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JILI ZHU

Han Jie (1894-1960): a Christian and  
intellectual Miao



Jili Zhu  
*Han Jie (1894-1960): a Christian and intellectual Miao*

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## Abstract

This paper examines Miao identity and Miao ethnic relations through the biography of Han Jie (韩杰), a native missionary who was instrumental in setting up educational institutions for the Miao minority during the period of the Republic of China. Han Jie belonged to the Flower Miao, a sub-group of the Miao in southwest China. Flower Miao identity arose through a history of migrations whereby the Miao fled from oppression and problematic relations with their feudal overlords. When foreign missionaries began to evangelize among the Miao in the early twentieth century, they emphasized education and set up numerous schools to teach literacy. Learning literacy was not just an educational achievement, it allowed the Miao to imagine that they could have a better future and be more than just poor farmers. Han Jie belonged to the first generation of graduates of Miao Christian schools, and he went on to set up more schools in remote areas, thus spreading literacy among poor Miao. Han Jie's insight was that the Miao people needed an independent, self-reliant church. Accordingly he poured his energy into increasing the sense of autonomy among the Flower Miao through evangelization and education. I argue that the history of religious proselytization transformed the Miao, their relations with their church ultimately determining their relations with the Chinese state as well. Thus Christian evangelization played a pivotal role in shaping Miao identity under the Nationalist regime of the Republic of China.

**Keywords:** flower Miao, missionary, identity.

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## Introduction

In 1807, Robert Morrison took a ship from the United States across the Pacific and landed in Guangzhou. Scholars of the history of Christianity generally consider the moment of his arrival as the beginning of Protestantism in China.<sup>1</sup> Over the next 150 years, up to the beginning of the People's Republic of China, Protestant evangelism changed the landscape of religion in many parts of the country. This was particularly the case in areas like Yunnan, Guangxi and Guizhou, where Protestant evangelists made great efforts to convert ethnic minority populations. For the Miao, Protestant Christianity became a defining aspect of their identity as an ethnic minority and of their interactions with foreigners and the state. This article looks at the history of Christianity in southwest China through the life of one of the earliest Miao Christians and intellectuals, Han Jie (韩杰), who converted to Protestantism after coming into contact with foreign missionaries. Han's story reveals the complex relationship between identity and religion among Chinese ethnic minorities in the first half of the twentieth century.

## Who was Han Jie?

**It has been more than a hundred years since Christianity was introduced to Miao communities. Han Jie was the only individual who was involved with the three denominations in the first and second generations of Miao Christians during the first half of the twentieth century. He not only set up church schools, he also finished writing his *A Brief History of the Flower Miao* in 1939. He was the first person to write a history of the Flower Miao from an indigenous perspective.**

Han Jie was born in Changhaizi (长海子) in Weining county, Guizhou Province, in 1894. His father was a locally famous master of the *lusheng*<sup>2</sup> and was thus often invited to take part in all kinds of Miao ceremonies of worship, rituals and other

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1 See, e.g., Yaohui Xiao 肖耀辉 and Dingyin Liu 刘鼎寅, 云南基督教史 [The History of Christianity in Yunnan] (Kunming: Yunnan University Press 云南大学出版社, 2007, 11.

2 “The *lusheng* [芦笙] is a Hmong musical instrument with multiple bamboo pipes, each fitted with a free reed, which are fitted into a long blowing tube made of hardwood. . . . The *lusheng* is used primarily in the rural regions of southwestern China (e.g. Guizhou, Guangxi, and Yunnan) and in nearby countries such as Laos and Vietnam, where it is played by such ethnic groups as the Miao or Hmong and Dong.” *Wikipedia*, s.v. “Lusheng,” last modified June 29, 2014, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lusheng>.

