

Introductory remarks on M.H. Hutton's Keh Deo writing*

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General observations

The Ge, a Hmong sub-group, is in the People's Republic of China officially defined as a part of the Miao people, one of 56 officially recognized nationalities of the country. The Ge originally lived in the western part of the Guizhou province, but were later moved to the southeast, to the Hmu area, mainly Chong'an township in Huangping county and Lushan in Kaili City, Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture 黔东南苗族侗族自治州黄平县重安镇. The reason for moving the Ge to this area was apparently a Chinese policy of using Miao soldiers to pacify other Miao groups, the so called *yi miao zhi miao* 以苗治苗. This has led to strained contacts between the Ge and the Hmu, but most of the Ge nevertheless speak Hmu as their second language.

Their self-designation is [qoŋ³³ m^hoŋ³³], but apparently the velar nasal of the first syllable is sometimes absent as in the missionary M.H. Hutton's rendering of this word in 1937, viz. 'Ko-Mpheo'. The labial stop is also present in R.A.D. Forrest's name for this people, viz. 'Mp'o', but he leaves out the prefix.¹ This fluctuation between voiceless nasal and nasal plus homorganic stop is also often observed in the Hmu or Black Miao dialect, spoken in the same area as Ge.

The Ge dialect is a variety of Hmong, i.e. the western dialect of Miao, and is officially designated as the Chong'anjiang sub-dialect.

However, the Ge do not accept to be classified as Miao, and have asked the authorities to recognize them as a separate minority. This has not yet resulted in any official recognition.

In classical Chinese sources they were referred to as the Gedou Miao 革兜苗, but this seems to be conceived as a derogatory term, and they prefer to be

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¹R.A.D. Forrest, *The Chinese Language*, London: Faber and Faber, 1965, p. 94.

called Gejia 革家 or Ge [nationality] 革族.² The missionaries used the spellings Keh Deo, Keh Do or Kehdeo for Gedou. As this group has not become recognized it tends 'not to exist' at universities and academies, and very little is to be found about it in the literature on the Miao people.

In 1937 the Ge population of Guizhou was estimated to more than 20,000,³ and according to Wang Fushi the population was about 40,000 in 1982.⁴ There are, nevertheless, different opinions about this figure, and according to Liao Ruqi, the informant of Wong How-man, a journalist from Hong Kong who travelled in these areas in 1982, the Ge population in Guizhou was then about 70,000, half of them living in the Chong'anjiang area.⁵

The emergence of Ge writing

According the *Book of A Thousand Tongues* published by the United Bible Societies, Maurice H. Hutton, an Australian missionary, had reduced the Ge language to writing by 1933, using the same spelling principles as for Hmu.⁶ The present writer has, however, found no indication that the year 1933 was of any special importance in the development of Ge writing. The first text in Ge written in the National Phonetic Script appears in the *Black Miao Hymnary*, published in 1928.⁷ Sometime around 1920 Hutton had introduced the Chinese National Phonetic Script (NPS), Chinese *zhùyīn zìmǔ* 注音字母, to replace the romanised script earlier used for writing Hmu. The NPS script was based on parts of Chinese characters and was inspired by Japanese *kana*. It had been accepted by the China Continuation Committee for use in the the missionary field 'after careful consideration by missionary experts', and a Mrs. Baller wrote in an article introducing this script to the readers of *China's Millions* in 1919.⁸ It was probably after the publication of this article that Hutton started using the NPS.

M.H. Hutton had arrived in China in 1911 and stayed there until 1937 with a furlough in 1921–1922. Hutton worked mainly at the mission station at Panghai

²This people is also presented in Wong How-man, 'Peoples of China's Far Provinces', *National Geographic*, vol. 165, no. 3 (March 1984), pp. 315–20.

³*The Book of A Thousand Tongues*, United Bible Societies, 1972, p. 224.

⁴Wang Fushi 王辅世, *Miaoyu jianzhi* 苗语简志 [Sketch on the Miao language], Peking: Minzu chubanshe, 1985, p. 106.

⁵Wong How-man, *op.cit.*, p. 317.

⁶*The Book of A Thousand Tongues*, United Bible Societies, 1972, p. 224. For a detailed description of Hutton's work among the Hmu and an analysis of the orthography, cf. Joakim Enwall, *A Myth Become Reality: History and Development of the Miao Written Language*, vol. 1, Stockholm: Institute of Oriental Languages, 1994.

