



“Tribes of Snow”

Animals and Plants in the Nuosu *Book of Origins*

An epic narrative poem known as *Hnewo tepyy* (*Book of Origins*) holds a central place in the mythic and ritual imagination of the Nuosu people of south-west China. Existing both as oral performances and oral-connected written texts, the narrative relates the origins of the sky, earth, geographical features, and life forms—culminating in the origins of the forebears of the Nuosu people. Animals and plants populate the landscape of the narrative world, clustering in the categories of wild and domestic. Individual species tend to be associated with specific niches in the natural and human-modified landscape, their origins occurring in a dynamic of creation and destruction throughout the ages. Among the forerunners of living beings in the present age are the “tribes of snow,” catalogued in taxons comprised of wild plants and animals. Moreover, many portions of the epic feature domesticated stock and crops that are associated with, and in some cases even sanction, Nuosu customs current today. In an approach drawing on folkloristic theory and ecocriticism, this article introduces and outlines a hitherto undocumented version of the *Hnewo tepyy*, examines how select images of life forms in the text relate to historic and contemporary Nuosu culture, and suggests that in the traditions of the *Hnewo*, boundaries between the realms are conceptually mitigated by the ultimate origin of all life in the sky.

KEYWORDS: Yi—Nuosu—origins—myth—animals—plants

IN 2005 an interdisciplinary international conference entitled “*Bimo* Practice, Traditional Knowledge, and Ecosystem Sustainability in the 21st Century” was held in the town of Meigu 美姑, in the Greater Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture (*Da Liangshan Yizu zizhi zhou* 大凉山彝族自治州), Sichuan province, China (BENDER 2006a). The theme of the conference dealt with elements of the traditional world view of the Yi 彝 ethnic group of southwest China in relation to the dynamic changes affecting virtually all indigenous cultures in the country. In the spirit of the emerging field of “ecocriticism” several papers dealt with environmental issues in traditional oral and oral-connected literary works, including a narrative known as *Hnewo tepyy* (translated here as *Book of Origins*) (MA 2004), an important text still in circulation among the Yi subgroup known as the Nuosu 諾蘇 (Nosu).¹

Ecocriticism has been described as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment,” with much effort expended on examining nature writing and more recent “green” writings of ecologically-minded poets and novelists (GLOTFELTY and FROMM 1996, xix). Yet, the boundaries of the approach continue to expand. GARRARD, in the concluding paragraph of a book of essays summing up recent currents in the approach, hopes that future developments in the study of literature and the environment will ideally be informed by both “artistic and scientific insight” and “committed to the biological diversity of the planet and its inhabitants” (GARRARD 2004, 182). Along this line, Eric L. BALL, in a recent essay on the work of a Cretan folk poet, encourages folklorists to explore the potential of an ecological orientation in relevant aspects of their research (BALL 2006, 277). Given the situated-ness of many traditional oral and oral-connected literatures within rural ecosystems, the joining of ecocritical perspectives with folklore theory allows both interpretively nuanced and ethnographically pragmatic investigations of oral folk literature in relation to the dynamic natural environments in which its creators and transmitters act. In cases such as that of the Nuosu and other Yi groups, such an approach will allow a better understanding of Yi attitudes towards the natural and human-modified (anthropogenic) world, as well as how the environment figures in the traditional imagination as expressed in oral literature.

The *Hnewo* (a common folk designation) is a central narrative in the oral and oral-connected traditions of folk literature and ritual of the Nuosu (BAQIE and YANG 2001, 88–92; BAMO 2003, 33).² The content of the narrative explicitly and implicitly saturates daily life, even in less traditional communities. Existing in many versions—both oral and oral-connected written ones—the narrative portrays a

world in which Nuosu origin myths unfold as well as legends of early migrations. Even stories that are not in versions of the *Hnewo per se* can be contextualized in the story world of the master myth-narrative. Incidents and explanations in the narrative act as templates and guides for social behavior in a variety of situations today. These include kinship and gender relations, life cycle events such as weddings and funerals, customs for entertaining guests, the production and consumption of food, social comportment of individuals and groups, relationships with domestic and wild animals and plants, and so forth. In recent years, themes of the *Hnewo* have become ethnic emblems that are displayed in public forums and frequently appear in the literary works (especially poetry) of contemporary Nuosu poets and writers.³

As epic scholar John Miles Foley has insisted, oral poetry is filled with cultural integers—many metonymic—that reference traditional knowledge and convey meaning for insider audiences on levels beyond the understanding of outsiders to the tradition (FOLEY 1995, 39–41). This is certainly the case in the receptive traditions of the *Hnewo*, and the interest in this paper in ethnographic description is intended to provide readers with insight into Nuosu traditions referenced in the oral and oral-connected versions of the poem.⁴

The first parts of the narrative detail various stages in the appearance of life on earth. As the process unfolds, wild animals and plants appear within specific niches of the environment or are placed there by supernatural beings. Though some plants and creatures are difficult to identify precisely, the majority of the species listed in the narrative are those that inhabit (or have recently inhabited) the Nuosu regions today. References to domesticated plants and animals still raised by the Nuosu are also found in many passages.

In Nuosu rituals and folk beliefs, wild and domestic animals and plants tend to be categorized and treated differently. For instance, while priests (called *bimo*) utilize the teeth and claws of certain wild animals as ritual tokens valued for their attributed powers, domesticated animals are usually used when sacrifices are made to the spirits.⁵ While a number of wild trees and plants are important in rituals, the accoutrements of the *bimo* must be carried in loosely woven bags of cultivated hemp. As for food taboos, however, certain animals, both domestic (dogs and horses) and wild (monkeys, pandas, frogs, snakes, etc.), cannot be eaten. Also, Nuosu hunters say that wild musk deer and other game must be skinned according to certain protocols, some of which (such as making the initial skinning cuts on the legs in a certain order) are similar to those used in butchering domestic creatures. Thus, though at times clearly differentiated, the boundaries between wild nature and the human-modified world—marked by these living integers—are not always impermeable.

This permeability between boundaries may reflect an orientation towards the world that is reminiscent of those that Ingold has observed among hunter-gatherers and pastoralists. He suggests that in instances where the strict Western scholarly dichotomy between “society and nature” is not descriptive, there may instead be different forms of “engagement” in which humans and animals are “co-participants in the same world” (INGOLD 2000, 75). As in life, likewise, in the



FIGURE 1. A group of *bimo* priests participating in a large-scale protection ritual demonstration at the 4th International Conference on Yi Studies, Meigu county, Greater Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture Sichuan, 2005. Note the array of fresh cut sticks and wood splints, comprising the passageways of the spirits, and small freshly cut fir tree tops. To the left are woven grass effigies of harmful ghosts. Among the sacrifices are chickens and carp. The *bimo* wear woven wool cloaks (*rapla*) and felted wool hats. Slung on the back of the priest in the foreground is a “*rytu*,” the spirit quiver used to cast spells against ghosts, styled in the shape of a bear’s snout and open mouth. One of the *bimo* in the center has a smoking pouch, typically made of musk deer leather.

Hnewo, the realms of the wild and the human world at times intersect, and boundaries are not clearly distinguished.⁶ Yet, while immanent in life, these realms and intersections occur only rhetorically in an imaginary world keyed by a folk text such as the *Hnewo* (FOLEY 1995, 136–39). This is in line with INGOLD’s (2000, 76) observation that “while humans and animals have histories of their mutual relations, only humans narrate such histories. But to construct a narrative, one must already dwell in the world, and, in the dwelling, enter into relationships with its constituents, both human and non-human.” In the mythic realms of the *Hnewo*, the same too could be said for relationships with plants.

Beneath these sometimes permeable though bounded realms, and the distinctions between the domestic and wild in both actual life and the poem, there is, however, a holistic unity. This linkage, in terms of relations between the realm of mortal life and the spirit world, is mitigated by ritual sacrifice, highlighted by funeral rituals, and expedited by beliefs in the existence of parallel societies of gods on high and of man on earth. As described in several instances in the poem, life descends from the sky to earth, and at times a two-way traffic between earth and the sky is evident.

Stimulated by the ecological theme in Yi studies and recent interest on the part of some folklorists in expanding the boundaries of ecocriticism, this article discusses the frequent appearance of wild and domesticated animals and plants in a hitherto undocumented oral-connected version of the *Hnewo tepyy* nar-

rative. In the course of the discussion, basic information about the Nuosu and their environment will precede an examination of the relation between textual representations of animals and plants and real-life folk practices of the Nuosu, suggesting how the realms of the wild and domestic are distinct yet sometimes intersect in a biotic system that has its ultimate origins in the sky.⁷

THE NUOSU AND THEIR ENVIRONMENT

The Nuosu are a subgroup of a large ethnic group in southwest China officially designated as the Yi.⁸ In brief, the Nuosu are speakers of dialects of Northern Yi, number about two million, and live mostly in southern Sichuan 四川 and the bordering areas of northern Yunnan 雲南. The traditional economy is based on a mixture of animal husbandry—especially goats, sheep, horses, pigs, small cows, and chickens—and subsistence farming of buckwheat and other hardy grains, several varieties of potatoes, maize, beans, squash, tobacco, and other vegetable and root crops. Society is organized into patrilineal clans, and the traditional world view encompasses beliefs in nature spirits and malevolent ghosts. As explained in Note 5, traditional ritualists include two types: the male priests known as *bimo*, who are literate in the native writing system and conduct major rituals, such as the elaborate funeral rites; and male and female shamans (the *sunyi* and *monyi*, respectively) who deal with the depredations of lesser ghosts. The question of the non-mythical origins of ancestors of the Yi and the Nuosu is under debate, though theories suggest early migrations from northwest China, indigenous origins in the Yunnan-Guizhou provincial area, or some combination of these factors not yet fully understood (HARRELL 2001, 84).

The area in which most Nuosu reside today lies within a rough triangle encompassing the Greater Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture and the Lesser Liangshan



FIGURE 2. A Nuosu farmstead, situated high on a hill covered with second-growth pines, Xide county, 2007. Note the agricultural plots around the house (circled).

Yi Autonomous Prefecture (*Xiao Liangshan Yizu zizhi zhou* 小凉山彝族自治州) systems (often collectively called “Liangshan”). The geography is characterized by mountains, broken uplands, and river valleys. Most Nuosu communities are found between 2,000 to 3,000 meters above sea level (MI 1997, 53). On a larger geographical scale, and of relevance to the discussion of life forms in the *Hnewo tepyy*, the Nuosu areas are located at the eastern edge of the Himalayas, between the semi-tropics of Southeast Asia and the northern climate regions of China (JARVIS and LIU 1993, 505).

