

MEMORY OF THE WORLD REGISTER NOMINATION FORM

PART A—ESSENTIAL INFORMATION

1. Summary

The Naxi people are the descendants of the ancient Qiang tribe, who inhabited the Huanghe and Huangshui valleys in northwest China. After constant nomadic migration, the early Naxis finally settled down in eastern and western areas along the upper reaches of the Jinsha river. Today approximately 300,000 Naxis live at the juncture of Yunnan province, Sichuan province and Tibet autonomous region.

Despite the extremely difficult environmental conditions and the lack of material wealth, the Naxi still managed to create a unique and distinctive ethnic culture. This culture, taking religion as a primary focus and concentrating the ancient Naxi civilisation accumulated over the past one thousand years, has presented to the world the complete shape of the ancient civilisation of mankind.

As a consequence of this culture being handed down through religion, and of the priests of this religion being called “Dongbas”, this ancient culture acquired the name of “Dongba culture” and this religion was called “Dongba religion”. Thus, all the pictographic characters, scriptures, ritual dancing, and artworks and utensils related to this culture are prefixed by the word “Dongba”.

Spread through the Dongba religion, the Dongba culture also permeated a few thousand years of Naxi social development, thus influencing every aspect of social life and becoming the guiding ideology for Naxi society. What is of a continual surprise to many people and which leads us to consider this culture as remarkable is the fact that the Naxi forefathers were able to create a system of writing with more than two thousand characters, using a particular pictographic script to give voice to their customs and write down their scriptures. It was precisely by using this script that they were able to write hundreds of thousand copies of Dongba scriptures.

As a result of the impact of other powerful cultures, Dongba culture is becoming dispersed and is slowly dying out. There are only a few masters left, who can read the scriptures. The Dongba literature, except for that which is already collected and stored, is on the brink of disappearing. In addition, being written on handmade paper and bound by hand, the literature cannot withstand the natural ageing and the incessant handling. Under such circumstances, the problem of how to safeguard this rare and irreproducible heritage of mankind has become an agenda for the world.

2. Details of the Nominator

2.1 Name:

Lijiang Prefectural Administration, Yunnan Province, P.R.C.
Yunnan Provincial Archives,

2.2 Relationship with the documentary heritage nominated:

Lijiang Prefectural Administration is the owner of this documentary heritage.

2.3 Contact person:

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3. Identity and Description of the Documentary Heritage

3.1 Name and Identification details of the items being nominated

Name : Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature Manuscripts

Identification: ancient literature written in pictographic scripts by Naxi ethnic people.

3.2 Description

The ancient Naxi Dongba literature totals approximately 20,000 volumes. These volumes are collected and housed in the Dongba Culture Institute in Lijiang of China, Lijiang County Library, Yunnan Provincial Library, Nanjing Museum, and many foreign museums and libraries in the USA, UK, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain and Japan. The more than 1,000 categorized volumes of all the literature, exclusive of duplicates, are proposed for listing in the World Memory Register.

Because of its length, the catalogue of the Naxi Dongba literature for the application is attached as background.

The Naxi Dongba literature was collected from local residents by scholars undertaking studies of Dongba culture during their field trips in the 1950's when China was carrying out general investigation of cultures. They were subsequently housed in the reference library of the Dongba Culture Institute. As for the current protection of the literature, there is no special physical treatment being undertaken. Among the many publications related to the documentary literature for the nomination, the *Collection of Naxi Pictographic Script* compiled by a Naxi scholar Mr. Fang Guoyu, a specialized publication *Living Pictograph Script and Naxi Culture* by a Japanese scholar Seida Tatsuo and the 100-volume collected translation and annotation edition of the *Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature* by the Dongba Culture Institute are the three most authoritative works.

