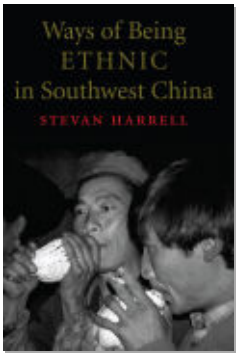
13. Ethnicity and Acculturation: Some Little Groups



13 / Ethnicity and Acculturation: Some Little Groups

All of the groups we have examined so far have possessed ethnic identities that clearly differentiate them from the majority Han—the Nuosu have an unassailable endogamy and, in most places, a distinct cultural and linguistic heritage that renders their identity completely unproblematic, even in cases where there has been some acculturation to Han ways. The identity of the Prmi and Naze is much more contingent; it is likely that the ethnic identification program forced them to choose and crystallize an identity that would otherwise have remained fluid. But there is little acculturation to Han ways in most Naze and Prmi communities; their local identities are solidly bounded (except where Prmi and Naze themselves overlap), and the contingencies in their identities involve choices in the wider language of ethnic identification between *minzu* or proto-*minzu* identities such as Meng, Zang, Naxi, Mosuo, and Pumi.

To stop our discussion of ethnicity in Liangshan at this point, however, would ignore one of the most important historical trends in southwest China: the centuries-long process of acculturation to Chinese ways, which in the past usually led after many generations to assimilation to Chinese identity, the identity that since ethnic identification has been uniformly referred to as Han. Jonathan Unger has maintained, for example, in a recent article (1997), that this millennia-old process has accelerated in recent years, as all over Yunnan and Guizhou formerly culturally distinct communities have come to adopt the ways of the majority, with only the increasingly artificial *minzu* designations standing between many minority communities and complete assimilation.

Such processes of acculturation have certainly been significantly accelerated in the People's Republic, and particularly in the Reform Era, as transport, communications, economic development, education, and popular culture have spread to formerly inaccessible areas. But here as elsewhere, individual cases are more complex than is conveyed by invoking a unidirectional process such as acculturation, sinicization, or Hanification. In fact, in Liangshan the process can be seen to have gone a number of directions, three of which are described

in this chapter. In many small ethnic enclaves, acculturation proceeds apace, and in some cases this leads to virtual or actual assimilation. In the first section of this chapter I describe what I conceive to be different stages in this process, as represented by several small enclave communities in Miyi County. In other, larger enclaves, acculturation is extremely evident but seems to have no effect on identity, rather in the manner of the Nuosu of Manshuiwan. In the second section I describe this process for a related but somewhat different case—the Lipuo of Pingdi Township in Panzhihua. Finally, there can sometimes be a resurgence of identity for instrumental purposes, even where acculturation is virtually complete. In the last section, I describe this process for the Shuitian people of Pingjiang and Futian Townships in Panzhihua, a place where an instrumental ethnic rationality has resulted in the maintenance of minority status as part of a strategy for economic development.

LITTLE GROUPS IN MIYI: ETHNICITY LOST?

Tucked in little ethnic pockets around the Lesser Liangshan area are tiny enclaves of people who claim an identity as a separate *minzu* but whose claims to *minzu* identity are not recognized by the Chinese state. In the metalanguage of ethnic classification, they are usually Yi, sometimes Han. Their own languages of ethnic identity are weak—they often do not speak any actual language of their own, or only the old people recognize a few words. They sometimes preserve what they proudly consider distinctive customs, but they do not practice very many of them, most of their practices having been assimilated to Han or occasionally Nuosu ways. Their ethnic languages are not so much dead languages—they are still spoken, sort of—but ghost languages, like ghost towns that might or might not still have a few people living in them, but where empty buildings testify to the former presence of something larger and more distinctive. Their ethnicity is in a sense residual; it was about to be forgotten and they were about to become ordinary Chinese farmers when ethnic identification came, and they were labeled as minorities. For some of them, whose acculturation has gone less far than others, this has meant that they will stay ethnic for a while, using their identity perhaps to gain minor perquisites such as a higher birth quota. Others will lose ethnic identity altogether, and although they may remain minority *minzu* in the official language of ethnic identification, they will be for all practical purposes no different at all from their Han neighbors and relatives. Still others will simply become Han, as did the ancestors of several hundred million central and southern Chinese. The townships of Hengshan, Puwei, and Malong in Miyi County are home to several such groups whose degrees of accul-

turation and assimilation can be arranged along a continuum from least to most merged.

These townships, which lie in rugged hills between the Anning and Yalong Rivers, were governed from the beginning of the Ming dynasty until the early twentieth century by a *tusi*, surnamed Ji, who was posted there from Guizhou by the first Ming emperor as part of his campaign to eliminate residual Mongol influence from the Southwest (Peng et al. 1992: 24). His own ethnicity was Nasu, or "Eastern Yi," a group that formed the ruling classes of much local society in western Guizhou and northeastern Yunnan (see Cheung 1995b). Currently, the population of this area is extraordinarily mixed, though the great majority of people are either Han or Nuosu. But in addition, I interviewed members of groups calling themselves Nasu, Abu, Hong Yi, Tazhi, Bai, Lisu, Yala,[1] and Shui. Some of these are alternative identifications for the same groups of people; each group and each identification applied to a group differs in the nature of the ethnic identity it expresses. They range from the Yala, who in the early 1990s still maintained a strong, if officially unrecognized, ethnic identity, through the Nasu/Abu/Hong Yi and the Tazhi/Bai, whose language seemed to be dying except for unintentional artificial life-support from the metalanguage of ethnic identification, to the Shui, who were simply becoming Han.

Yala

There are Yala or Lila or Niluo people in Hengshan and Malong Townships; they number a few hundred in each place. In Hengshan, they live in two villages, situated on opposite sides of the town; in Malong, where the town is hardly worth the name (though there is a paved street about one hundred meters long), they live in a little cluster of houses right above the market. Though most Yala dispute it, they are officially ethnically identified as Yi; the best they can do for separate recognition is to be mentioned in local sources as a branch of the Yi *minzu*. Knowledgeable local people in both places say that the Yala were the first people to get here, followed by the Han and, much later, the Nuosu. Though it is unclear exactly when the first Han came, it is certainly true that the Nuosu, despite their great numbers, are the most recent immigrants. The Yala, like the

1. *The Account of the Minzu of Miyi* (Peng et al. 1992) list four of these groups as subheadings under Yi: the Abu, Tazhi, Yala, and Niluo. It turns out, however, that Yala and Niluo are alternate words for the same group, which is represented in Hengshan and Malong Counties: Yala is a Han-language term, while Niluo (or Lila, as I heard it) is the name in the native language.

Nasu and Tazhi, trace their residence in the area to the Hongwu period (1368–98) at the beginning of the Ming dynasty.

