



## Writing Evolution Initiated by Naxi-Sino Writing Contact

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### Abstract

Writing system contact is a branch of language contact, and it is a representation of culture contact and language contact. Once two different writing systems come into contact with each other, the advantaged writing system will influence the disadvantaged one, in the case of the contact of Naxi and Chinese writing system. The contact of Naxi-Sino writing can be divided into two periods: writing mixed usage and writing evolution. The Naxi-Sino writing contact is of great significance to study the differences including sub-regional and dating of the Domba manuscripts.

**Key words:** Naxi-Sino writing contact; Naxi Domba characters; Chinese characters; Loan characters

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### INTRODUCTION

Writing system contact (Zhu, 2006, p.171) is a branch of languages contact, and it is a representation of culture contact and language contact. Writing contact leads to writing mixed usage and writing evolution. The former is occasional and the latter is stable. The result of writing contact is determined by the influence of the culture and language of the contact sides. Once two different writing systems come into contact with each other, the advantaged writing system will influence the disadvantaged one, as

in the case of the contact of Naxi Domba writing system and Chinese writing system apparently. With the impact of Chinese culture and Chinese characters (i.e., the culture and characters of Han nationality), Chinese characters are loaned into Domba manuscripts, some of which are loaned occasionally and some stably. This paper mainly focuses on the writing development initiated by Naxi-Sino writing contact.

The quoted examples in the paper come from *The Collected Works of Naxi Domba Manuscripts* (1999), and only the volumes and pages are indicated. For example, V100.P239 means the quoted example comes from volume 100 and page 239 of this book. Other quotes from other sources would be indicated academically.

### 1. THE TWO PERIODS OF NAXI-SINO WRITING CONTACT

Writing contact leads to writing mixed usage and writing evolution. Writing mixed usage is the preparatory stage of writing evolution, and writing evolution is the deep development of writing mixed usage. However, the writing mixed usage is not necessarily developing into writing evolution.

#### 1.1 Writing Mixed Usage

Under the background of Naxi-Sino culture and languages contact, the Naxi-Sino writings are continuously contacting, and the initial representation is writing mixed usage. Writing mixed usage is an occasional phenomenon, and the reuse frequency of the loan Chinese characters is low.

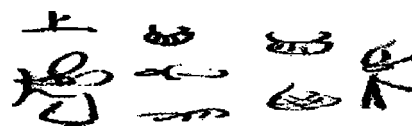


Figure 1  
 VI.P22



Figure 2  
 V4.P48

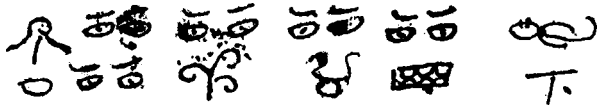


Figure 3  
 V96.P184

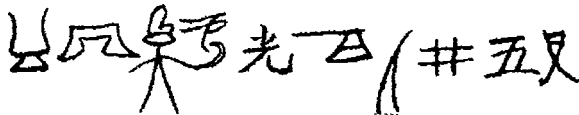


Figure 4  
 V100.V239

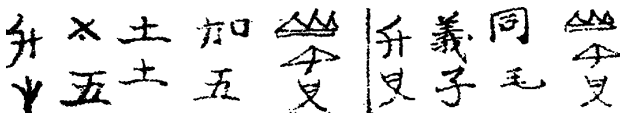


Figure 5  
 V100.P226

Figure 1 loans Chinese character “上” to express “say”. In Naxi language, “say” pronounces “sə<sup>33</sup>”. The pronunciation of “上” is similar with Naxi’s “sə<sup>33</sup>”;

Figure 2 loans Chinese character “止” to express “earth”. In Naxi language, “earth” pronounces “tɕɿ<sup>33</sup>”. The pronunciation of “止” is similar with Naxi’s “tɕɿ<sup>33</sup>”.

It is apparent that the Chinese characters’ pronunciations are loaned to express Naxi language.

Due to the same reason, Figure 3 loans Chinese character “下”, pronouncing “eə<sup>21</sup>”. Figure 4 loans “光”, pronouncing “kuæ<sup>33</sup>”; “五”, pronouncing “u<sup>33</sup>”. Figure 5 loans “五”, “土”, “義”, “子”, “同”, “毛”, respectively pronouncing “u<sup>33</sup>”, “thv<sup>33</sup>”, “i<sup>33</sup>”, “tɕɿ<sup>33</sup>”, “tho<sup>33</sup>”, “ma<sup>21</sup>”.

The loan phenomenons mentioned above seem the same, but when we count the loaning frequency in the *The Collected Works of Naxi Domba Manuscripts*, we find the difference between the above loaning phenomenon: “毛” for once; “光” for twice; “同” for twice; “義” for twice; “五” for 8 times; “止” for 68 times; “下”, for 192 times; “上” for 3122 times.

