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AUTHOR'S NOTE

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Institution: Université Paris Nanterre

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Supervisor: Brigitte Baptandier

- 1 This dissertation examines the society and religion of the Naxi, a Tibeto-Burman-speaking population of north-western Yunnan, recognised as the 'Naxi nationality' (*naxizu* 纳西族 in Mandarin) by the Chinese state during the 'ethnic classification' programme (1950–1960).
- 2 The Dongba are Naxi religious specialists who are known in particular for possessing a ritual pictographic writing that they alone master. Before the 1950s, the Dongba handed down their religious knowledge from father to son. But during the Maoist

period they suffered severe repression, their books were confiscated and lineage-transmission was interrupted. In this dissertation, I analyse new forms of transmission that have emerged since the so-called 'religious revival' in the 1980s.

- 3 My research focuses on two contrasting ethnographic case studies. My first fieldwork was in Baidi, the holy land of the Dongba, located in the Tibetan autonomous prefecture of Diqing. A Dongba training school was founded in Baidi in 1998 by a retired Chinese Communist Party (CCP) cadre. The school is now run by a layman, not a Dongba trained within his family, but who – thanks to his politically approved 'class identity' (as a 'poor peasant') – was able to study in secret the religious manuscripts confiscated by the government. Since China signed the UNESCO 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage' in 2003, the state has certified this school, thus raising new political and economic stakes for residents of Baidi. My other fieldwork is in Lijiang, the political capital of the Naxi, which was inscribed on the World Heritage List in 1997. There, the state organises religious transmission based on the official translation of the ritual corpus confiscated during the Maoist era. This takeover is intended to attract tourists to the region and generate economic income, while expunging the 'Naxi religion' by transforming it into an officially approved 'Dongba culture'.
- 4 The first part of the dissertation examines the specificities of Naxi society, its origin and characteristics. Then it presents the grouping of ethnicities that gave rise to what is now called the 'Naxi nationality'. Finally, it discusses the singularities that made the Naxi known, together with their kinship system and their systems of writing, as a 'living fossil'. In the second part, I present the religion of the Naxi: their ritual specialists, the Dongba, their ceremonies and their manuscripts, their secret writing named *senjiulujiu* and their traditional mode of transmission. In the third part of the dissertation, I discuss the mode of transmission of what has now become 'Dongba culture' and oppose the case of Baidi to that of Lijiang.

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Keywords: ethnicity, heritage, Naxi, shamanism, Yunnan, writing

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Zihan Li is affiliated with the Laboratoire d'ethnologie et de sociologie comparative of Université Paris Nanterre. Her work focuses on the transmission of shamanic writing especially in the context of heritagisation in contemporary China.