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The Hidden China

Paul Hattaway

For centuries the outside world has yearned to understand the mysterious land of China. Since the late 1970s—when China again opened her doors to foreign tourists and businessmen—millions of visitors have flocked into the “Middle Kingdom,” sampling her sumptuous food, photographing her scenic beauties, and experiencing her bustling marketplaces.

Few, however, have been fortunate enough to experience the “hidden” China. Woven into the mosaic of the largest population on earth is a rich thread. China's ethnic minorities, though numbering more than 100 million people, are largely lost amid the vast ocean of 1.2 billion Han Chinese. Although numerically the minorities of China account for only 6.7 percent of China's population, they live in 62.5 percent of China's territory.¹

Changing Fortunes

The name the Chinese use for their country is *Zhong Guo*, meaning “The Middle Kingdom.” For more than a thousand years the Chinese have believed they are the cradle of all civilization, the axis for all of mankind. This attitude surfaced frequently as foreign powers attempted to open China up to trade.

By the beginning of the 20th century, however, the Chinese felt great shame as a nation. Parts of their country had been divided up and were controlled by foreign powers, their economy was in tatters, and the countryside was effectively ruled by warlords and gangsters.

On the 1st of October, 1949, Chairman Mao ascended to the podium before one million spectators in Beijing's Tiananmen Square and triumphantly declared the founding of the People's Republic of China. China, once shamed and humiliated, sensed in the founding of the People's



Ken Bernhardt

Republic that a new dawn had arrived. However, her reaction was to close the door to foreigners for most of the next 30 years. Christian missionaries were ordered to depart.

The Communist government brought a mixture of fortune to China's minority peoples. For some, such as the Tibetans and Uygurs, the nation's new leaders reacted mercilessly and violently, not tolerating even the slightest suggestion of claims to independence by these two peoples. Many soon found the word of the law and the application of it were two different things. China's law states:

“If any worker of the government unlawfully deprives the citizens of their rights of lawful religious freedom, or violates the customs and practices of any minority nationality, he may be sentenced to imprisonment or compulsory labor for up to two years.”²

Yet for some of the smaller groups, the change meant an end to centuries of exploitation by

Perspectives and analysis for those who serve China

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greedy landlords and slave owners. It also meant, for some, the first time they were allowed to “officially exist.”

Sun Yat-sen in the 1920s considered China to consist of only five nationalities. The Kuomintang government simply denied the existence of ethnic minorities, regarding them simply—and erroneously—as branches of Han. The original flag of the Republic of China displayed five colors, representing these peoples: the Han, Manchu, Mongolians, Tibetans and Uygurs.

Centuries of hostility and prejudice between the Han Chinese and the minority peoples had been best illustrated by the Chinese use of the character for “dog” after the name of a tribe. This was officially banned by the new government in favor of using the character “nationality.” Each officially recognized minority was allowed a representative to the National Party Congress in Beijing. More recently, health and education benefits have been given to minority people. Only those minorities residing predominantly in urban areas are subject to China’s “one-child” policy. Most minority parents are allowed two children, while others in more remote regions are allowed three. Some small yet significant gestures of goodwill have been appreciated by minority peoples. The Miao, for example, who use an abundance of silver in their traditional costume, are allowed to purchase silver at a much cheaper rate than other Chinese citizens. As Ralph Covell notes, “Efforts are being made to remove tensions that have existed for centuries between Han Chinese and minority nationalities living in the same or nearby areas.”³

Origins

Today there are hundreds of distinct

ethnic groups scattered throughout China’s territory. Their languages belong to linguistic families as diverse as Persian, Turkish, Malayo-Polynesian, Tibeto-Burmese and Siberian. This ethnic composition is a result of thousands of years of history. Many groups and peoples migrated their way across the continent, some fleeing persecution, others famine, and still others just searching for a land where they could live in peace. Other peoples that appeared in different times in history can no longer be traced, having been assimilated into the huge Han Chinese race.

Prior to the 1950s little was known about China’s minority peoples. Chinese scholars did little or no research. The lack of motivation and practical and geographical barriers kept the minorities of China hidden from the knowledge of the world.

The majority of missionaries did not progress past the Chinese coastal areas where they worked faithfully and valiantly, among the Han Chinese, sowing the seeds for the great revivals of the last generation. Of course, there was mission activity among some of the larger and better-known minority groups such as the Tibetans, Miao, and Mongolians. Some brave and faithful souls ventured to extremely remote border areas to proclaim the Gospel among groups such as the Lisu, Lahu, Wa and Jingpo.

Due to the lack of research before the arrival of Communist rule and the ensuing anti-religious fervor which still continues today, the smaller ethno-linguistic peoples of China indeed have remained hidden from the Christian world, and therefore from prayer, awareness, and efforts to evangelize them.

In the 1950s, motivated by the need to extend its rule to all corners of the nation, the government commenced a massive project to improve the country’s infrastructure. Millions of miles of railway and roads were constructed across the width and length of China. Minority villages that had been an arduous two-week horse ride through dangerous bandit-filled mountains in the 1940s were now a short flight and bus ride away from a provincial capital.

Perhaps most important of all, Mandarin became the national language, used in all schools throughout the nation. Minority tribesmen who previously only saw Han Chinese on their irregular visits down the mountains to the marketplace are now able to speak their language. This has made it possible to research and document the smaller peoples of China and will greatly benefit the advance of the Gospel among them.

How Many Groups Are There?

Early writers were aware of a large number of different tribes and peoples in China, but had no way of conducting ongoing research or gathering further information or biographical data. Most simply offered a list of names and locations to the interested world. The Christian world marveled at the results of a 1944 survey by missionary John Kuhn who documented 100 tribes in Yunnan Province alone.

In the early 1950s, China’s new constitution declared China to be “a unitary, multi-national socialist state.”⁴ Leaders from China’s minority groups were invited to come forward and register their groups with the government to be considered for official recognition. The results, first released in 1953,



Brent Fulton, Editor • Julia Grosser, Managing Editor • Dona Diehl, Layout and Design

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were staggering. Over 400 names of groups were submitted of which more than 260 were located in Yunnan Province alone.⁵

The Han Chinese, however, have long viewed the different tribes and nationalities in China with suspicion at best, and utter contempt at worse. Sun Yat-sen had ominously stated, "The name 'Republic of Five Nationalities' exists only because there exists a certain racial distinction which distorts the meaning of a single republic. We must facilitate the dying out of all the names of individual peoples inhabiting China."⁶

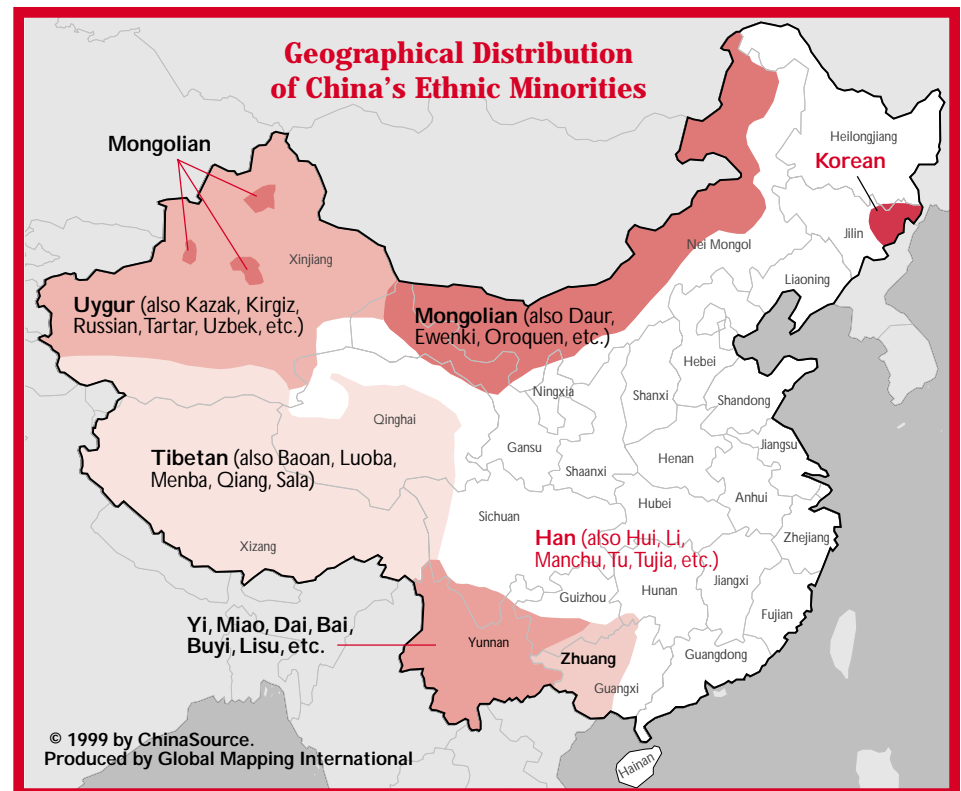
The new Communist government, obviously not willing to deal with so many different tribes and groups, began to artificially trim the list down to manageable proportions.

