

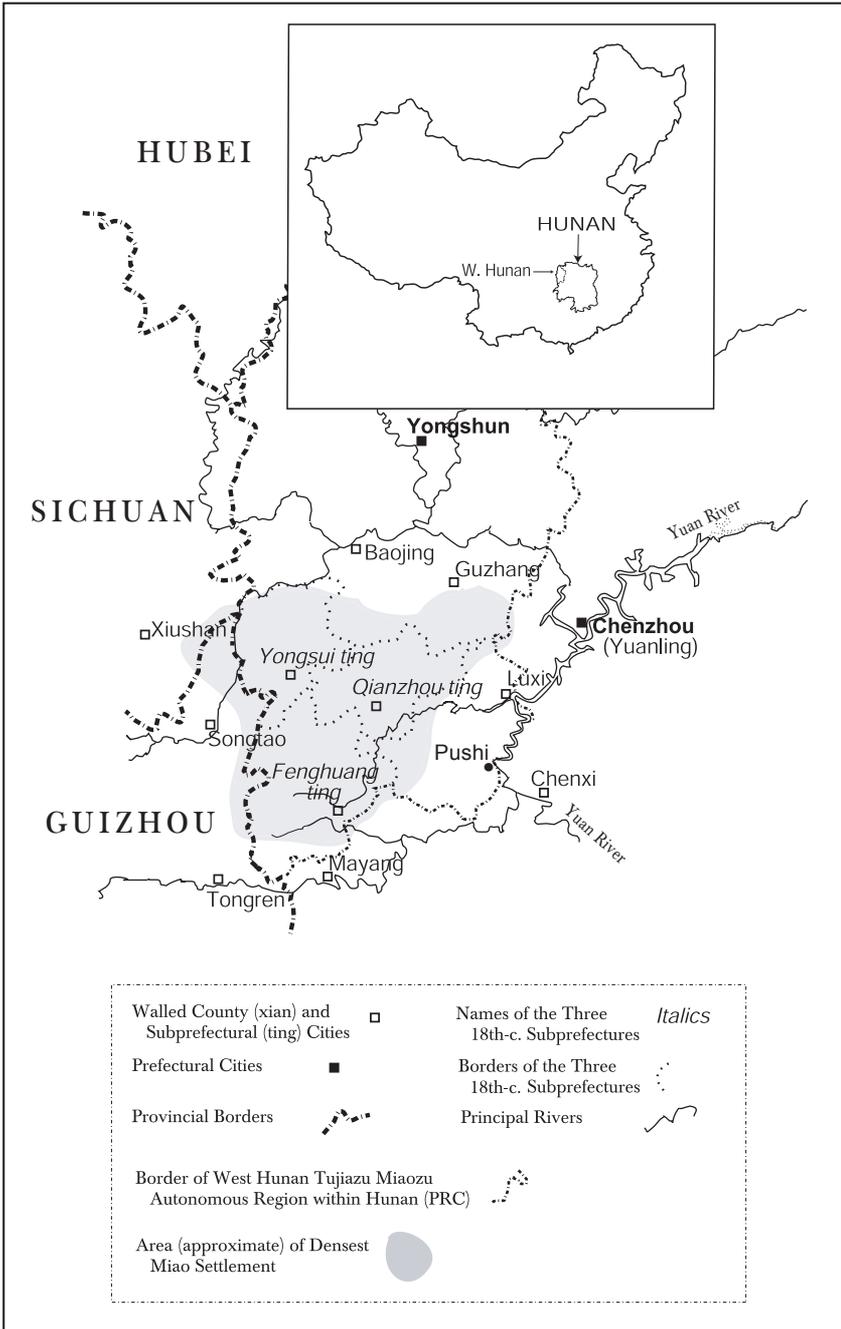
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Ethnic Revolt in the Qing Empire: The “Miao Uprising” of 1795–1797 Reexamined

The great revolt of the Miao 苗 of western Hunan – the easternmost branch of the Miao peoples dispersed over southwest China – began in the last year of the Qianlong emperor’s reign. It was a complete surprise to Han Chinese in this ethnic frontier region, and to Qing officialdom. Miao bands raided Han settlements in a region extending across the three subprefectures 廳 of Yongsui 永綏, Fenghuang 鳳凰, and Qianzhou 乾州 into parts of Guizhou and Sichuan provinces. (See map, overleaf.) Larger attacks followed into the lightly protected Qianzhou capital, which was several times overrun and burned, and into Pushi 浦市, the unwalled commercial center on the Yuan 沅 River. Two isolated walled official encampments, Zhengda 正大 and Chounao 嗅腦, were besieged, and so for a full two months was the remote capital of Yongsui. Qing reinforcements were ambushed, with the total loss of 700 or 800 in one case and an entire baggage train with thousands of guards in another; and rebel bands ranging from 500 to 5,000 in strength roamed over the region, killing or putting to flight Han Chinese and burning their settlements.

Within three months the tide had turned. Qing regional leaders, notably the Yunnan-Guizhou governor-general Fukang’an 福康安 (d. 1796), who had put down the Taiwan Rebellion and many others, marched large Manchu and Han armies through the remote mountains to suppress the uprising. The emperor paid daily attention to his gen-

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Map. Western Hunan

erals' reports of the campaign, and stinted no funds in their support. Defeated on every front, the Miao forces turned to defensive tactics – cutting paths and building fortifications, which succeeded in slowing the Qing advance, and making hamlet-burning raids on Miao who had surrendered to the official side. One by one the chief leaders were captured or killed, partly through a strategy of betrayal. Qing forces gradually moved through the mountains, destroying whole hamlets along the way and methodically securing supply lines and establishing encampments on the slopes and heights. Finally they pushed through to Pinglong 平隴, the rebel headquarters, in January, 1796. Some rebels fought on for a full year. Local troops would continue wiping out rebel remnants and burning hamlets of dubious loyalty for another ten years.

The Miao Revolt is interesting for two main reasons. First, as a rare ethnic movement, it is a late and significant case of indigenous resistance to Han Chinese expansion in south China. Second, as a challenge to imperial power it marks a turning point in China's last dynasty: it was the first of a series of revolts at the Qing periphery that culminated with the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864), which would permanently weaken the Qing imperial center. But whatever its long-term meanings, local conditions and motivations largely accounted for it and these will be the main focus of this essay. A series of secondary studies has debated such questions as the movement's ethnic or class character, its illumination of Qing oppression and rhetorical control of non-Han peoples, and its possibly millenarian ideology and “multi-ethnic” appeal.¹ The materials to examine these and related questions are so rich that they have barely begun to be explored. Besides numerous local histories and works dealing with the three western Hunan sub-prefectures, there is a three-volume edition of almost 700 memorials and edicts about the revolt and its aftermath, along with unpublished documents in Taiwan and Beijing archives.² Over eighty confessions

¹ I address some of the arguments contained in the following: Ma Shaochao 馬少僑, *Qing-dai Miaomin qi yi* 清代苗民起義 (Wuchang: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1956); Wu Rongzhen 吳榮臻, *Qianjia Miaomin qi yi shigao* 乾嘉苗民起義史稿 (Guiyang: Guizhou renmin chubanshe, 1985); Siu-woo Cheung, “Millenarianism and the Miao,” in Stevan Harrell, ed., *Cultural Encounters on China's Ethnic Frontiers* (U. of Washington P., 1995); Daniel McMahon, “Identity and Conflict on a Chinese Borderland: Yan Ruyi and the Recruitment of the Gelao During the 1795–97 Miao Revolt,” *Late Imperial China* 23.2 (December 2002), pp. 53–86.

² See the 3-vol. collection of punctuated memorials and edicts entitled *Qingdai qianqi Miaomin qi yi dang'an shiliao* 清代前期苗民起義檔案史料, the First Central Historical Archives, the Qing History Research Center of the Chinese People's University, and the Guizhou Provincial Archives, comp. (Beijing: Guangming ribao, 1987; hereafter *MMQY*). Unpublished memorials were drawn from “Zhupi zouzhe, Minzulei, Miaozu” 朱批奏折民族類苗族 (“Imperially Annotated Memorials, Nationalities Archives, Miao Nationality”; hereafter, *ZPZZ*) and the microfilmed Grand Council (Junjichu 軍機處) records, both at the First Central Historical

(*gongci* 供詞, *gongdan* 供單) were recorded and preserved, in the customary first-person style, some perfunctory, some in detailed question and answer form. Confessions extracted under torture, as these often were, in the certain imminence of death, may be less or more reliable than sworn testimony, but since most of the leaders were captured for trial, it is possible to crosscheck their testimony, and this testimony will be a principal source of this essay.³

I shall deal in turn with the frontier social setting of the movement, its leadership, the unexamined factor of trance-possession, the idea of the savior king, the ethnic aspect of the revolt, and the role of various intermediary groups. The article concludes with two codas in which I offer interpretations of the severity of the official suppression and note some recent memorializing and folk memories.

FRONTIER SOCIETY

Recent studies draw attention to the fluid and creative nature of China's periphery and to its contribution to the center's view of itself. Pat Giersch has used the term "middle ground" in his examination of the Yunnan/Burma border area in the eighteenth century, describing it as an area of freewheeling economic exchange, cultural interaction, and flexible identities; and Daniel McMahon has applied this concept

Archives in Beijing, and from "Miaofei dang" 苗匪檔, *j.* 3, pp. 13–14, using a version with the Taipei Palace Museum pagination; an identical version copied by the same hand but differently paginated can be found in the Beijing First Central Historical Archives with the revised title "Miaomin qiyi dangan" 苗民起義檔案 ("Archives on the Miao Uprising"). *MMQY* draws extensively from all these materials and several publications produced soon after the suppression. I also used gazetteers in U.S. and Taiwan libraries, and narratives about the revolt recently published or gathered in the field. I have published three related papers which I refer to in the notes: on a transethnic cult of the region titled "Myth Making on an Ethnic Frontier: The Cult of the Heavenly Kings of West Hunan, 1715–1996," *Modern China* 26.4 (October, 2000), pp. 448–500; on the special legal system applied to local Miao, "Violence and Ethnicity on a Qing Colonial Frontier: Customary and Statutory Law in the Eighteenth Century Miao Pale," *Modern Asian Studies* 37.1 (2003), pp. 41–80; and on the controversy among officials about whether to quarantine or assimilate the Miao, "Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier in the Eighteenth Century," in Pamela K. Crossley, Helen F. Siu, and Donald S. Sutton, eds., *Empire at the Margins: Culture, Ethnicity and Frontier in Early Modern China* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 2006), pp. 469–508.

³ The main vulnerabilities in the confessions as sources are: 1. possible elaboration of non-existent facts to please interrogators – a risky business; 2. protecting loved ones ("my brother died in the fifth month" – awkward if he was captured alive); see *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 361, re. Shi Laoqiao 石老喬, a nephew and step-son of Shi Liudeng, his confessions dated January 14 and 23, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 373); 3. omission of evidence about oneself – liable to be revealed by others; 4. incriminating personal enemies who were actually innocent – very hard to detect; 5. possible distortions in the recording process, notably in the use of summaries. Crosschecking is therefore essential; and skepticism is advisable if a person or incident or fact is described in a single confession and no other source.

to the Miao region of western Hunan.⁴ Its advantage is to draw attention to productive, dynamic roles of the people at China's periphery and to allow agency to these locals in the periodic expansion, and even gradual transformation, of the Chinese order.

"Middle ground" is a valuable framework for the study of China's frontiers, but in the case of western Hunan it needs to be carefully situated to allow for differences in time as well as space. In the changing internal frontier of western Hunan, the main flow of cultural influence can go in either direction; political authorities can be interventionist or passive; and Han population can trickle into or flood local society. Thus the middle ground in this region can be imagined dynamically, taking two different forms roughly corresponding to the contrasting political conditions of successive centuries: the seventeenth-century interdynastic period of low population, moderate in-migration, and indirect state control via hereditary *tusi* 土司 chieftains, a period that added numerous Han settlers as individuals or communities – trans-frontiersmen who tended to adopt local (Miao) cultural patterns and whose children might become Miao; and the eighteenth-century high Qing, a time of rapid Han Chinese in-migration and the intrusion of the state as the three new subprefectures were established, and a time of Han dominance, Miao acculturation, and Miao land-loss. By the nineteenth century, when Qing rule was maintained by reliance on Miao police and former *tusi* populations, the region no longer displayed the fluid cross-cultural movements characteristic of the "middle ground"; but this awaits investigation.

From this point of view there are two turning points in western Hunan: first, the Qing replacement of *tusi*, the hereditary, imperially ratified local chieftains long based to the north at Baojing 保靖 and Yongshun 永順, an administrative incorporation (*gaitu guiliu* 改土歸留) that seismically shifted the gradient of the "middle ground" in favor of Han Chinese economic power and cultural influence; and second: the revolt of 1795, the last large-scale disturbance in this region, which, when suppressed, brought on political stability, Miao subjection, and the end of a free-wheeling internal periphery. I regard the two turning points as closely connected: the imposition of direct rule created the conditions for the grievances that prompted the revolt.

⁴ C. Pat Giersch, "A Motley Throng: Social Change on Southwest China's Early Modern Frontier, 1700–1880," *JAS* 60.1 (Feb. 2001), pp. 67–94; McMahon, "Identity and Conflict." See also introduction and chapters in Crossley, Siu, and Sutton, *Empire at Its Margins*.

In other words, the Miao Revolt of 1795 can be seen as a delayed response to the consequences of imperial rule, chiefly the Han Chinese in-migration that state incorporation had made possible with the creation of new subprefectures at Fenghuang and Qianzhou in 1704 and at Yongsui twenty-five years later. The flood of settlers, with the tacit or indirect support of the new official yamens and the garrisons of soldiers, had gradually appropriated most of the best land in the region, formerly farmed by ancestors of the Miao. There had been a gradual process of competition in a rather unequal game: the Han settler arrivals, civilian and garrison soldiers, had better access to goods like salt, textiles, and iron. They had more money and knew how to manage financial transactions to their own advantage, and found that the subprefects' courts usually decided land disputes in their favor. It helped that some probably possessed a degree of literacy, unlike the Miao. There were two standard kinds of loans, one issued to the Miao by soldiers at the scattered camps, the other by merchants from elsewhere in Hunan who lived at the market places. Interest was paid at a rate of five percent monthly and was customarily treated as borrowed capital after three months, interest being paid on the interest. After a year the interest exceeded the original loan several times over. When the harvest became due, if a rich Miao would not be guarantor, nothing might be left after payment of the loan. Through such means, by the 1790s almost all the fertile valley land in the three prefectures had fallen into Han Chinese hands. Around the new capital of Yongsui, built in the early 1730s, settlers arriving from the interior in preceding decades had taken over a fertile plateau originally entirely farmed by Miao.⁵

There were other pressures as well. Population throughout the region had increased rapidly, as in much of late-eighteenth-century China. Besides Han in-migration, there was natural demographic increase among the Miao. "What had once been a single household with

⁵ This account of how Miao land was alienated is given in Yan Ruyi 嚴如煜, *Miaofang beilan* 苗防備覽 (1820; hereafter, *MFBL*), *j.* 22, pp. 21–22; on the rush of migrants into Yongsui after incorporation, see *MFBL* 3, p. 9. The problem of Han land engrossment at Miao expense is clearly recognized in the authoritative five-point proposal for postwar reconstruction made by Helin (Sichuan governor-general), annotated by the emperor on August 28, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 260–66). It forms the basis of the first point, the others concerning defense posts, Miao Baihu and hamlet heads, wall-building, and the refugee Han people. The Grand Council kept the same arrangement, adding only an item on confiscating Miao weapons. The councilors noted "repeated Imperial edicts to the effect that the disturbances of Shi Liudeng and others were all provoked by the every-day encroachments of the guest people" and approved an investigation of land occupied by Han people since Ming times, i.e. since 1644, including land inside the Miao hamlets for purposes of tax evasion 插花, dated September 6, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 272–78). The late Fukang'an had agreed (*MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 195–96).

several male members might have grown into several households and several tens of males; what had been one hamlet might have divided into several, and then several tens of hamlets.”⁶ When Fenghuang and Qianzhou had been established in 1704, 313 hamlets were counted and brought under control. By the end of the century there were estimated to be about 4,000 Miao hamlets in the three subprefectures (see map, above) with a further 1,070 in Songtao.⁷ The increase had been made possible by the conversion of forest land to agriculture; by good harvests, as elsewhere in central China in the late-eighteenth century; and by the improvement of Miao agricultural techniques, though not to the Han Chinese level. The result was a kind of demographic crisis with land in increasingly short supply. It was not exactly a subsistence crisis – the harvest of 1794 was a good one, enough in the following spring for rebel hamlets to send out their braves fully supplied – but rather a question of declining standards and open envy of Han prosperity in the valleys their Miao grandparents had tilled.⁸ Two easily overlooked repercussions of demographic pressure were, ecologically, the diminution of fauna that the frontier people had long hunted with muskets and spears; and, socially, the frustration of the Miao practice of newly-marrieds setting up a separate household,⁹ which especially affected young unmarried males who would be the main fighters in the Miao forces.

