods or spirits, even though their cosmology is different to that of the Buryats and other Mongols (cf. Swancutt 2012b; 2020). Many Nuosu in Nila, for example, start their household rituals by lighting a bundle of pine branches (sometimes paired with other plants) using fire from the household hearth. They wave these smoldering branches around the ritual space to purify it before placing them on the ground outdoors in front of the household threshold. The flames and smoke rising from these branches help to alert Ngeti Gunzy, the ancestors, and other spirits to the ritual space where their assistance is needed. When the spirits arrive at the ritual space, they may offer their own communicative displays—one of which is to make a sacrificial animal shake its body as a sign that it is an acceptable ritual offering. Yet the stakes of any two-way display are much higher during the Fire Festival, when the power relations with Ngeti Gunzy are at their most extreme, because he is awaiting his sacrificial payments and every Nuosu person is vulnerable to soul loss. Here, many Nuosu strive to instill favorable sentiments in Ngeti Gunzy through vibrant competitions and sacrifices without, however, knowing when he may suddenly signal his displeasure through the most irreversible of tragedies—a human death.[5] It is only after Ngeti Gunzy has taken the life of a seemingly ill or even healthy person that his dissatisfaction tends to become known. Faced with this uncertainty throughout the Fire Festival season, many Nuosu use savvy forms of display to please Ngeti Gunzy and other spirits.

Displays of competition and death

Two-way displays lie at the heart of both the official Fire Festival events in the town center of Nila and the informal celebrations in its country villages, where many Nuosu children improvise play-contests during the day and light handmade torches or bonfires at night (figure 2). Everything, though, is scaled up in the town center, where there are enough competitors that some events start off with auditions before moving to the main elimination rounds (figure 3). Prizes are given to winners on stage, including diploma-like certificates, trophies, and discreetly presented cash (figure 4), which are handed over by judges who invest many hours in the competitions, where crowds of spectators press up against their shoulders to get a better view (figure 5). Local and sometimes national television crews film the contests and hold interviews with knowledgeable judges. The full week of festivities leads up to a grand finale that features winners of the singing contests, followed by the Fire Festival extravaganza that boasts invited singers and dancers from elsewhere in China. All these events tend to be scheduled before Nuosu pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy on the last day of the Fire Festival.

High above in the heavens, Ngeti Gunzy watches these many festivities unfold. Every effort is made to ensure that the official competitions go smoothly, but they are ultimately beholden to the vagaries of the weather, the often-finicky sound systems, the nerves of the competitors, the personal preferences of the judges, and

Figure 2. Children in a country village of Nila at twilight, who had filled a back basket with torches made from dried branches, possibly including artemisia, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 3. Competitors in the traditional clothing competition on a stage erected in the Old Square of Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 4. Awarding the winner of the verbal dueling competition a diploma, a plastic trophy shaped like a torch, and cash in the Old Square of Nila, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 5. Judging a Fire Festival competition in the Old Square of Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

the ambience of amateur theater that puts pressure on everyone. Still, many Nuosu tend to consider that if the competitions are pleasing to them, then they will likely please Ngeti Gunzy, too. Even mishaps may contribute to the fun of the spectacle, as I learned during the final verbal dueling contest of 2019 in Nila, which took place just as the afternoon was turning to dusk. Keen to photograph the competition, I managed to position myself near to the stage, amid a huddle of spectators taking cover from the rain under a pop-up gazebo. From this vantage point, I had sight of the judges, including my long-term research partner, the Nuosu ethnohistorian I call Misu. Halfway through the competition, one competitor spent an unusually long time on his speech riffs. He paused in forgetfulness, stumbled over words, and slurred his speech. It soon became clear that, before coming on stage, this competitor had spent the day indulging in the Nuosu pastime of decadent drinking with friends. A young spectator at my side became bored and complained that he should wrap up his act, yet the competitor waxed ever more lyrical about the Nuosu heavens as he did. I saw Misu and his fellow judges try to stifle their laughing, while the spectators behind them started giggling, until eventually even the youth by my side jokingly asked if we should all just head out to a bar. But no one took any serious issue with this contestant, whose high-flown riffs about the heavens had somewhat missed their mark.

