

TRANSLATION OF
‘THE STRUCTURE OF THE NAXI PICTOGRAPHIC SCRIPT’
CHAPTER 3 IN A *DICTIONARY OF NAXI PICTOGRAPHS*
BY FANG GUOYU¹

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Abstract: The aim of this translation is to make accessible in English one of the most important chapters of the influential work *A Dictionary of Naxi Pictographs*, by Fang Guoyu, to a wider audience.² Through his work, Fang became a chief protagonist in bringing the attention and interest of the Chinese government and intelligentsia upon the Naxi people, the Dongba religion and the script during the mid to late 20th century. Although more contemporary research has superseded Fang’s efforts, his work is still widely used by both Chinese and Western academics as the basis for their research on the script.

The core purpose of this chapter is to analyse the structure of the Naxi pictographic script. Fang achieves this by classifying the pictographs into ten categories in accordance with theoretical principles adapted from the *liu shu* (六书), or six categories of Chinese characters. A discussion of the key features of each category is made and accompanied by examples to further illustrate the distinctive features of each category. A summation on the relevance of the script to the study of writing systems in general is completed at the end of the chapter. In addition, Fang also analyses the Naxi phonographic script as a script in its own right, and its relationship with the Naxi pictographic script.

Keywords: Naxi, pictographs, Dongba, Geba, Tibeto-Burman language, writing system.

INTRODUCTION

Naxi pictographs are symbols that represent language. They express the perceptions of *wù*: 物 ‘entities’, *shì*: 事 ‘actions’ and *yì*: 意 ‘concepts’ that people (the Naxi) encounter during everyday life.³ The Naxi used images of these perceptions as the basis with which to create a written script, which consequently made its dissemination and long-term preservation possible. The script is used as a device that facilitates the exchange of ideas and the accumulation of knowledge,

¹ Many thanks to David Holm, Luo Yongxian and the anonymous reviewer of this paper, whose comments and suggestions improved this paper considerably.

² Fang Guoyu. 2003. Naxi xiangxing wenzi gouzao (Chapter 3: The structure of the Naxi pictographic script). In *Naxi xiangxing wenzi pu* (*A dictionary of Naxi pictographs*), 56-79. Kunming: Yunnan People’s Press.






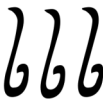



³ The definitions of *wù*, *shì* and *yì* can be complex, especially in theoretical contexts. Fang makes frequent reference to them throughout his work and as such has included more specific definitions in parentheses. I have chosen only to translate the parenthesised definitions as a translation of *wù*, *shì* or *yì* into English would be potentially inadequate. Furthermore, henceforth where Fang refers to *wù*, *shì* or *yì* in this context I have translated as the definition found within the parentheses.

and bears great significance upon the richness and development of Naxi society and culture. Since its inception, the script has undergone multiple phases of development. However, for a long period of time it was used only for religious purposes, which consequently led to its sustained conventionality and strength of preservation. As a result the original script has been passed down to the present era relatively intact. To understand the creation and structure of this script, it is necessary to consider characteristics of the Naxi people's natural environment, social composition, historical development and language structure, in conjunction with a thorough methodological examination of the creation of the script. Only then will it be possible to accurately analyse and understand the script.

The Naxi pictographic script uses images to create writing, such that a pictograph will look like the entity, action or concept it represents. However, it is unlike a drawing which seeks to imitate something in a very life-like manner, it instead uses basic brush strokes to roughly outline what it conveys – the entity, action, or concept. Since it is desirable that the script be simple and discernable, the method of creating the pictographs that comprise it is thus uncomplicated and natural. In contrast, due to the simplicity of the brush strokes and the relative similarity of many graphs, they can be easily confused with one another and it is often difficult to differentiate between them. Nevertheless, this technique fascinates many of those who come across it. In order to facilitate an investigation into the composition of the Naxi pictographs, they have been classified into ten categories as set out below.

1. PICTOGRAPHS: GRAPHS BASED UPON AN IMAGE

Naxi pictographs primarily use simple brush strokes to depict an entity, action or concept, thereby depicting it as a rough image. Below are examples of pictographs for astronomical phenomena, geographical features and household utensils.⁴

<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	heaven, sky		sun		moon
	stars		cloud		rain
	earth, ground		mountain		slope

⁴ Due to complications with inputting the Naxi script into a word processor I have been limited in the number of examples I could successfully provide to accompany my translation. Hence the majority of tables are missing examples that are present in the original text. However, I have tried to provide enough examples for the reader to gain an understanding of the ideas behind each category. E-Dongba, a font and IME package was used to supply examples of the Naxi script.



















Pictograph	Meaning	Pictograph	Meaning	Pictograph	Meaning
	water		stone		fire
	clothing		pants		hat
	plough		bucket		bowl
	hoe		door		sickle
	axe		knife		flag
	arrow		flute		drum

Table 1. Examples of pictographs for astronomical phenomena, geographical features and household utensils.