activities. At that time, the Miao believed that everything in the world has a soul and that these souls are immortal. A Hmao animism mainly consists of the worship of ancestors, nature and *guishen* (鬼神, ghosts and gods).<sup>3</sup> Han's family was a typically poor Miao family that had inherited Miao traditional culture and had migrated from the northeast of Yunnan in the 1800s because of the political turmoil in that region. Fortunately, he was young at a pivotal moment in Miao history, when formal education was becoming available to children from ordinary families thanks to the new schools being set up by foreign churches. Furthermore, new Protestant institutions in China needed native teachers and missionaries to support their rapid growth, so Han, in joining them at this crucial moment, had an opportunity to rise through the ranks quickly, taking on increasing responsibilities. In 1906 he completed his primary education at the Changhaizi school of the church at Shimenkan, which was run by Samuel Pollard (柏格理) of the Bible Christian Church.<sup>4</sup> Thereafter his education and career always took place within Christian churches. He graduated from Shimenkan's senior primary school (the equivalent of today's middle school) in 1911. As an early graduate of the newly created missionary education system, he took part in the "Miao Teaching Miao" (以苗教苗) campaign, Pollard having sent him to teach and manage schools in a Yi ethnic area in Yunnan Province. In 1915, Han married a Miao woman from Weining called Zhang. In 1922, the China Inland Mission (CIM) employed him as a teacher at the Xinshao church in Xundian, Yunnan. The next year, Han and two other Miao set up the Miao Self-Reliant Church (苗族自立会). In 1932, he converted to Seventh-Day Adventism and became a pioneer of Adventist evangelism in Miao areas of Yunnan.

In 1939, Han wrote *A Brief History of the Flower Miao* in classical Chinese, employing a traditional style of Chinese historiography. The original book was handwritten with a calligraphy brush and divided into twelve chapters with a total of more than twenty thousand characters. It begins with the story of the origins of the Flower Miao and their migration from north to south, then analyzes the reasons for their failures and summarizes the lessons of wars and other past events. Thereafter, the author details the history of the relationship between the Flower Miao and the

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3 楚雄州人大、楚雄州民委 [Chuxiong Zhou People's Congress, Chuxiong Ethnic Affairs Commission], 楚雄苗族史略 [Brief History of the Miao in Chunxiong] (Kunming: 云南民族出版社 [Yunnan Nationalities Publishing House], 2005, 157.

4 The Bible Christian Church was a Methodist denomination that entered Yunnan Province in 1883. It used this name until it merged with other Methodist denominations in 1907.



Yi aristocracy in western Guizhou under the chieftaincy and *tumu*<sup>5</sup> rule in the late Qing dynasty. The book also describes the traditional religious rites of the Flower Miao and introduces the process and social effects of Christian evangelism among them. The education that permitted Han to write the book and his self-conscious perspective on Miao cultural politics are both intimately bound up with his involvement in the Christian church.

Han was thus the first person to write a history of the Flower Miao from an indigenuous perspective. He is also the only Miao to have been involved with Methodist missionaries, the CIM, the Miao Self-Reliant Church and the Seventh-Day Adventists. His *A Brief History of the Flower Miao* was preserved by his family and formally published only in 2013. Ming Cang, Professor of History at Minzu University of China, has described Han as “the pioneer of preaching and running schools in Miao areas in Yunnan, and also the most influential religious figure before the founding of the new China in the Miao areas of northern Yunnan.”<sup>6</sup>

## Samuel Pollard and the Flower Miao

To understand how Han emerged as an important figure in Miao Christianity and education, it is necessary to examine the history of Protestant evangelism in southwest China and the way in which Samuel Pollard developed religious networks by setting up schools alongside churches. This had a lasting impact on ethnic minorities, some of whom had had no previous exposure to formal education. Many Flower Miao came to understand their history and the value of their culture better through this education, and awareness of Flower Miao ethnic and national identity began to awaken.

Han states that “the Miao settled in the Central Plain earlier than the Han Chinese. Because of wars and political strife, they migrated extensively within China.”<sup>7</sup> It is said that, more than five thousand years ago, Chi You, a Miao ancestor, often fought with the tribal unions of Huangdi and Yandi, Han ancestors, in disputes over land.

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5 *Tumu* were tribal leaders in the tributary system linking the Ming dynasty and Mongolia, an important part of the overall tributary system in the Ming period. This was a significant tool for dealing with the relationship between the Ming court and Mongolia and is a testament of their close relations.

6 Ming Cang 铭苍, Preface to Han Jie 韩杰, *花苗史略* [A Brief History of the Flower Miao] (Beijing: 中央民族大学出版社 [Central University for Nationalities Press], 2013, 2.

