



RESEARCH PAPER

Ethnicity, Diversity, and National Integration of China: A Case Study of Miao Community in China

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ABSTRACT

In the realm of historical analysis, the vital role played by communities at the local and village levels, as well as the diverse ethnic groups and marginalized segments of society, in influencing a nation's sociocultural and economic advancement is frequently overlooked. This study endeavors to address this gap in scholarship by shedding light on the importance of the Miao ethnic group in China's developmental history. Examining China's approach to incorporating diverse ethnic minorities into Chinese identity and nationalism holds great importance. The educational system in the village can shed light on both China's education system and its impact on the socio-cultural and economic development of a Miao Community in a rural Chinese village. Additionally, it illustrates how this system contributes to maintaining unity amidst diversity.

KEYWORDS China, Ethnicity, Fenghuang, Hunan, Miao, Sanatan Academy

Introduction

Before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, ethnic minority communities often found themselves enmeshed within serf and slave systems, wherein they were subjected as subjects to various feudal lords and nobles. In this context, they were bereft of authentic personal freedoms. However, upon the formal establishment of the People's Republic of China, democratic reforms initiated in the late 1950s dismantled these practices, granting tens of thousands of individuals from minority backgrounds the right to own land and exercise personal autonomy. The current Chinese President, Xi Jinping, is actively pursuing objectives related to modernization and assimilation, a course of action that certain critics contend impinges upon the individual liberties of ethnic minorities. Nonetheless, within the Fenghuang County of Hunan province, there exists a contemporary village equipped with modern educational amenities. This village is engaged in providing essential community services, thereby making a substantial contribution to China's advancement and progress across diverse domains. In this paper, I contend that a village of this nature has evolved into a tributary within the broader context of China's socioeconomic revolution. The intriguing question that arises is whether such a model can be replicated globally, specifically in Pakistan.

The Miao ethnicity, renowned as the most ancient indigenous group in Fenghuang County, boasts a total population of 250,410. Their presence in the county is characterized by a substantial concentration rather than widespread dispersion.

The term "Miao" is officially used in China to refer to four distinct groups of people who share only distant linguistic and cultural connections. These groups include the Hmu people of southeast Guizhou, the Qo Xiong people of western Hunan, the A-Hmao people of Yunnan, and the Hmong people residing in Guizhou, Sichuan, Guangxi, and Yunnan. The Miao Ethnic Group, hailing from southern China, Laos, Burma, northern Vietnam, and Thailand, is a vibrant and culturally rich minority with a deep historical background. Originally originating from China, the Miao practice animism and ancestor worship, traditionally

residing in villages situated between 3,000 to 6,000 feet above sea level. Originally hailing from China, the Miao people adhere to animism and ancestor worship, and they have historically lived in villages nestled at altitudes ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 feet above sea level. In Southeast Asia, the Miao are recognized as the Hmong, pronounced as "mung." They display unique ethnic and linguistic traits that differentiate them from both the Chinese population and other ethnic groups in both China and Southeast Asia. Even though they have intermarried with the Chinese, they retain distinct physical attributes, such as shorter stature and unique facial features. (Shenghai, (2017)) Notably, Miao groups can vary significantly from one another, with differences often as pronounced as those between Miao and non-Miao populations. Considerable literature exists about different ethnic groups in China, but the Miao ethnic group remains relatively unexplored. Consequently, this paper endeavors to delve into their socio-cultural and economic impact within China. (Ma, 2004)

