

The Miao in China: A Review of Developments and Achievements over Seventy Years

By

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Abstract: Since 1949, the Miao nationality in China has encountered historic opportunities for development. This paper reviews four aspects of the historical achievements of the Miao nationality in China: education, youth organizations, cultural heritage, and new media and women's empowerment. By analyzing official statistics and autoethnographic data, we demonstrate that the agency of the Miao has contributed to these historical achievements. We argue that the Miao have seized many chances to promote development. Moreover, this paper emphasizes that the Miao have diverse cultures and an imbalance in development in various areas. These diverse features demonstrate that a single criterion cannot be used to measure the complicated situation and we call for further transdisciplinary research.

Keywords: Miao; Community Development; Agency; New Media; Empowerment

Hmong Studies Journal Editor's Note: International scholars generally identify the 9 million Miao population in China as consisting of four major subgroups in terms of ethnicity – the Hmong, the Ah Hmao, the Kho Xiong and the Hmu. The current estimate of the Hmong population in China is around 4 million. (Sources: Gary Yia Lee and Nicholas Tapp, “Current Hmong Issues: 12 Point Statement”, accessed from <http://garyyiale.com>, December 16, 2019; Jacques Lemoine, “What is the actual number of the (H)mong in the World”, *Hmong Studies Journal*, 2005, 6: 1-8.)

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Introduction

According to 2010 census data, the Miao population in China is approximately 9,420,000 mainly living in Guizhou, Yunnan, Sichuan, and other provinces and municipalities¹. For more than three decades, public perceptions of the Miao have been shaped, in large part, by images of a “romantic ethnic minority” and “premodern society” crafted by the tourism, media and entertainment industries from 1978 to 2008 (Tapp

¹ See the statistics of the sixth national demographic survey: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

2010:237-247). During that time, the Miao population reached more than 9 million and continued to increase over the past decade, making this perception even more complicated.

Politicians and scholars passionately debate the impressions, profiles and schemes of the Miao. Are the Miao people the innocent victims of “internal orientalism” (Schein 1997) or brave rebels against cultural assimilation (Wang 2016)? Furthermore, they disagree with each other about how to develop Miao society while preserving cultural heritage. They are incapable of focusing on the overall picture of Miao society or focus only on certain variables, such as clans, costumes and gender-divided labor. Nevertheless, few of these discussions have investigated Miao agency, as does Tapp’s study (2014) of Miao women’s personal history of internal migration, marriage and maintenance of cultural connectedness to confirm the affirmative role of individual agency.

The purpose and importance of this paper is to create a general picture of the Miao in China over the past seventy years, especially including the experiences of different subgroups to compare and indicate the dissimilar experiences of the Miao in various regions. Sub-dialects, subcultures, economy, and social organization in different regions and subgroups constitute the Miao’s “super-diversity” (Vertovec 2007). Scholars have debated “Miao versus Hmong” and “Miao as a constructed concept in China,” either ignoring the willingness of the Miao to reside in China or their individual agency to create emotional bonds. Our focus in this paper is on the grounded changes in the Miao community.

We examine how the agency of the Miao has functioned in the past decades while encountering historical opportunities by collecting statistical data from official reports and analyzing the authors’ personal experiences as Miao youths growing up in the contemporary era. The research question is as follows: What is the current situation of the Miao in China? Related questions include how to evaluate the social status and economic development of the Miao in China, the opinions of members of the younger generations, their aspirations and visions, and the power of Miao women. Our analysis reveals how the Miao in China evaluate their situation, compare their position, and determine the evolution of their lives.

To review the past seventy years of the Miao in China, we collected our own experiences and the family stories of parents and grandparents because our elders have been involved in and witnessed the instantaneity of history. The chances of education has risen from almost zero, stimulating young university students to become activists, motivating activists to become cultural enthusiasts and enabling enthusiasts to empower their community. Individual experiences can be a powerful analytical tool to understand a society from an insider’s perspective (Halyer 2011; Chang 2008, 2013; Jones 2018).

The significance of this paper is that the contemporary history of the Miao in China

highlights the agency, endeavors and aspirations of ordinary people. This is not to claim that political policies have not impacted every aspect of life. The ups and downs in history affect everyone's life by setting the "stage". Although this article focuses on the ordinary people and their achievements over the past years, we fully recognize that individual agency has interacted with the social structure and institutions. Our article fills the gap by providing an insider's perspective, especially from our own experiences, to reflect individual efforts in the historical context. Our analysis contributes to the understanding of ethnic minorities in China as well as the development of cultural heritage.

1. Situating the stage

The purpose of this section is to provide a brief sketch of the comprehensive social context of the Miao. Our review focuses on the period since the Opening-up Policy was instituted in 1978 because social change became more significant at that point. The population and one-child policies, economic revolution, nine-year compulsory education, and related policies had a deep impact on the Miao people. Indeed, as a developing country, China has made efforts to alleviate poverty and maintain a high rate of economic growth and social development. The World Bank data showed that in 2017, China's GDP reached 12.238 trillion dollars, with an annual GDP growth rate of 6.9%, compared to 59.716 billion dollars of GDP in 1960². Economic achievement is not the only achievement of China over the past seventy years. Social, cultural and other aspects of Chinese society have changed dramatically for all Chinese citizens and nationalities.

Over the past seventy years, three features of the Miao in China could be observed. First, with the rapid increase of migrant workers, almost 30 provinces and municipalities now have Miao internal migrants, and the Miao no longer dwell only in Southwest China. Despite the great economic achievements, second, there is an imbalance in development between urban and rural areas, between Central China (Hunan Province) and Western China, and between agriculture and other sectors. Third, educational attainment and cultural industry have increased rapidly to provide new opportunities for the Miao to determine sustainable approaches to develop a local economy.