Yala may have once been primarily endogamous. Their expressed ideal (no longer rigorously practiced in the current generation) was for bilateral cross-cousin marriage, and I recorded at least one present-day case of direct brother-sister exchange, along with a lot of marrying back and forth between pairs of clans, especially in Malong, where only two clans are represented. Some people told me that they did not marry Han before the Democratic Reforms but did marry Lisu, who have since left the area. Nowadays, marriage with Han is fairly common: of thirty-nine marriages in the last two generations of the families I interviewed, sixteen were reported to be with other Yala, twenty-one with Han, and two with Abu. There were several marriages between Yala in Hengshan and Yala from Malong, which, combined with the fact that almost half of all recent marriages are still within the small Yala community, indicates that ethnicity may still be a factor in marriage choice. Or perhaps it is just that people continue to marry their affines, who tend because of past history to be Yala. What the Yala do not do is marry the Nuosu, even though both are classified as parts of the Yi *minzu*. In neither community could any of the Yala recall a single case of intermarriage with Nuosu.

Yala spoken language (which is certainly a variety of Yi, though it has not been studied formally) is alive, and perhaps well. In Malong, even young adults seemed to speak Yala most of the time around the house, while of course being perfectly fluent in Han. In Hengshan, it appeared to me that Yala was losing ground, but middle-aged people could still converse in it. Some people said that there had been a written language; one knowledgeable Yala man, a doctor in Hengshan, told me that the written language was lost sometime during the Qing dynasty, and that this was a great shame, because without a written language there was no possibility that the Yala could gain official *minzu* status: they would have to remain Yi, though they had nothing to do with the local Yi.

In the languages of ritual and customs, Yala still communicate difference, but not particularly loudly. Several people told me that there had been an erosion of Yala customs in the last decade, particularly with the opening up of Hengshan to commercial agriculture. Still, people preserve a few distinctive wedding customs, such as the bride's not entering the groom's house until the stars come out, the groom's painting the faces of the bride's relatives, and the bride's being carried on the back of a relative into the groom's house. In addition, they time their celebration of the New Year differently from the Han; they scatter pine needles on the floor of the house and courtyard, and terminate their celebrations on the thirteenth day of the New Year rather than waiting

for the Lantern Festival on the fifteenth, as the Han do. Finally, their burial customs are different. In Hengshan, we were told, they still cremate the dead (which immediately distinguishes them from the Han), but instead of just leaving the ashes with a little stone marker, as the Nuosu do, they put them in an urn and bury them. In Malong, they cremated the dead until the early twentieth century but then began to take up the practice of burial when urged by the Nasu *tusi* (see below). They had a lovely graveyard with big trees, but it was destroyed and the trees all cut down in the Cultural Revolution. One man said wistfully, however, that it didn't make much difference, since according to Yala belief the soul no longer lingers in the ashes after the cremation. It is ironic, perhaps, that all of these customs are also practiced by one or another group of Yi (Nuosu or Lipuo) who live fairly nearby and may have contributed, along with linguistic similarities, to ethnic identification of the Yala as a branch of the Yi.

The Yala thus seem to be a typical case (see Cheung 1995a, 1996) of a small group that formed an ethnic identity in a local context, distinguishing itself from its neighbors by a combination of descent and ethnic markers, but that was then classified according to cultural and linguistic criteria (as Stalin recommended) as a member of a larger category. They refuse to accept this category, on the surface claiming cultural differences such as their own written language and certain marriage customs, but the real reason is that in the local context they play a different role. In Malong in particular, the Yala settlement is adjacent to the small township center, and the Yala have been lowland farmers in the area for countless generations, as well as subjects of the *tusi* in Puwei for at least a few centuries. Their social position is different from that of the Nuosu, who arrived much later, live in the highlands, and were only loosely subject to the *tusi*. So, in the practical local language of ethnic identity, they claim differences of descent and culture to distinguish themselves from the Yi. The state, operating on broader criteria that do not take the local social context into account, classifies them as Yi without much hesitation. They are still some distance from being completely acculturated to Han language or customs, and refuse to identify with Nuosu, so their only recourse is to claim that they are a separate *minzu*.

Nasu

Nasu, Abu, and Hong Yi are different appellations for a single group, which is represented primarily in Puwei, the former seat of the Ji *tusi*. Members of the Ji clan (called Azhi in their native Nasu tongue) whom I interviewed agree with

the official history that says this group came originally from Shuicheng in Guizhou in the Hongwu reign period of the early Ming (probably in the 1380s), where the Ji clan were local rulers. The first Ming emperor, Taizu, moved them here as part of his campaign to oust the last Yuan officials in the area and consolidate Ming rule; after an unsuccessful rebellion by other local leaders, the family was established as *tusi* in 1404 (Peng Deyuan et al. 1992: 24). With the Ji came Nasu people of eight other clans, eventually given Chinese surnames. Many of them were landlords in the area until the democratic reforms of 1956 abolished old forms of landholding.

According to older members of the Ji and some of its allied clans, the term Abu comes from a hasty mistake made by the ethnic identification teams in the mid-1950s. In the Nasu language, the term for "grandfather" is *apu*; tenants and retainers of the Nasu rulers and landlords were required to call the Nasu "Apu" as a term of respect. When the identification teams came and asked who those people were, they were told, "Apu," and this got written down as an ethnonym (Abu in Chinese), when properly it was an honorific designation for members of a ruling class. Actually, of course, insofar as Nasu were the rulers of the local native administration, they were a class as well as a ruling ethnic group. At any rate, they did not call themselves Abu (except when they were addressing their own grandfathers), but this became their designation in local ethnology (Peng Deyuan et al. 1992: 49–50), even though their *minzu* designation, because of their linguistic closeness to Nuosu and perhaps because of the classification of their more numerous relatives in Guizhou, was Yi. Nevertheless, at least one woman of the Bai surname insisted to me that her family were Abu*zu*, and that they had been misclassified as Yi.

Why were the Nasu called Hong Yi, or Red Yi? Probably because they were Yi (or, in the more common but pejorative Chinese-language designation used before 1956, Luoluo), but they were neither the Black Luoluo (Nuoho) aristocrats nor the White Luoluo (Quho) commoners of the Nuosu, but rather a third kind of Luoluo, which needed to be designated by a color, which turned out to be red.

The ideal marriage form for Nasu before the current generation was delayed exchange, or *patrilateral* cross-cousin marriage; although direct exchange of the Nuosu type was allowed, it was discouraged. Even today, with considerably more freedom of marriage, a young woman's mother's brother's household is supposed to be given rights of first refusal before she marries a nonrelative. In recent years, however, freedom of marriage has meant that a large number of Nasu young people are marrying Han. In one branch of the Ji family, for example, the eldest living generation had two marriages, both to

Nasu surnamed Bai; the next generation had seven marriages, six of them to Nasu surnamed Ma and one to a Han; the third generation so far has had nine marriages, three to Nasu named respectively Lu, Ma, and Bai, and the other six to Han. What is striking here is that Nasu have started marrying Han, to whose cultural ways they are largely assimilated, but they have not intermarried with Nuosu, who are their close linguistic and cultural relatives, and with whom they share the Yi *minzu* designation.

The ethnic languages of the Nasu in Puwei are fading. One old man of the Ji clan could give me a basic vocabulary list, and knew that his "native" language shared about 80 percent of its vocabulary with the Nuosu dialect spoken by his mountain neighbors (which he spoke fairly well himself), but his conversation had been in Han for the last five or six decades at least, and people under sixty seem to know not even a few words in the old language. I was told that the Ji clan once had a genealogy, which was destroyed in the Democratic Reforms; the first part was written in Yi and the second in Chinese, but nobody now knows how to write the Yi characters; once again this contrasts with the situation of the Nuosu.