Agriculture has historically been the primary source of sustenance for these communities, predominantly involving the practice of shifting cultivation for rice, corn (maize), and the cultivation of opium poppy. Opium was traded in lowland markets, yielding silver that was used for bridal dowry payments. However, both shifting cultivation and opium production have seen significant declines. In Thailand, the Hmong have shifted their focus toward permanent field cultivation, with an emphasis on growing market garden vegetables, fruits, corn, and flowers. Traditionally, the Miao people had limited political organization beyond the village level, and the highest-ranking position was that of a village leader. (Hill, 1974) In China, the Miao have been integrated into the broader political framework that applies to the entire nation. In areas where minority populations are concentrated, they reside in autonomous counties, townships, or prefectures, allowing for a degree of self-representation. The term "Hmong" translates to "free men," while "Miao" can be translated as "weeds" or "sprouts." Historically, the Chinese referred to them as "man," signifying "barbarians," while the Laotians, Vietnamese, and Thais referred to them as the "Meo," with a similar connotation as "Miao." Subgroups among the Hmong and Miao, such as the Red Miao, White Miao (Striped Miao), Cowery Shell Miao, Flowery Miao, Black Miao, and Green Miao (Blue Miao), are often named based on the color of women's clothing. In Southeast Asia, the two main Hmong groups are the White Hmong and Green Hmong.

Literature Review

A substantial body of literature exists concerning the various ethnic groups in China, but there is a noticeable dearth of information dedicated to the Miao ethnic group. Among those who have undertaken the task of documenting the Miao ethnic groups, their focus has predominantly centered on portraying the socio-cultural characteristics of the Miao people in China and other countries. However, there has been limited exploration of the contributions made by these ethnic groups at the grassroots level within their villages. This study seeks to address this research gap by delving into the role and impact of the Miao ethnic groups within their local communities.

Material and Methods

This study utilizes an anthropological method that highlights both careful observation and direct involvement. During a recent visit to China, the author had the opportunity to personally witness the socio-cultural and economic activities of the Miao ethnic communities in various places, with a particular focus on the smaller village known as Jixin Town, situated within Fenghuang County, Jishin Town. This firsthand experience yielded valuable insights into their present conditions. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the Miao people and their cultural significance, the study also involved interviews with relevant individuals and government officials in the country. Additionally, documentary evidence was utilized to corroborate and elucidate the findings before drawing certain conclusions.

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- b. I also hereby affirm and assert that the information presented below primarily originates from my two newspaper articles, which were published in the Friday Times in 2023. These articles specifically explore the cultural and industrial aspects of Phoenix City and Fenghuang County.

Miao of Hunan Province

The Miao population is one of the largest ethnic minorities in China, inhabiting regions across Guizhou, Yunnan, Guangxi, and Sichuan provinces. A smaller number of Miao people reside on Hainan Island, in Guangdong Province, and southwestern Hubei Province. They primarily live in close-knit communities, although some are found in areas shared with several other ethnic groups. Key Miao settlements are located in regions such as the Southeastern Guizhou Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Southern Guizhou Bouyei and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Southwestern Guizhou Bouyei and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Western Hunan Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Wenshan Zhuang and Miao Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan, and Rongshui Miao Autonomous County in Guangxi Province. (Zhou, 1997) The Southeastern Guizhou Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture has the highest concentration of Miao residents. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, these diverse groups were unified under the standardized name "Miao."

Fenghuang County(Hunan Province)

Fenghuang, often referred to as the Ancient Phoenix City, gets its name from a captivating legend that tells the story of two Phoenix birds gracefully soaring over the city and deciding to establish their permanent residence there because of its stunning beauty. This historical town is rich in cultural treasures, encompassing a wide array of ethnic languages and traditions, thriving arts, and remarkable architecture. (Xiaotong., 2005)

This county is situated in Hunan Province, China, and is administratively part of the Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture. Positioned on the western edge of the province, within the southern Xiangxi region, Fenghuang County shares its borders with Huayuan County and Jishou City to the north, Luxi County to the east, Mayang County to the southeast, and Bijiang District of Tongren City and Songtao County of Guizhou to the southwest and west, respectively. Covering an area of 1,745 square kilometers (674 square miles), as of 2015, the county had a registered population of 428,294 and a resident population of 363,700. Fenghuang County encompasses 13 towns and four townships within its jurisdiction.

