

Flag 61

Gonshan-Yunnan Trek to a Mountain Nu Village

July 15–October 1, 2005

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Where is the Culture of the Nu Minority People of China?

by Peter J. Foley

How do the Nu people make their poison arrows? And without a written language, what is the meaning of the sticks that the Nu cut notches in with their knives to mark significant events? There is scant literature in English about the Nu people, but the mention of their poison arrows and their odd way of recording events made me curious. When I read more of the few tracts on the Nu I could find in English, I found out that the Nu had one of the smallest populations among the minority peoples of China—only 27,000 Nu remained. I also read that almost the entire Nu population live in the mountains along the Nu River, mountains that are so steep they appear to defy climbing. When the water rushes down from the top of the mountains, it falls with such force and speed that it makes the Nu river swirl and toss as if it was constantly boiling. The Chinese character Nu means furious, wild, angry. It is the character used for both the river and the Nu people. It fits a description of the river, not the people.

I set off for the month of August 2005 to the far northwest of Yunnan Province, China to get answers to my two burning questions. The previous year, I had met Ya Mei, a Nu woman living in Kunming, and engaged her as my guide for this trek. Ya Mei also agreed to arrange for me to stay with her family in the Fugong region of the Nu and Lisu Minority Peoples Autonomous region. Before we set off, Ya Mei kept asking me if I really was prepared to climb the mountains and live in a Nu home.

"Do you really think you can live with a Nu family?" "Do you think you can eat our food ? Sleep in our house?" And I retorted: "Of course I can, don't worry about me." I had no idea what I was talking about. There would seem no end to the surprises that awaited me.

The first surprise was how difficult and how long it was to get to Ya Mei's house. A plane delivered us from Kunming to Baoshan. That was the easy part. The only transportation from then on was by bus. The road along the Nu River is narrow, bumpy, and in disrepair in many parts. The soaring, jagged mountains, with water cascading down forming natural waterfalls, make you forget how dangerous the eight-hour bus ride is. You get used to looking down into the raging river knowing that a bump from a passing truck or bus will send you and your fellow passengers hurtling into the angry Nu River.

But the eight-hour bus ride turned out to be the easy part. Ya Mei and I managed to hitch a ride on a lumber tractor up to Bi Jiang, an abandoned Chinese village where her sister lives with about 50 other Nu families. There was a terrible earthquake a couple of decades ago which convinced the Chinese settlers that this was not a place to stay. The hour-and-a-half hike down to Ya Mei's family with my 90-pound knapsack was almost my undoing. The rain started, and stepping from one rock to another down the narrow path was like playing Russian roulette: Which rock would be so slippery that I would be pitched head first down the steep mountain side? Ya Mei's younger sister took my knapsack on her 100-pound frame without a word. "Step where the mud is brown not green, step where the rocks are clean and solid," Ya Mei cautioned.



The next surprise was not so much unpleasant as confusing. In Kunming I had started to read some of the literature written in Chinese about the Nu . In a book by Ya Jiave, Qi Chonghai, et al. entitled "Chinese Minorities" (Zhong Hua Ge Min Zu) I read how when

a guest arrives, all in the household greet the guest and offer him or her food and drink, and how this warm hospitality continues through the length of the guest's stay.

I was covered with sweat and exhausted when I arrived at Ya Mei's house. I waited to be greeted warmly. This did not happen. Instead, I was briefly introduced to Ya Mei's parents and her younger sister and her husband. Everyone nodded briefly and then proceeded to ignore me. Ya Mei informed me that the Nu are not formal about the times they eat; people eat when they are hungry. After an hour I was told by Ya Mei I could eat if I was hungry. I went into the public room and quietly ate boiled corn, peppers, and rice with the rest of the family. But toward the end of the meal, I could no longer contain myself and asked Ya Mei to translate my Chinese into Nu. "Can you tell me about the stick you use to record major events in your family?" I asked Ya Mei's father. He looked confused, and I repeated my question thinking that perhaps Ya Mei had not translated properly. Ya Mei told me her father had never heard of such a stick. We asked Ya Mei's mother and she had the same reaction. Later I asked other families living on the mountain if they ever heard of such a custom of carvings on sticks to record Nu people's important events. No one had ever heard of such sticks.

I did see cross bows hanging on the walls of the public room and thought the mystery of how the Nu prepared their poison for their arrows could be quick unraveled. I waited until the next day to ask.