7 Han 韩, *花苗史略* [Brief History of the Flower Miao], 43.

After Chi You was defeated and killed at the Battle of Zhuolu, at the beginning of China's history, the Miao were forced to move further south and west. In this process of long-term migration, the Miao were oppressed by the ruling classes, mainly composed of Han people, and pushed to the edges of society by its mainstream. In this case, the edge was the mountainous areas in southwest China, beyond the cities. During the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Flower Miao moved from the south of Sichuan to mountainous areas in northeast Yunnan and west Guizhou, which were mainly controlled by the Yi ethnic group and their Han landlords. In their long history of migration, they could neither participate in classical Chinese education nor find a place on the political stage. When Han Jie was a child, the Flower Miao in western Guizhou were still being exploited by their lords.

With the spread of Protestant Christianity in China, beginning in the late nineteenth century, the CIM in 1903 and the Bible Christian Church in 1904 were the first denominations to become active in minority regions of the southwest and thus the first to make contact with Flower Miao in Guizhou, Yunnan and Sichuan. They concentrated many of their efforts in encouraging literacy, which had profound effects on the Miao.

On June 25, 1865, James Hudson Taylor (1832-1905), a British missionary, founded the CIM,<sup>8</sup> the only missionary organization to set up its headquarters in China. In the late nineteenth century, it started to focus on ethnic minorities in southwest China.<sup>9</sup> As early as 1877, CIM missionaries were sent to preach in Guizhou. In 1888, a British CIM missionary, James Adam (党居仁), arrived in Anshun in western Guizhou Province, thus becoming the first western missionary to preach to the Flower Miao of southwest China. Adam then sent the Flower Miao who lived far from Anshun to his British colleague in the Bible Christian Church: on July 12, 1904, four Miao with an introduction from Adam visited Samuel Pollard in Zhaotong. Pollard taught them using a simple text, *Good Words to Persuade the World*,<sup>10</sup> and over the next three or four days slowly began to instruct them about Jesus. This was the first time that Pollard had met any Flower Miao, in spite of having done missionary work in Zhaotong for more than ten years. He wrote in his diary on July 12, 1904, "They were very

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8 It was renamed the Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) in 1964 and OMF International in 1993.

9 Wang Zhixin 王治心, *中国基督教史纲* [The History of Christianity in China] (Shanghai: 上海古籍出版社 [Shanghai Ancient Books Publishing House], 2011), 188.

10 *劝世良言*, by Liang Fa (梁发, 1789-1855), the first Chinese Protestant minister and evangelist.

much in earnest in learning to read.”<sup>11</sup> Afterwards, the story of the four Flower Miao who had met Pollard spread throughout the Yunnan-Guizhou Miao area, and Miao flocked to Zhaotong to visit Pollard, thousands of those living in the mountains following him to hear him preach.

These stories of Flower Miao looking for missionaries have a common point. The beginnings of the stories, the reason for seeking out the missionaries, is to learn to read, or to have a chance to study. China has a history of formal education stretching back thousands of years, but the Miao lacked access to it.

To carry out missionary work more conveniently throughout the Miao region, Pollard left Zhaotong and established a church in Shimenkan, on the borders of Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou Provinces. “In June 1905, Miao donated one million wen to build the Shimenkan church and school. Miao people did the majority of the building work.”<sup>12</sup> The church at Shimenkan was completed by the end of October, a spacious and beautiful building that can accommodate about 350 people. A dormitory was then added to serve the school. The school itself opened a few months later and quickly recruited more than a hundred students. Shimenkan’s church and school were the first such institutions for the Miao in the Wumeng Mountains. The school chose the *Three Character Classic*, a typical Chinese educational text, to use as the first textbook that students would read. The church paid the printing costs. “As for initial enlightenment, the Gospel was read, and Genesis and Exodus were taught. After that the senior class started with *Enlightenment Access* [蒙学捷径], written by Wang Hengtong [王亨通], as the textbook. This book could really assist the children’s reading, and it was an appropriate book for children.”<sup>13</sup>

At the end of 1905, Pollard had numerous discussions with Miao representatives like Wang Daoyuan (王道元) and Yang Yage (杨雅阁) and began to draft an alphabet inspired by Flower Miao clothing designs, skirt patterns and tools. He then studied with Yang and Li Sitifan (李司提反) for a month and used British missionary methods of tone marking together with the new symbols to create the Miao script of Shimenkan, called “the Pollard script” or “Pollard Miao.” The creation of the Miao script had far-reaching significance. Missionaries could translate the Bible and related religious texts into Miao and also communicate better with the Miao. Also,

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11 Norma Diamond, “Christianity and the Hua Miao: Writing and Power,” in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, edited by Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 142.

