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The Maoist Shaman and the Madman: Ritual Bricolage, Failed Ritual, and Failed Ritual Theory

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On a cool summer afternoon, a shaman arrived at a dusty mud-brick Naxi village to cure a resident who had gone mad. During the ritual that followed, the shaman called on Chairman Mao, Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping to assist her in driving out demons while she instructed the madman to brace up, learn from Lei Feng, and work for the greater good of his country. The shaman chanted, “The madman is one of the wretched masses. Arise if you don’t want to be enslaved! Let our flesh and blood build the next Great Wall.” The shaman incorporated political slogans and phrases from the Chinese national anthem into her ritual incantations. She wore a shoulder bag affixed with a Red Guard armband and marched around the madman’s courtyard as if she were going into battle. The shaman bowed to the gods and burned incense, but she also invoked the “gods” and the experiences of the Chinese revolution—all in an attempt to save the madman.

This extraordinary ritual was held at East Wind, a village populated by the Naxi ethnic minority in southwest China.¹ The shaman grafted national discourse onto local ritual structure in a context where there had formerly been a clear division between the state and the shamanic. The shaman’s performance reveals both the penetration of state power and the agency of the shaman in creating a syncretic form of ritual practice that momentarily blurred national and local epistemologies. During the ritual, the shaman’s conjurings created a site for the reinscription of ritual meaning and the opening of new contingencies and ambivalences. But the village audience immediately debated the merits of the ritual and ultimately assessed it to be a failure.

Anthropological analysis has largely privileged rituals that are routinely performed and dramatize shared meanings and visions of reality. Failed rituals, those not associated with either the successful reassertion or transformation of social order, are often relegated to the analyst’s dustbin. I suggest that examining failed ritual redirects our analytic gaze to local processes of legitimation and authentication, while it simultaneously avoids accepting merely temporary

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arrangements of power as a timeless cultural essence. Although shifting the analytic focus from ritual to ritualization avoids the reification of ritual by attending to processes, it is still informed by the functionalist celebration of normative practice. Understanding the failure of ritual draws us into the complex arena of conflict and contingency, where social dynamics enable new identities or create marginal ones.

Failed ritual in this case may be understood through a series of contextualizations that reveal East Wind ambivalences about national identity, ritual discourse, class, and symbols of power in the 1990s. The shaman's ritual brought out contradictions between Naxi historical experiences and a sense of shared national Chinese identity. The performance created a context in which different understandings of ritual among villagers and the lack of a singular all-encompassing belief system became apparent. And, finally, the shaman's use in the 1990s of Maoist symbols of power led villagers to rethink their objections to the very economic inequalities that mobilized them to hold the ritual in the first place.

Naxi

The Naxi are a non-Han ethnic group, one of the 56 officially classified "nationalities" living in the People's Republic of China.² There are approximately 250,000 Naxi residing in Lijiang Autonomous Naxi Prefecture in Yunnan Province.³ East Wind village is located in the Lijiang basin, about an hour-and-a-half bicycle ride from Lijiang town, the cultural and marketing center of Lijiang Prefecture.

The village of East Wind, built under the shadow of Wood Ear Mountain, faces a flat plain of dry farmland on which villagers grow wheat, corn, and beans. The village comprises a number of walled courtyards that are connected by a maze of narrow dirt alleys. Each courtyard has one or two red mud-brick buildings covered with pine fronds or gray ceramic tiles. Villagers use these buildings as living quarters and for raising pigs and chickens for household consumption. Only about one-third of East Wind's 84 households has a draft animal, and most of these animals are collectively owned by close patrilineal kin whose courtyards tend to be clustered together. East Wind has some of the poorest land in the Lijiang basin. Unlike that of neighboring villages, East Wind's land does not allow for rice cultivation. Water shortages are not uncommon. Families are allotted four *mu* (two-thirds of an acre) of land per person, in contrast with the two to three *mu* (one-third to one-half of an acre) allotted per person in basin villages with superior land. Except for their seasonal gathering of *songrong* (wild shitake mushrooms) and *muer* (wood ear fungus) from Wood Ear Mountain, the residents of East Wind are primarily subsistence agriculturists. To date, poor agricultural yields continue to hinder economic growth and prosperity. Only a handful of families have direct access to cash, either from the pensions of retired family members or the salaries of employed family members who reside outside the village.

Prior to the Chinese revolution in 1949, a single landlord family owned the choicest land in East Wind village. Two other lineages owned the remaining village land. With the exception of one Chinese family, all the contemporary residents of East Wind claim to be descendants of these three Naxi lineages. Small family-based farming was prevalent in East Wind prior to 1949, as it is now.

During my field research in the early 1990s, villagers conceived of recent history as divided into “pre-” and “postliberation” eras. The postliberation era is differentiated into the collective period (collectives were the administrative units under which the state merged all agricultural holdings in 1955 and organized all agricultural labor until 1980), roughly corresponding to the time of Maoist rule (from 1949 to 1976), and the period of decollectivization, roughly corresponding to the post-Mao era (from 1976 onward). In the early 1990s, the vast majority of East Wind villagers were supportive of the socialist state and had negative views of the pre-1949 era, which they associated with memories of hardship and poverty. Nevertheless, villagers did not fondly remember collectivized farming and the political strife of the Maoist period. Many villagers complained about the lack of freedom resulting from controlled work routines, and many associated the collective period with frequent hunger. Production team authorities on collective farms—under pressure to represent their teams as successful—exaggerated actual grain yields, which ultimately resulted in the village having barely enough grain for survival. Many villagers perceived collective-era *ganbu* (cadres—which refers to all officials in postsocialist China) as favoring their own immediate families in work assignments and work point allocations. Surprisingly, even the relatives of collective officials were critical of the officials’ behavior during this time. The resentment one detects in these accounts suggests that the collective era was characterized by strained kinship ties.

The most salient distinctions among villagers during the Maoist era were expressed in the idiom of class. Class labels, mandated by the Agrarian Reform Law of 1950, were assigned by local *ganbu*. There was an element of arbitrariness to these labels because, particularly in minority areas such as Lijiang Prefecture, there were often only slight economic distinctions among villagers. Yet, in an attempt to conform to national directives, local officials dutifully assigned class labels. It was on the basis of these labels that cadres and members of the Red Guard organized class struggle sessions in which the masses publicly criticized those neighbors identified as having exploitative class backgrounds. In East Wind, the most prosperous household was assigned the label of *dizhu* (landlord). The vast majority of East Wind villagers were classified as *pinnong* (poor peasants), who farmed small plots of land and hired themselves out as agricultural workers to make ends meet. A handful of villagers were *zhongnong* (middle peasants or small subsistence farmers) or *funong* (rich peasants). The male descendants of the sole landlord family left the village, and the female descendants married into *pinnong* families. Although it is common knowledge that *funong* and *zhongnong* families in East Wind incurred severe criticism from their neighbors—some were beaten and had their property confiscated—*funong* and *zhongnong* families were loath to discuss this era. Many of the younger

villagers enthusiastically supported the Communist Party during the Maoist era, but they seemed cynical, if not embarrassed, about this in the early 1990s. However, two village elders remained proud of their pasts as early recruits to the Communist Party; they worked in the underground movement, wielded some political power during the Maoist era, and were in the early 1990s *lixu ganbu*, cadres who took early retirement. Then again, survival during the Maoist era for many of the older villagers meant passively conforming to the rhetoric of the time. Many older women who could not speak Chinese or understand the ideological content of political recitations recounted using songs as mnemonic devices to enable them to reproduce the required political responses.

While decollectivization and the institution of *chengbao*, the Household Responsibility System, both dating from 1980, marked a significant improvement in the standard of living in East Wind village as a whole, they also brought about new economic inequalities between individual households. Decollectivization dismantled the collectives that were in effect from 1957 to 1980 and instituted a system of village-based government. In concert with this, the Household Responsibility System allotted land to individual households, which became independent economic units. Village residents unanimously prefer the Household Responsibility System to *jiti*, the system of collective agriculture. More than half of the buildings in East Wind were built after decollectivization. Villagers now have enough to eat, and many families boast of being able to eat meat at least once a week. Villagers highly value the freedom to organize their own work routines. During the 1980s, rapidly changing standards of living in both the town and basin made most villagers optimistic about the future. Villagers would gather curiously at the few households with television sets, and young people proudly sported fashionable store-bought clothing from the town. Some of the younger men planted fruit trees, and others planned to build a fish pond. Most villagers, however, continue to rely primarily on the farming of grain and beans as they had done before 1949, and, by the early 1990s, many villagers began to doubt state promises that exemplary households would serve as models ushering in prosperity for all. A few exemplary East Wind households continued to prosper in the early 1990s, but they were not leading the rest of the village to prosperity.

Divinatory Discourse and the Magic of Mao

As the shaman entered the madman's courtyard, a rapt crowd of villagers gathered to watch her begin arranging offerings for the ritual. The villagers had high expectations of the shaman. Someone in an adjacent Naxi village had recommended her after she had held a ritual that "cured" a local woman formerly unable to bear children.