Even though I was aware that both English and Chinese descriptions of the Nu contained numerous distortions, I did not expect the descriptions of the Nu hunting with poison arrows to be inaccurate. In fact, the Nu in the Fugong area do not use poison arrows to hunt with for a very simple reason. They used to use the poison arrows to hunt deer, bear and tiger. The Chinese penalties for hunting these nearly extinct animals became so heavy (five years in prison) that the Nu abandoned their use of poison many years ago. The Nu still use their famous crossbows. They hunt largely birds now with small wooden arrows-- without poison.

Ya Mei's father is a man of 60 years of age. I asked him through Ya Mei if he could give me any information about how the Nu used to make their poison for their arrows and how they applied the poison. In response Ya Mei's father unfolded a deerskin and showed me some old, earth that had been rolled into five balls. "This was the poison we used to use on our arrows." Ya Mei's father explained through Ya Mei that the poison dirt was made into mud and then placed around the base of the arrow. The potency of the poison was tested on mice or rats before going out on a hunt for tigers or bears. "Where did the poison come from," I asked.

"It boiled up from the earth," I was told.

"Where?" I asked.

"It is far away from here. There are no roads. No one goes there anymore. There is no reason to go," Ya Mei's father said in Nu and Ya Mei translated into Chinese.

Poison arrows played a significant role in the history of the Nu according to an older brother of Ya Mei father. He told me that “the poison arrows were the only way we had to defend ourselves.”

He told me of abuses by other people, other minority people who took Nu lands from them through deceit and sometimes conquest. I had asked Ya Mei at one point whether the Nu people married with the Bai people at all since the Bai were one of the largest minority groups. “No, we get along with the Lisu people. We have had problems with the Bai.”

Problems of lesser populated minority groups with larger minority groups is a frequent pattern throughout Southeast Asia’s minority people. The more populated and aggressive minority peoples took the best and most fertile lands in the valleys and the less aggressive and lesser populated peoples were forced higher and higher into the mountains where cultivation is difficult. In the case of the Bai people of Yunnan, they continue to spread and continue to push other less powerful and sophisticated minority groups off desirable land and further up into the mountains. When I asked Ya Mei whether she was concerned that the Nu people might one day disappear since their were only 25 to 35 thousand Nu population she promptly replied: “There are more of us than that.” Ya Mei went on to explain that the Nu population was increasing since the Chinese government extend the rights of minority people to have more than one child. The number of children a minority couple may have under Chinese law depends on the population of the particular minority. Since the Nu people are one of the smallest minority groups in China, they are permitted to have up to three children—many Nu couples even have four children. The Chinese do want the Nu People, in fact all Chinese couples to limit their family size, but the government uses the carrot and not the stick when dealing with minority groups. Ya Mei’s youngest sister, for illustration, has only one child, and she and her husband have decided to have only one child in order to take advantage of the Chinese government offer to get an immediate cash reward of 1000 Yuan and then 160 Yuan per year as the child is growing up. The government increases the amount of yearly stipends to 260 Yuan if the single child goes on in his/her education. If a minority couple has two or more child they receive no money.

Education continues to play a crucial role in how prosperous different minority groups become. The Nu are among the least educated and poorest minority groups in Yunnan. Few Nu over twenty years old have a good command of Chinese. Nevertheless, the educational opportunities are beginning for the Nu. Most Nu children now attend Chinese schools and many older Nu are learning Chinese from their newly acquired Televisions and VCDs.

But at least the Nu house I lived in and the surrounding houses on the mountain were constructed according to the descriptions in Chinese I had read.

The house I stayed at and all the other Nu houses I visited followed a set construction pattern with some variation in how much wood, bamboo or stone was used. All the Nu houses had the same basic feature of a public room and private room. The public room is where the family and guests meet to eat and socialize. It is a room with a floor of packed earth. There is a ground fire place with an iron tripod that supports a cooking pot. The basic Nu house has one other room which is the private room where the family sleeps. A more well to do Nu family may have one other room added which is used as another private room and sleeping quarter. Ya Mei's family had this third room and I was given the room to sleep. The Nu sleep on boards with a very thin corn stalk mattress. The construction of the house followed what the literature about the Nu people referred to as the house with the thousand supports. Wood studs are placed very close together to support the sides of the house and the roof. Woven bamboo separates the public and private rooms. If a Nu family becomes wealthy the family will start to build wood walls for more privacy; replace the dirt floor with a wooden one; and replace the thatched roof with a tin or tile roof. Another point several Chinese articles made when discussing the Nu people is how each member of the family is responsible for everyone else. When one member of a family or extended family has a problem it is the problem of everyone. I certainly found this to be true in my experience of being with Nu people for a month. For example, when ever any one member of a family would earn extra money it always went back to helping the family group in some way.