12 Ibid., 43.

13 Ibid., 47.

the Miao could record their own history and culture. In the early grades of the school system, “the script was the medium for teaching basic science and general knowledge along with religious concepts. It was a guide to the pronunciation of standard Mandarin Chinese and the pronunciation and meaning of the Chinese ideographs learned in the higher grades.”<sup>14</sup>

After Shimenkan’s central church school had been completed, Pollard began to establish branches in peripheral areas. He set up one of the first branch schools outside Shimenkan in Changhaizi, where Han Jie was born, about two hundred miles south of the church at Shimenkan. The school was completed on June 10, 1906, and Pollard sent an outstanding Han (汉族) teacher, Zhong Huanran, who had worked with him for many years, to teach there. His rigorous teaching methods laid down a solid Chinese-language foundation for Miao students. Some outstanding Miao students—Han Jie, Luo Peiran, Wang Ying and Zhang Ren—were among the first group of graduates of the Changhaizi primary school. In 1907, the Methodist Missionary Society (MMS), to which Pollard belonged, established a joint university in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, with several small churches.

In 1908, the MMS held two training courses in the Miao script, each lasting several months, with nearly four hundred trainees in total. Later, the Miao script was officially studied for two hours a week in schools. The Shimenkan church school became the first bilingual school in China and the first Chinese school that girls could attend. As long as there were Miao people, there would be a church and a school together.

The system of branch churches subsequently expanded around Zhaotong, Ludian, Yanjin, Dagan, Yongshan and Zhenxiong, areas mainly inhabited by Flower Miao. This led to churches becoming standard in Flower Miao communities. In 1910, Pollard established the Miaojiang Ministry of Education Committee of the Christian Association, Southwest Parish, in Shimenkan’s Guanghua primary school. All the branch schools of the Guanghua primary school were sequentially numbered, and it arranged their teaching materials, curriculum and graduation examinations.

In 1911, because of the continuous expansion of churches and schools, Pollard began to send out the first excellent graduates as preachers and teachers to Miao areas in all three provinces that the Southwest Parish covered. The “Miao Teaching Miao” method helped to solve the problem of the shortage of clergy and stoked Miao interest in evangelism and education. Han Jie graduated from Guanghua Pri-

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14 Ibid.

mary School in 1911, and Pollard sent him to Xundian, an ethnically Yi area in Yunnan Province.

Colin Mackerras has written, “Despite their general failure to win converts among China’s minorities, the Christian missionaries were very active in the field of education. Their role as educational innovators was their chief accomplishment, especially in the first half of the twentieth century.”<sup>15</sup> However, CIM and MMS missionaries had great success in Miao areas not only in education but also in achieving conversions. These achievements were inseparable from the special history of the Miao, including the particulars of their encounter with Christianity.

During an outbreak of typhoid in the Shimenkan area, Pollard became infected after tending to some of his students, and he died in September 1915. It is clear from articles about him and from Han’s records that Pollard’s personal qualities had a huge influence on the spread of the Bible Christian Church in Flower Miao regions in Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan, not least his sensitivity to local customs and the fact that he learned the Flower Miao language. Han describes Pollard as dedicated and determined in his work. Han also wrote about Pollard’s involvement in the political events of the era and the emphasis he placed on the active participation and recognition of the Miao in the new Chinese republic:

During the Xinhai Revolution,<sup>16</sup> Pollard took the opportunity to guide the patriotic enthusiasm of the Flower Miao. He arranged for Zhong Huanran to promote fundraising, while encouraging students to make publicity that would mobilize the Miao to donate money to the revolution. Eventually, the entire [Shimenkan church] school raised more than five hundred yuan to help Yunnan. Although it was a tiny part [of the total donations], it proved that Miao people also loved their country; without the guidance of Reverend Pollard, Miao people would not have known how to do that. It can be seen that Christ cares not only for the kingdom of heaven but also for the earthly world; this was what Pastor Pollard persuaded Miao people to do.<sup>17</sup>

These acts of Pollard’s greatly influenced Han. First, this was the first time that the Flower Miao had been included in a country. They could now contribute to the new country themselves, and they became aware of new social responsibilities and

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15 Colin Mackerras, “Religion and the Education of China’s Minorities,” in *China’s National Minority Education: Culture, Schooling, and Development*, edited by Gerard A. Postiglione (Routledge, 2013), 28.

