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Front cover:

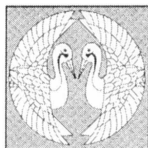
The depiction of Nāgeśvara-rāja, the “king of *nāgas*”, the central figure in the miniature from the first volume of the collection *Sungdui*. Manuscript K 6 in the collection of the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies, 17th century, lower cover, 63.0×21.5 cm.

Back cover:

Plate 1. The depiction of *bodhisattva* Mañjuśrī, an embodiment of wisdom, on the left, and of Prajñāpāramitā as a *Yum*- “Mother”, on the right. Miniature from the second volume of the collection *Sungdui*, manuscript K 6, upper cover, 63.0×21.5 cm.

Plate 2. The depiction of the formidable deity Śrī Maqakala, the central figure, and of Guru Ganbo (Skt. Pañjara Mahākāla), on the left and right, the second volume of the collection *Sungdui*, manuscript K 6, lower cover, 63.0×21.5 cm.

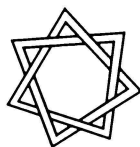
RUSSIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
THE INSTITUTE OF ORIENTAL STUDIES
ST. PETERSBURG BRANCH



Manuscripta Orientalia

International Journal for Oriental Manuscript Research

Vol. 5 No. 3 September 1999



75ESA
St. Petersburg-Helsinki

BOOK REVIEWS

T. Vinogradova. *A Ritual for Expelling Ghosts: a Religious Classic of the Yi Nationality in the Liangshan Prefecture, Sichuan*. Taipei: Taipei Ricci Institute, 1998, v—xxx, pp. 613, colour photographs.

The Yi (Yizu) are one of the peoples who populate the south of China. Seven million Yizu live compactly in the south-west provinces of Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou. The Yizu language belongs to the Tibeto-Burmese family of languages and has its own script. Yizu is an ancient people. Already in the third—sixth centuries, the Chinese singled out among the natives of the Yangtze river basin the *man* barbarians, a part of whom were apparently the ancestors of the Yizu. Among the non-Han peoples who lived in the state of Nanzhao in the eighth—ninth centuries, were also ancient Yizu. The history of the Yizu was a constant struggle with the ethnic Han Chinese for survival, national self-identification, and the preservation of their own culture.

Little is known of Yizu culture. Despite their undoubted significance, purely ethnographic field studies ignored texts in the Yi language. Until recently, facsimiles of only a few Yizu manuscripts had been published from the collection of the well-known Austrian scholar Joseph Franz Rock¹. These editions, however, lack any commentaries aside from “technical” descriptions of the scrolls themselves, and are accessible only to those who can read the Yi language.

The constantly growing interest of both Chinese and Western scholars in the culture and religion of the Yizu² could no longer tolerate this omission. The enormous project undertaken by the Taipei Ricci Institute to collect and translate religious texts in the Yi language attempts for the first time to fill this gap. An annotation indicates that the aim of the edition is to aid scholars in forming a complete picture of the religious ideas of the Yizu.

The case with the religious texts of the Yizu is indeed unique, since they were created and recorded directly by those who performed the rituals, the bimo-priests. Bimo texts on a single subject — the expulsion of spirits — were selected for the edition under review here.

The published texts are preceded by the Introduction in English by Benoît Vermander and its Summary in Chinese by the same author. There is also a Summary in Chinese by Bamo Ayi. They tell of the vast preparatory work completed

largely by members of the Meigu Center for the Study of Bimo Culture and the Liangshan Ethnic Research Institute (China). The contributions of the chief archivist and collector, Ggahxat Shyxzzi, copyist Jiphly Tiexssyr, chief translator Motsi Cyhox, and consultant, Prof. Stevan Harrell of Washington University are indicated. Information about the Yi people and their religion is also provided. Yi is not the Yi's own name for themselves, nor is it the traditional Chinese term for them. Benoît Vermander writes of the rumours according to which the character designating Yi was the personal creation of Mao Zedong, who substituted it for another character with the same reading that simply meant “barbarian”. Before Mao, the Yizu were known as Nuosu or Luoluo. They display a significant degree of diversity as a people, speaking six dialects, two of which are closer to the Sisu and Lahu languages than to Yi. One of the dialects has been chosen as the standard for the Yi language and is taught in schools.