There is no longer any form of distinctive dress for Nasu people, and what customs differ from those of the neighboring Han are just enough to serve as ethnic markers. For example, they celebrate the Chinese New Year (which Nuosu do not), but they celebrate it slightly differently from the local Han, leaving a carpet of pine needles on the floor from the thirtieth of the twelfth month of the old year until the sixth of the first month of the new. Their marriage rituals also differ slightly from the Han and considerably from the Nuosu. They also place their ancestral altars, in Yi fashion, on a high shelf in a back corner of the front room of their otherwise Han-style house, rather than having them on a central altar on the back wall, as Han everywhere do.

In short, while some Nasu people freely acknowledge that they are Yi, and related to the Nuosu, their languages of ethnicity in everyday life say otherwise. They resemble the Nuosu in none of their interactions with other groups in local society. While Nuosu preserve endogamy, Nasu intermarry frequently, with the result that Nuosu are about the only group that Nasu will not marry. While Nuosu preserve their spoken and written language, even when bilingual in Chinese, Nasu have lost their written language entirely and their spoken language almost. While Nasu customs are distinct in a few ways from those of the Han, they are more distinct from those of their purported ethnic relatives, the Nuosu. My guess is that if it had not been for the crystallization of *minzu* categories in the metalanguage of ethnic identification, the Nasu identity would be on its way to dying out; acculturation and contact would have led by now

to assimilation. For now, only their classification as Yi (which some of them dispute) has kept them from becoming Han.

Tazhi

Not far from the clusters of Nasu that dot the otherwise Han villages on the Puwei plain live an even more problematical group of people, identified as Tazhi in the local ethnological sources (Peng Deyuan et al. 1992: 52). When I first visited Puwei, I made the acquaintance of a local elementary school teacher, who told me that she herself was Tazhi and that there were three surnames of Tazhi resident in the township—Lu, Luo, and Wang. They once had a language of their own, she said, but only a few old people still remembered it. Their most distinctive custom was patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, which still existed in the form of the right of first refusal for a young woman's mother's brother's family. She also outlined to me certain Tazhi customs for holidays and rites of passage, which sounded very similar to those of the Nasu and other Yi groups (but not the Nuosu) in the region. They had mistakenly been classified as Yi, but they were in fact a separate *minzu*.

When I jeeped up to one of the Tazhi villages the next morning, however, and talked to some members of the Lu and Luo families, they denied that there was such a thing as Tazhi. They told me that their ancestors had originally called themselves Tazhi but that ethnic identification investigators in the 1950s had told them that there was no such group, that Tazhi was simply a name given to these three families by the Ji *tusi* and that in fact these people are descendants of Bai from Yunnan whence they came, so that they should properly identify themselves as Bai. But then that evening, I asked the schoolteacher again, and she told me that they were Tazhi, and that despite the official ethnic identification as Yi, she still wrote "Tazhi" on forms when required to state her *minzu*. Finally, the next morning I returned again to the Tazhi village to speak to the man who reputedly remembered the language, and he said that Tazhi was the proper designation for his group, but that since the state authorities would not recognize such an identity, and since they were not Yi, some people advocated calling themselves Bai. He turned out to know only a few words of the Tazhi language.

If we return for a minute to the metalanguage of ethnohistory, we may be able to place this confusion into context, at least. It seems clear from the affinities of the Tazhi language and the bits of the history remembered by people in the communities that the Tazhi are culturally and linguistically closely related to, if not identical with, the Nasu. Since the Tazhi were clearly neither members

nor affines of the ruling Ji clan (most marriages before the current generation were among the three surnames; I found one to a Ma surname, which is Nasu, and the rest were to Han or to a Lisu family that migrated to the area a few decades ago), they may have been given the designation White Yi or White Luoluo, in an analogy to the White, or *quho*, commoner-retainer clans of the nearby Nuosu. If so, it is but a small step from White Yi, or Bai Yi, to just plain Bai, which happens, coincidentally, to be the name of an official *minzu*, most of whom live near Dali in west-central Yunnan.

This interpretation is strengthened by another nearby example. In Malong Township, southwest of Puwei, there are a group of families who call themselves Bai, even though their official identification cards and household registration records designate them as Yi. These families say they came to Malong in the 1950s from a place called Zongfa, which is just south of Renhe District Town near Panzhihua City. Nowadays, the population of Zongfa is all Han, but Pingdi, one township to the south, is inhabited by people who call themselves Lipuo in their own language and Bai Yi in Chinese. It is quite likely that the self-designated Bai in Malong, like those of the Tazhi in Puwei who call themselves Bai, are descendants of people who were once known as Bai Yi and who have hit on the availability of the official *minzu* designation Bai to find themselves a name that is not Yi—that is to say, not the same as the Nuosu up in the mountains, whose customs and languages, as shown above, demonstrate very little Han influence. Similar cases have also been reported from other parts of Miyi by local ethnologists (Li Liukun 1992).

Again in the case of the Tazhi, we can see the impact of the metalanguage of ethnic identification upon the local languages of ethnic identity. The Tazhi, like the Nasu (with whom they probably share a common origin not more than seven hundred years ago), occupy an ecological and formerly a political niche that is not much different from that of the Han in surrounding areas or even in their own townships. Through intermarriage and through the acculturative processes of state education and propaganda, they are in the process of acculturating to Han ways. Their languages will probably be completely gone in another generation, and they can choose to keep certain of their distinctive customs or not. They are undergoing the process of "becoming Chinese" outlined by Brown (1996) for the lowland aborigines of Taiwan. But because ethnic identification has intervened, they have no prospect of becoming Han: they are, for the time being, classified as Yi. Wanting to reject any association with Nuosu, they have little choice but to cling to their identity as Nasu or Abu or Hong Yi or Tazhi or Bai.

Yet, when conducting field research in such places as Puwei or Malong, I

sometimes began to wonder how important ethnicity really is in the daily lives of these families. They are certainly aware of opportunities to gain slight but significant preferential treatment through affirmative action, and certainly when anyone asks them, they know their own *minzu* (though they don't always agree on the name, even among themselves), and there are certain people who are recognized experts, always delegated to receive investigating visitors, whether foreign anthropologists or county-level officials. But their life, with the exception of a few ritual occasions, is identical to that of their Han neighbors and relatives. I was struck, for example, when conducting household censuses of the Lisu lineage in the Tazhi village mentioned above, that one of their senior members (the township Party secretary) did not know the *minzu* of one of his brothers' wives or one of his own sisters' husbands. Nobody knew what *zu* they were because nobody had ever asked them, he said.

Shui

In Puwei Township there are eleven families, all named Wang, who are known to be members of the Shui *minzu*. According to one of their members, they have been in Puwei for five generations, having fled troubles in Guizhou Province, from whence they originally came. They have little left of an identity except a name, and even that is perhaps not permanent.

Ever since they arrived in Puwei, a prohibition on marrying close relatives has meant that the Wangs have almost exclusively married Han spouses, so that descendants of Wang women are simply Han, while descendants of Wang men retain their identity as Shui, but all have Han mothers.

