

Preliminary report on L2/17-337, Revised chart of Naxi Dongba characters

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Missing graphs

The following are missing from the proposed set but should probably be included (this is a sample, a comparison between the character inventory in Fang Guoyu's dictionary and the current proposal reveals a few hundred missing graphs, alongside graphs present in Li Lincan's dictionary but not present in Fang, but I have chosen some very common ones for the below list). I do not think that all the graphs in Fang need to be included in the final character inventory, but the ones listed below should at least be commonplace enough to warrant inclusion.

P# = Fang Guoyu dictionary page reference


F# = Fang Guoyu's graph reference number

P#	F#	Meaning
100	28	“暗, 无光” dark
107	64	“时” time
126	109	“雪山” snow mountain
138	139	“铁” iron
141	160	“北方” north
163	270	“鸟” bird
208	483	“夫妻” husband and wife
209	487	“宗族” tribe/clan
226	569	“梦” dream
250	705	“身体” body
251	709	“面, 脸” face


- 310 1049 “墨; 黑” ink, black
- 311 1052 “上册” first volume
- 311 1053 “中册” middle volume
- 311 1054 “下册” end volume
- 330 1160 “低” low
- 330 1162 “小” small (rebus)
- 334 1183 “红” red
- 334 1184 “黄” yellow
- 337 1201 “八” eight
- 338 1206 “万” 10,000
- 338 1207 “亿” 100 million
- 356 1303 “龙王” the *See* nature spirits
- 363 1337 “崇则丽恩（相传为洪水后仅存之人类始祖）” Coqsseileel’ee, the first post-flood ancestor of the Naxi and archetype of Naxi manhood

Missing common rebus meanings

In principle any graph can be used as a rebus for another word with an identical or near-identical phonetic value; however, there are some graphs for which the rebus use is actually *more* frequent than the original pictographic usage.

316		DONGBA CHARACTER FVL1	fy ⁵⁵	rat, mouse	鼠
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- only written as “rat”, does not include the common rebus usage for kvl, “year”

411		DONGBA CHARACTER GV2	ky ³³	garlic	蒜
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- only listed as “garlic”, does not include the common rebus usage for the verb gvl, “to be able to”

(It should be noted that Rock’s dictionary details the major rebus meaning for each graph, and in this respect is much more complete than Fang or Li).

Missing fixed lexical sets

The fixed lexical sets often contain the traditional local knowledge of the Naxi people: logographs for particular mountain names, names of divinities and all kinds of ghosts and spirits; if these are not included then the richness of both the linguistic and written heritage of the Naxi is in danger of being lost. These are of course rarely used in modern writing but I think the argument should be made for their inclusion – or at least the *most representative* graphs from certain sets.

P#

108-111 - the first ten days of the month and the twelve months of the year

127-129 - all specific mountain names, for example “居那什罗山”、“玉龙雪山”

131-135 - none of the specific names for bodies of water are listed

162 - names of sacred trees not listed


175-176 - names of scared birds not listed

200 - names of sacred insects not listed

357-361 – some of the ghosts and demons are not listed

Miscellaneous


Incorrect translation:

990		DONGBA CHARACTER SSEE1	z1 ³³	lifetime	一生一世
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“一生一世” zɿ³³ meaning not accurate

Zee means longevity, not for all one’s life/lifetime as the translations here suggest.

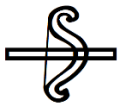
Incorrectly labelled graphs:

868		DONGBA CHARACTER RER1	zɛɿ ³³	willow	杨柳
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This graph is No 213 in Fang, zee, 山柳. Graph No 222 is the 杨柳.



207		DONGBA CHARACTER DAQ DDA	ta ³¹ da ³³	cross bow	弩 	F. P312 N1059Utensil L. P115 N1492Weapon
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The graph for crossbow is incorrect, it shows a bow. There is no entry for bow, “lee mei” (Fang# 1049).



Crossbow = Fang N 1062.

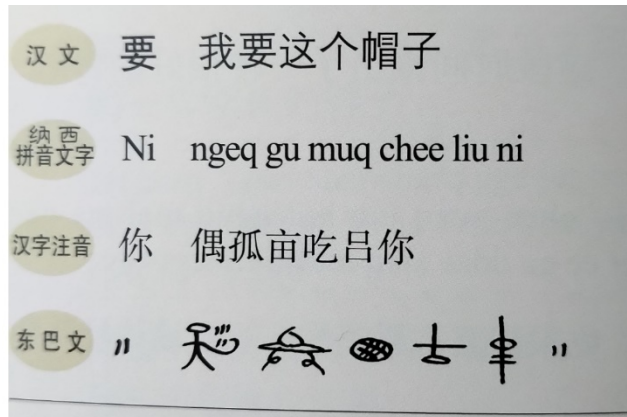
Use of obscure variant graph where simple rebus is more common:

165		DONGBA CHARACTER CHEE	tʂ ^h ɿ ³³	to hang up	悬、吊	F. P333 N1177Shape L. P96 N1213Utensil
170		DONGBA CHARACTER CHEQ	tʂ ^h ɿ ³¹	here	这里	L. P96 N1214Utensil

I believe certainly in Lijiang dialect (and as seen in Rock, p42, the simpler graph above, chee (165), means “hang, suspend” and can also be used as a rebus for “here” (the rebus is in fact much more common than the literal meaning).

In fact, in his dictionary Li notes that the more complex “Cheq” (170) is seen in Ludian. This graph is not common usage and I would question its inclusion as a separate entry within what is a limited graphic inventory.

I attach an example of the simple *chee* being used as a rebus for “here” instead of the more complex graph seen above. (From 跟我学说纳西话, p30).



Comment

The Naxi dongba script is most remarkable for being the only true logography in use in the present day. It is important to include some of the more complex logographs (i.e. graphs that represent multi-syllable words), frequently proper nouns, as it is these graphs that preserve the heritage of the dongba culture.

They can also be used to create interesting translations: for example, the use of the logograph, *lai ie e shee biu so* (F#1293) - the three sages sitting atop the sacred mountain, who created the Naxi, Tibetan and Chinese scripts, to represent the concept of “harmony” as seen on a sign in Heilongtan Park in Lijiang:

