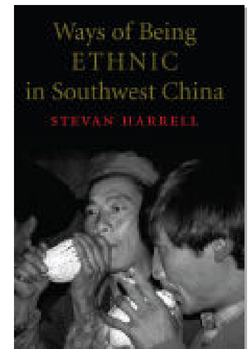
6. Mishi: A Demographically and Culturally Nuosu Community



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6 / Mishi: A Demographically and Culturally Nuosu Community

Mishi is written in Chinese with the characters meaning "rice market." It is reported by Nuosu cadres that PLA troops, coming into the area to quell the rebellion in the late 1950s, looked at the map and thought maybe it would not be such a hardship post after all; they would at least be able to buy rice to eat. Alas for them, Mbi Shy in Nuosu means "yellow leech," and there was little rice to be had. Mishi Township (*zhen*) is a real "Nuosu area" (*Nuosu muddi*). It lies in Xide County, about fourteen kilometers on a good dirt road built in the 1970s from the small railroad stop of Lianghekou, where the Chengdu-Kunming railroad emerges from its descending curlicues in the high mountains and proceeds down the river valley to Xide City. The township headquarters is a little cluster of whitewashed brick and mud buildings along a U-shaped paved street, including an elementary and a middle school, the official compound housing Party, government, and police headquarters, a small hospital, and several apartment-style buildings housing cadres, along with a few little commercial establishments. It lies at the south end of a small alluvial plain where 680 *mu*, or about 45 hectares, of rice can be grown in the wet summer season. Mishi Township is the headquarters for a grouping called a "slice district" (*pian qu*) that also includes Luoha Township, farther south on the same road, and two rural townships (*xiang*) that are not accessible by motor road—Yilu and Rekeyida. The population of the slice district as a whole is about eighteen thousand; the population of Mishi Township itself in fall 1984 was 5,782 people in 1,332 households, with a nonagricultural population of 189, including cadres, teachers, and their families, along with a few merchants who run barber shops, snack restaurants, and dry-goods stores. About fifty of the nonagricultural residents are Han, all of them merchants or teachers. All of the township cadres and police, and all of the agricultural population of all four townships are Nuosu, making Nuosu about 99.2 percent of the population of the slice area.

Mishi's is still by and large a subsistence economy. The main crops are potatoes, corn, buckwheat, and oats; people also grow a bit of soybeans, broad beans,

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and, on the scarce alluvial land, rice. Turnips, used to make pickles to put in soup, are the main vegetable; like most Nuosu, people in Mishi have little interest in green things to eat. After a long walk in the mountains, one can pull the mild, flat *voma* turnips from a trailside field and peel and eat them raw; they are cool and refreshing. Nonagricultural production is limited to two small township-owned workshops that produce indigo-dyed wool *jieshy* (pleated, unfringed wool-felt inner capes) and *vala* (woven wool-fringed outer capes), along with a spinning workshop and two small flour mills.

Electricity has lighted the homes and institutions of the township headquarters since 1992; it also reaches a few of the villages nearest to the town, all but one of them in Mishi Administrative Village (*cun*). The town had a generating station from 1979 to 1982, but they could not afford the maintenance, and it was closed down. Just up the road toward Lianghekou, a private entrepreneur, a native of the remote village of Vaha, was building a hydroelectric generating station when Bamo Ayi, Nuobu Huojy, and I lived in Mishi in October 1994, planned for completion in 1996. It has a planned capacity of 250 kilowatts, which would go a long way toward supplying the electricity needs of most of the villages in the township, but stringing the wires to those remote, roadless areas will take awhile. The entrepreneur, Qumo Vake, never went to school, but after marriage he joined the army in the 1980s and became a truck driver there. When he was discharged, he got a job driving a truck for the county government in Xide and then became the personal driver of the county magistrate. He accumulated enough money to finance a truck of his own and began to amass profits in the hauling business. He is now reported to have a large truck, plus a 4×4, of his own, and a house in Xide City worth about ¥100,000. The power station is costing about half a million *yuan*, of which Vake is reported to be putting up about ¥100,000; the rest comes from other private investors. After Vake became rich, he divorced his first wife, leaving her with their children in remote Vaha, about a three-hour walk from the road; in a brazen gesture of flamboyant upward mobility, he married a Hxiemgamo (Han woman) from Chengdu, who is reported by people in Mishi to be quite plain.

Aside from Vake, there is only one household in the township with an income of more than a few thousand *yuan* per year; they make around ¥20,000 from the commercial growing of apples and Sichuan peppercorns, or *huajiao*. Just about everyone else in the villages is an ordinary subsistence farmer. There are twelve administrative villages in the township, encompassing thirty-three cooperatives (called production teams during the period of collective agriculture) and about seventy or eighty natural hamlets (called *baga* in Nuosu and *puzi* in Chinese), though nobody has ever counted them. There are no settle-

ments on the *bazi*, and none is reached by road; the closest two are a fifteen- or twenty-minute walk—including in one case fording a shallow but swift stream—from the town. The village of Matolo, where we spent two days drinking and interviewing, is considered typical—neither rich nor poor, high nor low, close nor remote.

Matolo consists of two cooperatives and five hamlets; the closest is little more than an hour's walk up a slippery trail from the township headquarters. Village cadres told us that there were about twenty households in Matolo Cooperative and about nineteen in Tuanjie, but they were not sure, since Nuosu people move around a lot. In the old society, people lived more scattered, except when they needed to group together for defense in wartime; they clustered into tight hamlets during the period of collective agriculture and now they are dispersing again. Houses are simple, built entirely of mud walls, with wooden doors and roof frames; in Matolo most of them now have tile roofs, a sign of prosperity, in contrast to the minority whose roofs are still of thatch. Houses all have dirt floors; as you come in the door you turn to the left, and the hearth, with its three stones or andirons, sports a split-log fire, often with something cooking on it. Often there are mats to the right of the fire where the guests sit; if you are an honored guest, such as a foreigner, they may offer you a little wooden stool, but the mats are more comfortable. There are beds in the main room and sometimes in side or back rooms; much of the main room is covered by a wooden loft used to store grain, potatoes, and agricultural implements. One reported cultural change is that women are now allowed in the loft, as they were not in the old society. The oldest houses in the main hamlets of the village were built in the early 1980s.