Perhaps because of this intermarriage and isolation from other Shui, Mr. Wang said there is nobody who remembers even a single word of the Shui language (possibly this has been true for more than one generation), and they neither practice any distinctively Shui customs nor even know what these might be. Unlike some other local, isolated groups in this area, they have made no attempt to contact their relatives back in "the old country."

In other words, the Shui in Puwei are completely acculturated to Han ways. And even the ethnic identification process may not in their case be enough to save them from complete assimilation. Mr. Wang stated, and I confirmed by looking, that the household registration records for the Wangs in fact listed them as Han. All that is left, then, is a true ghost identity, and Mr. Wang said the only reason they still clung to any idea of being Shui at all was that they "had a feeling in their hearts that they should not forget their roots." It is impossible to know how long such a feeling might last.

From the Yala to the Nasu and Tazhi to the Shui, then, there is a progression of greater and greater acculturation to Han (or perhaps better stated, southwestern Chinese rural) culture. Yala, unhappy to be classified as Yi, proceed as if they were, indeed, a separate *minzu*; theirs is a case in which the languages of ethnic identification and ethnic identity are clearly at odds. Nasu and Tazhi are more ambivalent. Some claim a separate identity (as Abu or Tazhi or even Bai), while others seem content enough to be Yi, especially since this designation does not really mean having to interact closely with Nuosu. It is a safe bet that in the absence of ethnic identification they would just be Chinese. Shui, having originally been identified as Shui, seem not to care much longer, and are in the process of complete assimilation to a Han identity.

THE LIPUO IN PINGDI: ETHNICITY RETAINED

In the part of Panzhihua that lies south of the Jinsha River, in what was formerly part of Yongren County, Yunnan, there are fifteen thousand or more Yi people whose origins and social ties lie not in Sichuan to the north, but in central Yunnan to the south. Speakers of the Central Dialect (Chen Shilin 1984: 4) of Yi, they call themselves Lipuo and their language, Libie. In 1987, 7,607 Yi, probably all of them Lipuo, lived in Pingdi, the southernmost township in Panzhihua City. In 1988 my colleagues I and spent two weeks in the primarily Lipuo village of Yishala, in the southeastern corner of Pingdi (fig. 30).[2] In terms of the scale of acculturation presented above, the Lipuo in Pingdi are perhaps slightly more acculturated in every way but language than the Yala, Nasu, and Tazhi, but they retain their Libie language as the ordinary medium of everyday speech and the first language of small children. Their identity, unlike those of any of the groups described above, appears not to have gone even the slightest distance toward assimilation, despite their acculturation to Han (or perhaps more accurately, Chinese) ways.

"Lipuo" is a self-designation; all Lipuo use the term when they are speaking the Libie language; its Han translation is "Yi." Lipuo are, for the most part, educated people and know that there are other kinds of Yi around; many make a

2. The description and analysis in this section are taken, with some modifications, from Harrell 1990. They apply only to Pingdi; it appears that cultural differences and the conscious use of cultural markers are much more prevalent in other Lipuo or Lolopo communities in Yongren to the south, described in the works of Erik Mueggler (1998a,b, 2000). As with any other group (such as the Nuosu, chaps. 7-9,), the content and structure of ethnic identity differs from community to community.

FIG. 30. The village of Yishala. Lipuo and Han homes are identical.

distinction between themselves as "White Yi" and the Nuosu as "Black Yi."[3] One retired schoolteacher told me he thought they might have a common origin. None of the Lipuo I talked to seemed to dispute the existence of a broader Yi category or their membership in it, but it was not terribly important to them; the relevant relationships were local, and locally "Yi" was a Han word for "Lipuo."

Similarly, Han peasants, who make up about 8 percent of the population of Yishala, readily divide their local world into Yi and Han. One's status as one or the other is purely a matter of ancestry in most cases.

Neither of these local definitions is in any way in conflict with the state classification of the Lipuo into the Yi *minzu*. Officially, most Yunnanese Yi, including the Lipuo, are considered to have been at a higher, feudal stage of social evolution than were the Nuosu; this is evidenced by the similarity of their social organization with that of the local Han. But that the Lipuo are Yi is indisputable, and can be seen from their language, festivals, and other customs, as

3. This Black-White Yi distinction has nothing to do with the *nuoho-quho* caste distinctions of the Nuosu of Liangshan. Both are simply different instances of the use of colors to designate ethnic groups, which is widespread all over southwest China.

well as their history. The state identification is thus entirely compatible with the local identity, and indeed frames the local identity in the wider discourse of ethnic identification.

Unlike most Nuosu, the Lipuo have a relationship with neighboring Han that can be characterized not by separation but by absorption. Like the Nuosu of Manshuiwan, Lipuo in Pingdi have absorbed Han culture for hundreds of years, while retaining their ethnic identity. But unlike either the Manshuiwan Nuosu or the highland Nuosu, the Pingdi Lipuo communities have also absorbed Han people, not by slave-raiding and incorporation as the lowest caste but by marriage of both Han women and men into Lipuo villages and families.

Lipuo and Han live intermingled—in the same townships, the same villages, the same households. In Pingdi in 1987 there were seven administrative villages (*cun*) containing 12,336 people, of whom 7,607 (62 percent) were Yi and 4,729 (38 percent) were Han. The villages themselves varied in ethnic composition from Yishala (91 percent Yi) to Matou, (only 37 percent Yi and 63 percent Han). Within the village of Yishala, Yi and Han live interspersed in no discernable pattern: strictly speaking, there are no Han households, since every household in the village has Yi members. But despite this interspersal and intermarriage, Lipuo retain a strong Yi identity.

This pattern of interspersal has a long history. The Lipuo people in Yishala recognize themselves as belonging primarily to four major lineages, three of which can trace their origin to soldiers who came with various armies during the Ming and Qing periods from more easterly parts of China: Nanjing, Huguang, and Jiangxi. I have as yet found no concrete evidence of Ming origins for these clans, but one villager has in his possession a boundary agreement with a neighboring village, dated 1654.

The dates of migration thus seem reasonable, but what about the places? Villagers were willing to consider the suggestion that their ancestors who came from eastern or central China were in fact Han soldiers, who were sent to military colonies and intermarried with local women. If this is true, Lipuo and Han have been living interspersed for several hundred years, a conjecture that is also supported by a quotation from a late-eighteenth-century gazetteer of Dayao County saying that Han and Yi lived all mixed together (Dayao 1904: 60–61).[4]

4. One should realize, however, that these mixed Lipuo-Han communities, though they display no geographical or ecological separation between the two *minzu* at the local level (that is, in the highland townships of Pingdi, Ala, and Dalongtan), are still highland communities from the

The economy of Lipuo and Han is similarly integrated and identical in the local context. Peasants in Pingdi are basically subsistence cultivators, but they are regularly tied into the market and the cash economy. There has been a market at Datian, down the valley, since at least the early part of this century (Dayao 1904:2, 2b); there is now a market at Pingdi, and villagers go regularly on the market days.[5] Many villagers in 1988 also had cash income from a variety of sources: wage work at the Pingdi Concrete Factory or the Pingdi Winery, manufacture of lime to sell to private parties building houses, hauling with small tractors, or work at a variety of other wage-paying jobs. On the average, probably a quarter to a half of a family's income was in cash, and people had considerable amounts of bought consumer goods in their houses. Bailagu, another village in Pingdi, farms vegetables commercially, and Yibuku, a valley satellite village of Yishala, grows sugarcane as a major cash crop. In short, the Lipuo and the Han in Pingdi are equally full participants in the market economy of Renhe and Yongren.