Fenghuang County is renowned for its exceptionally well-preserved ancient town, a living testament to a rich tapestry of ethnic languages, traditions, arts, and distinctive architectural remnants in the Ming and Qing styles. Nestled within a picturesque mountain landscape, the town seamlessly integrates the natural flow of the Tuojiang River into its urban design. Over half of the city's residents belong to the Miao and Tujia ethnic minorities. Significantly, Fenghuang County holds a crucial place in history as it served as the epicenter of the Miao Rebellion from 1795 to 1797, leading to the dispersal of Miao communities across Southeast Asia over the past two centuries. The city plays a revered role in Miao traditions and funeral rituals and is also home to the Southern China Great Wall, a Ming dynasty fortification erected to protect the local Han Chinese population from Miao incursions. In 1913, the town's name was changed from Zhen'gan to Fenghuang. (Chawla, 2023,)

Preserving its historical allure since the Ching Dynasty in 1704, the town of Phoenix proudly showcases its well-maintained East Gate and North Gate city structures. Located along the picturesque Tuo River, the town's wooden buildings and bluestone streets contribute to its distinctive atmosphere, covering an area of around 10 square kilometers. Remarkably, this town has been a residence for numerous prominent figures in Chinese history, captivating visitors who are attracted not just to its scenic natural surroundings and captivating architecture but also to the chance to explore the residences of these esteemed cultural luminaries. (Oi, 1995) The ancient town of Phoenix City is a valley town that stands apart from other cities and towns in terms of its urban planning and architectural aesthetics. It holds unique value in both these aspects. Furthermore, Fenghuang's historical significance is underscored by its role as the central site within an ancient military defense system, adding a distinctive archaeological dimension to the town's heritage.

Throughout its history, Fenghuang has been inhabited by both the Miao and Han people, fostering rich interactions between these two ethnic groups. This unique blend of cultures has earned Fenghuang the reputation of being a city where different nationalities coexist harmoniously, making it a significant focal point for cultural anthropology studies that explore the dynamics of diverse ethnic communities and their relationships. (Yang, (2010)) Consequently, it becomes evident that the ancient town of Fenghuang possesses its own universal value that transcends regional boundaries.

Ancient Town of Phoenix and Miao

The ancient town of Phoenix was built in the Ching Dynasty (1704), and the East Gate and North Gate Ancient City Buildings are still there. The ancient town of Phoenix was built along the river, which is called Tuo River in Chinese. The buildings in the ancient town of Phoenix are all made of wood, and the roads there are all made of bluestone. The ancient town of Phoenix covers an area of about 10 square kilometers, and some famous people in

the history of China once lived here. Many tourists not only come here to visit the beautiful natural scenery and unique architectural features but also to visit the old house of these historical and cultural celebrities in China. Besides, some minority ethnic groups in China also live here, with a total of 28 ethnic groups including Miao, Han, and Tujia. After the ancient city of Phoenix became a tourist attraction, there were also many shops selling local ethnic handicraft products and ethnic costumes. (Luo, (1998))



The traditional attire of the Miao community is worn not only by brides but also by numerous young girls I observed, as an expression of their deep cultural affection.



The houses and hotels located alongside the river display the architectural splendor of the historic Phoenix City in Fenghuang County.

Introduction to the Academy in SanTanShuYuan

What an enthralling experience we had while exploring the incredible landscape and socio-cultural environment of SanTanShuYuan, accompanied by officials and three research assistants and students of Prof. Tan.



In this image:: On the left is Mr Tian Honghu, the director of Fenghuang County, in the center is Dr. Iqbal Chawla, and on the right is Mr Long Haijun, Vice President of Changsha Fenghuang Chamber of Commerce(Miao)

SanTanShuYuan is located in the northeast of Phoenix County, Jixin Town (the ancient name of the victory camp) territory, 22 kilometers from the county town. Qing dynasty Guangxu thirteen years (1874), Commander of Guizhou Qiangdong Army Wu Zhifa with unclaimed Pension for soldiers who died in battle built. It is the first major academy of the Southern Great Wall, the largest academy in the Miao region of China, and one of the four major existing academies in Hunan Province.

Since the establishment of SanTan Academy, education has been very fruitful, and there have been many talented people. Dr. Xiao Jimei, a professor at The University of Science and Technology Beijing (USTB), a professor at Tsinghua University and an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was educated here.