In 1956, sixteen teams were established by the government, with a total of more than 1,000 people, and sent across China to investigate the claims of the 400 groups that had applied for recognition. "The members included linguists, archaeologists, historians, economists, and experts in literature and the arts."⁷ These teams "collected a large body of data and presented their views on the classification of minority languages. These form most of the language information used today on China's minorities."⁸ The researchers rejected most of the 400 names, claiming, "Some were different names referring to the same group of people, some were different branch names of one ethnic family, some were place names of the areas where the minority groups lived and some were Chinese transliterations of a group of people."⁹

While this is no doubt partially true, any casual researcher of China's ethnic composition will soon be aware of the existence of many groups in China today which defy official classification.

By 1964, the government had managed to reduce the number of groups on their official list to only 183.¹⁰ Dismayed at being rejected, many minorities applied again in the late 1960s.

With the central government still uncomfortable with the prospect of dealing with so many collective needs,



and with administrators in Beijing no doubt unwilling to welcome hundreds of new 'Deputy to the National Party Congress' representatives, the scholars were sent back to work. From their revised list of 183, they squeezed together dozens of groups into broad ethnic classifications, grouping tribes together who, in many cases, shared no historical kinship and who could not understand a word of each other's language. In 1976, the State Council of the People's Republic arrived at a total of just 51 selected "minority nationalities" in China. Since that time four more have been added, arriving at the current total of 55 artificially constructed minorities. The State Nationalities' Affairs Commission now "considers the work of identifying nationalities virtually complete and is unlikely to accept any of the outstanding claims."¹¹

This has created a curious situation. At present there are only 21 officially recognized minorities living in Yunnan Province, but these 21 groups have 138 ethnic names, with an additional 157 ethnic names given to them by neighboring peoples.¹² The small Shuitian people, living on the Yunnan-Sichuan border, have been officially included as

part of the large Yi minority group, but "they think of the Yi as mountain barbarians and have no wish to be associated with them; they are both puzzled and bitter that they have not won recognition as a separate nationality."¹³

The Eastern Lipo people of northern Yunnan were also officially assigned to the Yi nationality even though their language is much more closely related to Lisu than Yi. This official classification horrified the Eastern Lipo, who had been slaves to the Nasu (another Yi group) for centuries. Eastern Lipo leaders petitioned the government saying they didn't care what minority group they were assigned to as long as it wasn't the Yi. The government officials ignored their pleas until recently. Today, on a national level, the Eastern Lipo continue to be classified as Yi people. On the district, county and prefecture administrative levels, however, the Eastern Lipo are now counted as Lisu! The confused classification of the Eastern Lipo embodies all that is wrong with the government's approach. If any lesson has to be learned from the Eastern Lipo case, it is that a people group's self-identity counts for much.

The Nosu people of northern

Yunnan and southern Sichuan, themselves considered only a branch of the Yi nationality, consist of “44 subgroups with different self-designations and obscure dialects.”¹⁴ The eight million Yi people, rather than being a cohesive ethno-linguistic people group, are instead a collection of 110 smaller groups, many speaking mutually unintelligible languages and coming from diverse cultural and historical backgrounds. One source even goes as far as dividing the Yi into 485 clans—with each clan occupying a distinct territory.¹⁵

Many outsiders view the nine million Miao as one people group, but from a linguistic viewpoint they “consist of 30-40 mutually unintelligible dialects [i.e. languages].”¹⁶ These languages are not merely slight variations of a common language, but as Joakim Enwall explains: “In Europe various languages may be mutually comprehensible to a large extent, like Swedish and Norwegian, or Spanish and Portuguese. In China dialects are usually not mutually comprehensible, and in many cases speakers of various sub-dialects have difficulty in understanding each other.”¹⁷

In addition to the Yi, similar cases of many distinct ethno-linguistic peoples being combined are found with the Tibetans, Miao, Hani, Zhuang, Yao, Dai and Mongolians. Even Chinese scholars have admitted the true number of distinct ethnic groups in China is staggeringly high. Among the Yao minority, for example, “There are thought to be as many as 300 such different appellations...making research and classification ethnically an impossible task...[the different Yao groups] are probably not of the same ethnic stock.”¹⁸

Reaction to the rejection of official recognition has been violent in some locations. The small Deng minority group living in southeast Tibet have even “threatened succession from China if they were not officially recognized as a nationality.... The Tibetan authorities strongly oppose such a move, arguing that it would split the Tibetan nationality.”¹⁹

To form the Ewenki minority, the Solon and the Yakut were combined.²⁰ Even the relatively small Pumi minority of Yunnan, comprising less than 30,000 people, is a collection of several tribes, each speaking their own language.²¹ Few of the 55 official minorities in China have not been created by a similar artificial fusion of smaller groups.

Furthermore, 748,380 people in the 1990 census were not assigned a minority group because they did not fit into any of the established categories.²² Most of these are members of small, distinct tribes. The 1982 census had listed 817,810 people in unclassified communities, but one Chinese source stated that “the actual number is higher.”²³ This probably indicates that a number of groups had already been provisionally placed or marked for placement in existing nationalities.

New information is continually coming to hand. As anthropologists and linguists begin to conduct studies in more remote mountainous areas of southwest China, it can be expected that dozens of more tribes and languages will come to light, especially among the artificially constructed Yi, Hani, Yao, Tibetan and Miao nationalities.

Ethno-linguistic Importance

Since the gradual opening up of China in the 1980s, numerous Christian workers and ministries have commenced work in China. Many ministries in China have wished to focus their energy on China’s minority groups. Unfortunately, because almost all literature on China’s minorities excludes any mention of groups apart from the official 55, most Christians have been forced to follow the government’s artificial classifications. *Operation China* contains information on approximately 300 people groups that have never before appeared on Christian mission ethno-linguistic lists.

Some may argue it is not important from a missiological view to break the groups down into an ethno-linguistic classification. They explain that the Gospel can penetrate into each people group cluster once indigenous believ-

ers are mobilized to spread the Gospel. In China this has proven to be a false assumption.

Observers have noted that the Yi nationality contains an estimated 200,000 Christians. Many would immediately classify them as a “reached” group. This is not the case, however:

People have the impression that these groups should be able to effectively evangelize the other members of the Yi.... However, upon closer inspection it is found that almost all of the Yi Christians are among the Gani and Lipo.... The other 70 or so Yi groups are totally unreached.... They live as far as 1,000 km [620 miles] away from the center of Yi Christianity. But even if the Gani or Lipo Christians should decide to travel and share the Gospel with other Yi groups they would find it a completely cross-cultural experience. They would have to learn a new language, in many cases with hardly a single word the same as their mother tongue, and they will have to learn the customs and culture of the new people.... Far better if we view all these groups as separate Gospel targets to begin with.²⁴

It is hoped that *Operation China* may spur many to learn about and to pray for the unreached people groups of China, and to give their time, talents, energy, resources, and lives, to do whatever is necessary for all of China’s people groups to know the saving grace and the indwelling life of Jesus Christ. May the Body of Christ of this generation not fail in its attempt to see God’s Kingdom come among all of China’s peoples!