Politically, Lipuo and Han have long been integrated here. At least since the mid-Qing this area has come under direct civil administration of the Imperial, Republican, and then People's governments (Dukou 1985: 74). There has not for a long time been any *tusi* or other equivalent "ethnic official" to serve as intermediary with the governments. In this respect, Yi and Han have been treated equally.

In the People's Republic the essentially undifferentiated treatment of Yi and Han has continued. Pingdi underwent land reform, characteristic of Han areas, in 1950–51, instead of waiting for the milder Democratic Reforms, characteristic of minority areas such as those inhabited by the Nuosu, in 1956. In Pingdi, and indeed in the Lipuo areas in Yongren in general, land reform took place in essentially the same way as in exclusively Han areas. In Yishala five families were classified as landlords and several more as rich peasants; they were struggled against and their land taken away. All of them were Lipuo. After land reform, the agricultural system underwent the same steps of collectivization, communization, devolution to the production team, and finally individual contracting of land as was carried out in most of the country.

Intermarriage between Lipuo and Han has been common here, probably ever since the communities were founded by the union of Han military colonists

perspective of the larger-scale local system of Renhe District or Yongren County. Lowland villages are almost exclusively Han.

5. The date of establishment of the market at Pingdi is not mentioned in the 1904 Dayao gazetteer.

FIG. 31. A Lipuo mother-in-law ushering her Han daughter-in-law into the bridal chamber

and local women. There are very few Han in the village who are married to other Han, and our whole research team was witness to one wedding in which a Han woman from outside married into a previously all-Lipuo household. Intermarriage between Lipuo and Han is facilitated by the similarity of the marriage and family systems. Marriages are usually arranged by an introducer, who must nowadays secure the permission of the couple to be married. Once this is accomplished, negotiations begin. Lipuo and Han give similar dowries at marriage, so negotiations for marriage exchanges proceed on a common understanding even if the families are of different ethnic groups. Also, the Lipuo marriage ritual is conducted in the Han language and takes Han forms (fig. 31).

Intermarriage is thus extremely common, and many children are born of "mixed" marriages. A child of a mixed marriage must be designated as belonging to one *minzu* or the other, but there is a choice. In the Pingdi area, the child of a Han mother and a Yi father would take the Yi *minzu*; the child of a Yi mother and a Han father may take either *minzu*. This means that most children of mixed marriages end up Yi, since most intermarriages involve a Han woman from outside the village marrying a Lipuo villager. So the absorption of Han people into the Lipuo community continues.

This close and almost indiscriminant interaction has, I think, led to the remarkable identity of culture, politics, and social structure that one observes between Lipuo and Han in Pingdi. We can see this lack of distinction in the sociolinguistic pattern of diglossia. Lipuo at home and with other villagers customarily speak the Lipuo language, called Libie. Libie contains a lot of Han loan words, ranging from kinship terms (Harrell 1989) to words for modern things such as tractors and sociological investigations. Nevertheless, the ordinary conversation one hears in Yishala is in Libie, not Han.

Almost all the Lipuo, however, are bilingual; their Han speech is almost uniformly fluent and indistinguishable from that of the local Han. Children at first speak only Libie but learn Han quickly when they go to school, so there are virtually no monolingual Libie speakers in the community. Children in primarily Han households may grow up speaking only Han at home, or they may learn both languages simultaneously, but when they are of an age to be getting around the community, they learn the Libie language also, so that there are not very many monolingual Han speakers either.

The Han language is used with outsiders, of course, but it also has several uses internal to the community. Wedding and funeral rituals, both of which our team observed in Yishala, are conducted entirely in the Han language and almost entirely according to Han forms. In addition, villagers use writing frequently: from popular magazines to the inscriptions on tombstones, everything is written in Han characters. When Yishala people write letters to Lipuo relatives, they do so in the only script they know: Han. Since Lipuo belongs to the Central Branch of Yi (Bradley 2001), which has historically not had its own scripts, we can be fairly certain that as long as these people have been writing, they have been writing in Chinese. I have photocopies of several documents dating as far back as the tenth year of the Shunzhi reign period (1654) of the Qing dynasty, so it is safe to say that they have been employing Chinese writing for a very long time.

In this diglossic situation, there has not for a long time been any separation of or difference between Han and Yi educational systems. The Yishala village school has taught both Lipuo and Han children in the Han language since 1906. Yishala is now a highly literate community; almost all males and some females born before 1949 went to school, and seven men from Yishala completed junior middle school before 1949. Today over 90 percent of children attend at least some school, and a sizable number go on to junior and senior middle school, and occasionally college. There is essentially no difference, then, in education between Yi and Han.

As the Lipuo community has absorbed Han people, so has it absorbed Han

FIG. 32. The son of the deceased *(right)* leaning on a staff as guests arrive at a Lipuo funeral, as prescribed in the classics

culture, to the point where there are no obvious ethnic markers that distinguish Lipuo from local Han. Both men and women dress in ordinary Chinese shirt-and-trousers costume. Housing in this area, consisting of mud-walled houses built around a courtyard, is identical among the two *minzu*. In the central room off the courtyard, houses have a shrine with four red papers pasted on the wall: one to heaven and the nation, one to the stove god, one to the family's ancestors, and one on the floor to the earth god. These are the paraphernalia of Han folk religion in its southwestern variant.

Also shared with the Han are the rituals of marriage, mentioned above, and burial (figs. 32–33). In short, there is little visible cultural difference between Lipuo and Han. If natives are asked about cultural differences, however, they can come up with them. For example, we were told that while both Lipuo and Han celebrate the traditional Chinese lunar New Year, Han refrain from eating meat on the first day of the year, while Lipuo will eat meat, though they will not slaughter the animal on that day. Similarly, in the typical wedding ritual, the bride's relatives paint the faces of the groom's parents (fig. 34) so that they will not seem too imposing (a ritual shared with certain other Yi groups), and on the evening of a wedding there is "ethnic dancing." Han of course par-

FIG. 33. Carving a headstone for a grave in Yishala

ticipate in this, but it is defined as a Yi custom. There are differences, then, that people can point to when they need a marker.

Finally, Lipuo social organization is essentially identical to, and thus compatible with, that of the local Han. The four lineages that dominate Yishala show the same structure and all the trappings of Han lineage organization (Freedman 1958, 1966; R. Watson 1985) and are different from Nuosu local lineages (Hill and Diehl 2001). In pre-land reform times, the lineages were corporate groups who held some land in common, used to finance ancestor worship. Certain branches continue collective worship at the ancestral graves today, though the land is gone. And, as mentioned, at least two of the lineages keep written genealogies, which contain no hint whatsoever that the lineages consist of non-Han people. Class was also, before land reform, the main principle of social inequality in the Lipuo communities. Land was privately owned and status was based primarily on landholding. Since land was marketable, this class standing was subject to mobility.