The book presents texts by bimo who lived on a single territory. It remains unclear how representative they are of the Yi as a whole, especially since there is evidence that many traditions and superstitions were interpreted variously by the inhabitants of various villages.

In describing the religion of the Yizu, Benoît Vermander does not term it “primitive”, as it represents the result of extended development, of the people. This religion attaches great importance to the written word, and has undergone continuous development as it came into contact with various Han and Tibetan cults.

In the religious system of the Yizu, the bimo are not the only priests; there are also so-called *sunis*, shamans who are not connected with the written tradition. They are invited to less significant occasions than the bimo. The existence of the *sunis*, along with many superstitions, seems to give reason to assume that the bimo's beliefs as reflected in the texts may not represent the actual religion of the Yi.

Benoît Vermander provides a rather schematic description of what he calls the “theology of the bimo”. A certain doctrine of “three souls” exists, but ordinary Yizu could not clearly explain to the scholar the basic sense of the doctrine. These spirits which inhabit the universe are unusually rapacious; the goal of all rituals is to defend the soul from the danger of being devoured, as the soul is like flesh for the spirits.

¹ *Verzeichnis der Orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland*. Bd. 7, beschrieben von Klaus L. Janert. T. 4: *Nachhandschriften nebst Lolo- und Chungchia-Handschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1977); T. 5: *Nachhandschriften nebst Lolohandschriften* (Wiesbaden, 1980).

² See *The First International Conference on Yi Studies* (Seattle, 1995). Also, the second international conference on Yi studies was carried out in Trier (June, 1998).

The cult of ancestors is well developed and demands offerings. The ancestors are no less rapacious than the evil spirits, and one must feed them as well. Burial rituals are of great significance — the cremation of the deceased is understood as a ritual offering of flesh. After cremation, a bamboo “soul” is prepared which is then dispatched to the ancestors. This is the most important ritual. Cremation and the rituals associated with it are the key to understanding the Yizu religion.

Noting that the description of the rituals themselves is not his task, Benoît Vermander offers ideas for future research in the light of the published bimo texts: the study of Yizu genealogy, comprehensive research into ritual texts and practices, the analysis of examples from daily life, the collection of stories and legends and comparisons with the folklore of other ethnic groups.

The analysis and description of the published texts are the subject of the Chinese Foreword, written by Prof. Bamo Ayi, translator of the texts. Its content is summarised in the English summary.

Ancient Yizu literature distinguishes between secular texts and those of the bimo. The collection of the Meigu Center for the Study of Bimo Culture contains some 115,000 bimo texts. Bimo scrolls are of varying sizes. Paper is wound onto a bamboo stick and placed in a case of leather, cotton, or hemp. Each scroll is equipped with a large heading so that the bimo can quickly find the manuscript necessary at a certain point in the ritual. The bimo scrolls of the Liangshan Yizu display a surprising feature: they are written and read in various directions. Priests write from left to right and from top to bottom; during reading, the scroll is turned 90 degrees to the left in order to move from vertical to horizontal reading, from right to left and top to bottom.

The bimo distinguish between three categories of sacred books: books associated with the cult of ancestors; texts for exorcism, medical texts, and spells against enemies; and, finally, fortune-telling books. We are here presented with excerpts from books of the second category, perhaps because they are the least offensive. Spells against enemies were traditionally written in human blood and for this reason could not be stored in dwellings, but only in special caves.

The exorcism ritual was quite extended. The “big” ritual was performed over the course of nine days; the “small” ritual occupied a single day. The ceremony was conducted at the home of the person who ordered it by the bimo himself, who was assisted by the head of the family and close neighbours. The ritual was accompanied by the sacrifice of black animals.

We turn now to the texts. The edition is a compilation of texts from nine different manuscripts gathered around the city of Meigu. It contains 24 texts of various lengths, from the very long to the very short. The original texts of the bimo manuscripts were specially copied for this edition. Early on, the book contains several photographs of the actual manuscripts, which display clear, easily readable handwriting. The clarity of the writing in bimo manuscripts can be explained by the fact that part of the ritual was performed at night and manuscripts were written so that the priest would be able to read them easily in the dim light of an oil lamp.