ENDNOTES

1. Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), *Information China* (London: Pergamon Press, 1989), Vol.3, p.1248.
2. Article 147 of the *Chinese Penal Code*.
3. Ralph R. Covell, *The Liberating Gospel in China: The Christian Faith Among China’s Minority Peoples* (Michigan: Baker Books, 1994), p.24.
4. CASS, *Information China*, Vol.3, p.1247.
5. Fei Xiaotong, “On the Question of Identification of Nationalities in China,” *Chinese Social Sciences*, No.1, 1980.
6. Sun Yat-Sen, *Memoirs of a Chinese Revolution* (Taipei: China Cultural Service, 1953).
7. Colin Mackerras, *China’s Minorities: Integration and Modernization in the Twentieth Century* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.142-43.
8. CASS, *Information China*, Vol.3, pp.1281-82.
9. Australian Academy of the Humanities and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, *Language Atlas of China* (Hong Kong: Longman Group, 1987), p. A-3.

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China's Christian County: The Lisu of Fugong

Tetsunao Yamamori
and Kim-Kwong Chan

Christianity, introduced to the Lisu people at the end of the last century in Burma, spread to China in the early 1920s.¹ Among the one million Lisu in the world, almost 60 percent live in Yunnan, China, concentrated in the Nujiang Canyon (formerly known as Selwin Valley).² In spite of the unfavorable political conditions against Christianity since 1949, the Christian population among the Lisu has been growing. For example, in 1997 about 70 percent of the people in Fugong County of Nujiang Prefecture were Christian. This is the highest Christian concentration in China at the county level and the first primarily "Christian county" in China.

Missionaries who went to Nujiang during the 1920s and 1930s were almost all from a fundamentalist background emphasizing a dualistic worldview with strong Puritan teachings. As they encountered the Lisu, they were aware that the Lisu were very religious—spending a huge amount of wealth on sacrifices to appease their gods and spirits in spite of their poverty. The traditional dowry customs made a heavy economic burden for the Lisu who often ended in debt. There were also many customs—such as rice-wine drinking, smoking, and premarital sex—which the missionaries considered incompatible with Christianity.³

We shall briefly explore the social changes brought about by the missionaries that had a bearing on the Lisu Christians and their economic situation. These economic changes were praised by the Chinese government in the 1950s despite their negative attitudes toward religion and the missionaries. The following data are drawn

from the official Chinese government reports that preclude any favoritism toward Christianity.

Lisu Marriage Customs before 1950 and Missionary Teaching

Marriage was an expensive event for the Lisu. The groom had to pay the bride several cows for the wedding and was in debt to her family or others for many years. It was not uncommon for a family to have to sell its children into slavery in order to pay the debt. Therefore, marriage became a trade and was arranged by the families instead of being decided by the bride and groom

The Lisu Christians in Fugong are already established as a dynamic community.

themselves. If the husband wanted a divorce, he could reclaim all he had paid. If the wife initiated a divorce, she had to pay back twice the amount she had received from her husband. Thus, a divorce led to many conflicts. Moreover, the Lisu men were allowed to have concubines, invariably causing complications in the family. Finally, all unmarried teens and adults could sleep in a "Common House" in search of sexual partners; they were allowed to engage in sexual acts freely until they got married.⁴

In 1954, a detailed study was made on the annual expenses of Lisu households. There was a well-to-do family whose son got married. The wedding cost about 38 percent of the entire household's annual net income. Immediately, the family was in debt and transformed from a well-to-do into a poor household (Research Committee, National Minority Commission of the National People's Congress 1954:43).

The missionaries regarded these Lisu marriage customs as inappropriate

and a hindrance to the spread of the gospel. Therefore, they insisted on the following teachings: Christians had to be monogamous; they were free to marry but could not divorce; premarital sex was prohibited. As many poor young people could not afford to get married, the missionaries insisted that both parties forego the exchange of gifts and the wedding feast was discouraged. Further, any consenting Christian male above the age of 20 and female above the age of 18 could marry in a



Paul Hartney

church free of charge. Christians could not marry non-Christians. These new marriage customs attracted people to the church (Gao and Zhang 1990:21-22). Marriage became an institution that could be decided upon by the couple without incurring debt. There would be fewer familial disputes over divorce and concubine issues. It was thought that forced marriages, due to out-of-wedlock pregnancies arising from the Common House, would decline. Finally, the Christian community protected marriage. As a result, many joined the church.

A Christian wedding was economically prudent to the Lisu community because of the austerity of the wedding ceremony and its related obligations.

Having no wedding feast was a great help in a poverty region and a great saving on food that might have been wasted.⁵ The money that was saved could be used to invest in agricultural production and benefited the newly-weds.

Christian Teachings on Drinking and Smoking

One of the few luxuries in the harsh environment of Nuijiang was alcohol consumption. Very often at the end of the first harvest, the Lisu would immediately set up a crude brewery in the field to make rice wine from the new grain.⁶ A large quantity of grain was used to make wine and they would then lie in the field drunk for several days. Since the grain produced often was not even enough for basic consumption, frequently these households would run out of food a few months after the harvest and go into debt or live on handouts long before their second harvest. A detailed study in 1956 suggested that an average Lisu household (excluding the Christians) would use 12 to 23 percent of their annual grain production to make wine. In addition, crops were sold for cash in order to purchase extra wine after the harvest season (Chinese Communist Party 1956:7-8). Since drinking was a must and getting drunk was culturally accepted, it would be difficult to ignore its economic significance and social consequences. Furthermore, the Lisu liked to smoke, and smoking also consumed a substantial amount of their disposable income (Central Government Visitation Team 1956:21).

The missionaries made their teachings clear on drinking alcohol and smoking: total abstinence. This was a basic requirement for all Christians, and the Christian community acted as an enforcement agency among its own. The missionaries substituted the habit of smoking with local tea drinking. It also helped those addicted to alcohol to withdraw from their habit. Soon the Christian families saved more money by not wasting their grain on wine making. There were fewer crimes among the Christians due to the lack of alco-

holism. In the early 1950s, even the anti-religious Chinese Communist Party cadres admitted that the economic well-being of the Lisu Christians was, in general, better than that of non-Christians due to the teaching of the church on abstinence from alcohol and tobacco (Central Government Visitation Team 1956:21).

Prohibition of Sacrificial Offerings to Gods and Spirits

Traditional religious customs dictated that the Lisu regularly offer livestock or crops to various spirits and also on special occasions such as illness and death. For example, a 1953 survey indicated that out of 37 families in Chuangmedi Village of Fugong, 25 made a total of 251 sacrifices during the year averaging ten sacrifices per household. (The other families were probably Christians who made no such sacrifices.) This amounted to more than 11 percent of the total annual village income. Discounting the 12 households that made no sacrifices, the 25 households used at least 15 percent of their gross annual income or crops for such a purpose—a substantial amount of wealth in this poor region. A study of a relatively well-to-do family showed that from 1929 to 1952 they offered 16 goats, 15 chickens, and 29 pigs. Eventually, the head of the household had to sell all the land to pay the debt incurred by these offerings; he became a hired laborer whose well-being was slightly better than a slave (Chinese Communist Party 1956:7).

The Christian teaching on these sacrifices was very clear: no Christian was allowed to make any sacrifices once he or she became a believer. This was not so much for economic reasons but for theological ones: only one God is to be worshiped.

Although the missionaries instructed Christians to bring offerings to the church, the amount received did not come near the amount previously offered to other spirits. The side effect of this teaching was obvious—if you became a Christian you saved money because it was less expensive to practice Christianity.⁷

Christian Teachings and Theological Justification

The main concern of the fundamentalist missionaries was to save the lost Lisu souls from eternal damnation for worshipping the wrong god rather than to rescue them from their miserable economic predicament. Their motive was religious, but the consequences of their teachings bore economic benefits. In order to teach the Lisu, the missionaries developed a set of doctrinal teachings including three basic theological teachings and the Lisu Ten Commandments (See box on opposite page) (Li, Daoshing 1994:1082-1083):

1. One must be devoted to one God. One cannot believe in God and, at the same time, make offerings to other spirits.

2. God is holy. Drinking alcohol is an unholy as well as a blasphemous act. This also applies to smoking.

3. Christians are civilized; it would be uncivilized⁸ and even shameful to accept wedding gifts from either party. Also, it would be uncivilized to waste money on a wedding feast.⁹

Because these doctrinal teachings were in the form of practical guidelines, the Lisu Christians built and based their community on them. Although they sound a bit legalistic, the Lisu Christians found them easy to follow and they helped to shape a unique community. While these teachings were never meant to be a guide for a self-sustainable economic community, one of their most obvious characteristics is the Puritan social ethic—no waste and honest work. As a result, these Christian families would eventually have a better economic situation than their non-Christian neighbors.