These pictographs are composed by copying the profile of the object they represent.⁵ Graphically they are not constrained by complexity or directionality, and are characterised by a ‘to see them is to understand them’ typology.⁶ This was the fundamental method through which the Naxi created their pictographic script.

2. INDICATIVE GRAPHS: GRAPHS THAT DEPICT NOTABLE CHARACTERISTICS

In this category the composition of the graph resembles the specific entity being depicted, and prominence is given to a particular characteristic of it.⁷ Although in general pictographs of the same category resemble one another, they each possess a distinguishing feature, so are therefore unlikely to be confused with one another. Listed below are some examples of birds, beasts, and plants.

⁵ In this sentence Fang borrows part of a phrase from the *Shuowen jiezi* (underlined below) which describes the first of the six categories of Chinese characters, namely the *liu shu*. The entire phrase is: 二曰象形者，画成其物，随体诘屈，日月是也。

⁶ This phrase (underlined below), taken from the description of the second of the six categories in the *Shuowen jiezi*, is perhaps the most often quoted classical phrase used to describe Naxi pictographs. Due to this I have made a rather literal translation so as to preserve the aesthetic of the original. The entire phrase as found in the *Shuowen jiezi* is: 一曰指事：指事者，视而可识，察而可见，上下是也。

⁷ 形体 *xíngtǐ* is often translated as ‘shape’, ‘physique’ or ‘body’. Here, I have chosen to translate it as ‘composition’ in order to convey the full scope of meaning that Fang attributes to it.













<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	chicken (male with crest - rooster)		duck (with a wide mouth)
	crane (with long neck)		dog (listening with two ears)
	dove (hiding food)		horse (with long hair)
	pig (with projected mouth and hair on the temples)		tiger (with stripes on the body)
	pine (with needle-like leaves)		chestnut tree (with wide leaves)
	bamboo (with joints)		rice (seed with awn)

Table 2. Examples of indicative graphs for types of birds, beasts, and plants.

The above examples all depict a portion of the body of a plant or animal, specifically the head of the animal or the leaf, flower or fruit of the plant. While their shape and structure are similar, each graph uses a notable feature of the animal or plant to express their respective differences. This was a method often employed by the Naxi to create their pictographs.

3. AUGMENTED GRAPHS: GRAPHS OF MODIFIED SHAPE AND FORM

In this category, a large number of pictographs are created from one original pictograph and each exhibits either a characteristic or function of it, although the new graphs are not radically different from the original.⁸ In order to communicate an alternative meaning, a change is made to the shape of the original, possibly a slight change or a graphical enlargement or extension of an element regarding the meaning of which is to be expressed. The following examples of human actions and related terrestrial affairs depicted in the two tables below highlight this functional characteristic.⁹

⁸ I have chosen to translate 德 *dé* and 业 *yè* which typically mean ‘kindness’, ‘morality’ or ‘virtue’ and ‘property’ or ‘business’ respectively as ‘characteristic’ and ‘function’. The basis for this is that the examples provided by Fang indicate a more abstract meaning than would have otherwise been conveyed by a direct translation.

⁹ 人事 *rénshì* is often translated as either ‘human affairs’ or ‘ways of the world’, however based upon Fang’s examples I feel that both definitions need to be included in order to express the concept in its entirety.





















<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	stand		sit
	lie, lay down		bend over
	kneel		rise
	dance		come
	raise		right
	left		i, me
	jump		full

Table 3.1. Examples of augmented graphs for human actions and related terrestrial affairs.

These examples all concern human actions and are formed from the original pictograph for person, yet each depicts a different action or affair. By changing the shape of the pictograph, so that each one possesses a unique marker, its meaning can be inferred from careful examination.¹⁰ Examples of human and terrestrial affairs are detailed below:

<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	north (the top half of the graph for 'water')		south (the bottom half of the graph for 'water')
	day (an abbreviated version of 'sun')		night (an inverted moon sans light)
	solar eclipse ('sun' with a portion removed)		lunar eclipse ('moon' with a portion removed)

¹⁰ Here, Fang appears to have modified a section (underlined below) of a phrase from the description of the second of the six *liu shu* in the *Shuowen jiezi* in his description: 一曰指事：指事者，视而可识，察而可见，上下是也 is changed to 察而见意.



<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	blind (eyes without eyeballs)		close (eyes stitched shut)

Table 3.2. Examples of augmented graphs for human and terrestrial affairs.

Likewise, each graph has been altered or modified to depict the specific characteristic which it is intended to represent. Similarly, this method was often used by the Naxi to create new pictographs.