The major crops are corn, buckwheat, potatoes, oats, and soybeans; in the past few years agriculture has been good to people, and they have been able to make a few hundred *yuan* per household per year selling surpluses on the market. They save this money or use it to buy household goods; most families have an account at the local credit cooperative. Villagers also estimated that each household is able, on the average, to kill a large pig, a couple of small pigs, a sheep or goat, and five or six chickens for meat each year; occasionally they sell a pig or some eggs, but they eat most of the latter. Otherwise, they eat potatoes and buckwheat cakes, and mostly feed the corn to pigs (who in Nuosu villages are not penned but forage around and often live inside the houses, along with dogs, cats, and chickens). Village families altogether farm only twenty-two *mu* (1.5 hectares) of rice land down on the plain, so rice is a special treat.

Very few people from Matolo have left the village economy to work for wages,

or *gongzuo*.[1] There is one boy who is now a college student, at the Southwestern Architectural College in Chongqing, and there have been three others who became cadres or workers of other kinds. The current cooperative head was in the army for awhile and speaks excellent standard Chinese, but he is now a plain farmer. Nevertheless, here as in so many villages, there is someone whose personal name is Gozuosse, a combination of the Chinese *gongzuo* with the Nuosu masculine ending. Ordinary farming people come and go as they feel like it; it is much easier to move now than it was during the period of collective agriculture.

HISTORY AND REVOLUTION

Mishi is a famous place in Nuosu history. When two branches of the *nuoho* Loho clan were forced out of Zhaojue eight or nine generations ago (probably in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century), one of the first places to which they migrated was Mishi. Later some of them moved on to Mianning and Yanyuan on the other side of the Anning Valley, but others stayed, ruling over large numbers of *quho* and slaves.

According to local oral accounts, the most famous lord in the Mishi area in the 1930s and 1940s was Loho Anyu, who was overlord of most of the current area of Mishi and Luoha Townships, and had many retainers and slaves in all the villages. He lived at the small town of Lianghekou, where he also had land and slaves, and where he became the primary Nuosu ally of the local Han warlord, Deng Xiuting (Xide Xianzhi: 456). Under him were several lesser lords of the Loho and Lomu clans, who regularly intermarried. To the east of the town, where Matolo and Jiemo (see below) villages are located, the most important petty lords were Loho Sunyi, who lived on a hill above Matolo, and who had four wives and six daughters, but no sons, and, living just below him, Loho Kavuga, who was considered very oppressive of his slaves; he was captured and executed at the time of the Democratic Reforms. Under the rule of Loho lords, *quho* and *mgajie* moved in and out of the area. For example, the great-grandfather of the current adult males of the *quho* Alur clan came about eighty years ago; they lived over a little hill from the current hamlet of Matolo. Two of his sons, however, were driven out in 1944 for unspecified reasons by Loho Anyu and settled in a mountainous area above Xichang City. Three years later,

1. For discussions of the meaning of the term *gongzuo,* see Entwistle and Henderson 2000 and Harrell 2000a.

when they had amassed the sixteen goats the lord had required of them, they returned and built another house, where they lived until 1990, after which they came to Matolo.

One of the best-known leaders of the revolt in the late 1950s also came from Mishi; he was Loho Muga, son of Loho Anyu. Upon his father's death in 1943, Muga at the age of seventeen became leader of warlord Deng Xiuting's Yi militia and also inherited much of his father's land and about seven hundred slaves.[2] In the late 1940s Muga developed close relations with local Guomindang figures and often used his power to kill local Nuosu who cooperated with the Communists. Nevertheless, in early 1953 the Communist Party attempted to win Muga over to its side, and appointed him head of the culture and education office of the newly formed county government, soon afterward sending him to the Nationalities Institute in Chengdu to study. But he returned home when his mother became ill, and never went back to school. When the democratic reforms were begun in earnest at the end of 1955, he rebelled openly, allying with rebel leaders in many parts of the county in a guerilla effort that was not put down until 1958. But even then, Muga refused to surrender, and took to the hills, where he mounted sporadic attacks on various settlements for several more years. Nuosu cadres and intellectuals, themselves beneficiaries and active supporters of the revolution, still tell tales of Loho Muga's audacity and heroism, including such deeds as his personally killing seventeen PLA soldiers, and coming into villages in broad daylight to hold open planning meetings as late as May 1964 (Xide Xianzhi 1992: 155). One of the Nuosu intellectuals with whom I discussed this period said that I should not think of the bandits as being anti-Communist; basically, they were just anti-Han. Like all the rebels, however, Loho Muga was eventually defeated: after he held his open meetings, the prefectural government organized a special "small group to eliminate the Luo bandits" and alerted residents everywhere to be on the lookout for Muga and his nephew. In December the effort paid off when Muga was spotted in the forest by a woman cutting firewood, who contacted the local army unit, which called together army and people's militia members, who surrounded Muga and killed him and his nephews in a fierce firefight (Xide Xianzhi 1992: 456–57).

At the time of the Democratic Reforms, a large number of former *mgajie*

2. The Chinese term *nuli,* or "slave," is used in the Xide gazetteer (Xide Xianzhi 1992), from which this account is taken. It is unclear, however, whether this term refers to actual *gaxy,* which would seem quite unusual, or to retainers and dependents generally, which would include *mgajie* working on the land and quite possibly also *qunuo* retainers. The latter seems more probable to me.

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and *gaxy* were liberated from their masters and formed the two villages that now lie close to the township headquarters. Some of these slaves are reputed to have been of Han origin, but none will now admit it. The two villages near the town were originally called Jiefang Cun, or Liberation Village, but that name sounds prejudicial, since to have been liberated one must have once been a slave, and slavery is something impolite to talk about in front of people who once experienced it. The villages are now called Jiemo and Vato, and are part of Mishi Administrative Village.