The three subprefectures were all part of the far-western periphery of what Skinner has called the Middle Yangzi macroregion,¹⁰ but beyond the low valleys with mostly Han population, two zones may be further distinguished within it: the “inner periphery” – the higher valleys and hills of Qianzhou and Fenghuang – and the cool mountainous “extreme periphery” including the Yongsui plateau and part of Songtao. The uprising would bring together the Miao newly seeking a living in the extreme periphery, who had since incorporation been called *sheng* 生 (raw, unfamiliar), and those more acculturated (*shu* 熟, or cooked) and better-off, cultivating inner-periphery plateaus and high valleys.

The form of the revolt would be conditioned by local Miao culture. (I suspend for the moment discussion of the question of the existence

⁶ *MFBL* 22, p. 22; 2, pp. 9–10.

⁷ *MFBL* 3, p. 22, and undated memorial by Zhao Shenqiao 趙申喬, Hunan governor 1703–08 (*MFBL* 19, pp. 3–4). See entry in Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period (1644–1912)* (Washington, D. C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, 1943), p. 80.

⁸ On subsistence crisis, cf. James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1976).

⁹ *MFBL* 2, p. 9. The ideal of the first son starting a new household is still noted in the region.

¹⁰ G. William Skinner, “Regional Urbanization in Nineteenth-Century China,” in *idem*, ed., *The City in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1977), pp. 211–19.

of either local, or pan-Miao, consciousness). The endemic cultural elements relevant to the uprising can be specified briefly.

1. Affinal connections were strongly emphasized with the help of frequent cross-cousin marriage and the levirate.¹¹
2. After many decades of direct Qing rule, a loose structure of appointed hamlet (*zhai* 寨) heads and *baihu* 百戶 (“hundred-family heads”) had given some definition to what had been an acephalous local society almost untouched by *tusi* authority centered far to the north.
3. Ecstatic possession was a key means of spiritual contact, and shamans played an important role as ritual leaders at the hamlet level.
4. There was a tradition of a Miao king appearing in times of collective trouble.
5. Organized feuds were an established custom, with a sequence of dispute, violence and negotiated recompense. In such feuds blood-oaths to the local gods, the White Emperor Heavenly Kings, preceded participation in violent raids, and *kuanhui* 款會, a sort of intermittent, multi-hamlet association, helped to resolve them.

The revolt’s loose structure and direction reflected these regional cultural practices and beliefs.¹² In form it produced no novel organization, as the Taipings would fifty years later, and in spirit it was not a revolutionary attack on local society, at least on its Miao aspects, but a sharpening of its basic cultural and institutional features against the threat of outsiders, or those perceived as outsiders.

In its short duration (though mopping up persisted until 1807) and narrow range (a few hundred square miles), this Miao revolt differs from the rebellion that devastated Guizhou for twenty years starting in the 1860s, which has been studied by Robert Jenks. Jenks convincingly sees this later revolt as multi-ethnic, and places “Miao” in quotation marks.¹³ Unlike the Guizhou rebellion, this uprising was not spurred

¹¹ The five surnames recognized as truly Miao systematically intermarried: e.g., a Shi could not marry a Ma, and rules dictated the placement of the stove depending on the in-marriage clan names. See the contemporary Shi Qigui 石啓貴, *Xiangxi Miaozu shidi diaocha baogao* 湘西苗族實地調查報告 (Changsha: Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1986), pp. 181–83. It is supported not only by field interviews and casual architectural observations in Huayuan [Yongsui] in 1996, but also by a survey of rebel relatives, along with the detailed lists of married couples in the records of the 1787 Goubu incident in *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 138–162, and in *ZPZZ*.

¹² Ma, *Qingdai Miaomin qiye*; Wu, *Qianjia Miaomin qiye shigao*. For evidence on the persistent cultural practices of the Eastern Miao, see Sutton, “Violence and Ethnicity.”

¹³ Citing Robert Jenks, *Insurgency and Social Disorder in Guizhou: The “Miao” Rebellion, 1864–1873* (Honolulu: U. of Hawai’i P., 1994). McMahon believes the 1795 revolt was also multi-ethnic, a position I argue against, below. Of the later Guizhou revolt, Jenks argues persuasively that “[I]n actuality the Miao represented only one element in the rebellion. Provincewide, the disorder in Guizhou consisted of a congeries of different revolts involving other

by a subsistence crisis or galvanized by anger at the official and illegal exactions of local government. Its religious elements, though not entirely different from the Guizhou rebellion, were distinctive to the eastern Miao of the Hunan-Guizhou borderlands. It was dominated by a small core group of leaders and was never broadly cross-ethnic in participation. But these matters deserve close examination.

THE MIAO LEADERSHIP

Early accounts of the revolt spoke of “Miao tribes,”¹⁴ a term that not only makes these largely agricultural people of western Hunan sound more primitive than they were but also simplifies the political organization of the revolt. The first of the above-mentioned features of local culture – family, clan, and affinal relationships – linked most leaders; and the second – preexisting authority as *baihu* or hamlet heads – sustained relations with their followers. Four of the five principal leaders (I come to the fifth below) had large and influential families including several sons and nephews. In the extreme periphery, at Cucumber Hamlet 黃瓜寨 in Yongsui, Shi Sanbao 石三保 was a cousin of Shi Liudeng 石柳鄧, from Datang 大塘 over the Guizhou border; an official raid on Liudeng’s hamlet on February 5, 1795, forced an early start to the revolt. Shi Sanbao was related to the man who became the chief leader, Wu Bayue 吳八月 (of Qianzhou in the inner periphery) by double marriage connections, and the two had always been close. A niece of Wu Longdeng 吳隴登 was married to Shi Sanbao, and Wu Bayue was his cousin. When at the start of the year Shi Sanbao sent a messenger to his cousin Wu to come to Cucumber Hamlet to prepare for revolt, he reminded him that “the Shi and Wu houses were relatives.”¹⁵ Through marriage the Shis and the Wus were linked with

ethnic minorities, Muslims (Hui), religious sects, secret societies, and disgruntled Han Chinese.” He cites “estimates that Han made up 49% of the rebel ranks, Miao (and presumably the other ethnic minorities that participated) 40 percent, and Muslims 11 percent.” Though some rebels classified as Han “turned out to be of minority stock...the rebellion was unquestionably multi-ethnic,” with “Han representation numerically larger than minority representation” (pp. 3–4). As for the leadership of this “mid-nineteenth century Guizhou rebellion” (p. 4), as Jenks would prefer to call it, his “sources identify at least fifty major Chinese rebel leaders, many of whom had their own bands of followers” (p. 55). Similarly, Jenks uncovers “a number of grievances that all the rebels had in common...poverty, land scarcity, excessive or unjust tax levies, and various official abuses...[which overcame] “interethnic frictions... against a common foe – the government and its representatives in the province” (p. 57). Thus Han and Miao were inspired to join a common struggle. Ethnic hostility was “but one of several significant points of friction that contributed to the revolt” (p. 57).

¹⁴ Entries on Bi Yuan (by Fang Chao-ying) and Fukang’an (by Knight Biggerstaff) in Hummel, *Eminent Chinese*, pp. 622–25, 253–55.

¹⁵ Wu Bayue confession, enclosed in Fukang’an memorial, January 17, 1796, imperial an-

other clans of the regional Miao, the Longs 隴 and the Liaos 廖. The importance of affinal connections was confirmed when the revolt suffered setbacks and those in flight generally sought hiding places near a mother's or wife's place of residence, for example, in the case of Wu Bayue at Longyabanchong 龍牙半冲. It was agnatic ties that came under strain when the revolt began to collapse in the face of huge Qing reinforcements.¹⁶ Shi Sanbao came to form a low opinion of Shi Liudeng, and never accepted his cousin's claim to have started the revolt. Wu Tingyi 吳廷義, son of Bayue, was betrayed by a paternal cousin. As for Wu Longdeng, he went over to the Qing, using his own sons to entrap their uncle Wu Bayue.

At the outset of the revolt, these four men were already looked up to as informal regional leaders – Miao leaders. Shi Sanbao was a hamlet headmen, Liudeng a forceful local personality. The possessed shakers (see below) of the Guizhou border region chose to gather in Liudeng's house, and soon announced that a Miao king would appear in Sanbao's hamlet. Wu Bayue of Qianzhou was said to be the richest of the Miao in the region through rents yielding an annual revenue of 400 *tiao* of unhulled grain, and was one of a handful of Miao who could read and write, along with his sons, whom he had taught. Wu Longdeng of Fenghuang was a deputy *baihu*, the subofficial *baihu* being the highest rank that a Miao could aspire to. Troop recruitment and leadership militarized existing ties, and blood oaths reinforced and extended the web of connection to many others. Drawing on their own habitual authority within Miao society, all four recruited troops from their respective *zhai*, and then led them out, initially at least, on a particular front. "Each road's Miao had its own head, each *zhai*'s Miao also had its head," said Shi Sanbao.¹⁷ Wu Bayue led the many hamlets in his region of Pinglong. Wu Longdeng led his hamlet chiefs, who brought over the members of their hamlets in a body.¹⁸ Their efforts at first

notation January 31, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 141). It is not always clear in *MMQY*, because of its varied sources, whether the dates refer to the time of dispatch from the front, or annotation 批 by the emperor.

¹⁶ The Qing legal concept of collective guilt which applied only to agnatic relatives may account for the difference.

¹⁷ Shi Sanbao's first Grand Council confession at Rehe, July 8, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 233). Wu Tianban said much the same to the Grand Council (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 121). Zhang Shifa 張士發 noted that in Shi Daike's 石代噶 and Shi Laoyan's contingent every nearby *zhai* sent men, and one was put in charge of each group, April 27, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 405-7).

¹⁸ See the confession of Bai Rende 白仁得, a Muslim aide to the Baihu Yang Guoan; *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 361-62. On matters incriminating Yang, Bai's confession is to be treated with care, because he may have had a grudge, having been driven out for "laziness" from Guoan's service "the year before last," according to Yang's son. See Grand Council memorial, May 27, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 489).

tended to concentrate near their home districts: Longdeng tried to attack the walled city of Zhen'gan 鎮竿 and other parts of Fenghuang, the two Shis sent troops into Guizhou and Sichuan, and Wu Bayue sent his Pinglong Wus into Qianzhou and down to the unwalled city of Pushi. Later when the Qing forces pressed their attacks some leaders returned near their home districts to recruit more troops, but Pinglong remained the main center. Thus the local basis and family form of the uprising were persistent underlying principles. Shi Sanbao pointed out that "The Miao were all relatives (*qinqi*), so that at the time of rebellion we all addressed each other as brother."¹⁹

Why did these men, who had so much to lose, decide on leading an uprising? A literate man like Wu Bayue, an acculturated (*shu*) Miao, surely he would support the Confucian order? Certainly they sensed a changed mood in the Miao hamlets during the winter of 1794–1795, and though it did not threaten them, no doubt they felt impelled to give vent to it. The three leaders whose confessions were taken all were quite clear about the goals of the rising, which were exactly as the only known handbill (written by Wu Bayue at Shi Sanbao's request) spelled out: "The Miao fields are now completely occupied by the Han people. If you help us to burn and kill the guests we can recover our lands for cultivation and become officials."²⁰ If the desire for fields to till appealed to the followers, the leaders must have thought more about the second goal. Official rank had been denied to all Miao. Because the Qianlong emperor had poured cold water on the feasibility of educating the Miao of the southwest, local efforts at education had languished, and even the status of *xiucai* 秀才, that is, someone who could take the provincial civil service examinations, remained out of reach.²¹ Not a single Miao from this region appears to have received a regular degree in the eighteenth century, though at least one earned an honorific one.

¹⁹ *MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 234.

²⁰ *MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 232–33. Copies of the handbills do not survive but the contents are repeated in other confessions and Wu Bayue confirms that he wrote them (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 141). Wu Tianban said, "In February of this year Shi Sanbao banded together with Shi Liudeng of Guizhou and Wu Longdeng of Hunan, saying all the Miao fields were occupied by the guest people (*kemin* 客民); they felt bitter about it and declared the various *zhai* Miaozi 苗子 should all help them to recover and till them. So the *zhai* far and near all thought to take this opportunity to seize the fields ... it was not only a question of getting fields, they could also become officials." "When we first rose up, it was out of hatred for the *kemin*, we just planned to take back the fields, seize some grain... truly, because the *kemin* had occupied their fields, the *zhai* Miaozi were terribly wretched; most rose altogether in anger, not thinking that the great armies would come and they would be guilty of great crimes..."; Wu Tianban confession January 13, 1796 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 121–24). It was presumably the confessions that convinced the emperor and high officials that land loss was the principal Miao grievance: see n. 5, above.

²¹ Discussed in Sutton, "Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier."

In the eyes of the Miao, officials lived in the splendor of the walled city, traveled in great style, received extraordinary deference, issued orders to underlings, administered punishments, and sent out armies. The rebel confessions do not spell out what official system they had in mind but only that they wanted to run their own affairs. However unrealistic it might seem in retrospect, the desire to become an official appears to have been a principal motive for these four men to lead an uprising. In the event they put in place no administrative system besides appointing some military leaders.