The political discourse of ethnic minorities in China is situated between two opposing poles. We briefly review these two poles, meanwhile noting that to do so inevitably appears to champion governmentality. On the more pessimistic and doubtful end of the spectrum of political commentary, scholars and critics of ethnic elites recognize the incapability of ethnic minorities. For instance, the ethnic classification and recognition (*Minzu Shibie*) process has been criticized by international scholars as a way for the regime to artificially create nationalities (Diamond 1993; Kaup 2000; Harrell 2001). Ethnic minorities have been situated in a scenario in which they are powerless to express their subjectivity when encountering the reform policies,

² <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=CN>

consumerism, and ethnic tourism that have existed since the early 1990s (Schein 2000). However, O'brien and Li Lianjiang (2006), Tsai (2007) and other scholars have shown that rather than being powerless victims, Chinese farmers have used their traditional ways to resist, and Pieke (2009) researched how a Yi CCP village chief used his traditional position as a clan leader and administrative power to deal with everyday bureaucracy. At the other end of the spectrum is a rather optimistic but cautious discussion of the agency of ethnic minorities to respond to the outside world (Litzinger 2000; Mueggler 2001). In response to the pressures of social transition, scholars have noted that ethnic minorities have created their own narratives to ensure that traditional social structure continues to “survive”.

Our analysis of the Miao does not ignore the interactions and tensions between the regime and ethnic minorities, nor do we present an up-to-date debate on “internal orientalism”. We focus on the subjectivity and agency of the Miao, one of 55 nationalities, and how their experiences provide sufficient evidence to explain their situation, choices, and vision.

Demographic

The Han (91.5 percent of the total population) and 55 other nationalities (approximately 106 million people) live communally in China. The population size of the ethnic minorities, however, varies dramatically. According to the sixth national census data, eighteen nationalities exceed one million people: the Zhuang, Manchu, Hui, Miao, Uighur, Tujia, Yi, Mongol, Tibetan, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Korean, Bai, Hani, Kazakh, Li and Dai³. The Miao population in China numbers 9,426,007 living in Guizhou, Hunan, Yunnan, Chongqing, Guangxi and other provinces⁴.

Table 1: Top 10 provinces of Miao population

Provinces	Miao population
1. Guizhou	3968400
2. Hunan	2060426
3. Yunnan	1202705
4. Chongqing	482714
5. Guangxi	475492
6. Zhejiang	309064
7. Guangdong	251970
8. Hubei	177490
9. Sichuan	164642
10. Fujian	88017

From the 2010 census data, it is clear that the Miao population in Zhejiang,

³ See the statistics of the sixth national demographic survey: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

⁴ See the statistics of the sixth national demographic survey: <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

Guangdong and other coastal provinces has exceeded the population in the original Miao regions, such as Hubei and Sichuan. Since the Reform and Opening-up Policy, improved mobility has made young and middle-aged Miao farmers join the migration flow to make a living in coastal areas such as Guangdong and Fujian. We will discuss this change later.

Socioeconomic

Generally, the Chinese government has promoted long-term efforts to eliminate poverty and inequality, increase international trade, and develop domestic markets (Wan et al. 2008:3-8). The data of 20 Miao autonomous counties⁵ clearly show that the economy of Central China is better than that of Western China. Even within the same province, some counties have a stronger economy than others. Inter-/intra-regional income inequality and the urban-rural gap affect social sectors, schooling, training, the job market, social welfare and Medicare.

1	Autonomous county (province)	population (10,000)	percentage of nationalities	GDP (100 million)	Per capita GDP (Yuan)	Rural per capita net income (Yuan)
2	Weining Yi, Hui and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	127.68	27.22	189.37	14882	6945
3	Xiushan Tujia and Miao autonomous county (Chongqing)	66.21	59.55	138.19	28145	8360
4	Youyang Tujia and Miao autonomous county (Chongqing)	85.04	81.84	116.97	20908	7263
5	Pengshui Miao and Tujia autonomous county (Chongqing)	70.25	67.00	108.80	20903	7469
6	Songtao Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	72.44	68.00	103.45	21132	6316
7	Rongshui Miao autonomous county (Guangxi)	51.55	75.43	76.68	18618	6586
8	Lvquan Yi and Miao autonomous county (Yunnan)	48.51	32.34	75.00	18316	6595
9	Zhenning Buyi and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	40.01	52.52	74.91	26311	6566
10	Yinjiang Tujia and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	44.97	75.66	74.22	26070	6650
11	Guanling Buyi and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	39.27	64.00	70.64	24092	6621
12	Jingzhou Miao and Dong autonomous county (Hunan)	27.14	74.72	68.04	27127	7156
13	Mayang Miao autonomous county (Hunan)	40.34	80.29	64.00	18334	6158
14	Wuchuan Gelao and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	46.50	96.56	51.55	16099	7534
15	Ziyun Miao and Buyi autonomous county (Guizhou)	39.55	65.40	51.54	18985	6543
16	Daozhen Gelao and Miao autonomous county (Guizhou)	34.86	83.00	48.34	19702	7572
17	Jinping Miao, Yao and Dai autonomous county (Yunnan)	38.12	87.41	42.85	11578	6444
18	Qiongzong Li and Miao autonomous county (Hainan)	22.61	61.59	39.10	22132	6782
19	Baoting Li and Miao autonomous county (Hainan)	16.76	68.66	38.39	25612	6735
20	Chengbu Miao autonomous county (Hunan)	26.22	62.61	33.54	11828	5331
21	Pingbian Miao autonomous county (Yunnan)	15.77	67.32	25.74	16524	6424

Table 2: GDP ranking and other relevant data of 20 Miao autonomous counties in 2015⁶

The rate of urbanization increased from 19.92% in 1978 to 57.96% in 2017⁷. Urbanization has had a deep impact on residents at all levels, with social mobility as an example. Domestic migrants/peasant workers (*nongmingong*) have increased dramatically in the past thirty years. Most of these migrants share socioeconomic concerns and have similar aspirations of improving their standard of living (Qiu

⁵ Regarding the bureaucratic system in China, see Sautman 1999

⁶Data from National Ethnic Affairs Commission of the People's Republic of China, <http://www.seac.gov.cn/seac/xxgk/mztj/index.shtml>

⁷ Source: World Bank, see <https://www.statista.com/statistics/455793/urbanization-in-china/>

2009:85). With the rapid development of China's economy, Miao youth continue to seek the opportunity of mobility in cities (Wang2012; Tapp2014; Wen2016).