During the week I stayed with Ya Mei's family, I visited a half dozen other households. I was offered tea or water at each household and in two cases was offered a meal. So, I conclude that the Nu are hospitable but certainly no more than other minority people or the Han Chinese. However, it may well be that my foreign face and ability to only speak very simple Nu expressions were reasons for keeping me at an arms length social distance during my stay with the Nu family. Indeed, several Nu people mentioned to me that I was the only white person ever seen on the mountain for as long as anyone could remember. But it also could be that the Nu people in the Fugong area I was staying at

were more reserved and timid than other groups of Nu. The literature on the Nu describes at least four separate identifiable groups of Nu and states that there are many different dialects of the Nu language. What I can state is that my personal observation of the families on the mountain I lived on were on the whole cautiously hospitable; timid, and reserved toward me. They appeared an inward looking people. And it may well be that the clan structure I observed is responsible for their contentment with their life and a lack of interest for life beyond their mountain.

Some Chinese literature on the Nu People talk of the progress the Nu have made in abandoning their “primitive communal way of life.” I found this remarkably ironic since the Soviet communal model adopted by Mao Zedong was only changed with the advent of Deng Xiaoping’s market economy policy in the 1980’s. Some of the Chinese literature refers to the disappearance of the clan system among the Nu People. From my experience living with one Nu family for a week on an isolated mountain side in a hamlet known as Me Bur Pu .whose GPS coordinates are N 26 32.193 and E 098 54.895, I observed strong clan networks. Indeed, the clan seemed to me at the very core of Nu culture. I observed the same clan structure in other parts of the Nujiang valley from Liuku all the way up the river to Gongshan during the rest of my month long sojourn. It might be more accurate to describe the clan network I observed as modified since the Chinese insistence on family- owned farming plots. The abandonment of communal farming lands has made individual families responsible for the cultivation of clearly demarcated farmlands. Nevertheless, many households are extended family arrangements with three generations living in the same household. Moreover, a majority of the surrounding households are related family members and there is continual cooperation in building each others homes and sharing water supplies, farming equipment, and transportation.

The clan system is reinforced daily with the hierarchical name structure used among the Nu people. Any one older is called by their family position name in relation to the younger person. Ya Mei told me that her mountain hamlet was typical among the Nu People. There were 24 households and 15 of the households were closely related and thus part of her clan. Thus as I walked with my family up and down the mountain we frequently met members Ya Mei’s clan. The younger member of the clan addresses the older member by their family title. I had read in the Chinese literature that the Nu greet stranger and those they know warmly on the mountain trails. I did not find this to be the case.

Nu extended family names include family relationship names back at least three generations. I asked Ya Mei what prevented intermarriage since the available marriage pool in the immediate area seemed so small. “Nu people cannot marry anyone within three generations of blood lines. We know from our language and the fact that our extended families live so close how everyone is related, so we never marry in our extended family.”

“ Now that Nu children go to school there is more opportunity to meet people from other mountain sites,” Ya Mei told me.

The actual names of older people are sacred. Ya Mei said: “ One can never address an older person by their name if we are younger in our Nu culture.”

I had asked many times the name of her father and mother only to be continually rebuffed. This confused me as well as not being acknowledged not only when I first met Ya Mei's parents but even during the week of staying at their house. At the end of our month long trip from Baoshan to Gongshan along the entire length of the Nu River, Ya Mei finally relented and told me her father's name. I had explained that I needed his name for the article I was writing. Her telling me his name was obviously painful for her since she said she was showing disrespect by telling me. Her father's name is A Ho.