Names and Addresses of Appraisers:

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4. Justification for Inclusion and / Assessment against Criteria

4.1 The Naxi ancient literature is the record of Naxi ancient indigenous religion. Besides duplicates, there are more than 1,000 volumes of Naxi Dongba literature in different categories for Dongba religious rituals. The Dongba religion is an indigenous religion that came into being among the early Naxi people and has been passed down to later generations. According to the types of Dongba religious rituals, the ancient Naxi Dongba literature can be classified as: 1, praying for blessings; 2, sacrificial offerings for exorcising evils; 3, funerals; 4, divination; 5, others (relevant miscellaneous works). The language recording the religion is pictographic with more than 2,000 characters, more primitive as compared with the inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty of Chinese history, and is the only surviving script of this type in the world. The scriptures were made on the tough local paper, written with mine ink and bamboo pen and bound with threads. All the literature is handed down from the Dongba priests and can only be read by them. So far, more than 20,000 volumes of the Dongba literature have been collected and housed (which are considered as the heritage of the human being with authenticity.)

4.2 Naxi Dongba ancient literature is the only surviving ancient indigenous religious books written with pictographic script. Both its form and feature are unique, and cannot be replaced and recreated.

4.3 (a). Time

Naxi ancient literature covered a wide range of contents and subjects including formation of the heavens and the world, the Genesis for all things and mankind, and the formation of the ethnic groups, containing the “age of God” to the “age of human being” in Naxi language, and spanning not frequently that the history of the Genesis (around 30 A.D.) to the Tang Dynasty. It is rare in the world to find literature covering such a long history written in primitive characters. Thus it is of great value with respect to the aspect of time.

(b) Place

There is no sufficient evidence to prove the accurate time and place for the creation of the Naxi ancient literature and the Dongba script. While referring to the popular parlance among the Qiang groups, analysis of the records and some relevant ancient books, it seems most likely it is an extension of the history and the culture of Di and Qiang Groups. It is of great value for the studies of the origin of classical Chinese. Exceptionally, according to some of the analysis of so many pages of divination in the ancient Naxi Dongba literature, there is such a parlance that some of the ways for fortune telling came from India and Nepal. Meanwhile, as the Tibetan Buddhism also had a great influence on the Dongba religion, it can be said the ancient Naxi Dongba literature’s origins lie not only in the southwest of China, but also some of the bordering countries.

(c) People

The ancient Naxi literature represents the accumulation of the culture of Naxi ethnic group. It covers every aspects of the ancient society, referring to some Naxi ancient characters such as the man leading the people to build their homes, Meirencici, Meilidongzhu, Congrenlien, Gaoqinqu; the creator of Naxi culture Meililuapu, Meilishenazu, Panzishamei; the Dongbashiluo who urged the reform of the religion. In the Dongba scriptures, they were worshiped as Holy men. All of their stories have become legends. However, we can still learn that, despite changes of habitation and costumes and endless wars, at critical moments, they led the Naxi ethnic group to migrate from west to north, cultivated the new territory, and finally realized the transformation from a nomadic tribe into a group of farmers. Under the Tutelage of this certain group of people, salt making and copper and iron smelting were started at an early stage. In Naxi culture, in addition, the invention of the ethnic written language and writing of ancient literature in great volumes not only promoted the colourful Naxi culture itself, but also helped pass on the most original and distinctive culture till now. The group of people mentioned with the ancient Naxi literature made a great contribution to the social development of Naxi ethnic group.

(d) Subject and Theme

Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature, nearly containing 1,000 categories, is mainly used for primitive Dongba religious rituals. It is hard to sum up the main content of these books by way of brief introduction since it covers the politics, philosophy, economy, military affairs, culture, astronomy, calendar, farming, living, etc in the development of Naxi history. In academic circles, it is regarded as the encyclopedia of ancient Naxi society. The ancient Dongba literature is a scripture of an archaic religion, serving the function of religion and customs but also covering every aspect of society. All the ideologies of human society, such as philosophy, literature, art, history, politics and law, originated from religious culture. The archaic indigenous religion is of great value as the cradle and the body of the ideology and culture of mankind. Often, to support this proposition, we only have scattered and unmethodical evidence; in most cases we fail to find material objects with more information, or in some cases we cannot see cultural forms with in-depth implication. Only the Dongba culture that is preserved intact and directly shown as an ideology turns out to be the most valuable solid evidence. That is why scholars pay close attention to the connection between the ancient Naxi Dongba literature and the origin of human civilization. As a result, the subject and theme of the ancient Naxi Dongba literature are often linked to the mysterious and fascinations theme – unveiling of the origin of civilization of humankind.