⁷Hymns 241–243 with the page head 'Three Keh Deo Miao Choruses', consisting of 'Jesus is coming again', 'Keep close to Jesus' and Jno. 3:16. Cf. *Black-Miao Hymnary*, Panghai: C.I.M., 1928, p. 194.

⁸Mrs. Baller, 'The New Script', *China's Millions* (Australasian edition), Aug. 1919, p.

opened in 1896, but also in the nearby Zhenyuan during times of unrest. In the area there is a large Hmu population, but also Chinese, Buyi and Dong.

In an article published in 1935 Hutton wrote:

Praise the LORD news has come to hand from Pangsieh saying that more baptisms have taken place there – but the best and cheering news of all to us is, one of these new baptised believers is a Keh Deo tribesman. It reminds me of the nine years of prayer and work to get an entrance into that tribe and the one soul – now there are six men and I hear their wives and families are interested in the Gospel too. Praise GOD for this brother in Christ from the Keh Deo tribe recently baptised into CHRIST'S death. The LORD has been burdening my heart for these Keh Deo tribespeople without any portion of GOD'S Word in their tongue, and now I feel GOD would have me, on my return to Pangsieh, to begin translating St. Mark or St. John's Gospel into their language. Will someone please pray with me for the right Keh Deo men to help me in this work? Pray too for the translation work itself.⁹

The China Inland Mission yearbook for 1936 quoted a report by Hutton, which stated that translation work on St. Mark's and St. John's Gospels into Ge was progressing well.¹⁰ In 1936 Hutton described a visit to the Chong'anjiang out-station and mentioned that meetings for worship were held in four villages, one of which was a Ge village.¹¹ He also wrote that the colporteurs were preaching in three languages (i.e. Chinese, Hmu and Ge), and ended with: 'We have been trying to hire a Keh Deo teacher to come and teach some of us that language.'¹²

The preface of the Keh-Deo *Catechism and Hymnary*, dated Chefoo [Zhifu], October 1937, stated:

The Hymns and Choruses of this book are in the Keh-Deo Tribal Language, and are selections from the Black Miao Hymnary of Pangsieh, Kweichow, and the numbering of the Hymns tallies with the Black Miao Hymnary numbers.

The Catechism is based originally upon Mrs. Nevius' Catechism, and is also a reproduction of the Black Miao Catechism, only in the Keh-Deo tribal language, and for use in work among the Keh-Deo (Ko-Mpheo) tribal people around the Pangsieh mission station district.

⁹M.H. Hutton, 'The New Testament for the Black Miao', *China's Millions*, Nov. 1935, p. 205.

¹⁰The Province of Kweichow', *Redeeming the Time, Being the Story of Time Redeemed Amid the Evil Days of 1936*, London etc.: C.I.M, 1937, p. 45.

¹¹M.H. Hutton, 'Fruit After Many Days', *China's Millions* (Australasian edition), Sept. 1936, p. 137.

¹²M.H. Hutton, 'Fruit After Many Days', *China's Millions* (Australasian edition), Sept. 1936, p. 137.

The translation of the two gospels of St. Mark and St. John, as well as the Catechism and Hymns were accomplished by Colporteur Liao Teh Ngen and aided by Mr. Liao Ruh Yin, both of Wang Ba Village.¹³

Wangba village 望壩村 is a Ge village, located a couple of kilometres away from Chong'an township 重安鎮. According to Rev. Pan Wenguang 潘文光 of the Chong'an church, Liao Ruyin 廖如銀 stayed at Panghai for approximately half a year. Pan Wenguang further explained that Liao Ruyin and his brother, presumably the above-mentioned Liao Teh Ngen (probably Liao De'en 廖德恩), were, together with their wives and possibly also their children, the only Ge Christians, but that they ceased to believe when Hutton left. 'They believed in the missionaries and not in Jesus.'¹⁴

In 1937, Hutton nevertheless wrote that three Ge families had become believers and that one young man had been baptised.¹⁵ In 1937 Hutton described his translation work into Hmu and also mentioned the translations into Ge:

There are many other tribes of aboriginals in our district, and recently work was begun among the Keh Deo tribe. Several families have believed and we are at present here in Chefoo having St. Mark and St. John and a catechism and some hymns and choruses printed, for we have also reduced their language to writing for them.¹⁶