4. REFERENTIAL GRAPHS: GRAPHS THAT DENOTE SITUATION

Graphs belonging to this category are typically those whose meanings are inherently abstract, but are used to indicate or refer to something specific; however they are not explicit themselves. Their meanings include many situational references, and they can thus be considered as referential markers, either signifying relative location, names of numbers or revealing the shape and circumstance of something.¹¹ The following examples demonstrate this methodology:












<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	top, above (depicts a bulge at the top)		high (a stick/rod standing upright)
	top, crown (the peak of a mountain)		low (the bottom of a foot)
	middle, centre (a line through the centre)		separate (two objects divided)
	one (can be duplicated to count up to nine)		nine
	ten (can be duplicated to count up to ninety)		hundred (can be duplicated to count up to nine hundred)
	thousand (can be duplicated to count up to nine thousand)		

Table 4.1. Examples of referential graphs indicating orientation and quantity.

¹¹ 形态 *xíngtài* is often rendered as 'shape', 'form', or 'pattern'. Here, I felt it pertinent to go beyond the typical English translation and include the concepts of circumstance and disposition in my version so as to convey the meaning Fang presents in his examples, and corroborate with examples from other sections. For example, the graph for 'to call out' in section five is composed of the pictograph for mouth and the referential graph for 'sound'. Nevertheless, Fang's description of the characteristics of referential graphs is somewhat unclear.

The meanings of the above examples are not absolute. They can indicate a variety of situational states. In addition, there are those graphs which represent relative condition or disposition. The four examples below occur frequently within the script:













<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	majority		sway, swing
	continuously, successively		sound

Table 4.2. Examples of referential graphs indicating relative orientation.

The above graphs, when added to the graph of an entity, denote a specific characteristic that expresses a certain condition or disposition.

5. COMPOUND GRAPHS: ADJUNCTION OF AN ADDITIONAL ELEMENT

Graphs of this category are those which are the depiction of the appearance of an entity or action, but whose meaning cannot be clearly expressed alone. Consequently, they are assisted through the attachment of an additional element in order to facilitate a comprehensive transmission of their meaning. This element depicts either an action or physical entity, and thereby further illustrates the meaning that is intended to be expressed. Of the elements that are attached, some are individual pictographs that possess meaning, while others are not, as the examples in Table 5 demonstrate.

<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	to lean on (a person leaning up against something)		to descend (a person coming down)
	to ascend, scale (a person climbing up)		to go through (a person going into a cave or hole)
	to wear (a person with something on their head)		to stumble (a person tripping on a rock)
	to prick, stab (a knife penetrating something)		to cut (a knife cutting through something)
	to send, deliver (a person carrying something with arms stretched out)		to take (a person picking an object up)















<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	dew (rain with affix for motion)		frost (snow with affix for movement)
	moo (an ox with the affix for sound extending from the mouth)		to look (eyes with lines representing sight)
	eyebrow (depiction of eyebrows above two eyes)		to call out (picture of a mouth with affix for sound)
	heart (depiction of a heart with lungs either side)		tongue (picture of a mouth with tongue)
	cutting block (meat on a block)		a ruler (a depiction of a person holding a ruler)
	plentiful (a granary that is overflowing)		writing brush (depiction of one made from bamboo)
	assemble, gather (a mass of people – with affix for multitude)		us (a person with the affix for multitude)

Table 5. Examples of compound graphs with adjunct elements.

The above examples were already pictographs in their original state, yet by attaching an additional element, deficiencies in the transmission of their meaning were eliminated. However, the definitions of these graphs are not born from the juxtaposition of the meaning of two individual graphs, nor is there a dominant-subordinate relationship. The attached element is simply giving prominence to the meaning of what is to be expressed.

6. COMPOUND GRAPHS: JUXTAPOSITION OF MEANING

Graphs of this category are formed by the combination of a number of graphs of entities, actions, and concepts which together create a new meaning. They are constructed from the original forms of the graphs in question, but do not keep their original meanings. Once combined, the composite meaning of the new graph can be obtained. Hence, here it is the relationship between the combination of the graphs, and not the graphs themselves, which gives the new graph its meaning. This is illustrated in the examples in Table 6:
















<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	master, host (a husband and wife inside their house)		to till, to plough (a plough turning up the earth)
	tend, herd (a person herding cattle)		hold, grasp (a person clutching a stalk of wheat)
	catch, seize (a hawk clutching a bird)		wade, ford (a horse hoof crossing water)
	cut, chop (an axe splitting a tree)		reap, harvest (to plant and cut down wheat)
	sharpen (a knife on a rock)		roast (meat on a fire)
	scold, abuse (two women squabbling)		to pull (two people pulling on an object)
	marriage, to marry (a shaman priest daubing the foreheads of the bride and groom) ¹²		tussle, fight (two people duelling)

Table 6. Examples of compound graphs.

In all of the above examples, each graph is the amalgamation of two or more graphs, and its meaning is easily discernable. Hence here, a number of graphs are combined to express one entity, action, or concept, the meaning of which is taken from the relationship between the combined graphs. There are many pictographs of this type in the Naxi pictographic script.