	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture, forestry, livestock & fishery	179535	176358	355893
Mining	2846	544	3390
Manufacture	37976	28845	66821
Electricity/gas/water	1027	455	1482
Construction	12787	3020	15807
Transportation & postal	5740	1139	6879
ICTs	671	511	1182
Wholesale & retail	7754	10115	17869
Hotel & restaurant	2539	4111	6650
Finance	649	594	1243
Real estate	524	266	790
Leasing business	693	306	999
Scientific research, techno and geological survey	282	121	403
Irrigation, environment and public facilities	389	391	780
Other services	2533	2311	4844
education	4435	3379	7814
Social welfare	1190	1721	2911
Culture, sport and entertainment	472	492	964
Public administration	5755	2536	8291
International organization	1	0	1

Table 3: Gender, professions and industries of Miao population in 2010 census

Political

In China, the formal governmental system works through two separate but connected organs: the CCP and the government bureaucratic structure (Mackerras 2001:9). The National Party Congress organizes an election to vote for the chairman of CCP. The National People's Congress votes for the president and vice president of the PRC. To measure political status, one criterion is the number of delegates of ethnic minorities/nationalities in both congresses. A new NPC delegate is chosen every fifth year. The percentage of ethnic minorities in the NPC represents the political participation of ethnic minorities (Mackerras 2003:41).

Table 4: Minority delegates in the National People's Congress

	Time	Number of Delegates	Ethnic Minorities	Miao Delegates
6th NPC	1983	2,978	403	22
7th	1988	2,970	445	22

NPC				
8th NPC	1993	2,977	440	26
9th NPC	1998	2,979	423	23
10th NPC	2003	2,985	412	23

(Data combined from

<http://www.npc.gov.cn/delegate/allPrevious/The10ThSession.htm>)

To measure the leadership of ethnic minorities in China’s politics, it is necessary to review the *Law of Ethnic Minority Autonomous Areas of the People’s Republic of China*. In 2002, the revised law specified that “the top position of the local government in all nationality autonomous areas should be held by a leader who has the same ethnic background as the majority of the citizens in that area”. At present, the heads of the five provincial-level ethnic minority autonomous regions are members of nationalities (meaning non-Han governors). The governors of thirty prefectures and 120 autonomous counties are members of ethnic minorities. In the Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Prefecture of Yunnan Province, for example, the governor, Mrs. Zhang Xiulan, is Miao.

Cultural and Religious

Encouraging the development of minority cultures is one of the major aspects of the *Law of Ethnic Minority Autonomous Areas of the People’s Republic of China*. The Miao have had opportunities to design new strategies to promote their invaluable cultural treasures, such as dance, music, ornaments, and costumes. Regarding to religious activities, a majority of the Miao among various subgroups in different areas practice the ancestor belief system. Christianity, including both Protestantism and Catholicism, however, has had Miao followers in Yunnan and Guizhou provinces from the early twentieth century to the present day (Diamonds, 1996; Lewis 2013).

2. Methodology

We examine the development of the Miao in China through a systematic content analysis of our personal experiences, that is, using the “autoethnography” approach (Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Holt 2003; Ellis 2004, 2007, 2009; Anderson 2006; Chang 2008; Pensoneau-Conway et al. 2017). Autoethnography is becoming popular in the social sciences (Ellis 2004, 2007, 2009). Individual experiences are crucial in understanding subcultures and explaining the society in which those individuals live (Halyer 2011:19). Memories of events, feelings, opinions and emotions can be the focus of analysis and interpretation (Halyer 2011:19). Autoethnography emphasizes the use of autobiographical materials as data, not only from a narrative perspective (Chang 2008) but also from a cultural and social perspective (Chang et al. 2013:18). It produces new knowledge through the analysis of individual initiative and social interaction (Jones 2018:6-7).

As we designed this research project, we considered a range of options when discussing possible hypotheses. We chose autoethnography as a method to understand the Miao because through their own experiences, the authors provide a powerful, affective and profound understanding of what they have seen, heard, learned and felt in the rapidly changing society. First, the authors come from three areas of Miao dialect: Tian Shi from the eastern dialect area, Xiao Hua Wu and Yan Lei from the central dialect area, and De Bin Wang from the western dialect area. Their personal experiences give them a thoughtful understanding of the “super-diversity” of the Miao in China.

Second, as members of the younger generation, all the authors have seized educational opportunities as well as experienced mobility from rural to urban areas. Following parents’ work rearrangements, Tian Shi moved to three counties and witnessed social change at the county and municipal level. Xiao Hua Wu and Yan Lei observed the disappearance and revival of the traditional culture in Guizhou Province. De Bin Wang has been closely attached to the efforts and hardships of the rural education system through his father, a primary school teacher. Hence, they have experienced genuine perceptions of education, rural development, and achievement in contemporary Miao society. In this paper, the authors use their memories, feelings, and experiences to assess the social changes of the Miao in China.

Besides, the first author Tian Shi has an opportunity to get grants to support her project *New Media and Empowerment: Wechat for Rural Hmong in Yunnan, China*, in 2015. In her project, participated observation online and research trips offline has been combined to understand how the new media creates the ethnic-media landscape. Meanwhile, we also include official data from multi-level governments like the 2010 census and other related statistics.

Native/insider ethnography is one of the triumphs of anticolonialism from the 1960s and 1970s (Jones 1970; Hayano 1979; Kuwayama 2003; Bunzl 2004; Kempny 2012) and is also one of our basic positions. In the postcolonial era, minorities, from Indians to Maoris, have voiced their struggle for their own rights and interests (Simon 1998; Trask 1991; Miheuah 2000; Jacobs-Huey 2002; Kahotea 2006). We actively promote the voice of the Miao because as members of the young generation of the Miao, we believe that it is our responsibility to discuss the current situation, efforts and achievements of the Miao people in China. We are the witnesses, observers, researchers and actors of history (Latour 2005). Rather than hiding our motivations, we lay them bare for readers to consider.