After the competition had ended, I joined Misu and his wife, who I call Minu, on the walk home along the streets of Nila, which were packed with spectators. They were amused with the drunken speech riffs but expressed mild disappointment at finding all the competitors less accomplished than in previous years. Misu explained that the competition rules in Nila forbid the winners from entering a new Fire Festival event for three years, so that more people may have the chance to win. Since many of the best verbal duelers in Nila had won in recent years, the 2019 line-up was filled mostly with people who had received low scores in the past. I wondered to myself if any problems might have arisen from Ngeti Gunzy having watched the drunken

competitor. However, no one expressed concerns that this competitor might have insulted the heavens; nor did anyone seem to think that Ngeti Gunzy might retaliate for this display of drunken revelry. At worst, the competitor was mildly mocked for his own lack of oratorial skills.

Nevertheless, the difficulty in knowing who might become the next target of Ngeti Gunzy's wrath became clear two days later when I visited the ethnological research institute in Nila. I was absorbed in an interview when Misu suddenly appeared at the office door with a worried expression on his face. He quickly informed his colleagues that he had received a telephone call and had to race out immediately to be with an uncle of his who lived close to his home and appeared to be at death's door. It was just after midday on July 23—three days before everyone in Nila would pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy—and Misu was hurrying before it might be too late. A couple of hours later, I went to hear Misu's son, who I call Yie, perform in the first round of the singing competition, but it was announced over the loudspeakers that Yie had telephoned to tell the judges he could not make it. The judges gave no further explanation and moved to the next candidate. Casting my eyes around the audience and the Old Square where the competition took place, I noticed that Misu's younger daughter, who I call Nravie, had not appeared either, despite her plans to come hear her brother sing. An ominous feeling came over me as I realized that Misu's entire family had gathered at the neighboring home of his uncle in what turned out to be his last hours.

However, on the following day, Nravie competed in the traditional clothing pageant, for which I was a guest judge, while Yie performed in the final singing competition that was part of the Fire Festival grand finale. The judges had allowed him to perform on what appeared to be compassionate grounds and without penalty for having missed the earlier elimination round. I found out that the affairs surrounding Misu's uncle had also been smoothed out, including his funeral, which had been postponed for about a week so that it would not fall on the day of the tiger (the same kind of day on which he had been born).[6] His funeral was set instead for an auspicious date after July 26—the day on which Ngeti Gunzy would receive his sacrifices in Nila and the Fire Festival would conclude. It turned out that Ngeti Gunzy had displayed his wrath only after he had decided that the fate of Misu's uncle was past the point of no return. This made it all but impossible to correlate the death of Misu's uncle with any one specific event during the Fire Festival, including the drunken verbal dueling we had seen just days earlier. All that anyone could do at this point, then, was to keep enjoying—and surviving—the Fire Festival until they could pay Ngeti Gunzy his sacrificial debt in exchange for their own souls.

Sacrificial displays

Early in the morning on the final day of the 2019 Fire Festival, I headed to Misu's household as I had done on two previous occasions to join them in paying their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy. Misu started the day by sacrificing a chicken to the local land spirit as part of an elaborate two-way display. He heated stones in his household hearth, transferred them to a long-handled roasting pan, tossed distilled