A woman in her early forties, the shaman wore a Heqing Bai minority head-dress, a Red Guard shoulder bag slung over a common blue cotton shirt, apron-covered trousers, and the ubiquitous army green tennis shoes on her feet. The shaman was not Naxi but of the Bai nationality. This was immediately apparent from the headdress, which identified her as from Heqing, 90 kilometers from

Lijiang town; it is standard for rural Bai women to wear the headdress of their area. She conducted the ritual in Yunnanese, which is the lingua franca of the Lijiang basin area as well as of Heqing. What villagers found peculiar about her appearance was the Red Guard shoulder bag, which is a Cultural Revolution relic rarely seen in the post-Mao era Lijiang countryside. Villagers claimed that the shaman was originally a poor peasant who had once been a Red Guard and Communist Party official with a high enough rank to have attended political conferences as far away as Kunming, the provincial capital.

The shaman first burned incense and prepared colored flags, which she positioned according to compass points associated with fire, water, metal, and wood. She placed an assortment of offerings in cups and bowls in the center of the courtyard next to a live chicken. The shaman's actions—the burning of incense and bowing to the gods of the East, West, North, South, and Center—constitute *chu ba zei*, the standard procedure for beginning rituals, including shamanic ones, in Lijiang Prefecture. *Chu ba zei* is also performed by some Naxi families on the first and 15th of each month and for *manyueke*, a baby's first month celebration, to which they invite the gods.

The shaman then began to sing: "I came to save the madman because I pity him! The madman is one of the wretched masses! We invite Mao Zhuxi [Chairman Mao], Zhou Enlai, and Deng Xiaoping to come and save the madman!" In doing this, she symbolically replaced a local ritual structure comprising the gods of heaven, mountain, and earth with a nationalized ritual structure presided over by this deified postrevolutionary trinity.

The shaman raised some wine cups toward the sky and poured water as if offering it to an invisible entity, and then she scattered rice in four directions as offerings to the gods. Addressing herself to the madman, she began singing from the Chinese national anthem: "Arise if you don't want to be enslaved! Let our flesh and blood be used to build the next Great Wall!" Before the anthem was finished, she began singing verses from an anti-Japanese war hymn, during which she dramatized a mock decapitation: "We'll wield our knife toward the demons and cut off a demon's head! One-two, one-two-three, one-two-three-four!" She marched as if in battle, singing this strange medley interspersed with extracts from *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* (Mao 1969), sung to the tune "Do-Re-Mi" (from *The Sound of Music*), and exhortations to emulate Lei Feng.

Some of the audience giggled sporadically. Her words were all too familiar; these songs once performed in schools and during political meetings evoked memories from the not-so-distant past and aroused vague feelings of patriotism and a determination to carry out political campaigns or tasks of heavy labor. During the Cultural Revolution, loudspeakers roused the villagers every morning with the inevitable revolutionary songs or the exercise count "one-two-three-four" (*yi-er-san-si*), which echoed through the village. Quotations from Chairman Mao, recited like daily mantras, spoke of what many villagers, who had been true believers, once considered the very meaning of life.⁴ "Xue Xi Lei Feng!" [Learn from Lei Feng!]⁴—a campaign repeated every decade or so—exhorted the

masses to emulate the personal sacrifices of that paragon of Communist righteousness. First in the 1960s and then numerous times thereafter, the state promoted Lei Feng, a People's Liberation Army (PLA) soldier and tireless worker, as a model of socialist sacrifice. Lei Feng had rescued a bus filled with children by propping up a falling telephone pole, which eventually crushed and killed him. His diaries, often miraculously discovered in different places at the same time during "Learn from Lei Feng" campaigns, are narratives of sacrifice and tireless enthusiasm to serve the people. Versions of these diaries were the mainstay of political study sessions for years (Farquhar 1996). Lei Feng was both an embodiment of the Communist spirit (Spence 1990:727) and a virtuous exemplar narrativized in the fashion of imperial and pre-1949 worthies (Ebrey 1981:382).⁵

The shaman's songs and gestures prompted some whispering and nervous laughter; the strange juxtaposition of shamanic activity and revolutionary text made many of the young people giddy. Shamanism belonged to the realm of pre-revolutionary local practices that remained situated outside state control, and it was antithetical to the political slogans that articulated the voice of the state. Despite this apparent incoherence, many of the older people watched attentively; the performance even transfixed some of them. The shaman appeared to use song and slogan as mnemonic devices to conjure strong attitudes and emotions from specific historical memories. In doing this, she sought to mobilize the madman and the audience by appropriating the fierce determination of the past for battle in a new context of demon quelling.

The ritual wound down after the shaman threw the increasingly dazed chicken in various directions, telling the madman to fetch it each time. A cool breeze was blowing, but the shaman's clothes were wet with perspiration as she alternately sang and trembled. Over one hour after the ritual began, the shaman fed the chicken some rice and said, "Now they've eaten their fill and drank until they are no longer thirsty, and so we ask that the demons go away and allow the madman to recover." Then the shaman instructed the madman to bow in the direction of the village graveyard. The ritual closed with a group consisting of the host, some relatives, the madman, and the shaman walking to the graveyard to send off the demons. Once there, the group killed the chicken and feasted on it.

Sometime later, the relatives of the madman graciously thanked the shaman and sent her on her way with ten duck eggs. Relatives of the madman described the duck eggs as a gift or a token of the hosting family's gratitude.

Within moments of her departure, the village was abuzz with criticism of the ritual and the shaman. Before the arrival of the shaman, the villagers had generally felt that one or more demons were afflicting the madman. However, after the ritual, and in spite of the shaman's demon-quelling efforts, the madman did not appear either substantially improved or particularly mad but, rather, quiet and withdrawn. Most villagers felt that the shaman had not cured the madman, although some were hopeful that he might improve with time. By the next day, public opinion had moved toward a negative evaluation of the ritual itself. Some villagers called the shaman a *pianzi* (cheat), who had only come to East

Wind seeking material gain. An older man complained, “She said Mao, Zhou, and Deng sent her to save the madman; she didn’t know the names of the gods and didn’t know how to sing shaman songs [he imitated the high melodic tune used by shamans].” Many of the older villagers rejected the shaman’s performance because her words, songs, and appearance were simply inconsistent with their cultural categories and shared memories of shamans and shamanic rituals. Prior to 1949, shamans in the Lijiang basin were men who wore cloth turbans, wielded drums or swords, and sang secret shamanic songs in a high melodic whisper.⁶ This shaman, many villagers pointed out, was a woman—wearing a minority headdress and toting a Red Guard bag—who sang revolutionary songs and spouted political slogans.

Most of the villagers under 40 had never seen a shaman perform, and their knowledge of shamanism was based on older villagers’ memories of the performances of the shaman who had lived in the village before 1949. Their rejection of the shaman was based not so much on a critique of her authenticity as on a rejection of what they saw as her promotion of the Maoist era. For many of the young people, the shaman’s Red Guard shoulder bag and strident rhetoric suggested a reinvocation of values they had once subscribed to and had since rejected. But did the rejection of the trinity of Mao, Zhou, and Deng also suggest a perception of state powerlessness in comparison with local gods and folk cosmology? If so, can this be contextualized in terms of the declining role of the state since decollectivization in the Lijiang countryside? Given that villagers in the 1990s have been going through yet another “Learn from Lei Feng” campaign, what does their rejection of the recent reincarnation of Lei Feng as demon queller imply? One young man protested, “How can studying Lei Feng help? That has nothing to do with it.” His response, which was echoed by other villagers, flatly rejected the shaman’s implication that the madman’s illness could be attributed to his ideological shortcomings. Perhaps this is why most villagers were sarcastic about the shaman’s use of *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* and the model of Lei Feng. Neither the initial village support for the ritual nor the occasionally recognizable ritual actions performed by the shaman could override what the villagers perceived as anachronistic ritual incantations. Before situating the shaman’s performance in a historical framework of ritual practice, I will discuss the significance of her ritual text and how it raised conflicting sentiments about national identity.

Interpreting Shamanic Bricolage

Through her ritual agency, the shaman attempted to wed shamanic discourse to state discourse in order to restore the madman’s mental health. The former called on divine intervention, while the latter prescribed ideological adherence and personal sacrifice. The shaman did not invite the gods usually summoned by Naxi shamans. Rather, she deified the state figures of Mao, Zhou, and Deng while celestializing the discourse of party and state. Her quotations from Mao and exhortations to emulate Lei Feng suggested that healing can partially be achieved by the divine intervention of the state but will also require the

agency of the patient. Although the shaman initially diagnosed demons in the patient's family, she then personalized the problem by attributing the patient's madness to a demon inhabiting his own body.