Some of the inhabitants of Jiemo and Vato had histories of oppression before the revolution. For example, one family of the Alur clan were slaves of Loho Kesse (*kesse* means "puppy"; I don't know if this was his formal name or a nickname) who was one of the aristocrats driven all the way across the Yalong River into Yanyuan and Muli by Deng Xiuting in the early 1940s. The man who told me the story was, along with his two brothers, orphaned in Muli, and when Deng died in 1944, Kesse returned, bringing his slaves with him, including the three boys. At the time of the Democratic Reforms, since they were orphaned slaves who previously had no home except that of the master, they settled down in what was then Liberation Village.

Two brothers of the Lama[3] family were slaves in Ningnan County, far to the east, before the Revolution. Sometime in the late 1940s, Lama Vusa and his brothers were moved to the Mishi area by the lord. Some of the family escaped back to Ningnan, but Vusa stayed here. Laqo, son of one of the escaped brothers, came to Mishi to join his uncle in the late 1980s and also settled in one of the hamlets of the former Liberation Village, now called Vato.

Vato and its twin settlement, Jiemo, close by the town, are much better off than Matolo. Village houses are noticeably larger, cleaner, and neater; they are lit by electricity and often sport Chinese-style collages of family photos on the walls, as well as cabinets and other store-bought furniture, and mosquito nets on the bed. People there drink boiled water and tea, unlike the highlanders, and their levels of education and literacy are much higher, and their incomes marginally so. These are the fruits of revolution; indeed Mishi is one of the few places I have been in China where, in the 1990s, revolution seemed still to be working; almost everywhere else, including other Nuosu communities, those who were rich before were rich again. Here the mostly *qunuo* families in Matolo still live the life of the hills, with almost no modern amenities or access to avenues of outward or upward mobility, while the former slaves down in the valley are

3. Lama is a common *quho* clan name and has nothing to do with Tibetan incarnations.

beginning, just beginning, to experience economic development. Just don't remind them that some of them may have been of Han origin.

LANGUAGE, LITERACY, AND SCHOOLING

A visit to Mishi Town on a school day would convey the impression of bustling educational life in the *Nuosu muddi*. At the primary school, the first-grade class has nearly fifty students crowded into desk space for about forty, so that some of the desks have three grubby, undersized, unwashed little tykes (the thirty-four boys sharing some desks and the sixteen girls sharing others), who thus fill up the desks intended for two. The first class of the day is language (*yuwen*), meaning Chinese. Since there are visitors today, the students first break into the Nuosu anthem, "Guests from Afar" (Sumu divi wo), and only after finishing the song do they stand for the middle-aged male teacher with the thick glasses and rumpled appearance, shouting at the top of their lungs, "Laoshi hao"(We wish you well, teacher) and then sitting down to business. After demonstrating some of the mistakes from the students' copybooks from the night before, the teacher proceeds to the day's lesson, which includes six new characters: *shang* (up, above, top, rise), *zhong* (middle, center), *xia* (down, below, bottom, sink), *da* (big), *xiao* (little), and *liao* (a perfective particle). The teacher leads the class in reciting each one in unison: "Shi-ang, shang, shi-ang, shang . . ." until he waves them off with his pointer, and they go on to "Xi-a-xia, xi-a-xia . . ." and so forth. Since the students at this time understand almost nothing of the Han language (Nuosu friends who grew up in villages typically tell me they couldn't really speak Chinese with any assurance until they were in the third or fourth grade), the teacher also explains what each character means: "*Da*, ayy nge" and so on. After he explains something or someone writes something, he asks, in Nuosu, if there are mistakes, and the class answers, in loud unison, "A jjo" (There aren't any), and they go on to the next topic.

The teacher then gives a writing assignment, telling them in Nuosu to write each character five times, and they get their dog-eared copybooks and stubby pencils out of their little shoulder bags, some of them using pocket knives to sharpen the pencils, and they set to work; the teacher strolls the room and corrects their handwriting and posture. The teacher tells us that the students have no trouble remembering how to write the characters, but they do have trouble with meaning and pronunciation, despite the repeated phonetic chants.

When the class period is over and the monitors have collected the copybooks, the class president stands, tells the students to say good-bye to the teacher, and they all yell, "Laoshi zaijian," and bolt for the door.

After recess, the same class has math. This is taught by the young school principal, who told me that first-year math was the hardest thing to teach, so he felt he ought to do it himself. He is outstanding at it. Teaching mostly but not entirely in Nuosu, he uses humor, challenge, and cajolery to get the urchins to understand addition and subtraction. Every time he asks for volunteers, hands shoot up in the air in some directions and elbows chunk down, fulcrumlike with the forearm vertical and the fingers waving, on the rickety desks in others. Most of the students work the problems on their fingers, and the teacher makes no effort to stop them. He calls on a little girl whose given name is Hxiemgamo (actually, a fairly common name) to do a problem at one side of the board, and thinks about it for a minute, then says, well, if we have a Hxiemgamo (Han woman) over here, we'd better have a Nuosumo (Nuosu woman) on the other side, and even the little urchins get the joke, since there are no actual Hxiemgamo, other than teachers, within miles of the place.

In both of these class sessions, there are four or five little punkins who are even tinier than the rest and who just sit there; they do not raise their hands, join in the chanting, or get out their copybooks to write characters or do math problems when the others do. The principal told me that most of these children are five-year-olds, whom the parents are sending to school early because they would like them to have a head start (there is no kindergarten or preschool here), or maybe because there is nobody to take care of them. He also said he thought that fourteen to sixteen of this year's students, including most of these little ones, would have to repeat the first grade next year.