What I surmised was that the clan structure is so tight that strangers are not let in, and hardly recognized. In the household where I stayed, for example, one of Ya Mei younger sister had married a Lisu man. The Lisu are a minority group very similar in culture to the Nu People. Yet, this husband hardly communicated with the parents even though they shared meals and worked the same corn fields. Part of the problem was language since the Lisu language is totally different from the Nu language. But the Lisu husband understood some Nu and the wife and younger members of the family could speak Lisu ,yet there were almost no efforts to really communicate that I could see. I learned about thirty basic phrases in Nu language and tried them out on the senior members of the household. Normally, such efforts by foreigners in most other cultures are greeted with appreciation. In the case of the Nu people there seemed to remain a wall that keeps strangers at a distance.

This tight knit clan system may be a salvation to the Nu people. They appear unaffected by the drug problems swirling around many of the other minority groups, and also they appear spared so far from the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Because of the use of intravenous heroin use among some of the minority groups, the HIV/AIDS epidemic is spreading rapidly along the borders of China with Burma. The insularity of the Nu people with the help of the towering mountains that separate them from Burma where the heroin comes from has also protected them so far. In Bi Jiang, the mountain town a couple of hours climb from where I was staying, I found no evidence of any drug use.

The Nu has been slow to adapt to modern ways of living and farming despite determined efforts by the Chinese government. For example, in the 1990's fuel saving stoves were given to all Nu families in an effort to help preserve the forests by having the Nu replace their traditional wood fires built under a simple iron tri pod. The Nu still feed their traditional fires until bedtime. Indeed the simple wood fire is an integral part of family life. All gather around the fire to eat from a communal pot of boiled vegetables spiced with hot peppers. Corn and rice are the mainstays of the Nu 's diet. Corn is the staple crop. Most Nu raise pigs and chickens mainly for cash, although during special occasions an animal may be slaughtered for a family meal. When Ya Mei left to go back to Kunming, a chicken was slaughtered and boiled and Ya Mei's father went out and collected bees and bee larvae. The bees and larvae were roasted and mixed with rice. The

Chicken was served separately in a soup. Ya Mei told me this meal was very special for the Nu People.

The fire is fed with long branches that extend out from the fire place. As one end of a stick is burned into coals the unburned part of the wood is pushed farther into the fire. The Nu used bent bamboo to mold tongs. These tongs are placed around the fireplace and used to pick up coals and keep the coal in the center of the fireplace to provide maximum heat for cooking. The tongs are used also for lifting pots and picking up scraps of food around the fire place.

The literature in both Chinese and English had mentioned the Nu fondness for making their own liquor and their drinking it. Here I found no exaggerations. The Nu enjoy their grog. Ya Mei's parents made their own liquor and also enjoyed drinking it. Her parents offered me a glass and I found it to be as strong as the Chinese "bai jiu" or what Americans might refer to as "white lightning."

The Nu are mentioned in Tang dynasty annals as being excellent farmers and excellent craftsman of bamboo baskets and wool weaving. This aptitude among the Nu I met and lived with remains. I watched Ya Mei's father make an intricate bamboo case and I watched her younger sister quickly weave a mattress of corn stalks. The literature about the Nu in Chinese also mentions that young women weave beautiful stockings for a prospective lover. I saw only one example of this weaving and was told that while women still learn to weave there is less and less of the courting tradition of the past. I had read in Chinese that almost all the Nu people play well the flute and the Nu Pipa (a mandolin sounding instrument with a triangular wood base.) The literature goes on to describe how young men and women court each other by playing musical phrases back and forth to each other. No word is spoken and on the basis of the musical understanding between the courting couple love and commitment reach a point where a couple decide to get married. I asked Ya Mei about this Nu custom. She laughed and said that first of all her father was one of the few Nu in the area that really played the flute and the Nu pippa well. And as for this custom of not having to talk during courting but just playing the flute and Pippa to each other in order to get a marriage partner, Ya Mei laughed and said: "you can see most of the young women here are married, yet few play an instrument well, the same is true of the young men. I think whoever wrote that version of our customs drank too much of the liquor we make."

Indeed, a lot of what I read about the Nu both in Chinese and in English appears highly romanticized. Most Chinese see the minority people of Yunnan through the lens of a camera that focuses on minority festivals that feature the best dancers and musicians among the minorities. The quotidian life of the minorities and of the Nu people in particular is far from romantic. The Nu are among the poorest people living in China. Their struggle is to eek out a living from the mountainsides where corn is the principal staple crop they can rely on.