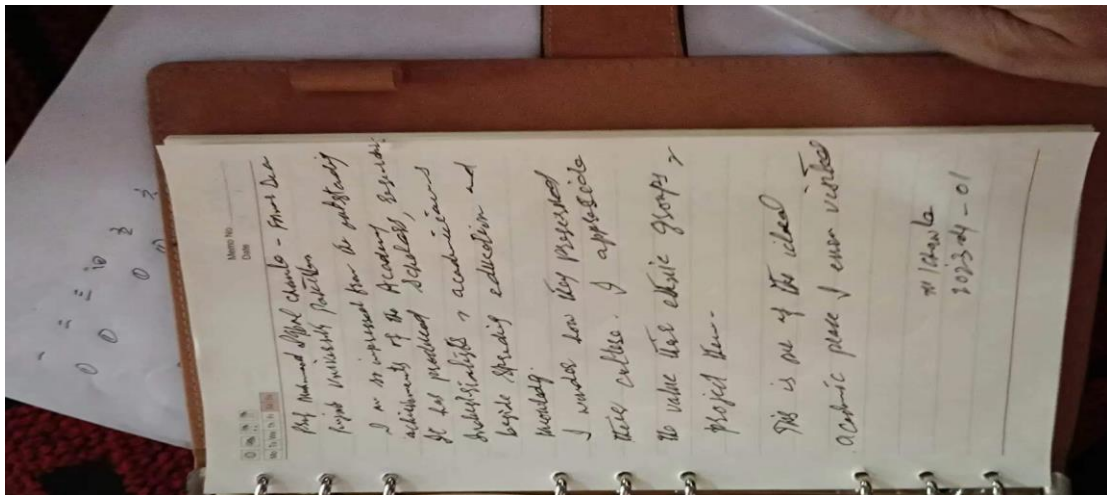
Jixin Town, the hometown of Professor Tan Biyou who is a distinguished social scientist of the Miao and Tujia community and an alumni of SanTan Academy driven by a remarkable vision and a mission to advance knowledge, currently holds a position at Hunan Normal University in Changsha. During his time at North East University, he collaborated with Professor Dr. Iqbal Chawla, who served as the Dean of Arts & Humanities and Chairman of the History Department, to inaugurate a joint Ph.D. program for Chinese scholars at the Department of History, University of the Punjab in 2018. This initiative has led to the successful graduation of a multitude of accomplished scholars. This village belongs to Fenghuang County, Xiangxi Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture, Hunan Province. According to the Fenghuang County Seventh National Census Key Data Bulletin: as of 00:00 on November 1, 2020, the resident population of the Town of Jixin was 16,993 people. Within the territory of Jixin Town, there is Santan Academy, which is 22 kilometers away from Fenghuang County. Qing dynasty Guangxu thirteen years (1874), Commander of Guizhou Qiangdong Army Wu Zhifa (alias ChengZhai) with unclaimed Pension for soldiers who died in battle built. The main building of the academy stands on the top of the hill, and behind the main building is a quadrangle patio, which is surrounded by galleries and

classrooms and dormitories. The building of San Tan Seowon is symmetrical in front and back.

Jixin finish primary school is located in Jixin Town, Beiting Au, an ancient wooded, scenic hillock, its predecessor is the SanTan Academy. The school system of one to six grades, the existing 24 teaching classes, 1281 average of 53.4 people / class, book collection of 12,250 books, the average student 9.56 books. There is a 200-meter circular runway, 1 5-man soccer field, 1 basketball court, 3 badminton courts, 1 table tennis court. There are 72 teaching staff, including 64 first-line full-time teachers, with a teacher-student ratio of 1:17.5.



The Academy has an abundance of books, journals, and manuscripts available to the public.



The script is rather antiquated, depicting the historical narrative of the Academy and the school.