By repeatedly instructing the madman to "learn from Lei Feng," the shaman's approach implied that the madman and his condition might improve if he modeled himself after the revolutionary exemplar. Her ritual was unlike those I witnessed in other villages, in which it was never suggested that the afflicted was individually responsible or that sickness could be linked with ideological shortcomings. By focusing on the afflicted individual, the shaman desocialized and defamilialized illness and misfortune: she portrayed the madman's illness as an individual's problem, as opposed to a problem of the extended family or village community. In this sense, the ritual's epistemology mirrors state discourse since the end of the collective era.

Social tensions had been rising in the post-Mao era resulting from incipient class formation and the growth of economic inequality in the countryside. State discourse sought to quell these tensions by promoting community etiquette and village harmony (Anagnost 1985:69). Pursuing this goal through a series of campaigns such as "Civilized Village," "Five Speak Four Beautiful," "Civilized Household," and so on, the state emphasized what it called "socialist morality," which specifically focused on the development of moral character and fixed responsibility at the level of "individual consciousness" (Anagnost 1985:71). Anagnost suggests that the reorganization of agriculture (decollectivization) required new forms of ideological work in order to mute tensions emerging out of class antagonisms (1985:65). Similarly, in the shaman's ritual, the individual's proper ideological disposition and selfless sacrifice to the state re-emerge as a remedy for the madman.

Yet the shaman was not suggesting that the madman's affliction could be cured solely by his personal reform, for her ritual acts—which included a sacrifice and the propitiation of new gods—still required the intervention or patronage of deities or perceived powers, as well as the intervention of the shaman herself. Hence, the shaman's conjurings were a syncretic assemblage drawing on elements of both pre-1949 healing rituals and more contemporary constructions of personhood.

The ritual text, which might have appeared to the villagers to be a combination of incongruous images, I interpret as offering coherence to the shaman's performance. The principal songs the shaman used were the national anthem and "Da Dao Jing Xing Qu," which she interspersed with punchy quotations from Chairman Mao, the slogan "Learn from Lei Feng," and the catchy marching count. The song that dominated the shaman's medley was "Da Dao Jing Xing Qu," an anti-Japanese marching hymn from the Sino-Japanese War (1937–45). While the hymn evokes the visual image of battling and beheading demons—images congruous to ritual demon quelling—it also summons forth a historically powerful memory of resistance and the context that inspired the imagining of Chinese nationhood. Catastrophes often fuel the strong sentiments that solidify a vision of nationhood (Anderson 1983:158). Benedict Anderson

(1983:158) suggests that in China, for the Chinese, the catastrophe that sparked the envisioning of Chinese nationhood was Japan's massive invasion in 1937 (also see Johnson 1962:1–14). Consistent with this view, the marching hymn “Da Dao Jing Xing Qu,” which was composed to rally the nation to fend off the attacking Japanese, did indeed inspire a determination and sense of identity linked to the conception of Chinese nationhood. The national anthem, also composed during this era, evokes similar sentiments of nationalism.⁷

The shaman's use of song in her curing ritual was not arbitrary but allusive: the anti-Japanese marching hymn and the national anthem served to evoke the powerful moment when a new social body and a modern national identity emerged. We may interpret the shaman's use of national imagery as an act of territorial resignification. In place of the heaven, earth, and mountain gods governing a cosmological order, the shaman remapped ritual action and the moral community on an imagined national landscape. If the shaman's performance relocates the madman in a moral community enlarged to national proportions, it simultaneously becomes a site for the revaluation of the magical power required to mediate the restoration of that moral community's order. The magical power required to preside over a “national” cosmos is ritually reconfigured in the national trinity of the deified Mao, Zhou, and the then not-so-dead Deng.

In such a reconfiguration, local ritual structure becomes the basis for the incorporation of reimagined national sources of power. New national deities are, in turn, freighted with state discourse and epistemology that may be deployed in the ritual arena they have entered. The shaman's exhortations to study Lei Feng offer a critique of local conceptions of misfortune, which solely blame demons for the madman's predicament, and suggest her complicity with state discourse by laying responsibility at the madman's feet for lacking self-discipline. But the concept of self-discipline also speaks of a tactic of control necessitated by a more complex social body. This tactic echoes what Foucault describes as biopower, a discourse of the self-disciplining self necessitated by the emergence of the modern European state (1980:140, 141), and is concordant with the more self-conscious model of personhood promoted by the postrevolutionary Chinese state. The shaman's ritual may be understood as Lévi-Strauss's bricolage (1966), a “concoction of symbols” (see Comaroff 1985) already laden with significance from the conflicting realms of the state and the shamanic. Had her ritual been successful, it might have brought about a transformed cosmological order infused with state power. The failure of the ritual, in the sense that it was not socially persuasive, directs us to analyze the various forces that inspired doubt among East Wind villagers. Processes of legitimization and authentication encompass local dynamics, experiences of structural change, the significance of ritual practice, and interpretations of new forms of power. To begin examining these processes, I will first turn to the shaman's ritual text and the villagers' ambivalences about national identity. By historicizing Naxi experiences of the Sino-Japanese War, I will call attention to one obvious reason for East Wind villagers' doubts about the shaman's incantations.

National Identity and Transition as Confrontation

While we may understand the convictions of the shaman by analyzing the songs she selected, we cannot assume that these songs had the same meaning for the village audience. As the subaltern studies group has suggested, we should scrutinize moments of historical “transition” and pluralize them as moments of confrontation (Spivak 1988:3). In this case, rather than assuming that Japan’s invasion caused people across the vast mass of China to simultaneously imagine themselves as a part of the modern Chinese nation, we should consider plural experiences of this historical moment. Using this strategy, we may situate the villagers’ sentiments by examining their response to the shaman’s use of the national anthem and the anti-Japanese marching hymn “Da Dao Jing Xing Qu.”

East Wind villagers did not appear to be inspired by the shaman’s use of song. There is no doubt that “Da Dao Jing Xing Qu” evokes patriotism and nationalism in an audience that includes the Naxi, but we may interpret the hymn as additionally referencing an alternative historical memory. During the war with Japan, many Naxi men cut off their right index fingers or committed suicide to avoid conscription by the Guomindang (Nationalists).⁸ It is not uncommon in rural Naxi villages to find elderly men with their right index fingers missing. Many conscripted Naxi soldiers escaped and returned to Lijiang to die by their own hands rather than in a foreign land away from their families. While the shaman was probably unaware of this history, East Wind villagers are familiar with Guomindang treatment of Naxi during the Sino-Japanese War.⁹ In Lijiang, Naxi conscripts were bound with ropes around their necks and arms and then led off like prisoners by rifle-toting soldiers (Rock n.d., cited in Sutton 1974:273).¹⁰ The Naxi resistance to conscription during the Republican era from 1911 to 1949 is painfully recounted in “La Wei Ger,” a popular Naxi folksong (Yang et al. 1986). Hence, what Anderson has generalized for the Chinese as a “transition” to membership in an imagined nation was for many Naxi a confrontation with the Republican Chinese over the very question of allegiance and shared national identity. For those East Wind residents whose ancestors had committed suicide to avoid conscription and for other villagers who identified with them, the shaman’s evocative hymn must have brought forth conflicting sentiments: national pride juxtaposed with a painful historical memory of the imposition of a national identity that many of the Naxi did not share. This painful memory may have contributed to the audience’s rejection of the shaman’s national cosmological narrative and, ultimately, to the villagers’ rejection of her cure for the madman.

Without hesitation, contemporary Naxi acknowledge themselves as a part of the Chinese nation. However, this was not always the case. At various historical moments the Naxi resisted both national and imperial identities. This was demonstrated by Naxi resistance to conscription during the anti-Japanese and anti-Communist war efforts, as well as by the suicides of Naxi women to avoid Chinese-instituted marriage practices during the late Qing dynasty (from 1723 to 1911) and the Republican era (from 1911 to 1949) (Chao 1990, 1995; Jackson 1971; Rock 1939).

If the villagers' ambivalences about national identity caused them to doubt the shaman's ritual, discontinuity in beliefs about ritual practice magnified the problem. An examination of historical layers of conflicting ritual practice reveals that there was no singular shared belief system among East Wind villagers. In order to understand these discontinuities, I examine prerevolutionary ritual practice, the impact of the Maoist era, and post-Mao era revivals of ritual practice.

Situating Ritual Practice

Religious practice in pre-1949 Lijiang and East Wind village included elements of Tibetan Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism, Daoism, the *dongba* religion, *sanba* shamanism, and a variety of heterodox religious sects. An understanding of this diversity requires some discussion of the history of regional religious practices and Chinese territorial expansion into what is now southwestern China.