For the loan characters, such as “毛” and “光”, the reuse frequency is low; but for the loan characters, such as “止”, “下” and “上”, the reuse frequency is high. Though they are all the writing mixed usage, with different reuse frequencies, their evolution results are varied. The former belongs to the occasional loan, while the latter goes into Naxi Domba writings system.

### 1.2 Writing Evolution

Writing evolution is the deeper stage of Naxi-Sino writing contact. Theoretically, only the loan characters which have experienced the writing mixed usage can enter into the Domba writing system, and eventually fulfill the writing evolution.

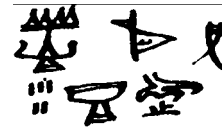


Figure 6  
 V75.P207



Figure 7  
 V98.P199

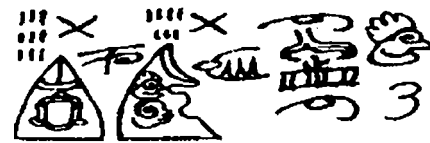


Figure 8  
 V67.P135

Figure 6 uses Domba character to express “light,ignite”. , pronouncing “tɕɿ<sup>55</sup>”, is composed of Domba writing and Chinese character “止”. The pronunciation of “止” is similar with “tɕɿ<sup>55</sup>”.

Figure 7 uses Domba characters and to express “Summer Solstice”, whose pronunciation is “xia zhi” in Chinese and “eio<sup>55</sup>tɕɿ<sup>55</sup>” in Naxi. is composed of Tibetan character and Chinese character “下”; is composed of Domba character and Chinese character “止”. They respectively represent the syllables of “eio<sup>55</sup>” and “tɕɿ<sup>55</sup>”.

Figure 8 uses Domba character to express “obstruct”, whose pronunciation is “tɕɿ<sup>21</sup>”. is composed of Domba character and Chinese character “止”.

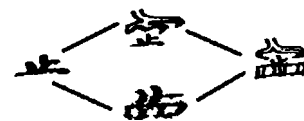


Figure 9  
 The Evolution of “止”



Figure 10  
 V10.P173

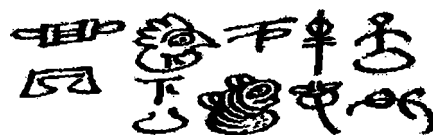


Figure 11  
 V10.P12

Figure10 uses Domba character to represent the syllable of “eə<sup>21</sup>”. is composed of Domba character and Chinese character “下”.

Figure11 uses Domba character to represent the syllable of “eə<sup>21</sup>”. is composed of and “下”.

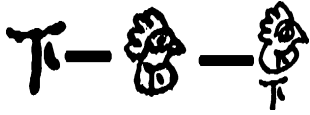


Figure 12  
The Evolution of “下”



Figure 13  
V2.P58



Figure14  
V15.P76

Figure 13 uses Domba character to represent the syllable of “sə<sup>55</sup>”. is composed of “上” and . is a ideograph of Domba character, and used to form one whole Domba character with other Domba characters, which means that it cannot be used independently.

Figure 14 uses Domba character to represent the syllable of “sə<sup>55</sup>”. is composed of “上” 和 . , pronouncing “sə<sup>21</sup>”, represents a god in Domba culture.

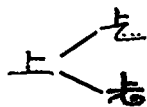


Figure 15  
The Evolution of “上”

The Domba characters mentioned above are all composed of at least one Chinese character and one Domba character, which means that the Chinese characters “止”, “下” and “上” are no longer occasionally used in Domba writing system, but go into a new stage: writing evolution.

From the two stages of writing contact, it can be concluded that writing contact has the nature of hierarchy. The initial stage is writing mixed usage, which is occasional; and based on its writing contact continues, the characters used more frequently go into an advanced stage: writing evolution.

## 2. THE INFLUENCE AND REASONS OF NAXI-SINO WRITING CONTACT

### 2.1 The Influence of Naxi-Sino Writing Contact

The Naxi-Sino writing contact makes some Chinese characters go into Domba manuscripts, bringing about the phenomenon of the mixed usage of characters. Moreover, with the high frequent use of some Chinese characters, they go into Domba writing system, combining with other Domba characters, and enrich the configuration of Domba characters.

However, the Naxi-Sino writing contact doesn't make the transfer of Domba writing system. In 897 volumes Domba manuscripts of *The Collected Works of Naxi Domba Manuscripts*, 762 volumes written in Domba hieroglyphs, and 135 volumes in mixed used Domba character, even in this 135 volumes, the Domba character occupies the major part.

### 2.2 The Reasons of Chinese Characters Going Into Naxi Domba Writing System

#### 2.2.1 Cultures and Languages Contact

Under the background of Naxi-Sino culture and language contact, the Naxi-Sino writings are continuously, and the Naxi learns culture and language from Han ethnic group. Once the Chinese words come into Naxi language, some use Chinese characters to express; and with the high frequency use of some Chinese characters, they go into Domba writing system, and even combine with other Domba characters.

