

## MIAO-YAO

IN A RECENT STATEMENT on the linguistic position of Miao and Yao, Downer (1961) says that Yao constitutes a clearly differentiated branch of the Miao-Yao language family. The close connection of the two is, however, apparent. Downer emphasizes that no affiliation of Miao-Yao with Tibeto-Burman, Chinese, Tai, or Mon-Khmer languages has as yet been convincingly demonstrated. Some linguists, e.g. Greenberg, class Miao-Yao tentatively as a separate branch of Sino-Tibetan. Miao. There has been much speculation, but little factual information, concerning the origins, history, and ancient migrations of the Miao (cf. Savina 1930). The name itself has been given a variety of interpretations; according to Ruey, it means, literally, "rice-shoot." In northern Southeast Asia Miao speakers are called Meo, which, according to Embree and Thomas, is derived from the Vietnamese term Man Meo. The term Man, in turn, was used in early Chinese dynastic histories to refer to all non-Han peoples (except Tai) in southern China; its later, narrower meaning has encompassed only peoples now called Yao. The total of all Miao speakers is probably in the neighborhood of 2,700,000, including a Chinese People's Republic 1953 census figure of 2,500,000 for China, an estimate for Indochina of about 100,000 (although Communist North Vietnamese figures are much higher), and a conservative estimate of 45,000 for Thailand. Although not the most numerous, the Miao (Meo) are the most widespread of all the non-Chinese minority groups originating in southern China. They are found today not only in Kweichow and neighboring provinces, but also in North Vietnam, Laos, and northern Thailand. They have a long history of migration under pressure from the Chinese; the rate of such migratory movement is suggested by Credner's estimate of 380 kilometers in forty years for the southward movement of Miao in western Thailand (1935a: 139-40). They are now practically everywhere broken up into isolated, swidden-farming groups hidden away in the more remote mountain valleys and hillsides. Fragmentation plus a wide variety of contacts with other groups may account for statements such as that of Eberhard that there is no uniform Miao culture—that it is rather a mixture or aggregate of Tai, Yao, Lolo, Chinese, etc. (cited in deBeauclair 1960: 165-67). In effect the various Miao populations in southern China and northern Southeast Asia exist as small cultural islands, surrounded by peoples of other ethnic background—most noticeably the lowland wet-rice-growing Chinese and Tai. If, as Bernatzik contends, the Miao live in the mountains because they are unable to acclimate to lower altitudes, such isolation has helped to maintain their cultural identity, since if they were to come down into the lowlands to live they would soon undergo cultural absorption at the hands of the Tai and Chinese (Bernatzik 1947: 501-02). • The Miao were apparently recognized by the Chinese as an ethnically distinct people early in the pre-Han period, when they appeared on the lower middle Yangtze. Increasing in number and attracted by the greater fertility of the Yellow river valley, they began moving northward. With the expansion of the Han Chinese southward, the Miao retreated into the area of Kwangtung-Hunan-Kwangsi, and finally into Kweichow—where they were first reported in early Yuan dynasty times. [Wu and Ch'en 1942: 1-2; deBeauclair 1960: 129; Wiens 1954: 88-91.] For the past five or six hundred years the Miao of Hunan-Kweichow have been under constant pressure from the Chinese. Miao uprisings have been frequent, e.g. those against the Manchus in 1735-40, 1795-1806, and 1854-71. The last of the independent Miao disappeared about 1870. However, as late as 1941-43 the Kuomintang government was forbidding the use of the Miao language, and suppressing the wearing of Miao costume (Gjessing 1956: 47). Despite centuries of oppression and disruption, the Miao continue to demonstrate a love of independence and an ability to organize for military action. Epic tales are handed down, perpetuated by traditional singers, of uprisings against the Chinese and of Miao heroism in battle. Most observers agree that the Miao are remarkable among all the hill tribes of Southeast Asia for their strong sense of independence, demonstrated organizational ability, enterprise and initiative, and adaptability. In Thailand they are among the most advanced and prosperous of all the hill tribes, and in Laos the Meo of the Xieng Khouang area have



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attained a measure of political recognition under their leader, Touby Lyfoung. Yao. Fortune regards the Yao (known in Indochina as Man) as remnants of a less civilized branch of the same stock from which the Chinese also sprang. The Chinese sources examined by Wiens generally agree that the Yao are among the original inhabitants of the south China area, apparently originating in the mountainous east coast provinces and subsequently spreading west and south. The total of recognized Yao speakers is probably in the neighborhood of 800,000, including a figure of 660,000 in mainland China according to the 1953 Chinese People's Republic census, an estimated 125,000 in Vietnam and Laos, some 10,000 in northern Thailand, and 6,000 "Miao" on Hainan who are now recognized as very probably speakers of Yao dialects. According to Fortune, all that is known historically is that the Yao were driven south from what is now Hunan province in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, retreating into the mountains that fringe the basin of the Hsi Chiang. Subsequently the Yao have been dispersed widely in southern China, Hainan, Indochina, and northern Thailand. These widely dispersed groups have developed along different lines, depending on external influences. At various times and places the Yao have been in contact with Hakka Chinese, Cantonese, northern Chinese immigrants into Kwangsi and Yunnan, as well as Miao, Lolo, and Tai peoples. Their wide dispersal has meant also that they have been subjected to differences in climate and vegetation. Thus there are Yao in Kwangtung who are permanently settled wet-rice agriculturists living in a kind of symbiotic relationship with surrounding Han Chinese lowlanders, whereas in northern Southeast Asia most Yao are migratory swidden farmers who by and large remain at relatively high altitudes. This widespread fragmentation of Yao groups, with accompanying differences in historical contacts and environmental influences and the resultant cultural variation, accounts for the fact that since early times Chinese chronicles and gazetteers have reported a great number of named Yao "tribes," and that in Vietnam and Laos, likewise, there are a great many tribal names recorded in the literature. • Despite their dispersal over large areas of southern China and northern Southeast Asia, the Yao have retained a considerable degree of linguistic homogeneity. Ling and Ruey (1947), for example, mention the marked cultural and linguistic similarity between the Yao of Kwangsi and the Yao (or Man) of northern Vietnam. Downer (1961), in a similar vein, remarks that the Yao (Man) speech of northern Laos seems almost identical with that of the P'anku Yao of Kwangsi.

### MIAO

#### SOUTH CHINA MIAO

Synonyms. *Hmong, Hmu, Hmung*

**ORIENTATION. Identification.** Miao speakers generally call themselves *Hmong, Hmung, or Hmu*, followed by a descriptive or identifying term, e.g. *Hmong Ntsu, Magpie Miao* (Ruey 1960: 143; Clarke 1911: 23). The word *miao* is of Chinese origin, and, according to Ruey, means "rice shoot." Although not used, and even disliked, by the people concerned, *Miao* has a long history of Chinese usage. In post-Han times, it referred in a general sense to "southern barbarians" or tribes people, but by the Sung dynasty it had acquired a more specific connotation. • The Chinese further distinguish a great many varieties of Miao speakers according to peculiarities of dress, hair style, occupation, etc., e.g. the Western Miao, the Pointed Miao, the Upside-down Miao, the Shrimp Miao, and the Steep Slope Miao (cf. Lin 1940: 282-83). The better-known varieties of Miao are, however, relatively few: He or Hei (Black) Miao, Hua (Flowery) Miao, Pe or Pei (White) Miao, Hung (Red) Miao, and Ch'ing (Blue) Miao. Dialectical

differences and minor variations in dress and other customs serve to mark off smaller groups and sub-varieties, e.g. the Ta Hua (Great Flowery) Miao, the Short-skirt Black Miao, the Magpie Miao (probably a subdivision of the White Miao), and the Cowrie Shell Miao. Only a small percentage of the many sub-varieties of Miao in South China—estimated at 70 or 80 in all—have been studied and described. Location. Miao speakers in South China are found mainly in Kweichow province, but also in some adjacent areas of Hunan, Szechwan, Kwangsi, and Yunnan. The so-called Hainanese Miao, on Hainan Island, are probably Yao. • The Red Miao are concentrated along the border area of western Hunan—eastern Kweichow. In Hunan they center in the districts of Feng Huang, Kan Ch'eng, and Yung Sui, an area of some 40 by 100 miles which has been declared an Autonomous Chou by the Chinese People's Republic. Southeastern Kweichow, in particular Chienho and Lushan districts, is the homeland of the Black Miao, although they have in recent decades also been migrating into northern Kwangsi and parts of southwestern Kweichow. Most Blue Miao are located in central Kweichow, in particular around Kweiyang city. The White Miao are found chiefly in central and southern Kweichow, and also in southern Szech-



wan, where they are known as Ch'uan Miao. Like the White Miao, the Flowery Miao are great migrants who, though based in western Kweichow, can be found scattered throughout eastern and southern Yunnan, northern Tonkin, much of Laos, and northern Thailand. [Cf. Ling and Ruey 1947: 22ff.; Wiens 1954: 278-79.] Only the Red Miao in western Hunan show any real degree of concentration. Elsewhere the Miao are relatively scattered and mixed—so that in many instances Flowery Miao villages adjoin those of White Miao or of Tai speakers or Han Chinese.