Because these central aspects of social organization—family, lineage, and class—were identical to those in Han communities, there were and are easy relationships between Lipuo and Han. Not only could families negotiate wed-

FIG. 34. The bride's relatives painting the faces of the groom's parents at a Lipuo wedding

ding exchanges with no trouble, they could also evaluate one another's social status in terms of the same criteria. Social organization, at least in the last century or so, does not seem to have formed a barrier to mobility or relationship between the two groups. The question that of course presents itself is Which came first—the integration or the similarity? In the long historical view, the integration must have come first, unless we believe that the social organization and customs of the pre-Ming ancestors of the Lipuo were identical to those of the Han, which seems highly unlikely. But once the process of demographic and cultural absorption began, similarity and interconnectedness fed on each other, leading to today's full integration.

In this situation of free relationship, cultural similarity, and social structural compatibility, the question that arises is What accounts for the continuing existence, indeed the continuing vigor, of Lipuo self-identity? What are the barriers to assimilation and the assumption of Han identity? I think, in fact, that there are three of these. First, there is the matter of habitus, an aspect of ethnic identity treated by Bentley (1987). These people have thought of themselves as Lipuo for a long time, and they quite naturally, without thinking about it, convey this identity to their children, for whom it remains part of their unex-

amined assumptions about their own place in the world. Since there are no pressures to assimilate, to take on a Han identity, and in fact no perceived advantage to doing so, the status quo remains unexamined and part of everyday experience.

Second, there is the current government policy of ethnic identification that applies to every individual. One has to be a member of some *minzu* or other if one is a citizen of China. And so people who are Yi marry other people who are Yi, and their children remain Yi. They cannot change their identity; they cannot simply become Han because they are culturally identical to, or culturally assimilated to, the Han *minzu*. In situations where there is even less "left of native culture" to serve as ethnic markers, people do not assimilate to Han identity once their minority identity has been established.

Third, there is in fact a perceived advantage in retaining Lipuo identity. Because Pingdi is a *minzu* township, it has gotten two medium-sized industrial plants (the cement factory and the winery) as well as several other government investment projects, and people can enter schools under special minority quotas, as well as legally bear two children within the state population-control program. The state has created a system in which minority status brings real advantages, which is a reason for claiming minority status. There are, however, two paradoxes in this situation. The first is that some of the benefits of minority status accrue to everybody in the minority district, not just to the members of the minority. Han people living in Pingdi are also allowed to have two children, and although they cannot use the minority quotas for school admission, they can of course share in the benefits of the factories built in the area, and of the cultural stations and other amenities the government has provided. So it is in the interest of the Han people as well that Pingdi be designated a minority township; for it to be so designated, a certain percentage of the population, no matter how Han culturally, has to be officially ethnically Yi.

The other paradox is that, in order for advantages of minority status to accrue to the Yi in this area, they need demonstrate only enough cultural difference from Han to be classified as a minority (language puts them over the top by itself) in order to receive the benefits of that status. They can become as Hanified as they please; they can equal or exceed their Han neighbors educationally or economically,[6] and once they are designated as minorities, they do not even

6. In fact, it looks good if they do so. The Han-controlled government likes to point out situations in which the "brother nationalities" are doing as well as or better than the Han: one frequently cited instance is the higher college admission rate among Koreans (who live mostly in the Yanbian [no relation] Korean Autonomous Prefecture) than among the Han.

need to retain the markers that got them the designation in the first place. So the nature of ethnic relations here, in which Yi absorb both Han people and Han culture, redounds to the benefit of everyone concerned, of all actors in the system: Lipuo, Han, and government. It is no wonder that, in this area, there is little of what we ordinarily think of as an ethnic problem. The stake of all actors in the system is the same. In this situation, acculturation can proceed even further than it has already, to the point where even language is lost, and ethnic identity will remain. The Lipuo in Pingdi are not that far yet, but we do have an example of such a situation: the Shuitian people.

THE SHUITIAN IN ZHUANGSHANG AND FUTIAN: ETHNICITY REGAINED

An Economic Success Story

When I first visited Panzhihua in 1987 to inquire of local authorities about the possibilities of conducting fieldwork there, I was told that there were three different kinds of Yi for me to study. There were the Liangshan Yi in various parts of Yanbian, who had preserved their ancient slave society system until 1956; there were the Yunnan Yi in Pingdi, who had long had a feudal mode of production; and there were some people in the western part of the municipality whom nobody knew too much about and who called themselves Shuitian,[7] but who ought to have more known about them.

As part of our 1988 field research, my colleagues and I went to a village called Zhuangshang in Pingjiang Township near the western extremity of Panzhihua, where we spent a week conducting household surveys and other interviews among the population, which was almost entirely Shuitian. In a 1990 publication, I had this to say about their ethnic identity:

> Although the Shuitian are officially classified as members of the Yi *minzu*, they reject this designation because they would prefer to be recognized as the Shuitian *zu*, so they are attempting to have their identity recognized as this separate *minzu*. They have been completely unsuccessful in this regard; the closest they have come is to have other people, unofficially at least, refer to them as the Shuitian Yi. Despite cultural, linguistic and social similarities to the surrounding Han population, the Shuitian people are firmly united in their assertion that they are not Han. . . .

7. There is no connection between the terms Shui (discussed earlier in this chapter) and Shuitian, though they both contain the character *shui,* or "water." The Shui are a recognized minzu, almost all of whom live in Guizhou, and whose language belongs to the Tai family.

> The government has accepted [this claim], but it has used its own Stalinist criteria to classify them as Yi. The people of Zhuangshang presumably received this designation on the basis of their language (which would have been known to most of the older people alive at the time of classification in the mid-1950s), and perhaps such things as lighting torches on the twenty-fourth day of the sixth lunar month. But the Shuitian emphatically resist such classification; they use their own cultural criteria to point out that Yi, that is Nuosu, live in the mountains, eat *tuotuo rou* (big chunks of meat),[8] and wear funny costumes. The Shuitian, by contrast, live in the lowlands, eat rice, and wear ordinary clothes. They are not, in their own eyes, wild barbarians like the Nuosu. They are civilized people—how could they then be of the same minzu as the Yi? [Harrell 1990: 536–37]

By 1994, when I spent a week in the neighboring township of Futian, I heard nobody make any kind of strong claim for special status as a separate *minzu*. People still referred to themselves as Shuitian *zu* or Shuitian *ren*, but when asked readily agreed that Shuitian were a kind of Yi*zu*, and when they were either asked directly or being careful to speak correctly, readily identified their *minzu* as Yi. In addition, when I made brief visits back to Zhuangshang in both 1993 and 1994, the few people I talked to said that while some villagers don't like it, everyone now accepts, for pragmatic reasons, the designation of Shuitian as a kind of Yi. What happened in the interim?

For one thing, between 1988 and 1994 the Shuitian in both Futian and Zhuangshang did extremely well economically. I wrote of my first visit to Zhuangshang,

> The southwestern corner of the township, where Jingtang, Kuqiao, Laluo, and Zhuangshang lie, is dry, undeveloped, and poorly served by transport. Zhuangshang itself is the poorest village in this corner of the township, with a *per capita* income in our survey of only around 424 *yuan*, not low enough to qualify it for state aid as an officially impoverished (*pinkun*) area, but low enough that it has no electricity, no bicycles (some families could afford them, but they couldn't get anywhere on them, so people use donkeys as their main means of carrying things), many people dress in patches, and all houses are built of unplastered mud walls. [Harrell 1993: 89]

8. The text in the original printed article is corrupt at this point. I have substituted a coherent, if perhaps less elegant version from an earlier draft.