Southern Sichuan and the bordering areas of Yunnan province are located in one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world—designated a “biodiversity hotspot” by CONSERVATION INTERNATIONAL (2007). The region is home to over 237 mammal, 611 bird, and nearly 300 fish, reptile, and amphibian species. Species of higher plants in Sichuan alone number over 10,000 (DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY 1994). This diversity is due in part to the differing ecosystems (which range from tropical to alpine), comparatively mild glacial periods, and the difficult mountainous terrain, which until recently has been important in “preventing biotic extinctions, by muting the destructive capacity of humans within natural ecosystems that is characteristic of China’s lowlands and basins” (COGGINS 2003, 34–35).

Until recent decades, large, old growth coniferous and mixed hardwood forests were found throughout the uplands of southwest China. Large-scale logging, however, has been carried out periodically since the 1960s, intensifying in the early 1990s and resulting in extensive deforestation and environmental degradation in many areas, including parts of the Liangshan region (ECONOMY 2004, 64–65). In recent years, government reserves have been established within the region in an attempt to preserve natural habitats for native flora and fauna.⁹

Despite massive changes in the natural environment in recent decades, and a decline in wildlife and some plant species, wild animals and plants continue to be of importance in rural Nuosu communities, though some in recent use are only of peripheral or symbolic value. Some of the resources and uses are: medicinal botanicals (for private use or sale), occasional dietary supplements (nuts, berries, rose hips, and so on), musk deer leather for smoking pouches and other items, water deer fangs for charms protecting children from malevolent forces, wild animal parts used as ritual accoutrements by *bimo*, patterns of plants and animals on clothing and implements, animals on traditional calendars, names of some people, and imaginative components in songs and stories, including the *Hnewo tepyy*.¹⁰

THE *HNEWO TEPYY*

As noted, the *Hnewo tepyy* is the master myth-narrative text of the traditional Nuosu world, telling of the origins of the earthly environs and the things and beings that inhabit them. The narrative also underpins the rich story world of shorter Nuosu origin tales and other folk stories. The first portions typically tell

of the creation and separation of the sky and earth, and the origins of geographical features, plants, animals, and ultimately the Nuosu and neighboring peoples. Latter sections relate the legendary migrations of Yi clan groups from which some contemporary clans in Liangshan claim descent (SUNZI 2004, 117). The narrative is most prominent among the various traditional texts that *bimo* priests master, and in one way or another parts of it are incorporated into virtually all Nuosu rituals. Although individual folk cannot read the written texts and may not know the *Hnewo* by title, the content is familiar to those within reach of the living performance tradition.

Many versions of the *Hnewo*, which can vary quite significantly in length and detail, exist in both oral and oral-connected forms (BAMO 2003, 32–36). At present there is no standard version in use among the *bimo*, though certain versions (or closely related versions) may be more popular among ritualists in particular lineages and areas. This lack of a standard text is likely due in part to the absence of a centralized government among the Nuosu or other Yi groups (some of which share similar myths) before 1949, and to the mountainous terrain, which presents obstacles to interaction among Nuosu communities (HARRELL 2001, 85).

The title “*Hnewo tepyy*” has been interpreted in several ways (ZHONGYANG 1996, 283–84). The word “*tepyy*” (the “p” is a tone marker, and should not be pronounced) means “book” (a term including scrolls) in Nuosu. More problematic is the meaning of “*Hnewo*,” which refers to the individual segments of the poem. After exhaustive fieldwork and research on oral and oral-connected versions of the *Hnewo*, Bamo Qubumo has concluded that there is no common definition of the term, which to some people means something like “things heard, then told.” In folk usage, the poem is often referred to simply as “*Hnewo*” (BAMO 2003, 121).

The *Hnewo* proper has been transmitted over time in two major ways. One is in the form of oral-connected written texts composed and copied by the *bimo*, who are the most important ritual specialists of the Nuosu and other Yi groups (BAMO 1994, 2001). They utilize an ancient script (which varies by region) to record history, myths, discourses on literature, and folklore (ZHONGYANG 1992, 3; BAMO 2001a).¹¹ The second mode of transmission—and the most readily available to the folk—is the chanting of portions of the narrative by *bimo* in a number of ritual contexts. Bamo has discovered that in Meigu county, parts of the *Hnewo* are sometimes performed by *bimo* in a kind of verbal dueling contest known as *kenre*.¹² Similar performances by singers may occur in other areas of Liangshan as well.¹³ In some cases other tradition-bearers (such as the *ndegggu* described below) may also know and perform parts of the poem.

Depending upon event and subject matter, specific portions of the *Hnewo* are recited at particular life cycle events. The earlier sections of the narrative tend to be associated with funerals, rituals for guiding souls to the land of the dead, and the purging of ghosts, while the latter portions, especially those dealing with marriages, are part of more festive occasions, particularly weddings. As BAMO has observed, *bimo* priests commonly categorize the parts concerning the early phases

of creation of the sky and earth as the “male” (*apbu*) segments (typically the first seven sections), while the latter sections relating affairs of earth are referred to as the “female” (*apmop*) segments (2003, 139). This seems to follow the traditional understanding that the cosmos is comprised of the sky above, the clouds and mists in the middle, and the earth below—as is reiterated throughout the *Hnewo* poem.¹⁴

Structurally, the poem is commonly conceived as having nineteen major parts (literally “segments of tree branches,” or *jjie*) (BAMO 2003, 123–26; 132–33). The number, length, and content of these parts, however, vary among the written oral-connected versions, as individual texts may have more or fewer sections. Given the dynamics of live performance, oral versions vary widely, and the number of parts performed on a given occasion is dependent on contingencies of the performance situation (BAMO 2003, 160).

Most of the oral-connected texts are written in lines of verse, with five syllables per line being the most common form. However, line length can vary between four and nine or more syllables. Oral versions likewise favor the five syllable per line form, though these also vary.¹⁵ In the written version examined in this paper, five syllables per line is the most common form. Some passages, however, include speeches by the characters (such as that by the sky spirit Ngetit Guxnzy, described below) that are presented in an amalgam of lines having five, seven, eight, and ten syllables, which may relate directly to conventions of oral performance.¹⁶

A VERSION OF *HNEWO TEPYY* FROM XIDE COUNTY

The version of the *Hnewo tepyy* examined in this paper was obtained in Xide 喜德 county, located in the northern part of the Liangshan region, 80 km north of the prefectural seat, Xichang 西昌. Although a number of *Hnewo* versions have been translated and published in Chinese, the author was interested in gaining access to a version still in circulation among the folk, hoping to eventually translate it into English. Professor Luo Qingchun 羅慶春 (aka Aku Wuwu), a Nuosu poet and scholar who teaches at the Southwest Nationalities University in Chengdu (see Note 3), located a version in Xide county, in the northern part of the Greater Liangshan area. Thus, in the summer of 2005, Professor Luo and I made a week-long trip to Mishi (*Mishi zhen* 米市鎮), a township seat in Xide county and the site of previous fieldwork on Nuosu customs carried out in the mid-1990s by Stevan HARRELL (2001, 104–105). In Mishi, Professor Luo and I met with Jjivo Zoqu, a resident of a nearby upland village, who was said to possess a hand-written copy of the *Hnewo*. Jjivo is known locally as a *ndeggü*—that is, one of the important Nuosu tradition-bearers who once functioned as dispute solvers (arbitrators) in many Nuosu communities and who are regarded as being particularly knowledgeable about local history and folklore (BAMO 2001b, 454). Soon after we met, Jjivo produced from his bag a small notebook with a picture of Chairman Mao on the cover and a somewhat larger one decorated with a picture of an attractive young woman. He told us that some years before he had

copied the contents of a version of the *Hnewo* recorded on a dilapidated scroll (now missing) into the Mao notebook. He later recorded this text into the larger notebook using the revised Yi syllabary (comprised of eight hundred and nineteen traditional symbols and created by scholars in the mid-1970s as a way to promote Yi literacy). Both texts were written primarily in five syllable lines. Over the next several days Jjivo explicated the second volume line for line, employing Northern Yi and Sichuan dialect.¹⁷

The Xide text is unusual in that researchers have collected few versions of the *Hnewo* in the county and none have been published in any form (BAMO 2003, 23). The text is comparatively long, with twenty-nine parts—making it ten sections longer than the “standard” nineteen part versions. While much of the rich content is similar to that of the best-known Chinese translation (FENG 1986), this “new” version is valuable not only as an addition to the assembly of original-language *Hnewo* versions, but as an alternative text to Chinese-language translations that have been made under the supervision of editorial boards. As such, the observations presented below on *Hnewo* content should be understood as being based on one particularly elaborate expression of the general corpus of *Hnewo* versions. (An outline of the content appears in the Appendix.)



FIGURE 3. Jjivo Zoqu, the local tradition-bearer conversant in the local version of the Nuosu *Book of Origins* discussed in this paper, sitting in a courtyard of a home in Xide county.

SUPERNATURAL MEGA-FAUNA AND ZHYGE ALU

Roughly the first half of the Xide version of the *Hnewo* (that is, up through Part Twelve), is set in a mythic world in which otherwise “normal” animals and plants have the power of speech, and sometimes other supernatural capabilities. Although some strange creatures also appear during the migrations in the latter sections, the setting of these latter parts is a world more legendary than mythical. Besides the regular (that is, “natural”) animals and plants there are giant creatures—or as paleontologists might say “mega-fauna”—that in the early stages of the narrative are key parts of the biodiversity of the story world. These include the anthropomorphic monkey named Anyut Ddussyt, who hangs the numerous suns and moons in the sky, and the creatures associated with the birth of the hero Zhyge Alu (Zhyxge Axlu), arguably the most recognized and celebrated mythical being in Nuosu folklore and that of many other Yi groups.