(e) form and Style

The ancient Dongba literature is on local Naxi paper, usually measuring 29cm in length and 9cm in width, and written with mine ink and bamboo pens. Written in a unique way and style, it is of great value for comparative studies of the techniques of paper making and binding of literature in ancient times. With respect to the way of writing, all the scripts in the Dongba literature look like beautiful paintings. Though limited in number of scripts, the literature is the only one written in such a special pictographic script in the world. The inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty have a long history of over 3,000 years, and are a more maturely developed characters in comparison with Dongba script in perspectives of the style of calligraphy and phonetic notation; the style of calligraphy of the former is already very abstract and recorded language has no omission, whereas the Dongba script looks more primordial in these aspects. Seen from the perspective of a written language, the literature was written with implications of linguistic passage, which can be important first-hand information

useful for studies of combination of written and spoken language. Due to its distinctiveness, the ancient Dongba literature written in Dongba script is regarded as a model of primitive literature as well as a documentary heritage of high aesthetic value.

4.4

There are altogether about 2,000 Dongba pictographic scripts used for writing the ancient literature. This literature records the all-round ideology of the archaic Dongba religion of Naxi ethnic group as well as all the chanting words, rules, dance notation, model paintings, and divination methods for more than 70 rituals. Fully displaying the archaic religion, the Dongba literature is very rare among those of ethnic groups all over the world.

The systematically housed ancient Dongba literature records all the aspects ranging from the Genesis to the social life of mankind, and is an encyclopedia of the ancient society of the Naxi ethnic group; it also covers every aspect of all the religious rituals. These aspects reflect the completeness of the collection.

The scripts for writing the ancient Dongba literature are of great value for studies of the origin and development of written languages of mankind. It holds an irreplaceable position in the history of the development of the written languages. With regard to styles of the development of the written languages, it is more primitive than Chinese inscriptions on bones or tortoise shells of the Shang Dynasty. It is also the only pictographic script still existent in the world so far, able to be read without any need to be deciphered.

From the information given above, the ancient Dongba literature written in this kind of pictographic script is rare in both content and style; it is the only one of the like in the world, irreplaceable and reproducible. Moreover, the content of the literature remains intact in comparison with other relics of the like that portray forms of indigenous religions and cultures.

Threats to the Naxi Dongba ancient literature: Due to the natural ageing, and the fact that the scripts were written on local paper, the original volumes cannot survive frequent reading. They are also faced with great threats of natural damage. Besides, only a few Dongba priests are now still alive, so later on, fewer and fewer people have a good command of Dongba culture. Without any measure to protect and house the originals, some of them will become “mystic books of heaven”. We really have to create better conditions to improve protection and management.

5. Legal Information

5.1: Owner of the Documentary Heritage:

Lijiang Prefecture Administration, Yunnan, China

5.2: Custodian of the Literature:

Lijiang Prefecture Dongba Research Institute

5.3: Legal statuses:

a. Category of ownership:

Public owned.

b. Accessibility

Open to the public.

C. Copyright Status

The copyright belongs to the Lijiang Prefecture Administration.

- d. Responsible Administration
Lijiang Prefecture Dongba Research Institute

6. Management Plan

6.1. Summary of management plan:

- a. Continue to collect and house the ancient Dongba literature that is still scattered in private hands.
- b. To translate the literature into English, Japanese, German, French and Spanish on the basis of Chinese version, and to make it known to the entire world.
- c. To sort out, catalogue, compile and copy all the literature stored at home and abroad, and to make a unified catalogue; collect study results about Dongba culture to make them widely accessible.
- d. Carry out the preservation of the document and training for the Dongba disciples.