There are a total of 208 students enrolled in the school; according to statistics they represent almost 70 percent of the elementary-aged children in the township, but this figure is clearly fudged, since we are also told that about 180 of the 208 students are from the two administrative villages of Mishi and Laiga, down near the *bazi*, and only about thirty come from the villages up in the mountains, of which Matolo is one of the closer ones. There are 38 girls and 170 boys.

Not everyone, however, who starts school does so in the township elementary school. Six villages have village schools, or *cunxiao*, and we visited the one in Matolo. It is a one-room mud-brick structure with no windows, only the open door and a couple of small skylights to let the daylight in, and of course no electricity (fig. 4). Until 1994 there were both first- and second-year students in the school, but now there are only first-graders, nine boys and a girl, ranging in age from six to nine. If they want to continue in the second grade next year, they will have to make the ninety-minute trip to the town. Last year, eight of the ten second-grade students continued.

There is a blackboard for the teacher to write on, but he has no desk, so he

FIG. 4. A class at the Matolo village school

puts his box of chalk on one of the students' desks in the front. He is a native of the village and a junior-high school graduate, and the villagers pay his salary as a *minban* (non-state salaried) teacher, which amounts to ¥400 per year. Under these conditions, he does a good job in language (Han) and math classes, despite great hardships. The lesson in the language class today, for example, is a text that reads, in translation:

> A big bird flies up into the sky.
> Wrong, wrong.
> It's an airplane.
>
> A big fish dives down under the sea.
> Wrong, wrong.
> It's a submarine.

For cosmopolitan, television-raised children in Shanghai or maybe even Xide City, this would be a fun lesson. But who knows what these little guys get out of it? They have probably seen airplanes flying over, but they have never seen so much as a rowboat, or a body of water larger than a mountain stream, let

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alone the ocean or a submarine. Still, they persist in a language they do not understand, and most of them will proceed down the hill the following year.

By the time these students get to the sixth grade at the Mishi school (which only about half of them do), they are fully accustomed to the culture of Chinese schools. There are two classes, or *ban*,[4] in the sixth grade, one of them an ordinary class, which is taught all in Han except for the Yi language classes, and another bilingual class (*shuangwen ban*), which uses Nuosu as the basic language for reading and writing, and as the medium of instruction for math, and uses both languages interchangeably in most of the other classes; Han language is not introduced until the third grade.

The first class of the day for the sixth-grade regular class is language, and the teacher is a twenty-year-old, pink-cheeked Han woman from nearby Mianning County, graduated only six months before from a normal school. She seems nervous, perhaps because of the presence of visitors, and teaches the text for this class, Hans Christian Andersen's story "The Little Match Girl" strictly by the book, as a realistic depiction of what life was like in the glory days of capitalism. When she calls on individual students, she walks over and knocks on their desks, seeming to have made no effort to learn any of their names. (My co-worker Bamo Ayi thought this was because Nuosu names were hard for her.) When the students are called upon to answer questions about the story, they read from the text, one syllable at a time, in exaggerated tones, as if the Han language is still a strain for them.

We then visit a Yi language class for the bilingual class. This class has nine girls out of seventeen students, and the teacher mostly explains the text without asking very many questions. He does, however, call the students by name. When they read the text individually, it sounds much more like natural speech, but when they read in unison, it sounds chanted, just like the Han texts, only with a different prosody reflecting different tonal patterns.

According to the principal and the teachers, this is the last time they will experiment with bilingual education in Mishi. It simply causes the students too much difficulty in testing into higher schools; they particularly get stuck on the differences between the *pinyin*, or romanized phonemic scripts, used to teach the two languages. Since schools tend to be evaluated according to their students' rates of testing into higher schools, having too many Yi-lan-

4. A *ban* is a group of students in a particular grade who take all of their classes together, often throughout the years they stay in a particular school. The bond between schoolmates of the same *ban (tongban tongxue)* is one of the closest non-kin bonds in Chinese society. For more on the *ban,* see Schoenhals 1993: 11-12.

TABLE 6.1
Enrollments in Mishi Middle School

Grade	*Boys*	*Girls*	TOTAL
Lower Middle 1	31	5	36
Lower Middle 2	21	7	28
Lower Middle 3	16	1	17
TOTAL	68	13	81

guage classes is an invitation to a low evaluation. Only in the four most remote townships of Xide County is bilingual education going to remain the standard policy. Left unsaid is the empirical observation, here and elsewhere, that bilingual or primarily Nuosu-language education tends to be a girl thing.

Of those who make it through to graduation, the best will test into the county middle school at Xide, and the next best to the *minzu* middle school in the town or perhaps to the vocational school at Lake in the northwestern part of the county. Some will drop out, of course, but those who want to continue but cannot test into one of the better schools will continue in Mishi Middle School, which has three grades, with the enrollments shown in table 6.1. It is more common to drop out than to graduate and not go on; a great many of those who graduate try to test into some higher school, usually a normal or vocational school.

The students learn language (sic), Yi language, mathematics, physics, chemistry, English, politics, physical education, health, history, geography, and music. We visited a second-year Yi language class, where the lesson was a poem of five-syllable lines concerning the knowledge and wisdom one could gain from one's elders, along with the reciprocal obligations of the elders in bringing up their children. The teacher conducted the class entirely in Nuosu, never using a single word of Han, and held the students' attention well (fig. 5). Bamo Ayi, who was observing with me, was impressed and proud that traditional Yi knowledge could be taught so well in a public school.

We also went to a third-year English class taught by a Han teacher from northern Sichuan who had just been sent to Mishi, having not found a job in a more desirable place. His English pronunciation and listening comprehension were not of the best; Ayi had to translate for him several times when I tried to speak to him in English. He was honest, neat, and hard-working, but I doubt the students learned much English from him. On this day, of course, whatever English they learned they learned from me.

FIG. 5. A teacher in a Yi-language class at the Mishi middle school giving a lesson on respecting one's elders

The English teacher is not the only Han instructor at the middle school; in fact five of the nine teachers, including the one woman, are Han. As in the town elementary school, it is estimated that about 80 percent of the students are from the villages down near the plain. In Jiemo, we found a large number of junior-high graduates, considerable numbers who had gone on to vocational or normal schools, and two students at the Southwest Nationalities Institute.

