

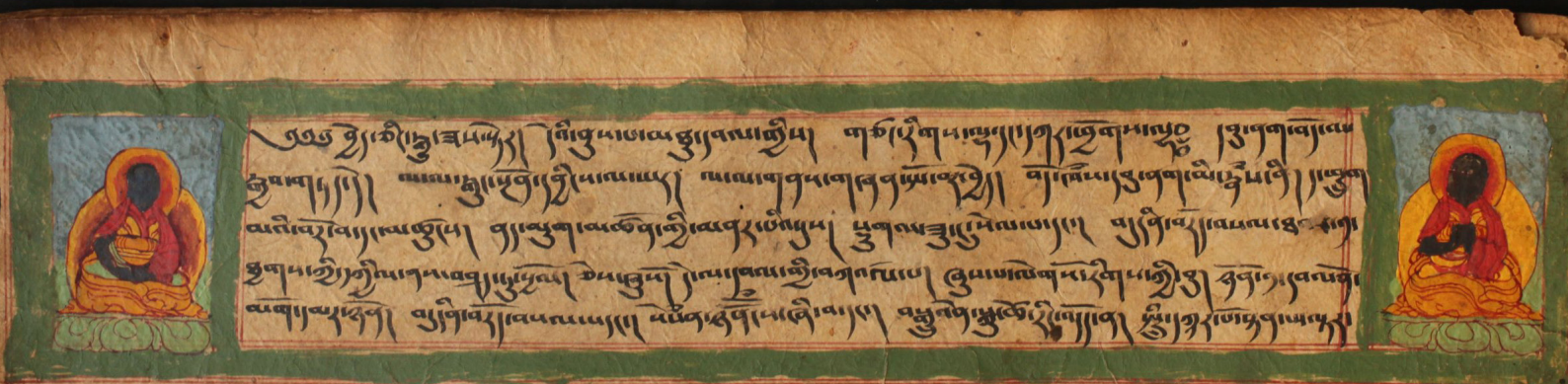
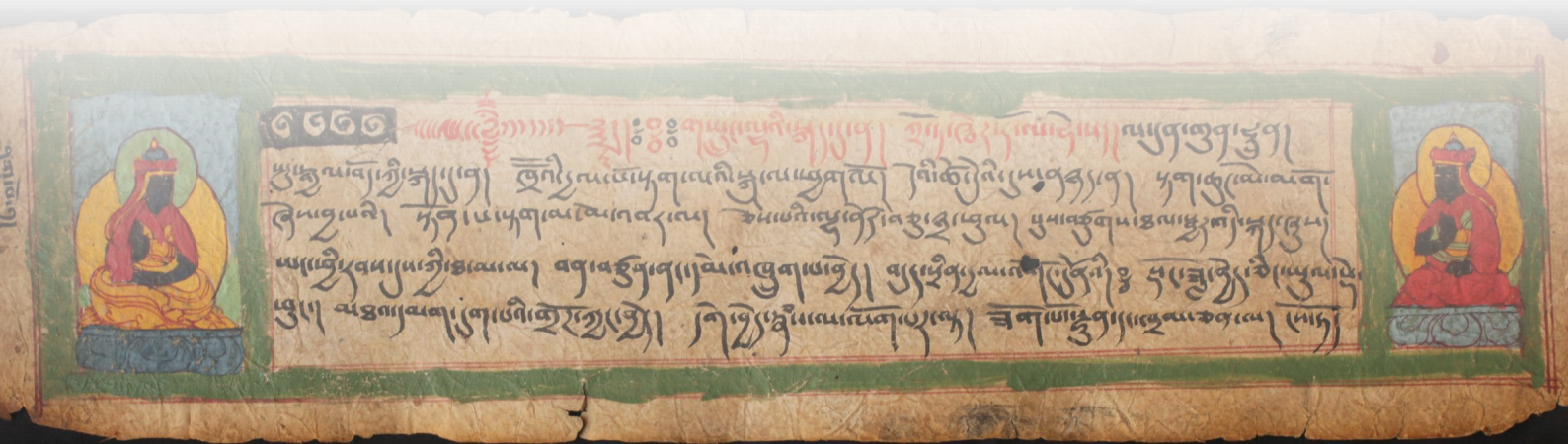
The elusive connection: Manuscripts and rituals of the Bon and Naxi traditions