7. POLYSEMIC GRAPHS: GRAPHS WITH MULTIPLE MEANINGS

The graphs belonging to this category are employed to represent other new entities and concepts, as well as their original meaning and usage. This is achieved by extending the meaning of the original graph to represent a new but related entity, action, or concept. Thus, by maintaining the original form of the graph, yet attributing a new pronunciation and meaning, a new pictograph is created, as the examples in Table 7 demonstrate:

<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>New Pronunciation</i>	<i>New Meaning</i>
	zi ³³	stud, collar stud	hæ ³¹	gold

¹² The shaman priest is actually called 东巴 *dongba* in Chinese and *to³³mba³¹* in the Naxi language. In modern academic literature the term is often used to designate the priest (Dongba), the religion (Dongba religion) and the pictographic script (the Dongba script).










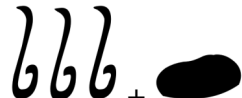







<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>New Pronunciation</i>	<i>New Meaning</i>
	<i>by</i> ³³	pot, cauldron	<i>ər</i> ³³	copper
	<i>tse</i> ⁵⁵ <i>be</i> ³³	axe	<i>ʂu</i> ³¹	iron
	<i>mi</i> ³³	fire	<i>hy</i> ³¹	red
	<i>hu</i> ⁵⁵	charcoal	<i>na</i> ³¹	black
<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pictographic Construction</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	<i>dy</i> ³¹	poison		black + flower (poisonous weeds)
	<i>dzi</i> ³¹ <i>na</i> ⁵⁵	large mountain		mountain + black
	<i>hu</i> ³¹ <i>na</i> ⁵⁵	torrential rain		rain + black
<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>New Pronunciation</i>	<i>New Meaning</i>
	<i>bi</i> ³³	sun	<i>ni</i> ³³	day (period of time)
	<i>le</i> ³¹	moon	<i>he</i> ³³	month
	<i>dze</i> ³³	wheat	<i>tʂi</i> ³¹ / <i>ər</i> ³³	the five cereals (rice, two kinds of millet, wheat,
<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>New Pronunciation</i>	<i>New Meaning</i>
	<i>hu</i> ³¹	rain	<i>zu</i> ³¹	summer
	<i>be</i> ³³	snow	<i>tsʰi</i> ³³	winter
	<i>ba</i> ³¹	flower	<i>tʂʰv</i> ⁵⁵	autumn
	<i>hər</i> ³³	wind	<i>ny</i> ³¹	spring

Table 7. Examples of polysemic graphs.

In the first three examples the graph for an object is used to represent the material that it is made of. Thus, as a stud is made from gold, the pictograph for ‘stud’ can also be used to graphically represent ‘gold’. A pot is made of copper and as such is used to graphically represent ‘copper’, likewise the graph for ‘axe’ symbolising ‘iron’. The following two graphs, ‘fire’ and ‘charcoal’, are used to represent respectively the colour which they are predominantly comprised of, ‘red’ and ‘black’. The next three graphs are the combination of the graph for ‘black’ which is then used to darken a section of another graph (‘flower’, ‘mountain’ and ‘rain’ in this case). When combined in this fashion it indicates an increase in magnitude, severity, or a shift in connotation. Hence, ‘rain’ becomes ‘torrential rain’, and ‘mountain’ becomes ‘large mountain’, which consequently take the pronunciation of *hu³¹na⁵⁵* (‘rain’+‘black’) and *dzi³¹na⁵⁵* (‘mountain’+‘black’) respectively.¹³ Whereas the graph ‘flower’ becomes ‘poison’ *dy³¹* with the addition of the graph ‘black’, thereby conveying a shift in connotation.¹⁴

The following three examples use the graphs for ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ to represent ‘day’ and ‘month’, and the graph for ‘wheat’ to represent cereals in general.¹⁵ The remaining four examples each take a well known characteristic of a particular season to represent the season in question. For example the Naxi winter is typified by snow, so the graph for ‘snow’ is extended by metonymy to indicate ‘winter’ as well. Consequently, ‘flower’ becomes ‘autumn’, ‘wind’ becomes ‘spring’, and ‘rain’ becomes ‘summer’. It should be noted that each graph takes on the spoken Naxi pronunciation of that which it represents. Furthermore, the graph for ‘cuckoo bird’ can also be used to represent ‘spring’, ‘wild duck’ for ‘summer’, ‘wild goose’ for ‘autumn’, and ‘white crane’ for ‘winter’. This is because each bird is associated with the coming of a specific season. During each seasonal period the scenery is different, thus a graph that represents an animal or typical characteristic of a particular season can be used to graphically represent the season itself.¹⁶

8. SYNONYMIC GRAPHS: A SINGLE DEFINITION REPRESENTED BY MULTIPLE GRAPHS

In this category the pictographs differ in form, yet each refers to the same concept. Thus, although the tangible object or entity graphically depicted differs,

¹³ This phenomenon is most likely a direct result of influence from the spoken Naxi language.