It would appear from the foregoing that despite the pervasiveness of the Nuosu language as the medium of everyday communication, literacy and mobility are dependent on learning Han. Mobility is, for sure, but literacy is a more complicated issue and really cannot be understood except in relationship to mobility. Bamo Ayi and I surveyed the populations of Matolo, up on the hill, and Jiemo and Vato, down by the plain, and came up with the figures in tables 6.2 and 2.3. Official figures might well show 53 percent "illiteracy" for males, and 86 percent for females, where we show 23 percent and 83 percent, respectively, because *wenmang* often means "unable to read and write the Han language," or sometimes even "did not attend school," though some official statistics include the category "self-taught," which usually still means "self-taught to read and write the Han language."

TABLE 6.2
Literacy and Language Competence by Age and Gender, Matolo

	Age 8–20	*Age 21–40*	*Age 41+*	TOTAL
1. Speaks Nuosu, no Han, no Writing				
Male	8	6	6	20
Female	21	16	24	61
TOTAL	29	22	30	81
2. Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, no Han				
Male	0	0	1	1
Female	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	0	1	1	2
3. Speaks Nuosu, speaks Han, no writing				
Male	1	0	2	3
Female	0	2	0	2
TOTAL	1	2	2	5
4. Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, speaks Han				
Male	0	3	8	11
Female	0	1	0	1
TOTAL	0	4	8	12
5. Speaks Nuosu, speaks Han, writes Han				
Male	6	2	1	9
Female	7	1	0	8
TOTAL	13	3	1	17
Literacy by Language				
Literate in both				
6. Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, speaks Han, writes Han				
Male	6 (29%)	15 (58%)	6 (25%)	27 (38%)
Female	1 (3%)	1 (2%)	1 (3%)	3 (4%)
TOTAL	7 (14%)	16 (33%)	7 (14%)	30 (20%)

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	Age 8–20	*Age 21–40*	*Age 41+*	TOTAL
Illiterate				
Groups 1, 3 (above)				
Male	9 (43%)	6 (23%)	8 (33%)	23 (32%)
Female	21 (72%)	18 (82%)	24 (96%)	63 (83%)
TOTAL	30 (60%)	24 (50%)	32 (65%)	86 (58%)
Literate in Nuosu				
Groups 2, 4, 6				
Male	6 (29%)	18 (69%)	15 (63%)	39 (55%)
Female	1 (3%)	3 (14%)	1 (4%)	5 (7%)
TOTAL	7 (14%)	21 (44%)	16 (32%)	44 (30%)
Literate in Han				
Groups 5, 6				
Male	12 (57%)	17 (65%)	7 (29%)	36 (47%)
Female	8 (28%)	2 (9%)	1 (4%)	11 (14%)
TOTAL	20 (40%)	19 (40%)	8 (16%)	47 (31%)
Han Spoken Language Ability				
No Han language				
Groups 1, 2				
Male	8 (38%)	6 (23%)	7 (29%)	21 (29%)
Female	21 (72%)	17 (77%)	24 (96%)	62 (87%)
TOTAL	29 (58%)	23 (48%)	31 (63%)	83 (56%)
Speaks Han				
Groups 3, 4, 5, 6				
Male	13 (62%)	20 (77%)	17 (71%)	50 (71%)
Female	8 (28%)	5 (23%)	1 (4%)	14 (13%)
TOTAL	21 (42%)	25 (52%)	18 (37%)	64 (44%)
Total population surveyed				
Male	21	26	24	71
Female	29	22	25	76
TOTAL	50	48	49	147

TABLE 6.3
Literacy and Language Competence by Age and Gender, Jiemo

	Age 8–20	*Age 21–40*	*Age 41+*	TOTAL
1. Speaks Nuosu, no Han, no writing				
Male	3	0	4	7
Female	12	5	13	30
TOTAL	15	5	17	37
2. Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, no Han				
Male	0	0	2	2
Female	0	0	0	0
TOTAL	0	0	2	2
3. Speaks Nuosu, speaks Han, no writing				
Male	2	2	3	7
Female	2	7	4	13
TOTAL	4	9	7	20
4. Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, speaks Han				
Male	3	1	3	7
Female	3	2	2	7
TOTAL	6	3	5	14
5. Speaks Nuosu, speaks Han, writes Han				
Male	6	10	8	24
Female	4	2	1	7
TOTAL	10	12	9	31
Literacy by Language				
6. Literate in both				
Speaks Nuosu, writes Nuosu, speaks Han, writes Han				
Male	18 (56%)	9 (41%)	7 (26%)	34 (42%)
Female	8 (28%)	2 (11%)	1 (5%)	11 (16%)
TOTAL	26 (43%)	11 (28%)	8 (17%)	45 (30%)

	Age 8–20	Age 21–40	Age 41+	TOTAL
Illiterate				
Groups 1, 3 (above)				
Male	5 (16%)	2 (9%)	7 (26%)	14 (17%)
Female	14 (48%)	12 (67%)	17 (81%)	43 (63%)
TOTAL	19 (31%)	14 (35%)	24 (50%)	57 (38%)
Literate in Nuosu				
Groups 2, 4, 6				
Male	21 (66%)	10 (45%)	12 (44%)	43 (53%)
Female	11 (37%)	4 (22%)	3 (14%)	18 (26%)
TOTAL	32 (49%)	14 (35%)	15 (31%)	61 (40%)
Literate in Han				
Groups 5, 6				
Male	24 (86%)	19 (86%)	15 (56%)	58 (72%)
Female	12 (41%)	4 (22%)	2 (10%)	18 (26%)
TOTAL	36 (59%)	23 (58%)	17 (35%)	76 (51%)
Han Spoken Language Ability				
No Han language				
Groups 1, 2				
Male	3 (9%)	0	6 (22%)	9 (11%)
Female	12 (49%)	5 (27%)	13 (86%)	30 (44%)
TOTAL	15 (17%)	5 (13%)	19 (40%)	39 (26%)
Speaks Han				
Groups 3, 4, 5, 6				
Male	29 (91%)	22 (100%)	21 (78%)	72 (89%)
Female	17 (51%)	13 (73%)	8 (38%)	38 (56%)
TOTAL	46 (83%)	35 (87%)	29 (60%)	110 (74%)
Total population surveyed				
Male	32	22	27	81
Female	29	18	21	68
TOTAL	61	40	48	149