white liquor on them to make them steam, and used the steam to purify the hearth room of his home. Throughout this act of fumigation, Misu chanted to his household's guardian spirits and spirit helpers, and poured distilled liquor into the small cups he kept atop of the household altar for them. Like many Nuosu altars, Misu's took the form of a short wooden shelf fixed high up on a wall near to the hearth, on the side of the home devoted to its own residents. When he had finished chanting, Misu headed outdoors with another heated stone and seated himself on a stool to fumigate a yellow-feathered chicken, which Nuosu typically consider to be the luckiest color of chicken to sacrifice during the Fire Festival.[7] Holding the chicken upside down with one hand, he placed its head in a traditional Nuosu lacquerware bowl filled with water, and used a thin stick with his other hand to press its head down against the base of the bowl until it had drowned (figure 6).[8] As Misu explained, he had slaughtered the chicken in the way that he considered best for the Fire Festival, even though this method is unusual. Reminding me that Nuosu often adapt their Fire Festival sacrifices from year to year in hopes of improving their prosperity, he noted that his own approach had already borne fruit. The excrement that the chicken had deposited next to the bowl and the maize kernels that it had choked up as it drowned were both, Misu declared, a sign from the spirits that his household would be "prosperous" (Ch. *facai de* 发财的) in the coming year. Putting the drowned chicken into a basin, he poured hot water on it to loosen its feathers and ease the task of plucking while telling me that the very last Fire Festival ritual, known as "burning the chicken's feathers" (*vazo jjie* ꃅꆹꑟ), would take place when all the guests had gone but the family members were assembled, usually about two days later.

Returning to the hearth, Misu waited as Minu roasted the chicken wings on their electric stove top. As soon as they were cooked, Misu and Nravie ate the chicken wings as quickly as they could to prevents ghosts from entering the home and shoo

Figure 6. Sacrificing a yellow-feathered chicken to the local land spirit on the morning of the final day of the Fire Festival in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 7. Chanting to the culture hero Zhyge Alu as well the household's spirit helpers and guardian spirits with offerings of chicken meat, broth, and boiled bitter buckwheat cakes during the sacrifice to the local land spirit. Kindling lit from the household hearth burns in the household courtyard, sending fire and smoke signals skyward in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

out any that might have managed to enter. Minu then prepared traditional bitter buckwheat cakes for the Fire Festival breakfast, shaping the dough in the form of human genitalia. With an embarrassed laugh, she told me that they looked funny and joked that they also needed to be eaten quickly to keep away unwanted ghosts. But in fact, the idea here was to engage the ancestors, guardian spirits, and spirit helpers of Misu's household in a two-way display that would encourage the propagation of people, livestock, and grains for the year ahead. Three bitter buckwheat cakes were therefore formed into flat and round pieces to represent the women in the home, while two were made like phalluses to represent its men, and all of them were boiled. Then Minu and Misu prepared a fresh mug of tea, a shot glass filled with distilled liquor, and some chicken meat, broth, and bitter buckwheat cakes neatly added to a large lacquerware bowl. Placing this full breakfast for their guardian spirits, other spirit helpers, and ancestors on the household altar, Misu requested that they facilitate his household's prosperity in the coming year as well as the research being done.

Next, Misu and Yie took this two-way display further by lighting small pieces of kindling from the household hearth and carrying them outdoors into the courtyard, along with a small bowl filled with chicken meat and broth and a lacquerware dish holding a bitter buckwheat cake. These pieces of burning kindling were reminiscent of wooden torches. Positioning himself directly across from the household threshold, Misu chanted to the hero Zhyge Alu as well as to his household's guardian spirits and spirit helpers over these food offerings, while the burning kindling that Yie laid on the ground sent fire and smoke signals—albeit, somewhat subdued by the rain—skyward (figure 7). To complete the chicken sacrifice, Misu splashed oblations of chicken soup to the spirits in each of the cardinal directions and returned indoors

to join Minu and Nravie in quickly eating the last of the roast chicken to keep away ghosts. With this first ritual done, everyone visibly relaxed, and Misu brought down the food he had placed on the altar so that we could enjoy a breakfast of chicken meat, soup, and bitter buckwheat cakes together. As we ate, Misu noticed a grain of maize was still caught in the beak of the sacrificial chicken and declared this to be a rare sign of prosperity. Cleaning the meat from its head so that he could divine the shape and direction in which the chicken's tongue bone pointed, he also confirmed that his household would be very prosperous (cf. Swancutt 2021, 29–31). The divination served as another two-way display, making it clear that the spirits had approved of the chicken sacrifice. Misu then explained that, on the following day, he would visit his home village outside of the Nila town center and stop by a different village on the return journey to pay respects at the household of his uncle who had recently died. His busy schedule meant that he would need to hold the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers that very evening, rather than two days later, and that I would witness it.