The Northern Yi word for “dragon” is “*lu*,” and by name Zhyge Alu is associated with dragons. Moreover, his birth clearly indicates that he is a “super-hybrid” derived from dragon, dragon-eagle, and supernatural human stock. The opening

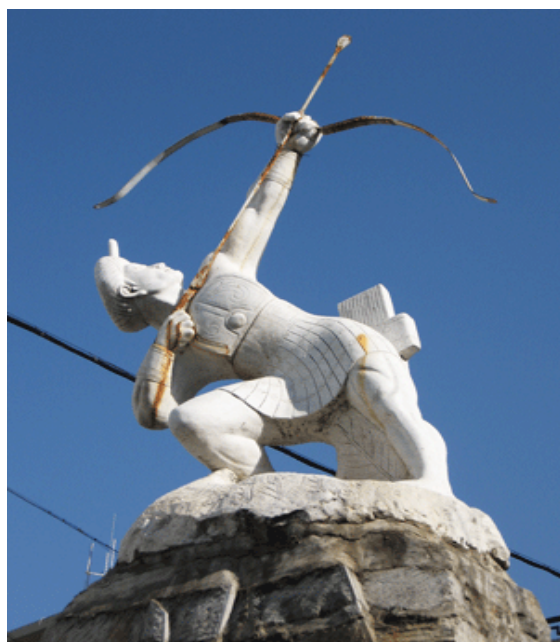


FIGURE 4. A marble statue of the Yi culture-hero Zhyge Alu, town center, Xide, Xide county, 2007.

lines begin with the birth of dragons in the sky and earth, descriptions of a dragon dwelling in rivers, cliffs, and forests, and playing with various wild creatures, including fish, bees, and deer. Following these introductory lines, which set the context for the child's later adventures in the wild, the text presents a genealogy of Zhyge Alu's mother (which is, incidentally, the only genealogy of a female character in this *Hnewo* version):

A dragon was born in the fir forests,
 And lived in Ggup chox cho hxo,
 Where Ggupmo Axrryr was born;¹⁸
 She later lived in Vop ndip hlyt qu.
 This was the place the beauty of Hlytqu was born.¹⁹
 She lived in Di shy shuo nuo,
 Where Dishy Majie was born,²⁰
 and later lived in Ox lu zzip vop,
 the place where Zzipmop Hnimo was born.
 And later lived in Op rro ndap ssyp,²¹
 The place where Zytzyr Apmy was born.
 A woman of the Zyt family married into the Git family,
 A woman of the Git family married into the Pup family,
 And gave birth to the three daughters of the Pup family.
 The Pup daughter Jy ma married into the Jy family,
 The Pup daughter Max ma married into the Ma family,
 Leaving only Pupmop Hnixyyr who did not marry.

sup sse lur sse yur,	ox lu zzip vop jjip,
ggup chox cho hxo jjip.	zzip mop hni mo yur,
ggup mop ax rryr yur;	op rro ndap ssyp jjip,
vop ndip hlyt qu jjip.	zyt zyr ap my yur.
hlut qu hni nrat yur,	zyt ap my git ddu jjip,
di shy shuo nuo jjip,	git ap my pup ddu jjip
di shy ma jie yur,	pup mop hni suo yur.

pup mop jy ma jy ddu jjip,
 pup mop max ma w ddu jjip,
 pup mop hnix yyr zzi.

A further passage from Part Eight describes Pupmop Hnixyyr weaving under the eaves of her home. She spies the eagles soaring above—possibly ancestors of the golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) of today—as well as the seemingly more powerful dragon eagles. The giant birds lure her from her task and impregnate her by their blood that falls from the sky (foregrounding the later fall of red snow resulting in the snow tribes):

Pupmop Hnixyyr
 For three years prepared to weave,
 used three months to set up her back-strap loom;
 The ground spike was like a star,
 The batten glimmered like eagle wings,
 The shuttle moved through the warp like a honeybee.
 The weft threads were like a rainbow,
 She sat under the eaves of the house weaving,
 The loom singing, “*zhat zha jjiet lie*.”
 A pair of eagles soaring above,
 Came from Dit hxo Gulch;
 From earth below a pair of eagles,
 Flew from Zhyp nge Mountain;
 From Suo pyr below a pair of eagles,
 Flew from the midst of Nuo Mountain;
 A pair of eagles in the human realm
 Came from Nyu lu vit;
 Four dragon eagles
 Came from the midst of the fir forests.
 As Pupmop Hnixyyr
 Prepared to go see the eagles,
 Prepared to go play with the eagles,
 Three drops of blood splattered down
 Onto Pupmop Hnixyyr’s body,
 Fell down so strangely.

pup mop hnix yyr nyi,	dit hxo lo wa la;
suo kut yit ho shy,	mu kex dit nyip zzi,
suo hlep yit jjie dur,	zhyp nge bbo wa la;
yit ki mu jy zzur,	suo pyr dit cyp zzi,
yit mop jot ddu hlit,	nda nuo bbo wa la;
yit bur jjip yo mga,	nge jji dit cyp zzi,
yit hni si w jip,	nyu lu vit wa la;
zhat zha jjiet lie nyi.	dit lu ly ma ne,
mu vut dit cyp zzi,	shurt zzur bbo nyiet la.

pup mop hnix yyr nyi,	dit sy suo tuo ci,
dit hxep li mo ddix,	pup mop hnix yyr ssop,
dit ggcp li mo ddix,	map ssop lux li ssop.

After being cast into the wilds for his deviant behavior (described in the outline), Zhyge Alu is raised by dragons:

Because of this perverse behavior,
 His mother put him in a cave.
 In the cave lived dragons;
 Alu understood the dragon language
 And called himself a dragon;
 The days he was hungry, he ate dragon food;
 The days he was thirsty, he drank dragon milk,
 And when cold he wore dragon clothes.

sse shu sse fi ddix,	ix nyi lu nge ddix,
mop xie vat vur zip.	mit nyip lu zza zze,
vat wap lu zzur dde,	syt nyip lu niep ndo,
lu hxop ax lu syp dep lox,	gguo nyip lu vit ggat.

Thus is born the outstanding figure of Nuosu mythology who, as a hybrid of the human, wild, and supernatural realms, shoots down the extra suns and moons, tames lightning, and reduces insects, frogs, and snakes into their present benign sizes.

THE “TRIBES OF SNOW” AND OTHER WILD ANIMALS AND PLANTS

Despite the occasional appearance of supernatural creatures, mortal animals and plants most densely populate the story world of the Xide version of the *Hnewo*. Possibly the most vivid occurrence of these natural beings is that of the “tribes of snow” in Part Eleven. As recounted in the overview (see Appendix), after a devastating period of global warming, three falls of red snow descend from the sky to become the basis for life on earth.²²

The snow tribes consist of two catalogues of plants and animals that, taken together, comprise a bifurcated folk taxonomy that includes a number of species inhabiting the bioregions represented in the poem. The groups “without blood” include a host of trees and grasses, while the groups “with blood” include frogs (amphibians); snakes (reptiles); vultures, peacocks, swans, and various eagles and hawks (large avifauna, with a stress on raptors); bears (ursines), monkeys (primates), and humans (hominids). Since Nuosu traditions tell of early migrations into the region, it is not clear whether the floral and faunal “tribes” listed in the text were originally based on actual conditions in Liangshan.²³ The “Twelve Tribes of Snow” (*vo nre sse ci nyix*) are presented in the Xide county text as follows:²⁴

Of the twelve snow tribes,
 Six groups had blood,

Six groups had no blood.
 Of the six without blood,
 One group was grasses;
 Black-headed grass grows
 In the grassy places,
 In three hundred grassy places;
 The second group was trees,
 White cypress was a snow tribe;
 The third group was fir trees,
 The fir trees growing in the high mountains;
 The fourth group was *bbyp zy* grass;
 The long-legged *bbyp zy* grass was a snow tribe;
 The fifth group was *ne put* grass,²⁵
 Black *ne put* grass was a snow son,
Ne put grass growing in the marshlands;
 The sixth group was green vines,
 Growing at the foot of trees and in caverns.

The six groups with blood were:
 One group was frogs,
 The frog group had three brothers,
 Living in the marshy places:
 The frog tribe's eldest son,
 Became Uox ba nyuo ngu,
 And lived in the black earth place;
 The frog tribe's second son
 Was Uox ba qi hni,
 And lived in the marshy places;
 The frog tribe's youngest son,
 Became the frog group's Frog God,
 And lived in people's houses;²⁶
 And there were more and more types of frogs.
 The second group was snakes.
 The snake tribe's eldest son
 Became a *nzyimo* dragon,²⁷
 And lived in the high, barren cliffs;
 The snake tribe's second son
 Was the *shy go bbo hlut* snake,
 That lived in the top of the fields;
 The youngest son of the snake tribe
 Was the *bbup jjiep ke hni* snake,
 that lived in the muddy places;
 The snake tribe became larger and larger.
 The third group was huge vultures,
 The kings of the winged creatures;
 The vultures of the vast sky,

Living in the white clouds and mountains.
 The *nzymo* of the winged creatures
 Is the peacock,
 Living at the Die pa shur nuo Sea;²⁸
 The head of the winged creatures
 Is the swan,
 Living in the Ggup chot cho hxo Gorge.
 The second son of the vulture
 Was an eagle;
 The eagle's eldest son
 Was the big-headed black eagle,
 Living in the fir forests;
 The eagle's second son,
 Was the spotted-face white eagle,
 Living in Shuo nuo Mountain;
 The eagle's smallest son,
 Was the short-winged cliff eagle,
 Freely soaring around.
 The vulture's third son
 Became the red-winged hawk,²⁹
 Living in the Ganluo area.
 The fourth group was the old bears.
 The black bear had one mother and two sons;
 They spread out into the fir forests,
 And the black bears became more and more.
 The fifth group was monkeys.
 The red monkeys had one mother and two sons;
 They spread out into the forests,
 And the red monkeys became more and more.
 The sixth group was humans,
 The humans lived in the human realm,
 And the humans in the human realm multiplied
 more and more.

vo nre sse ci nyix,	ly nre lox bbyp zy,
sy nyi su fut xip,	bbyp zy qie jie nyi vo nre;
sy ap nyi su fut xip.	nge nrep lox ne put,
sy ap nyi fut xip ne,	put nuo vo nre sse,
cyp nre lox ne ry,	put ggo zyp wa dip;
ryp ddu op nuo ggo,	fut nrep lox le hxo,
ndip qu ggu wa dip,	syr xy vat vur dip.
ry zzur suo wa pux;	sy nyi fut xip ne:
nyip nre lox ne syr,	cyp nre lop ne ba,
ba lat vo nre sse;	ba hxo suo mox ggo,
suo nre lox ne shut,	zyp ho liet tuo dip;
shut zzur bbo nyiet dip;	ba hxo sse yy li,

uox ba nyuo mgu jjip,	mu vut ggup shyp jjip,
zza nuo ho wa dip;	ggup chox cho hxo dip.
ba hxo sse gat li,	di hxo sse gat li,
uox ba qi hni jjip,	jot hxo jot ddi jjip,
zyp hop liet tuo dip;	jot hxo sse yy li,
ba hxo ssep nyop li,	jot nuop op gge jjip,
uox ba jjyp lup jjip,	shut zzur bbo nyiet dip;
lip yi shy vut dip;	jot hxo sse gat li,
ba hxo suo hxa pux.	jot qu bbo hlut jjip,
nyip nre lox ne shy,	shuo nuo bbo wa dip;
shy nge sse yy ggo,	jot hxo ssep nyop li,
lu nzy lu mop jjip,	ba yi ddur jjuo jjix,
vat hni ggu wa dip;	mu ke dop wa vo.
shy nge sse gat ggo,	dit hxo ssep nyop li,
shy go bbo hlut jjip,	hlelep zhy ddur hni jjix,
za bbo hxo wa dip;	ga lo li pit dip.
shy nge ssep nyop ggo,	ly nre lox ne wo,
bbup jjiep ke hni jjix,	wox nuo suo mox ggo,
za ho liet tuo dip;	lox ggu ssup wa dip;
shy nge suo hxa pux.	wox nuo suo hxa pux.
suo nre lox ne dit,	nge nre lox ne nyut,
ddur ndit vo mu jjip,	nyut hni suo mo ggo,
mu ggu dit sse jjix,	syr xy ggu wa dip;
di qu bbo nyiet dip;	nyut ggo suo hxa pux.
ddur ndit nzy mop li,	fut nre lox ne co,
shut nyi vop le jjix,	co ggo zzyt mu dip.
die pa shur nuo dip;	zzyt mu co zzur du.
ddur ndit sux yy li,	