**Geography.** The heartland of the Miao in South China lies in the area of the Kweichow plateau and its extension into adjacent areas of Yunnan, Szechwan, Hunan, and Kwangsi. Averaging 4,000 feet above sea level, extremely cut up and precipitous, and with a wild and sparsely-settled landscape, Kweichow is the most impoverished province in all of South China. Only in the central basins around Kweiyang and in scattered river basins to the east is extensive wet-rice agriculture possible. A temperate monsoon climate prevails a good part of the year. The fauna of the area includes deer, bears, tigers, and wild boar. [Wiens 1954: 16-18; Mickey 1947: 3-5.]

**Linguistic affiliation.** Miao dialects have been variously classified as Mon-Khmer (Austroasiatic), Tai, Sinitic "Independent," and so on. Greenberg (1953: 282-83) classes Miao and Yao together as a separate branch of Sino-Tibetan. Miao is a tonal, monosyllabic language, differing somewhat from Chinese in word order and phonetics. Many words in Miao are obvious Chinese loan words. [Cf. Savina 1930: 1-111; deBeauclair 1956: 303.] The major dialects, e.g. Black, Flowery, etc., are said to be mutually unintelligible, so that Chinese or a Tai dialect frequently serves as a lingua franca (deBeauclair 1960: 128). Most Miao men, at least, are able to speak some Chinese. Within a major dialect group such as the Flowery Miao, the various sub-groups, e.g. Great and Little Flowery Miao, are presumably mutually intelligible (cf. Clarke 1911: 16ff.). There is no indigenous Miao writing, and until recently the language was written only in missionary-devised scripts. The Chinese People's Republic (Institute of Linguistics of the Academy of Sciences) began collecting and analyzing Miao vocabularies in 1951, and by 1955 three Latinized alphabets had been devised—representative of western Hunan, southeastern Kweichow, and western Kweichow (Its 1960: 105-06).

**Demography.** The total of Miao speakers in South China, based on 1953 Chinese People's Republic census figures, is 2,500,000. Of this total, Kweichow has 1,425,000; Hunan 378,000; Yunnan 360,000; Kwangsi 204,000; and Szechwan 84,000 (Bruk 1960: 32). Earlier estimates are lower, as illustrated by a 1939 figure of 548,000 for the total of Miao in Kweichow province (Wiens 1954: 278-79). According to Its (1960: 113), over 70 per cent of the Kweichow Miao reside in the southern and southeastern part of the province, where the CPR has created two autonomous regions. Cul-

tural relations. The most potent acculturative force in Miao history has undoubtedly been the Chinese—both through the steady encroachment of Chinese peasant farmers and the more dramatic policies and programs of successive imperial dynasties and governments. In the traditional hierarchy of southern frontier society under the Manchu and Republican governments, the Miao ranked near the bottom, looked down upon and exploited by Chinese and Lolo landlords, and regarded as inferior by the Tai-speaking Chungchia—themselves largely second-class citizens. Only the Long-skirt Black Miao, centering in Huang-p'ing district of southeastern Kweichow, were relatively well off—some even landlords in their own right. The generally despised and exploited condition of the Miao may have contributed to their rather widespread acceptance of Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In western Kweichow, among the White and Flowery Miao, the Christian missions met with considerable success. Miao villages everywhere participate in the market days and trade fairs characteristic of the area, where they come into frequent contact with Chinese merchants and with members of other ethnic minorities. Inter-marriage with these other groups, including the Chinese, has been relatively infrequent, however. • According to Chinese Communist sources, the Miao of Szechwan and Kweichow formed revolutionary bases during the military campaigns of the late 1920s, and many Miao are said to have joined the ranks of the Communist party. Miao cadres were thus on hand to assist in the Chinese People's Republic reforms of the 1950s. These reforms have concentrated on education, elimination of the landowner class and the establishment of cooperatives and state industrial enterprises such as electric power and lumbering. Textbooks have been published in Latinized Miao orthography. In 1954 the Communists claimed that among the nationalities of Kweichow 47,000 Communist party members were united through some 4,600 local party organizations, representing 70 per cent of all the villages in the province (Its 1960: 88-89).

**SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND HOUSING.** **Settlement pattern.** Villages are located at some distance from centers of Chinese settlement, characteristically in a remote mountain valley reached only by trails open to foot travelers or pack animals. A village site is usually located on a hillside with fields on surrounding slopes, and often along a stream or river below, necessitating considerable climbing up and down in pursuit of gathering and farming activities. The layout of villages varies. Among the Cowrie Shell near Kweiyang city, a compact village is laid out with more or less regular footpaths or streets, but without walls or palisades. The orientation of the village and the houses within it is in accordance with the Chinese geomantic system of *feng shui*.



(Mickey 1947: 8, 14). Among the Magpie Miao of southern Szechwan, the village is a cluster of separate hamlets (Ruey 1960: 144). The Red Miao of northwestern Hunan occupy an area of relatively recent armed conflict between Chinese and Miao, subject to the Chinese military garrison system, which probably helps to explain their pattern of compact walled villages within which a maze of small alleyways separates the closely spaced houses (Ling and Ruey 1947: 33 ff.). • The average number of inhabitants per village does not appear to be very large, although the range, e.g. among the Sheng, may extend from 3 or 4 households to as many as 100—the equivalent of about 15 to 400–500 inhabitants (deBeauclair 1960: 141). The average appears to be between 50 and 100 persons. **Housing.** Throughout many of the more remote areas of Kweichow, Miao houses are crudely built, and rest directly on the ground. Walls are of bamboo and/or mud, with thatch roofs. Windows are few or lacking entirely. The structure is essentially a single rectangular room with one section screened off for the family's domestic animals. A fire pit in the earthen floor serves for cooking. In economically more advanced areas, as among the Long-skirt Black Miao of southeastern Kweichow, two-story, multiple-room houses of brick and tile construction occur. The family occupies the upper story and domestic animals are housed below (Wu and Ch'en 1942: 8). The Red Miao of northwestern Hunan retain the basic Miao architectural style, but with variations in materials and method of construction, possibly for defense purposes. Stone slabs, in addition to clay and brick, are used for walls, and roofing consists of slate or tile (or pressed bark among the poorer villagers). The rectangular space inside the house is divided by means of pillars into three areas. Animals are housed in an attached shed, which also provides toilet facilities for members of the family. Potatoes and other vegetables are stored in a pit beneath the house (Ling and Ruey 1947: 38–40). The Sheng Miao of southeastern Kweichow provide an example of the ability of the Miao to assimilate alien culture traits and adapt them to their own environment. These Miao, living in a mountainous, heavily timbered area, have apparently adopted a number of culture traits from their lowland Tai-speaking neighbors, including wet-rice cultivation and housing. Here the house is a rectangular wooden structure raised on piles some ten feet above the ground. A veranda runs along one side of the structure, with a wooden staircase leading down to the ground. The house consists of a main room, with a fireplace for cooking purposes, and two or three smaller rooms for sleeping. The roof is of tile or bark. Animals are quartered beneath the house and crops stored in separate granaries (deBeauclair 1960: 143). • **House furnishings,** as with most items of material culture among the Miao, are very similar to those in use among the Chinese.

**ECONOMY.** The Miao rely primarily on agriculture as a source of food. Secondary resources include domesticated animals, hunting, and some fishing. Gathering is probably a more important source of food than is indicated in the literature. **Agriculture.** Primarily mountain-dwelling swidden farmers, although when given the opportunity the Miao can adapt very well to wet-rice agriculture—as in the mountain valleys of central Kweichow province, where they are found in large numbers interspersed with Chinese and Tai-speaking wet-rice agriculturists. Swidden farming occurs in southern Szechwan (Ruey 1960: 144–45), western Kweichow (Clarke 1911: 182), and northwestern Hunan (Ling and Ruey 1947: 55). Crops include maize, buckwheat, millet, barley, kaoliang, and various vegetables. The upland swiddens appear to be supplemented wherever possible by irrigated wet-rice fields, either along river valleys below the village site or in the form of terraced fields on the lower slopes. Terracing may be extensive and elaborate (cf. Betts 1899: 86). Among the Sheng subgroup of the Black Miao of southeastern Kweichow, terraces, supported by stone walls and irrigated with ditches and bamboo pipes, may cover an entire hillside (deBeauclair 1960: 144–46). Where reliance is mainly on swiddens, as in western Kweichow, there may be frequent clearing of new land and rotation of fields, but only infrequent movement of an entire village from one location to another. Lin (1940: 289) quotes from an 1820 Chinese source:

In agriculture the Miao men and women work together. They have more mountain farms than irrigated fields. The farms are seldom suitable for grain. Burning the thorny trees and decomposing plants and exploiting the mountain slopes, they plant sesamum, millet, rice, wheat, beans, calyx grain, and kaoliang. Having cultivated for three or four years, they relinquish the old land and exploit new places because the land becomes poor after intensive cultivation. After lying fallow several years, when the soil is rich again, they continue to cultivate.