Holistic Ministry and Today's China

The Chinese government, like other restricted-access countries, does not welcome Christian mission work, but it does welcome assistance in economic development. Since Nuijiang Prefecture is one of the poorest areas in all of China, the national government is targeting it for its special poverty-eradication program. Thus, the government is more open to outside help.

The Christian community is by far the strongest social unit in Nujiang Prefecture and can serve as a powerful agent to launch any social program. Although the Christian community in Fugong County is generally better off economically than their non-Christian neighbors, they are, as a whole, still living below the poverty line. This may be attributed mainly to the increase in population (four-fold since 1950) due to better government health service since 1950 and to a special birth quota allowance given to national minorities in China.¹⁰ At the same time, there are no funds for capital investment, technological improvement in productivity or exploring alternative means of resource utilization.

The Christian leaders in Fugong and Nujiang are thinking of using Christian training centers and the extensive church network to promote economic development through medical and agricultural projects. Such projects, executed by committed Christians, may lead to the formation of holistic communities throughout Nujiang Prefecture.

The concept of holistic ministry parallels Food for the Hungry International's (FHI) "Vision of a Community." As a result of their ministry, FHI wishes to see the people of a community advance toward their God-given potential. This comes through equipping to progress beyond the meeting of their basic physical needs and becoming a growing group of Christians that love God and one another, manifest the fruit of the Spirit and reach out to serve others.

Although Lisu Christian leaders have no formal theological training, their theological methodology seems to be a "from-below approach:" realization of physical needs, reflection upon these needs and pastoral action to fulfill them. At first, they taught only the Bible to their voluntary pastors, but in recent years have realized that the

Two versions of the Lisu Ten Commandments

Example One (Bijiang County Government 1990:447)

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| (1) No adultery. | (8) Stay close to the pastor to help evangelize others. |
| (2) No cheating, and keep the Sabbath. | (9) Respect your parents and abide by the law. |
| (3) No flirting. | (10) Love others as yourself, help each other, do not envy others. |
| (4) No stealing or killing. | |
| (5) No false witness. | |
| (6) No smoking or drinking. | |
| (7) No traditional dancing or singing. | |

Example Two (Central Government Visitation Team 1981:21)

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|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| (1) No drinking. | (6) No cheating. |
| (2) No smoking. | (7) No stealing. |
| (3) No gambling. | (8) No worshipping of evil spirits. |
| (4) No killing. | (9) Be hygienic. |
| (5) No trading in marriage. | (10) Be monogamous. |

needs of the Christians are physical as well as spiritual. They began to focus their ministry not just on spiritual teaching but also on agricultural, educational, and medical programs. They are now teaching the voluntary pastors to minister to both the spiritual and physical needs of their flocks.

Prior to World War II, the Lisu Christians began sending missionaries to evangelize their neighboring minority peoples such as the Dulong. The Dulong are the most remote, the most difficult to access and the most underdeveloped people group in China. It is the only minority group in China that cannot be accessed by road. Yet, among the 4,000 Dulong in Dulong Valley north of Fugong, at least 800 are now Christians worshiping in seven churches¹¹ all supported by the Lisu Christians. With further efforts, it may be possible to turn the Dulong into a holistic Christian community through the Lisu.

Lisu Christians already have a good Christian foundation, a good testimony, a large critical mass (Fugong being a newly Christianized people with perhaps the highest rate of conversion in modern mission history) and sufficient readiness to be challenged.

The challenge before us is this: how

best can we help the Lisu build a concrete Christian community to promote the cycle of reciprocity; namely, redemption leading to development, and further, development leading to redemption. The Christian community, deeply committed to the concept of holistic ministry, will attempt to accomplish at least three general goals.

1. Show the Chinese government that Christians can indeed make a positive contribution toward the socio-economic development of the community and the nation. The Chinese government is hospitable to the Christian organization as long as it registers a measurable socio-economic contribution helping China's modernization effort.¹²

2. Demonstrate that the Christian community can reach out to other people groups not readily accessible to outsiders. Such outreach is holistic in nature and will transform the community both physically and spiritually. In other words, the cycle of reciprocity will lead the Lisu to reach out to the Dulong by sharing the gospel and helping them to help themselves. In the end, the Dulong will begin sharing the gospel with their neighboring unreached people groups while helping them to help themselves.

3. Allow the Christian community to reap great dividends. Even though China is the largest populated nation in the world (1.3 billion), more than 90 percent of the Chinese are unreached. There are 55 officially recognized ethnic minority groups in China, mostly living in the rural areas.¹³ Many mission models have failed to penetrate these peoples so that about half of them have not been reached by the gospel.¹⁴ If the holistic model works among the Lisu and among the Dulong, eventually it may become a paradigm for many other rural ethnic communities in China. Furthermore, it would be the Chinese Christians, not foreigners, who evangelize the Chinese—a "self-propagating" ecclesial principle that is strongly emphasized by Chinese Christian leaders.

Conclusion

We have seen that the emergence of Fugong into the first Christian county in China has significant implications for our missiological thinking, in general, and for reaching China's unreached ethnic minorities, in particular. Socialism, the state orthodoxy in China, holds out a rather negative view on religion—a view based primarily on economic assumptions (i.e., religion is bad for social progress and hinders economic development). In light of this, Christians may be able to demonstrate that Christianity offers not only spiritual salvation but also economic liberation—liberating the people from the yoke of poverty by applying Christian principles. The Chinese government officially closed its door to those traditional missionaries who emphasized only the other-worldly message. However, the Chinese authority is open to good-willed agencies that can work as equal partners with the Chinese to alleviate poverty in the rural communities, especially within the national minorities who inhabit the most hostile terrain in China. The Lisu Christians in Fugong are already established as a dynamic community. Can this Christian community, with resources from external Christian development agencies, establish a concrete holistic community that can act as a viable development model in China? Further, can this model be used as a missiological paradigm opening mission frontiers in areas hitherto denied to the traditional mission approach? The story of the Lisu makes us hopeful.

ENDNOTES

1. Covell (1995) has written a chapter on the evangelization of the Lisu in *The Liberating Gospel in China*. See also Tien Ju-K'ang (1993), *The Peak of Faith: Protestant Mission in Revolutionary China*.
2. According to the Chinese government, there were 574,800 Lisu in 1995. See Jiang (1995:64).
3. As a historical record, the missionaries in Fugong used the term "uncivilized" to describe the traditional lifestyle of the Lisu. They were, of course, entrapped in their historical context, and they regarded Christianity as being a superior culture to the local ones. They also taught the Lisu Christians that a Christian lifestyle was more civilized than the traditional Lisu one. The term "civilized" is used among Lisu Christians when they make reference to the traditional Lisu way of life. This attitude was attacked by the Chinese

authority as a form of cultural imperialism.

4. On marriage customs, see Central Government Visitation Team Second Detachment Nujiang Group (1956, 1981:21-22). On the Common House, see the Research Committee, National Minority Commission of the National People's Congress (1956:9). These Common Houses have been abolished since the 1950s. However, such customs—premarital sexual practices—are still common and accepted among the Lisu.

5. One of the writers (Chan) personally witnessed a Christian wedding in March 1997 and interviewed the newlyweds. Both were poor peasants and claimed that they could not afford to get married if they were not Christians and did not have the wedding in the church. Unlike most of the weddings in China (among the Hans and other ethnic minorities alike), there was no feast or reception after the wedding service. Such austerity at the wedding is rather rare in China.

6. The common drink of the Lisu is rice wine (or grain wine) which is made from a simple distillation process of the newly fermented cooked grains. The alcoholic content is between five and ten percent. Technically, this type of distilled alcoholic drink is not considered hard liquor, which would have an alcoholic content of 25 to 40 percent. The Lisu also drink a form of hard liquor on special festival days, but it is produced by a special brewery and cannot be made at home or in the field.