Although the wild animals mentioned as the “snow tribes” all occur in or near the Liangshan bioregions, it is interesting that several animals, insects, and plants mentioned elsewhere in the narrative (and found in the region) are not listed in these catalogues. Although the text offers no conclusive answers, some observations can be made. To begin with, the unlisted animals include: various cervids such as the “*qyp le*” (a compound term denoting the muntjac (*Muntiacus*) and water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*)—primitive musk deer with fangs and prominent in Nuosu folklore); other deer such as roe deer (*Capreolus*); foxes, leopards and tigers; rabbits and Eurasian otters; corvids, including crows and magpies; pheasants, song birds, and smaller creatures with blood (GEIST 1998, 44–48; 26–8; XU 1989, 26–28; MORTENSON 2006, 423). Some of the unlisted creatures, however, are among those spied by the sky spirit Ngetit Guxnzy as he peers down onto the drowned landscape after the great flood. He notices a number of animals—both wild and domestic, all living precariously in their respective niches—as well as a single hemp plant. The animals include both wild and domestic creatures: a goat, a deer, a fox, a black horse, a wild duck, a sheep, and a leopard.³⁰



FIGURE 5. A *bimo* (center) recites passages from a protection ritual during the fourth International Conference on Yi Studies, Meigu, Sichuan, 2005. The *bimo* to the right holds a *gike* (spirit fan), used to wave away malevolent forces. Effigies of tigers, Eurasian otters, eagles, and other wild creatures are carved on the wooden handle, typically made of cherry wood. Note the ritual scriptures in his right hand.

Trees, shrubs, ferns, and flowers—“tribes without blood”—appear throughout the *Hnewo*, sometimes in contexts that belie a deep, practical knowledge of the nature and inter-connectedness of subtle features of the local biotic communities. One such instance is the reference to a species of fern associated with natural upland lakes that hold water only part of the year.

Several plants figure in Zhyge Alu’s search for a perch from which to shoot down the extra suns and moons. Punished for their failure to aid the hero, the *Hnewo* describes the characteristics of the plants in what could be conceived of as an ascending hierarchy of “useless to useful” still acknowledged today: the lowly, weak-stemmed, *ndax bbo* fern; the *rot mop syp wo* shrub that bends limbs unto the ground to grow new suckers; the stunted horse mulberry tree; the bamboo that grows joints rather than a trunk (that could be used in planking); and pines that cannot grow suckers after being cut (and are typically not especially tall trees). The worthy fir tree, on which the hero successfully stands to shoot, still provides shingles and timber for residents of upland rural areas.

Many other plants, however, are not mentioned in the lists. In Part Twelve, a bee bites the sky god’s foot and a clever frog from earth provides various weak and strong medicines as a cure. Although it is not stated in the poem, these cures may be based on the huge Yi pharmacopeia of wildcrafted medicinal roots and herbs. Moreover, while trees and grasses are well represented in the “without blood” groups, the *shuo hma*, or rhododendron, does not make the list. This most revered flower of Yi folklore exists in over 200 varieties in southwest China and often represents women’s beauty in Nuosu oral poetry (BENDER 2007, 25–26). Near the end of Part Twelve, the animal members of the “snow tribes” all rush to drink the waters of wisdom and dullness. The waters of wisdom, which Shyplip, the son of

snow, drank (with the help of a capable frog), was held in the petals of a *shuo hma* flower.

With these observations in mind, one aspect of the “snow tribes” catalogue may suggest a reason for the unacknowledged animal species. Creatures in the list (with the possible exception of snakes—though the Yi do recognize a sort of four-legged “snake” that is considered by some to be a “dragon”) share certain general similarities with humans in terms of shape (particularly hand-like feet) and at least occasional bipedalism, suggesting a sort of anthropomorphic folk taxon. These animals include frogs, bears, and monkeys. As mentioned earlier, according to Nuosu hunters, it is taboo to kill frogs and monkeys, as well as eagles, snakes, toads, pandas, and some other creatures.³¹ It is possible that ungulates—creatures with hooves—and predators with paws are absent from the list because they do not share comparable morphological affinities with humans. The exception is the omnivorous, occasionally bipedal bear (most likely a local race of Asian black bear, *Selenarctos thibetanus*), which cultures worldwide see as human-like (DOMICO 1988, 113–15). From another perspective, the inclusion of these animals and many other species throughout the text suggests that those listed as “snow tribes” may serve in part as metonymic devices that evoke images of all living beings in the environment, including those listed and those not (FOLEY 1991, 7).

DOMESTICATED ANIMALS AND PLANTS

No domestic livestock make the “snow tribe” list, yet they are the first animals to be mentioned in the early phases of creation in conjunction with the separation of the earth and sky, as they attempt to move giant copper and iron balls holding down the earth so it does not reunite with the sky. This suggests a folk idea that the supernatural beings (gods or spirits), whose home is the sky, exist in a realm that is to some degree parallel to that of humans, but in many ways superior. This is especially evident in the episodes dealing with the marriage of the sky god’s daughter and the mortal son of a descendant of the early “snow tribe” generation. In the latter sections of the narrative, domesticated animals and plants frequently appear as ritual sacrifices, or as sources of food and fiber for clothing.³²

Sheep and goats—domesticated in the Middle East between 9000 and 7000 BCE—are especially prominent in the text and make their presence known either as living animals or as their useful by-products. Possible remnants of a more nomadic herding culture, the wool-bearing sheep and hide-bearing goats are differentiated from each other in Nuosu folklore. As a form of insider folk coding, the noble, wool-bearing sheep symbolizes the Nuosu, and must never be killed with a knife.³³ The insider coding also equates the common goat with the Han Chinese (N: *Hxiegmət*). Thus, at feasts or sacrifices today, a sheep is honored by holding its mouth shut and compressing its nostrils to smother it, while a goat is simply killed by cutting its jugular vein with a knife.³⁴ The skins of both creatures (both “hair on” and “hair off”) are used for rawhide and leather for horse tack, rope, mats, and bags, as are cow and other hides. Goat hides were (and in some

places still are) used for making vests or crude cloaks by poorer Yi. In general, the Nuosu (with some exceptions in western areas near Tibetan communities) do not utilize goat or other animal milk, as is the case among the Sani 撒尼 Yi subgroup in Yunnan.³⁵

In the above passage detailing the birth of Zhyge Alu, the hero's mother, Pup-mop Hnixyyr, is engaged in the gender-specific art of weaving (probably wool), which highlights the importance of animal (and plant) fibers in Nuosu society (BARBER 1994, 17–41).³⁶ Although modern textiles are gradually replacing home-spun, wool is still processed, woven, and worn in many communities. In the first step of production, the wool is sheared from sheep in spring and fall (LUOBU and ANIU 2003, 123; HARRELL, BAMO, and MA 2000, 17–18). The day before shearing, the sheep are washed in a stream to clean the wool. Shearing involves many conventions, including the eating of buckwheat cakes by the shearers and different shearing cuts for male and female sheep. Once the wool is sheared, it is fluffed with a bamboo bow strung with an iron wire (much as cotton was once fluffed throughout China). Wool is stored in huge, fluffy clumps, spun into thread using a drop spindle, and woven on a back strap loom. Women weave alone, or in groups, sometimes tying the ends of their warp threads onto a single wooden stake driven into the earth (to give tension to the loom), with the women sitting on the ground in a circle with their feet all oriented towards the center stake.

Wool is the major component in the production of most of the emblematic Nuosu cloaks.³⁷ The woven cloaks with string tassels—called *vapla*—are produced by women, while the felt cloaks called *jieshy* are made by men. The felting process involves fluffing, wetting, and shaping wool into cloak-size pieces that are then folded into pleats and pressed in wooden forms (HARRELL, BAMO, and MA 2000, 18–19).



FIGURE 6. Women parade in traditional dress, Fourth International Conference on Yi Studies, Meigu, Sichuan, 2005. Note the woven wool cloaks with fringe (*vapla*). Dress styles vary somewhat throughout the Liangshan areas.

The felt may be dyed with various plants and barks, or left a natural off-white. In a small felt cloak operation in Xide, for instance, deep purple dye is rendered from indigo plants.

Other common Nuosu domestic animals mentioned in the poem are still raised today, including a small breed of Asiatic cow, chickens, pigs, horses, dogs, and, in lowland communities, the occasional water buffalo.³⁸ All of these creatures appear at various points in the *Hnewo*, often (with the exception of horses and dogs, which are not eaten) in the context of ritual sacrifices and/or feasts, made for the sake of resolving disputes between local and migrating groups, or in relation to some sort of ritual of protection. In the following short passage from Part Twenty-nine, “The Genealogy of the Qot nip Clan” (“Qot nip cyt”), sacrifices of cows and sows are made to tigers (one of the rare mentions of these beasts in the poem) and vultures that guard the homes in new settlements (a task dogs do today):

Four tigers were kept—
 One in each direction.
 Four red cows were killed
 In an offering to the four tigers
 Four female vultures were kept—
 One in each direction.
 Four sows were killed
 In a sacrifice to the vultures.

lat mop ly ma hxo,	jot mop ly ma hxo,
mux ly rry wa nyi,	mux ly rry wa nyi,
nyl hni ly ji sit,	vot mop ly ma sit,
lat hni ly ma qip	jot mop ly ma qip.

Depending upon the situation, livestock are still commonly slaughtered to honor visiting guests from afar, and at weddings and festivals, in which they are linked to good fortune (LUOBU and ANIU 2003, 124). The highest respect is paid to guests by killing a cow, often in some combination with sheep, goats, and pigs (though in some places a poor family may offer two chickens to represent a cow).³⁹ Protocol dictates procedures in skinning and butchering. Meat and other parts, such as livers and lungs, are cut into large and small chunks, cooked in huge pots, and served in communal wooden bowls or pans; ribs may be roasted over coals. The meat chunks are eaten by hand, typically accompanied by steamed buckwheat cakes, boiled or roasted potatoes, and/or boiled pieces or shreds of *vop ma* (Ch: *yuangen* 圓根) turnips, and a soup of reconstituted dried turnip greens and soy-bean meal.