¹⁴ For the case of ‘poison’, ‘flower’ and the colour ‘black’ also depict a poisonous grass that is indigenous to the area inhabited by the Naxi.

¹⁵ It is interesting to note the similar application of the graphs ‘sun’ and ‘moon’ to represent ‘day’ and ‘month’ found here with that of the Chinese script, perhaps the result of influence from Han Chinese who also inhabited the area.

¹⁶ I have altered the layout of this section from Fang’s original in order to accommodate for the additional information included by Fang in his work, as well as a result of the previously mentioned difficulties associated with inputting Dongba pictographs into a word processor. In addition I have expanded this information for the sake of greater clarity of meaning.

each one refers to the same specific particularity of it, and its meaning and pronunciation remain the same. The examples in Table 8 illustrate this:

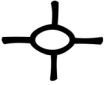





Meaning	Graph 1	Graph 2	Graph 3
light: <i>bu</i> ³³	 starlight	 sunlight	 firelight
burn: <i>bər</i> ³¹	 to burn firewood	 a house burning	 to burn a corpse

Table 8. Examples of synonymic graphs.

‘Light’, when written as ‘sunlight’, ‘starlight’ or ‘firelight’, appears different in form but its meaning and pronunciation remain the same. Each one is characterised as possessing rays of light. ‘Burn’, can be written as the action of burning firewood, a corpse being cremated or the event of a house burning. Each graph however is the depiction of fire with the object being ‘burnt’ portrayed above it. Again the pronunciation remains the same.¹⁷

9. PHONETIC-SEMANTIC COMPOUND GRAPHS

In this category the object being depicted is graphically determined by its shape, but acquires pronunciation and refinement of meaning through the addition of a phonetic graph that is homophonous. Thus, the phonetic graph can alter the pronunciation of the original graph and sometimes its meaning as well. Phonetic graphs are either attached in their entirety or a key fragment is used. They are always homophonous or similar sounding, and sometimes even a phonographic character of the Naxi phonographic script is employed.¹⁸










Pictograph	Meaning & Pronunciation	Semantic Element	Meaning	Phonetic Element	Pronunciation & Meaning
	mountain farmland: <i>dzy</i> ³¹ <i>k^hur</i> ³³		mountain		<i>k^hur</i> ³³ : foot
	tree roots: <i>dzər</i> ³¹ <i>k^hur</i> ³³		tree		<i>k^hur</i> ³³ : foot
	the back-side of a house: <i>dzi</i> ³¹ <i>mæ</i> ³³		house		<i>mæ</i> ³³ : tail

Table 9.1. Examples of phonetic-semantic compound graphs.

¹⁷ I have only translated sections of this paragraph that relate to the examples I have included.

¹⁸ See ‘Appendix: The Structure of the Naxi Phonographic Script’ below for more information.

The graphs above were augmented by the addition of a homophonic element, each taking the pronunciation of the element as well as the change to its meaning.



















Pictograph	Meaning & Pronunciation	Semantic Element	Meaning	Phonetic Element	Pronunciation & Meaning
	hamlet, village: <i>be</i> ³³		house		<i>be</i> ³³ : snow
	multi storey building or dwelling: <i>ts^ho</i> ³³		house		<i>ts^ho</i> ³³ : to jump
	fog : <i>tɕi</i> ⁵⁵ <i>sər</i> ³³		cloud		<i>sər</i> ³³ : tree
	sick: <i>gu</i> ³¹		to lie (down)		<i>gu</i> ³¹ : warehouse
	intimate, relation: <i>k^ho</i> ³¹		a person		<i>k^ho</i> ³¹ : fence
	everlasting peace : <i>ly</i> ³³ <i>dy</i> ³¹		the earth (ground)		<i>ly</i> ³³ : spear

Table 9.2. Examples of phonetic-compound graphs.

The above examples, in their respective combinations, have used one graph to supply meaning and one for pronunciation in order to create a new graph, but here only the phonetic element records pronunciation.¹⁹

The phonetic elements used within Naxi pictographs are not fixed or conventionalised phonetic graphs. Pictographs of this category are also commonly used for names of people and places, and the designations of ghosts, spirits and demons. The graphs which use phonetic indicators are often rather complex, and thus the majority of readers of the script are typically only able to comprehend each individual graph and not the greater meaning of the content of the text, such as with the Dongba religious texts.