Like all cultures that have contact with other cultures the Nu culture is evolving and changing. The Lisu who share the precipitous mountains of the Nujiang region have a similar culture. The Lisu and Nu woman share a similar head dress of elaborate design festooned with silver ornaments. A significant number of Lisu and Nu share the Christian faith which was brought to them by American Christian missionaries early in the 20 th century. Ya Mei's paternal grandfather was one of those converted. He died in a Chinese prison when her father was only 9 years old because he refused to give up his Christian beliefs. The missionaries also left a written Lisu language which the missionaries transliterated using the Roman alphabet. Old hymnal books written in the Lisu language are still used by Nu and Lisu congregations in their services. The mountains along the roaring Nujiang river are dotted with simple churches with large red crosses placed high on the front of the church. But despite the best efforts of the missionaries to convert the whole Nu and Lisu population, the Nu animistic spirit world still possesses the mountain and streams of the Nu People. Even Ya Mei , a devout Christian, showed she had not escaped the spirits entirely. We were still on a cliff edge over looking the Nu river at 8,000 feet. I had just climbed steadily for two hours. My shirt was soaked with sweat.

“Do you think it would be alright if I took my shirt off here, Ya Mei?”

Ya Mei looked alarmed and said: “ Please don't do that! The mountain spirits would be very angry and offended. You can cool down by whistling. We Nu believe that if you whistle the wind spirits will respond and send you a breeze. Here I'll show you.” Ya Mei whistled .Immediately , a fresh gust of cool air brushed our faces. The spirits and culture of the Nu remain in the mountains of Nujiang. Much remains to be discovered about the Nu and their world.

Despite being one of the smallest and poorest minority groups in China, I discovered in August of 2005 during my stay with a Nu family in the Fugong area of the Nujiang and Lisu Minority Peoples Autonomous Region, a culture and language that remains largely intact. The fairly consistent Chinese policy of respecting minority cultures and their rights to maintain their culture has played a significant role in this preservation. Very little information about the Nu People appears in English, and even the articles in Chinese are frequently contain distortions of current Nu cultural practices. It is common, for example, to read that the Nu still use poison arrows to hunt. They do not, and for a very simple reason. They used to use the poison arrows to hunt bear and tiger. The Chinese penalties for hunting these nearly extinct animals is so great (five years in prison) that the Nu abandon their use of poison many years ago. The Nu still use their famous crossbows to hunt; however, they largely hunt birds now. The senior member of the household I stayed at, and Ya Mei's father is a man of 60 years of age. Ya Mei's father unwrapped a deerskin and showed me some old, earth that had been rolled into a ball. This was the poison we used to use on our arrows. Ya Mai's father explained through Ya Mai that the poison dirt was made into mud and then place around the base of the arrow. The potency of the poison was tested out on mice or rats before going out on a hunt for tigers or bears. Where did it come from I asked. It boiled up from the earth I was told.

Where? I asked. It is far away from here. There are no roads. No one goes there anymore. There is no reason to go I was told.

Nevertheless, poison arrows played a significant role in the history of the Nu. I interviewed an older brother of Ya Mei father. He told me that “the poison arrows were the only way we had to defend ourselves.” He told me of abuses by other people, other minority people who took Nu lands from them through deceit and sometimes conquest. I had asked Ya Mei at one point whether the Nu people married with the Bai people at all since the Bai were one of the largest minority groups. “No, we get along with the Lisu people. We have had problems with the Bai people.” It is a frequent pattern throughout Southeast Asia’s minority people. The more populated and aggressive minority peoples took the best and most fertile lands in the valleys and the less aggressive and lesser populated peoples were forced higher and higher into the mountains where cultivation is difficult.

I did find the Nu people to be on the whole shy, reserved and not aggressive at all. They appear to be inward looking people content with materially unencumbered, simple existence. I was never asked about my life in the United States. I was for the most part ignored, not in a hostile way but in a way that indicated that I was just outside their lives and therefore of little interest.

Another example of a Nu practice that is no longer in practice is the keeping of significant events in the form of a stick with peculiar notches to signify events. This is mentioned in English descriptions of the Nu culture as well as Chinese texts. I found no traces of either the sticks that allegedly use this peculiar type of communication or anyone who remembered using such stick to record events. The Nu are a people with no written language. And up to now few Nu People are literate in Chinese. Ya Mei, for example was the only one who could read Chinese in her extended family. The situation is changing now since most of the Nu younger children are attending Chinese schools. In addition, many of the Nu household have televisions and radios and learn their Chinese from the television and some are learning Chinese characters from the subtitles in Chinese of many Chinese programs or VCDs.