According to people there, the situation in Futian was about the same in the late 1980s, with a per capita income of around ¥400 and a primarily subsistence economy. But since then, there has been rapid economic development, most dramatically in Futian, but also in Zhuangshang. In Futian the official per capita income in 1993 was ¥1,343; even with the considerable inflation that took place in China during that six-year interval, this is a startling improvement. Annual per capita income of individual production cooperatives ranged from ¥833 to ¥2,299. The three that are almost completely Shuitian Yi had average incomes of ¥1,724, ¥1,539, and ¥1,767, somewhat above the average for the township as a whole.

These income figures are also reflected in the changed standard of living in Futian in general, and in the Shuitian communities in particular. In the three production cooperatives that are all Shuitian, most people have recently built new houses with concrete floors, tile roofs, and piped-in running water from a local spring. Over half the families have televisions, and increasing numbers are purchasing washing machines and refrigerators. There are even a few households that have small trucks used for agricultural hauling. Zhuangshang has experienced similar development; from a place with no electricity and a shortage of irrigation water (caused by the water having been diverted by a local coal mine), in 1993 it boasted a per capita income of around ¥1,100 *yuan*—enough electricity for about half the families to have televisions, piped-in water in almost every household, and a new reservoir that was expected to solve their springtime irrigation problems beginning in 1995.

Futian has followed a model that would probably be familiar to those concerned with recent economic development in rural China. The township government has invested resources heavily in township and village enterprises, or *xiangcun qiye*; in 1994 they owned seventeen of these, including three coal-washing plants, a gas station, a papain plant, a coking factory, a mining company with six mines, a construction materials company, a wholesaling corporation, a construction company with four hundred workers, a gas station, some brick and tile kilns, and a driving school on the streets of Panzhihua City. The companies together had a total income of ¥21 million, of which something like ¥1 million was available from remitted taxes and another ¥200,000 from outright profits, both available for investment in education and rural infrastructure such as roads.

With the input from township investment in infrastructure, and with recently increased availability of agricultural extension programs, farmers of Futian have been able to increase their cash income greatly from three sources. Many areas have a grain surplus, which people can use to feed livestock or to

sell on the open market. Scientific pig-breeding has also been introduced, and many households find this a source of increased income. In one village, because all breeding is done by artificial insemination, male pigs are castrated and sold as soon as they reach the most advantageous weight. And most dramatically, silkworm production was begun in 1991 and took off very quickly. The township government brought in an extension agent to teach silkworm-raising methods, and three households raised them that year. By 1994 about sixty families of the 109 in Tangba Village, which has the highest Shuitian population, raised silkworms, and their income according to official figures totaled ¥127,000, or slightly over ¥1,000 per household.

Development has led to increases in personal consumption, but some profits have also been plowed back into infrastructure and education, with the result that all production cooperatives (most of which are small natural villages) are now accessible by jeep roads of varying quality, and most also have running water. Local schools have improved their rates of pupil retention and graduation, and school officials are proud of the fact that Futian's children are taught every subject mentioned in the national "Outlines for Elementary Education," including natural science starting from the first grade and laboratory sciences in the upper grades.

Futian has thus become a success story, like so many other communities in rural China where there has been rapid development of cash crops and local enterprises in the past ten years. But Futian is special, because it is a minority township, or *minzu xiang*, by virtue of the fact that 1,320 of its 3,711 people, or 35.6 percent, are minorities, all but about 250 of them Shuitian Yi. This means that they are not just a run-of-the-mill success story (after all, they still lag far behind rural areas near China's coastal cities, and are not among the richest villages even in Panzhihua or Liangshan); rather, they are a demonstration that minorities can make it, living proof that even in one of the poorest parts of the country members of minority *minzu* can achieve economic development. The "Futian Model," with its agriculture- rather than migration-based development, its judicious use of local resources, and its reinvestment of profits from township and village enterprises, has begun to be advanced as a paragon for other minorities to follow in their own efforts at development (Li Xingxing 1995).

In my own opinion, Futian does not seem like much of a breakthrough for minorities. It is a lowland village near a medium-sized city, with good, relatively flat land and good soil; relatively good transport access, especially for a mountainous region; a tradition of schooling that goes back well before the establishment of the People's Republic; and a population 100 percent fluent in the Han language. Futian can certainly be a model for how to develop a com-

munity without destroying it, at least in the short run, but there is nothing about this model that makes it particularly suited to minorities, and it would be outrageous to think that a place like Mishi, with none of these advantages, or even one of the much better off natural economies around Lugu Lake or Baiwu, has any of the conditions necessary to emulate Futian in its pattern of economic takeoff. But probably because economic development in minority regions has been such a vexing problem for Chinese authorities generally, some people have seized on Futian, despite its special situation, as at least a real example of a minority community that has experienced development. And since Futian is, willy-nilly, a minority model, in a sense its presentation of self to the outside world must be of a minority community. As long as Futian's cadres, teachers, and ordinary people present themselves as successful minorities, they will continue to garner the outside attention that has contributed to their success. It is in this context that the current ethnic consciousness of many of Futian's Shuitian people has evolved in the last few years.

The Shuitian and Acculturation

The Shuitian, according to researches into their language, belong to the Western Branch of the Yi, one of the two who are more closely related linguistically to Lahu and Lisu than to the other Yi branches, and who are not known historically to have ever had a script for writing their language (Bradley 2001). In their own language, which is fading in Futian and gone in Zhuangshang, they call themselves Laluo (Björverud 1998). There has been little historical research into the origins of these particular Laluo, but people in Tangba Village related a legend:

> The ancestors of the three surnames—Li, Ni, and Hu—who constitute the entire population of the three hamlets that make up the ethnic core of Tangba, originally came from Yangshu Tang, Yangliu Wa, near Zhaotong in northeastern Yunnan. They originally all lived together, 360 households, in a stone-walled village [*shi zhaizi*]; this may have been located at the site of the current No. 1 Production Cooperative, where there are still some ruins of such a structure [I went to see these—a gate and some steps—myself]. They had a tenant, however, who got into some sort of dispute with them and burned all the wooden buildings inside the wall. With the buildings were burned any historical records that might have existed, so nobody knows how long ago this might have been. Any records they might have had would have been written in Chinese, since nobody knows of any evidence that there was ever a Shuitian writing system. When the walled

> village was burnt, the surnames dispersed, and now they are found in Futian, Zhuangshang, and Taiping in what is now Panzhihua, and in many parts of Huaping County in Yunnan.[9]

According to older residents of Tangba, during the early part of the twentieth century this was a generally poor area, and *minzu* (which is the word Shuitian people often use to refer to themselves) were uniformly poor, and many of them worked as tenants for either the He or the Lu, two Han landlord families. But there were also poor Han peasants. The tenants usually lived in rudimentary houses provided by the landlords, and in addition to the rents paid to the landlords they also paid duties to the Gao *tusi*, who is remembered as having been Han himself, even though he collected duties only from the *minzu*. There were two traditional-style private schools in the township, and some of the *minzu* boys went there to study *The Three Character Classic*, *The Thousand-Character Text*, and some of the Confucian classics known as the Four Books. The only girl students, however, were Han. At that time, older people told us, people still mostly spoke the *minzu* language at home, though they were of course bilingual. Older people did not remember women ever wearing skirts, but they remember hearing their elders say that Shuitian women used to wear them, and in the early part of the twentieth century people still wove hempen cloth.