10. PHONETIC LOAN GRAPHS

Graphs of this category are those which use a semantically unrelated yet homophonic (or near-homophonic) graph as a substitute when the meaning is difficult to express through the depiction of its shape. Thus, the new pictograph takes the form of an unrelated graph with an unrelated meaning; it takes the new pronunciation (which is homophonous or near-homophonous with the original)

¹⁹ Here, Fang uses 形 *xíng* which by definition means ‘shape’ or ‘form’, and 声 *shēng*, typically taken to mean ‘sound’ (pronunciation). However, and most importantly, in this instance the shape of the graph inherently represents its meaning, the very nature of pictographs.

but does not keep the semantic meaning of the original graph. There are instances of pictographs that comprise many meanings, the original, as well as those that are the result of phonetic loan. Examples of this phenomenon include those in Table 10.1.





<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Loan 1</i>	<i>Loan 2</i>	<i>Loan 3</i>
	<i>mur</i> ³³	heaven	ten thousand	scar	
	<i>tei</i> ⁵⁵	scissors	small	to fear	
	<i>ts^hɿ</i> ³³	to hang, suspend	this	broken, damaged	stack
	<i>bu</i> ³¹	pig	the fate that brings lovers together	class, team	kiss

Table 10.1. Examples of phonetic loan graphs.

In addition, phonetic semantic compound graphs will sometimes have their semantic component omitted, with only the phonetic component written. Moreover, at times the concept in question already has a graph to represent it, yet still a phonetic loan graph is used. Such phenomena occur often in Naxi religious texts. The examples below have all been used as phonetic loan graphs.




<i>Pictograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation 1</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Pronunciation 2</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
	<i>k^hu</i> ³³	door	<i>ho</i> ⁵⁵	express good wishes, wish
	<i>gu</i> ³³	masticate, chew	<i>gu</i> ³¹	true, real
	<i>k^hə</i> ⁵⁵	basket	<i>k^hə</i> ³³	break (a bowl)

Table 10.2. Examples of phonetic loan graphs.

The structure of Naxi pictographs possesses many common characteristics with other pictographic scripts. For instance, the ancient Chinese script and the Naxi pictographic script display many considerable similarities. The origin of the Chinese script, according to Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi*, is described in the following excerpt:²⁰

²⁰ The following quote is taken from the postface of Xu Shen's *Shuowen jiezi*, my translation.

“Looking up, pondering the forms in the sky, looking down, and appraising the patterns on the earth. To observe the elaborate appearances of the birds and beasts, and the suitability of the soil. Near at hand, in oneself, are things for consideration, and the same afar, things in general.”

Hence, it is by this manner of depicting what is observed that Chinese characters were first created. This method of character creation is known as the *liu shu*, or ‘Six Categories of Chinese Characters’, and explains the construction of Chinese characters.

Researchers of the *Shuowen jiezi* state that it was written in the Seal script, and since the subsequent unearthing of the Bronze and Oracle Bone scripts, which were predecessors of the Seal script, many more related discoveries concerning the creation of the script have been made. The results of this research into the structure of Chinese pictographic characters can be used as a reference for research on the Naxi pictographic script. Although the two scripts were created at different times and places, and there exists no relationship between their respective origins, the methods used to create each script are fundamentally identical. Xu Shen’s ideas concerning the origin and structure of Chinese characters, and the results of subsequent research on Chinese characters, can all be used as points of reference in the research of Naxi pictographs. Conversely, Naxi pictographs can also be used as a reference to research the Chinese script. Furthermore, the use of the two scripts as sources of reference when investigating the primitive pictographic scripts created by humankind should also be encouraged. This is because the civilisations that created these pictographic scripts possess common characteristics that are not encumbered by spatial or temporal restrictions. However, the creation and evolution of each script is still dependent upon its own particular circumstances.

It can be assumed that the previously listed ten categories succinctly classify the various compositions of the Naxi pictographic script. However, the structure of this type of script is very complex, so whether or not these ten categories are practical still awaits further investigation. Through using the framework of the ‘Six Categories of Chinese Characters’ to conduct a comparative analysis of the ten categories of Naxi pictographic construction, the following assumptions can be made: Graphs belonging to the *pictographs* and *indicative graphs* categories, are typified by the idea that one can merely look at them and deduce their meaning. Those graphs classified under the *augmented graphs* and *referential graphs* categories can be understood upon careful examination. For both categories of *compound graphs*, semantic meaning can be inferred through the correlated relationship between the combined graphs. *Polysemic graphs* and *synonymic graphs* can be understood through an overlapping of meaning with related graphs. Finally, the meaning of *phonetic-semantic compound graphs* and *phonetic loan graphs* can be understood on the basis of their pronunciation.

The Naxi pictographic script was created based upon the mutual interrelation of composition, pronunciation and meaning. Each graph has its own structure, which expresses the experience of engaging with the entities, actions and

concepts that people come into contact with in everyday life. It is these images that are used to make Naxi pictographs. The research of pictographic writing systems, such as that of the Naxi, is of universal significance to research of the creation and use of writing systems by humankind throughout history.