In recent years, social etiquette increasingly demands the killing of many large animals (especially cows) at weddings and other feasts. Livestock is also sacrificed as part of the complex and lengthy Nuosu funeral process, with cows, sheep, goats, and pigs figuring prominently at various stages of the rites. (For instance, a pig is tethered under the funeral bier during a funeral and is thought to help lead the



FIGURE 7. Chunks of boiled and braised beef, potatoes, and large steamed buckwheat cakes served at a feast honoring guests, Mianning county, 2007. The table is an example of contemporary wooden ware painted with traditional Nuosu colors and designs.

deceased on the spiritual road leading to the ancestors.) Thus, some families find themselves in financial difficulty trying to keep up with these emerging trends.

Livestock also figures in other ways in the *Hnewo*. Parts Fourteen to Twenty-nine concern migrations of the early clans and lineages, with groups traveling to a spot, then stopping and often leaving a few families behind before continuing in search of a more ideal place to settle. Although the actual routes of these trek accounts, as well as many of the names of places and persons, are obscure or open to conjecture, such migrations certainly occurred, and the poem provides evidence of the domestic animals taken along. The text also supplies clues about the logistics of herding livestock over rugged terrain, which is still a concern in more remote areas. The scale and difficulty of such enterprises is attested to in the lines beginning Part Twenty-seven, “The Genealogy of the Ggu ho” (“Ggu ho cyt”), which offer a catalogue (cast in poetic formulae) of the stock taken along on the trek. On their migration, the clan must take their horses, sheep, goats, pigs, and fowl across a river, leaving the weaker animals behind. The fact that choices must be made between mature female breeding stock and less-hearty (and more replaceable) younger animals may indicate that the migration was made under duress—possibly recalling a forced wartime migration made centuries ago from northeast Yunnan up the treacherous river valleys into the mountains of southern Sichuan. The arrangement of creatures also indicates a hierarchy of value (still current today), with horses being most valued, and fowl least.

In the place Lip mu mo ggu,
They crossed the river upstream at Ba ke,

Crossed the middle of the river Lur njy,
 Crossed the river downstream at Vop chop.
 One day horses were taken across the river.
 Three hundred mares were taken across;
 Three hundred colts were left behind.
 One day stock with cloven hooves were taken across.
 Three hundred ewes were taken across;
 Three hundred lambs left behind;
 Three hundred nannies were taken across,
 And three hundred kids left behind;
 One day three hundred sows were taken across;
 Three hundred piglets were left behind;
 One day the winged fowl were taken across;
 Three hundred hens were taken across;
 Three hundred chicks were left behind;
 In this way the river was crossed.

lip mu mo ggu ne,	yox sse suo hxa da;
o wap ba ke ggup,	chyt mop suo hxa xie,
jjut wap lur njy ggup,	chyt sse suo hxa da,
hmu wap vop chop ggup.	vot mop suo hxa xie,
cyp nyip mu sip ggup,	vot sse suo hxa da;
mup mop suo hxa xie,	cyp nyip ddur ndit ggup,
mup sse suo hxa dat;	yie mop suo hxa xie,
cyp nyip bbit ndit ggup,	yie sse suo hxa da,
yop mop suo hxa xie,	cyx nyi ggup la vex.

A few domesticated plants are mentioned in the early parts of the *Hnewo*, with more appearing in the latter sections. When the sky god Ngetit Gunzy's daughter descends to earth to marry the mortal, Jjutmu Vuxmu, she secretly takes horses, as well as the seeds of hemp, the native turnip-like tuber called *vop ma* mentioned above, and the bitter and sweet buckwheats (N: *mgep nuo*, Ch: *ku qiao* 苦蕎; and N: *mgep qy*, Ch: *tian qiao* 甜蕎, respectively).⁴⁰ All are important Nuosu cultivants today, and there are other origin narratives about them in the folklore (LIANG-SHAN 2006, 102–103; 118–19; 108–12). These gifts from the sky, however, do not come without a price, as the vengeful sky god ensures that each crop will have its shortcomings, thus providing a rationale for the difficult subsistence lifestyle of the Nuosu farmers who farm small plots in marginal soil on steep, dry hillsides that support only a limited range of hardy domesticated crops. These lines in Part Twelve cite the curses placed upon hemp and buckwheat:

“All that was given to my daughter's new family has been given,
 Except for the seeds of hemp—
 Everyone knows that
 The world of humans has hemp as tall as firs.”
 Ngetit Gunzy said:

“Without my consent the hemp seeds were taken;
 In the future the hemp won’t last long,
 If there is a poor harvest,
 Old hemp seeds won’t be able to be distilled as wine.”⁴¹
 Ngetit Gunzy said:
 “All that was given to my daughter’s new family has been given,
 Except for the seeds of sweet buckwheat—
 Everyone can see that
 The earth’s hills are covered with buckwheat flowers.
 In the future, harvesting buckwheat will be like chasing a shadow,
 Flailing buckwheat will be hard as preparing a corpse,
 And eating sweet buckwheat will be like not eating at all.”⁴²

it ap my bbyp mu bbyx lu ggo,	nge tit gu nzy nyi:
mup ly ap bbyp sy yip ddix,	it ap my bbyp mu bbyp lu ggo.
shyp mu nge jyx jxox,	mgep qy lyp ap bbyp yip sy ddix,
mup ni shut bbo hmup ox ddix.	shyp mu nge jyx jox,
nge tit gu nzy ne:	mge vie shy juo w ox ddep lox,
it ke ap bbo mu sip yy ox ddix da,	mgep qy yyt li co hla mgot,
mup shyt yu ap bu,	mgep qy zzyx li co mo ji,
ga ggit ga ggo li,	mgep qy zzex li chop ap wep.
mup ly nry ap qip.	

Hemp is another traditional weaving fiber once common in Yi communities throughout Southwest China.⁴³ Like buckwheat, hemp was covertly brought from the sky by Ngetit Guxnzy’s daughter, though archeological data suggests that hemp was cultivated in central China over five thousand years ago. Early sources also note the dioecious nature of the plant—and the Nuosu today differentiate between male and female plants, each having different uses (HARRELL, BAMO, MA 2000, 18). When the leaves yellow, the more delicate male plant is cut with a knife—a weak product results if too-green plants are used. The outer layer is then loosened from the woodier core of the stalk by soaking it in river water for several days or longer. The soaking helps to break down (or “ret”) the fibers, making it easier to strip the outer layers (or “bast”) from the stalks and work the hemp fibers. The bast is then dried outside the home by laying it on the ground or by hanging it from trees. If the hemp is to be stored for later use, it will be wrapped into thick twists and stored in the attic above the household fire pit (to let the smoke strengthen and cure it), or it is sold. Some dried hemp, however, may be directly corded (in a pattern similar to snakeskin) for ropes or plough lines. If very fine, light-colored hemp is desired for weaving, the process may involve mashing the bast in a treadle-style mortar and pestle, then boiling it for five to six hours. Grass and weed ashes may also be added to the water, which creates a lye wash that is effective in breaking down the pectins in the fibers and tempering the bast (BAMO Jiemei 2006, 147–48). Among poorer Yi, women’s skirts and pants for men were once made of hemp or, at best, a mixture of hemp and wool. As

the upper-classes wore wool, the lower class males were described by this saying: “Goatskin shirt worn on top; hemp pants worn on the bottom” (*lot zzi chyt njy hop; qi zzi mup pa hop*).

As the discussion illustrates, in some instances wild, domestic, and even supernatural animals or plants figure in given sections of the narrative. While the forests and waterways are the province of wild animals and plants, domestic stock and cultivants tend to be associated with the realm of humans, while the supernatural mega-fauna inhabit their own unseen realms. Though the boundaries between these realms and categories are quite clear, at times they seem rather permeable, as illustrated in the quote from Part Twenty-nine about tigers and cows, and vultures and sows.

In Part Twelve, in a section detailing the rise of marriage and other human customs, the wild and domestic are quite pragmatically co-mingled. Shyplip Wote, a descendent of one of the original humans created from snow, goes out in search of a father (for at this time there was no marriage). As described in the Appendix, he eventually finds the daughter of a *nzymo* (a local ruler), and his “bride-to-be” asks him to find the answers to several riddles that evoke images of hunting dogs, pheasants, sheep, deer, wild boars, and water buffalos, along with bamboo, the “forest,” and other “living beings” such as rainbows, ice, and clouds. With the advice of his sister, Shyplip answers the riddles as follows:

“The three dogs that cannot hunt
 Are the spotted-snout foxes;
 The red-checked chicken unable to cry
 Is the fern-dwelling wild pheasant;
 The three pieces of wood that mustn’t be burned
 Are the three bamboo soul containers in the home;⁴⁴
 The three pieces of cloth that can’t be woven
 Are the rainbows in the sky;
 The three piles of sheep wool that can’t be fluffed,
 Are the misty mountain clouds;
 The three *jin* of salt that can’t be eaten
 Are the icicles in the deep forest;
 The upper part of the war armor,
 The war vest with the front and back
 Is missing a piece made of deer antler skin;⁴⁵
 The middle part of the war armor,
 Made of 6,002 leather plates—but for one
 Made of the thick skin on a wild boar’s neck;⁴⁶
 The rear part of the armor,
 That has two plates,
 Is made from the skin of a water buffalo’s knee.”⁴⁷

map lut ke suo cup,	lo hnot zzup w ti.
ax ddu nyiet mguo ti,	vit xie o wa da,
map gu yie bbop hni,	xie o xie wa nguo nyip pyr su li,
nda xy shup bbu ti,	cie fu hla bba ti;
map jie syr suo dda,	vit xie jjut wa da,
yi vut nip jjup ti,	xie yy ma fut dur fut hxa nyip
map chyp yit suo ho,	ma su li,
mu vut six si ti,	vot nyi li bbux ti;
map nbie sha suo yo,	vit xie hmy wa da,
bbox o hxot shy ti,	xie njyr ma nyip ma su li,
map zze ce suo jip,	yyx nyi bbap zyr ti.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the myths and legends of the *Hnewo*, conveyed by narrative and ritual, are situated within the ecological landscapes of southwest China. Regardless of whether wild or domestic, within the *Hnewo* life forms of earth ultimately originate in the sky and now populate the earth by previous interventions of supernatural forces. Everything can be traced back to the sky, and was either sent or brought down by forces from above and implanted during the mythic past in its own niche within a natural/supernatural environment shared by other living beings. Some of these life forms contribute to a subsistence agricultural system developed centuries ago by one group of these beings, namely humans. Animals and plants serve as material, aesthetic, and spiritual resources useful to them since the legendary migrations of long ago down to the present day.

In this holistic view of the cosmos communicated explicitly and implicitly in the lines of the *Hnewo*, people are but one part of an imagined landscape that ranges from the abode of the gods above, to the realms of wild plant and animal populations in the mountains and rivers on earth, to the human settlements with their domesticated crops and livestock nestled within the hillsides of Liangshan. As exemplified above, the boundaries between these realms is often permeable.