But first, we awaited the arrival of the yellow-colored sheep that Misu's household had purchased and would sacrifice to Ngeti Gunzy in exchange for their souls. Although heavy rain had started to fall, the ram was fumigated with smoldering stalks of bamboo from Misu's garden as soon as it arrived, to purify it and send a smoke signal to Ngeti Gunzy. Donning Nuosu capes, but no other finery on account of the rain, Misu and Minu were joined by Yie, who had put on the same traditionally embroidered jacket that he had worn days earlier for the final singing competition of the Fire Festival. As household head, Misu would have been able to chant to Ngeti Gunzy himself during the ritual for the descent and exchange of the soul, but he preferred to invite a priest to help steer this ritual of social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction.

Moments later, the priest arrived by motorcycle wearing ordinary clothes and without any priestly accouterments, as he would only need to facilitate what is ultimately a householder's ritual. One of Misu's neighbors also came to help with the heavy lifting needed to display the sacrificial sheep. Misu, Minu, and Yie then gathered in a seated huddle facing the household threshold, with the main door to their house wide open as is customary during Nuosu rituals, so that nothing would obstruct them from recovering their souls. In one deft movement, the neighbor lifted the sheep, which he balanced in the crux of his arms, and moved it in circular motions above Misu's family (figure 8).[9] The sacrificial animal is held over the right sides of the bodies of men and boys and moved in nine counterclockwise circles, while for women and girls it is held over the left sides of their bodies and moved in seven clockwise circles.[10] After this, the sacrificial animal is rubbed against each of the householder's bodies. Throughout this work of offering the ram to Ngeti Gunzy, the priest chanted and called back the lost souls of Misu's household (figure 9), before racing off to perform the same work at the many other households that had summoned him for the day. Finally, the neighbor and Yie smothered the ram, which is the preferred mode of slaughter at the Fire Festival.[11] Everyone in Misu's household was relieved to have recovered their souls from Ngeti Gunzy.

Figure 8. Circling the sacrificial ram above the householders for the ritual of the descent and exchange of the soul in Nila, 2016. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 9. Nuosu priest chanting to facilitate the ritual of the descent and exchange of the soul in Nila, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 10. Gallbladder from the sacrificial sheep for the Fire Festival supported by the right edge of the household altar, which holds alcohol offerings and effigies made of plants from previous rituals in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

While butchering the ram, Yie called out excitedly that he had extracted an especially large gallbladder. Nuosu across Liangshan have traditionally used the gallbladders of slaughtered animals to display the amount of prosperity that a fresh kill has brought to the household. The larger the gallbladder, the more ample the prosperity. Once removed, the gallbladder is typically stuck to the household wall just beneath the altar using only the vital fluids on its surface to keep it in place, where it is allowed to remain on display (for months and sometimes years) until it drops of its own accord. Yie and Minu tried sticking the sacrificial ram's gallbladder to the household wall, but it kept falling to the ground due to its size and weight until Misu hit upon the makeshift solution of positioning it just above the altar, allowing it to rest against it for support (figure 10).