FRIDAY-SATURDAY, 18-19 MARCH 2022

A workshop hosted by

THE CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES,
UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF MANUSCRIPT CULTURES
WARBURGSTRASSE 26
20354 HAMBURG
ZOOM LINK: TBA





Manuscripts have been essential in supporting the efforts of Bon monks, nuns and hereditary priests to preserve their unique culture and rituals, as well as the attempts of scholars elsewhere to understand not only the Bon religion but also the early cultural and intellectual history of Central Asia. Manuscripts account for the entire range of Bonpo literary production, from all the major canonical works such as the Bonpo Kanjur, or the so-called New Collection of Bonpo Katen, to the collected writing of famous masters, and the plethora of ritual texts that have been unexpectedly coming to light in many parts of the region during the first decade of the twenty-first century. These manuscripts are of great importance for gaining new insights into largely unknown cultural developments on the Tibetan Plateau and its connections to other traditions present in the region.

There is also a growing body of evidence to suggest that a connection between the rituals of the Naxi dongba priests and those of the Bon religion of Tibet is more than merely speculative. However, despite a growing number of scholars exploring Bon and Naxi manuscript traditions, there is still only little evidence for a possible common ground which both traditions may share. While some examples of Bon manuscripts recently revealed may date from as early as the ninth century, most of the extant Naxi dongba pictographic ritual texts were produced within the last two centuries. However, most of the physical manuscripts of both traditions have not been dated, and so far have attracted only little attention as material objects. While irrefutable instances of Bon-Naxi connections may be rare, the case for a link is reinforced via the ritual texts of a class of priests in Gansu and Sichuan known as le'u. This very large corpus of material – which continues to grow as new discoveries are made – contains texts that seem to provide a bridge between the archaic rituals of Central Tibetan Bon and those of the Naxi. Furthermore, certain aspects of Naxi ritual themselves may elucidate mysteries surrounding Tibetan ritual. Similarities may also be seen in mythic narratives and figures, iconography, or even habits of using the same materials and technologies. Naxi paper has been thought to be unique, with influence from, among other things, the papermaking traditions of the Tibetan community. But many questions remain when we consider this region with its complex history of interaction between various ethnic groups.

The previous workshops were intended to be an open-ended discussion on the existing Bon manuscript collections which, besides being a record of history and religion in its textual sphere, are also material objects that are a part of sustainable cultural world heritage. Along the same lines, we would like to continue an interdisciplinary discussion that will make it possible to see Bon manuscripts in the wider perspective of manuscript studies. However, on this occasion we would like to place the emphasis on the Bon-Naxi connections found in both traditions and revealed by multidisciplinary studies. The participants are specialists of different academic disciplines, and will present their research on a variety of topics including different collections of Bon and Naxi manuscripts, the concepts and history of both traditions, and the science and technology of book studies.



Programme

FRIDAY

- 10:00–10:10 Welcome
- 10:10–10:40 **Michael Friedrich:** *First results from a survey of Dongba manuscript studies*
- 10:40–11:10 **Charles Ramble:** *Long-distance networks among Bonpo communities: historical conduits of tangible and intangible heritage*
- 11:10–11:30 Coffee break
- 11:30–12:00 **Daniel Berounsky:** *The Tibetan Sadak Collection (Sa bdag 'bum) and the Chinese king Kongtse*
- 12:00–12:30 **Imre Galambos:** *Centre and periphery: The whirlwind binding and its descendants*
- 12:30–14:30 Lunch
- 14:30–15:00 **Marc des Jardins:** *The compendium of the lords of the earth and the Chinese spirit tradition reflected in it*
- 15:00–15:30 **Agnieszka Helman-Ważny:** *A shared craft tradition? Papermaking plants and technologies identified in both Bon and Naxi manuscripts*
- 15:30–15:50 Coffee break
- 15:50–16:20 **Sam van Schaik:** *Who was performing Bonpo funerary rituals at Dunhuang and Miran?*
- 16:20–16:50 **Cristiana Turini:** *Calling the soul back. Ritual space and manuscripts among the Naxi people*
- 19:00 **Dinner**