How do we explain their hostility to Qing officialdom? It was not, as several admitted freely in interrogation, because of heavy taxation. The Miao were exempt from the land tax and the runners' and sub-officials' surcharges that in practice would go along with its collection.²² But anger at official treatment may have played a role. Experiences in the subprefectural courts provoked Miao irritation; it was perfectly natural for subprefects, isolated in a peripheral region, to take the side of settlers against the barely civilized Miao. But one incident seems to have been especially resented. It had occurred at Goubu 勾補 in the mountainous fringe of Fenghuang eight years earlier.²³ Hundreds of Miao from its three hamlets had been arrested and executed after several residents had forcibly resisted arrest when accused of waylaying a passing Han merchant. Wu Longdeng had helped officials to settle the case. Men surnamed Shi had been particularly affected, and the Shi clan was said to have been particularly angry at the outcome.²⁴

It is important to note that family ties among the leaders brought together the poorer *sheng* Miao of the extreme periphery, with the *shu* Miao leaders Wu Longdeng and Wu Bayue from the inner periphery.²⁵ In this way, the skills of possession were combined with those

²² Heshen et al., memorial, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 252); see also Wu Tingyi confession (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 413); and Shi Sanbao, second Grand Council confession, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 257).

²³ *Ibid.* Sixteen of the memorials and edicts on this incident are reported in *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 138–62; see also Wu, *Qianjia Miaomin*, pp. 21–23, and Sutton, "Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier."

²⁴ See July 17, 1787 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 152–57; 3, p. 256). "Before, at Goubu, official armies killed too many of our Miao," said the 77-*sui* Long Jiusheng 龍久生, a former hamlet head, in one of the most eloquent confessions, April 12, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 337–38). Lingering Miao resentment at the Goubu incident is underlined by the well-informed *MFBL* 22, p. 21. See also Grand Council Records, confession of Yang Xingnong 楊興農, reel 585 #2577–78.

²⁵ The contrast between the two groups of Miao should not be overdrawn (see below), but it is suggestive that the wives in the inner periphery (plateau and upper valley) appear to have busied themselves helping the uprising at home, in one case weaving a silk dragon robe for one of the Miao leaders. On the extreme periphery, by contrast, several Miao women became "generals."

of literacy. The fifth principal leader, Wu Tianban 吳天半, referred to in most documents as Wu Bansheng 半生,²⁶ also recruited forces in his home region, near Suma 蘇麻 hamlet in Yongsui, but he did not have connections with the others through blood or marriage. He had neither money nor official position nor literacy, but was a “shaker.” Shaking was a form of spirit-possession, the third aspect of local culture listed above; it assumed a key role in the uprising.

THE MIAO SHAKERS: A CENTRAL FEATURE OF THE MIAO REVOLT

Earlier writings ignore or downplay the fact that the uprising was sparked and partly led by possessed shakers (*dianzi* 顛子). Recent scholars tend to follow Qing sources that speak of feigned madness, and dismiss them as “crazies,”²⁷ or as “shaman-sorcerers, or simply people who had given in to hysterics.”²⁸ Accounts sympathetic to the uprising similarly ignore the role of possession, and local myths show the leaders engaged in magical acts without any shamanic mediation. It is true that the term *dianzi* came to mean little more than rebel in the reports of Qing authorities.²⁹ But the Miao historian Wu Rongzhen suggestively interprets the term *fadian* in confessions as “becoming transcendents.”³⁰ Shi Sanbao uses the term *fadian* eleven times in his first interrogation, and as in the other confessions, in no case does it sound like craziness; even the interrogators struggled to grasp this.³¹ Shaking was preparatory to the decision to revolt and came without warning;³² and the shakers (as I translate the term *dianzi* when transcribed from confessions) were not trained shamans. The action was

²⁶ Bansheng was a name given him by the emperor who presumably thought “Half-a-Life” a more appropriate name for a rebel than “Half-the-Sky”; *MMQJ*, note, vol. 2, p. 516.

²⁷ McMahon, “Identity and Conflict,” p. 75.

²⁸ Cheung, “Millenarianism and the Miao,” p. 222.

²⁹ *MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 362; 3, p. 379. In one report of Mingliang 明亮 and Edengbaode, January 21, 1797 (*Gongzhongdang Jiaqing chao zouzhe* 宮中檔嘉慶朝奏折 [Taipei: National Palace Museum, 1990s], pp. 472–73), the phrase “mad Miao rebel leaders 賊目” was used four times and 顛苗 once, as general terms for the wanted rebel leaders. See also n. 46, below.

³⁰ Wu, *Qianjia Miaomin qiye shigao*, p. 27.

³¹ A Grand Council member prefaced a question to Shi Sanbao: “You say you rebelled because you became possessed and got the idea 自因顛起意. It seems as if it may have been because the local officials oppressed you...” (Sanbao denied this inference, pointing to Han settlers’ acquisition of Miao land; *MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 234.)

³² See his sons’ confessions, *MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 414–15; and p. 230: “My nephew Shi Youbao 石由保 with Shi Laoshen 石老審, Shi Laoyan 石老岩 and Shi Laoyang 石老養 of my household suddenly were ‘shaking’ [possessed] together, saying that the Miaozi would become officials, and crying out that they would kill the guest families.”

seen in principle to be independent of the will of the possessed person (Shi Sanbao: “I also suddenly started shaking, and involuntarily 不知不覺 said I had been sent down from heaven”).³³ Shi’s and other cases resembled speaking in tongues (Wu Bayue: “In their mouths they cried out [*kouli rangzhe* 口裡嚷着]),³⁴ and their martial gestures may have reminded people of local shamans (Wu Tianban: “They wielded knives and brandished spears”).³⁵ Possession served to proclaim the imminent or actual reincarnation (*zhuansheng*) of a Miao king, to mobilize local Miao around particular leaders (Shi Sanbao: “Later Miaozi 苗子 in other hamlets also *dianled*, and Shi Youbao and the others said that a Miao King would appear in our *zhai*”).³⁶ The actions and statements of the shakers were seen as inspired by higher direction (Shi Manyi: “My father also *dianled*, saying he had descended from heaven and called on the Miao to help him”).³⁷ During séances, the movement’s goals of recovering their lost Miao fields and killing the settlers were enunciated (when they *fadianed* ... they wanted to kill the guest people;³⁸ they brandished knives and waved swords... clamoring to kill the settlers and recover the lands”).³⁹

Possession spread infectiously among Miao who witnessed these episodes or heard about them. Thus the *dianzi* were possessed people, who convinced others, and *fadian* became a means of mobilizing a people scattered over hundreds of miles who had no established leaders outside the Qing *baihu* system. Shaking readied them to undertake the quixotic goal of challenging Qing military power. Although for most officials *dianzi* and *fadian* carried the usual connotations of madness, specifically the insane rejection of imperial authority and neglect of life and limb, the confessions plainly show that there was method in the shakers’ madness.

The origin of the revolt in November of 1794 came without any carefully laid plans: despite using every method at their disposal, the interrogators would fail to discover any sign of earlier preparations. It began when a number of people became possessed in Shi Liudeng’s and other hamlets in the extreme periphery either side of the Hunan-Guizhou frontier.⁴⁰ The movement spread rapidly. There were a “great many shakers in the various hamlets,” recalled Shi Sanbao, noting the

³³ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 231.

³⁴ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 141.

³⁵ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 120; Wu Bayue uses the same terms.

³⁶ *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 230–31.

³⁷ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 380.

³⁸ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 141.

³⁹ *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 120–23. Wu Tianban’s testimony is confirmed in other sources.

⁴⁰ Testimony of Liudeng’s sons and stepsons Shi Laoer, Shi Laoguan, and Shi Laojiu; *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 371–73.

names of his brother and three nephews and three others in Cucumber Hamlet “who were first to shake, and rose together.”⁴¹ Four of the eight principal leaders went into possession (or, *fadian*). By this means Shi Sanbao and Shi Liudeng buttressed their traditional authority as local leaders and later generals, Shi Sanbao recalling that in the field he was “sometimes possessed, and sometimes not.” Wu Tianban, briefly a Wu king, became a leader solely through his performances as a *dianzi*. Shaking was not practiced personally by any of the three successive Wu kings at Pinglong, Qianzhou – Wu Bayue and his sons Tingli 廷禮 and Tingyi 廷義, who were exceptional among Miao for being literate in Chinese. Although not practitioners, they nonetheless saw the value of shakers and publicly recognized their authority.

Shaking, although not the same as full-fledged shamanism, was a mobilization device. It accomplished many things. It borrowed unseen powers to fortify authority; it ritually embodied the violent means intended, rehearsing the violence of future confrontations; it crystalized hopes into intentions by voicing the movement’s goals “to drive out the settlers and recover the lands.” It built consensus and selected charismatic leaders. Shaking was the way in which the movement spread eastwards from the extreme periphery: thus the Guizhou’s early shakers spoke of the forthcoming advent of a Miao king and pointed to Cucumber Hamlet as his location. The Cucumber Hamlet shakers picked this up and pointed to Shi Sanbao. Wu Tianban many miles away became a shaker after hearing of the shaker movement. “In the first month of 1795,” said Wu Tianban, trying to defend himself, “I *fadianed*, they said I was the Wu king reincarnated. I am young, so I believed them.”⁴² Possession was the essential means of mobilizing the Miao of the region. Not least, it suspended any careful consideration of a fatally doomed venture.

When Shi Sanbao and Wu Bayue agreed on the uprising on January 24, 1795, the handbills Wu wrote simply repeated the twin goals enunciated by the shakers in the Cucumber Hamlet region for the previous two months – recovering the lands and becoming officials – and no more elaborate ideology was ever produced.⁴³ Possession can, of course, fail

⁴¹ “I was the head of Huanggua [Cucumber] *zhai*, [said Shi Sanbao in his first interrogation]. The year before last, in January, my nephew Shi Youbao [of Dimucun] with Shi Laoshen [nephew], Shi Laoyan [paternal younger cousin, later referred to as the ‘lofty general’] and Shi Laoyang [brother], all from my household suddenly were ‘shaking’ [possessed] together, saying that the Miaozi would become officials, and crying out that they would kill the guest families. Subsequently Miao in hamlets everywhere were ‘shaking’ too”; *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 232. See also n. 32, above.

⁴² *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 121.

⁴³ The confessions of the two disagree on where the meeting was held.

to persuade, as Margery Wolf has shown in an example of a would-be female shaman in Taiwan,⁴⁴ but if it succeeds and disguises personal intent and ambition from the onlookers (and perhaps to a degree from the person possessed)⁴⁵ it may convince the community of the visible workings of destiny. As a result it helps to build consensus.

Those possessed deny responsibility, even to themselves. “I too became ill with shaking without any intention on my part,” claimed Shi Sanbao in his second recorded interrogation, “Truly up till then I had no thought of rebelling.” Others joined the uprising in a similar way. According to Shi Liudeng’s elder son, “Because Father *fadianed* in January [1795], he rose [in revolt] with Shi Sanbao.”⁴⁶ Whether possession was genuine or not is of secondary importance; it was all the more effective for the element of uncertainty, even in the minds of those possessed, as to whether it was genuine in a particular case. The uprising achieved its spontaneous nature through the shakers, and gained irresistible momentum. Of course there was an element of compulsion. “Because there were a great many Miao who *fadianed*, and all rose up together in tumult, [others] were afraid their hamlets would be burned, and all obeyed, so more and more gathered.”⁴⁷

Possession carries the power to persuade if people believe it manifests the presence of a spirit. The rebels trusted that their special gods, the Baidi tianwang 白帝天王 (White Emperor Heavenly Kings) and the Feishan gongzhu 飛山公主 (Flying Mountain Princess), would help them, though we cannot be sure that these were the gods possessing all of

⁴⁴ Margery Wolf, *A Thrice-Told Tale* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1992).

⁴⁵ Cf. Donald S. Sutton, *Steps of Perfection: Exorcistic Performers and Chinese Religion in Twentieth-Century Taiwan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Asia Center, 2003), chap. 4. On possession in Taiwan as it affects 1. practicing shamans (*dangki*); 2. usually reluctant candidates to be *dangki*; and 3. festival performers, see David K. Jordan, *Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: The Folk Religion of a Taiwanese Village* (Berkeley: U. California P., 1972); Donald S. Sutton, “Ritual Trance and the Social Order: The Persistence of Taiwanese Shamanism,” in Andrew Barnes and Peter Stearns, eds., *Social History and Issues in Consciousness* (New York: New York U.P., 1989), pp. 108–27; “Self-Mortification and the Temple Community: Taiwanese Spirit-Mediums in Comparative Perspective,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 4.1 (Winter 1990), pp. 99–125; and Wolf, *Thrice-Told Tale*.

⁴⁶ Shi Laoguan confession, *MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 372. Different understandings of what I see as possession can be seen in the texts, which show no interest in ethnographic explanations: The confession text of Shi Laoer, Liudeng’s nephew and stepson, says without explanation, that Liudeng “in a crazed fit started an uprising 瘋癲起事.” When first reporting this, Guizhou officials reported that on February 2 he “used [a fit of] madness to dance with flags, beating gongs and running riot 藉瘋舞旗 鳴鑼滋事,” and they wondered why the Miao masses would obey him and revolt. Fukang’an, hearing the reports en route from Yunnan, was sure the madness must be feigned, noting that Liudeng “on the excuse of madness danced with a flag 借瘋舞旗.” This still did not explain why anyone would follow a madman into battle; *MMQJ*, vol. 2, p. 171, 190; 3, p. 371.

⁴⁷ *MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 122.

the *dianzi*.⁴⁸ Standards of various colors with these names in Chinese were borne ahead of the rebel bands, and marching songs were sung to summon divine help. Shamans called “old masters” (*lao shifu* 老師傅) wearing a spirit mask and uttering spells to win the gods’ support, accompanied the rebels into battle.⁴⁹ Shakers may have led out some of the forces, “grasping their standards and dancing forth.”⁵⁰ Possession continued to play a role in battle as late as March, 1796. A force with Fukang’an was “attacking up a ridge killing uncounted Miao when at once from among the rebels ten or twenty Miao shakers, male and female (*dian Miao dianfu* 癩苗癩婦), rushed forward. Our soldiers fired their muskets and arrows together, and every time one fell dead other rebels came from behind to carry the corpse away.”⁵¹ This is a hint that possession, just as at the start of the revolt, was no monopoly of the leaders. At least one of the Miao rebels seems to have used possession trance as a means of resisting torture. “The said criminal pretended to go into trance [to have a crazy fit?] and remained silent under torture,” memorialized five of the Qing generals. “Death-by-slicing was then applied and in the end the head displayed for all to see” 該犯裝點瘋癩熬刑不吐當將該犯寸磔梟示.⁵²

If we do not grasp the centrality of the shakers in sparking the uprising and keeping its momentum, we cannot understand how land alienation and resentment could quickly produce a revolt involving well over 50,000 Miao. Without the passion of possession, how could leaders such as Wu Tianban – a man of twenty-three without education, wealth, official status, or important connections – draw thousands of followers? How could mass attacks be mounted and sieges sustained, and how could people act as if confident of success, in the face of superior official arms and ancestral stories of defeated Miao heroes? Shaking produced charismatic leaders, built consensus and spurred courage. But it offered no long-term solutions for the Miao and could be quickly deflated in the face of the Qing expeditionary troops. The effervescence of the Miao was also their weakness, their forces composed

⁴⁸ For the *Baidi tianwang*, a phonetic rendering of the Miao name, see Sutton, “Myth Making,” pp. 448–500.

⁴⁹ *MMQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 405–7. A Miao master, perhaps a shaman, used the Tianwang pusa to prescribe herbal drugs to other Miao (*MMQJ*, vol. 2, p. 337). As for the Feishan Princess, she was a smaller, hamlet-based malevolent god to be propitiated.