16 Also known as the Hsin-hai Revolution, the Revolution of 1911 or the Chinese Revolution, it overthrew China’s last imperial dynasty (the Qing) and established the Republic of China.

17 Han 韩, *花苗史略* [Brief History of the Flower Miao], 59.

obligations. Secondly, Pollard's actions emphasized the point that Christians should participate in social activities in "the earthly world." A national identity and a sense of the value of social activities sprouted in Han's mind. "Pollard encouraged his students when the [Shimenkan church] school was established, saying, 'You should read more books, and you will soon be teachers.' The church trained forty to fifty teachers in less than ten years."<sup>18</sup> The project of "Miao Teaching Miao," which Pollard led, made a great contribution to Miao society. Under the Republic of China (ROC), the church schools' modern, Western-style education system produced the first three doctors and the first batch of university students in the Flower Miao area.

In the early ROC, some people said that the Miao needed to assimilate to Han Chinese society in order to develop. Pollard argued the opposite: "No, this is China, which is composed of multiple ethnic groups. I am concerned that there are no Miao people in government positions now that the central government has been established. The Miao are an ancient, indigenous people of China, who have existed for many years and should not perish. You must not bring about your own destruction!"<sup>19</sup> From then on, many Flower Miao people better understood their history and the value of their culture. The consciousness of Flower Miao ethnic identity began to wake up.

## Han's experience of running schools

**This section deals with Han's experience of running schools through Christian conversion, the connections between his early experiences with different Protestant dominations, his later activities in running schools, his sense of identity as a Flower Miao intellectual, and his contributions to cultivating Miao talent in the years of the Republic of China.**

Before Pollard died, he made plans to spread Christianity throughout the Miao region based on the successful example of the Shimenkan church. In 1906 he went to Wuding, Yunnan, to lead a vaccination campaign, and the next year he helped to establish a church in Sapushan, Wuding county, a central location in the area inhabited by the Flower Miao, with a missionary from the CIM, Arthur G. Nicholls (郭秀峰).

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18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.



When Pollard passed away in 1915, Han went back to Shimenkan before returning to work in the Yi region of Xundian in Yunnan. When, in 1920, he was invited to teach in the Xinshao (新哨) church, the area was under the charge of H. Parker, the son-in-law of H.A.G. Allen, Director of CIM headquarters in Yunnan. One day in August 1921, local bandits kidnapped Parker. The payment of his ransom and internal disputes in the church, which were not dealt with over the following months, caused church affairs to stagnate. For Han, this meant no salary and no work.

At that time, the CIM's church in Dashuijing (大水井), which was not far from Xinshao, learned that Han was Pollard's student and that he had taught in Xundian for many years, so it engaged him as a teacher. Until then, Han had always taught among Yi, never having had the chance to teach among Miao, so he gladly accepted the invitation.

In Dashuijing he met Wang Youdao, a Miao from Shihuaqing (柿花箐). Han's *Family History* records that he, Wang and Zhang Yifu often discussed the situation of the Miao churches in central Yunnan. All of them felt that the Methodist church and the CIM had divided the Flower Miao between different canons, creeds and management. In addition, the CIM, which employed the Sapushan church in Wuding as the center of its evangelism in the region, divided its activities among different ethnic groups, hindering friendly communications between them.

After Parker was kidnapped in Xinshao, no one came to manage the work in the area. And, with Dashuijing's church being caught in the demarcation dispute between the Methodist church and the CIM, the situation was as stagnant there as it was in Xinshao. Thus, Han proposed that the Dashuijing church could manage and develop itself, and in 1922 he, Wang and Zhang built a church of and for the Miao. Han called it the Love Church (爱救会), referring to the love of Christ. The next year, it was renamed the Miao Self-Reliant Church.<sup>20</sup> Han was the president, Zhang the vice-president and Wang a teacher.<sup>21</sup>

After setting up this church, they met with numerous difficulties. They went to Miao villages to raise funds, but they had to make it clear that this church was different from others, being founded especially for the Miao, and they asked people to give some money or other support to help run the school and promote Miao education. In the beginning, some believers provided money and food for the church and

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20 楚雄州民委 [Chuxiong Ethnic Affairs Commission], 楚雄苗族史略 [Brief History of the Miao in Chunxiong], 178.