And so it has been seemingly for centuries, as oral and oral-connected versions of the narrative have become as woven into Nuosu ritual and customary life as the threads of Pupmop Hnixyyr's loom. Yet the patterns of traditional life, already rocked by the social upheavals of the latter twentieth century, are increasingly stressed by pressures that draw young people out from the hinterlands and into the factories and offices of greater Chinese society, and by the influx of modern ways and technology into the mountains. Equally threatened is the relatively low-impact relationship of the Nuosu to an environment that becomes more anthropogenic by the day, imperiled by the needs of rapid modernization and resulting in serious deforestation, degradation of the water supply, shrinking biodiversity, and other detrimental effects of development that are all too familiar to traditional cultures worldwide.

It remains to be seen in what ways the myths of the *Hnewo* will be meaningful to the future descendants of the Shyplip Wote, the son of snow, and the relation-

ship of those generations to their fellow beings among the tribes of snow. Will they continue to inform a daily life led in close association with the dynamics of nature? Or, over time, will the narrative inevitably fade into the redoubts of poems written in Chinese by urban-based ethnic poets, or of iconic public sculpture and abstract mosaic display, to be enlivened only when what FLUECKIGER (1999, 144-8) calls the narrative's "performative exterior" is presented in the contrived venues of tourist attractions, as is the case with many traditions from ethnic groups in Yunnan and other parts of China today?⁴⁸

APPENDIX

OUTLINE OF THE XIDE COUNTY *HNEWO* VERSION

The following outline is based on the version of the *Hnewo* as contained in Jji Vo's notebooks. It is offered here because: 1) the *Hnewo* is still a relatively unknown narrative outside the Nuosu population and a narrow circle of folklore scholars in China; 2) written (and of course oral) versions of the *Hnewo* differ, and the version from Xide county offers more comparative data; 3) it provides narrative context for the examples and observations elsewhere in the paper; and 4) it appears to be one of the longest known versions of the narrative—a full ten sections longer than the "standard" nineteen parts.

Part One, the "Genealogy of the Sky," begins with the appearance of the sky spirit, Ngetit Guxnzy, a major actor in several of the sections of the *Hnewo*. He lives in the "vast expanse of the heavens" and becomes motivated to create the sky and earth. He sends a number of mythical beings to carry out certain tasks. The actions of "herding" clouds and sun are carried out by one being, who also comes to "hammer" the mists into dark clouds. In the end of this short section, the sun shines brightly "beneath the clouds."

Part Two recants the primal condition of nothing above or below, or in any of the four directions. By the end of the short passage, forests, trees, and grass are growing on some places on the earth, and water appears in some valleys. Part Three speaks of transformations that occur in the void—"before the great flood had retreated." Certain changes alternate between day and night and the changes take place within a series of ten generations of mythical beings. Finally, after some discussion (among whom, it is not clear, as is often the case in the narrative), one being is given the task of opening four holes in the sky and connecting the four directions with the metals copper and iron. The appearance of multiple suns and moons is also noted. The origin of lightning, a powerful force having eyes, a head, hands, feet, and a mouth, is described in Part Four. Thunder arises from mists and clouds on several mountains. There is also a mention of twelve types of iron wire (also personified) that live in mountain crags.

Part Five, "The Separation of the Sky and Earth," is a much longer segment than the previous ones. The family of the sky spirit, Ngetit Guxnzy, produces a series of spirits, and thereafter summons the spiritual hosts to discuss how to sepa-

rate the sky from the earth as they eat and drink.⁴⁹ Eventually, one being is delegated to forge copper and iron forks from broken cooking pots that are used to pry the realms apart so that light, wind, and water can come out. Copper and iron bars, used to hold doors shut, are used to push the sky and earth to their respective places. Yet there are still cracks, and Ngetit Guxnzy spies four huge copper and iron balls on earth. Young horses, cows, sheep, and pigs fail to move them, so another celestial being is sent to solve the problem by hammering them into four copper and iron brooms, which are given to four female fairies who sweep the sky and earth into place, each taking on its own characteristics. In the next passage, four giant metal columns are seen to be holding up the sky, and the cardinal directions are held in place by wooden ropes and stones. Although separated from the sky, the earth needs some refining, and the blacksmith is again called to hammer out nine copper and iron axes used by nine young immortals who are directed to shape the contours of a land marked by valleys and mountains, with areas humans will eventually find suitable for herding goats, bull fighting, growing rice and buckwheat, and making war. A tamping tool is used to flatten certain areas for grass. There are also areas with trees, and in some stark places no life grows.

In Part Six, a spirit is sent to see the great *bimo* priest Awop Shutbu, who then goes about determining the dwelling places of the living things on earth. Clad in ritual garb, he sets out on a wonder steed and engages in bringing down tree and grass seeds from the sky, and populating the forests, flatlands, waterways, and mountain crags with deer, sparrows, grasshoppers, otters, bees, and other insects, all in their respective niches.

Part Seven is the genealogy of the spirit monkey, Anyut Ddussyt, who is called to set the suns and moons in the sky. Upon the Tur Lur Mountains (which play a recurring role in the *Hnewo*, though their actual location is unknown), the being hammers the suns and moons out of gold and silver, respectively. After sacrificing a heifer and placing the insides in the four corners of the house (which may mean the earth), he calls day and night until he has assembled six suns and seven moons. He then repeats the process, using a gelded sheep as a sacrifice, and calls in several constellations of stars. Finally, he descends from the mountains and sacrifices a pullet, calling in several specific stars. Eventually all of the lakes, save one, dry up, and plants and animals begin dying off due to the effects of intense global warming caused by the multitude of heavenly bodies. In the end, only a single stalk of hemp and a gray water deer survive.

Section Eight, relating the birth of the culture-hero Zhyge Alu, is one of the best-known and oft-repeated sections of the *Hnewo*. The section begins with the birth of a dragon which has relations to both the sky and the earth. As the genealogy unfolds, the mother of Zhyge Alu, who is an unmarried woman of the Pup clan, Pupmop Hnixyyr, appears in the story. One day, while weaving under the eaves of her home, she spies several flying eagles and wishes to go play with them. Three drops of blood fall from the eagles and splatter her body. A magical birth results in a strange child named Zhyge Alu who refuses to nurse, sleep in his mother's bed, or wear clothes. Eventually he is abandoned in a cave and raised by dragons.

He grows to manhood, his bows and weapons becoming more powerful at each stage of his growth. Seeking out his roots in the sky and earth, he demarcates his homeland by shooting arrows in each direction.

In Part Nine, Zhyge Alu attempts to shoot down the excess suns and moons that are destroying life on earth by standing atop various grasses and trees, until finally succeeding when atop a fir tree upon the Tur Lur Mountains. After pressing the downed celestial bodies into the ground, he next reduces gigantic insects, reptiles, and amphibians into their present sizes and presses or smashes them into their respective ecological niches. In Part Ten, however, the world becomes dark because the remaining sun and moon have gone into hiding, fearful for their lives. With the intervention of another supernatural being, Zhyge Alu is eventually able to call out the sun and moon, permanently differentiating night and day. These phases are marked by the crow of a red-combed rooster and the bark of a white dog.

In Part Eleven, a talisman falls from the sky and starts fires burning across the earth, which begins the transformation of present day life forms and, eventually, humans as we know them. Winds, clouds, and various beings (including a sort of hulking ogre/ape man) are unable to be transformed into the living beings of the earth. Thus, a spider is sent to the sky to ask advice from the sky spirit, Ngetit Guxnzy, who angrily tears it to bits. Thereafter, Ngetit Guxnzy's wife begins to go blind and he goes to search for a *bimo*, who advises him to put the spider back together again, since it was sent from earth. He manages only to find the head and tail (which is why spiders look the way they do today). Afterwards, a *bimo* is invited to earth to sacrifice a number of animals in the hope of making the ogre-like creature into a human. However, this does not work. Finally, the Ge spirit falls from the sky, and mist rises to the sky, followed by red snow that falls to earth, transforming into the twelve tribes of snow: six groups without blood (plants) and six groups with blood (animals). Towards the end of the section, a human ancestor named Shyplip helps a frog, which in turn aids him in seeking the water of wisdom, held in the petals of a *shuo hma* flower (a type of rhododendron and the most popular flower in Nuosu folklore). All other creatures rush towards a wooden bowl filled with the waters of dullness.

Part Twelve, "The Genealogy of Shyplip Wote," is the longest section of this version of the *Hnewo*. The origins of many customs and templates for customary and ritual behavior still relevant today are found in this section, which begins with Shyplip Wote, who is an eighth generation descendant of Shyplip, the son of snow who drank the waters of wisdom. Up to Wote's generation "sons did not know their fathers," and in his search to buy or find one he meets the daughter of a local overlord, or *nzyimo* (called "*tusi*" in Chinese). After consulting his sister about the answers to a series of riddles posed by the *nzyimo*'s daughter, Wote wins the hand of the upper-class young woman after a long series of interactions involving the exchange of livestock, negotiations over the placement of the bamboo vessel that contains the souls of the dead, sacrifices appropriate to the ranks of family and guests, and the tempering of Wote's self-importance.

Later, three sons of one of Wote's descendants discover an elder dressed in black clothing on their lands. The elder brothers wish to kill or beat him, but the younger brother suggests they talk to him. The elder warns them of an impending flood which will rise to the skies, covering everything on earth, because the sky spirit has become enraged when a being he sent to earth was killed by a human. The old man also advises the elder sons to make beds of metal and hang their grains outside, while telling the youngest son to make a wooden bed and keep his grains inside. Of course only the youngest brother survives the flood. Eventually the youngest son's bed settles on a mountain peak.

Various animals—and a stalk of hemp—have survived on the mountain peaks. The creatures, led by the Frog King, attempt to marry the youngest son to the daughter of the sky spirit, sending a crow, a snake, a rat, and a honeybee to the sky. The rat steals the home's soul containers, the snake bites Ngetit Guxnzy's foot, and the bee stings the spirit's daughter. The sky spirit summons many *bimo* to find out what is the cause of the attack, and sends envoys to earth to talk with the youngest son. In the end, the sky god agrees to allow the youngest son to marry his daughter as a cure for his swollen foot. With the aid of the wise Frog King, everything is resolved, including the return of the soul containers. The sky spirit unites the upper and lower worlds with bronze and iron pillars and his youngest daughter descends to earth to marry the youngest son.