Where the Miao do engage in wet-rice agriculture, their methods, techniques, and implements are likely to be similar to those in use among the Chinese. This is well illustrated by the Cowrie Shell just southeast of Kweiyang, who rely primarily on wet rice grown in paddy fields along river valleys, supplemented with winter crops of beans, peas, and wheat, and by kitchen gardens (Mickey 1947: 29ff.). DeBeauclair (1960: 144–46), however, reports the use of a primitive wooden spade and man-drawn plow among the Sheng Miao wet-rice growers in southeastern Kweichow. Those Miao living in the more mountainous parts of the area usually grow opium poppies as a commercial crop, but are reportedly little addicted to the use of the drug. Tobacco and sugar cane are also grown. Fishing and hunting. Fishing techniques



include the use of nets, hook and line, and poisoning. Some Miao have adopted the Chinese method of growing fish from spawn in irrigated fields, probably the single largest source of fish in the diet (Ling and Ruey 1947: 70; deBeauclair 1960: 148-50). The Miao are known as avid hunters, pursuing this activity as a sport as well as a supplementary source of food. The crossbow with poisoned arrows is a characteristic Miao weapon, although it may be displaced in the more sinicized areas by old muskets of Chinese origin. Other hunting techniques include traps, snares, pits, and surrounds (using men and dogs). Animals sought include deer, bears, tigers, boar, and birds. [Cf. deBeauclair 1960: 148-50.] Domestic animals. Cattle, pigs, chickens, cats, and dogs are raised by most Miao. Sheep, goats, and horses are more common in the west near the Tibetan culture area. Water buffalo are kept where feasible and, together with cows, are the principal draft animals. The Sheng Miao of southeastern Kweichow, however, use a man-drawn plow (deBeauclair 1960: 144-46). Bee-keeping is mentioned for the Red Miao of northwestern Hunan (Ling and Ruey 1947: 72). In general, domestic animals serve less as a source of food than as draft and pack animals and, even more important, as a source of animal sacrifices. Food and stimulants. Throughout most of the area, including western Kweichow (Clarke 1911: 182), southern Szechwan (Graham 1937a: 20), and northwestern Hunan (Ling and Ruey 1947: 55ff.), maize is the staple food, supplemented by such crops as beans, millet, buckwheat, and potatoes. Only in central and southeastern Kweichow is rice a major food item. In these latter areas the Cowrie Shell, for example, base their diet on nonglutinous rice supplemented by beans, vegetables, chilies, pork, chicken, and fish in a pattern very similar to that of the Chinese (Mickey 1947: 23). The Sheng Miao staple is glutinous rice, a preference apparently learned from previous association with lowland Tai-speaking peoples of southeastern Kweichow and northern Kwangsi. Wu and Ch'en (1942: 8ff.) call attention to the fondness of the Miao for hot peppers and fermented meat dishes, to the frequency of dishes made from sour (pickled) vegetables, to the relative scarcity of meat (as compared with Chinese), and to the extensive use of alcoholic beverages made from rice and corn. Industrial arts. Home industries include weaving, dyeing, embroidery, carpentry, and work in bamboo. Individual specialization is rare, although Ruey reports occasional silversmithing and blacksmithing among the Magpie (1960: 145). The Miao make their own cloth and dye it themselves, using home-grown indigo and other dyes. In general, hemp cloth predominates in the western part of the area, cotton cloth in the east (Wu and Ch'en 1942: 8ff.). The White and Flowery Miao of central and western Kweichow make elaborate use of the batik method of resist dyeing, but the technique is not used among most of the

Black Miao groups to the east (deBeauclair 1960: 148). Its (1960: 77-78) mentions the increased economic importance under the present CPR regime of such industries as ~~lumbering~~ and silkworm culture. Embroidery is being encouraged as a cottage industry. Trade. Handicrafts, produce, and game are regularly sold or traded at Chinese markets for such products as salt, cloth, and iron. Among the Cowrie Shell Miao of south-central Kweichow, markets in the Chinese *hsien* towns are held every five or six days, serving a variety of ethnic groups (Miao, Chung-chia, etc.) within a five or ten mile radius (Mickey 1947: 41). Its (1960: 78) reports the development under Communist China of wholesale cooperatives in the Miao nationality areas of Kweichow and Hunan. Division of labor. Among the Cowrie Shell Miao, who are sinicized wet-rice agriculturists and therefore somewhat atypical as regards their economic institutions, Mickey (1947: 38) reports the division of labor as follows:

Men—~~butchering, plowing and hachowing, sowing seed, woodworking and housebuilding, contacts with the outside world, and participation in Chinese political and educational systems.~~

Women—~~preservation and preparation of food, kitchen gardens, transplanting, weeding, and harvesting rice and other crops (with some help from men in an extremely busy season), gathering firewood, making thread, and sewing clothing.~~

Both—~~carrying water, spreading manure, beating grain, going to market, and care of small children.~~

In general men and women share in the agricultural work. Household chores tend to be women's alone, and hunting to be the specialty of men. Land tenure. Throughout much of Kweichow and into adjacent Yunnan, Miao farmers have for many years been tenants on the lands of Chinese, Lolo, and Chung-chia landowners. There is little doubt that the Miao have been economically exploited (cf. Clarke 1911). On the other hand, the Long-skirt Black Miao centering in Huang-p'ing *hsien* in southwestern Kweichow have been in some cases themselves relatively well-to-do landowners (deBeauclair 1960: 130-31); and in a good many instances Miao farmers have worked as tenants on land owned by other Miao, often the descendants of former *fu-shu* ~~chieftains~~ appointed to hereditary positions by the Chinese. Where Miao have settled down as permanent ~~wet-rice~~ agriculturists and been assimilated into the Chinese administrative system, as among the Cowrie Shell farmers may own the land they work (Mickey 1947: 29, 42). In such cases the patrilineal ~~extended family~~ is the corporate land-owning group. \* Its, quoting from Communist Chinese sources, reports that in one sample area, just south of Kweiyang, ~~some~~ 12 per cent of the population



owned well over three-quarters of all arable land in the area. The Communists instituted wholesale land reforms in Kweichow in late 1954, and by 1956, according to its sources, some 90 per cent of all peasant farms in the Ch'ien-tung-nan Autonomous Chou in southeastern Kweichow were incorporated into agricultural cooperatives (Its 1960: 71-72).

**KIN GROUPS. Descent.** The Miao of South China today are practically everywhere patrilineal. **Kin groups.** The situation among the Magpie of southern Szechwan is typical: exogamous patronymic surname groups, with surnames borrowed from the Chinese, can be equated with the patrisib; the localized core of a hamlet, or occasionally of an entire village, made up of families bearing the same surname, is synonymous with the exogamous patriclan; the males of a patrilocal extended family, together with outmarrying females, equal a patrilineage (Ruey 1960: 145-46). A 1943 report by Yang Han-hsien describes the Ta Hua (Great Flowery) Miao of extreme northwestern Kweichow as formerly organized into 12 exogamous [patrilineal] clans. A clan was served by a hereditary priest-leader who officiated at sacrificial rites to a common remembered ancestor, preserved a genealogical record, and settled minor disputes. [As reported in deBeauclair 1960: 185-86; Its 1960: 174.] This type of organization shows many similarities with that of the traditional Han Chinese, and is by all indications a result of cultural borrowing; that this has occurred relatively recently is indicated by Lin Yueh-hwa's translation of an 1840 Chinese source which records an absence of surnames among the Flowery Miao of western Kweichow (Lin 1940: 286). Nor have the Miao taken over the Chinese system in toto: in most instances, for example, they are less strict about surname (sib) exogamy, restricting it in practice to individuals who can trace descent to an actual common ancestor, i.e. to lineage exogamy (cf. deBeauclair 1960: 186-87). • Ruey suggests that the Miao may have originally had a bilateral type of organization. He bases this hypothesis on such evidence as bilateral characteristics within the kinship system; the retention among the Red Miao, at least, of independent nuclear families; and the tendency, e.g. among the Magpie, to maintain a close association among near kinsmen on both sides—approximating a bilateral kindred (Ruey 1960: 145-46). **Kin terminology.** The kinship system, like the rest of the social organization, appears to reflect the imposition of a unilinear (patrilineal) principle on an older base that by all indications was probably bilateral. Thus within the Magpie kinship system the first ascending generation is bifurcate collateral (different terms for Fa, Mo, FaBr, FaSi, MoBr, MoSi), a feature characteristic of the patrilineal Chinese. On the other hand, for Ego's generation, sibling terms are essentially extended to include all first cousins, a feature normally associated with bilateral societies. Unilinear

influences are noticeable here, too, in that orthocousins (FaBr children) are terminologically differentiated from other cousins (Ruey 1960: 147ff.). Adequate information is lacking on the kinship terminology of most other Miao groups of South China. The Red Miao of northwestern Hunan, as reported by Ling and Ruey, do, however, call parents and parents' siblings by separate terms—the bifurcate collateral feature reported above for the Magpie (1947: 455).