Four aspects of Miao society in China that we will discuss below, education, youth civic engagement, cultural heritage and new media usage, represent fundamental and novel developments in China, as numerous studies in the social sciences have discussed in general. In contrast, regarding ethnic minorities, few studies have focused on the overall image of the Miao in terms of these current trends. That is the reason that we discuss how Miao society is situated in China’s transition.

3. Educational achievement

One of the most striking achievements in the Miao society of China is educational attainment because it started from almost zero. Recently, nearly 140,000 people have obtained higher education degrees (undergraduate degree and above), including a small number of PhDs. This is a proud achievement for the Miao. In addition, Guizhou, which has the largest Miao population, has promoted education in the Miao language in recent years so that young people can systematically inherit and learn the Miao language in higher education.

Educational attainment

Since the Ming and Qing Dynasties, public schools have been opened in the southwest for the purpose of “civilizing savages”, but very few Miao enrolled in them (Zhang Zhongkui, 2012:163-164). At that time, the education of Miao society relied mainly on informal teachers, such as elders, clan leaders, and community organizers. The general literacy rate in China was lower than 20% in the mid-20th century (Hannum 1999), but literacy was even more rare among the Miao. If this percentage was further classified into eastern-western and urban-rural categories, the literacy rate of the Miao would be almost negligible.

In my village, located in a junction area of Chongqing, Guizhou and Hunan Provinces, the generation of my grandparents was illiterate without any institutional education. My grandfather, for example, born in the 1910s, has never been in a local school nor had a private course. This reality didn't change until 1949, when the generation of my parents finally obtained the educational opportunity to go to schools. (Tian Shi)

Since 1949, illiteracy reduction and the nine-year compulsory education policies have been carried out throughout the country. The enrollment rate of students, including the Miao and other minorities, has increased dramatically, and the dropout rate has been controlled. Guizhou province, for example, with 42% of the Miao population, had 494 primary schools and 81 secondary schools in 1949. The enrollment rate was lower than 20%; the illiteracy rate of children and youth was higher than 90% (Tang 2010). In 2009, the enrollment of the primary school was 98.4%, along with the 98.2% enrollment rate of secondary school (Zhang 2010).

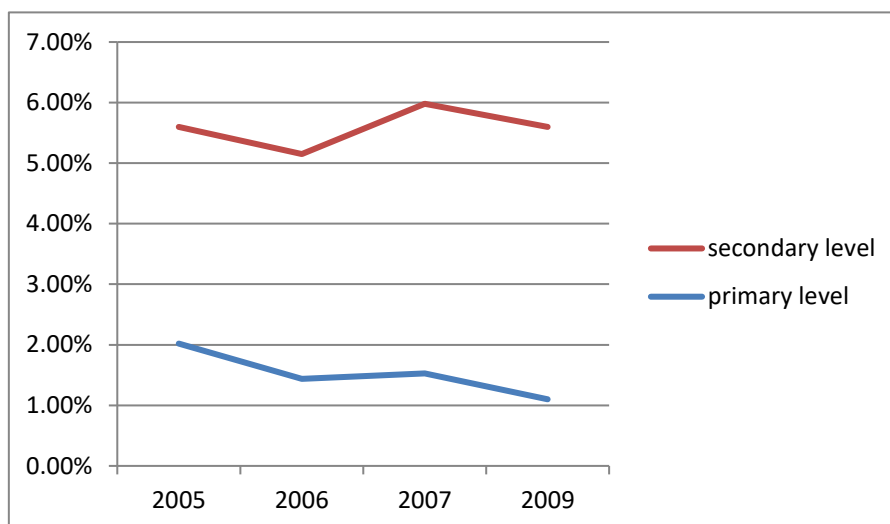


Figure 1 the dropout rate in Guizhou province, 2005-2009 (Education institute, 2008 rf. Zhang 2010)

According to the sixth census in 2010, it is estimated that there are more than 870,000 Miao who have never attended school, more than 390,000 who finished a primary school education and 272,000 in secondary schools. More than 610,000 have graduated from high school, 235,032 hold a professional college degree, 132,635 hold an undergraduate degree, and 7177 hold a postgraduate degree⁸. Evidently, the data of different provinces and municipalities vary.

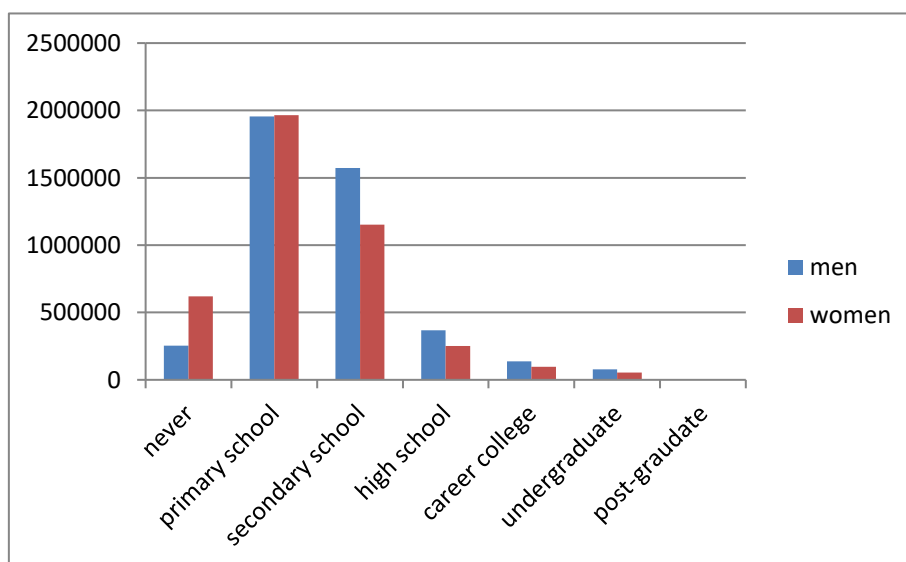


Figure2 Educational attainment of the Miao in the 2010 census

Regarding academic achievement, an increasing number of PhDs have received tenured positions in top universities around the world. Professor Zhang Haibin at Peking University, Professor Gao Fei at Michigan University, Professor Tang Jiawen at Heidelberg University in Germany and Dr. Shi Miaoming at Minzu University in China

⁸<http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/pcsj/rkpc/6rp/indexch.htm>

are Miao researchers who have contributed to the development of humankind.