7 Consultation

7.1 (a.b.c.)

A leading group was formed to prepare the application project and was presided over by the governor of Lijiang Prefectural Administration, who is the group leader; director of the Dongba Research Institute serves as the vice group leader. Besides the routine work, scholars with senior academic titles in the institute have several rounds of discussions. Six workshops on the theme and final version of the application have been held. Meanwhile we got great guidance and assistance from Chinese National Committee of the *Memory of the world* programme, Yunnan Provincial Archives and some other relevant departments and scholars in the process of preparation for the nomination.

8. Assessment of Risk

Earthquake and fire constitute threats to the ancient Naxi Dongba literature. Though Lijiang is located in a frequent earthquake zone, the threat can be reduced if the exhibition building can be built strongly enough to resist earthquakes. However, as most exhibition halls for housing the literature are an earth-wood structure, the potential for fire risk is great.

The Naxi Dongba literature under application for “Memory of the World Register”, are preserved by The Dongba Culture Research Institute of Yunnan Academy of Social Science under excellent conditions. While no fire alarm and fire extinguishing systems have been installed, all the collections of the literature are now housed in metal cabinets, but natural ageing and the constant use, however have affected the condition of the documents.

It is necessary for us to catalogue and to ensure the use of the documentary heritage. So far the cataloguing has been completed for the application.

9. Assessment of Preservation

9.1

The ancient Dongba Naxi literature was written by Dongba priests. From the 19th century, people have been aware of the need to collect and protect the document, including Mr. Pere De Sgodins, a French scholar in cultural studies. In the 1950s, about 5,000 ancient Naxi

Dongba document were found with the help of Lijiang prefectural government. In the beginning of 1980's, the Dongba Culture Research Institute was established, and now nearly 1,000 volumes of the ancient Dongba literature have been collected and housed. After sorting out and excluding the duplicates, the Institute worked on phonetic notation, translation and publication, which is the best way to protect the ancient Dongba literature.

Concerning publication of the ancient Dongba literature:

In 1885, Mr. Tylen Karaparia, a Frenchman, published an article about Dongba script; in 1909, Mr. Jacques Bacot, a French scholar, published the first monograph about Dongba culture; in 1931, Mr. Yang Zhonghong, Naxi scholar, compiled a dictionary about the Dongba pictograph script and the Geba syllabic script; in 1933, encouraged by famous scholars including Mr. Liu Bangnong and Mr. Zhang Taiyan, Mr. Fang Guoyu, a Naxi scholar, compiled and published *Naxi Pictographic Script Dictionary*; in 1940, Mr. Li Lincai, who was vice curator of the Summer Palace Museum of Taipei, compiled and published *Moxie (Naxi) Pictographic Dictionary*, *Moxie Geba Script Dictionary*, and nine version about Dongba document and several paper; in 1965, Jackson, an English scholar, published *Naxi Religion*; in 1966, Seida Tatsuo, a Japanese scholar, published *Living Pictographic Script and Naxi Culture*; in the same period, Mr. K.L. Janert, a German scholar, compiled and published eight volumes of *Catalogues for Naxi Manuscripts(also co-edited together with Rock, J.F: Na-khi Manuscripts. 2 parts. Verzeichnis der orientalischen Handschriften in Deutschland ,Band vii, Wiesbaden, 1965)*; after the Dongba Culture Institute was founded in 1981, there was aroused a fashion in studies of the Dongba culture. With the Dongba Institute being the center, a group of experts and scholars was established to study Dongba culture with more and more achievements in the field.

In 2001, as part of an extensive project for the rescuing literatures of minority ethnic groups, the 100-volume collected translation and annotation edition of the *Ancient Naxi Dongba Literature* (completed by all the scholars and senior Dongba priests of Dongba Culture Institute of Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences after 20 years of hard work) was published Yunnan People's Publishing House. The volumes won a honorary prize from the National Books of China.

PART C—LODGEMENT

The nomination is lodged by

Lijiang Prefectural Administration, Yunnan, China

Date: August 12, 2002