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. Mode.** Premarital sex freedom and institutionalized courtship appear to have been at one time characteristic of practically all Miao groups in South China. As they become assimilated to Chinese culture, however, the Miao tend to modify these practices or to give them up altogether. [Ling and Ruey 1947: 94; Graham 1937a: 30; Wu and Ch'en 1942: 133, 199; Clarke 1911: 78ff.; Mickey 1947: 49; deBeauclair 1960: 176-77.] Courtship takes place at annual festivals, bazaars, and other public occasions. An institutionalized form of courtship may take place on a hillside outside the village, where young people engage in antiphonal singing and young men serenade their partners on the reed organ. Where the patrilineal name-sib or lineage is synonymous with the local group, as among the Cowrie Shell, this courtship pattern is exogamous, i.e. the girls of a hamlet or village are serenaded by visiting boys from a nearby village. Fine clothes, dancing skills, and clever singing are highly prized attributes in the selection of a mate. Older Chinese sources mention the existence of youth houses located outside the village. These are not reported, however, in the contemporary literature (Ling and Ruey 1947: 94; deBeauclair 1960: 176-77). • Where the older patterns of premarital freedom and courtship still exist, a go-between is normally engaged by the boy's family once the couple have decided to marry. A bride price is paid, consisting of cattle, goats, sheep, or (more recently) money. The Magpie, for example, pay a substantial bride price of money and cattle (Ruey 1960: 146-47). Among the Red Miao a kind of gift exchange was formerly practiced, consisting of a "bride price" of five or six cattle and a "dowry" of cows, goats, and implements (Ling and Ruey 1947: 94). The more sinicized Miao follow the custom of arranged marriages, with a marriage ceremony conducted by a local (Taoist) priest. **Form.** Marriages are predominantly monogamous, although polygyny appears to be allowed. In one Cowrie Shell village, there were 3 or 4 cases of polygyny out of 32 marriages (Mickey 1947: 19). **Extension of incest taboos.** Theoretically, marriage is prohibited among members of the same surname group. In practice, however, this seems to be limited to individuals descended from the same actual ancestor, i.e. the lineage (Ling and Ruey 1947: 95-96; deBeauclair 1960: 186-87; Ruey 1960: 146-47). Premarital sexual freedom with cross



ousins is allowed among a number of South China Miao groups. Asymmetrical patrilineal cross-cousin marriage is specifically reported for the Black Miao (Ling and Ruey 1947: 94) and the Magpie Miao (Ruey 1960: 146-47). Among the former, a FaSiDa must consult her maternal uncle before marriage, and he may demand an indemnity of her father if she marries outside the preferred pattern; on the other hand, if he has no son for her to marry, then her father may seek an indemnity from him. **Residence.** Somewhat variable. Ranges from neolocal in northwestern Hunan (Ling and Ruey 1947: 98) through various degrees of matri- patrilocal among some Kweichow Miao groups, to straight patrilocal among the southern Szechwan Miao (Graham 1937a: 26; Ruey 1960: 145-46). Ruey feels that neolocality among the Red Miao may be associated with an earlier bilateral social organization; he also suggests an earlier bilateral structure with neolocality for the Magpie. Among the Black Miao of southeastern Kweichow, the bride remains with her parents, with periodic visits from her husband, until the first child is born, after which she moves to his home. This is true also of the south-central Kweichow Cowrie Shell, except that change of residence takes place once the girl becomes pregnant (Mickey 1947: 19, 43, 47). With rare exceptions, then, it appears that most Miao in South China today are ultimately patrilocal. **Domestic unit.** The Red Miao of Hunan retain what Ling and Ruey call the old tradition of independent nuclear families (1947: 93). More typical of the South China Miao today, however, are the Cowrie Shell, where extended patrilocal families (sometimes living in adjacent households) slightly exceed the number of nuclear households (Mickey 1947: 16-17). As among the Magpie, extended families tend to be of the minimal or stem type. Once the parents die, these extended households break up into nuclear units which later repeat the cycle. **Inheritance.** Among the more sinicized Miao, the patrilocal extended family functions as a corporate group with respect to land ownership and ownership of animals and nonpersonal property. At the death of the parents, the sons normally divide the family property among themselves. [Mickey 1947: 37, 42; Graham 1937a: 26ff.] **Divorce.** Divorce, including that initiated by the woman, is relatively easy and is said to occur frequently—at least until the first child is born. **Secondary marriage.** In general, both the levirate and sororate are permitted. [Clarke 1911: 78ff.; deBeauclair 1960: 186-87.]

**SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION.** Political organization. The variety of Miao groups encountered today, often termed "tribes" in the literature, is probably a result of centuries of oppression and disruption at the hands of the Chinese. It is also possible that some of these distinctions may reflect the existence of former indigenous kin-based political institutions that transcended the village level. Today, however,

indigenous political organization above the village level is lacking, and the Miao are integrated into the Chinese political-administrative system. Each village is a separate unit, subject to the local Chinese governmental authority (cf. Mickey 1947: 43-44; Ruey 1960: 146). • Varieties of Miao, such as the Flowery or Black, cannot be considered tribes in any political sense. Nevertheless these groupings of Miao have in the past organized for purposes of military resistance, e.g. the insurrection of Black Miao in Kweichow in the 1860s. A type of loose tribal formation, primarily kin-based and consistent with a long history of migrations, seems a likely hypothesis. It is probable that such formations were dominated by ephemeral quasi-religious leaders much on the order of the Miao "kings" reported by French researchers for the White and Flowery Miao at the time of their migrations southward to Indochina in the late eighteenth century (deBeauclair 1960: 186). Further information is contained in a 1943 report by Yang Han-hsien, a Ta Hua (Great Flowery) Miao trained in sociology at West China Union University. According to Yang, the Ta Hua had exogamous clans served by hereditary priest-leaders who officiated at sacrificial rites to a common remembered ancestor, preserved genealogical records, and settled minor disputes. The various clans differed somewhat with respect to the details of ancestral ceremonies, such as the type of animal sacrificed and the method of killing it. The obligations of clan membership, including mutual help and attendance at various ceremonies in the life cycle, superseded those of village residence, and clan affiliation continued despite change of residence. [Cited in deBeauclair 1960: 185-86; Its 1960: 87.] A possible kinship basis for such loose "tribal" formations is indicated also in the case of the Cowrie Shell:

Since they consider themselves descendants of a single ancestor, the Cowrie Shell Miao reckon all other Cowrie Shell Miao their kin, and one finds among them the same degree of unity as among members of a large family distributed over a considerable territory . . . they are simply an aggregation of people who trace their descent from a single ancestor, follow the same or similar customs, and speak a common language (Mickey 1947: 9).

The Cowrie Shell Miao area in south-central Kweichow is roughly 30 to 40 miles square. A somewhat similar case is that of the Ch'uan (White) Miao of southern Szechwan, who are said to be defined in part by the legend of a common female ancestor (Graham 1937a: 56). In these cases there is apparently a feeling of oneness based on the idea of pseudosib. Clarke cites cases of Flowery Miao emigrating out of Kweichow into eastern Yunnan and continuing to maintain contact with their kinsmen at home (1911: 178, 278). Related to this kind of identification is the fact that the various Miao groups rarely intermarry (cf. deBeauclair 1960: 186-87). Social strati-



fication. The Miao lack any kind of indigenous stratification. They were, however, formerly involved in the feudal type of landlord-peasant class system characteristic of the frontier areas under pre-Communist Chinese rule. Their role has often been that of tenant farmer, although in a few cases the Miao themselves, usually descendants of former *t'u-szu* chieftains, have been members of the landlord class. The Chinese introduced the *t'u-szu* system into Kweichow and the surrounding areas about 1500 A.D. Tribal chieftains, including Miao chieftains, were appointed to hereditary administrative positions, adopting Chinese surnames and entering into a kind of feudatory arrangement with the imperial government on behalf of the tribesmen within their jurisdictions. [DeBeauclair 1960: 130-31; Clarke 1911: 26; Wiens 1954: 214ff.] The old feudal institutions of southern frontier society are now under heavy attack by the Chinese Communists, and the position of the Miao in this area is undoubtedly undergoing change. Miao are reported to be managers of agricultural cooperatives in Kweichow, and delegates to the All-China Assembly of People's Representatives (cf. Its 1960: 88-89).

**RELIGION.** Religious behavior reflects the centuries of contact in the South China area between the Miao and the Chinese, Tibeto-Burmans, and Tai. Some animistic and magico-religious beliefs and practices, as well as some elements of ancestor worship, appear to be very old in Miao culture, or possibly related to an ancient cultural complex common to both Miao and Chinese; other elements are clearly of Taoist or Buddhist origin; and Lolo (Tibeto-Burman) influences are evident in certain magical feats of healers and exorcists in western Kweichow. • Propitiation and exorcism, directed at local spirits, demons, and ancestral ghosts, comprise a good portion of Miao religious behavior—up to 90 per cent, according to Ling and Ruey (1947: 128). Religious specialists carry out animal sacrifices and perform various magico-religious acts in connection with most of these activities. Evil and malevolent forces abound, and much energy and time is spent in placating, avoiding, or exorcising them. The Chinese People's Republic is today striking at these ideas, particularly the widespread habit of animal sacrifice, which is labeled both anachronistic and wasteful. The CPR has devoted special attention to introducing scientific medicine as a counteracting force to animal sacrifice (Its 1960: 94). **Supernaturals.** Animistic beliefs are evident in the many food offerings made to spirits of trees, rocks, and so on. Also propitiated are a variety of local deities, household gods, demons, and spirits. Many of these, such as the Jade Emperor, the Lady Buddhas, and the Mouth Odor Ghost, are of Chinese origin (cf. Wu and Ch'en 1942: 27ff.). Ling and Ruey (1947: 129) catalogued some 40 different classes of supernaturals in northwestern Hunan, 16 of which