As we argued, the Miao had very little in terms of education facilities, teaching staff, and other related education resources seventy years ago. Therefore, any interpretation of these data should include the historical and social context. It cannot ignore the enormous challenges of poverty elimination in Guizhou, Yunnan, and other under-developed regions. Our parents always share their experiences with us that they had to walk one or two hours to go to school every morning in the 1960s. To finish homework by candlelight, to read textbooks while feeding the pigs, to walk to school without shoes, all these experiences are tiny parts of the enormous challenges they have encountered and conquered. The main task, therefore, of education development in China is to improve primary education, eliminate illiteracy, and enhance bilingual education throughout the country. From this perspective, all data above represents the tremendous effort of Miao to improve educational attainment over the past seventy years.

Bilingual policy and the Miao language

Over 80 languages and 30 writing systems are used by 56 nationalities in China (Dai and Cheng 2007:78). The minority-language policy in China has fundamentally changed twice, from pluralism to monopolism and back to pluralism, since 1949 (Zhou, 2000, 2003). Bilingual education in all minority communities has been seriously affected by these changes (Lam 2007:17-18). Except for some subgroups that have been taught by missionaries, the majority of the Miao had only an oral language without a functional writing system before 1949. Although the writing system of the Miao language was created in the 1950s, Mandarin or Putonghua was promoted over all the regions where the Miao lived during the monopolistic period of 1956 to 1977 (Zhou 2000). Recently, teachers, scholars and government officials have tried to design effective strategies to manage the bilingual policy.

The second author Xiao Hua Wu learned the writing system for Hmub when she was in fourth grade in local primary school in the mid-1990s. At that time, almost every village in the central dialect region of Guizhou had a passion to learn the writing system of Miao. Villagers invited teachers to deliver training courses after agricultural sessions. Considering that the teaching system of Mandarin uses the alphabet (pinyin) in the first grade, it is not too difficult for young students to learn. At the end of that semester, Xiao Hua Wu finished the training course with an excellent score and received awards – a notebook and two books about “the legends of Miao”. However, some young adults must learn the writing system by themselves for reasons such as occupation, accessibility or educational deficiency. An example from a famous Hmub singer, Dieel Guik, demonstrates how the agency mobilized children to manage the balance between personal motivation and difficulties:

Since 2007, I tried to learn the writing system of Hmub, but it's too hard to learn. I'm a native speaker, but even for me, it's so hard to make the pronunciations fit

the written letters. All the learning materials I've collected are just texts, no audios or videos at that time. Some particular consonants and tones hardly match these letters. I've employed a consonant list to check every pronunciation and try to get the logic. Regarding the vowels, it's not too hard to learn because the standard writing system is close to our regional accent. Hence, I continuously compare my own experience as a native speaker with the writing system of Hmub to manage its logics. (Diel Guik, Taijiang County, Guizhou)

Guizhou Province is actively trying to promote ethnic languages. In 2014, it was the first to recruit high school students to higher education through the bilingual enrollment examination by three universities, Guizhou University for Nationalities, Kaili College and Qiannan Normal College for Nationalities, supported by the Office of Ethnic Languages of the Ethnic and Religious Affairs Commission of Guizhou Province. Six major ethnic languages in Guizhou province – Miao, Buyi, Dong, Yao, Shui and Yi – were evaluated in this enrollment exam. For the Miao language, three dialects were included. In total, 2630 Miao students registered in the bilingual enrolment exam in 2016: 1543 students from the central dialect area, 869 western dialect students, and 218 students from the eastern dialect area.

The third year of the bilingual enrollment examination was 2018. There has been further expansion in both enrollment and institutions. In 2017, eight universities and colleges joined to recruit bilingual students. As the number of candidates increases, the number of questions decreases gradually, but the difficulties are in changing the evaluation of lingual capability, usage, and ethnic knowledge.

4. Youth in Action

Along with the achievement of higher education in China, an increasing number of Miao students have been admitted to universities and colleges. They are eager to make contributions to the development of the Miao. More than five Miao student associations –at Tsinghua University, Central Minzu University, Yunnan Normal University, Wenshan College and Honghe College –are active at various levels.

Location	Student association	University/college	Rank	Start date
Beijing	Miao Culture Research Association of Tsinghua University	Tsinghua University	Top 2	2012
	Miao Cultural Exchange Association of Minzu University	Minzu University of China	985/211	2016
Hubei province	Association of Miao New Culture	Wuhan University	985/211	2016
Hunan province	Association of Miao studies	Jishou University	N/A	2009

Guizhou province	Research Association of Miao Culture	Guizhou Normal University	N/A	2011
	Youth Group of Miao Studies	Guizhou Minzu University	N/A	2003
	Youth Association of Miao Studies	Guizhou University of Finance and Economics	N/A	2014
	Youth Learning Group of Miao Studies	Guizhou University	211	2013
	Research Association on Miao Studies	Guiyang University	N/A	2011
	Research Association on Miao Culture	Guizhou Light Industry Technical College	N/A	2016
Yunnan province	Miao Culture and Heritage Research Association	Yunnan Minzu University	N/A	N/A
	Miao Culture and Heritage Research Association	Yunnan Normal University	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Yunnan Arts University	N/A	N/A
	Miao Culture Exchange Association	Yunnan Vocational and Technical College of Agriculture	N/A	2015
	Miao Student Association	Honghe University	N/A	2005
	Miao History and Culture Research Association	Wenshan University	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan Nursing School	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan advanced technician training school	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan Finance and Trade school	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan ethnic professional training school	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan Business Information Administration School	N/A	N/A
	Miao Association	Wenshan Vocational Senior High School	N/A	N/A
Miao Association	Wenshan No.2 High School	N/A	N/A	
Sichuan	Miao Culture Learning Association	Southwest Minzu University	N/A	N/A

Table 5 Students Associations in Chinese universities

The table above is an incomplete list of student associations in Chinese universities we have collected through the internet. Some of them specifically focus on cultural affairs; others emphasize primary education and aspiration in undeveloped

regions. The following sections will take the Miao Culture Research Association of Tsinghua University as an example to discuss its missions, visions and activities.