Later, the sky spirit discovers his daughter has secretly taken the seeds of various key cultivants, as well as horses, to earth. In a rage, the sky spirit curses the crops and horses. When the youngest son's wife gives birth to three mute sons, a spider and various birds are sent to the sky for the secret of speech, but all are soundly beaten. Finally the *axpu yoxqo* bird stealthily flies into the sky spirit's home and overhears a conversation between him and his wife in which the answer is revealed. The bird flies out from the house, burning off part of his tail in the process, and reports back to the youngest son. The son takes three stalks of bamboo, boils them until they explode, and then splashes the water on the sons—who cry out in three different languages: Tibetan, Yi, and Han 漢 Chinese. Each of the three sons takes his family to different places (highlands, uplands, and flatlands). Relations between sky and earth eventually sour, and Ngetit Guxnzy ruminates over the release of the waters of wisdom and dullness, and the fact that only humans can speak.

Parts Thirteen to Twenty outline the genealogies and migrations of the Tibetans ("Opzzup" in Northern Yi; groups sometimes locally called "Ersu" 爾蘇, Lissu 裏蘇, or Duoxu 多許 in Chinese), Han (called "Hxiegmat" in Nuosu), foreigners (Yie ryp), and ancient clans of Yi, in particular the Nyz, A huo, Ggu ho, and Qot nip. These sections are for the most part very skeletal in terms of content, usually following a formula in which certain members of a lineage move to a certain place and either settle there or move on in search of a more suitable location (that is, "The generation of XX was followed by the XX, which settled at XX."). The formula is repeated over and over within a single section and often involves many generations within a lineage. Animals or birds of a particular locale are sometimes mentioned, as is the suitability of the land for particular crops.

NOTES

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1. In this paper the term “oral literature” refers both to texts transmitted primarily by oral means in the act of performance, as well as “oral-connected” written works that have a clear link to the dynamics of oral transmission. Thus, oral literature can include the versions of stories and songs that circulate orally without the aid of writing, as well as written texts that in some instances are used as scripts for oral recitation, or are otherwise closely related to a tradition of oral performance. As detailed below, the *Hnewo* exists both as oral performance versions and as oral-connected written texts. See FOLEY (2002) for lengthy discussions of “oral poetry” and the relation of writing, orality, and performance.

2. The Nuosu words in the text (identified by “N.”; Chinese words by “Ch.”) are presented in a romanization system based on a dialect of Northern Yi spoken in Xide County. As Nuosu is a tonal language, the tones of each syllable are represented by the appendage of final consonants “t” (high), “x” (mid-high), and “p” (falling) represent three of the four tones in the dialect, with an open syllable at the end indicating a level tone. It has become customary in some English language publications not to include the final tone markers for the ease of readers unfamiliar with the conventions (thus *bbopat* is written as *bbopa* if the tone marker is not added). Except in some quoted material and commonly accepted usages (such as “*bimo*” for “*bimox*”), the tone markers have been retained in this text. Modern Nuosu texts are written using a syllabary with 819 graphs (based on traditional graphs) that became standardized in the mid-1970s. BRADLEY (2001) offers a detailed introduction to Northern Yi and other Yi dialects.

3. Since 1949, beginning with Wuqi Lada 吳琪拉達 in the 1950s, and particularly Jidi Majia 吉狄馬加, Asu Yue'er 阿蘇越爾, Ma Deqing 馬德清, and Bamo Qubumo 巴莫曲布嫫 in the 1980s, Nuosu poets have utilized folk material related to the *Hnewo* in their works. Aku Wuwu 阿庫烏霧, the sole poet to have created a corpus of poetry in Nuosu (virtually all other poets write only in Chinese), has extensively used themes from the *Hnewo* in his poems. A prime example is his long poem “Calling Back the Soul of Zhyge Alu” (“*Axlu yyrkut*”) (BENDER 2005, 123–30). Moreover, he is working with the present author on a translation of the *Hnewo* into English and Chinese. Examples of public art and architecture on *Hnewo* themes include, for instance, statues of the deeds of the epic hero Zhyge Alu and friezes depicting mythic events on display in Xichang 西昌 and Xide 西德 in the Liangshan region.

4. See BENDER (2006, xxvii–ix) for a brief discussion of creation epics in southwest China, and comparative information on epics of the Miao 苗 of Southeast Guizhou province.

5. According to BAMO Ayi (2001), the Nuosu recognize two major types of ritualists. The most prestigious is the *bimo*, a male folk priest who can read/recite ancient Nuosu written scripts, interact with the spirit world, and officiate over life cycle events, particularly funerals, and various personal and community rituals that entail dealing with malevolent ghosts, who are thought to be the source of soul loss, disease, and calamity. A type of ritualist enjoying less prestige are the shamans known as *sunyi* (*sunyit*, or *monyit*, in the case of women). *Sunyi* experience trance ecstasy, employ hand drums while dancing, and perform tests of physical and spiritual strength which may include balancing objects on the head while spinning in circles and handling burning material. Unlike *bimo* who attain their positions by heredity, *sunyi* are recruited by “shaman sickness,” as is paralleled in many forms of North Asian sha-

manism (ELIADE 1964, 14–26; NOLL and SHI 2004, 6–8). *Sunyi* are engaged by clients to deal with lesser harmful ghosts. *Sunyi* do not normally have the ability to read the traditional Nuosu script (though many people have learned a reformed script that has been promoted by local governments since the 1970s). The ritual paraphernalia of *bimo* in the Liangshan region often includes animal parts such as eagle claws, the teeth of wild boars, and sometimes water deer teeth. The cherry handle of the ritual fan (*qike*) used to dispel negative forces, is usually carved as a snake on which stand animals such as tigers, wolves, Eurasian otters, frogs, eagles, and so on. The creatures represent the various natural realms of earth and sky, as well as the powers of the *bimo* and animal spirits over various natural and supernatural forces. Most, if not all, of these creatures appear in the *Hnewo*, though the larger ones are now either extinct or rare in Liangshan today. Another ritual tool, the spirit quiver (*rytu*) used to cast spells against ghosts, is a wooden tube with one end in the stylized shape of a bear's snout with open mouth. See HARRELL, BAMO, and MA (2000, 52–54).

6. This is in line with GARRARD's observation that in literature divisions between the wild and domestic are not always clear cut (2004, 150). As a point of interest, the theme of the wild/domestic/civilized can be traced back in Middle Eastern traditions to the Babylonian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which may have content from as early as 3000 BCE (GEORGE 2003).

7. Most of my analysis will be confined to one version of the *Hnewo* text and examples of how some animals and plants in the poem relate to Nuosu customs and traditional technologies. I will only touch on the vast and complex ritual tradition, which deserves singular treatment.

8. See HARRELL (2001), HARRELL et al (2001), and BAMO (2001b) for more complete introductions to Nuosu culture and a discussion of Yi ethnicity.

9. See the on-line paper by POLING et al (2003) and JARVIS and LIU (1993) for comprehensive studies of biodiversity and ethnobotany in specific areas of the Liangshan region. The latter source details the situation in Mianning 冕寧 county, which borders on Xide County, where the Jjivo version of the *Hnewo* was obtained.

10. Historically, various groups of Yi have used several calendars divided in ten, twelve, or even eighteen "months." Both wild and domestic animals appear, some the same as those on the Chinese lunar calendar, others featuring such creatures as Eurasian otters, crocodiles, bharal (*Pseudois*), leopards, and pangolins (ZHONGYANG 1992, 234–39). See MA (2001, 82, 84–87) for examples of Nuosu names associated with animals or plants. See Note 9 for information on the *bimo*'s accoutrements.

11. Several "complete" versions and portions of the *Hnewo* collected in various parts of Liangshan have been published in Chinese translation, and in some cases in bilingual, multi-linear formats (ZHONGYANG 1996; BAMO 2003, 251). The best known version in Chinese is Feng Yuanwei's 馮元蔚 translation, comprised of 14 sections (FENG 1986; LIANGSHAN 2006, 1–81). A number of passages in the Feng version are quite similar to those in the version examined in this paper, though other versions differ quite radically from either of these texts (GANLUO n.d.).

12. See BAMO (2001b, 2003) for an in-depth introduction and analysis of performance and ritual traditions associated with the *Hnewo*, and other examples of Nuosu verbal art.

13. In July 2007, I witnessed part of a funeral wake in Mianning county (bordering Xide), during which people from the family and clan performed at will in front of the bier. At one point, a pair of young men (called *vap zyr blit*), one from each side of the deceased's family, borrowed traditional cloaks from two women who had been singing laments. The men then recited portions of a narrative about the origin of death, moving back and forth in front of the bier. Afterwards, several other young men linked arms and sang similar lyrics, with some overlap in *Hnewo* content. This performance was followed by a group of women singing more laments, who were in turn followed by other singers. I was told that later in the night

it was likely that longer portions of the *Hnewo* might be recited, possibly in formats similar to the ones I had witnessed.

14. BAMO (2003, 144) also points out that in the oral tradition, portions of the story concerning the origins of the gods, culture heroes, and myriad living beings are considered as part of the “black *Hnewo*” (*Hnewo anuo*), while the portions of the texts concerning the ancestors of contemporary humans are known as the “white *Hnewo*” (*Hnewo agu*). This color differentiation may be related to ancient Yi clan groups, or even reflect a pattern of hierarchy similar to that of the former categories of social order that distinguished between “black” (upper) and “white” (lower) castes in Nuosu society (which before the 1950s was characterized by a small ruling elite and several lower divisions of commoners, serfs, and slaves [HARRELL 2001, 93–96]). More directly relevant to this paper, Bamo also observes that in the past some parts of the narrative concerning the origins of animals and plants were known as the “mottled *Hnewo*” (*Hnewo azzip*), though this term is now obscure.

15. Much more can be said about form and structure; the discussion is limited here due to space. See BAMO (2003) for a fuller treatment of the structure of oral performances, and ZHONGYANG (1992; 1996) and BAMO (2001a) for information on traditional oral-connected Yi literature.

16. Although the *Hnewo* deals with origins, there are many shorter origin narratives in Nuosu oral tradition. Commonly called *bbopat*, they play a part in the majority of Nuosu rituals, ranging from rites conducted by ritualists (especially *bimo*) to recall the wandering soul of someone ill, to funerals, weddings, and exorcisms of malevolent forces from the home (BAMO 2001b, 458; BAMO 2003, 173–74; N.A. 1998; VERMANDER 2006). As BAMO (2001b, 458) notes: “The *bimo* typically performs *bbopa* songs at the very beginning of a ritual, and continues inserting them into sub-rituals as the need to articulate the objects being employed at that very moment arises.” Although origin accounts may be told as individual stories or chants in contexts apart from recitations of sections of the *Hnewo per se*, ultimately many of the stories are related to events conveyed in the Nuosu master myth narrative. In 2006 an elaborate volume of Chinese language versions of Nuosu oral and oral-connected literature was published by the Liangshan People’s Government Press that includes the FENG (1986) version of *Hnewo* (see Note 12), and origin poems of living things: water, fire, iron, grass, trees, bamboo, hemp, tea, buckwheat, oats, rice, turnips (*vop ma*), tobacco, sheep, horses, cows, dogs, pigs, chickens, bees, salt, and alcoholic beverages (LIANGSHAN 2006). As discussed in the body of the paper, origins are either directly attributed to the sky god Ngetit Guxnzy, or to the sky, clouds, mountains, fairies, or the ancestors. As is to be expected in oral literature, most of the story versions both echo and diverge from written ones, such as the examples of the *Hnewo* text examined in this paper and by FENG (1986).