#### 2.2.2 The Chinese culture level and the attitude of the writing users

The users of Domba characters are Naxi's priest--Domba, and most of them are farmers in the peace time. When they are needed, they put on the Domba-dress, take out Domba manuscripts, and hold the ceremony for the villagers. Dombas are not proficient in Chinese, so they only choose the easy-use characters

The attitude of the writing users is another factor. Dombas use Chinese characters in writing Domba manuscripts, in order to show his strong supernatural power. Dombas used to compete with each other. If one of them uses three variations in Domba manuscripts, the other will use five variation (Li, 1978, p. 301).

#### 2.2.3 Easily-written of loan characters

The easily-written loaned characters are also an important factor. If the loan character is difficult to write, it may not be used again, such as the “義” in Figure5. If the loan character is easy to write, it may use more frequently, in this way the character goes into Domba writing system, such as “止”, “上”, “下”.

### 2.3 The Reasons of Naxi-Sino Writing Contact not Affecting the Whole Naxi Domba Writing System

#### 2.3.1 The Mature of Domba Writing System

The mature of Domba writing system is the main reason that Naxi-Sino writing contact does not affect the nature

of Domba writing. The main function of character is to record language, and if its own character can record the language systematically, it needn't loan characters from other languages. The main configuration of Domba character is hieroglyphs, and the main way of recording is ideographic and phonetic. According to the advanced Ludian Domba manuscripts, Domba characters can record the word systematically, and do not need to loan many Chinese characters to record the Naxi Language.

### 2.3.2 The Experience And Attitude of Domba Towards the Loan Characters

The experience and attitude of Domba towards the loan Chinese character are important social factors, which can obstruct or promote the writing contact evolution.

Domba, skilled at Domba characters, is the intellectual of Naxi, but not skilled at Chinese characters and Tibetan characters. He cannot loan many Chinese characters, but can loan some easily-written characters instead. There are scriptures loaned from Tibetan, which are recited in Tibetan language, but written in Domba characters.

### 2.3.3 The Difference of Two Writing Characters' Structures

The difference of two writing characters' structure is another reason why Naxi-Sino Writing Contact does not affecting the whole Naxi Domba writing system. Chinese character is a highly abstract writing system, but the majority of Domba characters are hieroglyphs. The two characters' symbol forms are greatly varied, which blocks the loan of Chinese character.

## 3. THE VALUE OF NAXI-SINO WRITING CONTACT STUDY

Writing contact is a reflection of culture and language contact, and the study of Naxi-Sino writing contact is of great significance to the deeper research of studying the sub-regional and dating of the Domba manuscripts.

### 3.1 The Time of Naxi-Sino Writing Contact

The scholar of Domba manuscript researcher Li lincan studied the geba characters in *The Domba Manuscripts Collected by Library of Congress*. Geba character is a phonetic character of Naxi which mainly originates from Domba characters, Chinese characters and Tibetan characters. In the article, Li proposes that geba character appeared at about the end of Ming dynasty and the beginning of Qing dynasty. In King Kangxi period, Chinese character “上” appeared in Domba manuscripts. In King Xianfeng period, the number of geba characters increased. In King Xuanton period, there were the Domba manuscripts written in geba characters. Li believed that, at the beginning of geba character, simplified Domba characters and loan Chinese characters are two resources of geba characters, and the appearance of geba characters is closely related to the loan of Chinese character “上” (Li, 1984, p. 154).

The emerging of geba characters may results from the loaning of Chinese characters. It can be concluded that the latter the Domba manuscripts are, the great number of geba character appear, vice versa.

### 3.2 The Regionality of Naxi-Sino Writing Contact

It can be analyzed that writing contact is varied in different Naxi areas.

Baidi, Lijiang, Ludian are Naxi area. According to our field study, Domba character originates from Baidi, develops in Lijiang, and becomes nature in Ludian. And relatively, Baidi is farther away from Han areas than Lijiang and Ludian. After analyzing the Domba manuscripts in Baidi, Lijiang and Ludian, we find Baidi's Domba manuscripts only loan Chinese character “上”. Lijiang Domba manuscripts loan Chinese characters “上”, “下”, “犬”, “子”, “写”, “了” and so on. Ludian Domba manuscripts almost loan the same Chinese characters as Lijiang, but it is used more frequently. According to the loan of Chinese characters, we can differentiate Domba manuscripts of varied areas.

The Naxi-Sino writing contact presents a developing trend of Domba character from Baidi to Lijiang to Ludian. Domba character emerges and develops during the Naxi ancestor migrating from Sichuang-Yunnan ethnic corridor to the south. The regional difference of migrate route is virtually the reflection of historical difference (Yu, 2003, p. 250). Meanwhile, the reflection of writing contact on regionality proves this point.

## CONCLUSION

Chinese characters going into Domba writing system is a slow process. In the beginning, few Chinese characters go into Domba writing system. With the more frequent culture and language contact, more Chinese character goes into Domba wrting system. And all these kinds of research may contribute to the sub-region and timing research.

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