Motivation

Many students have grown up in a difficult environment and have a profound understanding of the current situation of the Miao, as the third author De Bin Wang recalled below:

My father is a teacher who teaches in a primary school in a neighboring village. The primary school has only the first and second grades. It was set up to solve the problem of attendance in three or four nearby Miao villages. The classes are basically all Miao students. There is only one teacher in that school. After the first grade class, the teacher assigned exercises to students and then went to the second grade class; back and forth. Later, the school was closed. In the second grade, I went to the central village, which was a little farther away, to continue my studies. After the fourth grade, I registered at a boarding school in the county to study.

Such experiences have been ubiquitous among Miao students, so they are motivated to achieve promotion for the sake of their own people. After enrolling in colleges and universities, many young Miao students want to publicize the Miao cultural heritage and set up associations to further this goal.

Activities

The Miao Culture Research Association of Tsinghua University was established in 2012. Its purpose is to connect Miao students, popularize the Miao culture, and include stakeholders to enable a deeper understanding of the Miao. This association recruits members and elects executive boards through campaigns and votes at the beginning of every academic year. De Bin Wang has served as the chairman of the Miao Culture Research Association (2015-2016).

The association has two kinds of activities. The first type is participation in festivals at the university level, such as *the Associations Culture Festival*, *the New Year's Eve Party for Ethnic Minorities*, and *the Carnival for Ethnic Minorities*. Through these festivals and activities, teachers, students and other stakeholders engage in Miao dance, music, literature and art. These activities, moreover, make the “Miao” visible in the urban space and in public perceptions as an important step in discourse.

The second type is inspirational activities. The association designed these activities based on the reality that Miao pupils lack aspirational and role models in daily life to inspire them to handle everyday pressure. The association also realized that Miao teenagers do not have opportunities to learn their ethnic history and culture. Therefore, many teenagers do not have confidence and pride in being Miao. To solve this problem, the association collaborated with Miao students from Central Minzu University and other universities to practice a voluntary teaching program during holidays in Miao

regions. The purpose is to motivate Miao pupils to find their aspiration and work hard to achieve it.

We take the voluntary teaching program in 2016 as an example. The preparation started in September 2015. The association selected activists from among Miao undergraduates in Beijing, determined the project plan, "Entering the *Miao World*", and applied for university support. From November to December 2015, the executive board, on the one hand, clarified and revised the plan and, on the other hand, intensively contacted NGOs to raise funds. Meanwhile, the association contacted Miao villages in Yunnan to determine their needs and collected details for preparation. In total, more than 6,000 Yuan (900 US dollars) was raised, and a number of books and pencils were donated. From recruiting volunteers to planning themes to contacting NGOs, each discussion reflected the flexibility and resilience of the Miao undergraduates, and these qualities have also become a part of the motivation of Miao youth in China.

At the end of January 2016, the volunteers arrived at a primary school in Mengzi Prefecture, Yunnan Province, to start the voluntary teaching program. The volunteers taught English, math, music and PE courses for students in grades 2-3 for one week. The volunteers also presented basic information on Miao history and culture to stimulate students' curiosity. At the end of this program, the volunteers delivered donations to the students and encouraged them to sustain their aspirations. After this program ended, the volunteers maintained personal contact with the local students by using QQ, WeChat and other applications to provide suggestions and consultation.

Outputs

There are multiple outputs for both undergraduates and local primary school students. For the former group, many Miao undergraduates are mobilized to realize the importance of inheriting and advertising their culture. A Miao student concluded:

As a Miao University student, it is the first time I participated in such voluntary activities that let me understand we should love our ethnic brothers and sisters, and at the same time, we should collaborate with other ethnic compatriots. As long as we try our best, we will get the reward. As Mr. Zhang Yuanqi's lyrics say, "There is no reason, just because our name is Miao" (Luo Yubing, 2016).⁹

The comment above shows that these activities inspired ethnic pride and confidence and made the students think about strategies. Miao undergraduates have begun to take the initiative to learn new approaches to speak out for the Miao culture.

⁹清小苗:《清华大学苗族学子“走进苗疆”给山区孩子带去了什么?》,三苗网X智慧苗族,2016年9月24日。链接:

https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzI0NjI5NDc2Mg==&mid=2247487971&idx=2&sn=34e88068ddaf1a57de17b8fcd711e6fc&chksm=e9402066de37a9706314f385e843efe8822f2f43e42c9fd9b693e4e2f0d39e2013dc08b28e71&mpshare=1&scene=1&srcid=0924ItK7oYkfO3RFE3W21NhA&pass_ticket=irzl6b%2B8aJbMZ3X1KE4Pw7u9MbKsJL2AKazwFpZnxc7sD8nW%2BQBzQpu%2FMRZgBDv#rd

Motivating their ethnic confidence is a critical step toward empowerment and mobilization. Local students obtain role models from these young, active, and passionate volunteers that are absent in their daily living environment. Some of them told the volunteers that they have aspirations now to study hard to one day to enroll in a university. Others said they were inspired to learn more about Miao history and culture in the future.