Almost the entire population of the Nu Minority People is located along the Nu River (Nujiang) in the north western part of the province of Yunnan in China. China’s most spectacular mountain scenery can be seen all along the Nu River. The Chinese character for the Nu river and Nu people is the same and means wild, raging, fierce. It was obvious to me that the Chinese character applied to the character of the river and not the people.

Estimates of the population of the Nu People range from 25 to 35 thousand. My Nu guide and friend, Ya Mei, insisted there were more Nu than the estimates. She pointed to the fact that the Nu population was increasing since the Chinese government extend the rights of minority people to have more than one child. The number of children a minority couple may have under Chinese law depends on the population of the particular minority. Since the Nu people are one of the smallest minority groups in China, they are permitted to have up to three children—many Nu couples even have four children. The Chinese do

want the Nu People, in fact all Chinese couples to limit their family size, but use the carrot and not the stick when dealing with minority groups. Ya Mei's youngest sister, for illustration, has only one child and she and her husband have decided to have only one child in order to take advantage of the Chinese government offer to get an immediate cash reward of 1000 Yuan and then 160 Yuan per year as the child is growing up. The government increases the amount of yearly stipends to 260 Yuan if the single child goes on in his/her education. If a minority couple has two or more child they receive no money.

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The actual names of older people are sacred, Ya Mei said. One can never address an older person by their name in our Nu culture. I had asked many times the name of her father and mother only to be continually rebuffed. This confused me as well as not being acknowledged not only when I first met Ya Mei's parents but even during the week of staying at their house. At the end of our month long trip from Baoshan to Gongshan

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What I surmised was that the clan structure is so tight that strangers are not let in, and hardly recognized. In this household, for example, one of Ya Mei younger sister had married a Lisu man. The Lisu are a minority group very similar in culture to the Nu People. Yet, this husband hardly communicated with the parents even though they shared meals and worked the same corn fields. Part of the problem was language since the Lisu language totally different from the Nu language. But the Lisu husband understood some Nu and the wife and younger members of the family could speak Lisu but there were almost no efforts to really communicate. I learned about thirty basic phrases in Nu language and tried them out on the senior members of the household. Normally, such efforts by foreigners in most other cultures are greeted with appreciation. In the case of the Nu people their remains a wall that keeps strangers at arms length.

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The traditional Nu house is made of bamboo and wood with a natural thatched roof. There are two rooms and the floor is of packed earth. A bedroom and a room where the fireplace is located and all the family activities take place. Recently, more modern materials have been used in house construction including tin roofs and wood floors and wood walls. There appears to be much more gender equality among the Nu. When I asked if there was a preference for male children I was told that there was a slight preference because men are "good at building houses." But at the same time, people are

also delighted to have female children since “women work just as hard as men in the fields.” Household chores seem to be shared by everyone. Children learn at an early age to be useful and frequently take part in keeping the fires tended and helping to prepare the communal meals.

Like all cultures that have contact with other cultures the Nu culture is evolving. The Lisu who share the steep mountainous land of the Nujiang region have a similar culture. The Lisu and Nu woman share a similar head dress of elaborate design festooned with silver ornaments. A significant number of Lisu and Nu share the Christian faith which was brought to them by American Christian missionaries early in the 20th century. Ya Mei’s paternal grandfather was one of those converted. He died in a Chinese prison when her father was only 9 years old because he refused to give up his Christian beliefs. The missionaries also left a written Lisu language which the missionaries transliterated using the English alphabet. Old hymnal books written in the Lisu language are still used by Nu and Lisu congregations in their services. The mountains along the roaring Nujiang river are dotted with simple churches with large red crosses placed high on the front of the church. But despite the best efforts of the missionaries to convert the whole Nu and Lisu population, the Nu animistic spirit world still possesses the mountain and streams of the Nu People. Even Ya Mei, a devout Christian, showed she had not escaped the spirits entirely. We were still on a cliff edge over looking the Nu river at 8,000 feet. I had just climbed steadily for an hour and my shirt was soaked with sweat. It was hot.

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