Several hours were then devoted to cooking, and everyone was pleased that the sun came out in time for our mutton feast because sunshine is itself a display of social and cosmic renewal on the final day of the Fire Festival. As we relaxed, Misu approached me to share more details about the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers. He told me that this ritual is ideally held by small children in the household, but because his children are now grown, he would conduct it himself. Adding that our colleague Tuosa often overstates the importance of Ngeti Gunzy and the myth-historical death of his spirit emissary, Misu explained that the Fire Festival accomplishes more than paying a debt to the sky god and recovering human souls. It is also a season in which Nuosu seek to make the coming year prosperous, while gathering with relatives and friends to celebrate and chat. To underscore his point, Misu enumerated three distinct outcomes that Nuosu wish for when burning the chicken's feathers. First is the removal of all ghosts, illnesses, hunger, dirty or impure things, and the cold that comes from lack of clothing and impoverishment. Second is the burning and sending away of insects that eat people's grains, crops, and plants. Third is the summoning home of the souls of livestock animals. The whole point of the Fire Festival, Misu

Figure 11. Stoking the fire during the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. A bottle of distilled liquor and a lacquerware goblet filled with an alcohol offering to the spirits is in the background. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

concluded, is to steer everything in a prosperous direction so that the year ahead will be smooth, successful, filled with good weather, abundant in crops and livestock, and free of damaging insects, ghosts, and bad or impure things that are sent away from the home.

Summoning displays

As the time had come for Misu to hold the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers, he collected some fresh sticks of bamboo from his garden and seated himself again in his courtyard to prepare for another two-way display. Splitting the bamboo sticks with a dagger into ten tidy halves, he explained that they would be assembled into two small effigies of animal feeding troughs. Animal feed and salt are ideally added to these troughs during the ritual, but Misu said that he would need to use flour in lieu of the animal feed that he had run out of at home. The ritual would be held some distance away, so that any ghosts or impure things that might be attracted to it would not find their way back to Misu's household. Gathering scraps of wood from his garden to use as kindling, he dried them over the hearth so they would burn quickly, before handing a bag filled with the feathers of the sacrificial chicken to a neighbor's child who came along to help carry it. We headed out with Yie, a friend of his who had just arrived, and several more of the neighborhood's children to a nearby waste ground covered in scrub and rubbish, which Misu declared was suitable for burning the chicken's feathers.

Misu immediately prepared a small fire for the ritual with the dried kindling, pouring distilled liquor over it in a clockwise circle to fumigate the area and send a fiery smoke signal to the heavens. Dropping handfuls of chicken feathers onto the flames, he explained that they are burned so they will not rot and attract the insects that eat the grains, crops, and plants that people grow. He also poured an offering to the spirits into a small lacquerware goblet that he placed near to the fire, which he stoked from time to time (figure 11). With all eyes fixed upon him, Misu declared that adults teach children how to hold this ritual and then proceeded to construct miniature effigies of the feeding troughs for livestock. Sorting eight of the split bamboo sticks into pairs, he pushed them into the ground so that they stood vertically in "x-shaped" formations that resembled the support stands for troughs. Then he balanced a split bamboo stick across each of them to evoke the hollowed-out logs in which livestock feed is placed. But as he had forgotten to bring the feed (or flour to be used in lieu of it) and salt, he instructed Yie to race home and retrieve them. Once the salt—which was all that Yie could find—had been added to the effigies, Misu confirmed that this was sufficient to feed the souls of his household's livestock.

Then Misu started chanting to send away bad things and the insects that harm crops, enjoining Yie to chant with him while reminding everyone that small children usually conduct this ritual, but that they would need to follow their own personalized approach (figure 12).[12] Staring on in wonder, the neighborhood children gathered around us did not join in the chanting but observed the ritual with curiosity. Misu chuckled with slight embarrassment as he explained that he and Yie would now need to imitate the calls that Nuosu make to summon animals to eat at their troughs. He