5. Revival of villages and traditions

Rural China has changed dramatically over the past seventy years in terms of social and economic structure. More importantly, all aspects of the social structure are still changing (Chan 1999; Harrell 2001; Yan 2003; Yan 2003; Li 2004). The *Election Law of Village Committees* enables villagers to vote for their favorite candidates at the village level (O'brien 1996; Solinger 1999; O'brien & Li 2006), on the one hand. On the other hand, farmers spontaneously organize associations to support their interests. The implementation of the family planning policy, moreover, changed the size and structure of the extended family (Yan 1997; Joseph & Phillips 1999). In addition, televisions and mobile phones have changed the landscape of relationships and leisure time (Yan 1996; Kipnis 1997; Jacka 2014). This shows that the vitality of rural China can no longer be ignored.

Reasons

Miao citizens, at least a large part of those who live in rural areas of Southwest China, have been involved in China's transition as they determine how to develop their communities. The agricultural sector, domestic migration and the service sector around ethnic tourism in rural areas have been the three main options for Miao citizens since the 1990s. Each option has benefits and costs for individuals and the traditional society. In particular, domestic migration and ethnic tourism have caused catastrophic damage to traditional culture, which is the starting point of the movement to revive Miao villages by reconstructing the public space in contemporary rural areas.

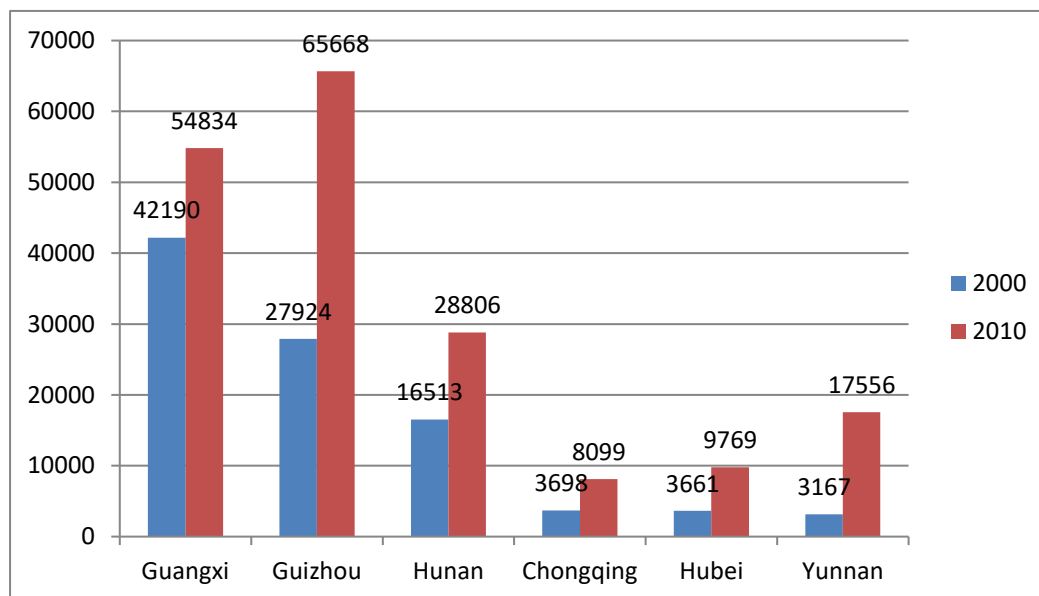


Figure 1 net number of minority migrant workers left the origin provinces (Combined from He & Cheng 2016)

In encountering the three main options – the agricultural sector, internal migration, and the business of ethnic tourism since the 1990s – Miao villagers have had to balance their life choices. The first option is to continue farming with a limited income that cannot improve living standards. The second choice seems more rational because villagers can earn more income in coastal cities, but it causes another problem in that only women, children and elders stay in the villages to maintain the basic social structure.

The last choice, although many commentators have criticized the inability of individuals to pursue it, seems to attract adults to stay in villages to run tourism businesses. Xijiang Thousand Miao Household Village, Langde Upper Village and Suoga Miao Village in Guizhou represent different types of ethnic tourism. Scholars of feminism and postmodernism have stressed the discourse of authenticity, performing ethnicity and stereotypes (e.g., Schein 2000). Evidence from recent studies, however, suggests that villagers are not fragile victims awaiting their fate; rather, their agency makes them accountable for their behaviors (Oakes 2005; Chio 2014; Feng 2017). Now we have the chance to hear explanations from these agents:

As a leading singer of “Vibrant Colored Guizhou” Songs and Dances Troupe, I have performed in hundreds of performances and represented Guizhou on tours around the world. I was born and raised in a Miao village, which made me absorb music, dance and poems as part of my flesh and bones and my life. It is my standing point to sing songs. I keep asking myself, where am I going while singing? I think it goes back to my heart, to sing from my heart because my heart is full of Miao culture to give me energy. Meanwhile, as a delegate of the National People's Congress, I have made suggestions on the protection of ancient villages and

intangible heritage because our culture and heritage are the source of our life. So we will continue to protect our ancient villages and intangible heritage and try our best.
(Yan Lei)

Mission

Yan Lei and her team have brought together multiple stakeholders, artists, lawyers, journalists, anthropologists and entrepreneurs to design the revival programs of culture, crafts and talents in Miao villages. At present, they have collaborated with more than 20 PhD holders to form research teams and have cooperated with villagers to carry out the program “*Revival of Miao Ancient Villages*”. To date, their team has launched a number of projects.

The first project was to build a *gix* (*qeej*, reed pipe) playground in Bisuo (*Bil Hsob*) Miao village of Shibing County, Guizhou Province. Villagers have played *gix* (*qeej*) in the field because the old *qeej* playground was abandoned long ago. As we know, *gix* (*qeej*) playing is at the core of Miao culture to guide the soul back to the ancestral land, to provide instruction in rituals, and to recall ancestors to protect their descendants. With the help of activists, entrepreneurs and charitarians, this team raised enough funds to build a new *gix* (*qeej*) playground. Moreover, a local museum and an embroidery cooperative group were established with the support of this team.