In our own figures, we see some interesting patterns. Males are more likely at all ages to be literate in either language and to speak Han; literacy in Nuosu is either passing away or is acquired at later ages (or our figures may underestimate this slightly with the younger population, since we tended to concentrate on their school achievement). There has been, for sure, an improvement in male literacy in the Han language in the last forty years, and this undoubtedly reflects schooling. For women, the change has been less impressive, and fits with the observations that only a small minority of school children are girls. Somewhat more young women speak Han than do their mothers or grandmothers, but they are still overwhelmingly illiterate and monolingual.

The situation in Jiemo, down the hill and close to the town schools, is somewhat different, as shown in table 6.3. From careful examination of these tables, we see that the differences between Matolo and Jiemo are almost entirely in their competence in the Han language. Literacy in *Nuosu bburma* (Nuosu writing) is only slightly higher in Jiemo than in Matolo; in the younger age groups, a few more people in Jiemo are probably literate in Nuosu, because more of them go to school, and they learn Nuosu writing in school. But in the adult age groups, literacy in Nuosu is not very different—around 50 percent of the men, and only a small fraction of the women (15 percent or less) can read and write their language. This despite the fact that, as the villagers of Jiemo proudly told us, they had spontaneously been conducting their own adult literacy classes in the Nuosu language, and many women had attended them.

When we move to Han language ability, however, the differences between the two villages are striking. Male Han literacy is higher than female in every gender and age category, and Han literacy is lower in the over-forty age group than in the under-forties. But within every single gender and age category,[5] Han literacy is higher in the lowland villages. In other words, villagers of Jiemo have been able to go to school for the last thirty years, while villagers of Matolo have sent only a small number of their girls and only about two-thirds of their boys. Older women have rarely had the chance to learn to read and write in Han in either place, but in all the other categories, Jiemo villagers are more literate in the outsider language.

The same holds true for Han speaking ability, which is less closely correlated with schooling. Whereas a majority of males of all ages in both villages speak Han, the percentages are higher in Jiemo. Similarly, only a small fraction of Matolo women speak Han (13 percent), fully 56 percent of the Jiemo

5. Among women over forty, the difference is of course not significant, since there are only three such women in the two villages combined who can read and write Chinese.

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women do, and much higher percentages do in the younger age groups. Much of this ability to speak Han is correlated with Han literacy, but not all of it; there are thirty-four people in Jiemo (23 percent of the total population) who speak Han but cannot read it, and 17 more in Matolo (12 percent of the total).

All of these differences in language ability are related to mobility. Men get about more than women, and lowland villagers more than mountain villagers. Mobility means going to the city (there is a road and a daily bus from Mishi Town, only a twenty-minute walk from the two Jiemo villages), it means going out to work (recall that only four villagers from Matolo have ever held salaried positions, while there are many cadres and others from Jiemo), and it means going to school (not only is attendance at the local school higher from the villages on the plain, but many more students have gone on to further education). And even here near the heart of Liangshan, where the government is making a huge effort to promote Nuosu as a language of schooling, bureaucracy, and mass media, the real route to success outside the tiny confines of Mishi lies in learning the Han language. This is why bilingual education is being relegated by Nuosu educational bureaucrats to the four most remote townships in all of Xide.

ETHNIC CULTURE AND CRAFTS

Ethnic markers such as dress, food, and housing have very little salience in the Mishi area, because everybody is Nuosu. After living in Yanyuan and visiting Nuosu communities in Yanbian and Miyi, where ethnic identity is a mosaic of chromatic textiles, with the Nuosu women the most colorful of all, I was astonished when I first arrived in Mishi that women did not wear Nuosu-style skirts or fancy jackets except for special occasions. They certainly had them; I purchased an exquisite embroidered jacket with rabbit-fur shoulder linings from a woman in the Mishi hospital who made such things for sale; and when the hospital workers wanted me to take their pictures, they all got decked out in their finest. But for the most part, in the town and in the villages, they went about in the usual trousers and tops of ordinary Chinese rural women, with only the embroidered head-cloth tied down by the long braids of the young women, and the black high-framed headdress on the mothers and grandmothers, distinguishing the village women from what Han peasant women would look like if there were any in the area, and not even that on many of the town women who worked in the government agencies. I asked all sorts of people why women did not wear Nuosu clothes for everyday wear here, as they did in Yanyuan and other areas, and the uniform answer was that such clothes were inconvenient for field and farm work. True enough, but presumably they are

just as inconvenient, for example, for the road-building crews I saw in Malong and Guabie, which included women in pleated skirts. I think the real answer may be that there is no need for ethnic clothing to serve as an ethnic marker here, since everyone is Nuosu. Thus elaborate clothing can be saved for dress-up. Some people, both men and women, wear the *jieshy* and/or *vala* when the weather is cold, but this may be for the functional reason that these traditional garments are very warm, and at least as comfortable as the modern alternative, the green army overcoat.

Similarly, there is little fuss made about food. People eat potatoes most of the time, adding a little hot sauce and maybe drinking some sour-vegetable soup, and of course liquor when they can afford it. When guests come, they kill something, as is the custom everywhere. Housing, similarly, is a fact of life. These are certainly not Han-style houses; Nuosu people always have a hearth with three stones or andirons, an ancestral altar in an inner corner, and a half-loft above the main living area. But none of this serves as an ethnic marker; it is just how people live.