Figure 12. Chanting during the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 13. Effigies of livestock feeding troughs, filled with salt, constructed for the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

pointed out that these vocal displays would be a way of ritually calling back the lost souls of horses, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, and cattle—the latter of which, he added, Nuosu classify together with yaks, but not water buffalo. Much like people who lose their souls before the onset of the Fire Festival, he said that livestock are bereft of their souls until this ritual is held. But when coaxed home in animal language and with the attractive salt (and, where possible, feed) that is added to the effigies of animal troughs, the souls of livestock understand that they are being summoned to return to their bodies (figure 13). So, for several minutes, Misu and Yie interspersed onomatopoetic imitations of animal calls into their Nuosu-language chanting. To conclude the ritual, Misu chanted some simple words that any Nuosu person can use

to expel "all manner of ghosts" (*nyicy hamo* ꆹꀋꃅ), illnesses, poverty, bad or impure things, and the want of clothing that leads to feeling cold. Taking one last moment to admonish the insects to leave his crops and plants, Misu declared that the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers would help to ensure the health and propagation of his grains and livestock. As we watched the embers burning the chicken's feathers die down, I thanked Misu, who insisted that he had only held a very small and minor ritual. By then the evening had set in, and Misu returned home to rest. I therefore headed out, as did Yie and his friend, to watch the carrying of torches, which was the final Fire Festival display of the year in the Nila county town.

Deferring and disguising display

Just three days after the Fire Festival had ended in Nila, I joined Misu, the priest I call Obbu, Tuosa, and one of his anthropology students for a research trip to northeastern Liangshan, where we learned that people approach their festive displays rather differently. We traveled in Tuosa's jeep for the better part of three hours before reaching our first destination, the city of Xichang, known in Nuosu as Labbu Orro (ꃅꂷꀠꊿ), which is the seat of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. Although we had arranged to meet some local priests on our arrival, they had been summoned away from the city to assist numerous households in the countryside that were paying their sacrificial debts to Ngeti Gunzy. No one was surprised about this, since the exact dates for the Fire Festival vary across Liangshan. But Tuosa decided that it would be a better use of our time to travel to Limu Moggu early the next day so we could meet with some other priests and scholars. However, when we reached Limu Moggu, the priests there explained that many people in the area were also busy paying their sacrificial debts to the sky god. Since the Fire Festival had become an unexpected obstacle to our plans yet again, we jokingly folded a comparative discussion of its festive displays into the small talk in our introductions.

We learned then from the priests in Limu Moggu that the Fire Festival is considered by many in the area to be an understated—or by some accounts even uncelebrated—occasion. As they explained, Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan hold the key sacrifice to Ngeti Gunzy during the Fire Festival season, but do not call it "the descent and exchange of the soul." They added that it is also customary across northeastern Liangshan to port the Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season. Tracing these differences to the local lore about an ancient battle that summoned forth red snowfall during the Fire Festival, which many now associate with extreme bloodshed, the priests confirmed that no one wants to invite a similar disaster again. Many Nuosu across northeastern Liangshan therefore pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy in summer to recover their souls in a timely manner but refer to their ritual as "turning back the enemy." It seemed to us that this alternative name would help to disguise the ritual's associations with the Fire Festival and to ward off the possibility of summoning red snowfall. Similarly, deferring the Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season would incorporate them into a celebratory moment already associated with children's play—which is itself a kind of disguise.

Everyone's curiosity was piqued by the different local and personalized approaches that Nuosu may take to the Fire Festival. But no one, including the priests from Limu Moggu, was able to guess who had been the enemies of northeastern Liangshan during the ancient battle that led to red snowfall. Some days later I asked Tuosa, Misu, and Obbu if the strategy in Limu Moggu for rescheduling the Fire Festival competitions was meant to prevent a return to the myth-historical moment when Ngeti Gunzy sought to transform red snowfall into human beings, only to fail, and then succeed, before setting out to destroy humankind with a flood when his spirit emissary was killed. They agreed this could be why the Fire Festival appears to go uncelebrated in Limu Moggu but added that no one there seemed to have drawn this connection themselves. We were all left wondering whether the motivation across northeastern Liangshan to defer and disguise the Fire Festival was to ensure that this highly dangerous moment in Nuosu myth-history would not be repeated. After all, if Ngeti Gunzy had once been angry enough to destroy humankind with a flood—and had sent red snowfall to northeastern Liangshan again many generations later—then it was conceivable that he might, in another moment of anger, send red snow to earth as a way of transforming the world. It was even possible that Ngeti Gunzy might repeat the old chapter of myth-history in which he had transformed red snowfall into a new crop of beings that would replace the previous generation of humans, animals, and plants.