The Origin and Growth of Educational System in the Village by the Miao

The SanTan Academy which is located in Jixin Town (formerly known as Deshengying) in the northeast of Phoenix County, 22 kilometers from the county seat, and is located on a mountaintop in Jixin Town. In the 13th year of the Guangxu reign of the Qing Dynasty (1874), the Commander of Guizhou Qiangong Army, the military preparation road in Qiangong, Guizhou Province, was built by Wu Spontaneously with a pension bank for soldiers who had died in battle and were not accepted. The main building of the Academy stands majestically on the top of the mountain, with eaves and corners, carved beams and painted rafters, and

exquisite workmanship. Behind the main building is a quadrangle patio surrounded by galleries, classrooms, and dormitories. The building of Santan Academy is symmetrical in front and back, with a rigorous layout. In the courtyard, the flowers and trees are sparse, quiet and elegant; Outside the courtyard, ancient cypresses towering above the sky, and golden osmanthus wafting fragrance. Presently the largest academy in southern sections of the Great Wall, as well as the most extensive academy within the Miao region of China. It is one of the four existing academies in Hunan Province. Currently, the Santan Academy is a key cultural relic protection unit in Hunan Province. Every year, many students, scholars and tourists like me, visit it to learn about its profound history.

In the 21st year of the Guangxu reign during the Qing Dynasty (1895), Mr. Long Haijun (Miao) explained that Xishan Academy was founded by his great-great-grandfather 'Long Ji'. He passed the Juren examination in Hunan Province and revisited his hometown from Deshengying, where his family resided. He is an educator who once worked at Santan Academy. During an informal conversation with his relatives and friends, Long Ji expressed a profound sense of remorse for not having pursued extensive education. Concurrently, he felt a deep concern for the cultural underdevelopment prevalent in his hometown—a place where the Mao and Han people coexisted. Fueled by determination, he resolved to institute educational initiatives and foster intellectual growth in his birthplace, thereby enhancing the cultural aptitude of the local children.

In the Qing Dynasty era, the imperial court distributed compensation funds to the families of soldiers who lost their lives in battle, although some of these funds remained unclaimed. In the later years of the Tongzhi reign, Wu independently brought these funds back to Phoenix and utilized them to construct an academy atop the hills overlooking the three pools of the Wanrong River: Yangliu Pool, Luobu Pool, and Qishu Pool. This institution was christened as the "Three Pool Academy." Furthermore, he employed a portion of the residual funds from the academy to acquire 160 mu (approximately 26 acres) of farmland as the school's endowment.

In 1914, the residents of Deshengying reconfigured the academy as the "Cuncheng School" in honor of Wu Chengzhai. Following a mandate from the county government, the 10th Primary School was established within this institution. Due to an influx of students and inadequate infrastructure, over ten supplementary buildings were constructed. Students were categorized into two groups: those in advanced classes and those in elementary classes. During this period, the school covered expenses such as teachers' salaries, students' textbooks, and lamp oil, and provided financial assistance to underprivileged students.

By the spring of 1937, the "Ten Primary Schools in the County," "Cuncheng School," and the second girls' primary school in the vicinity amalgamated to form the fourth primary school in the county, still situated at the Santan Academy location. In 1940, the "four primary schools" underwent a name change to become the "Weiwen Township Central Primary School." After the liberation, it was rebranded as the "Jixin Town Central Complete Primary School." (Chen, (2005)32)



Entrance gate to the Sanatan Academy (the author, Dr. Iqbal Chawla).

Ever since the inception of Santan Academy, education has borne abundant fruit, giving rise to a multitude of talented individuals. For more than a century, Santan Academy has nurtured a considerable number of these talents. Post the imperial examinations, numerous scholars excelled, achieving titles like Jinshi, Juren, and ten other distinctions. Additionally, eight students ascended to the position of magistrates in Phoenix County. Furthermore, the roster includes one member who became an academician of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, alongside a multitude of university professors, among them the distinguished social scientist, Prof. Tan Biyou.