APPENDIX: THE STRUCTURE OF THE NAXI PHONOGRAPHIC SCRIPT

The Naxi phonographic script is comprised of very simple strokes. In general, one graph represents one syllable and homophonic graphs, irrespective of tone, are used interchangeably. When the script was first created the structure of each graph was fixed. However, over time variations of individual strokes within graphs began to appear, and consequently differences in the overall form of graphs slowly emerged which resulted in the script becoming disjointed. The following information has been gathered from various sources and analysed and systematised in order to explain the workings of the script.

1. THE ORIGINS OF THE NAXI PHONOGRAPHIC SCRIPT²¹

A number of phonographs have their origin in the pictographic script. Examples of these include those in Table 11.1:





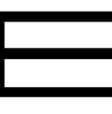


<i>Phonograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Original Meaning</i>	<i>Phonographic Meaning</i>
	$p^hər^{31}$	untie, undo	white; the name of a deity; untie, undo
	$tʂ^hi^{33}$	hang, suspend	hang, suspend; this
	ka^{33}	good	good; lid, cover; tired, weary, fatigued
	$sæ^{33}$	blood	blood; the name of a deity
	pe^{33}	door bolt, latch	door bolt, latch; alcohol residue; to touch, make contact with
	na^{31}	the name of a deity	black; but
	k^hua^{31}	cup	cup

Table 11.1. Examples of phonographs that originated in the Naxi pictographic script.

²¹ Headings are subsequent additions and are not found in the original text.

The examples in Table 11.1 are pictographs that are comprised of a few simple strokes, and as such have been adopted directly into the phonographic script.

The phonographs depicted below are simplified versions of graphs taken from the pictographic script.













Pictograph	Meaning	Phonograph	Pictograph	Meaning	Phonograph
	push down, hold down			rib	
	tree			fight, tussle	
	hair			spear	

Table 11.2. Examples of phonographs that were modified from the Naxi pictographic script.

The phonographic script also consists of graphs whose origins are found in the Chinese writing system, examples of which are shown below.









Phonograph	Chinese Character	Meaning	Phonograph	Chinese Character	Meaning
	山	mountain		飞	to fly
	火	fire		犬	dog
	目	eye		牛	ox
	石	stone		马	horse

Table 11.3. Examples of phonographs that were borrowed from homophonic characters of the Chinese writing system.

The above examples all adopt Chinese characters that carry the same meaning as the phonetic reading in spoken Naxi in order to represent it in graphic form.

The examples shown below are phonographs that use Chinese characters whose pronunciation is similar to that of the spoken Naxi language to represent it in graphic form.

Phonograph	Meaning	Pronunciation - Naxi : Chinese	Chinese Character
主	to meet	<i>tsy</i> ³³ : <i>zhǔ</i>	主
保	treasure	<i>po</i> ³³ : <i>bǎo</i>	保
巨	to bite	<i>ts^ha</i> ⁵⁵ : <i>chén</i>	巨
口	door	<i>k^hu</i> ³³ : <i>kǒu</i>	口
上	to speak	<i>ʂə</i> ⁵⁵ : <i>shàng</i>	上
叻	to run	<i>dʒə</i> ³¹ : <i>jiā</i>	加

Table 11.4. Examples of phonographs that were borrowed from near-homophonic characters of the Chinese writing system.

There are also a number of graphs that were created independently. That is, without direct influence from the Naxi pictographic or Chinese scripts.

Phonograph	Meaning	Phonograph	Meaning	Phonograph	Meaning
	left		female; woman		'yang' god
	right		male; man		'yin' god
	gold (metal)		dog ²²		tiger
	yellow		ruthless, resolute		leopard, panther

Table 11.5. Examples of independently created phonographs.

In the above examples the meanings of each pair of words are related, their shape is similar, and are thus consequently easy to recollect and identify.

²² The phonograph for 'dog' was also listed by Fang as a graph that was adopted from the Chinese writing system. The graph is similar to the Chinese character of the same meaning, thus indicating it was most likely borrowed and not created independently. Nonetheless, Fang may have listed it here as well because it is both a graph derived from a Chinese character and forms a pair with the Naxi phonograph for 'ruthless, resolute'.

2. VARIATION IN THE STRUCTURE OF THE NAXI PHONOGRAPHIC SCRIPT²³

The graphs of the phonographic script are not fixed in form or structure; as such identical graphs can vary and subsequently may be difficult to identify as being so. This difficulty can arise for several reasons. First, some graphs are created from an original graph, such that a group of semantically related graphs are born from an original graph, making it easy to confuse them with one another. For example:

Phonograph	Pronunciation	Meaning	Phonograph	Pronunciation	Meaning
	<i>dzi</i> ³¹	water (original)		<i>tci</i> ³¹	cloud
	<i>hu</i> ³¹	rain		<i>lo</i> ³¹	ravine
	<i>k^hæ</i> ³³	channel, trench		<i>dər</i> ³³	pond, reservoir
	<i>hu</i> ⁵⁵	sea, lake		<i>dər</i> ³¹	foam, froth

Table 12.1 Examples of a phonograph that was modified to create additional semantically related phonographs.