Naxi territory directly borders K'am (eastern Tibet), and the religious practices of Naxi in these border regions reflect the legacy of Tibetan Buddhist influences. The Mu family, ancient rulers of the Naxi, practiced Tibetan Buddhism in the 1600s and were patrons of Tibetan Buddhist temples located in Naxi territory. Daoist, Confucian, and Chinese Buddhist influences in Naxi religious practice derive from the Chinese expansion into the southwest during the Ming dynasty, from 1368 to 1644. The building of Chinese-style temples in Lijiang basin dates from this period, as does the official institution of the *tusi* system, a form of indirect government in which indigenous chiefs rule on behalf of the dynastic state. Under the *tusi* system, the state attempted to convert indigenous rulers to Chinese ritual practice and, simultaneously, to incorporate local gods into a Chinese cosmological structure. The state achieved this by bestowing new identities on local gods. For instance, the state gave Sanduo—who was formerly worshipped as a sacred mountain god, as well as a god of local Naxi and Bai shamans—the title of “protector-general” of the empire. By giving local gods the stamp of state legitimacy, the state blurred a local system of belief with its own. Moreover, it restricted the power of local gods by embedding them within an imperial cosmological hierarchy in a lower position than more powerful state-promoted deities.

With the end of the *tusi* system and the institution of direct Chinese rule in 1723, Chinese magistrates promoted Chinese-style rituals, particularly marriage and burial practices, among the Naxi population at large. In prerevolutionary East Wind, religious practice showed the signs of a successful Chinese project of ritual promotion. During the Republican era, the Naxi practiced Chinese-style life-cycle ceremonies that were identified as Naxi ritual practices. In East Wind village, three Chinese-style temples—Guanyin Miao, Hay Ghee Mei (in Chinese, San Shen Miao, or Temple to Three Gods: Confucius, Lao Jun, and Cai Shengyi), and Longwang Miao (Temple to the Dragon King)—all housed deities who were part of a Chinese ritual pantheon. The Guanyin and San Shen temples were built by East Wind elites in the 1800s during the Qing

dynasty and, during the Republican era, served as schools to prepare village children for provincial exams. The temple-building projects of elites aimed at fostering their power and prestige were compatible with the state project of creating a unified system of belief. The gods worshipped in these East Wind temples were also worshipped throughout Yunnan Province, which suggests that some standardization in beliefs was achieved in the late imperial era.

More locally distinctive elements of East Wind ritual practice were evident in these rituals: for example, the annual Muanbpo sacrifice, the worship of the Naxi god of heaven; Sanduo Jie, a holiday to worship the Naxi god Sanduo; Topiu, a harvest festival during which ancestors are worshipped; and Huobajie, the Yunnanese torch festival, during which ghosts are driven out. The celebration of these rituals involved the entire village and reinforced a shared belief system that narrativized the origin of the Naxi people and provided a means of reproducing community well-being.

In Naxi and regional Chinese and Bai ritual before 1949, it was common to treat historical figures as deities. The historical figures Confucius and Guan Yu were worshipped as gods throughout Yunnan Province by the Chinese, Bai, and Naxi. The Naxi and Bai god Sanduo was interpreted as both a historical figure and a deity. Powerful historical figures were thought to possess *ling*, magical power or efficacy, which supplicants could harness for their own needs through acts of ritual propitiation. In other words, ritual formulas allowed for both the local manipulation of deities for personal benefit and the expansion of the supernatural realm through the deification of historical figures.

Prior to 1949, the Naxi, Chinese, Bai, Lisu, and Tibetan ethnic groups each had healers who may be glossed as shamans. These practitioners were called on to cure illness, retrieve souls, perform divinations, and exorcize intractable spirits, usually ghosts or demons.

The Naxi had two types of ritual practitioners who were often referred to as shamans: the *dongba*, often translated as “priest,” and the *sanba*, translated as “shaman.” *Dongbas* differed from *sanbas* in that they acquired their skills through apprenticeships that required learning pictographic texts to be used in structured rituals. *Dongbas* usually inherited their professions and were always male. The role of *sanba*, open to both men and women, was not learned or chosen but resulted from a traumatic illness during which a channel of communication with a spirit or god opened up. Aside from practicing purification and propitiation of the gods, *sanbas* do not follow standard or predictable sequences in their rituals. Neither the role of *dongba* nor that of *sanba* was prestigious, and it was often taken on by poor farmers seeking to supplement their livelihoods. East Wind had once been the home village of legendary *dongbas*, but in the 1940s the only ritual practitioner in residence was a *sanba*.

After the revolution, the state discouraged ritual practice in Naxi territory, as it did throughout China, and persecuted religious practitioners. In Maoist era Lijiang town, government officials forced Buddhist monks and celibate female devotees to marry (sometimes each other) and publicly executed the leaders of religious sects.¹¹ In East Wind, temples were stripped of icons and then served

as schools, and public ritual practice ceased altogether. Since then numerous campaigns sought to eradicate such practitioners as magical healers, shamans, sorcerers, geomancers, and exorcists. The state accused dongbas and sanbas of spreading feudal superstition, and they joined the ranks of former landlords and rich peasants as objects of local denunciation. Nevertheless, the ban on ritual practitioners did not put an end to all ritual practice, for in remote mountain villages sanbas continued to hold clandestine rituals in private households. In East Wind village, however, as throughout the basin areas, dongbas and sanbas abandoned their ritual roles during the Maoist era, as political rituals of class struggle replaced villagewide ritual practice. While some individual families continued to worship ancestors or their *si* (house gods), these practices were family based and no longer tied to a system of belief shared by the community.

For some villagers, Maoist era political rituals took on a religious tenor. During the Cultural Revolution, from 1966 to 1976, Mao was worshipped like a god; his picture replaced ancestral tablets in some East Wind homes, and even marriages were performed before Mao's picture with wedding parties reciting his quotations in unison. Mao's image was so sacred that pasting his picture on old buildings protected them from destruction. Other symbols of the state also made their way into East Wind's popular imagination during the Maoist era. Before 1949, *men shen* (a pair of gods usually depicted riding wild animals) were usually pasted on both sides of a household's entrance. In post-1949 East Wind, *men shen* were replaced by new protectors: a PLA officer and a Navy officer, each mounted on horseback. During this time, throughout China and for many East Wind villagers, Mao became truly godlike. For other villagers, however, ritualized recitations of Mao quotations or the singing of revolutionary songs did not speak of a depth of belief so much as a strategy for survival.

The post-Mao era brought a relaxed implementation of the state's anti-religion policy. The Chinese state redefined harvest and life-cycle rituals as *fensu xiguan* (customs) rather than religious practices. As a result, in rural China and in East Wind many residents eagerly resumed the practice of life-cycle rituals, which became important villagewide affairs. Yet in East Wind the shift in state policy was also greeted with confusion and caution about what was permissible religious activity. Current state policy, dating from the post-Mao era, tolerates the practice of "religion" (*zongjiao*)—narrowly defined to include Buddhism, Daoism, Islam, and Christianity—while strictly prohibiting magical practitioners or purveyors of "feudal superstition" (*fengjian mixin*). But the category "religion" is the product of state-created differentiations as opposed to distinctions existing among common people.¹²

The post-Mao era redefinition of practices formerly viewed as "religion" as "customs" was further complicated by the state's new stance on ethnic identity. In the 1980s, the state began to encourage expressions of ethnic identity among ethnic minorities, a policy that had reverberations for religious belief in East Wind. During the Maoist era, dongba practices fell under the rubric of feudal superstition. In 1981, during the climate of reform, Naxi leaders rehabilitated *dongba jiao*, dongba religious practices, and renamed them *dongba wenhua*,

or dongba culture (Chao 1996).¹³ Naxi leaders have also officially equated dongba culture with the history and culture of the Naxi people. Ma Barou, a semiretired Communist Party official and native son of East Wind, spearheaded the transformation of dongba ritual practices into a key symbol of Naxi ethnic identity. It is significant that the legitimization of the dongba was an oppositional process, a vital part of which entailed defining the sanba as an illegitimate ritual practitioner who occupied the space of feudal superstition (Chao 1996).

In the late 1980s, Ma Barou's dongba culture caused confusion in East Wind village. Ma, who had been residing in the provincial capital, began spending more time at his old family home in East Wind village and in Lijiang at the Dongba Institute, which he had founded.¹⁴ Ma's promotion of dongbas as Naxi scholars and his own interest in learning dongba practices appeared to signal an official Communist Party authorization of prerevolutionary ritual practice. Many middle-aged villagers, who had associated dongbas with feudal superstition less than a decade ago, began to take an interest in newly defined "Naxi cultural practices." Some young people with no experience of the old rituals reconsidered their views that these practices were backward, while the rebellious youth of the village made jokes about Ma being "head of the dongbas." But most of the middle-aged and older villagers treated Ma with considerable respect and deference. Ma had been the highest-ranking Communist Party official in Lijiang Prefecture after the revolution; he had orchestrated the transition to a socialist government in Lijiang and had ordered the suppression and execution of religious cult leaders who resisted the state. In 1957, provincial leaders denounced Ma for ethnic nationalism; he was exiled from Lijiang and did not return until he was rehabilitated in 1978. Rehabilitation meant that political labels such as "ethnic nationalist" and "anti-rightist" were rescinded and people were reinstated to their former positions, sometimes posthumously. The denunciation of Ma and other ethnic leaders had been part of a larger shift in state policy away from embracing elements of ethnic difference and toward creating a Maoist era national identity that sought to homogenize all internal differences. This ideal of internal homogeneity changed in the 1980s with the representation of China as an ethnically diverse nation open to trade and diplomatic relations with nations once regarded as imperialist enemies during the Maoist era. Ma was quick to embrace the state's celebration of ethnic difference in the 1980s. In the 1990s Ma was again one of the most powerful and beloved leaders in Naxi territory. When he came to East Wind, the older men of the village frequently wandered into his courtyard to reminisce about dongbas, ritual practices they had witnessed, and the old society. Ma's presence conferred a legitimacy on ritual practices viewed as "traditional." Moreover, his influence enabled the older men of the village to be recognized as sources of knowledge themselves and to be elevated over young people who "knew nothing." Despite ambivalence about "traditional" ritual, the entire village attended when Ma invited dongbas from the Dongba Institute to perform his nephew's marriage, a ceremony that included *siku*, the Naxi ritual to "invite the house god."