SATURDAY

- 9.00-9.30 **Amy Heller:** *Imagery of birds, deer and priests during the Tibetan Empire according to archeological artefacts and manuscripts Pelliot tibétain 37 and Pelliot tibétain 60: Buddhist, Bon-po, Naxi or...?*
- 9:30–10:00 **Kalsang Norbu Gurung:** *Similarities and differences between Tonpa Shenrab Miwo and Dto-mba shi lo mi wu*
- 10:00–10:30 **Naljor Tsering:** *The Clever White Bat: A note on the formation of le'u literature from the 'Brug chu Valley in the southeast Tibetan Plateau*
- 10:30–10:40 Coffee break
- 10:40–11:10 **Valentina Punzi:** *Tibetan manuscripts as objects in use: vernacular literacy in the ritual context of the Baima (Sichuan, PRC)*
- 11:10–11:40 **Ewa Paśnik-Tułowicka:** *Naxi manuscripts found in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw – preliminary study of the Collection*
- 11:40–12:10 **Dan Petersen:** *Structure and content of a Dongba ritual manuscript*
- 12:10–13:00 **Round table discussion**



Abstracts

The Tibetan Sadak Collection (*Sa bdag 'bum*) and the Chinese king Kongtse

DANIEL BEROUNSKÝ, CHARLES UNIVERSITY, PRAGUE

It has been shown with increasing evidence that there is a link between the Naxi ritual texts, the ritual texts which recently resurfaced in eastern Tibet (so-called *le'u* manuscripts), and the *Nyen Collection* (*Gnyan 'bum*, a collection of myths contained in the Bon Kanjur). The extent of their mutual relationship is, however, still awaiting more precise determination. In this contribution I would like to pay attention to another Tibetan collection of myths dealing with the 'lords of earth' (*sa bdag*), which might have influenced both Naxi and *le'u* rituals. It is called Sadak Collection (*Sa bdag 'bum*) and contains parts which appear to be a candidate for early Tibetan ritual tradition ascribed to the Chinese king Kongtse. While there are certainly texts related to the Chinese king Kongtse among the *le'u* manuscripts, it is not certain if such a layer is also present among the Naxi texts. Clarifying it could be another step towards better understanding of their mutual relationship.

Centre and periphery: The whirlwind binding and its descendants

IMRE GALAMBOS, UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE, UK

Manuscripts from Silk Road sites along the northwestern peripheries of "China" preserve some of the earliest examples of book forms that became dominant in Chinese book culture during the following centuries. But there are also some that seem to have disappeared without developing any further. Among such descendantless book forms is the so-called "whirlwind binding", which consists of stacked sheets of paper attached on one side to a wooden rod. It is often noted that this form facilitates browsing and searching through the text, which is why it has traditionally been associated with lexicographic works. It is noteworthy, however, some of the modern (19th-20th century) Yi manuscripts from China's southwestern region share a similar format, showing that this form did not entirely disappear. This is also an example of how cultural phenomena may survive on the peripheries even when they are completely absent in the centre. This talk will examine the physical form of these manuscripts and argue for the benefits of approaching the history of East Asian book culture from a trans-regional and transcultural perspective.

Similarities and differences between Tonpa Shenrab Miwo and Dto mba shi lo mi wu

KALSANG NORBU GURUNG

Abstract: In 1937, Joseph F Rock published a translation of a Na-khi manuscript regarding the myth of Dto-mba shi-lo, the founder of Moso shamanism. He expressed the opinion that Dto-mba shi-lo was none other than the founder of Bon, Tonpa Shenrab Miwo. Almost seventy years later in 2003, Lhakpa Tsering, a Tibetan scholar, has compared the stories of the two founders, and also translated a similar manuscript into Tibetan (but probably from a Chinese version) and indicated that the Tonpa Shenrab's myth was the source of the latter myth. I have found some differences in reading the manuscript regarding the life of Dto-mba shi-lo by the above two scholars; furthermore, they have a different understanding of the Bon religion, apparently due to the different time period. In this presentation, I will revisit their works and investigate further the relation between these two myths and the two founders. I will further explore if this myth of Dto-mba shi-lo represents the original myth of Tonpa Shenrab Miwo as Joseph Rock suggested, or the life account of the latter was the source of the former account as Lhakpa Tsering indicated. Since some details in the two accounts are not entirely the same, I will also try to understand what these differences in the stories tell us and how the myth of the two figures diverged over time, if indeed they do belong to the same source.