⁵⁰ This description by Yan Ruyi, translated by McMahan, “Identity and Conflict,” p. 61, may refer to a possessed state.

⁵¹ Fukang’an usually uses the general terms “Miao *fei* 苗匪” or “*ni* Miao 逆苗” for the enemy, not Dian Miao as his successor Mingliang would; April 22, 1796 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 198–200).

⁵² Mingliang et al., December 12, 1796 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 339).

of unruly mobs “gathering quickly and dispersing [equally] quickly.”⁵³ Led by *dianzi* panache rather than military skill, Wu Tianban’s force twice crumpled in the face of the Qing reinforcements, and, as he took flight, his charisma evaporated.⁵⁴

In the long view, shaking puts the revolt squarely in the tradition of movements in late-Qing China when the official military had lost its edge and official finances were in difficulty. Miao possession in 1795 foreshadows the Taipings in the early 1850s, when Hakkas of eastern Guangxi, following their possessed leaders, struggled for land, and also the Boxers of 1900, with their martial-arts mass possession against Chinese Christians and foreigners.⁵⁵ Just as these movements had their connection with regional shamanic practices, so too the Miao Revolt was grounded in the endemic shamanism of western Hunan.⁵⁶

The shakers were not full-fledged shamans but they depended on cultural familiarity with the shaman’s instinctive wisdom and ability to draw on unseen powers. Possession is one of the weapons of the weak.⁵⁷ Disadvantaged by their peripheral location and poverty, like the Taipings and the Boxers, the Miao tried to resist the might of the Chinese state and society not by arms alone, but with the power of oral wisdom, divine inspiration, and dramatic bodily performance.

⁵³ Hunan governor Jiang Sheng’s 姜晟 comment cited in Qianlong’s edict March 9, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 208).

⁵⁴ Wu Bayue confession, *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 141–42.

⁵⁵ On shamanic possession in the Taipings, see Robert P. Weller, *Resistance, Chaos and Control in China: Taiping Rebels, Taiwanese Ghosts and Tiananmen* (Seattle: U. of Washington P., 1994); Jonathan D. Spence, *God’s Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: Norton, 1996); on Boxer possession, see Joseph W. Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Rebellion* (Berkeley: U. of California P., 1987) and Paul A. Cohen, *History in Three Keys* (New York: Columbia U.P., 1997), pp. 96–118.

⁵⁶ *Qianzhou zhi* 乾州志 (n.p., 1739), section on Red Miao customs, refers repeatedly to “Miao wu 苗巫” (4, pp. 26, 32, 35). See also the 1909 *Yongsui tingzhi* 永綏廳志 (comp. Dong Hongxun 董鴻勳) 6, p. 27, copying the 1868 prefectural gazetteer. Similar rituals, based on observation in the 1940s, are described in Ling Chunsheng 凌純聲 and Rui Yifu 芮逸夫, *Xiangxi Miaozu diaocha baogao* 湘西苗族調查報告 (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1947). A 1774–75 legal case describes the typical paraphernalia “worn by a ghost master, Guigong 鬼公 dancing to the gods” – items such as leather shield, casque, and sword; ZPZZ, file 1876.3 (December 20, 1774). See also *MFBL* 8, p. 15.

⁵⁷ Though missing in James C. Scott’s book of that title, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1985), see Michael Taussig, *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago: U. of Chicago P., 1987), especially p. 376. Note that Miao women sometimes participated, like the “woman general” Shi Miemei 石巴妹, who fought alongside Shi Liudeng, another presage of the Taipings and Boxers. Some could become possessed; see *MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 165 (February 17, 1795); *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 199; Ma Shulan 麻樹蘭, ed., *Xiangxi Miaozu minjian wenxue gaiyao* 湘西苗族民間文學概要 (Beijing: Zhongyang minzu xueyuan chubanshe, 1992), p. 22.

THE MIAO (OR WU) KING

Siu-woo Cheung has emphasized millenarian aspects of the movement, but it is useful to keep in mind that the Miao leaders were not much like the sort of primitive rebel described by Hobsbawm. For example, there was no “total rejection of the present, evil world,” no chiliastic ideology.⁵⁸ Nor was there any preexisting institutional basis such as that described by Susan Naquin in her examination of millenarian rebellions drawing on the White Lotus tradition.⁵⁹ The titles Miao King 苗王 and Wu King 吳王 capitalized on local historical memories. One of these was of the recent Goubu rebel of 1787, Shi Manyi 石滿宜, who had called himself Miao king after digging up a stone resembling a dragon’s head;⁶⁰ another was the 1735 movement at Guzhou 古州 (eastern Guizhou) led by possessed shamans who had also invoked the title.⁶¹

Such terms probably played a role in galvanizing Miao in the hamlets, but their use was inconsistent and discontinuous. For example, the notion of a savior king was undeveloped. The shakers announced the coming of a Miao king and leaders successively adopted the title. Shi Sanbao for a few months claimed the title “Miao King,” emboldened as we have seen by the shakers, but no other leader assumed it. After the defeat of his and Shi Liudeng’s forces, both men went to Pinglong by early June. Having been defeated, recalled Wu Bayue, Sanbao “could not really be the Miao king.”⁶² One or more Pinglong *dianzi* praised them for starting the uprising, and Wu simply pronounced Liudeng “country-founding general (*kaiguo jiangjun* 開國將軍)” and Sanbao “country-protecting general (*huguo jiangjun* 護國將軍),” ranking them below himself. In Pinglong, Wu Bayue was regarded as the Wu king and the reincarnation of the seventeenth-century anti-Qing rebel of the southwest, Wu Sangui.⁶³ (He was too prudent to mention this in his confession.) Meanwhile Wu Tianban, the shaker leader, had heeded his followers’ urgings that he was the “reincarnated 轉世” Wu

⁵⁸ Cheung’s interesting observations preface his discussion of the role of Christianity among Miao in various parts of southwest China; see, “Millenarianism and the Miao.” Eric Hobsbawm, *Primitive Rebels: Studies in Archaic Forms of Social Movement in the 19th and 20th Centuries* (orig. 1959; New York: Norton, 1965), pp. 57–58.

⁵⁹ Susan Naquin, *Millenarian Rebellion in China: The Eight Trigrams Uprising of 1813* (New Haven: Yale U.P., 1976).

⁶⁰ *MFBL* 22, p. 21. Coincidentally the same name as the elder son of Shi Sanbao, cf. *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 380.

⁶¹ Guizhou governor, April 21, 1735, *Gongzhong dang Yongzhengchao zouzhe* 宮中檔雍正朝奏折 (Shih Lin: National Palace Museum, 1977) 24, pp. 308–12.

⁶² *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 142; 3, p. 361.

⁶³ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 361.

king, and received the support of Sanbao and Bayue to use the title to hold together his many thousands of Miao, who came from many *zhai* in Yongsui.⁶⁴ After Tianban's successive defeats in early June, "even the Miao did not believe he was the Wu King," recalled Wu Bayue.⁶⁵ Bayue said he made his fourth son Wu Tingyi adopt the name; and after Bayue's arrest his elder son Tingli 廷禮 used the title and stopped listening to Shi Sanbao's instructions.⁶⁶ Tingli's death from "yellow disease" early in the summer of 1796 was, on Shi Liudeng's advice, kept secret; later the title was again adopted by Tingyi.⁶⁷

There is an extemporaneous feel to all this. The leaders manipulated the title rather casually, especially in battle, in order to recruit, rally, and centralize the Miao, but the title ratified rather than created political influence, and at times there was no recognized king at all. Asked who was really the king, Shi Sanbao listed the use of the title by one leader after another, starting with himself, and concluded with typical directness and bravado: "Whoever said move the troops, people at once obeyed. In fact where is the Miao king? The leader of this rising was in fact myself, why should I still venture to deny it?"⁶⁸ While, as Siu-woo Cheung has suggested, there seem to have been millenarian conceptions, they were vague, and it would be going much too far to regard the Miao or Wu king in a dynastic way, or as a sort of ideology implying a hierarchical kingdom.

The title "Wu King" was a reference to the coincidence between the Wu clan name and Wu Sangui's surname. Daniel McMahon suggests that the rebels invoked Wu Sangui in order to appeal across ethnic lines, but there is no evidence such an appeal was ever made.⁶⁹ While Wu Sangui had gathered many indigenes of the southwest under his anti-Qing banner in the Three Feudatories Revolt, the Hunan and Hubei *tusi* chieftains theoretically in charge of these Miao regions had actually declared for the Qing and fought against Wu. Perhaps the Miao in 1795 saw Wu Sangui simply as an available symbol of resistance, dimly remembered as an anti-Qing warrior of earlier generations. Other symbols of revolt were lacking.⁷⁰ The Wus did share the same surname

⁶⁴ This motive is suggested in both Wu Tianban's and Shi Sanbao's confessions. Some recent scholars use the term "heir" when referring to Tianban's presumed connection with Wu Sangui, but his and other confessions use the term "reincarnated." The Grand Councilors closely question both men on who successive "Wu kings" were in the revolt.

⁶⁵ *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 141-42.

⁶⁶ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 256.

⁶⁷ Wu Tingyi confession to Grand Council, March 15, 1797 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 410-13).

⁶⁸ Shi Sanbao's second confession, *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 257.

⁶⁹ McMahon, "Identity and Conflict," pp. 67-68.

⁷⁰ To have invoked Ming loyalist struggles against the Qing would scarcely have been plau-

but according to Shi Sanbao, “The Miao only knew from their ancestors that there had been a Wu Sangui who was the Wu king.”⁷¹

The rather casual and unelaborated invocation of Wu Sangui seems to have been a sort of political extension of the Miao cultural borrowing that was quite routine on the eighteenth-century frontier, where many locals had taken to the Manchu-style queue or Han Chinese-style clothing as a mark of status. (Shi Liudeng wore a queue with a green ribbon.)⁷² These sartorial and other cultural changes were a matter of acculturation, much as later these Miao were to adopt religious practices that they called guest rituals and practice them alongside their “Miao” rituals.⁷³ They did not necessarily signify assimilation, that is, the adoption of a Han Chinese perspective or identity. There is no evidence that this Han symbol of anti-Qing resistance was accompanied by any effort to approach Han Chinese groups in western Hunan or elsewhere in the southwest, nor did other groups join. The adoption of the title “Wu King,” in short, cannot be used to prove the prior existence of cross-ethnic regional identification or support an argument that the revolt was a multi-ethnic effort.

THE QUESTION OF THE ETHNIC CHARACTER OF THE 1795 REVOLT

The view that the Miao Revolt was not essentially ethnic, but rather the rising of various oppressed groups in the frontier against local Miao and Han landlords, has had broad appeal in the People’s Republic of China. This is not only because peaceful relations among ethnic groups have usually taken priority over assertions of ethnic identity, but also because such a position aligns the revolt with pre-Marxist peasant movements in China. (Ma Shaoqiao pays lip-service to this perspective in an essentially ethnic interpretation.)⁷⁴ A somewhat different view is developed by Robert Jenks with reference to the “Miao” rebellion (his quotation marks) in mid-nineteenth-century Guizhou – beyond the scope of this paper – and by Daniel McMahon with respect to the revolt under discussion. “Insurgency was a means to gain wealth that

sible since Miao clan ancestors had repeatedly fought the Ming between the 15th and early-17th cc. See *Hunan tongzhi* 湖南通志 (1874), j. 83.

⁷¹ Grand Council, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 258).

⁷² Confession of Shi Laoqiao, *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 362, who was captured looking for his father’s body, and on the orders of Qing officers identified his head in a pile of them.

⁷³ Ling and Rui, *Xiangxi Miaozu diaocha baogao*.

⁷⁴ Writing in 1956 and citing Mao Zedong, Ma, *Qingdai Miaomin qiye*, allows for elements of a class interpretation, p. 42.

otherwise remained beyond the reach of local people,” runs the revisionist argument. The insurgents were striking out “in pursuit of land, wealth and autonomy from Qing government control.”⁷⁵

If we were to take the position that ethnicity was not the main factor in this revolt, we must set aside the explicitly anti-Han utterings of the shakers and the ethnic appeal, in almost the same words, of Wu Bayue and Shi Sanbao’s handbills “to burn and kill the guests” because “Miao fields are now completely occupied by the Han people.” Han settlers in Qianzhou, the most ethnically intermixed subprefecture with the smallest permanent garrison, demonstrated their view of Miao intentions when they took to flight in large numbers. Rebels confess to detailed acts of murder, specifying “guests” or “Han,” and routinely speak of pillaging and burning Han villages. Biographies of Han Chinese martyrs specify Miao (not rebels or Miao rebels) as the perpetrators.⁷⁶ The contemporary documents speak of prisoners as “surrendered Miao” (*xiang Miao* 降苗) and of the non-Miao among them as “Han traitors” (*Hanjian* 漢奸), both terms implying a departure from the ethno-political identification expected by officials. The declared goals of the revolt were explicitly ethnic, in short, and its actions were directed against settlers and city inhabitants, who were Han, and the Qing armies, who were posted to protect the settlers. But the question can be considered more closely.

Testing a counter-hypothesis that the revolt set poor against rich, rather than Miao against Han, we would expect to find landlords under attack by peasants irrespective of ethnic identity. But no nascent class tensions on the Han side are visible in the sources. In effect big Han landlords are absent from the record, and the settlers were not divided by conflict before, during, or after the revolt. Any social differentiation among them in the years leading up to the revolt had been completely overridden by the extraordinary opportunities for land reclamation and engrossment at the expense of the illiterate Miao. The scattered Qing encampments were surrounded with Han settlements, who made common cause with the soldiers. In the uprising, settlers saw Qing troops as their saviors; when one small force of 150 men en route to Yongsui was blocked by Miao rebels for two days, 200 Han civilians came to their aid from nearby villages, armed with sticks.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ McMahan, “Identity and Conflict,” pp. 53, 67; Jenks, *Insurgency and Social Disorder in Guizhou*; see n. 13, above.

⁷⁶ *MFBL* 18, pp. 18–22.

⁷⁷ Testimony of Chen Lun 陳綸, a veteran of the Jinchuan 金川 and Taiwan campaigns, May 20, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 470).

The question of social stratification on the Miao side, and resulting tensions, is more complicated. There was indeed some stratification within Miao communities, notably between what I have called the extreme and inner peripheries of the macroregion.⁷⁸ Shi Sanbao in one of his interrogations said “We Miao are all impoverished (*qiongku*); people like Wu Longdeng, Wu Bayue, and myself may be considered to have enough to eat, but we haven’t any money.”⁷⁹ This is too modest, for all three were well off, and it was precisely as a patrician ready to help Miao in normal times that Wu Bayue gained widespread support from the hamlets.⁸⁰ In leading the revolt they sought to help fellow Miao to recover land they had lost over several generations to the Han settlers, and many followed them enthusiastically. There is not a glimmer of social upheaval in the sources, of poor versus rich, except in the ethnic context of confiscating Han settler land. In fact, this revolt gathered Miao of every status, reproducing not modifying the existing shallow social hierarchy, and even keeping the established leaders in place. The only novelty, as we have seen, was the addition of ecstatic possession as an optional mark of leadership, which propelled new men like Wu Tianban into prominence.