they identified as Miao, and 24 as Chinese. Ancestor worship and the propitiation of ancestral ghosts is a prominent feature of Miao religion (cf. Its 1960: 98). Offerings to "Lord and Lady No" are characteristic of the Red Miao (Ling and Ruey 1947: 129ff.). These two beings figure in a creation myth common to many Miao groups, wherein the incestuous union of a brother and sister, saved from a universal deluge, results in the peopling of the entire earth or of various Miao clans or surname groups (cf. Clarke 1911: 55ff.). **Practitioners.** Most Miao villages have at least one individual, usually a male, who specializes on a part-time basis in knowledge of the spirit world and in the propitiation and exorcism of malevolent spirits, demons, and ghosts. He may or may not combine with his over-all priestly functions the additional functions of curing, divining, and fortune telling. Curing is often the special province of a female shaman or exorcist. Practitioners employ ritual incantations, animal sacrifice, and the manipulation of a variety of objects—practices which have a distinctly magical connotation and appear to be related to, if not derived from, Chinese Taoism. • Among the Cowrie Shell, the priests are ordinary men of the village who perform at rites of passage, ancestral sacrifices, and on various ceremonial occasions to ensure good fortune for home and village. They manipulate incense, paper money, bowls of wine and rice, and a sacrificial fowl, while delivering a ritual incantation in Miao (Mickey 1947: 45). The Red Miao village priest operates in much the same way, wearing a special robe and cap and making use of incense, wax, rice, meat, wine, a trumpet, cymbals, paper money, fire, and so on (Ling and Ruey 1947: 128-29). Whereas the Red Miao priest may also engage in healing ceremonies, rain making, and divining, most curing functions among the Cowrie Shell are handled by a female specialist or shamaness (Mickey 1947: 45, 62). The Black Miao of southeastern Kweichow combine these various functions in one person, a part-time village priest or exorcist (Wu and Ch'en 1942: 27-28; deBeauclair 1960: 162); whereas the Flowery Miao of western Kweichow, like the Cowrie Shell, employ a priest, *kwet-shih*, as well as a female shamaness-exorcist, *mi-la* (Ch'en 1942: 89). The southern Szechwan (White) Miao conform to the western Kweichow pattern except that their shamans or exorcists are males endowed with extraordinary or supernatural powers, such as the ability to walk on knives and handle red-hot metal. These attributes, plus the elaborateness and complexity of their incantations and formulas, reflect the influence of Tibeto-Burman cultures farther west (Graham 1937a: 65ff.; deBeauclair 1960: 162). There are indications that Miao priests may also have had in the past secular functions as quasi-religious leaders of loose tribal (kin-based) formations during periods of migration and insurrection (cf. deBeauclair 1960: 185-86). **Ceremonies.** Individual or family-



oriented ceremonies include periodic offerings of food and incense at small shrines outside the village and along the road to a variety of local spirits and ancestral ghosts. The more sinicized among the Miao preserve a small shrine within the home for the ancestral tablets. • Many of the annual ceremonial occasions and religious festivals reflect a strong Han Chinese influence. Most characteristic are the annual flower dances or musical festivals and the periodic buffalo sacrifices. The festivals, which tend to be associated with the Miao agricultural calendar, not only ensure good crops but are also major recreational events. Neighboring villages among the Flowery Miao, for example, may cooperate in putting on a dance festival outside one of the participating villages. Music, dancing, gaiety, and courting may go on for a day or more. Chinese merchants set up their stalls, and racing and buffalo fights serve as added attractions (Wu and Ch'en 1942: 195ff.; Clarke 1911: 63). • Miao ancestor worship often involves animal sacrifice. The Red Miao, for example, tie a pig to a post, where it is ceremonially slaughtered to the accompaniment of incantations and ritual acts by a village priest (Ling and Ruey 1947: 131ff.). Among the Flowery Miao, a memorial ceremony should ideally be performed on the thirteenth anniversary of death. A straw pavilion is erected on ground outside the village and here the members of the family and friends congregate, together with a *kwei-shih*, village priest. The latter conducts the ritual aspects of the ceremony, while the actual sacrifice is performed by a male descendant of the deceased ancestor. The sacrificial animal is dismembered and cooked on the spot. The body parts are eaten by all family members assembled and the head is placed on the altar within the pavilion (Ch'en 1942: 91). • The most spectacular of these ancestral ceremonies are the periodic village-wide buffalo sacrifices. According to deBeauclair (1960: 158), such sacrifices in western Kweichow are at present sponsored by individual families following the death of a male member; only in central and eastern Kweichow, among the White and Black Miao, is the killing of buffalo simultaneously carried out by all families of a village every seven or thirteen years. Water buffalo fights may be held in conjunction with these cyclical ancestral ceremonies, or they may be purely recreational events, as among the Tai-speaking Tung of Kweichow. According to deBeauclair (1960: 158), fighting buffalo on the occasion of ancestral sacrifices is limited in Kweichow to the area of Kweiyang and eastward. • Cyclical, village-wide buffalo fights and sacrificial ceremonies in honor of the ancestors are described by Wu Tsu-lin for the Cowrie Shell south of Kweiyang (quoted by Mickey 1947: 78ff.). The families of a village enter specially selected and fattened bulls in paired contests. Prior to the fighting, the animals are led in procession around the bullfight meadow, accompanied by family rep-

resentatives, village priests, and musicians. The victorious animals are sacrificed in individual family rites outside the village. The killing is done on an inscribed stone which remains in place as a memorial. The body is cut up and divided among friends and relatives and the horns preserved in the family homestead. These are occasions also for village-wide feasting and for courting and merry-making among the young people. • Drum dancing is reported specifically for the Red Miao of Hunan in connection with certain sacrificial ceremonies. Here men and/or women dance around a drum set on crosspieces. Methods of beating the drum are elaborate and varied (Ling and Ruey 1947: 202ff.). DeBeauclair (1960: 152-53) reports the use of bronze drums among the Sheng and certain other Black Miao groups of eastern Kweichow. • An ordeal or oath-taking ceremony by "eating blood" occurs among the Red Miao. Two individuals engaged in a dispute will, in the presence of a priest, drink a mixture of animal blood and wine following the invocation of a powerful spirit by the priest. The Miao maintain that whoever is at fault in the dispute will immediately die (Ling and Ruey 1947: 152). **Illness and medicine.** Sickness and death are in most instances attributed to supernatural causes—either soul loss or the presence of a malevolent spirit. In the case of the latter, the usual procedure is to identify the offending spirit and exorcise it by means of magical ritual and incantation. Among the Red Miao, identification is made by a female specialist and the exorcistic ritual carried out by a male priest (Ling and Ruey 1947: 129, 194). The Black Miao combine these functions in one person, a village priest, who also officiates at ancestral ceremonies, funerals, and the like. The most usual pattern appears to be that found in central and western Kweichow as well as in southern Szechwan, where curing rites are the specialty of a female exorcist or shamaness. These persons among the Cowrie Shell undergo no special initiation, one woman stating that she received her powers after a serious illness during which she "died" and recovered. The woman goes into a trancelike state, moving her hands and feet in a prescribed fashion to the accompaniment of whistling, hissing, and coughing noises in an attempt to enter into communication with the spirit world. The remainder of the ceremony consists of an exorcistic ritual with Taoist overtones (Mickey 1947: 45, 62). **Insect poisoning.** A kind of witchcraft or sorcery by insect poisoning, *ku*, is reported for the Red Miao (Ling and Ruey 1947: 196ff.), the Black Miao (Clarke 1911: 63), the Flowery Miao (Ch'en 1942: 92), and the Cowrie Shell (Mickey 1947: 61). It was formerly widespread among the Han Chinese, who continue to ascribe to the women of the Miao and other minority groups the ability to harm or influence others through this practice (cf. Feng and Shryock 1935). As reported for the Miao, a woman acquires knowledge of insect poisoning as a result of



secret training at the hands of a female relative. A variety of poisonous creatures are put together in a jar for a time until only one is left. This is the *ku*, or *ku* spirit, which contains the essence of all the poisons. According to different versions, a powder is made from the *ku* which is secretly put in the food of an intended victim; or the woman, having absorbed the *ku* essence or spirit into her own body, releases it by pointing or shaking her fingers at a victim. It is generally held that a woman must periodically release her poison or she herself will lose her reason, or sicken and die. Symptoms of *ku* poisoning are said to include bodily swelling, stomach cramps, diarrhea, and coma. It is also believed that Miao women use the poison, or the threat of it, to retain a husband or lover. Egg divination is used in some cases to determine whether an illness has been caused by insect poisoning. Antidotes appear to be few, although Feng and Shryock (1935: 15) mention that according to some sources the person so afflicted must resort to the original sorcerer. Persons suspected of being insect poisoners are shunned and occasionally ostracized from their home villages. **Birth.** Both Ling and Ruey (1947: 99) and Mickey (1947: 47ff.) report that childbirth among Miao women is relatively easy. The former maintain that among the Red Miao of Hunan a woman will continue working up to the day of delivery, which may occur unattended while she is still in the fields. The woman is said to maintain an upright position, legs apart and slightly bent while grasping a stationary object, with a lined basket or receptacle on the ground to receive the baby. The mother is back in the fields and working again within three or four days. The Red Miao are said to know of an herb which makes their women strong and able to give birth easily. Mickey, reporting for the Cowrie Shell, confirms this account of the ease of birth, and the fact that a woman is up and doing hard labor within three to five days. **Soul, death, and afterlife.** The Miao have the Chinese concept of three principal souls, as well as their ideas about transmigration and reincarnation. Particularly feared are the souls of persons who have died unnatural deaths, since these linger on earth as malevolent spirits. Much attention is paid therefore to ensuring that the soul gets well started on its journey to the afterlife, and to making sure that no evil influences are present during the period of mourning and burial. • The funeral ceremonies of the Miao also show much Chinese influence. The body is placed in a wooden coffin in the home for a period of one or two days, during which time it is attended by mourning relatives and also by a village priest. The priest exorcises evil influences by chanting and magically manipulating various objects, and performs an "opening the way" ceremony for the soul. On the second day, a buffalo or other animal may be sacrificed. Burial usually takes place on the third day, preceded by a procession to the village