The compendium of the lords of the earth and the Chinese spirit tradition reflected in it

MARC DES JARDINS, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY, MONTRÉAL

The compendium of the Lords of the earth (*Sa bdag 'bum*) is a composite work included in the Bon Canon (Vol. 140) which focuses on myths and rites associated with a collection of deities minding the cosmos. The presence of Chinese themes in it is ubiquitous, ranging from the miraculous deeds of a character by the name of Confucius (*Kong tse 'phrul kyi rgyal po*) to the propitiation of Chinese spirits that are in charge of the various parts of the manifested world. This paper seeks to document these and attempt to appraise these acknowledged 'Chinese' borrowings in lieu of indigenous Tibetan categories.

Imagery of birds, deer and priests during the Tibetan Empire according to archeological artefacts and manuscripts Pelliot tibétain 37 and Pelliot tibétain 60: Buddhist, Bon-po, Naxi or...?

AMY HELLER, UNIVERSITY OF BERN, CRCAO

This presentation will focus on representations of birds and deer among archaeological artefacts of the Tibetan Empire and the Silk Route as well as the Tibetan manuscripts from Dunhuang. Their representations in diverse archaeological artefacts help to contextualize drawings of birds and deer among the Tibetan manuscripts, in particular the enigmatic drawings of Pelliot Tibétain 37 and Pelliot Tibétain 60, with dancers wearing deer- or antelope-headed masks. In these two manuscripts, there are also drawings of anthropomorphic figures, some of which may be deities while others appear to represent ritual specialists (female and male). The appearance of these ritual practitioners may present parallels, in terms of their costumes and attributes, with drawings in the Mokotoff manuscript as well as drawings produced in the Naxi traditions. This presentation will explore the visual parallels; however it is too premature to firmly establish an identification within a specific religious tradition.

A shared craft tradition? Papermaking plants and technologies identified in both Bon and Naxi manuscripts

AGNIESZKA HELMAN-WAŻNY, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, GERMANY

Tibetans established their own papermaking tradition and created a unique type of paper by using specific plants and technologies. Paper pulp is prepared by beating the materials upon a stone with a wooden mallet; this pulp is then mixed with water and poured on the “floating” mould placed on a water surface in measured quantities. The papermaker moves the frame in the water until the pulp entirely and equally covers the surface of the mould; he then tilts the frame until the water drains off. The papermaking moulds with newly made sheets of paper are left undisturbed until the sheets are dry. The same technology, however, sometimes with slight modification, was identified in a large group of studied Naxi manuscripts.

The high altitude of the Tibetan Plateau and the extremes of its climate make the vegetation distinctive from all other areas of Asia. Original Tibetan paper was made mainly from the phloem of shrubs or roots belonging to the *Daphne*, *Wikstroemia*, *Stellera* and *Edgeworthia* species which also have poisonous properties. The rarest plants used for the production of Naxi paper are those from the *Wikstroemia* genus, specifically *Wikstroemia delavayi* and *Wikstroemia lichiangensis*, which are found only in Yunnan Province, Sichuan Province, and

the Tibetan Autonomous Region in China. The bast of these plants is robust and the paper made from them has an eminently suitable surface for writing with hard bamboo pens.

Independently of cultural or religious affiliation the production of paper probably played an important economic and social role in areas where it was produced, often associated with local production of manuscripts. It is likely that it was also an important trade commodity. The usage of plants with poisonous properties in the paper makes it resistant to damage caused by insects, and, ultimately, it is longer lasting than other types of paper. It is also likely to have been preferred for usage in ritual manuscripts. This talk will present the distinctive features of papermaking technology, components and properties of paper identified in both Bon and Naxi manuscripts preserved in museum, library and private collections in Europe and Asia. It will also discuss the complexity of papermaking tradition, sometimes locally shared by various communities.

Naxi manuscripts found in the Faculty of Oriental Studies, University of Warsaw – preliminary study of the collection

EWA PAŚNIK-TUŁOWIECKA, UNIVERSITY OF WARSAW, POLAND

At the end of November 2018 at the Faculty of Oriental Studies of University of Warsaw (FOS) a mini-collection of three Naxi manuscripts was discovered. The provenience of the manuscripts remains unknown. Because this mini-collection has never been researched, the main aim of this paper is to present preliminary findings of the study carried out with my colleague Olgierd Uziembło, MA, who is linguistic specialist. The connection with Bon rituals at this point is uncertain, but placing the FOS manuscripts in the context of other collections and deciphering their possible meaning will perhaps reveal the influence of Bon rituals.