Paradoxically, however, there is one kind of ethnic marker that originates in the Mishi slice area that is less salient for the locals, because they do not need to mark their identity in any conscious way, than it is for the whole of Liangshan. This is the manufacture of red-yellow-black lacquered wooden dinnerware. It is practically impossible these days to go to an urban Nuosu household in or out of Liangshan, and increasingly rare to go even to a farm family, where there are not at least a few pieces of this dinnerware, at the very least little shot glasses for downing grain liquor. Most of the dishes are now made in a pair of factories in Xide City and one in Zhaojue City, but the tradition is reported, by the local people at least, to have begun with the Jjivo clan in the village of Apu, which lies way up in the hills about halfway between Mishi and the township headquarters of Yilu, a quite poor, roadless township to which Apu belongs administratively.

Jjivo Munyu, a member of the dishes-making clan, is now vice-magistrate of Xide County and an amateur scholar of his own family's tradition. He writes that the Jjivo clan has a history of fifteen generations of manufacturing wooden dishes in Xide. According to the clan's own oral history, the first member to create wooden tools and dishes was Jjivo Jjieshy, a particularly skilled carpenter and woodworker. Jjieshy brought back advanced tools from Han areas at that time, and carved ritual implements in the shape of dragons and other animals for *bimo* to employ in exorcistic rituals. He also applied his skills to making various household implements such as buckets, and this was the beginning of the manufacture of dishes (Jiwu n.d.: 3).

Jjieshy's great-grandson moved to a place called Vaqiemu, where the craft was refined in two ways: lacquer pigments were extracted from local sources and applied to the wooden dishes, and the pit-lathe was invented for turning the dishes out of wooden blanks (ibid.: 4). Three generations later Jjivo Abi moved his branch of the clan to the present village of Apu, where further improvements have been made, generation by generation, in the selection of wood, improvement of pigments, and refinement of the designs. Finally, the high artistic standards of the present day have been achieved under the guidance and inspiration of Jjivo Vuqie, born in 1944, who now lives in Xide City.

We visited Apu in 1994 and recorded the process of manufacture in detail in writing and photographically. The following extract from my field notes, modified slightly, describes the process:

> The wood for any of the larger dishes is of a special kind. Wild cherry, called *huagao* in Han and *ngehni* in Yi, is cut and sold in the Mishi market by people from Bajjolomo, which is east of here, and is sold by the chunk, not by weight.
>
> They also make spoons (*ichy*), but the wood for them they can cut themselves in the neighboring hills—it is rhododendron (*shuohma*).
>
> When they first buy the wood, it has to dry out; they put it in an underground place where wind doesn't get to it, so that it will dry slowly. The piece we saw was coated with dirt when they first brought it out.
>
> The dishes are turned on a lathe, called *gedde*. It consists of two wooden seats, for one man each, which they sit on while they operate two long wooden foot pedals that are transverse to the seats, which lie one behind the other. The pedals are connected by a belt, formerly made of leather but now made from the inner part of a tire, which turns the rotor.
>
> The owner of the wood, who will make the dish, first hollows out a small hole (3 cm wide, 1 cm deep) in the middle of the blank, using an adze with a concave blade, about 3 cm wide and 1 cm deep, called a *zzo*. He then inserts the pointed end of the rotor in this hole. The rotor is called *zzowo* and consists of a 6– or 7–cm-thick, 60–cm-long wood cylinder, onto one end of which is hafted a conical iron blade, tapering to a point along a length of about 20 cm. This is pounded in with a wooden mallet made from a section of a pine trunk, with one side branch left as a handle.
>
> This assemblage (rotor, point, and blank) is then inserted between the two wooden rails that form the sides of the lathe. On the end where the blank is attached, there is a metal point called a *funzoddu*, and the mallet is used to pound the whole thing onto that point. In previous times, there used to be a similar point on the opposite rail; now they use a ball-bearing attached to the opposite

FIG. 6. Turning a bowl on the pit-lathe

rail—it turns more easily that way. The space between the rails, where the assemblage fits, can be adjusted for the depth of the blank.

Then the turning begins, with the carver giving instructions to the two pedalers when to start and stop (fig. 6). The carver turns the blank into the desired shape with a set of eight chisels, called *iku*, all hafted onto 60– or 70–cm-long rough, unturned pieces of wood. The chisels vary slightly in width and shape; all of them are hook-shaped on the end of a conical, iron base. . . . The carvers said that each slightly different one has a different use.

The carver alternates inner and outer surfaces of the dish. When the stump in the center where the rotor is pounded in is chiseled down to 1 cm or so thick, typically it breaks off, or the similar cone on the outside breaks off. The dish is then taken off the lathe and some more of the two cones are carved away using the adze.

We watched a bowl (ordinary rice-bowl size) being made, and I estimate that the whole process probably took twenty minutes from insertion to the final chopping with the adze. People told us that they can turn up to fifteen small or ten large dishes in a full day's work.

After it is turned, the dish still has to dry for a few days before it can be painted. The black is painted on first over the entire surface, usually excepting the bot-

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FIG. 7. Lacquering a wooden bowl

tom (of any of the large, pedestal-bottomed dishes), as the base coat. Then it dries for a day, and the yellow is painted on, then it dries for another day, and they paint on the red.

They didn't have any blanks ready to paint when we were there, but one man demonstrated for us by painting over some of the red and yellow designs on a large bowl that was already painted (fig. 7).

The painter had a wooden box with a sliding top, which contained two small dishes for the pigments, and about twenty brushes. They make the brushes themselves using wooden sticks on the end of which various-shaped points of local goat wool are attached by wrapped thread. The brushes are called *ssema*, the little tiny one is called *qiema*, and the wooden paint-paddle, which has two flared ends about 4 cm long and 1.5 cm wide, is called a *ddivaddu*. The brushes have to be cleaned with tung oil, which is sold in the market.

Painting time varies greatly. One of the large rice dishes, with a fancy pattern, may require three to five days' work, or a full day's work for a simpler one. One large or two small soup tureens (*kuzzur*) can be painted in a day.