cemetery where a grave site has previously been selected by geomancy. Postmortuary rites may include visits to the grave for a period of years and the maintenance of an ancestral tablet in the home. [Cf. Mickey 1947: 46, 52 for the Cowrie Shell; Wu and Ch'en 1942: 27 for the Black Miao.] Cremation is practiced only in cases of death by contagious disease. Methods of disposing of the corpse apparently varied much more in the past than they do now. Wu and Ch'en (1942: 11-12) report stone-lined graves and exposure; while deBeauclair (1960: 159-60) mentions cases of live burial among a subgroup of the Black Miao. Among the White (Chu'an) Miao of southern Szechwan, a second burial takes place after an indefinite period; the bones are washed, put in a new coffin, and reburied (Graham 1937a: 57ff.).

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** DeBeauclair 1956, 1960; Betts 1899; Bruk 1960; Ch'en 1942; Clarke 1911; Feng and Shryock 1935; Graham 1937a; Greenberg 1953; Its 1960; Lin 1940; Ling and Ruey 1947; Mickey 1947; Ruey 1960; Savina 1930; Wiens 1954; Wu and Ch'en 1942.

## INDOCHINA ME0

Synonyms. *Mlao*, *Mnong*

**ORIENTATION. Identification.** The Indochina Meo refer to themselves as Mnong or Mlao (Bourotte 1943: 33; Lafont 1961). According to Abadie (1924: 150-51), those in northern Vietnam are divided into five groups, each named for a characteristic of the women's costume: the White Meo, Black Meo, Red Meo, Flowered Meo, and the Mung Cha Meo. A recent source from North Vietnam (NNCDT 1959: 244) also describes five Meo groupings in northern Vietnam, using Vietnamese transcriptions: the Meo Trang (White Meo), Meo Hoa (Flowered Meo), Meo Do (Red Meo), Meo Den (Black Meo), and the Meo Mong Sua. According to Lafont (1961), the Black Meo and White Meo predominate in northern Laos. **Location.** In northern Vietnam the most important concentrations of Meo are along the Chinese frontier between Dong Van and Quan Ba, between Pa Kha and Muong Khuong, and along the right bank of the Red river between Nghia Lo, Van Bu, and Tu Le. On the Black river they are located north of Vau Yen. In the Dong Van and Muong Khuong regions they constitute the majority of the population. [Embree and Thomas 1950: 112.] The Meo in Laos are most heavily concentrated in Xieng Khouang province (Barney 1961: 10-11). **Linguistic affiliation.** The language is predominantly monosyllabic. It contains 53 consonant phonemes, 13 vowel phonemes (9 simple vowels and 4 vowel clusters), and 7 tone phonemes. The Meo of Xieng Khouang in Laos are of two major dialect groups, the Mon Tleu or White Meo, and the Mon Len or Striped Meo. [Smalley 1956: 50.] In northern



Vietnam, the Meo are reported to use *kwan hoa* as their lingua franca in dealing with other groups (Abadie 1924: 152). Lao is the lingua franca in Laos, according to Barney (1961: 45). Demography. Savina (1930: 193) estimated the total Meo population of Laos and Vietnam at 200,000, although Roux and Tran (1954: 388) consider this figure much too high. Abadie (1924: 149) reported the Meo in Vietnam at 40,000 and Morechand (1952: 355) later raised it to 60,000. Bourotte (1943: 34) reported 100,000 in all of Indochina, with 40,000 in Vietnam and 60,000 in Laos. Le (1955: 48) also placed the Meo population of Indochina at 100,000. According to Barney (1961: 2), the governor of Xieng Khouang province in Laos estimated the Meo population for that province at 45,000. Lafont (1961) agrees with the 1931 census which lists 60,000 Meo in Laos. The NNCDT (1959: 244) reports the Meo population of Vietnam to be 182,747. History and cultural relations. Early in the nineteenth century, the Meo are reported to have begun their large-scale migrations into northern Vietnam. At this time several thousand moved into Vietnam, after devastating large areas of Yunnan province in southern China. They clashed with the Man (Yao) and Tai groups of the Dong Van area, driving them out and occupying their land. Around 1860, the second Meo "invasion" occurred, coincident with the Tai-ping rebellion in China. Several thousand Meo swept across the upland area of northern Vietnam, reaching the fringes of the delta before the Vietnamese repulsed them. It is said that the heavy, humid climate of the lowland was too much for the Meo, since they were accustomed to higher altitudes. They also are reported to have been terrified of the elephants used by the Vietnamese army. • Sioung, the semilegendary leader of the Meo, appeared about this time. Gaining prominence for his remarkable physical feats, he led the Meo in combat against the various groups in the Yen Ming and Quan Ba areas. Some of the Man and Nung accepted his leadership, but the Tho fought Sioung and his followers for twelve years. [Abadie 1924: 150, 163; Diguët 1908: 129; Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 297.] The Meo in Vietnam have been involved in a long series of rebellions against the central government. In 1862 the White Meo led an uprising which was repressed by the Vietnamese, aided by various Tai groups as well as some Meo. In 1919, in an attempt to neutralize the Meo potential for rebellion, the French seized all their firearms. Because of the traditional skill of the Meo at making muskets, this proved to be an ineffective effort. The role of Meo priest-sorcerers in these uprisings has been emphasized by some investigators. [Bonifacy 1919: 24; Grossin 1926: 43.] Migrations into Laos have been largely without conflict. As early as 1850 Meo are reported to have established numerous villages in the mountain area around the city of Luang Prabang, where they cleared the forest to plant maize and poppies. [Le Boulanger

1931: 212.] In northern Laos the town of Xieng Khouang with its market place attracts most of the ethnic groups in the area. The town population includes Vietnamese artisans, Chinese traders, Indian cloth merchants, and a scattering of Westerners. The daily market and the grand festival of the eighth lunar month provide opportunities for visiting Meo to meet other ethnic groups. These contacts have had some effect on Meo society. Some have been drawn into the labor market and others have adopted wet-rice agriculture. Those of the Xieng Khouang area have also been integrated into the national political life of Laos, and have been influenced by the expanding educational facilities in the area. [Barney 1961: 5, 45-50.]

**SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND HOUSING.** Settlement pattern. The Meo prefer higher elevations ranging from 3,000 to 6,000 feet. Despite a traditional pattern of periodic moves in search of new land to clear and cultivate, some settlements have remained in one site for a relatively long time. Morechand (1952: 356) describes one such settlement in Vietnam located in the same place for over a hundred years. Because of their poppy cultivation, the Meo in Laos are more restricted in their selection of village sites. They must seek fresh, arable land and slopes that are relatively less exposed to the sun. A site thus chosen is occupied for five or six years. [Lafont 1960: 186-87.] Morechand (1952: 355), in studying a White Meo canton in northern Vietnam, found that there were no real agglomerations; instead, farmsteads were dispersed. A total population of 676, divided among 133 families in 82 households, yielded an area density of 16 per square kilometer. Barney (1961: 12) reports that in the Xieng Khouang area of Laos, Meo villages average around 8 houses, with some larger villages of around 40 houses. **Housing.** Meo houses in Vietnam are rectangular in shape and built directly on the ground, with walls normally of wattle and a thatched roof. Well-to-do Meo use planks for walls and either tile or wooden shingles on the roof. Windows may be cut into the walls. A main room serves as storage room, granary, and reception room for visitors and also contains the hearth and altar of the ancestors. Usually there are several small sleeping compartments. A stable, constructed of sticks and other available wood, is located nearby, and a kitchen garden and fruit grove are near the house. [Abadie 1924: 157-58; Savina 1930: 184-190; Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 304-08; Maspéro 1929-30: 244.] In the Xieng Khouang area, Meo houses are constructed entirely of axe-hewn wood. Most have two doors; none have windows. A raised platform serves as a sleeping area. Most houses have two hearths, one for cooking and one which is used during social gatherings. A shrine for the spirits is usually found attached to one wall. Family and personal possessions, which are stored in the main room, include a rice pounder, a



husking machine, a corn mill, tools, crossbows, flint-lock guns, utensils for cooking, musical instruments, and saddles. [Barney 1961: 30.]