“*Hanjian*,” Han traitors, people of Han Chinese origin who worked on the Miao side, receive a great deal of attention in the documents.⁸¹ As an official construction, the term had great rhetorical force, but the actual role of Han support of the Miao is easily exaggerated. Mention of them recurs in memorials and edicts because of the Qianlong emperor’s long-held and widely-known view that the simple Miao could not organize rebellious opposition and must a priori have been instigated and aided by Han transfrontiersmen who moved freely among the different groups in the region.⁸² In early 1795, the emperor reiterated this belief and issued an edict calling for their arrest. Noting the arrest, interrogation, execution, and public exposure of several by the Hunan

⁷⁸ For a law case and conflict among Miao between more and less acculturated branches of a Miao family in the inner periphery and extreme periphery, see Sutton, “Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier.”

⁷⁹ *MMQX*, vol. 3, p. 234.

⁸⁰ Grand council summary of Wu Tianban confession, February 17, 1797 (*MMQX*, vol. 3, p. 394). None of the Miao tales I have come across include critical mention of these leaders’ relative prosperity, probably because it was remembered as only a matter of degree; in one story, indeed, Shi Sanbao is presented as a typical Miao laborer, his ethnic character blotting out any differences in wealth.

⁸¹ McMahon, “Identity and Conflict,” p. 68, admits that Han Chinese within the Miao camp were treated without trust by Miao leaders and indeed proved to be disloyal to the Miao cause, but still sees them as a significant factor.

⁸² “Transfrontiersmen” is Frederic Wakeman’s useful term, applied to the 17th-c. north-east, later known as Manchuria.

governor Fu Ning 福寧, he commented, “The Miao masses are stubborn, obtuse, and ignorant. Without the incitement of *Hanjian* among them, how would they dare to form gangs and riot? The present resistance and widespread plunder by Wu Tianban [Bansheng], Shi Sanbao, and others must have at its center the plotting of *Hanjian*; they are truly hateful.”⁸³ These *Hanjian* were even worse than the Miao bandits, he added in an edict of September 12, 1795.⁸⁴ Besides the full application of the law for treason, he ordered that their family members be tracked down as accessories and dealt with.

The emperor’s obsessive concern with *Hanjian* guaranteed a thorough search for civilians (*min*) among the captives and thorough reporting from the field to Beijing.⁸⁵ Sometimes they alone were interrogated after a battle, and Miao captives were usually asked if they knew of any *Hanjian*. Consequently these instances are vastly overrepresented in the confessions. Officials, who did their own interrogations, persisted in the belief that Han men had to be behind the scenes.⁸⁶ Wu Tianban came from a mixed hamlet with fifty Han who initially “joined up,” but some remained in the hamlet and others went back to Tongren 銅仁, over the Guizhou border, from where they originated.⁸⁷ Shi Sanbao himself explained that “the Han people were all caught up 裹來的 [in the uprising]; the Miao never trusted them and did not let them fight with them.”⁸⁸

⁸³ Edict received July 19, 1795, by Fukang’an (*Miaofei dang* 3, pp. 13–14).

⁸⁴ In response to Helin’s arrest and execution of Tian Yingqiao, September 12, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 280).

⁸⁵ See edict cited in governor Jiang Sheng’s memorial, March 18, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 277).

⁸⁶ Presumably taking his cue from Qianlong edicts, Sun Shiyi asked captives: “What Han people (*Han ren*) in [Shi Sanbao’s hamlet] also discussed rebelling?” (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 438). Tian Qinglu, himself classified as a Miao, insisted he had never seen any in Shi’s camp; “Notes of the confession of Tian Qinglu and others,” appended to the memorial of Sun Shiyi. Interrogating Long Zhanggu, Sun asked about a Miao leader, Wu Laoyan: “If he was head, there must have been *Hanjian* inside his *zhai*: who in fact were those in charge of his strategy?” May 7, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 436–38); May 9, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 485).

⁸⁷ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 394. On the basis of the same account McMahon says Wu Tianban “confessed to fifty Han in his camp,” “Identity and Conflict,” p. 67. Tianban underwent three interrogations, no doubt with torture, but was able to remember only the surnames Zhang, Wang and Wu. I have found 19 interrogations of suspected *Hanjian* out of a total of about 80, but there are many more mentions of interrogation, which was explicitly ordered for *Hanjian* by the emperor, between capture and execution. Often generals would interview only the Han captives and simply execute the rest, which explains the high proportion among the confessions.

⁸⁸ Shi Sanbao, *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 257. One Yang Tiancai 楊天才, an Eight Trigram diviner from Mayang may have served as Sanbao’s adviser. He claimed that the rebels at Cucumber Hamlet held him captive but his well-informed testimony suggests an active role; June 14, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 507–9).

Among the leaders, Shi Liudeng alone set forth a policy on Han recruitment, ordering that “Those who killed any Han people who had seized crop land in Miao territory, and burned their houses, were to have the land distributed to them at once, and only those Han who were willing to join the band would escape death.”⁸⁹ Two Han men who joined his force left confessions. One was a tobacco-leaf trader acquaintance of Shi Liudeng who “joined up” at his request and who burned and robbed some thirty *zhai*, and the other a tile roofer who had been approached by two men, one a relative of his Miao wife: “Shi Liudeng invited [me] to burn and rob some *cunzhai*, and would I like to join the gang?”⁹⁰ There is no hint of a wider purpose here. A certain Long Duma 龍獨麼 added that there were “quite a few” *Hanjian* in Liudeng’s force, and nineteen Han appear in a list of sixty-nine captives.⁹¹ These Han, none of them serving as troop leaders, constituted a small fraction of the thousands of rebels he recruited. Even for Liudeng’s force, the assertion that “a sizable number of Chinese settlers had taken up with the rebels” seems overdrawn.⁹²

If we try to enumerate “settlers leading Miao,”⁹³ apart from the Han named Wang who adopted the name Shi Daliu, and noted by McMahan, four other Han men can be found who were given leadership in one or other of the numerous Miao forces, though none strictly speaking is a settler in the sense of a farmer or property owner. Tian Yingqiao 田應喬 had received an official title from Wu Tingli; in September, 1796, he was executed in front of the troops in the approach to Pinglong; governor-general Helin 和琳 did not memorialize a copy of his confession so nothing more is known of him.⁹⁴ Liu Denong 劉得農, a man of twenty-six whose father had died young,⁹⁵ had no fixed home, for his mother and elder brothers had driven him out of the house for his gambling habit. Proud of his skill at boxing, he went up to Shi Liudeng’s hamlet as soon as he heard about the revolt, and was

⁸⁹ Sun Shiyi, April 7, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 313).

⁹⁰ Confessions of Yang Xingnong 楊興農 and Zhang Shenglu 張勝祿 in Grand Council Records (reel 585 #2577–78). See also Yunnan governor Feng Guangxiong 馮光熊, March 20, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 253).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*; and *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 436–38; for the list of captives, see *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 362–64. Many were part of the force gathered by Shi Liudeng for raiding Xiushan in Sichuan and put under the command of his nephew Shi Laotang and close friend Wan Song. The 19 identified only as native to a particular place (and therefore Han) are from many different villages in Guizhou and Huguang; they do not fit the Miao pattern of fighters being natives of a particular community.

⁹² McMahan, “Identity and Conflict,” pp. 67–68.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ Helin memorial, imperial annotation on September 12, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 279).

⁹⁵ Fukang’an memorial with enclosure April 12, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 336, 338).

made a captain 頭目 with a gold button after he had proved his ability to burn and rob. He participated in the siege of Zhengda Fort and later instructed his Miao troops in the building of a sharpened rock embrasure near Chounao Fort to slow the relief force's advance. With his gold-topped hat and leader's demeanor, he caught the attention of Fukang'an, and was selected for interrogation. Tough, adventurous, and charismatic, Liu played a highly visible role as section leader, but there is no evidence that he or other Han with the rebel forces had anti-Qing ideological goals, beyond sharing the spoils. Another source spoke of "only one Han" promoted to the rank of captain by Shi Daike and Shi Laoyan 石老岩 from among their several thousand – a man named Yang Zaizhang 楊再章.⁹⁶ He appears nowhere else in the sources. Thus rarely do confessions assert that *Hanjian* played key roles, even though the Miao leaders under interrogation might have supposed that blaming Han helpers would deflect guilt away from themselves.

Beyond Liu, Tian, and Yang, among the few Han, qua Han, who led small rebel detachments, who might have been individual Han rebels among the Miao? They fall into three main categories. First were the classic type of *Hanjian*, families settled in Miao villages in a pattern common in the seventeenth century before heavy in-migration began. Three such men surnamed Zhang and Yang summoned Miao to assault the barriers and camps of official troops in the guise of rural militia.⁹⁷ Second were some men who had joined after their villages were raided. Their claims to have done so under duress were undermined by their subsequent participation in Miao raids and their admission that in the process they had personally killed Han men and in one case a woman. These *Hanjian* included Li Daming 李大明, Yang Chang 楊昌 and Wang Shengliang 王勝良, each attached to different Miao lower-level leaders.⁹⁸ On the Sichuan front in Xiushan 秀山, said the Han artisan Zhang Shifa 張士發, he and others had been "abducted" to build bridges and

⁹⁶ Confession of Zhang Shifa, *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 405–7. A fourth "Han" helper, Yang Laolong 楊老隴, identified by Fukang'an perhaps exaggeratedly as an "important rebel leader," assisted the literate Wu Bayue by writing out handbills summoning the Miao to battle. But Yang could well be a Miao name, and his personal name is a typical Miao child's name too. If his identity was uncertain, Fukang'an might well have used him as an example of the *Hanjian* he knew the emperor wanted to seek out. Yang was not interrogated and is not mentioned in any of the confessions; Fukang'an, March 23, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 181).

⁹⁷ Fukang'an, May 2, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 201).

⁹⁸ In Baojing, Li Daming (age 31) joined a group of 300–400, 100 armed with muskets; elsewhere Yang Changfeng (36) on February 26, 1795, joined the band of Wu Sanju. On February 17, when 400 or 500 Miao arrived under Shi Wuguan at the village of Wang Shengliang (51), firing their weapons and setting fires, Wang got them to spare the village and strike a white flag over it, and in return joined the raids into Xiushan (Sichuan). The two men testified separately immediately before their execution; *MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 486–87.

make gunpowder, but the fact that Zhang was eventually captured with spear in hand, fighting the Qing forces, made his claim suspect.⁹⁹ In the third category were the ne'er-do-wells of this remote region, the "bare sticks" of eighteenth-century official rhetoric,¹⁰⁰ who sought to join the fun. These were people of similar origin to Liu Denong who already socialized with local Miao. Cou Laosan 鄒老三 of Zhen'gan, another young man without family, volunteered with a Miao friend to join Wu Longdeng when the news of the revolt had arrived in February, and proved his mettle in burning villages and fighting official forces.¹⁰¹ Han Zhonglian 韓仲連 of Fenghuang also had a circle of Miao friends, and went with them to join Wu Longdeng. With him were the twins Yang Shengtai 楊勝太 and Yang Shengxue 楊勝學, and two older men also named Yang. All five men declared their commitment by means of a Miao-style blood oath with Long Laoman, one of the six *zhai* chiefs said to be under the direction of Wu Longdeng. Laoman sent the twins into Zhen'gan city dressed as firewood carriers to start fires and had Han Zhonglian and the Yang cousins join the official forces in order to sabotage from within the city, pouring blood into the gun breeches and so forth. Similar Han spies, none evidently very effective, were sent to Zhen'gan by Wu Longdeng and into Tongren by Shi Liudeng.¹⁰²

None of these categories of *Hanjian* was especially important to the Miao effort, and they were few. Even more significant, community support from settlers was absent. Only one small unit of fighters was identified as Han on the rebel side: a group of "bare sticks," petty swindlers and gamblers mostly named Huang, according to the testimony of their partner, who happened to know the Miao Shi Xingbao, offered their services, swore a blood oath, and joined in attacks on Yabao and Qianzhou.¹⁰³ There were no reports of Han shakers, indicating that Han communities did not undergo the ferment that led to the Miao Revolt. Not a single village, whether under existing or new leadership, is recorded to have joined in a body. The participation of a number

⁹⁹ Grand Council, April 27, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 405-7). Three men named Yang were captured with him.

¹⁰⁰ Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2000).

¹⁰¹ Imperial annotation, April 12, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 340).

¹⁰² Fukang'an, March 6, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 249); Feng Guangxun, March 4, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 253-54); Fu Ning, September 26, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 44).

¹⁰³ Confession of Zheng Shan 鄭善, July 3, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 549-51). Captured across the Guangxi border, Zheng was tortured in the presses for several days before Cheng Lin 成林, governor of Guangxi, accepted that he knew nothing about the revolt or its leaders and joined with his low-life companions only for profit. On July 21 the emperor approved his execution and the public display of his remains.

of Han men as individual spies and raiders seems insufficient to prove this was “a regional and multi-ethnic endeavor” as the later Guizhou revolt was.¹⁰⁴ The fact that some Han joined the cause is no reason to convert it into a protest of the deprived of the frontier. While not exclusively Miao in composition, the movement was in essence a revolt of people calling themselves Miao, with the occasional participation of Han frontier adventurers.

PEOPLE IN THE MIDDLE

The rebels stressed ethnic loyalty and sometimes used force to guarantee it. In practice, however, identifications could be very confused. Besides the *Hanjian* and the seventeenth-century Han assimilators into Miao society, a crucial role was played by two other groups, who were in different ways and degrees the products of Chinese cultural influence and imperial presence. These were people in the middle, specifically, those *baihu* in the three western Hunan subprefectures who were Miao, and the *turen* 土人 who occupied the area immediately to the north of the main Miao concentration. (The term *turen* was common in official documents and meant approximately “local people” on the periphery of administrative control, with a frequent context that suggested non-Han peoples.) My examination of these people in the middle explores whether in motivating their actions their cultural indeterminacy prompted neutrality, whether the various named groups in the region were self-consciously ethnic, and in particular the role of official action in these matters.

The best illustration of the difficulty of being in the middle, in the political as well as the cultural sense, was the Miao *baihu*. By all accounts this was a failed institution of administrative incorporation after the *tusi* abolition. Thirty-six *baihu* and several hundred hamlet heads had been set up in the three new subprefectures, not as officials (some secondary sources exaggerate their powers), but as a sort of equivalent of the village and community functionaries in Han villages of the interior known as *lizheng* 里正 and *baojia* 保家. They were charged with settling minor matters and bringing larger issues to the attention of local civil and military officials. Initially they were supposed to be Miao, but in practice “they were few and weak, and the Miao masses didn’t listen to them.”¹⁰⁵ The result was that increasingly Han were appointed instead, and these Han *baihu*, usually outsiders, proved by all accounts

¹⁰⁴ McMahon, “Identity and Conflict,” p. 68. Cf. note 13, above.

¹⁰⁵ Helin, in his already cited postwar recommendations; *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 263–64.

to be corrupt and self-seeking.¹⁰⁶ In retrospect this was scarcely better than the former *tusi* system.