21 Han Xingde 韩兴德 and Han Xingzhi 韩兴智, 韩杰家史 [Family History of Han Jie] (1990), 8. This manuscript is in the possession of the Han family.

the school, but those supplies ran out. After that, Han made contact with a pastor named Xie—a member of the Self-Reliant Church in Kunming, a church of Han people—and got goods from her on credit, expecting to increase church revenues through trade. Within a year, however, the Miao Self-Reliant Church was disbanded because of difficulties in running the school and management disputes.

By 1923, Han knew that the Miao Self-Reliant Church would be dissolved. He took Ducai, his second son, and wandered everywhere carrying their luggage and books in order to promote education. He and Ducai stayed many days in Luoci (罗次) and Fumin (富民) trying to raise funds and visiting almost every Miao village in the area.

Although the school for which Han was trying to raise money was linked to the church, its ultimate goal was to produce not only Christian but also – as the name “Self-Reliant Church” suggests – “self-sustaining, self-reliant, self-preaching” (自立, 自养, 自传) students to improve the status of the Miao through education. At this period, the CIM’s educational and evangelical efforts were primarily directed to the poor; it lacked access to elites and could not improve the political status of its Miao students. The Methodist mission had the same problem, although its missionaries seemed to be aware of the issue and sent some of their outstanding graduates to study in other provinces. On graduating, some of them returned to Shimenkan, while the rest remained where they had done their higher studies. Finding jobs and being able to take part in economic and political activities were widespread problems for graduates of church schools in the Christian Miao community. Han’s efforts must be seen in this context, that is, as an attempt to provide social, economic and political improvements to the Miao through modern education. In 1928 he was able to move forward with this dream when he received an invitation to develop a school in Zhebei Yuanjia village (者北袁家村) in Fumin county.

Han named the school “Dalongtan” after a cool spring nearby. He started to recruit students and used the *Three Character Classic* as a textbook at the beginning of their education, as was the case at the Shimenkan church school. He taught the Han language, not only speaking but also writing. To overcome their lack of communication with the outside world, Han encouraged his students to speak the Han language. Later, when they had some basic knowledge, he showed them how to fill out some practical official documents and taught them the Shimenkan Miao script. With its help, he could explain more history and science to his students. He ardently loved printing works for the Flower Miao, and such textbooks and a book of songs served as publicity for his ideas about education.



To raise the funds for printing, paper and chalk, Han visited Pastor Xie. She introduced him to Pastor C.B. Miller of the Seventh-Day Adventists, who encouraged Han and invited him to study the Bible with the Adventists. With their help, and with Han leading the way, the construction of Dalongtan's church and the school at Fumin was completed. Later, the number of Han's students gradually increased. Some Miao from nearby Wuding, Luoci and other Miao areas were suffering kidnappings and other injustices, and they requested help from Dalongtan. They asked Han to write complaints to the court, which he did, and the government successfully resolved most cases. This made Han well known in the area and attracted new Miao followers to the Adventist faith. Several more Adventist churches and schools were established in Miao villages in the area.

After that, Han became more active and enthusiastic in teaching and preaching religion to Miao. In 1933, the then director of the Seventh-Day Adventists' West China Union, Claude B. Miller, said, "The work to the north of Yunnanfu is chiefly among the 'Big Flower' Miao. At present two-thirds of our membership is from this district. . . . We are glad to report real progress in our Miao printing work. . . . We are sure they will be able to fill a great need in the work in Yunnan."<sup>22</sup>

In 1934, the Adventists of Yunnan notified Han and Long Changde that they had been chosen to take part in a summer teacher-training course organized in Nanjing by the Adventists' Shanghai headquarters. Han began to write *A Brief History of the Flower Miao* the following year. By the end of 1939 he had completed twelve chapters, totaling more than twenty thousand words, of *A Brief History of the Flower Miao*. In this book he wrote, "Nowhere do we find the study of the history of our people, the Flower Miao. We depend only on ancient legend and memory to record [our past]."<sup>23</sup> Although he did not have access to modern scholarship, recent Chinese academic research supports Han's description of the northern origins of the Miao and their southward migration. His sources were instead fairy tales and historical legends passed down through Miao oral tradition. Han referred to himself as a "Flower Miao" in his book. Ming Cang points out that "Han Jie used the term 'Miao zu [nationality]' (苗族) in the book instead of 'Miao' (苗) or 'Miao min [people]' (苗民). . . . This was unusual in the 1930s and reflected his strong sense of ethnic identity and his ethnic perspective."<sup>24</sup> Though the Miao have a long history, there is

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22 Claude B. Miller, "Yunnan Mission of Seventh-day Adventists," *China Division Reporter* 3, no. 8 (July-August 1933): 13.