**ECONOMY. Agriculture.** Maize is the traditional staple, although Gourdon (1931: 92) points out that whenever possible the Meo adopt paddy agriculture. Abadie (1924: 151) reports that some Meo in northern Vietnam have irrigated paddy fields along the slopes and bottoms of upland mountain valleys. Farming them during the daytime, they climb the slopes back to their villages in the evening. In Laos, particularly in the vicinity of Xieng Khouang, some Meo have been engaged in wet-rice agriculture, and some of the White Meo and Striped Meo cultivate upland rice by the swidden method (Lafont 1960: 188; Barney 1961: 24-26). For upland-rice swidden agriculture, the heavy vegetation and trees are cut and allowed to dry. In March, before the rains start, the dried wood is burned. Debris is cleared from the swidden, and the soil is loosened with hoes. After the first rains of late April or May have moistened the soil, the seeds are planted. The Meo are casual about weeding, and they irrigate the swidden only occasionally. When the swidden is located some distance from the village, temporary shelters are erected for the young men who guard the growing crops. • Maize swidden agriculture is similar to that for rice. When the first rains begin, the men make holes with digging sticks, and the women follow, placing animal dung fertilizer and kernels in each hole, after which the soil is pounded with a hoe. At harvest, the maize is stored in the upper parts of the house, away from the animals, where the heat from the fires dries it. Stalks are cut and carried to the house to be used as fuel. The Meo customarily cultivate a maize swidden three years, leaving it to lie fallow for eight to ten years. Secondary crops may be planted in the swidden after the maize harvest. [Abadie 1924: 160; Diguët 1908: 138; Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 309.] The French have attempted to prevent Meo swidden agriculture on several occasions. In 1912 the *résident* of Xieng Khouang became apprehensive about deforestation, and issued a decree that the Meo would either have to replant areas they had cleared, burned, and cultivated, or leave the province. The Meo agreed to replant, and it is reported that they have continued to do so. [Roux and Tran 1954: 389.] Secondary crops, grown in kitchen gardens and sometimes in the swiddens, include green beans, peas, pumpkins, cucumbers, buckwheat, sorghum, turnips, eggplant, cabbage, squash, and a local grain called *cao lien*. Tobacco and hemp are less common. [Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 310; Diguët 1908: 138; Abadie 1924: 160; Roux and Tran 1954: 390.] Some of the Meo in the Xieng Khouang area of Laos grow potatoes, of which some are sold to Westerners, but most are fed to livestock. Maize and squash are also fed to livestock in the wet-rice

growing zones, but they are consumed by the family when the rice crop is inadequate. The Meo of Xieng Khouang also cultivate flax for weaving. [Barney 1961: 26-28.] Roux and Tran (1954: 390) report that opium poppies constitute the major cash crop among the Meo. According to Barney (1961: 26-28), each patrilineal residence group in the Xieng Khouang area has its own poppy field. Opium was formerly bartered at the Xieng Khouang market. Fishing and hunting. The Meo are skilled hunters. They make their own firearms, which resemble European muskets of the eighteenth century. Diguët (1908: 139) reports that neither hunting nor fishing contributes very much to their sustenance, however. Domestic animals. The Meo are celebrated horse breeders. They also raise cattle, buffalo, pigs, goats, chickens, ducks, guinea hens, dogs, and cats. A special breed of white dog is a common household pet. Goat's milk and cow's milk are sometimes consumed among the Meo in Laos, but the eggs obtained from chickens and ducks are usually traded at the local markets. [Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 311; Abadie 1924: 158; Barney 1961: 28-29.] Industrial arts. Meo industry is predominantly familial, although there usually are several specialists in each village. Within the family, the women weave cloth for clothing and coverings. For male garments the cloth is dyed, but for female garb it is elaborately embroidered in intricate and colorful designs. A batik type of design is produced by a *cire-perdue* (lost wax) method, using beeswax collected in the forest. Silk and needles are purchased from Chinese and Vietnamese merchants in the market towns. [Abadie 1924: 161; Cresson and Jeannin 1944: 435; Barney 1961: 28.] An alcohol made from maize is produced by most Meo families. Village specialists work silver purchased in the market towns into heavy bracelets and collars, intricately designed. In addition to their value as jewelry, they serve as a public display of family wealth. Village specialists also produce farm implements, and Meo armorers make musketlike weapons. Powder is prepared from saltpeter found in mountain caves and sulphur purchased from lowland groups. [Fromaget 1937: 168; Dussault 1924: 41; Grossin 1926: 42-44.] Trade. The Meo are active traders. In northern Vietnam along the Chinese border they sell wood for coffins to Chinese merchants (Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 310-15). In northern Laos, Xieng Khouang and Luang Prabang were until recently the principal markets for Meo opium. In the traditional pattern reported for the Yunnan-Indochina border area, Chinese merchants travel from village to village, purchasing opium from individual farmers. [Roux and Tran 1954: 391; Hickey 1956; Lafont 1961.] Division of labor. In the Xieng Khouang area men prepare the fields, care for the crops, and construct the granaries. At harvest time, all able-bodied members of the family participate. Men cut the stalks while women flail, and the men carry the



baskets of grain (maize or paddy) to the granaries. Should pack horses be needed to transport grain, they are led by young boys, while the girls help gather grain into baskets. Older members of the family watch the small children and prepare meals. [Barney 1961: 25-26.] In the production of opium, women are more active than men. Men construct the woven rattan or bamboo fences around the poppy fields, while women sow the seed, weed, and cut the bloom to remove the opium fluid. [Barney 1961: 27.] Men construct and maintain the houses and care for the livestock. Boys and older men gather firewood. Women are responsible for preparing and serving food, but at festivals, the young men prepare special rice cakes. [Barney 1961: 30-31.] **Land tenure.** In the Xieng Khouang area, Barney (1961: 31) reports that wherever there is swidden agriculture, the man who clears the land has usufruct. A Meo patrilineal descent group working together may have three or four cleared swiddens planted to upland rice and one planted to opium poppies. A married son may begin work on a field of his own if he can do so without disrupting the division of labor. [Barney 1961: 31.]

**KIN GROUPS. Descent.** Lunet de Lajonquière (1906: 314-18), Diguët (1908: 144), and Abadie (1924: 167-69) report that Meo groups in northern Vietnam have patrilineal kinship systems. Descent is patrilineal, and the father holds title to family property. After his death, the bulk of the property passes to the eldest son, who also receives exclusive right to use the family swiddens. Residence after marriage is either patrilocal or neolocal, but in the vicinity of the paternal house. **Kin groups.** The White Meo of Xieng Khouang in Laos are reported to have exogamous patrilineal clans, each of which has a name and an origin myth. Members trace their descent from a common ancestor. There is prescribed behavior for members of the same clan, and special terms of reference and address. They refer to other members of the clan as *ku to kew ti* (my juniors and seniors). The clans constitute the most important social units among the White Meo, and in some villages a clan is coextensive with the village, so that the head of the clan is also the village headman. Marriage is considered a bond between two clans, and the reciprocal feasting which is integral to the marriage ritual symbolizes this relationship. [Barney 1961: 10-17.] According to White Meo informants in northern Laos, there normally are several clans in each village, each with a leader who is the eldest male of the senior line. Each clan has its own name and origin myth, and ancestors who are contacted in prescribed rituals through the special powers of the clan chief. Children are members of their father's clan, and clans are exogamous. One informant reported that in his village there were four clans. [Hickey 1956.]

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY. Mode.** The North Vietnam Meo permit their children to select their own mates. The young people gather at periodic "marriage fairs" to display their prowess at handicrafts and games. Courtships start in the festive atmosphere of singing and dancing. When a selection has been made, the boy's parents obtain the services of an intermediary to approach the girl's parents, and an agreement is made concerning the bride price. If the boy is too poor to pay the bride price and the cost of the marriage feast, his parents-in-law usually defray the cost, and the boy is then expected to do service for a two-year period. [Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 314-18.] According to Barney (1961: 31-33), in the Xieng Khouang area of Laos young people meet at village celebrations such as the lunar new year feast. Villages extend invitations to other villages, and games are organized so that the young people may meet. A ball game is the most common. Boys and girls form two lines, arranged so that those facing are of different clans. A ball is tossed back and forth, and the participants sing to one another. Relationships resulting from the ball game are expected to result in courtships. In courtship, the boy visits the girl's village, where they may initiate a trial marriage. The formal marriage is arranged by an intermediary, usually an elder brother or paternal uncle of the boy. A bride price is agreed upon, and the marriage date is set. A young man is responsible for accumulating his own bride price, although members of the patrilineal residence group may assist. Usually a young man earns it by extra labor or wage labor. Marriage consists of a celebration at the groom's house followed by another ritual at the bride's house. Gifts are exchanged. Residence is patrilineal, and the bride visits her family. [Barney 1961: 33-32, Bourotte 1943: 38-45.] **Form.** In northern Vietnam, the Meo permit polygyny. Usually it is found only among the well-to-do. It is not uncommon for a man to have three or four wives. [Grossin 1926: 40, Bourotte 1943: 45.] Among the Meo of the Xieng Khouang area of Laos, many cases of polygyny result from the levirate. Sororal polygyny is found, but is not common. Well-to-do Meo usually have more than one wife, all living under the same roof even sharing the same sleeping area. The first wife is considered the head wife. [Barney 1961: 15-16, Residence. In northern Vietnam, residence after marriage is patrilocal or neolocal, but in the vicinity of the paternal house. If the family is poor, however, or there is insufficient land, sons may have to disperse. Young men may reside matrilocally for a shorter period when they cannot afford a bride price. Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 314-18; Abadie 1924: 167-69, Grossin 1926: 45.] Among the Meo in Laos residence is temporarily patrilocal. After a child is born, the couple establish their own household near the paternal house, and the son is still under his father's authority. [Barney 1961: 11.] **Domestic unit.** Meo households normally