Structure and content of a Dongba ritual manuscript

DAN PETERSEN, UNIVERSITY OF HAMBURG, GERMANY

A closer look at the structure and content of Dongba ritual manuscripts can shed light on the close relationship between ritual and manuscript. Their content can range from myths, divination practices, and offerings to implicit or explicit ritual instructions. These parts sometimes differ in structure and style and their features vary from formulas that show parallelism in sentence-structure to the description of ritual acts the components of which are being enumerated. The presentation aims to introduce observations made when translating from a 20th century interlinear Chinese translation of a Dongba manuscript. Their potential meaning for the understanding of these manuscripts and the questions that the findings raise will be discussed.

Tibetan manuscripts as objects in use: vernacular literacy in the ritual context of the Baima (Sichuan, PRC)

VALENTINA PUNZI

The Baima are a group of ten thousand people living at the Gansu-Sichuan border and officially classified as Tibetan. As is the case for other communities on the Sino-Tibetan borderlands, their identification is controversial. Tibetan scholars advocate the “Tibetaness” of the Baima, whereas the Baima themselves argue for their recognition as a separate ethnic group.

The community speaks a non-literary Tibeto-Burman language, which is unintelligible to the surrounding Tibetan communities. However, apotropaic, good-fortune, divination, and healing rituals performed by the local ritual specialists involve the reading and chanting of a corpus of texts that are written in literary Tibetan language. These texts are not independent from the ritual performances but are used as mnemonic devices that prompt and organize ritual actions while their meaning remains largely obscure to the Baima ritual specialists themselves.

Based on fieldwork carried in 2018 and 2019 in the village of Kade, I will first outline the characteristics of the corpus of one Baima ritual specialist. Secondly, I will describe how vernacular literacy in Tibetan is acquired and how Tibetan manuscripts are used in the Baima ethnographic context. Finally, I will discuss how the monopoly on access to ritual texts grants Baima ritual specialists social authority within the frame of “marginal Tibetaness” and how different forms of vernacular literacy are implemented across the communities in the so-called ethnic corridor (*minzu zoulang*).

Long-distance networks among Bonpo communities: historical conduits of tangible and intangible heritage

CHARLES RAMBLE (EPHE – PSL, CRCAO, PARIS)

The legend of the dispersal of Bonpo masters to the frontiers of Tibet and adjacent lands during the persecution of their religion by the Emperor Trisong Detsen in the 8th century is well known from numerous works. Since the time of this quasi-mythical episode, the members of these far-flung communities – however they might actually have originated – have been far from static, and subsequent centuries have witnessed extensive interactions among groups of Bonpos that are sometimes separated by vast differences. Historically, the great majority of abbots of Menri monastery in West-central Tibet were, like its 14th/15th-century founder, natives Gyalrong (Jinchuan) in the far east, while its most eminent (the 23rd) was from Derge in Kham. The colophons of Bon manuscripts in northern Nepal

reveal that many of them were composed or copied in Central or East Tibet. The historical connections between Bon centres within and beyond Tibet are not well understood, and a study of these networks could lead to a clearer picture of the diffusion of local religious traditions, the movement of artefacts such as manuscripts, and the generalisation of regional codicological and grammatical features in Bonpo texts. Following a preliminary sketch of this long-distance mobility, this presentation will discuss the particularly close relationship that seems to have developed between the rulers of Gyalrong and the Yangal clan of Dolpo, respectively the eastern- and western-most outposts of the Bon religion, both of them lying outside the frontiers of Tibet.

Who was performing Bonpo funerary rituals at Dunhuang and Miran?