The second project was to cooperate with a local company, *Wushui Yuntai*, to train young women in embroidery handicrafts and create a platform to promote these handmade products. The two-threshold project aims to alleviate poverty and improve participation in traditional handicrafts. The Miao are known for their gorgeous embroidered costumes. However, young women either move to coastal cities to earn higher salaries or raise children at home in the village without leisure time. The purpose of this project is to increase their incomes by making embroidery handicrafts, empower women and deliver the related knowledge of Miao embroidery. Recently, more than 1,000 women have been trained and participated in this project.

The third project focuses on the Miao talentscape, attracting Miao talent to explore how to systematically promote cultural heritage and community development. At present, this project is ready to launch a practice in Banshan (*Vangl Ved*) Miao village in Huangping County and Gailai Miao village in Sandu County of Guizhou Province to recruit talent from various backgrounds and search for collaborators in the craftsmanship, cultural heritage and landscape of Miao villages.

6. New media and empowerment of women

Backed by development programs, villagers in China have promoted their villages as “digital” communities. According to CNNIC’s statistics in 2018, there were 817 million smartphone users, and almost one-fourth of them were rural residents¹⁰. This section focuses on the newest experience of Miao villagers and observes the

¹⁰ CNNIC: 2019 年第 43 次中国互联网络发展状况统计报告:http://www.sohu.com/a/333446151_100049487

empowerment effect of the new media. We take *Vol* village in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan Province, as an example.

Making a village online

Vol village is located on the border between China and Laos. Young villagers have established a WeChat¹¹ group to share photos and videos of daily life as well as discussions. Daily activities shared in this WeChat group include planting beans, learning to kill pigs, digging ditches and other farm work. They share almost everything in their WeChat group to create a digital visual version of their offline village.

Moreover, young villagers learn negotiation strategies while going out to study and work and then use them in village public affairs. When the WeChat group discussed the preparation for the 2016 *noj peb caug* festival, a young man in the village complained that the backboards in the village were useless. S2 responded as follows:

Let the villagers' team write the application and ask for another backboard. We should urge the cadres to do so. Now our government is willing to provide sports equipment, which means, if we apply.

This negotiation skill is gradually learned. Through discussion on the WeChat group, these strategies are circulated and acquired by villagers, although these resistance strategies are not new for peasants in China to use to defend their interests within the social context (O'Brien 2001; He 2006; O'Brien & Li, 2006). The young generation of peasants who have worked in cities is no longer satisfied with the structure of rural society. They rely on their own experience to play a dynamic role in village affairs (O'Brien & Li 2005; Tsai, 2007; Jeffreys 2009; Xu et al. 2010).

If "empowerment" is defined as "the enhancement of an individual's ability to instruct his actions and influence the surrounding environment" (Henderson & Pochin, 2001) for a long-term effect, then the WeChat group achieves both individual and group empowerment through technological empowerment. The new media provide a platform for ethnic minorities to solve practical problems, to promote ethnic solidarity, and to develop ethnic confidence.

Women's empowerment

Traditionally, men are in an authoritative position in the social life of Miao society (Symonds, 2004:8-10; Zhang, 1997:19). Men are responsible for external affairs, political activities and public affairs decision-making; women are responsible for housework and have fewer opportunities to express their opinions. In China, many factors, such as social and economic development, higher education levels and an increasing number of migrant workers, have affected the division of gender roles in Miao society (Wang Chen, 2012).

¹¹WeChat is one of the most popular applications in China.

Generally, young women are still less involved in the discussion of public affairs in traditional village life and are more likely to be in the position of compliance and execution. In public political activities, such as village committee elections, voting and community governance, the participation of women is lower than that of men (Wang Xinsong, 2015:71). However, on the WeChat group, Miao girls in *Vol* village actively participate in discussions of public affairs:

N3 : Railways should be built here. The circulation of goods and persons should be intensified to promote our economic development. At the same time, culture should keep pace with the development of society and to improve social consciousness.

This comment attracted more comments and compliments from men. S1 said, "Miao women are always thinking more than men. Every Miao family has a strong woman." N3 emphasized that "economic development", "culture" and "improve social consciousness" are terms that the older generation of women can hardly express. The new media provide a public space for women to speak out.

The new media also promote women's initiative in public affairs. At the beginning of the preparation for the New Year festival in 2016, N1, a migrant worker in Kunming, maintained contact with families through WeChat, suggesting that WeChat be used to advertise *Vol* village. N1 posted information on some websites that *Vol* village would hold the Miao New Year festival and welcomed everyone to attend this event. When W, an entrepreneur in Xishuangbanna, saw this information, he contacted N1 and finally decided to sponsor 50 packages of beer for the event. W and his friends took the beer to *Vol* village and promised to continue to support cultural activities. Obviously, the new media provide women with many opportunities to play an active role, so that Miao women can emerge from their traditional role to participate in public affairs.

7. Discussion

Our review shows that the Miao in China have seized opportunities to try to create a better life. Educational advancement, as our analysis demonstrates, may represent a particularly notable achievement. Miao Youth in urban and rural areas have taken action to empower their community and to determine a way to combine tradition with modernization. The new media, last but not least, provide an effective way to brainstorm, act and empower Miao villages.

We have argued that we should not ignore the agency of Miao individuals. Such agency determines what can and cannot be done and thus influences the dynamics of Miao society. Migrant workers in coastal cities contribute to the GDP and are involved in local issues in their hometowns. Their vision has prompted educational attainment, which motivates youths to act as the future force of the Miao community, maintaining a balance between development and traditional values. Agency plays a major role in

these achievements. We have pointed out that the Miao community in China is super-diverse, shaped by geo-demographic and socio-economical variables. We should not ignore the gap between urban and rural, regional imbalances and gender differences.

This article suggests that the Miao in China have determined their own way. Although political and scholarly debates have occurred over decades, the efforts of the Miao in China should be understood in the context of the diversification of Miao society. We also see that, first, the Miao have taken the initiative far beyond the four aspects mentioned in this article; the Miao elite has struggled in all walks of life. Second, these developments are inseparable from the specific context of Chinese society. China's reform and opening up, the rapid development of the GDP and economic growth have all provided historical opportunities for the development of the Miao nationality in China.

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