The Ge language

The main sources for analysing the Ge language are Hutton's own manuscript dictionary,¹⁷ with some 144 words, and Wang Fushi's *Miaoyu fangyan shengyunmu bijiao*,¹⁸ a comparative vocabulary of 600 words in nine dialects of Miao, where he lists the pronunciation of Fengxiang Village in Chong'an Commune (Huangping County) 黃平縣重安公社楓香寨, calling it the eastern sub-dialect of the Chuan-Qian-Dian dialect 川黔滇方言東部次方言. The author

¹³*Catechism and Hymnary*, Shanghai: N.B.S.S., 1937. Preface in English by M.H. Hutton.

¹⁴Pan Wenguang, personal communication, Chong'an, 13 Nov. 1990.

¹⁵M.H. Hutton, 'Steady Advancement', *China's Millions* (Australasian edition), August 1937, p. 124.

¹⁶M.H. Hutton, 'How the Message came to the Black Miao', *China's Millions*, Nov. 1937, p. 214.

¹⁷M.H. Hutton, [Black Miao (Hmu) – English dictionary, without title], 64 pp. + 38 pp, with an additional ten-page comparative vocabulary of 'English, Chinese, Black Miao, Keh lao, Keh Do, Big Flowery Miao, Neo Su and Li-su', unpublished ms. in the possession of the present writer.

¹⁸Wang Fushi 王辅世, *Miaoyu fangyan shengyunmu bijiao* 苗语方言声韵母比较 [Comparison of Miao initials and finals], Peking: Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan minzu yanjiusuo 中国社会科学院民族研究所 [Nationalities Research Institute of the C.A.S.S.], 1979.

has also consulted the unpublished field research notes from Fengxiang, recorded by Ni Gui 尼圭 (Language Committee of Guizhou) and Li Yongsui 李永燧 ([Second] Work Group [of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences]) in July 1959.¹⁹ Their informant was a Ge man called Liao Rufa 廖如發, aged 38, from Fengxiang.

According to Wang Fushi there are no vernaculars of Ge, but the informant Liao Rufa, however, stated that there are two different varieties which are mutually comprehensible, one being that of Chong'an and the other the variety of Lushan and Shibing.

Remarks on the Ge orthography

In Ge there are altogether six tones which could be indicated in an orthography which is not based on etymological tone marking principles, and only on the actually realized tones. Hutton employed six positions of tone marking with single or double dots around the syllable, a tone marking system used with the National Phonetic Script before 1922. As in Hmu, the tone marking is remarkably exact, although there exist some uncertainties regarding the tones of words appearing separately and in conjunction with other words, i.e. in tone sandhi environments. The principles for writing initials and finals are the same as those of Hmu.²⁰

Conclusions

Hutton's Ge writing was, just like his Hmu writing, a fully adequate tool for rendering the language in question and for publishing books. Nevertheless, even in the Hmu work Hutton's success was quite limited due to various factors such as the preference among the local people to learn to write Chinese rather than their own language. The emphasis of this whole missionary enterprise was solely on the religious work and much less on general education, a fact which probably accounts for part of the difference between this mission station and those in other Miao areas, where the writing systems were readily learnt by young and old alike.

It appears that Hutton became acquainted with the Ge only during the last years of his work in the Panghai area, and he had little time to devote to this new work. Before going to Zhifu in 1936 to oversee the printing of the two gospels and the hymn book in Ge only three hymns had appeared in this language, and the books published in 1937 most probably never reached the Ge area, as Zhifu was occupied by the Japanese that same year. Copies of the gospels were sent to the National Bible Society of Scotland, as this organization had financed the

¹⁹Ni Gui and Li Yongsui 尼圭, 李永燧, Diaocha jilubiao 調查記錄表 [Research note form], (informant: Liao Rufa 廖如發, July 22-27 1959), unpublished ms. kept at the Nationalities Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

²⁰Joakim Enwall, *A Myth Become Reality: History and Development of the Miao Written Language*, vol. 1, Stockholm: Institute of Oriental Languages, 1994, pp. 197-212.

publishing, and two sample copies of the hymn book were taken to Australia. The rest disappeared at that time, presumably destroyed by the invading Japanese. Thus ended the mission among the Ge, and it was never resumed by any of the missionaries active in the area between 1936, the year Hutton left Panghai, and when the missionaries were expelled from China in 1951.

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