There was no singular or unified belief system in East Wind village on the eve of the shaman's ritual for the madman. Life-cycle rituals meant different things for differently positioned participants. Prosperous households associated them with displaying their prestige and largess. Poorer families could partake of ritual feasts but could not afford to host them. The most profound divisions existed between generations. For many older and middle-aged villagers, ritual had far more significance than for younger people. East Wind life-cycle rituals entailed seating and serving arrangements that reenacted Confucian hierarchical distinctions based on age and gender. Not surprisingly, many of the older villagers felt vindicated by the recent interest in "Naxi practices," a category that was then fleshed out by discussing once taboo prerevolutionary ritual practice. During both impromptu gatherings, such as visits to Ma Barou's courtyard, and weddings and other social occasions, older villagers commanded the silence of younger villagers as they held forth on stories of shamans, charms, ghosts, exorcisms, and seances. Old He reminisced about his grandfather's donkey being cured after the character for "luck" was written on a piece of paper and burned. Another villager told of how his wife became possessed and spoke in the voice of a dead relative. An older villager recounted witnessing how a neighbor with a dislocated arm screamed uncontrollably until he was magically silenced by the appearance of a dongba. This ethnicization of dongba ritual appeared to take the controversy out of ritual practice. Some of the East Wind villagers had worshipped ancestors and house gods during the prerevolutionary and Maoist eras, and for them elements of a preexisting system of belief were still significant. Other villagers had ambivalent views about ritual practices and would make judgments based on particular cases.

The escalation of ritual activity was part of a wider regional and national pattern. Beyond East Wind, other forms associated with past ritual practice were starting to appear in the Lijiang basin. In neighboring Heqing, a town occupied by the Bai minority, Buddhist groups began meeting publicly and there were plans to rebuild local temples. At the annual Jia Liu Hui, a popular agricultural fair held in Dali, a Bai city some six hours by bus north of Lijiang, geomancers, physiognomists, diviners, and other fortune-tellers offered their services while keeping close watch for local Public Security Bureau officers. There were also new forms of magic. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, a second Mao cult swept across China. While still negatively associated with the Maoist era for some people, Mao's image for many urban taxicab drivers became a protective talisman in the early 1990s (Kristof 1992). Mao's second apotheosis reveals these taxi drivers' perception that there is *ling* (magical power) associated with Mao. Drivers would recount stories of devastating accidents in which only those people riding in taxis with Mao talismans survived (see Barmé 1996).¹⁵ In Dali and Kunming, Mao buttons from the Cultural Revolution and taxi amulets featuring Mao were being sold by independent vendors, although by 1991 the second Mao craze had not spread to Lijiang.¹⁶ The shaman's conjuring of Mao, then, was not an isolated event but, rather, part of a broader phenomenon in which elements of

past ritual practices were revived alongside syncretic forms combining state symbols with magical practice.

This complex history of ritual practice in East Wind indicates that there were discontinuous layers of belief systems in a broader arena of varied practice. The identification of these elements of religious meaning, none of which commanded the consensus of villagers, enables us to track the evaluative processes that led to the villagers' acceptance or rejection of the shaman's ritual as a crystallization of social experience. The history of Naxi religious practice reveals that religious meaning has been forged in a fluid arena infused by state power, local interpretations of state power, and village power dynamics. The divisions between local and national discourse were not clearly drawn, in part because the interests and projects of village elites were compatible with state aims to standardize ritual meaning. Thus, the significance of ritual knowledge is tied not only to a persistence of belief but to the contemporary uses of ritual to forge authority within East Wind village. Following in the footsteps of Ma Barou, the older men of East Wind sought to legitimize ritual meaning as a path to village authority. Their authority had been substantially tested during the Maoist era and, more recently, by the children and grandchildren who eloped and set up new households in defiance of their parents. But generational cleavages were not the only ones that defined East Wind village life. In turning to the specific circumstances that precipitated the ritual for the madman, I will argue that there were underlying tensions in the village community caused by the experience of class inequalities.

Village Dynamics: Illness, Class, and Community Critique

The appearance of village solidarity in East Wind forms a thin veneer over a community characterized by differences and undercurrents of discontent. The pillars of the community, the economically successful families with impeccable political backgrounds, were often the focus of these tensions. The most successful families in the village were those who had retired party officials, or retired or salaried workers, as family members. Their additional sources of income and connections enabled many of these families to find nonagricultural work for their grown children and, in some cases, to obtain for them residence permits for Lijiang town through unofficial channels.¹⁷ Throughout China, a person's residence locates one in a spatial hierarchy that corresponds to a particular standard of living. Villagers with family members who had successfully made the transition to town or urban lives were the economic elite of East Wind.

In the early 1990s, there was a sharp difference between the standard of living of families with and without outside earnings. The least prosperous families often lacked fenced courtyards, owned no draft animals, and had only one building, which was used for living quarters and shared with a few smaller animals (pigs and chickens). These families were usually unable to provide their out-marrying daughters with substantial dowries (managing one quilt or a single set of clothes, if that) and did not celebrate their sons' marriages beyond simple dinners for the immediate family. More prosperous neighbors owned two or three

buildings, neatly walled-in courtyards, and many animals. They celebrated the marriages of their sons and daughters with villagewide banquets and elaborate displays of dowries and gifts (multiple sets of clothing, quilts, thermos bottles, bicycles, bedding, and even furniture in some cases).

The growth in village solidarity and village-based identity was partially a response to the economic inequalities that have become particularly pronounced since decollectivization. According to villagers' own accounts, the recent revival of life-cycle rituals, to which the entire village was invited, contributed to a village solidarity that stressed the equal status of villagers and muted the past and present inequalities among them. Additionally, related kin assisted each other on the basis of affective ties and membership in a patriline. Less formal but often emotionally deeper ties were founded on village-based age-mate networks. Age-mates played a defined role in helping with marriage celebrations, but they also assisted each other informally in a variety of contexts based on the strength of particular friendships. Age-mate ties were particularly strong among the somewhat rebellious young men of the village. Many of these men eloped and established residences separate from their patrilineal kin in a row of houses dubbed the "village of unfilial sons." Many of these "unfilial sons" shared the experience of having lived outside the village and regarded their elders as conservative or even "backward" in their beliefs about social protocol and farming. Yet rebelliousness tended to fade as these young men raised children of their own, mended bridges with their families, and participated in villagewide activities. The ties and sentiments that bound the village as a community were not unrelated to practical forms of assistance. Since decollectivization, villagers engaged in reciprocal labor exchanges to insure that harvesting was done when grain was ripe and to meet labor demands when family members were ill or had social obligations that took them away from the village.

Along with fostering solidarity and a village-based identity, the growth in economic inequality among villagers since decollectivization gave rise to some kin and intravillage tensions. Social ties were often the nodal points where tension erupted. More prosperous villagers felt pressured by or unable to resist the requests of age-mates or kin for loans, which were often not repaid. With the abolition of the collective, villagers perceived kin, particularly those whose households were economically comfortable, as responsible for assisting their less fortunate relatives. A common theme in the criticism of families unwilling to assist others was the opposition between "greed" and "caring." The discourse that opposes "greed" and "caring for others" appears loosely compatible with the ideology of socialist revolution, as well as with *zuoren* (to be a person), a popular notion of how to be a social being.

What is ironic, however, is that those households that needed to shield themselves against such potential criticism were those with the "reddest" backgrounds, who had once vigorously proselytized the ideology of socialist revolution and whose privileged positions during the collective era had contributed to their economic successes since decollectivization. Perhaps because of the pressures associated with their relative prosperity, many of these families took a

prominent role in villagewide activities, and they were considered the exemplary citizens of East Wind. Their eagerness to contribute to the village promoted an image of social engagement and caring for others and muted discontent over their economic superiority. It was one of these red and exemplary families that was seen as benefiting from the madman's condition and subsequently responded to village pressure to help with his cure. The shaman came to East Wind to cure not just a madman but a kinsman of one of East Wind's most prosperous and politically prominent families.