The powerless Miao *baihu*, who were very much under the influence of Miao opinion but responsible to Qing officialdom, found things difficult in 1795. Politicization along ethnic lines forced these individuals, like the various groups in the middle, to choose sides. The most successful man in the middle was Wu Longdeng of Yabaozhai 鴨保寨, Fenghuang, a deputy *baihu* who had already played the intermediary perfectly in the 1787 Goubu incident. Wu may have joined the revolt reluctantly. Threatened with violence by Shi Liudeng, who visited him on January 14, 1795, Wu compromised by agreeing to have his four sons swear a blood oath with Shi. But on February 10 Wu began the revolt in Fenghuang by leading his sons to burn Yabao itself, presumably the houses of fellow villagers who were Han; he then fought alongside the rebels, launching a series of vigorous attacks on Qianzhou and beyond. Then, realizing the power of the official Qing expeditionary armies, he made contact with the authorities, who quickly saw his potential defection as a crucial means of defeating the revolt. Wu did not surrender at once, irritating the Qing commanders by keeping out of official reach, but proved his usefulness when he secured the capture of the rebel leader Wu Bayue. Wu Longdeng alone among the rebel leaders survived. His descendants were still vilified by some local Miao as a traitor family two centuries later.

A less fortunate straddler was another Miao *baihu*, Wu's friend Yang Guoan. Yang was a full *baihu* stationed like many near a military post, Qianghuxun 強虎哨, in Fenghuang, and his story deserves to be retold. Yang was one of a number of Miao with the Han-style Yang surname; officials sometimes distinguished these from "true Miao 真苗,"¹⁰⁷ believing them to have originated as Han settlers at a time of thin official presence and to have adopted Miao customs through cohabitation and intermarriage. Yang Guoan had strengthened his status as a cultural and political intermediary by taking two Han junior wives in addition to his Miao wife of the Long clan. As a Miao working for the Qing authorities, Yang was in an extraordinarily difficult position. When he visited Wu Longdeng on January 18 Wu told him about Shi Liudeng's visit. In an act he was to deeply regret, he failed to report this information to his official superiors.¹⁰⁸ Yet despite being Miao, as a *baihu*, the

¹⁰⁶ This was Yan Ruyi's strongly held view as well as Helin's; *MFBL* 22, p. 21

¹⁰⁷ *MFBL* 8, p. 5.

¹⁰⁸ By contrast Shi Liudeng's Miao *baihu* in Guizhou had reported the possession movement

channel of official authority, he was not immune from Miao violence, and on February 12 the marauding bands arrived, yelling and setting fires. Yang at once left for Qianzhou, sending his nineteen-strong interethnic family towards the Han valley areas of Chenzhou 辰州 City. Seeing the Qianzhou outskirts ablaze in the distance, he turned south toward the far safer, stone-walled Zhen'gan, capital of Fenghuang sub-prefecture, but rebels were blocking that route too, so he went down to Chenzhou to report to the authorities. Once his family had arrived to take refuge there, Guoan, now carried in a sedan since his leg was infected, again set out to report to Zhen'gan.

While the party was making its way through the Han lowlands, an incident occurred that vividly illustrates the ethnic polarization precipitated by the revolt.¹⁰⁹ Local Han militia stopped the party. Yang and his son Yang Qing 楊清 must have been dressed Han-style, no doubt with the shaven foreheads and queues of Qing subjects, but one of his two bearers, whose name was Liao Laoer 廖老二, looked clearly Miao. In the eyes of these Han militiamen defending their fields and settlements not far from the Miao areas in revolt, to be Miao was to be an enemy. Even to be in company with a Miao, despite the decades of frontier interaction, was now to be suspect. The militiamen doubted the loyalty of Yang father and son. Why, though in Han dress, were they returning to the areas in revolt in the company of an obvious Miao? And perhaps they noticed that the *baihu* and his son spoke the local Chinese dialect with a distinct three-prefectures accent or worse a Miao version of it. "Because he was Miao, [they ordered us to] kill him ourselves." In the crisis of the Miao rebellion, it was ultimately a matter of who you were. Cultural hybrids like Yang and his son, who had built their lives as political intermediaries between the Miao and the Qing government, could at this moment of crisis no longer stand in the middle. They had to declare themselves for the dynasty. Yang Qing tried to meet the test by instantly stabbing to death the bearer Liao Laoer, his fellow Miao and travel companion. Even that desperate act was insufficient to allay the suspicions of the Han militiamen. Father and son were turned over to the authorities at Chenxi and later

centered at his house, prompting the official raid on Datang; *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 360. Bai Rende's evidence is still more damning, but should be treated with caution; see note 18, above.

¹⁰⁹ McMahon first recounted this incident, but reading Yang Guoan as a Han Chinese name, he misidentifies Yang Qing as "a Han man travelling with a band of Miao" ("Identity and Conflict," p. 63). The error is understandable because Guoan does not identify himself as Miao at the start of his testimony, only later specifying that he is one of the "Miao baihu." I have relied on both men's interrogations by Hunan governor Jiang Sheng, on Jiang's memorial of March 18, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, pp. 276-82).

sent to the capital for trial and execution. The fate of his nineteen family members, recommended for execution, is unknown. Yang Guoan had not been able, unlike Wu Longdeng, to play one side against the other; in the end, despite his greater cultural adaptability, he was caught in the middle. Circumstance and error had brought him down, not cultural factors.

Once the revolt broke out, many ethnic straddlers had a similar decision to make, with their lives sometimes hanging in the balance. The *turen* were a minority in the process of creation, still a mix of the variously acculturated people in the old *tusi*. No one knew quite who they were. The key figure was Zhang Tingzhong 張廷仲, who quickly rallied his large family and raised a force of several thousand. Who was Zhang? Yan calls him, as do most others, a *turen*, but in early 1795 the Hunan governor Jiang Sheng 姜晟 (1725–1811) identified him as a “Miao rebel”; Fu Ning calls Zhang’s son part of the “using Miao to attack the Miao” strategy; and later materials consulted by the Hunan gazetteer compilers call him a Tumiao 土苗 (perhaps with the sense of “*tusi* Miao 土司苗”).¹¹⁰ The Grand Councilors, far north at the emperor’s summer residence in Rehe, were equally unclear about the *turen* in general. When enquiring of Shi Sanbao why in defeat he had tried to escape to the Tuman 土蠻 districts to the north, they asked: “Are the Tuman Miaozi, or a distinct race or variety?” Shi Sanbao’s response to the Grand Councilors offered a plausible historical analysis, recognizing that identity can shift: “Those Tuman were originally Miao, at the time of official incorporation [of Yongshun and Baojing in the 1730s] they became Tumin 土民. We call them Tuman; they have long been acquainted with the Miao.”¹¹¹

We have earlier differentiated the “middle ground” in terms of time, contrasting the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Here we must differentiate in terms of space. In the central parts of Baojing county and Yongshun prefecture the *turen* were a majority and were out of range of the revolt. Just north of the Miao areas, however, they lived intermixed with other groups. In these areas, within and just beyond Qianzhou subprefecture, Han in-migration following administrative incorporation (*gaitu guiliu*) deposited in-migrants over many generations among the *turen* and Miao population, the different communities intersecting “like dog’s teeth,” in the usual catch-phrase. Over

¹¹⁰ *MFBL* 22, pp. 18, 26; *Hunan tongzhi* 84, p. 30; also *MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 207; 2, pp. 439–40.

¹¹¹ Shi Sanbao, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 255). For a man undergoing torture, Sanbao’s matter-of-factness is remarkable, and in stark contrast to Wu Tianban’s obvious terror before the Grand Council. See also, *MFBL* 9, pp. 5, 16, on Tuman.

time, the military camps and the roads joining them tended to form spatial patterns of distinct self-conscious peoples. “In the Miao region, outside the camp roads are Miao hamlets; living next to the camps are guest people; and between the camp roads and mountain ravines are the *turen*.”¹¹² While the ravines produced little food, the better land was near the roads, and the best commercial opportunities and military security were found there too. Thus political-military and ecological factors worked hand-in-hand, creating three mutually dependent groups with differentiated ways of life. This was the pattern in the northern parts of Qianzhou, as well as just outside that subprefecture in the southernmost parts of Baojing and Yongshun.

The crisis of early 1795 upended the social system created by this differentiation. The soldiers were too few and scattered to withstand the Miao, who took control of the roads, and in some places (particularly in Qianzhou) the “guests” fled their homes. Thus *turen*, as people in the middle, played a crucial role in the revolt. Left to fend for themselves, the temptation might have been to ally with the Miao rebels and pillage the roadside valley lands, but – whether out of caution (they were more familiar than the Miao were with the nature of imperial power) or on account of hostile feelings against their Miao neighbors – they organized defensive forces of varying size and waited uneasily to see what would happen. Governor-general Bi Yuan 畢沅 (1739–1797) and governor Jiang Sheng deliberately courted the *turen*. Their winning over of Zhang Tingzhong of Yongshun, which the Hunan literatus Yan Ruyi 嚴如煜 (1759–1826) said saved Chenzhou and Yongshun from the Miao,¹¹³ was their greatest success. In general, the diverse peoples called the *turen* effectively exploited their position as people in the middle, siding with Qing in 1795, though not without dithering and mistrust. Qing reliance on the relatively more acculturated groups in 1795 presaged the P.R.C. policy in the autonomous region. Eventually the *turen* would grow by external augmentation and natural increase and see themselves as a single group. The (Mandarin-speaking) Tujia of the P.R.C. now predominate in population and political power in the ten-county West Hunan Tujia and Miao Autonomous Region.

Yan had himself cultivated the Gelao 仡佬 people, another of those groups that are hard to define and which were used in counterattacking the Miao. McMahon uses the case of the Gelao to illustrate the “amorphous nature of identity in the Miao frontier, especially as government observers perceived it.” The official observers’ confusion pointed to

¹¹² *MFBL* 22, p. 18.

¹¹³ *MFBL* 22, p. 26.

by McMahon is certainly demonstrated by the Gelao, as by the larger category of *turen*. At different points in his book, Yan Ruyi calls his Gelao protégés “*turen*”; neither *turen* nor Miao but a separate category; and the “Great and Small Zhang Tuman 大小章土蠻.”¹¹⁴

The few-thousand-strong Gelao were intermediate in three senses: they stood culturally between Han and Miao; they occupied land between predominantly Miao and Han territory in Luxi on the road to Chenzhou; and were suspect in the eyes of Qing officials. McMahon describes how they chose to align themselves with the Hunan literatus Yan Ruyi on the Qing side. Their case proves the difficulty of being in the middle; it shows that because the cultural lines between groups were fuzzy at the edges and some subgroups were culturally in-between, which side they would be identified with was an open question. In a crisis, self-interest and contingency could tip the balance, and did. McMahon acknowledges the sense of ethnic consciousness arising from hostile cultural interaction, and also the commonalities within a particular group and the presence of a sense of ethnic identity, but places emphasis on the ambiguities.¹¹⁵

The *turen* as a group were less clearly defined than the Gelao. Confronted with the confusions of the “middle ground” of cultural interaction, where individuals switch languages, adopt new styles of dress and hair, marry across ethnic lines, and change their names,¹¹⁶ we may be tempted to throw up our hands in postmodern despair. In this chaos of nomenclature, did the Gelao and *turen* have doubts about who they were? Like all of us, no doubt they had many identities, and the designation people gave them, given its instability, may have counted less than it would today; the idea of an identity that transcends all contexts

¹¹⁴ *MFBL* 22, p. 18; 17, p. 31; 22, p. 4. For the Gelao villages, typically defined as village-hamlets, neither Han nor Miao, see also *MFBL* 3, pp. 16–17.

¹¹⁵ McMahon, “Identity and Conflict,” pp. 63–64. The Gelao were neither Miao nor Han, and the fact that they may have wavered politically when the revolt broke out does not indicate ambivalence about who among them (or those they confronted) was Han and who was Miao. As for the “Miao” label, it was obviously vague and inconsistent if one surveys official writings throughout southwest China across centuries, as do the writers he cites, but that doesn’t mean that people in western Hunan had any doubts as to who was Miao and who was not. In short, the fuzziness of real life, especially in the “middle ground” of socio-cultural interaction, should not obscure the fundamentally ethnic nature of the revolt. As demonstrated above, the revolt at its outset was explicitly ethnic in ideology and essentially so in participation. Its thrust was against the Han settlers and their soldier allies; as official armies arrived to crush the revolt, it perforce became anti-Qing.

¹¹⁶ McMahon (“Identity and Conflict,” p. 68) cites the interesting case of a Han sympathizer called Wang 王 who adopted the Miao name “Shi Daliu 石大流”; see *MMQJ*, vol. 2, p. 437. Of course this adoption of an ethnic label would indicate the political significance of ethnic identity, not its irrelevance.

may well be a twentieth-century one associated with the nationalist demands of the modern state. But, of course, the revolt put them all on the spot, risking their necks depending on whether they encountered Miao forces and when official forces arrived. Just as in normal times they were quite happy to position themselves advantageously, depending on the situation, so in the revolt they may have been flexible, perhaps more flexible than others. But notice that in practice, unlike the Miao, almost none in either group appears to have joined the revolt.

Identity is surely based on social experience. This is the message of many studies – in the China field most recently the works of Mark Elliott on identity shifts of bannermen transferred to provincial cities, and Melissa Brown on Taiwan aboriginal acculturation.¹¹⁷ The experience of the Gelao had made them familiar to each other, as farmers along the road to Chenzhou, and conscious that they were better off than the Miao and even most *turen*, and dependent ultimately on the soldiers' camps for protection from the Miao. In this situation their siding with the government was almost a foregone conclusion. The *turen*, as people of the middle on a larger stage, though not a face-to-face community and still in the process of creating their own imagined community, also fell naturally into a pro-official role.

What then about the category “Miao,” notably the 200,000 who “surrendered,” many convincing the government of their loyalty by hunting down other Miao of the five clans? Scholars have recognized “Miao,” broadly applied across time and space, as a complex category. Today it includes groups speaking mutually unintelligible dialects and out of touch with each other for centuries. As a result of minority policy since the 1950s and the enforcement of central authority, there is heightened Miao consciousness among all these groups. The Miao across southwest China compete with other recognized ethnic groups for government attention and concessions. Indeed Hmong websites and periodic international conferences loosely link Miao in China with the diasporic Hmong population in Southeast Asia, the United States, and Europe. But several centuries ago many of today's minority nationalities did not yet exist as self-conscious groups. The term Qiang in western China, for example, was a generic term for people occupying land between Han Chinese and Tibetans on the fringes of agricultural China.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Mark C. Elliott, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 2001); Melissa J. Brown, *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities* (Berkeley: U. California P., 2004).

¹¹⁸ Wang Ming-ke 王明珂, “From the Qiang Barbarians to Qiang Nationality: The Making of a New Chinese Boundary,” in Shu-min Huang and Cheng-kuang Hsu, eds., *Imagining*

Qiang consciousness and a sense of difference from outsiders, that is to say ethnogenesis, appeared slowly and by fits and starts as certain local groups sought to exploit potential advantages of the designation that outsiders gave them. Besides special treatment by the government, a crucial element in their self-consciousness seems to have been their relations with immediately neighboring settlements, often competing within the same ecological niche. These neighbors were not necessarily sharply different in cultural terms, but the differences grew in significance in conditions of competition and became cultural markers, with an invented history to go with them. Similar patterns of ethnogenesis seem to have taken place in the cases of the She and Yao elsewhere in Ming and Qing China, although here there was no earlier term to use as an ethnonym: the term Yao simply referred to people freed from the obligation to do *corvée* on account of their places of residence far from agricultural valleys.¹¹⁹ All three cases show the importance of official as well as local initiative in the formation of a self-conscious group.