Second, it is typical for graphs of the phonographic script to have variant forms; practically every phonograph displays this feature. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon:

Pronunciation	Graphic Variants			
<i>y</i>				
<i>du</i>				
<i>mu</i>				

Table 12.2. Examples of phonographs with graphic variants.

²³ Fang does not supply glosses for his examples in Tables 12.2-12.5, nor does he supply tones. Further investigation of later chapters in Fang's dictionary reveals that the homophonic phonographs listed above as exhibiting graphic variation do in fact differ with regard to their tone and subsequently meaning. However, Fang does not match individual graphs with their respective meanings. Thus, it is difficult to supply glosses for the examples in Tables 12.2 - 12.5.

The above examples are on the whole very similar, yet it is easy to recognise the differences between each graph.

In the examples below, if one is unaware of their development but makes an analytical comparison, provided one has knowledge of the first graph, it is easy to interpret the second and third graphs.

Pronunciation	Variants		
ba			
be			
by			

Table 12.3. Examples of phonographs with minor graphic variations.

Third, a single phoneme can be represented by various graphs. A convention that was possibly introduced when the script was created, or a phenomenon which evolved thereafter. For example:

Pronunciation	Graphic Variants			
py				
gæ				
p ^h y				
be				
ts ^h i				
o				

Table 12.4. Examples of homophonic phonographs.

In the above examples, there exists one pronunciation for a multiple number of distinct graphs, and each of these graphs also has many variations.

Finally, near-homophonous graphs are used interchangeably. These graphs have a fixed pronunciation, yet they are used to represent other graphs with a similar pronunciation. This is possibly due to historical changes in pronunciation and influences from the differences found in local dialects, resulting in one graph carrying multiple pronunciations. For example:





<i>Phonograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>	<i>Phonograph</i>	<i>Pronunciation</i>
	<i>nə ; miə</i>		<i>ti ; ty</i>
	<i>fɿ ; fæ</i>		<i>du ; də</i>

Table 12.5. Examples of phonographs with multiple pronunciations.

3. USE OF GLOSS MARKS IN THE NAXI PHONOGRAPHIC SCRIPT

The Naxi phonographic script has a small number of prescribed ‘gloss marks’ that when used merely add extra pictorial commentary to the graph they are attached to.²⁴ However they carry no inherent meaning, they are used only for enhancement. The following are examples of graphs that make use of gloss marks:







<i>Phonograph</i>	<i>Meaning</i>	<i>Gloss Mark</i>
	salt	
	double suicide (people of forbidden love)	

Table 13.1. Examples of phonographs with ‘gloss marks’ indicating phonographic characteristics.

In the above examples a simple pictograph is augmented with the addition of a gloss mark, which indicates it is a phonograph.

<i>Phonograph</i>	<i>Meaning & Pronunciation</i>	<i>Phonograph & Element</i>	<i>Meaning & Pronunciation</i>
	sand: ɕə^{31}		serious wound: ɕə^{33}

²⁴ I have translated 文饰 *wénshì* as ‘gloss marks’ based on the meaning derived from Fang’s examples. It is generally used as a verb in vernacular Chinese and the general English translation is ‘to gloss’, ‘to polish (a piece of writing)’ or ‘to falsify’.




Phonograph	Meaning & Pronunciation	Phonograph & Element	Meaning & Pronunciation
	ghost, spirit: ts ^h i ³¹		hang by the neck, hang oneself: ts ^h i ³³
	heart: nu ³³		livestock, domestic animal: nu ³¹

Table 13.2. Examples of phonographs with ‘gloss marks’ indicating tone.

The above examples use    marks respectively to distinguish homophonic graphs of different tones.







Phonograph	Meaning	Phonograph	Meaning	Phonograph	Meaning
	to teach: me ⁵⁵		pa ³³ : frog		oil: ma ³¹

Table 13.3. Examples of phonographs with superfluous ‘gloss marks’.

The above examples have one of the following marks added to the head or foot of the graph:   . These marks have no relation to the pronunciation or meaning of the graph. It is possible that these marks are the result of influence from the superscript markings of the Tibetan script.

The phonographic script is composed of simple strokes and its pronunciation is fixed. Nevertheless, it isn’t an alphabetic script and thus can only be learnt by rote. The structures of the graphs are not fixed and, as can already be seen, the script is quite difficult to read and articulate. Moreover, because of the various meanings of individual homophonous and near-homophonous graphs, differentiating between these meanings when reading the script can be an arduous task. In addition, the Dongba priests themselves have made various alterations to the script causing many discrepancies and differences within it. Due to these shortcomings, using this script to serve as a tool that represents language is very difficult to achieve. As a result, the Dongba rarely used this type of script to write religious texts, and because of this the role of the script has been very limited.

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