The madman, whose wife had recently died, was about forty years old and lived alone. Before his madness, he had a reputation for being very intelligent and knowledgeable; villagers often consulted with him before deciding when to plant their crops, and they had enjoyed chatting with him because he was considered an expert on world events. The madman's household, one of the village's poorest at the time of liberation, had fared well during the collective era. Since decollectivization, however, the household's fortunes had declined, and villagers recounted that after his wife's recent death the man had gone mad. There was a general feeling among the villagers that the madman's case was exceptional and that something should be done. The merits of his case are highlighted by comparing it with the case of another villager.

East Wind village has another madman, but no shaman was invited, nor was a ritual held to cure him. This second madman had *shang men* (married uxorilocally), killed his wife during a quarrel, and then gone mad while in prison. After being released, he returned to East Wind where he was known to have occasional bursts of *feng feng dian dian* (madness). A man who marries uxorilocally becomes the classificatory son and heir of his in-laws; at the same time, he loses the right to membership and inheritance in his own lineage. Although villagers viewed this second madman as part of a social body, given his uxorilocal marriage that social body consisted of his wife's kin who had symbolically adopted him and were socially recognized as his patrilineal kin. Hence, this madman had a tenuous, if not nonexistent, claim to support from his natal kin and was already impinging on their goodwill by being allowed to return and live with his brother. The lack of village pressure on his relatives to intervene ritually was due to the perception that they were already making a sacrifice by taking him back. This was not the case for the first madman, whose relatives did host the ritual: he was indisputably part of one of the three village patriline and had been a valued member of the village community.

However, there is another explanation for why the villagers decided that the first madman's condition warranted particular attention and triggered a swelling of village concern. Illnesses during which the body is vulnerable often raise questions about the fundamental basis of social order (Adams 1992; Comaroff 1981; Foucault 1980; Turner 1987). Yet not all forms of affliction are perceived as equally momentous. Particular cases of affliction may strike a cord as emblematic of broader dynamics in a fluctuating social order.¹⁸

The villagers could not ignore the poverty, misfortune, and affliction of the first madman, particularly given the conspicuous prosperity of his relatives. The

first madman's father, mother, younger sister, and wife had all died in a ten-year span, which coincidentally corresponded to the beginning of decollectivization in the Lijiang basin. Had his household faced economic hardship during the collective era, they would have received assistance from the collective. But because his misfortunes occurred after decollectivization, his household necessarily became dependent on wealthier relatives. These relatives—whose prosperity over the last decade had not come at the madman's expense but, rather, was due to the unrelated circumstances of having a high-ranking official in the family and having family members who were salaried workers in Lijiang town—had become one of the most prosperous households in the village since decollectivization. While these relatives had helped their poorer relation, they had also begun gradually expanding their courtyard into his and farming his land.

When discussing this situation, villagers focused on the “strangeness” of the multiple deaths in the madman's household. According to informants' accounts, these deaths appeared to be more problematic than the existence of the madman himself. At what one may refer to as a cosmic level, the villagers perceive fertility and productivity as “natural” phenomena, the reversal of which is conspicuously “unnatural.” Consequently, the lack of fertility in the madman's wife (they were childless), the fact that he was an only son, the untimely death of his young, unmarried, and presumably fertile sister, and the withering productivity of his household unit—taken all together—suggested to the villagers a negativity of supernatural proportions.¹⁹ East Wind villagers conceive of *si*, a life force associated with productive increase or fertility, as the divisible property of a given kinship group. During the pre-1949 era, when a bride joined her husband's household, his family held *siku*, a ritual to invite the bride's *si* (associated with her family's house god) to join the groom's family. Similarly, when a household was divided among sons, each would receive a share of *si*. *Si* was conceived of as that household's prosperity evidenced in children, grain, animals, and so on. Villagers associated excessive wealth with abundant *si*, just as poverty aroused suspicions that someone had taken or “led away” one's share of *si*. While only some villagers articulated the depletion of *si* in their explanations, all the villagers were familiar with the concept from the recent performance of *siku* at the wedding of Ma Barou's nephew. What most villagers noticed was that the madman's household was becoming impoverished at the same time that his relatives were becoming prosperous, which appeared to support vague constructions of greed and exploitation. At a symbolic level, patrilineal kin could be seen as usurpers, of fertility and productive increase, who had a particular responsibility to engage in reciprocity in order to restore the madman's unproductive household unit. While circumstances forced the madman's household to “eat the grain of their relatives,” the relatives were seen as “eating the madman's land.”

The demonization of misfortune, and its symbolic location in the larger familial unit of the patriline, not only forced the madman's relatives to take ritual action as a matter of self-defense but also effected a symbolic form of redistribution. (For villagers, rituals are always associated with the expenditure of money

or its equivalent on the part of the hosting family.) The relatives sacrificed ten duck eggs (equivalent to 20 yuan—at the time, 30 percent of a monthly rural income), a live chicken, and a modest amount of food offerings. The ritual expenditure of duck eggs, a live chicken, and rice—items that are also symbols of fertility and productivity—signified the abundance of “fortune” on the part of the madman’s relatives. The logic of the ritual is simple: that which has been depleted would be ritually added. By acting as host and paying a ransom to appease the demons, the relatives would symbolically reverse “misfortune” by redirecting “fortune” (material offerings and symbols of fertility and productivity) to the madman’s household. The performative operations associated with ritual would credit reciprocity and social relations with having created and restored fertility in post-Mao era East Wind village.

Such a scenario might seem particularly just in the eyes of those villagers who viewed the source of the madman’s affliction not as simply existing in the individual but as located in the larger social body to which he belonged. It is quite common in Naxi villages for relatives prompted by community members—as opposed to the afflicted individuals—to make decisions as to when and how illness should be treated (White 1993). This demonstrates that these decisions are not individual but familial and reveals where the villagers locate responsibility for physical well-being.

In sum, the madman’s personal misfortune resonated with a wider historical experience of the growth of economic inequality in the village since decollectivization and was itself a striking example of this inequality. Some villagers simply felt that the madman’s relatives, given their prosperity, should help their kinsman. By assisting the madman, particularly given their own gains from his illness, the relatives could *zuoren* (act as responsible social beings). But many villagers conceptualized these inequalities as “unnatural” or generated by supernatural sources. “Supernatural sources” operate as an idiom for emergent class inequalities. Villagers were faced with these inequalities, whether conceptualized as demons or greed, which created dilemmas for them as a moral community. Because the discussion of class has been officially muted by proponents of economic reform since the post-Mao era, this created a climate ripe for an alternative construction of village experiences. At the same time, the solution of inviting a ritual practitioner became an attractive option given the apparent rehabilitation of prerevolutionary ritual practice.

Ritual Failure, Identity Failure, and Failures in Ritual Theory

What makes the shaman’s ritual significant despite the fact that it failed to effect the reinvention of a symbolic system that was either enduring or, apparently, even shared by its audience? Watts (1992) has pointed out that “identity failures” or failed projects to map the construction of selves onto the creation of imagined communities have been largely ignored. Gupta and Ferguson (1997:14) warn us that, by ignoring “identity failures,” questions of identity are examined without attention to processes of legitimation and authentication. Such discussions enable us to understand why some identities become salient at

certain historical moments while other marks of difference fail to become the basis of identity (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). What marks of difference, then, led to the apprehension of the shaman as an “identity failure”? Answering this question requires an examination of what identity the shaman tried to create and how this identity was understood by East Wind villagers.

The shaman’s new role as ritual practitioner may originate from her former position as a low-level Communist Party representative and her subsequent displacement in the post-Mao era. In her capacity as shaman, she may have attempted to reclaim symbols from her days as a Red Guard and party official by ritually conjuring them to aid in a cure for the present. Perry has shown that in the post-Mao era many Communist Party officials, divested of their former authority, have curiously emerged at the forefront of the revival of “unauthorized religious activities” (1985:183). As a former party official, the shaman undoubtedly played a role in the interpretation of state directives. A new identity as ritual practitioner similarly positions her as a mediator, interpreting directives from higher authorities and explaining the workings of the imagined social landscape over which these authorities preside. Yet unlike the powerful local elites who spearheaded the authorization of new deities in the late imperial era, actors like the shaman are marginal.²⁰ Marginality has long been associated with shamanism as a vocation. Prior to 1949, those who took on the role of shaman were poor farmers, and they only became shamans after life-threatening traumas, which might be likened to the dislocation experienced by obsolete party officials in the post-Mao era. The marginality of the shaman who came to East Wind village to cure the madman must have made her performance particularly crucial to assessments of her identity.