At this institution, Xiao Jimei, acclaimed as the "Doctor of Iron and Steel" and a professor at The University of Science and Technology Beijing, as well as a distinguished academician of the CAS, underwent an enlightening education. Noteworthy personalities, including Long Zaiyu, who previously held the position of deputy governor within the Xiangxi Autonomous Prefecture Government, Long Zhicheng, a covert member of the Communist Party, Professor Long Youming from the Central University for Nationalities, and Professor Tan Biyou from Hunan Normal University, all have Santan Academy as their alma mater. (Chawla, 2023, 25 July)

In China, the educational system is structured into a six-year primary school stage, succeeded by three years each of lower secondary school and upper secondary school. Subsequently, most students opt for a four-year standard university curriculum. State funding primarily aids urban schools, while rural schools depend more on their own financial resources. In China, subject teachers play a role in educating children right from the start of their education, setting it apart from other countries where a single teacher handles all subjects during the early grades. The one-child policy in China also contributes to this educational system, as families can concentrate their resources and attention on providing the best possible education for their only child. (Li., 2014) As of 2013, China has emerged as a significant choice for international students, earning the title of the most sought-after country in Asia and ranking third worldwide in terms of popularity. Notably, it has garnered particular appeal among Anglophone African students, making it their top destination. Additionally, China is home to the second-largest population of international students across the globe. When it comes to academic reputation, the 2022 Academic Ranking of World Universities featured an impressive 26 Chinese universities among the top 200 globally. This achievement solidifies China's position as a formidable player in higher education, standing only second to the United States in terms of overall representations. It is believed that the provision of quality education at the grassroots level, such as at Sanatan Academy for minorities like the Miao, serves as a contributing factor to the vast reservoir of research, technology, and knowledge that China is generating and influencing the world with. The soft power approach through knowledge and cultural heritage is well-received by contemporary nations.

Conclusion

China's official policy aims to safeguard and uplift marginalized communities, leading to the declaration of over fifty ethnic groups. Despite this government support, smaller ethnic communities like the Miao ethnic group have thrived and played a significant role in propelling China into its position as an emerging global economic powerhouse. The Chinese state has patronized these groups by promoting and showcasing their cultures. (Bolan, 2021) "The inclusion of Miao embroidery in various exhibitions particularly in Milan serves as not only a point of pride for Miao and Guizhou but also a demonstration of China's cultural impact on the international platform, highlighting its cultural soft power. Chinese investment in research and development has exhibited remarkable expansion, with an annual growth rate of 20 percent, surpassing \$100 billion. The country has witnessed a substantial influx of science and engineering graduates, boasting approximately 1.5 million

students graduating from Chinese universities. This research also aligns with the concept of 'cultural consciousness' and provides insights into the evolution of ethnic minority culture in the context of the Chinese National Community's formation. By investigating the process of cultural consciousness within the Miao ethnic community residing in Fenghuang County, it scrutinizes how ethnic minority culture transforms within the broader framework of Chinese cultural identity. This study has emphasized the educational role played by the Miao community, showcasing their advancement and integration while preserving their cultural heritage. It supports the assertion that, especially under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has been actively promoting the preservation of ethnic cultures within ethnic groups. China has been making deliberate efforts to encourage ethnic minority communities like the Miao to transcend ethnic divisions, nurture a shared Chinese cultural awareness among all ethnic groups, and facilitate their collective participation in promoting and disseminating Chinese culture.

The million-dollar question is how Pakistan can draw lessons from the Chinese experience. The answer lies in our ability to learn and implement the following recommendations. In Pakistan, numerous communities, including ethnic minorities such as Sindhi, Balochi, and Pashtuns, have voiced apprehensions regarding the pronounced influence of the majority Punjabi population in the decision-making process of the country. This sentiment is prevalent in every province of Pakistan, encompassing Sindh, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Punjab, where subnational or ethnic groups advocate for formal recognition as separate entities within the broader framework of the Pakistani nation. Communities like the Mohajirs, Sariaki, Hindko, Brohi, Jangli, Pothowari, Kashmiris, and others firmly believe that they should be officially recognized as distinct ethnic groups and provided with a measure of autonomy. By incorporating the concept of ethnicity and officially categorizing these communities as unique ethnic groups, it has the potential to provide them with a stronger sense of identity within the broader framework of Pakistani nationality and overall national identity.

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