7. As these writers interviewed Christians in the field, similar comments were expressed: it is cheaper to believe in Christ than traditional gods. One of the writers (Chan) had also heard similar comments in other parts of rural China in recent years.

8. Although this is a pejorative term, the authors wish to be faithful to the facts observed in the field. This is the original term used by the missionaries and later by Lisu Christians themselves in their teachings.

9. John and Isobel Kuhn were married in Kunming, and they did throw a big wedding party as recorded in Isobel's several writings. However, it had taken place before they went to work among the Lisu. John and Isobel did live a very austere life—a lifestyle that was compatible to their teachings. Not all missionaries who worked among the Lisu were like the Kuhns. The Morrisons of the Assemblies of God church in Fugong were accused of living an extravagant life. His son was accused of raping local women with one of them giving birth to a "mixed-race baby." This lady and the baby were well known in the local village; they left China for Burma in 1950. See Fu, Abu (1994:1094-1096).

10. In China, the Han Chinese can only have one single child if residing in the city and two, at the most, if they live in the countryside. However, the national minorities are not restricted by these regulations. It is a policy to protect the national minorities so that they can have a sizable community to preserve their ethnic identity.

11. A Lisu evangelist went to the northern part of Dulong Valley in the fall of 1997 and held a series of evangelistic meetings; close to 100 Dulong accepted the gospel and two new churches are being formed (Yesi 1998).

12. The Christian Church in China has raised the issue of Christianity and moral, social, intellectual, and cultural modernization in recent years. However, it has not discussed economic development. See Wickeri and Cole, eds. (1995).

13. This number was established in 1956 by the State Council of the Chinese Government. In

fact, there are many more than 55 ethnic minority groups.

14. It also depends on the definition of "reached." Some ethnic minority groups, such as the Zhuang, with more than 14 million people, have fewer than 10,000 Christians and do not have the Bible in their own languages. They are very well mixed with the Han. Covell (1995), in his *The Liberating Gospel in China*, provides insights into this issue among the minority groups

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Tetsunao Yamamori is president of Food for the Hungry International and author of Serving with the Urban Poor. Kim Kwong Chan is Executive Secretary of the Hong Kong Christian Council and co-author of Protestantism in Contemporary China. This article is adapted from "Missiological Ramifications of the Social Impact of Christianity on the Lisu of China" in Missiology, Vol. XXVI, No. 4, Oct. 1998, pp. 403-417. Used with permission.

Waves of History

Thoughts on China's Ethnic Minority Issue

Spring Festival is a time for family reunions. Government officials from the Center to the local levels host a series of receptions and celebrations, inviting representatives from all walks of life. This tradition has continued uninterrupted for the past five decades. The only differences between each of these annual occasions are the slogans and content of the speeches reflecting the social, political and economical environment of the time. Despite the variations in political rhetoric, however, one slogan—"ethnic unity"—will always remain.

What makes ethnic unity such a weighty issue? Looking at a map that shows the distribution of China's ethnic populations makes the answer clear. The Han Chinese comprise 92% of China's total population; all of the other nationalities combined comprise only eight percent. However, this eight percent occupies more than 65% of the land—most of this in the border regions surrounding the heartland where the Han Chinese are concentrated. (See map, p.3.) These provinces boast rich natural resources—forests, minerals, water and others that are crucial to the economic development of China. In addition, numerous small communities of minorities can also be found in other provinces where Han Chinese have traditionally been the majority.

Due to the gravity of this political issue a special government organ, the State Nationalities Affairs Commission, has been created to manage minority affairs at all levels. In some regions the Nationalities Affairs Commission is combined with the Religious Affairs Bureau and called the Nationalities-Religion Commission (*ming-zong wei*). The Nationalities Affairs Commission comes under the leadership of the Party's United Front Work Department (UFD). Together, these two entities decide the quota of minority representatives in the People's Congresses and Political Consultative Conferences at all levels, as well as the National People's Congress (NPC).

In addition to these political arrangements, the Chinese government has established five autonomous regions at the provincial level and over 100 autonomous counties. A number of minority colleges train minority youth to become minority officials.

With the exception of Tibet, in each of the other four autonomous regions, the Han comprise the majority of that

region's population. Fifty years of ethnic unity policy has literally made the minority group the "minority" within its own autonomous region. Within the government structures of each of these areas there is no shortage of minority officials, yet those in key positions are almost all Han. Considering the power structure and the composition of the general population, how much autonomy do the minority people enjoy? The imbalance in thought and aspirations between the masses of minority people and their officials is obvious.

In addition, most minority regions are in border regions, concentrated in China's deserts, snow-covered mountains, or frozen wastelands. These areas suffer from harsh geographic and environmental conditions worsened by underdeveloped transportation and communications. They are backward in terms of education, culture, medicine, health, and business. In the economy of China they are exporters of natural resources. Coastal areas use these resources to

manufacture goods which are then sold back to the minority regions. Over many years these regions have become the "third world" of China and the gap in economic development between them and the coastal areas has increased. The majority of the 80 million people in China who live below the poverty line are from the ethnic minority areas. The government has a special term, *lao-shao-bian-qiong*—"old-minority-frontier-poverty areas," to describe such regions.

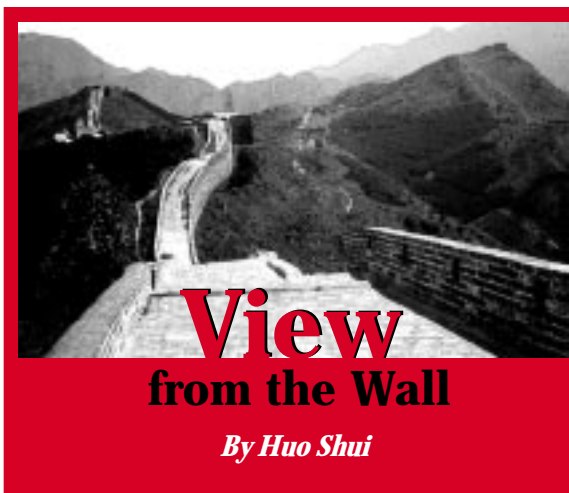
If the minority areas' current political and economic structures were changed, if more minorities

were promoted to leading positions, if the political controls over these areas were loosened and investment in these areas were increased, would these measures be sufficient to solve China's minority problem? Once Beijing loosens its grip on the minorities and they become more wealthy, the contradiction of China's minorities will only become more acute, increasing the chance that China could eventually fragment.

Three factors account for this phenomenon:

First, the policy of regional autonomy for nationalities is the root cause leading to national independence and the disintegration of the country. This policy was learned from Russia and carries a strong Leninist/Stalinist color. Its essence is allowing minorities to have their own relatively independent "autonomous regions," a piece of territory they can call their own, giving the appearance of realizing equality with the mainstream. This strengthens the sense of national minority identity rather than blurring it, as evidenced in the post-cold war decade that has seen an unprecedented tide of new national independence movements throughout the world.

This tide of national independence movements has



View from the Wall

By Huo Shui

heightened the spirits of activists who desire independence for minority groups inside China—although they cannot pursue their goals openly. Their strategy is to reuse the slogans that the communists used to promote minority issues; act within the legal spectrum; negotiate with the central government; bargain for authority, funding, and favorable policies; and fortify the power of their respective groups. Ironically, the leaders who are standing up to the central government are those who were groomed by the communist party during the last few decades. Their motives are quite simple, for only when a minority group gains local independence can these leaders become the rulers of their land in the real sense and gain the greatest

The rise and fall of ethnic groups and of nations are never-ending waves on the river of history. Without them, the water would be still and old.

personal benefit. The most powerful weapon in their arsenal for struggling with the central government is the “minority national autonomy” policy itself. As long as all the issues at stake are wrapped up in “minority regional autonomy” their grab for power and resources becomes legitimized morally and gains the support of the minority masses.

Second, a minority’s religion and culture cannot be replaced. When the communists replaced Confucian tradition and religion with Marxism and atheism, for the Han Chinese it was merely an issue of religious freedom. However, for minority groups, their religion is not only their system of faith but also the vehicle for preserving their historical traditions and culture. During the past 50 years, communist policy on religion has been proven to be devastating to minority groups. Due to the basic contradiction between Marxist philosophy and religion, it is a given that the issue of religion will further complicate the already troubled relations between the minorities and the Han Chinese and between the minority

regions and the central government.