The ritual replacement of the shamanic hierarchy with prominent national figures, themselves symbols of Chinese socialist morality and power, resembles what Watson (1985) refers to as an act of “superseding local gods” with what the shaman conceptualized as “state-approved deities.” In Watson’s analysis of the process by which local gods were superseded by a handful of state-approved deities during the Qing dynasty in southern China, the “standardization of gods” (such as Tien Hou) paralleled the “rise of state authority over China’s southern coastal region” (1985:293–294). He interprets the spiritual triumph of state over local gods as “a metaphor of political domination in the real world” (1985:311). The shaman had tried to replace local gods with Mao, Zhou, and Deng, who were much like “state-approved deities.” Had this been successful, state symbols would have superseded local symbols in a process parallel to that described by Watson. Such a transformation could have fused powerful symbols of the socialist state with the shaman’s cosmology and created a new ritual form expressing the political dominance of the state.

However, unlike the case described by Watson, the shaman’s attempt to supersede local gods with state deities was unconnected to any state project aimed at political domination. Indeed, the state would have condemned the shaman, despite what may appear to be her pro-state pedagogy. The state condemns shamanism as feudal superstition. Moreover, the shaman’s ritual actions went beyond

a simple resurrection of Maoist era symbols. By disengaging the figures of Mao, Zhou, and Deng from the realm of state authority and deploying them in shamanic practice, the shaman transformed their meaning. For both the shaman and the village audience, a Mao, Zhou, and Deng identified with shamanism and relocated in a celestialized hierarchy could not be semantically equivalent to flesh-and-blood state figures or even larger-than-life Maoist era icons with auras of personal power. What, then, does it mean when symbols of the state, unbeknownst to state authorities, shape local practice? Is it the power of the state or the shaman's agency that is evident in this ritual? To different extents, it is both.

By inserting Mao, Zhou, and Deng into the ritual context, the shaman enables their manipulation according to the logic of symbolic ordering and propitiation implied by ritual formulas known to the Naxi and other regional ethnic groups. In a sense, their cosmological relocation renders them exploitable as perceived yang sources of magical power and ling mediators, gods that the shaman can then harness for practical uses through acts of ritual propitiation. The shaman's actions may be understood as creating a formalized space for the interpretation and manipulation of state symbols which is outside the state's control. Had it succeeded, the shaman's ritual might have become a context for the local co-optation of state symbols that drew on and reinforced preexisting ritual formulas by using them to manipulate new forms of power. It would also have reinvented an identity for the shaman as a powerful healer and transformer of popular ritual practice.²¹ I suggest that in either scenario—state deities eclipsing local gods or the co-optation of state symbols for local uses—the shaman is not simply subject to state hegemony but may be understood as expressing her own experiences of state power: she is an agent acting on contradictory structures and values of the Maoist and post-Mao eras.

The villagers' interpretation differed from mine. Most villagers saw the shaman as a throwback to the Maoist era. For many villagers, symbols of state—like the shaman's Cultural Revolution paraphernalia—had lost their aura of power in the post-Mao era. Many of the villagers perceived state leaders, even deified, as impotent to address the plight of the madman. By revisiting the Maoist past, the shaman's anachronistic Maoist identity and ritual performance reminded villagers of the virtues of the post-Mao era. In post-Mao era East Wind, the attempt to craft a Maoist identity—even within a shamanic framework—could only fail.

Decollectivization had brought about a marked improvement in the standard of living in the village as well as an enthusiastic return to family-based farming. Although there were contradictions between village experiences and state logic, villagers welcomed the potential of "getting rich" that the state has promoted since decollectivization. When the growing prosperity of individual families created tensions within the village, discussions about misfortune of "unnatural" proportions and "greed versus caring for others" provided a means for venting frustrations over forbidden topics such as growing economic inequalities and emergent class cleavages. Since the post-Mao era, the topic of class has been effectively buried because of its association with painful memories

of Maoist era political extremism and community bloodletting. East Wind accounts of history define the post-Mao era—characterized by decollectivization, tolerance of ritual and ethnic identity, new prosperity, and sharp economic inequalities—in opposition to the Maoist era—characterized by collective farming, an ethnically muted national identity, poverty, class struggle, the Cultural Revolution, and tumultuous political campaigns. But the moratorium imposed on discussions of class necessitated an idiom to express new problematic sentiments. In this context, shamanic remedies and village solidarity gained a momentary popular appeal. But rather than as a ritual that redressed inequality and affirmed a village-based East Wind identity, the audience interpreted the shaman's ritual as conjuring a Maoist era in which class struggle divided and dominated East Wind. In contrast to the now-permissible Naxi identity embraced by villagers, the ritual called for national identity, individual responsibility as opposed to community-based decisions, and a cosmological order that resembled a celestialized Maoist state. While the villagers welcomed a shamanic resolution of experienced inequalities, they could not tolerate the volatile mixture of Maoist symbols and class differences. The shaman's ritual tells us something about the realms of possible interpretation and the conflicted fields of power that intervened to preclude their legitimization. East Wind interpretations of the shaman as an "identity failure" issued from a disjuncture of experiences. Certain factors—the identification with Republican nationalism during the Sino-Japanese War, historical experiences based on positionality during the Maoist era, models of shamanic healing, collective era experiences, and the rhetorical efficacy of state discourse during the post-Mao era—all worked to challenge the legitimacy of the shaman's identity and the imagined community that she tried to invoke.

The shaman's ritual unwittingly led to a polarization of options: a return to the tightly controlled and impoverished life evoked by the symbols of the Maoist past or an alternative model that harmonizes and elides inequalities. The shaman's performance provided a model against which villagers constructed an identity that was tolerant of emergent class inequalities, inequalities that prompted holding the ritual in the first place.

Failed Ritual and Failed Theory

What does this failed ritual contribute to the understanding of ritual theory? In a landmark article, Siu (1989) perceptively argues that ritual in the post-Mao era can never be a simple revival of preexisting forms innocent of the experiences of a "monopolizing state power." She further states that the ritual revitalization currently under way in contemporary China is taking place with the complicity of the state and has resulted in rituals that are comparatively recycled, diluted, secularized, pragmatically motivated, and lacking their former depth of meaning (1989:132–133).

Although the shaman's ritual for the madman reveals experiences of a "monopolizing state power" as Siu suggests, her second observation about contemporary ritual revitalization does not apply. The shaman's ritual did not take

place with state complicity, nor does it fit Siu's description. However, the disparity in our analyses reflects more than the differences in our two cases. Rather, my case study calls for the rethinking of some theoretical presuppositions in Siu's argument which reveal a functional bias that gives priority to ritual outcome over ritual process. Siu's analysis of contemporary ritual is additionally based on an implicit comparison with standardized rituals that integrated state and popular culture during the late imperial and Republican eras. While Siu acknowledges the existence of other ritual forms, such as pre-1949 ritual practice used to subvert state authority, she excludes these from her theorization because the thrust of standard ritual practice was integration. By limiting their analyses of ritual to standardized or normative—and integrative or functional—forms, analysts tend to create representations of society that primarily focus on consensus and homogeneity. These representations simultaneously overlook forms of contestation and conflict that are a regular feature of social arenas. By categorizing standardized and integrative ritual as somehow more authentic, analyses tainted with functional bias are prone to reify hierarchical arrangements of power as "cultural essence." And, by privileging ritual outcome over ritual process, the conflicts and lineaments of power that are part of the processes of even successful rituals often escape notice.

A theory of ritual must allow for the inclusion of rituals aimed at transforming social order, whether or not they are successful, as well as those that result in the maintenance of social order. Without theorizing transformative rituals and failed rituals, analysts eliminate from their depictions of social arenas many forms of agency that contest and resist power. In addition, analyses that categorize rituals according to outcome often ignore the contradictory elements that are common in ritual practice. As Ahern has explained (1981:106), we may see ritual as serving both the ends of political power in some ways and the ends of the powerless in other ways. A theory of ritual that adopts a functional, "all or nothing" view cannot account for the shaman's ritual for the madman of East Wind, which wed state power to counter-hegemonic interpretations and shamanic agency. Such a theory is further ill-positioned to address the complex contingencies and fluid dynamics that led to the failure of the shaman's ritual. The inclusion of failed rituals would be an important step in enhancing our understanding of social processes. In doing this, however, it is important not to let outcome—in either failed or successful ritual—govern our focus. To do so would impair our ability to find conformity in failed rituals, as well as conflict in successful ones. By including a spectrum of ritual practice in the analysis of ritual, we address an arena broadened to account for how conflict, contestation, conformity, and unity shape social processes and ritual outcomes.

Notes

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1. Place-names, such as “East Wind” and “Wood Ear Mountain,” as well as personal names, such as “Ma Barou,” are pseudonyms.

2. The term *nationalities* refers to ethnic minority groups that have been officially recognized by the Chinese state and appear in the census.