17. One afternoon, to give a sense of its sound and rhythm, Jjivo read aloud the entire text. The elocution was fairly monotone, except for the quoted speech of some characters. On a follow up visit to Xide in the spring of 2007, he chanted several shorter passages of the text from memory, though this ability was enhanced by reviewing the written text. Somewhat more emotion was injected into this performance. On the whole, Jjivo seems to have internalized large portions of the narrative, along with extra-textual information, a great deal of which he supplied during his explications in 2006 and 2007. The closest thing we saw to an uncontrived performance context of lyrics with *Hnewo* content was during a home-protection ritual held privately in Mishu. During the event a pair of *bimo* sat in one corner of the sitting room on mats and chanted simultaneously at varying rates of speed and intensity. The chanting included parts of origin narratives and genealogies that had considerable overlap with the *Hnewo*. Although *bimo* scrolls (along with other ritual paraphernalia) were at hand, they were not read during the ritual. More fieldwork on *Hnewo* performance traditions, especially in connection with funerals and weddings, will contribute to a better understanding of present and former performance contexts in the area. As noted, the author and Luo are presently completing a multi-linear translation of the entire Jjivo version, which is nearly four thousand lines in length.

18. Refers to a celestial swan and a place.

19. A famous beautiful woman in the region.

20. A person named “Bamboo Stalk.”

21. This is possibly a reference to Lake Qionghai 邛海 near Xichang, the capital of the Greater Liangshan prefecture.

22. This event somewhat uncannily presupposes recent scientific theories of exogenesis and panspermia that suggest that water or life itself was brought to our planet by icy comets. The *Hnewo* account would also make an interesting comparison with the fifth century BCE theory of Anaxagoras that the “seeds of life” descended to earth via rain from the sky. Other parallels with science include the evolution of humans from proto-humans in the *Hnewo* (see the discussion in the text), as well as in creation accounts from several Yi areas, including the Nisupo 尼蘇潑 epic *Chamu* 查姆, from the Shuangbai 雙柏 area in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture (Chuxiong Yizu zizhizhou 楚雄彝族自治州), Yunnan Province (CHUXIONG 2001a, 244–302).

23. Although everything listed is present in the local ecosystems, many Yi groups trace their origins to the Yunnan-Guizhou border area in the vicinity of present-day Zhaotong 趙同. During funerals in many Yi areas—including Liangshan—the *bimo* ritualists guide the souls of the dead across the landscape to the Zhaotong area. Here the souls rise to the sky (sometimes in a multi-colored pillar of light) to meet the ancestors in the other world. Thus, it is possible that the actual creation site described in the *Hnewo* does not “officially” take place in Liangshan, but instead directly across the Jinsha (upper Yangzi) River to the east.

24. This and other passages from the Xide *Hnewo* were translated from Jjivo’s Nuosu language text in cooperation with Luo Qingchun, who also supplied the romanizations.

25. *Ne put* (Ch: *changpu* 菖蒲) grass is commonly used by Han people in parts of Sichuan during the Dragon Boat (*duanwu* 端午) festival.

26. Several Nuosu I spoke to in Xide county told of having seen a small green frog in their homes that is thought to bring good luck.

27. *Nyzmo*, or *tusi* 土司 in Chinese, were powerful native overlords who, with imperial sanction, ruled parts of the Yi regions during the Ming 明 (1368) and Qing 清 (1644–1911) dynasties. For a discussion of *nyzmo* in the *Hnewo*, see WU 2001, 38–40.

28. Possibly Lake Dianchi 滇池 in Kunming 昆明, Yunnan province.

29. Probably a small hawk.

30. Except for a brief mention in Part Twenty-seven (see excerpt later in this article), little is made of tigers in this version of the *Hnewo*, though the beasts do figure in certain ritual texts from Liangshan, such as the ritual for expelling ghosts (N. A. 1998, 515). Tigers are also a huge presence in the creation myths and folklore of many Yi subgroups in Yunnan—so much so that an international conference was held in the summer of 2007 in Shuangbai county, in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture, on the theme of tigers in Yi lore. See CHUXIONG (2001b, 3–19) for an account from Yao’an 姚安 of how the features of the sky and earth transform from the body parts of a supernatural tiger, the meat of which is divided among various insects, a jackal, and birds—except for a great hungry eagle that flies to the sun, blocking the sunlight. Houseflies lay eggs in its wings and the eagle falls to earth, where ants move it so that day and night are clearly distinguished.

31. In some cases, such as with monkeys and eagles, certain parts of these creatures may be utilized if the animal is found dead in the wilds. If a hunter is unfortunate enough to kill one, he and his family will be visited with bad luck for generations and a *bimo* must be sought to conduct proper rituals of atonement and cleansing.

32. See INGOLD (2000, 58) for a discussion of the perception of animals in hunter-gatherer and pastoralist societies. He argues that in the former, free-roving wild animals have a sort of “trust” relationship with humans in that hunters must properly engage with animals that

present themselves as consumable resources. As hunters, the Nuosu believe wild animals are under the control of the Mountain God to whom offerings must be made at the start of the hunt. Wild animals are thought to have souls, and must be properly hunted, killed, and butchered, including the order of the initial skinning cuts on the legs. As pastoral herders, the Nuosu have high regard for their livestock and a stake in protecting it as a source of food and sacrificial offerings, a commitment which involves both husbandry and the invoking of spiritual protection of the animals. In the case of pastoralists, Ingold purports that domesticated animals are in a “slave” relationship with their human masters, and subject to complete dominance and subordination—a formula that may also carry over into relations between humans in the society. HARRELL (2001, 93–96) discusses Nuosu class and caste, noting that while caste stratification was a strong component of society, it never seems to have “included notions of pollution or automatic deference,” at least the upper-class (called “Nuoho” in Nuosu dialect) and the lesser-caste (known as Quho). The lower caste persons known as “Gaxy,” many of whom were captured Han peasants, however, have been classified as slaves by Chinese scholars. The degree of servitude expressed by members of this caste and the nature of the traditional caste system is still a subject of debate among scholars of Yi culture.

33. See RADNER (1993, 5) for an introduction to the idea of coding in women’s folk culture. While animal coding is complicitly understood among Nuosu, the meanings are not widely known among outsiders.

34. These customs parallel ancient protocols of respect on the North Asian steppe in which offending royals were smothered in carpets or buried alive, so that their blood would not be spilled.

35. The Sani (located mostly in Shilin 石林 County in eastern Yunnan province) make a white cheese from goat milk. It is often eaten lightly sautéed, with a texture something like drier forms of bean curd.

36. In Nuosu society weaving is the province of women, while men make felt (BAMO Jiemei 2006, 146–52).

37. Although silk is mentioned in this version of the *Hnewo*, its production—and the domesticated silk moth (*Bombyx mori*)—is not. However, sericulture is an ancient practice in southwest China, and the insect fiber was produced by many Yi communities, especially in Guizhou and Yunnan. Several passages describing silk production can be found in the oral epic *Meige* 梅葛, collected in the late 1950s from Lipo 俚泼 communities near Yao’an, Yunnan (CHUXIONG 2001b, 93–96). See also CHUXIONG (2001a, 313–20) for an account of the origin of silk in the *Chamu* epic of the Nisupo subgroup.

38. Dogs are used in hunting and as watch dogs. It is a taboo to eat dog meat, and a purification ritual must be held in the event it is accidentally consumed.

39. The sacrifice of a cow, a sheep or goat, and a pig in Yi rituals has interesting parallels with the sacrifices of a cow, a ram, and a wild boar that the shade of Tiresias directs Odysseus to make to placate the sea god Poseidon in the *Odyssey*, a text likely predating the *Hnewo tepyy* by millennia (FAGLES 1996, 253.)

40. *Vop ma* (Ch: *yuangen*) is a semi-domesticated turnip-like tuber eaten in many upland areas (MI 1997, 18). Potatoes, a Nuosu staple today, are also mentioned in the segment. Like maize and tobacco (the latter also occurs in the poem), varieties of potatoes were imported to China from the Americas by the sixteenth century, eventually making their way into the Liangshan region.

41. In the sky, hemp seeds can be distilled for alcohol, but after the curse, not on earth.

42. Sweet buckwheat (*mgep qy*) is regarded as nutritionally inferior to bitter buckwheat (*mgep nuo*)—which is the desired strain. It is said that one cannot fill up properly on sweet buckwheat.

43. The processing of hemp seems to differ in some areas. Among the Sani and other groups in Yunnan the stalks are laid out in the elements for weeks and the fibers are strung

from trees once processed, as part of the retting procedure. See also CHUXIONG (2001a, 303–312) for a mythic account of the origins of hemp and cotton in the epic *Chamu*. See MUEGLER 1998, 100–103 for an engaging discussion of the cultural meanings of hemp among the Lolopo 蘿羅潑, a major Yi subgroup in northern Chuxiong prefecture.

44. These containers, which hold one of a person's souls, are kept in the home until being deposited within mountain crags.

45. According to Jjivo's interpretation, this refers to the thick skin on the bony pedicles supporting a deer's antlers. Certain Asian deer, particularly muntjac (*Muntiacus*), have several inches of such skin that can be removed as a unit if properly skinned (GEIST 1998, 45).

46. The skin on the neck of a boar is especially thick and useful in making hunting garb. This "saddle" on the boar's neck is well-known to hunters worldwide, who must place their killing blows carefully to avoid it.

47. According to Jjivo's interpretation, this article is made of the specially shaped skin around a water buffalo's knee joint. This "cow's knee" seems to be the same cut of skin used by American colonials to protect their flintlocks from rain.

48. Among the prominent examples of the redeployment of tradition in non-traditional formats for largely non-Yi audiences is the development of the Stone Forest tourist attraction in the Sani subgroup area of Shilin county, on the theme of the oral poem of the heroine Ashima 阿詩瑪, and the Ten Month Solar Calendar Park in the city of Chuxiong, which features massive columns covered with Yi myths pictured in bas-relief (BENDER 2007, 213). See DAVIS (2005, 115–19) for a discussion of what she calls the "simplifying project," whereby traditional folktales and dance of the Dai 傣 ethnic group have been altered to suit non-traditional contexts.

49. See BARBER and BARBER (2004, 200–201) for a discussion on the mythic separation of sky and earth. The work also treats many other themes in world mythologies, which the authors feel may be related to geophysical events and ancient cosmologies.

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