Only men work on the lathe, but both men and women paint designs on the dishes. Until recently, the tradition of painting belonged only to the Jjivo

clan and their daughters-in-law, but in recent years affines marrying into the village have also taken up the craft, with the result that members of at least three other clans also know how to make and paint the dishes.

Since 1982 the craft of dish-making has spread beyond Apu, with the establishment of a factory in Xide City and another in Zhaojue. The dishes they produce are for the mass market and are turned on machine lathes, though they are painted by hand. They also include all sorts of nontraditional shapes and forms, including plates, rice bowls, tabletops, and even chopsticks. Jjivo Vuqie, the artist who inspired the latest refinements in design and technique, was originally hired as artistic director of the Xide factory, but in 1991 he became dissatisfied with two departures from what he considered the tradition—the high gloss coat that gives the factory dishes a modern sheen, and the change from a dull, slightly brownish-yellow color in the village dishes to a bright lemon-yellow in the factory ones. Vuqie thus became an entrepreneur, and now he has his own private factory, employing about twelve people, which uses machine techniques and continues the trend of innovative shapes but uses a lower-gloss paint and a duller yellow pigment.

A folk craft from one village in Mishi, passed down in a single clan for several hundred years and not well-known outside Nuosu society, has thus in recent years become an ethnic marker for Nuosu all over Liangshan and beyond. Museums covet the village-made utensils as a true folk art (I collected a set for the Burke Museum at the University of Washington, for example), but for most people, the factory dishes do just fine as an ethnic marker.[6]

HAUNTED BY THE HXIEMGA

The paradox of Mishi is that it is not one of those minority regions, such as the cities of Tibet (Schwartz 1993: 203) or even parts of Liangshan closer to main transport routes (Heberer 2001), where Han people are taking over. They are, in fact, almost completely absent in the daily life of most Nuosu people in Mishi. The cadres, the doctors, the extension agents, all are Nuosu; only a few teachers are actual Hxiemga. People are not ordinarily concerned with using ethnic markers to distinguish themselves from anyone else, and Nuosu cultural forms—house design, lack of attachment to place, clan solidarity, animal sacrifice, cape-wearing, and all sorts of rituals from weddings and funerals to exorcisms performed by *bimo* and *sunyi*—go on, especially in the post-

6. I treat the topic of Nuosu lacquerware, and its transformation from folk craft to ethnic commodity, more fully in Harrell 1999.

Cultural Revolution era, as taken-for-granted aspects of being human in such a place. But the physical absence of Hxiemga, and of corresponding Han cultural forms, hides a deeper-level, haunting presence. Even this ethnically homogeneous district has been incorporated into the People's Republic of China.

This is, for the people of Mishi, not necessarily all bad. They have some access to health care (though not much), some possibilities of outward and upward social mobility, some access to education, if they can afford it and get through the sometimes meaningless-seeming elementary grades. A few of them have joined the Communist Party or work in the government, or have become teachers. At the same time, there is a sense of loss, of something that seems to be gnawing the inside of the society, even though it comes from the outside. Consider:

> The villagers of Jiemo do not like to use the name Liberation Village, even though this would seem desirable in the communist order to which they belong. It would imply that they had been slaves, and having been slaves raises the suspicion that one's ancestors were Han. Still, at least one family there has named its daughter Hxiemgamo.
>
> A visit to a village by outsiders, themselves Nuosu (except for the curious American) prompts a serious discussion of what has gone wrong with society in the last few decades. A commonplace is repeated—before the Revolution, "there were no beggars in Nuosu areas" (Nuosu muddi zzahmo a jjo), because clans would take care of everyone, as was the case when the man was murdered while we were there. But now . . . there is a deterioration in social morals, and there are indeed beggars in Nuosu areas.
>
> Qumo Vake, the local boy who makes good, gives back to his own community by building a power station that may eventually light most of the homes. This is a right and proper thing to do. But then he overreaches; he adopts goals foreign to the community, just like the *tusi* who were driven out of the nuclear area in the Ming and Qing. He goes and gets a divorce and then marries a Hxiemgamo. People can say nothing about this, because he is rich and can do what he wants. And it is not terribly uncommon; I met a much richer entrepreneur in Ganluo who had the same ambition—he said he didn't think a Nuosu wife would respect him, if he cared so much about making money. But people feel uncomfortable with intermarriage, as if a haunting presence has taken one of their own. At least they say Qumo Vake's new wife is really ugly.

Recent writers on social memory (Abelman 1996) have talked about haunting—events of the past, though they are clearly in the past, are not safely

in the past. In their absence, they continue to be present through memory. I would suggest that the presence of Hxiemga in places like Mishi is an analogous phenomenon, structured in space rather than time. Aspects of Chinese national culture, of Marxism-Leninism, of modernity (conceived of in Mishi as things of the Hxiemga, such as beggars and brash entrepreneurs) are more important in formulating the threat of Hxiemga than are actual Han people. These elements, which potentially represent the transformation of something familiar into something alien, are not present physically in Mishi, but they are an overwhelming presence in their absence.

Hxiemga is thus not so much another ethnic group to which to compare one's own, and certainly not any kind of people one sees very often unless one is a student or works in the schools. Hxiemga is a way of talking about selfishness, individual ambition, lack of solidarity, deterioration in social morals, the things that replace what is lost on the road to social change. It is also the bringer of education, material change, and opportunity. Individual Nuosu people adopt, sometimes enthusiastically, aspects of this outside presence—school, government service, Han language, entrepreneurship. But they do not trust it. Its presence is vague, distant, but no less threatening for that. *Nuosu muddi* can no longer be really autonomous, but then, of course, it never was. From enfeoffed *tusi* to slave raiding on the margins, Nuosu culture has always, from as early as we can discover, been shaped in reaction to the tempting, the corrupting, the haunting by those whose absence is such a huge presence in their lives—the Hxiemga.