SAM VAN SCHAİK, THE BRITISH LIBRARY

The majority of our manuscript evidence for early Tibetan non-Buddhist ritual are associated with death and funerary practices. Wooden slips and stakes from the Miran fort dating from the period of the Tibetan empire (i.e. before the mid-ninth century) are ritual ephemera of these funerary practices, with inscriptions which name the roles and occasionally the individuals involved. When we turn to the manuscripts preserved in Mogao Cave 17, in Dunhuang, we find many narrative texts which are similarly associated with funerary practices. Most of these were copied after the end of the Tibetan empire, on the backs of Chinese scrolls. Unlike the wooden documents from Miran, their purpose is not immediately obvious. Another set of manuscripts from Dunhuang contains Buddhist polemics against non-Buddhist beliefs and Bonpo funerary practices. Given the overwhelmingly Buddhist context of the contents of Cave 17, the copying and preservation of Bonpo texts suggests a more complex picture than the one presented by these polemical texts, and we need to ask the question: did Buddhist monks and nuns preserve and even practice Bonpo funerary rituals?

The Clever White Bat: A note on the formation of le'u literature from the 'Brug chu Valley in the southeast Tibetan Plateau

NALJOR TSERING, ÉCOLE PRATIQUE DES HAUTES ÉTUDES (EPHE), PARIS

In recent years, a number of ritual manuscripts have been discovered in the region near the 'Brug chu valley in south-eastern Tibet. These ritual texts are mainly associated with *le'u*, a term referring to a well-known group of ritual specialists in the local tradition. These newly discovered manuscripts are difficult to classify and analyse, since both the Tibetan Buddhist and the institutionalised Bon traditions have imposed varying degrees of reconfiguration at different points in history. Therefore, it might be worthwhile to

direct our attention to the formation of the specific ritual elements contained in these texts, which could help to shed light on the history of the *le'u* ritual tradition as a whole. It may also help us to understand how the Tibetan religious and cultural patterns in the pre-Buddhist period are related to the extant *le'u* traditions of the south-eastern Tibetan Plateau. The present paper suggests two possible approaches to this problem.

Fortunately, the association of this textual group with other Tibetan ritual texts is relatively clear, especially with those related to the institutionalised Bon tradition. This paper takes the example of the *sGam po pha wang*, “Clever White Bat”, a ritual text found in the ‘Brug chu river valley in the south-eastern Tibetan plateau, and discusses its formation through an analysis of its structure and content. It argues that the conception of the three traditions in the Tibetan culture of the pre-Buddhist period, namely *sGrung*, *lDe'u*, and *Bon*, as proposed by the early Buddhists, provide a good basis for discussing the origins and formation of such texts. First, the function and significance of bats described in this ritual can be traced not only to the myths and legendary stories about bats popular in traditional *sGrung* and *lDe'u*, *Bon*, but are also attested in recent folkloric and ethnographic findings.

Second, in addition to the main content of the rituals, etiological stories, *smrang*, have also long been recognised as an important feature of Tibetan ritual. These include not only a wide variety of indigenous myths that narrate dialogues between deities, but also dialogues between mythical characters, such as Kong rtse ‘phrul rgyal and lHa bon thod dkar. The present paper analyses first how the origin story depicts the ritual significance of bats, then compares the structure of the story with similar accounts depicting the dialogue between Confucius and chimeras as attested in early Chinese classics. In the light of these analyses, I argue that the diversity of *le'u* literature is not only developed on the basis of indigenous Tibetan mythology and beliefs, but may also have received influence from narrative elements in other civilisations.

Calling the soul back. Ritual space and manuscripts among the Naxi people

CRISTIANA TURINI, UNIVERSITÀ DI MACERATA

Naxi reality is inhabited by a great number of different supernatural beings whom they have to confront daily, and many of them can cause illness in a variety of ways. The most common one is soul stealing. Demons, spirits and even deities can steal people's souls with different purposes and if ritual intervention is not immediate or if it is not adequate, death can occur.

Although vast corpora of Naxi manuscripts have been published in 1999 and 2000 in a hundred volumes containing an annotated collection of *dongba* ritual texts, since the death of the last generation of great *dongbas* it has become more and more difficult to relate Naxi manuscripts to genuine ritual activities and ceremonies.

This paper will present the ritual space, the paraphernalia and a summary of the contents of the most important manuscripts chanted in a Naxi healing ceremony to the Shu spirits documented during one of my research trips to the areas of Shuming, Mingying, Tacheng and Dadong in north-western Yunnan province. Some information on the ritual practices dealing with the purification of pollution opening this ceremony will be also touched upon.