Third, the saying, “Division never lasts very long before union is desired, and vice versa,” is a historical rule. Throughout imperial times there were many cycles of division and reunification. This is the balancing mechanism for solving the political and economic contradictions in the process of China’s social development. In the relationship between the central and local governments and between the Han and the minorities, this mechanism manifests itself every time the central government is weak or the internal contradictions among the Han intensify, the result being that the minorities seek to break away. Afterward, when China is strong and prosperous, the central government can successfully balance internal contradictions and control society, and the problems among the minorities tend toward resolution with each minority leader submitting to the central government.

China today is in a period of social transformation. The redistribution of wealth and political power brought about by economic reform directly influences the relationships between the central government and local authorities, between the Han and minority groups. Whether China in the future erupts with ethnic clashes that eventually split the country or becomes stronger and, to a great degree, united will depend on the minority policy Beijing adopts and the way internal conflicts develop. The minority problem will continue to exist as a latent powder keg, with an ever-present potential for explosion.

The rise and fall of ethnic groups and of nations are never-ending waves on the river of history. Without them, the water would be still and old, and the scroll of history would be drab and colorless. The future of the Chinese nation will follow its own logic, whether divided or united. Let us wait and see what God has in store for this nation in the new millennium.

Huo Shui is a former government political analyst who writes from outside China. Translated by Brent and Jasmine Fulton and Ping Dong.

The Hidden China continued from page 4

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11. Mackerras, *China’s Minorities*, p.143.
12. Li Youyi, *Ethnology in China* (Griffith University Press, 1980), p.10. Also see Lin Yuehua, “Zhongguo Xinan Diqu de Minzu Shibie” [Ethnic Studies in Southwest China], *Yunnan Shehui Kexue*, 1984, No.2, p.1.
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Paul Hattaway’s 12 years of research on China’s unreached people groups has included 150 expeditions into China’s cities and remote areas to compile and verify his data. This article is condensed from the introduction of his forthcoming book Operation China available in September 2000 (Piquant Publishers, ISBN: 0-9535757-5-6, 500 pp).

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Photos by David Chow



Miao Christians singing and worshipping.

Matters of the Heart... and the Nation

A Visit to the Big Flowery Miao

Daniel Wright

Daniel Wright spent the last two years in Guizhou, China on a fellowship that allowed him to study the people and societies of inland China. As he spoke with people, they expressed to him, in a variety of ways, the crisis of faith that has come with the erosion of belief in communism. The following is the account of his visit to Shimenkan, a township of the Big Flowery Miao. Editor

It has been fascinating during my two-year fellowship, living among the people of Guizhou Province, to observe a widespread quest for belief—efforts to find a meaningful worldview, peace, satisfying human relationships, moral guidance and a basis for social justice.

The question of belief is part of the reason two friends and I traveled to a remote township known as The Stone Threshold (Shimenkan), accessible only by Jeep, in Guizhou's northwestern most corner. At an elevation of over 6,000 feet, the mountain region that surrounds Shimenkan, Wumeng Shan, is one of the most rugged and poorest areas in Guizhou Province.

The most numerous ethnic group in the region is the Big Flowery Miao (*Da Hua Miao*), one of a dozen or so Miao subgroupings. The Miao have long been a despised people. In fact, several Chinese have told me of a western scholar who has suggested that the two most oppressed peoples in the world have been the Jews and the Miao. Even today, prejudiced Chinese use the word "Miao" the way racists in the United States use the term "nigger."

Of all the Miao subgroups, the Big Flowery Miao have been the most oppressed. Just over 100 years ago, for example, their ethnic neighbors in northwest Guizhou, the Yi people, though in the minority, enslaved many of them. Treated as less than human, the Big Flowery Miao were housed with the animals and forced to eat out of the same troughs the animals used.¹

Previously unknown and isolated,

Shimenkan was put on the map by a foreigner: Samuel Pollard (1864 - 1915), a British missionary who moved to Shimenkan in 1904. Even to Pollard, an experienced missionary, Shimenkan was the most wretched place he had seen in China.

After relocating to Shimenkan, at the time a village of a dozen families, Pollard lived the lifestyle of the Big Flowery Miao. He wore the same clothes as the Miao, refused to ride on horses or on sedan chairs as other privileged people did, did not carry weapons, used the Miao language to communicate, ate potatoes and wheat porridge with common folk and initially lived in a thatched-roof hut like everyone else.² Pollard's lifestyle authenticated his message of God made flesh in Christ.

To Pollard's amazement, many of the Miao ancestral legends and children's rhymes were consistent with biblical themes: a creation story, a flood myth, even Noah's ark.³ For many Miao, the rest of the Bible filled in their gaps. In less than two decades, Pollard and his coworkers saw the conversion of more than 10,000 people. Churches, schools, medical clinics, a soccer field, even a swimming pool, followed. Mountainous and remote Shimenkan became known as "Heaven from Abroad" (*Haiwai tianguo*).

According to China scholar Zhang

Tan's thorough examination of Pollard's life and the history of Shimenkan, there are no believers left.⁴ The primary reason Zhang gives for this abrupt change is that the liberation that the Miao's savior had given them was a freedom of the soul, not of politics and the flesh. When another savior appeared—the Chinese Communist Party—that could provide economic and political liberation, people began turning to socialism. Faith in Christ, Zhang concludes, expired without a whimper.

Based on Zhang Tan's conclusions, I expected to find Shimenkan a fascinating piece of pre-revolution, foreign-missionary history. Nothing more. Even so, I could not help but wonder, given the crisis of belief I have observed in other areas of Guizhou Province, whether the faith of 10,000 people had in fact simply disappeared like a lost tribe.

Seven hours over dirt-packed gravel and sometimes sloppy mud roads, we finally arrived in Shimenkan. Constant rain and thick fog made the trip seem longer than it actually was.

Then, there it was, just like the picture in Zhang Tan's book. Market day was just wrapping up when we pulled into the driveway, so we had many curious observers. The Big Flowery Miao I had read so much about circled around us. We exchanged the curious stares of distant strangers. A group of five especially friendly Big Flowery



Miao hymnal.

Miao women took a particular interest in the woman accompanying me. When we reappeared from the township government offices, the women were patiently waiting and presented her with a bag of cookies.

We were then led on a tour of Shimenkan's remnants of the past. An enthusiastic band of locals followed us, including the five women who were never far behind. As daylight turned to dusk, light rain and a blanket of fog created an almost eerie atmosphere. The last stop of the tour was Samuel Pollard's tomb. Pollard died of typhoid in 1915 while tending to locals with the same disease. Our group milled around the tombs for about 20 minutes, then, as we tracked back down the hill toward the road, I walked behind several of the Miao women, my mind full of thoughts of their past and questions about their present.

"Do you believe in Jesus?" I quietly asked the woman who walked in front of me, eager to know for myself if they or others in the area had carried on their pre-revolution faith.

"Yes, I believe," the woman replied, turning her head with a smile.

"I am a believer as well," I replied. "That means we are one family."

I sensed she was not the only one.

As we continued to walk, one of my travel companions asked the women if there were only elderly women in their church.

No, they said, there are men as well, and young people, and middle-aged people. Their church is their community.

"Are there many churches in Shimenkan?" I followed.

"*Duo de hen.*" (Very many!) She replied with a sparkle in her eye.⁵

It was almost dark and time for dinner. The tour was over. We did not know if we would see the Miao women again, so we said goodbye. An older woman came up to me and with strong hands that had obviously farmed for many years firmly grasped mine. With a penetrating look I will not forget, she said, "We will meet again in heaven. Pray for us, we will pray for you."

The Big Flowery Miao women,

dressed in traditional hemp skirts, blue blazers and muddy rain boots stood quietly at the turn in the road as we walked off. As their figures began to disappear in the mist, they began to sing. We stopped, turned and listened.

The first song sounded like a Miao melody. It was beautiful, but I could not understand it. Then they began to sing a chorus in Mandarin, well known among believers of Christ around China: *Zai Yesuli women shi yi jia ren* ('In Jesus we are one family'). As they sang, I could see through the fog that several of them were wiping tears from their eyes with aprons that hung from their Miao skirts. They had met family; we had met living history—and vice versa.