3. While the Naxi nationality officially includes the Moso, a subgroup that contests its categorization as “Naxi,” I conducted my research among informants who identified themselves as “Naxi.” The Moso areas are adjacent to, but geographically distinct and separate from, Naxi-populated areas. The designation “Autonomous Prefecture” is based on the demographic dominance of a particular ethnic group in that region. Autonomous areas were established in 1949 to both cultivate the expression of ethnic characteristics and integrate ethnic groups into national culture. The Chinese borrowed this system of autonomous areas from Soviet practice, but, unlike the former Soviet republics, the Chinese autonomous areas have no implied right to secede and are considered an inalienable part of China (Dreyer 1976:262). These designations do not imply juridical autonomy and are simply the state governmental structures used in minority areas.

4. The reader should note that subjects, just as particular villagers who now reject Maoism were once true believers and, as we will later see, some villagers who resisted a national identity now accept it, may be understood as having pluralized subjectivity—stratigraphic layers of subjectivity as they live through history.

5. According to Spence,

The Lei Feng spirit is the Communist spirit, the spirit of serving the people wholeheartedly, and the spirit of warmly loving the Party wholeheartedly, the spirit of warmly loving the motherland and socialism, of studying painstakingly, of waging arduous struggle, of being selfless, and of taking pleasure in helping others . . . as defined for the PLA Political Department senior CCP [Chinese Communist Party] leaders during the Lei Feng Spirit Forum. [1990:727]

Ebrey describes Lei Feng as “a PLA icon of socialist sacrifice whose narrative is redolent of tales of virtuous exemplars dating from the imperial and pre-1949 eras” (1981:382).

6. According to Rock (1959), who lived in the Lijiang basin but traveled widely in the Lijiang area, there were no longer any female shamans when he arrived in 1922 nor any or when he left in 1949.

7. Wong (1984:142) has pointed out that many songs composed during the Sino-Japanese War were later used as a medium for the expression of modern Chinese nationalism.

8. The Guomindang (also transliterated as Kuomintang and abbreviated KMT) was the Nationalist Party—the ruling party and government of the Republic of China from 1911 to 1949. In 1949, leaders of the Guomindang fled to Taiwan, which continues to be named the Republic of China.

9. I do not know if the Bai have a similar history of resisting conscription during the 1930s and 1940s. Hsu (1967:168), who studied the Bai in the 1930s, refers to the presence of a spirit tablet at a Bai temple erected in memory of brave Bai residents who died fighting the Japanese. It might be speculated from this that the Bai supported the anti-Japanese resistance efforts.

10. Sutton reports that this quotation from Rock comes from an unpublished manuscript of his that is stored in the Arnold Arboretum. Sutton provides no additional information about this manuscript.

11. The followers of cults were often sent to labor-education camps, and some were also forced to act as *peisha* (death escorts), made to stand on a platform in public holding the hand of a *tou* (cult leader) while the leader was shot in the head.

12. Generally speaking, the term *religion* should be prefaced by some discussion of the problematics associated with its use as a category and the ethnographic topography in which it is articulated. Asad (1993) has illustrated how elements of medieval Christianity were disavowed when an Enlightenment doctrine of critical reason redefined certain practices as “uncivilized” and outside the pale of Christianity as a “religion.” Scott (1994) similarly demonstrates that the distinction between Buddhism and spirit religion does not issue from Sinhala practices but, rather, is an artifact of colonial British preoccupations with marking such distinctions. A similar case can be made for the distinction between practices labeled “religion” and those labeled “feudal superstition” in postrevolutionary China. In the construction of religion as a category, the Chinese state actually extends its authority to arbitrarily defining what constitute “Buddhism,” “Daoism,” and so on. Local agents, however, had the last word in the struggle over categorizations. The tourist pamphlets describing Lijiang and the Naxi, dating from the late 1980s when the area opened to foreign travel, translate *dongba jiao* as the “dongba religious sect” (Huang 1988; Tang and Jin 1988). However, with the escalation in ethnic tourism in the 1990s, a number of glossy books on the customs and cultures of China’s ethnic minorities were published (He 1993; He 1992; Kang 1990; Lijiang Naxi Autonomous County 1990). In these more extensive publications a key attribute of the Naxi ethnic group is identified as *dongba wenhua* and translated as “dongba culture.” The shift from the use of *religion* to *culture* to describe dongba practices and the Naxi ethnic group was promoted by the Dongba Institute under Ma Barou, a retired Naxi official and leader of the institute (see note 14). The adoption of the term *dongba culture* deliberately sought to rescue historic Naxi religious practices from classification as “feudal superstition” because they do not fit the official state definition of religion. By redefining such practices as “cultural” and therefore “secular,” Ma enabled “dongba culture” to become a noncontroversial symbol of the ethnic heritage of the Naxi (Chao 1996).

13. Generally, national and local projects asserting the boundedness of cultural categories must identify objective characteristics and historical narratives to support their existence. Thus, a category such as dongba culture, once created, presents the illusion of historical depth around which “Naxi” identities are imagined and claims to ethnic autonomy and rights are promoted. As the substantial literature on the social construction of ethnic categories demonstrates, such categories are problematically treated as a priori entities and are more productively understood as the endpoints of the political processes that have led to their construction (Anderson 1983; Chao 1996; Handler 1988; Jackson 1995).

14. Located in Lijiang, the Dongba Institute is a government-funded research institute and branch of the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences devoted to the task of translating and preserving dongba texts. While translation is the primary task of the institute, the resident scholars also conduct ethnological research and publish articles on Naxi cultural practices. The institute was founded by Ma Barou in 1980. The scholars at the Dongba Institute are considered some of the foremost authorities on Naxi culture.

15. It could be argued that Mao's first apotheosis took place during the Cultural Revolution. The second apotheosis of Mao in the 1990s is referred to as *Maore* (Mao fever, or the Mao craze) (Barmé 1996). *Maore* began with taxi talismans, continued with the development of Mao's hometown as a site for tourism, and eventually took hold among avant-garde urban Chinese artists and their overseas Chinese counterparts. The lack of contradiction between Mao's second apotheosis and the post-Mao era economy is underscored by the fact that the second Mao cult began in Shenzhen, a free trade zone and "the laboratory of post-Mao capitalist reforms" (Barmé 1996:23).

16. When I returned to Lijiang town in 1995, Mao memorabilia (or "Maorabilia") in the form of taxi amulets, Mao buttons, and commemorative Mao fountain pens were being sold at both the open market (which caters to national and international tourists) and the government department store (whose customers are local people). The presence of such items and their local buyers illustrates the *ling* (magic power) that continues to be associated with Mao. As a testament to the prescient powers of the shaman, in 1997, six years after her ritual, many Lijiang taxis were sporting talismans with Deng's picture, some with Deng on one side and Mao on the other.

17. In order to control migration to urban areas, the state established the *hukou* system (implemented in 1958), whereby each citizen received a residence permit that assigned a residence in a rural area or in a particular town or city. Those without residence permits for towns and cities were technically not permitted to reside there. People lacking residence permits were forced to buy grain at inflated prices and usually had no access to permanent housing. As Potter and Potter (1990) have noted, the residence system created a caste-like hierarchy with rural residents on the bottom and an urban elite on the top. This system was still in effect in 1990–91, the time frame this article addresses. Since the mid-1990s, however, barriers to rural people working in cities have begun to erode, and now a residence permit is less indicative of where one actually lives and works. This is particularly the case for migratory rural workers who live in urban centers and constitute sizable *liudong renkou* (floating populations).

18. It should be noted that, while the two cases both involve madmen, we cannot assume that their madness marked these men in the same way. For many Naxi, madness does not exist as a distinct category. The reactions of villagers to "madness" in these two cases resonate with differences between Western and Chinese medicine. A frequently made distinction between Western and Chinese medicine is that the former relies on "giant disease classes that lump syndromes together" whereas the latter attends to the peculiarities of "time, place, and person" (Farquhar 1996:249). Some East Wind villagers described madness as an omen and not an affliction. When someone goes mad it may not be a case of demonic interference but, rather, a sign that the afflicted is about to become a shaman, is on the verge of death, or is simply acting out of sorts. For these villagers, madness is not necessarily perceived as problematic in and of itself. In other cases, however, madness is interpreted as a secondary indication or symptom of a larger affliction, an affliction that may not be contained within the parameters of an individual.

19. Although the "fertility" of a daughter usually leaves the household when she marries, this would probably not have been the case here. It is quite common for Naxi families to find men to *shangmen* (contract uxorilocal marriages) with their daughters. In the madman's household, because there was an infertile daughter-in-law married to the only son, had their own daughter lived the family would have probably found her a husband willing to shangmen as a means of insuring their line of descent.

20. Since decollectivization, the low status of Communist Party officials is evident in such local sayings as "With the Household Responsibility System, who wants

cadres?" and "With the Household Responsibility System, we don't want cadres" (Anagnost 1985:94).

21. The shaman's ritual may, of course, still be evaluated as successful in the future. Her line of reasoning is consistent with that of other local shamans who appeared in the Lijiang area since her ritual performance. In 1995, I visited another shaman who incorporated political slogans into her ritual exhortations, and I learned of the practices of two other such shamans. One of these woman was regarded as mad, but the other was reported to be popular.

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