The text is published in four columns. The first column is the bimo text copied in the graphics of the Yi language.

The second is the text in international phonetic transcription. The third column contains a literal translation into Chinese, while the fourth — a literary Chinese translation. There are a small number of “obscure passages”, which are left without translation or comment. The book ends with commentary on the texts, though quite limited and dealing mainly with place-names and proper names.

The text is broken down into poetic verses (in the manuscripts the texts form an unbroken whole). Each line contains from 3 to 11 syllables. The Chinese translation tends toward five- to seven-syllable lines, as the translators wanted Chinese readers to grasp the beauty of the original. Segments which represent a single idea are numbered; their quantity fluctuates in various texts from 57 to 1,500.

Unfortunately, in its current form, the edition fails to convey such important elements of bimo manuscripts as drawings and marginal notes made by the priests themselves. The notes contain information about the time and place of a ritual and concrete circumstances relating its performance, for example, weather. The uniqueness and value of the manuscripts can be discerned from the few photographs at the beginning of the book.

The majority of the 24 texts published here deal with the expulsion of spirits of various illnesses which afflict both people and animals: spells against leprosy, birth pangs, madness, incantations against plagues which kill monkeys. There are also texts directed against “social plagues” such as the debauchery of prostitutes. Many verses combat some general danger such as bad luck or surprises. For this purpose there exist incantations against evil and rapacious spirits or aggressive ancestors. These provide the fullest picture of the Yizu pantheon. The final text entitled “The Bimo Offer the Ancestors Sacred Books” contains a great deal of information about the activities of Yizu priests.

All texts, irrespective of their content, begin with the single line “Pure sound of *lan-lan*...” and end with “Quickly, quickly be gone!” For instance, the eighth text contains an incantation against illnesses of the earth, which include fumes, swampiness, gaps and cracks. The pure sound of *lan-lan* indicates that the ritual has begun and that all forces have been marshaled to cast out the “evil of the earth”. There are too many uncontrollably multiplying earthly evil spirits. Left to their own devices, they have spawned grandchildren and great-grandchildren, who have come to exert too strong an influence on good. Therefore, the bimo have penetrated beneath the earth and engaged the earth spirits in battle. In this struggle they are aided by people who live on the territory, adults and children. The monstrous earth demons are assisted by the people's domestic animals, but the bimo succeed in shattering the resistance of the evil forces. The evil spirits are vanquished, but one must remain watchful, for they may return, hence the final words “Quickly, quickly be gone!”

Only the final text, a sort of bimo “encyclopedia”, has a somewhat different structure. It consists of numerous excerpts which begin and end with the standard lines. Each fragment tells of the Bimos' experience in subjugating or expelling various evil forces. The text, however, ends with a line in which these introductory and final words mentioned above are absent; it recounts that the activities of the bimo cannot and should not ever cease.

The books' publishers are convinced that the many years of cooperation with the priests themselves guarantee the accuracy and quality of the Chinese translation of the

bimo sacred books. Unfortunately, there remains the problem that no one can guarantee the accuracy of translations from the Chinese into any other language: the text is too unusual and difficult to understand; it contains too many unfamiliar details, such as names of beings and actions, which allow for at least two interpretations. All of this exacerbates the problems inevitably associated with double translation. Even while reading the text in order to write the present review, the reviewer gained a sense of the complexities which the actual translator encountered. We note that the presence of two Chinese translations — one literal, one literary — eases the task in certain cases. The publisher herself sees the main obstacle to reading and understanding the religious classics of the bimo in the fact that the text

cannot be understood in and of itself. One must know the text's connection to the ritual. Additionally, there is the difficulty of appropriately conveying religious terms in a different language, the language of a different culture. In light of this problem, fears that the reader may fail to grasp the poetic beauty of the original seem less than crucial.

These, however, are problems which face the translators and scholars of religion who will use the book in their work, an issue which the publishers recognise. But the latter have coped splendidly with their task of introducing for the first time into scholarly circulation a religious classic of the Yi people. The rest depends on the concerted work of scholars, on their ability to make the best possible use of the linguistic material which has been placed at their disposal.

Tatiana Vinogradova