**"What difference
does your faith
make to you?"**

With that taste of faith, I realized that Zhang Tan was wrong, or at least his information was incomplete. Religion, after all, appeared to be alive and well in Shimenkan.

When we went for breakfast the following morning, there they were—the same women from the previous evening, standing patiently down the road, now accompanied by several men. They walked up to us and presented us with a few dozen hard-boiled eggs and then returned to wait for us at their distant post.

With a bit of arm twisting, we were able to convince our hosts to allow us to visit a Miao village. Our tour the previous day had been around the township headquarter's immediate vicinity. We wanted more. The most convenient village for us to visit, it turned out, was the home of the women who had sung to us!

Within an hour we were off to their village. We slipped and slid down a mud path as shepherds, wearing thick wool capes to protect them from the cool and rain, tended their sheep and goats on the lush shrub-covered mountains that surrounded us. The air was moist and clear.

Before long our entourage had arrived at their village. The village hovels were made of thick, tan, earthen walls and thatch roofs. Pigs moved in slow motion as chickens dashed through the inch-thick muck that covered the village grounds. Big Flowery Miao began to gather as we mingled, standing around one of their homes.

We remained in the village just a few hours, chatting and even singing. My companions and I were struck with the sense of dignity among the people. Yes, they were very poor. But compared to dozens of other villages I have visited in Guizhou, there was an absence of apology for their backwardness (I am usually overwhelmed upon arrival with self-deprecating excuses for the people's poverty). These villagers made no excuses. In fact, *Moxi* (Moses), who appeared to be the local leader, stated confidently, "We are poor, but we are rich."

Moses, as the village spokesman, said that 40 out of the 50 families in the village believed in Christ. Most of them began to follow Christ in the 1980s. The villagers gather weekly to worship.

"What difference does your faith make to you?" I asked Moses as we stood around, county and township government officials included.

Moses replied that under the government's policy to protect freedom of religion, their community was strong. Then, calibrating his response, he added that they did not smoke, did not drink and did not carouse. His facial expressions communicated that there was a lot more he could have shared.

The sense of community also seemed quite strong. From the way they organized themselves to the way they related to one another, they appeared as one. You should have heard them sing! Old and young, men and women, they sang hymns in both Mandarin and Miao.

Before we said goodbye, I asked Moses if he had a Bible with him. I had a verse I wanted to present to their community as a gift. He reached into his bag and pulled out a Bible printed

in Nanjing. I pointed to 1 Corinthians, chapter one, verses 26-28 and stepped back. Thoughts from Zhang Tan's history of Shimenkan and Pollard's journal flooded my mind as Moses, head down, read in silence:

Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong; God chose the lowly of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.

Moses, now at a distance, looked up at me in tears. We understood.

As the villagers, the officials and the three foreign visitors slowly proceeded back to the main road, the Big Flowery Miao began to sing again: "In Jesus we are one family."

One family with the despised and historically oppressed Miao of Shimenkan. It was a lot to take in.

Since that trip to the remote mountains of northwest Guizhou and the months of traveling around the province, I have thought how fascinating and noteworthy it is that during this transitional period in China's history the search for meaning and community continues as it does: from shrines that dot the countryside, to overflowing state-approved places of worship, to young women wearing jade Buddhas, to the Big Flowery Miao of Shimenkan—even the members of Falungong who are now under pressure.

The heart of the matter is that the people's quest will play an essential, albeit subtle, role in determining the nation's evolving future.

ENDNOTES

1. Zhang Tan, *Zhai men' qian de shimenkan* (The stone threshold in front of the narrow gate) (Kunming: Yunnan Education Press, 1992), 25.

2. *Ibid.*, 122.

3. *Ibid.*, 57.

4. *Ibid.*, 228.

5. During our briefing, township officials said that there are two approved places where some Miao gather to worship, but that there are not many believers.

Excerpted with permission from "Matters of the Heart...and the Nation" by Daniel Wright in ICWA Letters (Institute of Current World Affairs: Hanover, NH) June, 1999. Daniel Wright is currently the Washington-based Executive Director of the Hopkins-Nanjing Program, a graduate-level education joint venture in Nanjing, China.

Peoples of China

God's Love for the Minorities of China

Jim Nickel

As we consider the fact that the minorities of China constitute less than 7% of the population of that huge nation, we might be tempted to dismiss them as less important than the nearly 1.2 billion Han Chinese. However, that would not reflect the heart of God. The Bible makes it clear that God's love extends to all the peoples of the earth, including the minorities.

The Bible is a book about people groups and often refers to minority peoples. A study of the hundreds of references to people groups in Scripture reveals a clear theme: **God loves all the peoples of the earth and desires that they become His people.**

Consider with me some of the ways God expresses His love to the peoples of the earth.

1. By blessing them

God declared His intention to bless all the peoples of the earth in Genesis 12:3. Speaking to Abram, He said "...all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." The preceding verses reveal God's chosen method of blessing: "The Lord had said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.'" (Gen. 12:1-2)

While the call of Abraham was in one sense a unique event, it reveals a pattern we see repeated throughout the pages of Scripture—and even to the present time: God calls out an individual, blesses him, and then makes him or her a blessing to others.

As Christians, it is critical that we understand this. God has called us out of



Paul Hattaway

our separate ethnic groups to be His people. He has blessed us, and intends that we in turn be a blessing to all the peoples of the earth. That clearly includes the minorities of China who are desperately in need of the blessing that only the people of God can bring them.

2. By judging them

This seems strange to us. How does judgement show love? Yet the Scriptures make it very clear that God's judgement of the peoples of the earth is an expression of His love for them.

The Psalms declare that God will judge the nations in righteousness, justice, truth, and equity (Ps. 9:8; 96:10,13; 98:9; 110:6). God expresses His love for the peoples of the earth by putting things right. How the minorities of China would welcome this message, if only they could hear it! Throughout their history many of them have suffered from discrimination, oppression,

even attempts at genocide. To be sure, things are much better today for many of the minorities of China than they once were. Even so, prejudice, poverty, limited educational opportunities and other serious problems still confront many of them on a daily basis. How welcome they will find the message that God will one day judge between them and their oppressors in righteousness, justice, truth, and equity.

Someday, and it could be very soon, Jesus will return and bring justice to the peoples of the earth. Isaiah, as quoted by Matthew, prophesied, “Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.” (Matt. 12:18-21)

The first part of this prophecy has already been fulfilled. However, the last part awaits a future day for its consummation. Jesus has already come and proclaimed justice to the nations. But his message was rejected; indeed, He was Himself rejected. But that is not the end of it. He is, through us, still proclaiming justice to the nations, and one day He will return to judge them, leading justice to victory. Should we not share this message with the minorities of China?

3. By redeeming them

Isaiah 25:6-8 says, “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The Lord has spoken.”

What a contrast! In the verses we have just considered, we see Christ coming to judge the peoples of the earth; here we see him spreading a

banquet table for them.

But notice where the feast is to be provided: “On this mountain.” What mountain? To answer that question we need to go back to Genesis 22 to the account of Abraham’s journey to a mountain in the region of Moriah, to offer Isaac as a sacrifice. God had instructed him to do so, but at the last minute provided a ram as a substitute sacrifice. From that day on it became a saying in Israel, “On the mountain of the Lord it will be provided.” (Gen. 22:14) Furthermore, God declared that because Abraham had obeyed him in this matter, he would bless all people through his offspring. (Gen. 22:18)

Many years later, on a mountain called Calvary, God provided a substitutive sacrifice for us—and for all the peoples of the earth. There Jesus became our redeemer—and the redeemer of all the peoples of the earth who would put their trust in Him. As a result, the way has been cleared for all peoples to come to the great feast God has prepared for them. The shroud that envelops them has been destroyed; death itself has been defeated.

In Revelation 5:9 we are told that the saints and angels will one day sing, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.”

The price for the redemption of the nations has been paid. However, they will only experience the benefits of this redemption as they hear and respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations....” (Matt. 28:18-19). The Greek word translated “nations” here is *ethne*, from which the English word “ethnic” is derived. Our assigned task as followers of Jesus Christ is to make disciples of all the ethnic peoples of the world. That surely includes every one of the minorities of China.