Such a view rejects primordial notions of cultural continuity, blood transmission, and permanent identity while recognizing the power of such notions and the capacity of people to create and adhere to them. This interpretation of ethnogenesis suggests the importance of terminological designation, along with territorial location and propinquity with other groups. People of the western Hunan region were called Miao relatively early, from at least the fourteenth century, but the Chinese notion of Miao during the eighteenth century was still shifting. When the region underwent administrative incorporation, the Miao were sorted on a scale from ripe, or familiar (*shu*), to raw, or unfamiliar (*sheng*). The continuum in practice equated cultural distance and unfamiliarity with political unruliness, because the *sheng* Miao were always making trouble and the Miao who made trouble were almost always *sheng*. Consistent with this notion of natural unruliness of the uncivilized, some officials envisaged full assimilation, the making of Miao into Min, going so far in a few cases as to imagine them merging into Han (*yi Miao wei Han* 以苗爲漢). Others argued for separation and protection from Han settlers and “*Hanjian*,” a view reflected in the legal system for thirty years after administrative incorporation.¹²⁰ In the revolt, Miao were said to be sur-

China: Regional Division and National Unity (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, 1999); and his *Qiang zai Han Zang zhijian, yige Huaxia bian yuan de lishi renleixue yan jiu* 羌在漢藏之間——一個華夏邊緣的歷史人類學演究 (Taipei: Lianjing, 2003).

¹¹⁹ David Faure, “The Yao Wars in the Mid-Ming and Their Impact on Yao Ethnicity,” and Wing-hoi Chan, “Ethnic Labels in a Mountainous Niche: The Case of She Bandits,” in Crossley, Siu and Sutton, *Empire at the Margins*.

¹²⁰ Sutton, “Ethnicity and the Miao Frontier.”

rendered (*xiang*), submissive (*shun* 順) or rebellious (*ni* 逆); submissive Miao being no less Miao for submitting. All of these categorizations acknowledged a Miao identity.

What was that Miao identity? As for outward markers, local Miao were clearly distinguished from new and old Han settlers by their dress, as we know from accounts of Han and Miao disguised to pass as individuals in the other's communities.¹²¹ Both sides were very clear about these differences.¹²² Judging from the interrogations, however, Qing officials could be confused about the subdivisions of the category Miao, though it seemed not at all confusing to the Miao themselves. First, Miao leaders saw internal differences *within* the three subprefectures as insignificant. In one of his confessions, Wu Tianban spoke of colored Miao (Huamiao) and black Miao, colored Miao being the term he gave to people recruited near his home village of Sumazhai 蘇麻寨.¹²³ Wu Tingyi pointed out that the black Miao were simply Miao near Wu Bayue's base at Pinglong. "They wear black clothes, so they are called *hei* Miao 黑苗, they are certainly not of another race 種."¹²⁴ As for the Miao just across the Guizhou border, they wore slightly different clothing and adornments, and their leaders might not be accepted by Hunan Miao fighters, but many were related and the sense of difference was slight.

Within all these Eastern Miao many practical interconnections had evolved. During the decades of official incorporation, trade and population growth had enlarged them well beyond a face-to-face community, disseminating the same language and cultural practices to a population of hundreds of thousands. Affinal as well as agnatic links had great importance. Consciousness of community grounded on the relations among potential and actual marriage groups served as the main basis of the rising. Beyond this we have noted the gods peculiar to the

¹²¹ See *MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 198. Governor Jiang Sheng of Hunan reported three spies discovered by soldiers near the city walls: "They were found to have both ears pierced for rings, and their accents, eyebrows, and hair were completely different from *minren* (civilian Han); there is no doubt they are Miao bandits (*Miao fei*"); *ZPZZ*, file 1882.3, emperor's annotation of February 24, 1795. This is one of the documents not included in the comprehensive collection *MMQY*, though there is another memorial from Jiang bearing the same date.

¹²² There is a remarkable martyr's biography of a Yongsui licentiate and his wife. When the Miao rebels kidnapped them they forced them to put on Miao clothing. "How can we, from a scholar family, be defiled by criminals like you? 我宮牆中人豈受賊污者," a protest that led to their deaths. The inclusion of these two among the martyrs of 1795 is evidence of Han Chinese views; whether the Miao actually forced them to change, and if so why, are unanswerable questions; *MFBL* 18, p. 20.

¹²³ *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 120–23.

¹²⁴ Grand Council memorial on the judicial interrogation of Wu Tingyi and others, March 15, 1797 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 411).

region, the White Emperor Heavenly Kings and the Flying Mountain Princess, which gave the Eastern Miao not only a focus of worship but allowed them a method of customary law that must have strengthened self-consciousness.¹²⁵ Moreover decades of common treatment since incorporation – in official registration, tax exemption, dealings with Han merchants, soldiers and moneylenders – intensified a sense of identity. The revolt is the proof that, probably more than the emergent *turen*, they had developed a sense of themselves as a community sharply different from the Han Chinese they knew and with sharply antagonistic interests.

That did not mean pan-Miao (pan-Hmong) sentiment or consciousness. Asked about Miao farther afield in other parts of Guizhou, Wu Tingyi said he had heard of them but they were very distant: he did not know any.¹²⁶ This suggests the awareness of a pan-Miao group but not a common pan-Miao identity. For these “Eastern Miao,” western Hunan and the Guizhou borderlands formed the limit of their sense of identity. They had a distinct dialect largely incomprehensible to Miao farther west (at least by the twentieth century) and in the 1930s they would be known as the Kexiong 克匈. In the 1795 revolt they already produced leaders who articulated distinct ethno-regional goals.

What then of the more acculturated Miao in the northwestern parts of Qianzhou? Like the nearby *turen* and the Gelao, these were also people in the middle – fence-sitters and more acculturated than other Miao to Chinese ways. Shi Shangjin 石上進 was a Miao *baihu* in charge of twenty-eight *zhai* with 2,000 residents. He claimed to have hidden in a cave after the fall of the subprefectural capital. Though a captured rebel incriminated him as a sworn leader in the revolt, he sent out Han men as envoys to Chenzhou seeking to get back in the good books of the officials. Bi Yuan welcomed him there, entertained him and sent him back to his hamlet “dancing and drumming” with relief, kowtowing to the emperor’s extraordinary mercy. “They are also human beings,” remarked Bi, exemplifying the Mencian trust in the power of Chinese assimilation, “Though their customs are peculiar, how can their hearts be different? If we treat them with sincerity and stimulate their natural goodness, their conversion will come readily of its own accord.”¹²⁷

¹²⁵ Sutton, “Myth Making,” and idem, “Violence and Ethnicity.”

¹²⁶ *MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 410–11.

¹²⁷ *MFBL* 22, p. 19. On Shi Shangjin, see confession of Shi Xingbao, March 3, 1795 (*MMQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 185–86), and Bi Yuan memorial, May 5, 1795 (*MMQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 453–55; *MFBL* 22, p. 19); see also list of his *zhai*, Grand Council Records (reel 585#2630–1). The emperor was suspicious about Shangjin’s veracity, in view of the large number of Shis in the rebellion, and preferred to wait until Fukang’an arrived to investigate; May 13, 1795 (*MMQJ*, vol. 2, pp. 456–57).

Another Miao leader, hamlet chief Shi Dagui 石大貴, after sounding out Bi Yuan and Jiang Sheng through the good offices of a surrendered Miao, escorted representatives of sixty-eight other *zhai* from adjoining areas of Qianzhou and north in Yongshun from Baojing. The two officials summarized their plea:

[We] Miao people (Miao *renmen* 苗人們) live close to the Guizhou and Yongsui Miao hamlets: since we Miao all have large families and many relatives, how could we fail to realize the gravity of the crime of rebellion and risk self-destruction? It was just that at the start of the marauding (*zishi*) the official soldiers could not immediately come to save us, so rebel Miao set fires and robbed, always telling us we would be killed if we didn't join them. The good-for-nothing Miao in the various hamlets, to save their skins, sought to use the opportunity to burn and plunder, devastating the [Han] people of the villages. Now that we have been graciously spared we petition with the various hamlets to defend the border and block off the rebel Miao. To make up for having been remiss, all the hamlets of the border region in Chenzhou, Yongzhou [Yongshun], and Baojing will keep watch together, permitting absolutely no rebel Miao to enter and maraud.¹²⁸

While not to be taken at face value, such confessions of laxity and promises of good behavior are significant in the rhetorical shift from earlier conceptions. Shi Dagui and the other heads are made to draw several kinds of differentiation that seemed less significant, if they existed at all, before the revolt's outbreak: distinctions between good and rebel Miao, those among hamlet dwellers, and those between Miao of the extreme periphery (who didn't have such large families to prize) and the former chieftaincy (*tusi*) region. They position the sixty-eight hamlets for a post-war order in which they would police themselves and protect nearby Han villages from Miao troublemakers. Though the words in Bi's and Jiang's summary are organized to promote these officials' case for winning over the temporizers and compromisers and persuade the center, we glimpse community strategies in play, in the manner of the alternating banditry/militia and defense/rebellion of Elizabeth Perry's mid-nineteenth-century Huaibei fortress towns.¹²⁹ With a strong assist from official rhetoric, these swing groups were making their own history and shaping the future of the frontier.

¹²⁸ On Shi Dagui, see August 17, 1795 (*MMQX*, vol. 3, p. 4; and *MFBL* 22, p. 19); his *zhai* are listed in Grand Council Records (reel 585 #2631).

¹²⁹ Elizabeth J. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China, 1845-1945* (Stanford: Stanford U.P., 1980).

The post-war policies had large effects on both Miao and *turen*. The continuing suppression, vigorously conducted from hamlet to hamlet by Fu Nai 傅霽 of Fenghuang to accomplish the late Qianlong emperor's draconian cleansing policy, permanently removed charismatic Miao leadership, wiped out many communities, and replaced the parallel (if unequal) Miao and Han Chinese social hierarchies with a class system where the great majority of Miao were poor peasants under the dominance of *turen* (from the mid-twentieth century, "Tujia") and allied to external Han Chinese authority. On the other hand, closer political integration with the empire introduced an (albeit rickety) ladder of success as a new Miao militia force took over local constabulary duties, and assimilated Miao men were given new educational opportunities. Self-consciousness tends to increase in contact conditions whether in unequal competition between groups or in violent confrontation, and it is likely that neither the suppression nor the renewed trend toward acculturation altered the sense of Miao consciousness that had intensified in the decades since incorporation and the subsequent wave of Han in-migration, and had found expression in the revolt of 1795-1797. On present evidence, it seems reasonable to describe that revolt as a key phase in Miao ethnogenesis. The modern Miao nationality had emerged at least in part of the southwest, with the conversion of the Chinese term "Miao" into something felt and acted upon as well as recognized by others. But we should repeat that local Miao consciousness took only the Eastern Miao as its significant political community. This ethno-regionalism, recognizing no broad Miao/Hmong community, did not change until later, in the twentieth century. Thus the local clans in western Hunan would not make common cause with the "Miao" risings, correctly labeled multi-ethnic, which spread over much of the neighboring province of Guizhou in the decade beginning in 1864.¹³⁰

For "people in the middle" the revolt had presented a life-threatening choice. As we have seen, the leaders of the revolt saw matters in ethnic terms, drawing a sharp line between Han settlers ("guests") and Miao natives, regarding pro-Qing Miao as traitors to the cause, and seeking allies among the old *tusi* people, whom they regarded as originally Miao. But the officials, the leaders of the suppression, redrew the lines in political-moral terms of support or opposition to imperial power and Confucian principles. This official tactic was successful. Intelligence and the military participation of "surrendered Miao," or "good Miao," played a significant role in defeating the revolt. So did the help of the

¹³⁰ See Jenks, *Insurgency and Social Disorder in Guizhou*, and n. 13, above.

old *tusi* populations to the north represented by Zhang Tingzhong. Officials were able, largely by force majeure, to undercut ethnic solidarity within the Miao and forestall any self-protective alliances of Miao with *turen*. For Qing officialdom, the struggle was about order and morality, not ethnicity, and they had the resources to translate their rhetoric into reality. Official decisions played a big role not just in the new order but in the ensuing interethnic balance in the region and in the strengthening of ethnic self-consciousness in its various groups.

THE REVOLT IN WIDER CONTEXT

The Miao Revolt came at the cusp of high Qing, in terms of place and time; the country was never larger in extent and never more powerful, but its recently gained peripheral territories were soon to show their instability. This uprising was not the disaster of the mid-nineteenth-century revolts, which almost brought down the dynasty. Though the suppression must be counted an official success, it was so laborious and expensive that it brought into question the incorporation of this peripheral region, especially the Yongsui plateau of the extreme periphery, sixty years earlier, and foreshadowed the unraveling of the Qing state. Subsequent movements at the periphery would take root in conditions similar to those of the Miao Revolt – a sense of inequity and official unconcern in an ecological zone undergoing rapid change. Like the early Taipings in Guangxi, another imperial periphery, the Miao Revolt was rooted in a struggle between different ethnic communities in which Miao saw themselves as a disadvantaged minority. Like the Boxers, it reworked local religious and martial traditions. The Miao Revolt differed from these devastating revolts in never having extended beyond the local or developed the ideology and systematic relations that would enable it to do so. That was because it was in essence ethnic and local, the mobilization of a community of intermarrying clans in a nostalgic effort to restore the situation as it had been before outsiders took away its lands.

Coda One: The Suppression as Shock and Awe

War is not a chess game or a soccer match, in which both sides play by the same rules, but a sort of blind man's buff in which one constructs the enemy out of one's own experience and imaginings. The war that the Miao fought was not the war fought by the Qing armies. Miao memories and Qing reports reflect entirely different wars, not just the differing views of winners and losers.

We have seen how the purposes and methods of the uprising sprang out of local Miao culture. It came apart when these cultural expectations were not met. Magical flags did not protect the possessed ecstatics who carried them. The gods were no match for official ferocity. The familiar mountains and their network of footpaths were no refuge from armies coming from every direction. The Yuan River was not the Yangzi. Passed-down muskets and locally made gunpowder were useless against light cannon. Again and again under interrogation, the Miao, young Wu Tianban for example, commented how frightful the Qing armies had been. They seemed unimaginably unforgiving, seeing Miao actions not as an expression of grievances to be settled by negotiation and compensation, in other words, the customary logic of local feud, but as dehumanizing. To the civilized Chinese mind, the rebel was outside society and its norms, and his acts justified root-and-branch destruction of his hamlet including his neighbors, the killing or sale of his wife and female relatives, extinction of his sons and grandsons, and the slow, skilled, public butchery of his body.¹³¹

The official purpose and rationale need to be spelled out further if we are to understand the form of the suppression. Punishments meted out to captives had their positive side, playing an essential part in the restoration of Qing authority. Here we are obliged, like Michel Foucault, to adopt the perspective of those who ordered or were expected to witness the punishment.¹³² Death penalties according to Qing (and Ming) law were in principle to be approved at the capital. The trial and execution of the top leaders took place at Rehe, by the Grand Council itself, in a visible reassertion of the central authority challenged by the revolt. Miao leaders who survived the fighting and were captured (for example, Wu Tianban, Shi Sanbao, Wu Tingyi, and two of Liudeng's adoptive sons, Shi Laoqiao and Shi Laoer) were sent there to be tried and sentenced to a slow lingering death. Sanbao's elder son, Shi Laoquan, who was not on good terms with his father, was judged as meriting only immediate decapitation.¹³³ For those considered to be ringleaders, public exposure followed execution. Shi Liudeng was fortunate to die on the battlefield. His head, defaced by bullet wounds, was picked out from a pile of Miao heads and dispatched to Peking along with his live adoptive sons.¹³⁴ The Qing commander Fukang'an assembled a

¹³¹ Rebel bands had committed their own butchery, in one case flaying alive a military lieutenant in Mayang county who had organized village resistance and killing other members of his family; Fu Ning, August 23, 1795 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 18).