The picture one gets from talking to older people is that immediately before the founding of the People's Republic, there were still cultural and linguistic differences between Shuitian and Han. They were, however, integrated into the same economy of mixed tenants and small freeholders, as indicated by the fact that unlike Nuosu areas in Liangshan, for example, they underwent the ordinary process of the violent, class-struggle land reform, just like Han communities everywhere in China. Some of the local landlords in Futian were struggled against; in Zhuangshang, there were no landlords or rich peasants, though some people remember going to the neighboring Han Catholic village of Jingtang to participate in struggle sessions.

In the last forty or fifty years, however, any significant cultural differences that might serve as ethnic markers seem to have disappeared among the Shuitian in Zhuangshang and Futian. In Zhuangshang in 1988, there was already nobody who could speak the Shuitian language, and although it was lasting a bit longer in Futian, by 1994 even middle-aged people, though they could speak some,

9. All of this seems plausible with the exception of the number of households. The area is far too small to have held 360 families.

still felt much more at home in Chinese. All people could tell us in 1988 in Zhuangshang was that people were probably a bit darker-skinned on the average than the Han, and that they pronounced a very few words differently, such as *yinba* for "salt" in contrast to local *yanba*, as pronounced by Han in neighboring communities. In Futian in 1994, people could not name any customs that distinguished them from local Han—their marriage, funeral, and burial practices were all the same, and what ancestral altars I saw in both Futian and Zhuangshang were entirely in the local Han style.

A Resurgent Identity

Where people do make a lot of comments about ethnic differences, however, is in terms of character. For example, the Party secretary of the Shuitian-majority Tangba Village, herself a Han, along with two of her fellow cadres, both Shuitian, were eager to extol the virtues of the *minzu* to us. They are, of course, hospitable, or *hao ke*, something that is almost invariably said of minority *minzu* everywhere in China. This is a problem, of course, in one sense, since it means they "don't have a commodity-economy mind-set" (*meiyou shangpin jingji guannian*), another thing that is often said about minorities. On the other hand, their lack of economic killer-instinct makes them better able to undertake cooperative projects. A young woman who was among the leaders in the production of silk in Futian told us that if one producer does not have enough mulberry leaves at the crucial time between the last molting and the spinning of the cocoon, when it is difficult to keep up with the voracious appetites of the squirming larvae, another producer who had extra leaves she was not expecting to need would just allow her neighbor to go pick some and not charge her or expect anything in return. Han, however, would of course ask for money. Similarly, the village head told us that he borrows a room, free of charge, to raise silkworms in the township head's nearby large compound. Minorities, he told us, would never charge rent.

Speaking about character differences is only one way in which cadres and others in Futian emphasize their minority identity. They also like to stress how far they have come as a minority success story, but do not neglect to mention how far they still have to go. For example, my research companion in Futian in 1994, Yan Dezong, was telling some local cadres and farmers how much better the economic situation seemed in Futian than in his home village near Chongqing, to which he had recently returned for a family funeral. Immediately, local cadres responded that this must not be the case, since he after all comes from a Han area.

I think that all this presentation of self as minorities who have made it is probably carefully calculated to ensure that Futian retains its status both as a minority township (which can receive certain development aid from higher authorities, and whose residents can be eligible for certain perquisites) and as a model township, which receives solicitous attention from government agencies and from ethnological researchers alike. One discussion with a group of cadres of mixed ethnicity elicited the opinion that while there may be character differences between Han and *minzu* (the Han work harder when young, and the *minzu* when middle-aged, for example), really everybody is pretty much the same. But they all agreed that they worked hard to get Futian recognized in the early 1980s as a Yi township precisely so that they could get favorable treatment: everybody there, including the Han, has a flat two-child quota regardless of the sex of the children, and middle school students who are classified as minorities (though not, in contrast to the birth quota, the Han from minority areas) get an extra ten points added to their scores on the examinations for entry into vocational high schools, or *zhongzhuan*. For similar reasons, when Han marry minorities, the children always take the minority nationality.

Another way of pushing their case as a model minority community is to court visiting anthropologists. Futian was not in my original plans for field research when I went to Chengdu in October 1994; I changed my plans to accommodate it because I learned that the indefatigable Li Xingxing (who also wrote about the ethnicity of the Naze) was writing about Futian as an example of successful development in a minority area (Li Xingxing 1995) and that the township had become a long-term project of the provincial Nationalities Research Institute. When we visited the township head's house for lunch, he told me that I was not the first anthropologist to have been there; both Li Xingxing and his patron Li Shaoming (himself a member of the Tujia *minzu*) had eaten lunch at the same table. Mikhail Kriukov, an eminent Russian ethnologist who now teaches in Taiwan, had come only to the township and had not actually visited the villages.

This frank and unashamed instrumentalism goes a long way, I think, toward explaining both why the minority people of Zhuangshang and Futian try so hard to retain their minority status, in spite of their own admission of having no cultural barriers to intermarriage or to other interaction between them and their Han neighbors, and why by 1994 they had given up, for the time being at least, their earlier resentment over being identified as Yi. Most people in Futian in 1994 still did not come out with the term Yi entirely spontaneously; in the course of normal conversation they called themselves either Shuitian or, more

commonly, just plain *minzu*. But when asked specifically which *minzu* they belonged to, none had any hesitation volunteering the name Yi.

It appears to me that the newfound prosperity of the Shuitian people would not be seriously threatened if they were to lose their minority status; they have come too far already. But it is still prudent not to take any chances. And fighting one minority designation just to get another that would not bring any added advantages seems chancy and therefore imprudent. When I was in Zhuangshang in 1988, people were angry. They had experienced a decline in agricultural income because of the diversion of their water by the coal mine; they had experienced a cutoff of their electricity in response to their attempts to get the mine to give them back their water; they had unsuccessfully filed suit against the mine to try to get the water returned and the electricity turned back on. Being called Yi, getting lumped in with those barbarian Nuosu, was just another insult, and Yi status was visibly not doing them any good anyway. As a young man said to me in 1993, "When you were here before was the most difficult time." By 1993–94 things had changed for the better, and only the most diehard local loyalist would have failed to see the advantages of instrumental ethnicity.

It was thus entirely on instrumental grounds that the ethnic identity of the Laluo people of Zhuangshang and Futian was based in the mid-1990s. The process of acculturation had already gone so far that relatives did not always know the ethnicity of their own in-laws, and nobody could think of any cultural markers that distinguished one group from another. But unlike the Shui of Puwei or even the nearby Nasu and Tazhi, whose acculturation seemed to be leading them in the direction of assimilation, the Shuitian were standing firm, ideally as Shuitian but anyway as Yi. The *minzu* designation was so valuable that it brought along with it a real ethnic identity, even in the absence of ethnic conflicts or sharp local ethnic boundaries.