Concluding reflections on social and cosmic renewal

Of the many displays that Nuosu may unleash during the Fire Festival, the act of pleasing and pleading with Ngeti Gunzy is arguably the most important. However, what the vibrant competitions, sacrificial offerings, and other forms of ritual blandishment that make up the Fire Festival ultimately accomplish depends on how they unfold. Whereas Nuosu in Nila and across western Liangshan hold opulent two-way displays throughout the Fire Festival, Nuosu in Limu Moggu and across northeastern Liangshan disguise their sacrificial payments to Ngeti Gunzy under a different ritual name and tend to defer the timing of their competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season. Many Nuosu, then, follow their own local and personalized strategies for staging fun-loving competitions, paying their annual debt to Ngeti Gunzy, recovering lost souls, and steering social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction. Their different approaches to worldmaking throw light not only on the invisible authority of Ngeti Gunzy but on how the efforts to please him through two-way displays may shape human lives, for better and worse.

Fire Festival displays are meant to be moving, lively, and performative parts of a major season of social and cosmic renewal. Many Nuosu therefore harness these displays to communicate their wishes to invisible authorities, from Ngeti Gunzy to local land spirits, ancestors, guardian spirits, spirit helpers, and sometimes even the culture hero Zhyge Alu. When the Fire Festival is successful, Nuosu find that their wishes are fulfilled through the prosperity displayed to them in the year ahead. Where they are unsuccessful, Nuosu fail to usher in prosperity and may find that Ngeti Gunzy displays his wrath by taking a human life. The reciprocity implied in these two-

way displays underpins the "logic," following Don Handelman (1997, 1998), of the Fire Festival across Liangshan. It is also central to how many Nuosu approach each festive competition, sacrifice, and the fire and smoke signals that they send skyward during rituals. Yet many Nuosu choose to unsettle this logic through two-way displays that enable them to step outside of the social and cosmic order, as happens when the Fire Festival is disguised, deferred, and treated as a largely uncelebrated event in Limu Moggu and northeastern Liangshan. Here—and as the contributors to this issue show for other parts of Asia—display is used to push at the edges of an ontology, unleashing new meanings and possibilities. What the anthropology of display opens up, then, is a new way of envisioning how people and spirits steer rituals, festivals, public events, the cosmopolitics that animate myth-histories, and even the process of worldmaking itself.

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Notes

1. Nuosu terms are transliterated without tonal markers except in the case of certain authors' names that are conventionally spelled with them. Tonal markers in Nuosu are not pronounced and are written as consonants that always appear at the end of a syllable ("t" denotes a high tone, "x" denotes a high-mid tone, "p" denotes a low falling tone, and the mid tone has no marker). The "Fire Festival" (*Duzie* ꀋꉆ), for example, is a compound word composed of a syllable with a high tone followed by a syllable with a mid tone, which appears as "*Dutzie*" when written with

tonal markers. Similarly, the name of the sky god, "Ngeti Gunzy" (ꆏꌠꀕꋍ), is composed of two compound words that move from a mid tone to a high tone, followed by a high-mid tone, and finally a mid tone. It is written as "Ngetit Guxnzy" with tonal markers. All Nuosu terms are also rendered in Nuosu script, while Chinese terms are preceded by "Ch.," transliterated into pinyin, and rendered in Chinese characters.

2. Many Nuosu in the southern region of Liangshan collectively sacrifice an ox to pay their debt to Ngeti Gunzy, rather than holding separate household-based sacrifices for each family.

3. "Turning back the enemy" can alternately mean "turning back the west" (cf. Jiarimuji and Yang Da-chuan 2022, 100), an interpretation that suggests the generations-old battle in northeastern Liangshan may have been fought with the Han ethnic majority of China, other minority nationalities who came from the west, such as Tibetans, or perhaps even Nuosu from Nila or elsewhere in western Liangshan. Notably, "turning back the enemy" is the name of an altogether different ritual in western Liangshan that may be held to cure people of madness or to avenge the death of a person killed in a fight.