23 Han 韩, *花苗史略* [Brief History of the Flower Miao], 43.

24 Ming 铭, in preface to *ibid.*, 17.

little information on them in Chinese historical sources. The narrative of their history in Han's book shows their strong national identity. He wrote, "Now we are at the new time of different nationalities, with the right to make our own decisions. Furthermore, the unity of nationalities is essential for our country. All Miao people of different branches should come together as a whole to help other nationalities build our motherland. This is exactly what all of us expect."<sup>25</sup>

During this period, Han also composed a lot of Miao songs. In the song "Hurry Up, Miao People!" (苗族, 赶快起来), he wrote, "In 1904, when the Miao first believed in Christ, we started to read and to learn about world events. From then on, great changes happened to the Miao. We learn more, and we can have more hope."<sup>26</sup>

In 1941, Fumin's government held a student sport meet, and the Shiyu primary school's excellence in team competitions won it the "Light of the Nationality (民族之光)" flag. This success made the school famous throughout central Yunnan. In March 1946, its name within the church changed from Dalongtan Children's Life Society to Central Yunnan Children's Life Society. This was a golden era for Adventist schools in Miao communities. After Han had joined the Adventists in Kunming in 1932, he set up churches and schools in Fumin, Xundian, Luquan, Wuding, Lufeng and Anning counties. Around Kunming there were a total of thirteen schools and churches supported by the Adventists. Excellent students, such as Yuan Dexian, Zhang Deying, Yuan Kaidao and Pan Fucheng, who had graduated from Han's primary schools, later became teachers themselves. From 1928 to 1952, eleven classes graduated from Shiyu primary school. After the founding of the People's Republic, most of its graduates obtained positions in Fumin's schools. The Shiyu primary school became the Fourth Central Primary School in 1953, being incorporated into the central communist education system. At last, Han realized his idea of educating Miao people and training them to work outside Miao society.

Through the experience of Han Jie, we can see that the Miao taught themselves and acquired their newfound access to education through the "Miao Teaching Miao" campaign. Protestant evangelism in southwest China and its missionaries employed education as a means of spreading their religious message. They viewed literacy as the key to making Christianity accessible to ethnic minority groups in southwest China and thus made great efforts to spread literacy among those who had not previously had access to formal education. In Han Jie's view, the low social and political status

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25 Han 韩, *花苗史略* [Brief History of the Flower Miao], 43.

26 Han 韩 and Han 韩, *韩杰家史* [Family History of Han Jie], 12.

of the Miao was tied to their lack of literacy, a view that many Miao also shared. The spread of Chinese literacy among them meant that the Miao could develop a new relationship with Chinese culture and politics, but the creation of the Miao script had an even more far-reaching significance. Missionaries could translate the Bible and related religious texts into Miao and communicate better with the Miao. Also, the Miao could record their own history and culture using their own language.

## Conclusion

Han Jie was among the first Miao to receive a church education and to be involved in the movement to spread literacy throughout Miao communities. His example illustrates the fact that the ethnic minorities in Yunnan were not just the passive objects of missionary attention but rather active subjects who engaged with Christianity and identity politics in a self-conscious manner. Han reflected on and was the first to write about Miao history from an indigenous perspective. He employed the term “Miao zu” (苗族) to refer to the Miao people, suggesting that he thought about Miao identity in relation to the ethnic politics of the time (*zu* (族), also used to construct the word *nationality* ( ), implies a sense of “nationhood”). He founded the Miao Self-Reliant Church, emphasizing the importance of Miao independence and agency in Miao Christianity. Finally, his switch from Protestantism to Seventh-Day Adventism exemplifies his conscious reflections on religious doctrine and religious education.

When the People’s Republic was founded, one legacy of Christian education in China was that Miao individuals educated in church schools possessed political capital, which they had lacked under the old system. There was therefore a tension between religious education and the state, as a regime that frowned on religion and the power of foreign missionaries nevertheless created an ethnic minority elite out of people schooled in the church education system. Through Han Jie’s life, and in the encounter with Miao Christianity, we can see that the experience of conversion led to many changes going far beyond the realms of religion and education.