Paul Hattaway challenges us to think clearly about how the command applies to the peoples of China: “The term ‘unreached people’ has circulated

around mission circles in recent years. Many people, however, do not fully understand the criteria used to determine who has been reached and who remains unreached.... The 1982 Lausanne Conference on World Evangelization defined an unreached people as:

A people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize their people group without requiring outside (cross-cultural) assistance.... Therefore a group is considered reached if it has a viable, indigenous, self-producing church movement in its midst. This means a people group has strong churches pastored by *their* own people using *their* own language, and these churches are actively evangelizing *their* people and planting daughter churches.¹

“The AD2000 Movement further defined the difference between ‘reached’ and ‘unreached’ by saying a group may be considered statistically reached if it contains more than 5% adherents to any form of Christianity, including 2% adherents to evangelical Christianity. Using this guideline, of the 491 groups profiled in *Operation China*, a mere 52 groups could be considered reached. Although the revival of Christianity in eastern and southeastern China has resulted in millions of conversions among the Han Chinese, most of western and northern China remains in complete spiritual darkness, without a glimmer of Gospel light.”²

The challenge to us is clear. We must not rest until every one of the peoples of China has been reached with the gospel and a church planting movement established within it. God’s heart for the peoples of China, including the minorities, is clear: He loves them all, and wants to give them all an opportunity to become His people. Do we share His heart in this, to the extent that we are willing to give our lives to reach them?

ENDNOTES

1. *Missions Frontiers*, April 1995.
2. Paul Hattaway, *Operation China* (UK: Pi-quant, forthcoming), Introduction.

Jim Nickel is President of the Institute of Chinese Studies in Colorado Springs, CO, an independent research and training agency committed to connecting leaders and knowledge for kingdom advance among the unreached peoples of China.

Book Review

The Untold Story

The Liberating Gospel in China, The Christian Faith among China's Minority Peoples, by Ralph R. Covell, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI, 1995. ISBN 0-8010-2595-8, \$17.99

A review by Jim Ziervogel

In the preface to his book on China's minority peoples, Dr. Ralph Covell writes, "Christian people remain fascinated with exotic China." If you are one of those who is fascinated with the exotic China, read *The Liberating Gospel in China, The Christian Faith among China's Minority Peoples*. Between the covers of this book, there are many thrilling stories of God's great work establishing the Christian faith "among China's minority peoples."

The author, Dr. Ralph Covell, first went to China in 1946 as a pioneer missionary among the Nosu people who live in a remote area of southwestern China. Then, when China's Bamboo Curtain fell in 1949, Dr. Covell and his family returned to the States. However, they did not stay in the U.S. for long before answering the call to work among the Sedig peoples—aborigine dwellers in the high mountains of northeastern Taiwan. Although now retired from Denver Seminary, where he served as professor of world missions, he still carries a burden for China's minorities and continues to do research and writing about China's minority nationalities.

The author's primary purpose is to show how the Christian faith has been a message of liberation for some of China's minority peoples. Groups of people who had been enslaved to demonic powers for centuries have been led out of their dark dungeons into God's marvelous light. Dr. Covell very effectively reveals how the Lord Jesus became the Liberator of several different people groups.

The author's second purpose is to confront the mystery of the resistance of some of these minority peoples to the Gospel. As Dr. Covell notes, "some...groups resisted Christ even more vigorously than did the Han Chinese." Why this "resistance rather than response" of peoples to follow the Lord Jesus? Throughout his book, Dr. Covell probes for and offers some answers to this mystery and sums them up in the last chapter.

As you read this book, you will find that it is well structured for the development of the author's purposes. The first chapter introduces the reader to China's minority peoples. In it, Dr. Covell takes the stance that culture, rather than race, is the criteria for exactly who is a minority. The next ten chapters each concentrate on one or two minority nationalities.

While the names of many of these minority peoples may be unfamiliar to most, one exception could be that of the Lisu people. Isobel Kuhn, with her husband John, labored among these people. In her books, she speaks of living among the Lisu as life in the "perpendicular." Dr. Covell refers to this in the title of his sixth chapter called "Evangelism on the Perpendicular Among the Lisu of Yunnan," in which he describes some of the wonders that God has performed among them.

In each of the other nine chapters, Dr. Covell recounts either the mighty wonders that God has performed among those groups responsive to the

gospel or covers the unresponsive groups. The Tibetans, Turkish Muslims, Wild Nosu of Sichuan and Chinese Hui Muslims are all groups that have strongly resisted the gospel. The author looks carefully at their histories and suggests some reasons for their resistance.

Throughout this book, you will find threads of missiological strategy, observations and principles. These will prove to be excellent resources for those who are taking the "liberating gospel" to China. For those who teach missions, there is good material for interacting with students. Without a

doubt, the author's telling "stories that have never been told anywhere" comes from the wealth of research that he has obviously so diligently accomplished. Herein lies the greatest strength of his work.

Another strength is the presentation of the "big picture" of pioneer missionary work among the far away people hidden in China's re-

mote areas. It is very common for authors to research and report on the work of their mission, but Dr. Covell has researched many archives and files including those of the Roman-Catholic mission in China. Also, note his excellent footnotes and bibliography that are very useful resources.

Perhaps we should ask, "What is missing from such a superb work?" Those that are on the cutting edge of mission leadership will want to see and hear about the unofficial minority groups—some of which are hiding under the umbrella of official groups—which are now being discovered. While there is debate regarding the placement of these peoples, each with their own language and culture, they too need to hear the liberating gospel in their heart language.

Jim Ziervogel is the founder of the Institute of Chinese Studies (Colorado Springs) and has researched the unreached peoples of China for more than 20 years.



Charting the Future of China's Ethnic Minorities

On the table directly opposite my desk sits a wedding portrait of my wife, Jasmine.

To many who come into my office, this picture is all they know of my wife. Beautiful, even stunning, in her white satin gown against a background of floral bouquets, her lovely smile shining radiantly out from the silver and gold frame—the portrait certainly gives my visitors a glimpse of how special Jasmine is.

To really know her, however, they would have to meet her personally. Only then would they have a sense of her character, her aspirations, her hopes and dreams for life. The wedding picture, taken on a beautiful July afternoon nearly nine years ago, tells something of where Jasmine has been, but only by meeting her would one be able to know where she is going.

During the past decades researchers (several of whom are featured in this issue) have spent countless hours studying China's ethnic minorities. Detailed profiles of many are now available. Through these profiles we can learn much about their histories,

their cultures and customs, their religious beliefs and practices, where they live, even how they dress and what they like to eat. Such information is invaluable to those who seek to understand these peoples and share the love of Christ among them.

Yet, like my wife's wedding portrait, these profiles give, at best, only a partial image of the peoples they aim to represent.

Photos and printed words are static. Peoples are dynamic. To adequately engage the peoples of China in this new century requires a research agenda that not only addresses the peoples

as they have been but also anticipates how they are likely to change given the myriad forces currently transforming China.

Consider, for example:

* The shift of China's population from the countryside to established urban centers and newly emerging cities will loosen existing social ties and loyalties, exposing hitherto isolated minority populations to massive forces for change.

* Key members of minority communities are not necessarily found in traditional minority areas but may live in major cities where, as students,

entrepreneurs or officials, they serve as informal conduits of information and resources.

* Television, VCD's and the Internet are linking ethnic minorities not only to the rest of China but also to the world beyond, hastening their assimilation into a rapidly developing global culture.

* Minority status and poverty often go hand in hand, as Huo Shui points out in this issue of *ChinaSource*. China's growing gap between rich and poor will have an inordinate effect upon the ethnic minorities.

Each of these examples raises obvious questions about how best to serve among China's minority peoples. Many more factors could be listed that will shape the future of these peoples in this new century. Unless we begin now to think seriously about the implications of these dynamics, we may be left with strategies that are appropriate for peoples that exist only on paper.

Understanding where China's ethnic minorities have come from is important. Equally important is understanding where they are going.

Brent Fulton is the Executive Director of *ChinaSource* and Editor of the *ChinaSource* journal.



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Wheaton, IL 60187

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