¹³² Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1975; New York: Pantheon, 1977), pp. 3-69.

¹³³ Grand Council mem., March 7, 1797 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, pp. 410-16); edict (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 416).

¹³⁴ Mingliang memorial, January 4, 1797 (*MMQJ*, vol. 3, p. 362).

Miao crowd to watch Wu Bayue executed by castration and beheading along with the shaker Shi Laoyan (the Lofty General) and the supposed *Hanjian* Yang Laolong, and kept their heads for public exhibition once Pinglong had been captured.¹³⁵ Wu Bayue's sons, Tingyu and Tingying, did survive to be taken home for their lingering execution.¹³⁶ Their brother, Tingli, who had died of sickness, "already punished by hell," was dug up so that his head could be set up alongside those of his brothers.¹³⁷ At Cucumber Hamlet Fukang'an gleefully dug up seven grave mounds and scattered into the wind the dust of what he presumed to be the bones of Shi Sanbao's ancestors.¹³⁸

The wartime situation allowed flexibility, even a degree of imagination, in the forms of punishment and execution. The Han traitors (*Hanjian*), who we have seen were mostly low-level spies or artisans, were sliced alive in public, usually where they had lived or in front of the troops, for example, Tian Yingqiao.¹³⁹ Still more gruesome deaths were reserved for the most charismatic middle-level Miao leaders who had quickly risen to leadership in organization and battle. Shi Daike, the bold nephew of Shi Liudeng, was castrated and borne from *zhai* to *zhai* in a wooden cage like an animal, his wounds slowly festering. His head would be removed and exposed in the place where he died.¹⁴⁰ Similarly treated was Long Laoer, a man of self-confessed wild character and enormous strength who was known as Wild Bull Long among the Miao, received the title of general from Shi Sanbao, and probably led the rebel's most notorious success, the rout and extermination of commander Ming'antu's 明安圖 force at Yayou.¹⁴¹ On the battlefield he was glimpsed on horseback, his head tied in a red kerchief, and at the height of the revolt, according to his unrepentant testimony, controlled (the fighters of) as many as thirty-six *zhai*. After his capture, he too was carried round from *zhai* to *zhai*, in each subjected to unnamed forms of exemplary torture, and finally put to death.

¹³⁵ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 181. Execution took place on about March 23, 1796. Fukang'an's term is *fuge* 腐割. This "Lofty General" seems different from the mysterious Wu Laoyan seen by one witness in a cave near Cucumber Hamlet with Shi Liudeng and Shi Sanbao after the official raid on Shi Liudeng's *zhai*. He too was known as the Wu King according to the witness, Long Changgu 龍長固 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 484).

¹³⁶ See memorial from Mingliang, Eledengbao, Delengtai, Eyao, Jiang Sheng (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 390). The emperor's comment on February 17, 1797, was "Good!"

¹³⁷ Edict, July 8, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 230), and Heshen memorial, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 252).

¹³⁸ Fukang'an memorial, June 14, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 506).

¹³⁹ Helin memorial, September 12, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 279).

¹⁴⁰ September 16, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 286).

¹⁴¹ *MMQY*, vol. 3, pp. 155-56; 3, pp. 253-54.

What sense was there in these extreme punishments, long drawn out and extending at times beyond death? Were they not superfluous and even counterproductive? Some were carried out in front of the troops to whip up their enthusiasm for chasing and killing the enemy. Most of all they were to intimidate the Miao, prompt the hold-outs to give themselves up, and reduce the Miao to docility for another generation, yet in the short run, it seems that their terrifying nature could prevent surrender and prolong a desperate resistance.¹⁴² It is easiest to grasp them as powerful symbolic acts, though acts with rather complex and veiled meanings. At one level they are understandable for their vengeful and satisfying inverse symmetry. The binding, fettering, and caging reversed the license to maraud and raid once enjoyed by the rebel. His screams of pain matched and, as it were, undid his earlier cries of defiance and revolt. The bleeding from the executioner's cuts in a sense redeemed the blood of others he had himself spilled. But beyond this bodily symmetry there was a more abstract logic of reversal that applied to the imperial system as a whole, and we should read the punishments rather as Foucault read those of Europe in the age of absolute monarchy, but with adjustments to account for Qing peculiarities. The revolt had seemed to challenge the principle of imperial sovereignty, a principle inseparable from the emperor's person, and it had violated cosmic harmony and bureaucratic hierarchy. All this was now visibly and patently restored. The complete destruction of the rebel's body and spirit reestablished total sovereignty. The offender's confession and admission of guilt, his pleas for mercy, extreme pain, erasure as a human being, and the extinction of his descendants repaired the autocrat's dignity. The proper cosmic order identified with the authority of the state was remade by the most unambiguous expulsion and destruction of a metonymic symbol of rebellion.

The bureaucratic process deserves close attention. Official supremacy was reasserted by the formal routine of elaborate penal procedures, from search and capture to identification and interrogation, followed by the proposal of a statutorily suitable punishment, approval, execution, and at last the documentary filing and archiving of the whole bureaucratic process duplicated in the capital and the local walled city. Bureaucracy pigeonholed and standardized the criminal according to

¹⁴² Perceiving this problem, the Qianlong emperor ordered a policy of deferred punishment for the great majority of Miao fighters. Any Miao who joined in the marauding and resistance to Qing armies would be rounded up and executed, following Fukang'an's practice in the Taiwan campaign. But in order not to inhibit capitulation by terrified Miao in the mean time, this policy would not be carried out until the revolt had been put down; edict March 5, 1795 (*MMQY*, vol. 2, p. 194).

the severity of the crime, recording but making irrelevant his original purposes, claims, and personal identity.

The phase from confession to disposal is especially noteworthy for the way it made the criminal's body into a rhetorical device. The interrogation phase did not simply extract the truth but produced words through the impersonal infliction of pain and rendered them into official language. At Rehe, after Shi Sanbao had been tortured with the press at increasing levels of severity, the supervisory official reported, "The criminal lay prostrate admitting his guilt, and could not offer another word."¹⁴³ Besides extracting truth and proving that the examiner was doing his job, interrogation with its ritualized logic erased the criminal's will by marking his body, forcing him to conform to his proper role as a subject. (This is reminiscent of Confucian ritual theory uniting inner disposition and bodily practice, if we consider torture an involuntary version of the ritual practitioners' habitual conformity, in heart and mind, with correct positioning, movements, and words.) The scribe transferred the words to paper for editing, memorializing, imperial perusal and annotation, and archiving. Bureaucratic routines, so rudely disrupted, had been restored, officials had done their utmost duty, and flesh and blood had been transubstantiated into familiar bureaucratic expressions on paper. Note that Shi Sanbao and other captives sent to Peking followed the same path as official written communications, inert and object-like, and after sentencing and execution the account of their crimes was posted in their communities, confirming the process and its result and "making manifest the laws of the state and quickening hearts and minds 用照國法 而快人心," lest others might think of revolt.¹⁴⁴

The other meaning of the suppression, invisible to the Miao and indeed to most contemporaries, was its corruption.¹⁴⁵ The campaign brought troops from all the four surrounding macroregions and was enormously expensive to provision. Peculation of Heshen at court and the group around him, including other imperial favorites like his fellow governors-general Helin and Fukang'an, made the campaign even costlier. I shall not examine corruption by these leaders, but point out only that it makes their testimony on the war very unreliable. The official forces were likely much smaller than reported, and estimates of Miao

¹⁴³ *MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 252; the emperor had instructed a more severe reexamination.

¹⁴⁴ Grand counselor Heshen, on Shi Sanbao's sentencing, August 20, 1796 (*MMQY*, vol. 3, p. 252).

¹⁴⁵ The corruption of the campaign to suppress the White Lotus revolt in the Hubei borderlands, beginning in early 1796, became quickly known. Many of the same generals had been posted from western Hunan.

strength greatly exaggerated. And, at a time when nationality identity is celebrated partly through accounts of such revolts, Miao historians are in no mood to question these figures.

Coda Two: Official Interpretation and Miao Memories

The Miao Revolt of 1795 is not forgotten in the West Hunan Tujiazu Miao Autonomous District 湘西土家族苗族自治州, but different ethnic groups remember it differently. There are monuments only in Huayuan 花園, the former Yongsui plateau, the most heavily Miao county. One is near Cucumber Hamlet, Shi Sanbao's home, at the village of Yayou 鴉酉. A 1985 stele describes the revolt as an "uprising of the Miao people," calls Shi himself a "nationality hero" who "died for the cause 就義" and names his betrayers, but omits mention of the attacks on Yayou's Han settlers that opened the revolt. Instead it specifies the target of the revolt as Manchu-Qing officials and subofficials "in league with upper-class Miao people," a group absent from the historical record. No openly anti-Han or anti-Tujia sentiments here, but a representation of the revolt in nominally ethnic but substantively class terms. This is a compromise view of the Miao Revolt, avoiding any challenge to harmony among China's fifty-six nationalities

By contrast in Qianzhou, neither at the former walled city, sacked in 1795, nor at Pinglong, Wu Bayue's old headquarters, is there any monument, though local Miao memory is vivid. During my visit to the remote hamlet, a young man told me his ancestors had left Qing cannonballs under their latrines as an expression of contempt. Asked about Wu Bayue, a group of boys grinned, and one pointed to the steep cliffs overlooking the hamlet. "Wu Bayue is up there." A white shape in the rock resembles a man on horseback brandishing a spear – the Wu king escaping arrest by the Qing forces. Why have officials at Qianzhou, or the nearby regional capital Jishou, not erected a monument? Could it be because Tujia dominate the region politically and demographically?

In Fenghuang county, which had, and still has, the smallest Miao population of the three eighteenth-century subprefectures, official and popular views of the revolt appear to be in harmony. People informed about local history spoke of the Miao suppressor Fu Nai with respect. Several expressed sympathy for Wu Longdeng's Fenghuang descendants, who had been embarrassed by publications criticizing his pro-Qing role. Thus, powerful memories and allegiances, prevailing after 200 years and varying according to the ethnic composition and leadership of the respective counties, help to define local identities even today.

Among the local Miao, there is scarcely a hint of ambivalence, and the heroes of the revolt take on the character of Robin Hood and Rob Roy, swashbuckling heroes outwitting an oppressive state. Fabulous stories cast a revealing angle, with their mix of magic and realism, on the emergent regional sense of Miao identity. In 1996 at the Cucumber Hamlet of Shi Sanbao, rebuilt but still occupied by families with that surname, the grandfather, age eighty-three, told a story about Sanbao and the revolt lasting over an hour before we had to take the mountain path down to Yayou. (We had arrived without official accompaniment. My interpreter was a young Miao schoolteacher, Mr Ma, who had used his day off to accompany me on a twenty-mile journey, and there were no Han Chinese present.) There was no question about the old man's sympathies, though he claimed not to be directly related to Sanbao.

There seemed to be three main elements to the old man's story, each developing the central theme of Miao difference and confrontation with the Han Chinese: the man predestined to success and failure; Han humiliation of Miao people; and the use of magical martial powers. First, Shi's mother, buried on a wooded ridge below the *zhai*, appears to him. After 120 days, she says, he will be an official. But he replies that he could not wait that long. Second comes a series of petty humiliations at the hands of Han: a white haired old man gives him a book which he is not to open until 120 days are up. Walking past a school, he mocks the Han students and says they are learning nothing. Why then are you just a day laborer? they mock him, grabbing the book. Their Han teacher in dismay reads in it the goals of the Miao and burns it. A Han merchant also humiliates him by rejecting his effort to buy a decorated bowl. Because he is only a Miao, he gives him a plain, earthenware one instead, and Shi at once smashes it. The first of these incidents reflects deep Miao ambivalence about literacy, at least in the teller's generation. The second captures the Miao desire for status and their dependence on the market run by others, just as true today as in the past.

Third, magical and martial powers are used to outwit official forces. The white haired old man recovers the book again, rebuking him for opening it, and a little spirit (*xiaogui*) in it tells him to look at the sun and turn around his finger. He does so, and the sun spins around. Miao people gather. He tells them he wants to rebel. When they refuse to believe him, he convinces them of his power by stamping on the ground three times so that one of the skeptics falls dead. Then he revives him by splashing water on his face. Convinced of his arts, people agree to rise in revolt. He trains 120 men to be warriors. He and his sister ride

on wooden benches that turn into horses; she turns the loom counter-clockwise to confuse the troops trying to find Cucumber Hamlet; he flies to Pushi and leads troops to the Yellow River, and reports he has fought all the way to Beijing. Magic helps him transcend nature and defeat the empire.

Finally, the story represents Shi Sanbao's capture as a victory for his generosity: fleeing Qing troops, he comes across a poor man cutting straw for pig's food to support his children, and invites him to tie him up and turn him in to the troops. The poor man, a loyal Miao, refuses, but Shi puts a rope around himself, and others hand him over. Even in his moment of desperation he acts to help a fellow Miao.

An oral tale about Wu Bayue published in 1992 presents a similarly magical-realist account of a Miao hero unvanquished by the Qing "dog soldiers."¹⁴⁶ Captured after Wu Longdeng's betrayal, "Eighth-month" Wu (Wu Bayue) is bound with 88-catty fetters, 88-catty manacles, an 88-catty iron cangue, and guarded day and night by 88 stalwart men armed with knives and spears. Fukang'an, the Qing commander, then tries to recapture Qianzhou city. Wu suddenly appears on a tower inside the city. He waves a sword three times and millions of knives shining like snow fly out to cut the Qing troops to pieces. Fukang'an decides he must kill this "god-like" enemy. He ties Wu to a cedar tree 88 feet in circumference. As he prepares to slice him to death there is a gust of wind, a clap of thunder, a flash of lightning, a storm of red rain, and the Wu King snaps his ropes and flies skyward with a great laugh at the "dog soldiers." When at last Fukang'an reaches the peaks surrounding Pinglong, the Wu king is waiting: he waves his magic sword and the knives fly again, scattering the Qing soldiers bodies over the cliffs and flinging down Fukang'an's remains at a place later renamed "Pig's Death Precipice."

Myths are not history but have their own subjective truths and therefore their uses for historians. These myths mark the revolt as distinctively nativist and Miao in contemporary folk memory, consistent with the historical analysis offered above. It is true that they omit most of the essential features I have suggested for the revolt: its causes – land alienation and resentment at official acts; its methods – charismatic possession, cooperation among intermarrying clans, and a preexisting religious focus; and its results – a desperate, ill-matched struggle. Rather than reflecting what Miao actually experienced in the 1790s, both myths illustrate the uses to which later generations of locals put the

¹⁴⁶ Ma, *Xiangxi Miaozu minjian*.