4. There are in fact three Nuosu sheep shearing (*yoshacy* ꑭꊿꉆ) seasons, the exact timings of which are dependent on the weather, starting with the spring sheep shearing (*nyisha* ꑍꊿ) that is held before sheep are taken to the mountains or forests to escape the summer heat. This is followed by the autumn sheep shearing (*chursha* ꆹꊿ) that tends to take place when the wool is at its best, because the grass is not yet at its highest and it is still clean of burrs. Winter sheep shearing (*shaga* ꊿꌩ) is usually only done when the wool is thick; otherwise many Nuosu wait until spring to shear their sheep again. However, the Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival is held in summer at the height of the tourist season, so that it may roughly coincide with the official Fire Festival celebrations elsewhere in Liangshan, unfold as a competitive attraction to them, and evoke—or even take the place of—the autumn sheep shearing (Jan Karlach, personal communication, May 14 and 23, 2023, and Yueqi Zuoxi, personal communication, May 15 and 23, 2023). Nuosu in Limu Moggu and northeastern Liangshan, then, may choose to port their Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season, to the Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival, or to both events. For more on Nuosu sheep shearing and wool production, see Bender (2008, 22).

5. The irreversible tragedy of death is reflected in the poetry of Aku Wuwu, perhaps the most prominent poet in Liangshan. One of Aku Wuwu's most famous poems laments the death of the culture hero Zhyge Alu and the unsuccessful effort to reverse his death by laboriously calling back his soul (Aku Wuwu, Bender, and Jjiepa Ayi 2005).

6. As is common across Asia, Nuosu recognize animal days, months, and years. Care is often taken to ensure there are no conflicts between a Nuosu person's astrology and the day of his or her own funeral, which starts the deceased's journey to the afterlife.

7. This chicken is ideally a young hen that has not yet laid eggs.

8. There are many different views among Nuosu on how to slaughter a chicken for the Fire Festival, which, as a household-based ritual, may be adapted to improve the prosperity of each household.

9. Before the sacrificial animal is circled above the householders during the ritual for the descent and exchange of the soul, a special rope is often woven together with three sticks (one black, one white, and one grey), which may be used to touch each of the householder's heads. I did not observe

the use of this rope woven together with the three sticks at Misu's household in 2015, 2016, or 2019. However, many Nuosu consider that each household approaches the Fire Festival in the way that seems best suited to enhancing prosperity for the coming year. Some Nuosu even slaughter a different kind of animal or make other small adjustments each year when paying their sacrificial debts to Ngeti Gunzy, in hopes of attracting more prosperity than they had done previously.

10. The circling of sacrificial animals over householders follows the same logic of directional movement as the gestures that Nuosu traditionally use to indicate who is part of the in-group or out-group. Men and the living are typically members of the in-group and associated with a counterclockwise gesture using the right hand, whereas women and the dead are usually members of the out-group and associated with a clockwise gesture using the left hand (cf. Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, lxxviii).

11. Misu explained that the sheep is smothered because its meat is tastier if no blood has been lost. Later, during our travels in Limu Moggu, he added that on a good day like the Fire Festival, it is best not to let blood flow from the sacrificial animal (for more on the sacrificing of sheep, see Bender 2008, 21). Some priests from Limu Moggu agreed with Misu that the chicken sacrificed to the land spirit should be drowned, although they had not heard of using a stick to keep its head submerged under water. No one knew the exact reason why the chicken should be drowned.

12. No specific formulas are used in these chants, which express the householder's wish to send away all bad things, ghosts, and disasters. The souls of lost livestock are also the only spirits that pay attention to these chants. Misu explained that in addition to burning the chicken's feathers, Nuosu may burn wild plants that bear fruits, which are common across Liangshan.

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