consist of parents and at least one married son and his family. The patrilineal extended family (or minimally, the stem family) is probably common. For Laos (Xieng Khouang area) Barney reports households of 20 to 35 residents, containing married sons and their families as well as other dependent kin. [Barney 1961: 9-10.] **Inheritance.** In northern Vietnam, Meo family property consists of the house, furnishings, animals, produce from gardens and swiddens, and the swiddens themselves. After the death of the household head, the wife assumes temporary control of family property, and after her death, the eldest son inherits the bulk of the property and exclusive use of the swidden. Other sons receive a small share of the movable property. [Abadie 1924: 167-69; Dignet 1908: 144.] Barney (1961: 31) reports much the same pattern among the Meo in Laos. Unless the widow is elderly, she normally becomes the second wife of her husband's brother, who then becomes guardian of his brother's family property. Bourotte (1943: 38-45), writing of the White Meo in Laos, says that it was traditional for the eldest son to become head of the house on the death of his father, and also to inherit most of the family property with the understanding that he be responsible for all males who chose to remain in the paternal house. Due to Lao influence, however, the White Meo now divide the patrimony evenly among the sons, and the son who remains in the paternal house becomes the head of the family. **Divorce.** Among the North Vietnam Meo, if the wife is proven to have committed adultery, she can be repudiated by her husband, and her parents must return the bride price. [Grossin 1926: 49.] Divorce is possible, but not frequent among the Meo of the Xieng Khouang area of Laos. In cases of marital difficulty, the heads of the patrilineal residence groups may arbitrate, perhaps with the assistance of the district chief. [Barney 1961: 16.]

**SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION.** In northern Vietnam most Meo groups are dispersed, and in most instances the highest political position is that of village chief. In Meo villages populated by members of the same kin group, often the eldest male is automatically the village chief (Dignet 1908: 137). In areas where there are relatively dense groupings of Meo, they have sometimes attained positions of authority recognized by other ethnic groups. In the Dong Van area the Meo have gained political control, and in the Pa Kha area, the *ly truong* (the position above village chief) was at one time Meo (Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 319). In areas where Tai-speaking groups have been in control, the Meo have been subject to them only in respect to taxes and furnishing labor for corvées (Bonifacy 1919: 26). Dignet (1908: 137) points out that Meo terms for political offices vary from north to south of the Red river. Dignet also contends that some terms refer to military

functions; for example *ma phai* is "keeper of the horse register" and *ping t'eu* is "chief of the troops." • Since 1954, when the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam was established, the Meo have been politically integrated in the semiautonomous Tai-Meo zone in which they have representation. [Fall 1960: 80-100.] In the Xieng Khouang area of Laos, where there are relatively dense groupings of Meo, their political authority extends beyond the village. Several district chiefs are Meo, and all Meo in the area at the present time recognize Touby Lyfoung as their "paramount chief." The present Lao government also has declared him the official leader of the Xieng Khouang Meo. Meo villages in the Xieng Khouang area enjoy a great deal of autonomy, and consequently most administrative responsibility rests with the headman. When the patrilineal group is coextensive with the village, the head of the group is village headman. When there are several kin groups, the eldest of the kin-group heads assumes the role. The headman must arbitrate disputes, organize village festivals, and supervise public works projects such as opening new trails and maintaining existing ones. If a village moves, the headman organizes the migration. In addition to receiving a small commission from all taxes collected, he also receives gifts from the villagers. Since the organization of the Royal Lao government, the Meo of Xieng Khouang have had representatives in the National Assembly. [Barney 1961: 20-23.]

**RELIGION.** Major religions. Formal Buddhism is not found among the Indochina Meo, although they do venerate some Buddhist deities. Quang Am (Vietnamese name for Quan Yin), the Buddhist Goddess of Mercy, is venerated by some Meo (Dignet 1908: 144; Abadie 1924: 167). **Supernaturals.** The Meo pantheon of spirits is extensive. Among the most important are: To, the spirit of heaven, Ang, spirit of earth, Sien Chen, spirit of the mountain, Lu Shen, spirit of thunder, Long Wan, the spirit of the dragon, and household spirits known collectively as *tsao chen*. The Meo also believe that each human has three souls called *pli* which are reincarnated in the bodies of pregnant women. [Lunet de Lajonquière 1906: 310-15.] The cult of the ancestors is found among the Meo, although it is described as less elaborate than among the Chinese and Vietnamese. Ancestral altars are simple—a table containing a jar of sand in which joss is burned, and two bands of red paper containing invocations in Chinese calligraphy. [Dignet 1908: 144; Abadie 1924: 167.] Among the Meo in Laos, the *tlán*, or spirits, are classified according to their functions. There are *tlán* associated with the elements, fertility, the trails, rice, the hearth, and sleeping quarters. *Tlán* are related to good and bad fortune, and to natural phenomena and unusual events, and they also are believed to affect individual behavior. [Barney 1961: 35-39.] **Practitioners.** More-



chand (1955b: 509-58) describes a form of shamanism among the White Meo of northern Vietnam and Laos in which the shaman, male or female, must meet specific requirements and must be initiated. The initiate cannot be too young, and the male must not be of low social status, while the female should have at least two children. These shamans heal illnesses, exorcise evil spirits, and make talismans. Shamanistic rituals are elaborate—characteristically there is a dance, spirit messages, and a trance. • Shamans among the Meo of Laos are known as *tu ua neng*, and they may either be male or female. They are believed to have *tlán* (spirits) dwelling within them, from whom they receive the power to heal, determine the meaning of signs, protect newly born infants, predict the future, and communicate with the *tlán*. In addition to preparing amulets, they erect altars in houses, in the fields, and along paths. The role of the shaman is not necessarily hereditary, although children of shamans often manifest the presence of *tlán* and assume the métier from a parent. A village may have more than one shaman, each of whom may have specialized functions. All receive fees. [Barney 1961: 35-37.] Ceremonies. In addition to ceremonies associated with the cult of the ancestors, there is a feast to mark the new lunar year. The Meo "eat the new year" by killing a pig as an offering to the spirits and the ancestors, and afterward serving it at a large meal. At planting time a chicken and joss sticks are offered to the spirit of the mountain. [Maspéro 1929-30: 244.] Illness and medicine. It is commonly believed that evil spirits cause illness, and the Meo also attribute ailments to soul loss. Among the White Meo in Laos, it is believed that should the *pli* (soul) leave the body, the person will fall ill. The shaman is summoned to perform a ritual in which he employs a figure representing the victim. A blood sacrifice is then made to restore the *pli* to the body. [Barney 1961: 39.] There are no food taboos for a pregnant woman, but the husband must observe a vegetable diet, and he also must remain near the house. According to Abadie (1924: 165), both practices are survivals of Meo couvade. If the newborn is male, the placenta is buried before the entrance to the house; if female, it is buried beneath the hearth. Thirty-three days after the birth, the child is named, and friends and kin bring gifts. Soul, death, and afterlife. In northern Vietnam, the corpse, dressed in fine clothes, is attached to the wall in the main room of the house where kin, neighbors, and friends have gathered. There is feasting and dancing, and occasionally some food is placed in the deceased's mouth. The grave site is selected by the shaman. The body is carried on a stretcher to the accompaniment of firecrackers and firearms. After burial, the cortege returns to the house to continue feasting. There is no grave cult. [Abadie 1924: 167.] Among the Meo of Laos, there is a belief that after death the soul goes to live in

the land of the *tlán* (spirits), and some Meo believe that the soul of the deceased enters the next newborn member of the family. In the Xieng Khouang area the corpse may be placed in a chair during several days of feasting. The corpse is buried outside the house. Each year the [patrilineal] residence group observes a "visit" with their group *tlán* or ancestors. The house is taboo for several days and the family remains in seclusion. [Barney 1961: 34-35.]

BIBLIOGRAPHY. Abadie 1924; Barney 1961; Bonifacy 1919; Bourotte 1943; Cresson and Jeannin 1944; Diguët 1908; Dussault 1924; Embree and Thomas 1950; Fall 1960; Fromaget 1937; Goudan 1931; Grosin 1926; Hickey 1956; Lafont 1900; Le 1955; Le Boulanger 1931; Lunet de Lajongquière 1906; Maspéro 1929-30; Morechand 1952, 1955; NCSDT 1959; Roux and Tran 1954; Savina 1930; Smalley 1956.

## THAILAND MEO

Synonyms. *H'moong, Meau, Mong*

ORIENTATION. Identification. Called Meo (Meau) by the Siamese, to which they add terms for "Flowery," "Black," and "Striped" (Meo Dawk, Meo Nam, Meo Lai), referring to differences in dress. The people refer to themselves as H'moong (Mong) Young (1961: 44), following native usage, categorizes the majority of Meo in Thailand as either H'moong Nua (Blue Meo) or H'moong Deaw (White Meo). Bernatzik (1947: 3-4) investigated groups of White and Black Meo in Nan province near the Thailand-Lao border. Location. Mainly in Nan, Chiangrai, and Chiangmai provinces of northern Thailand, with scattered settlements as far south as 16° 30' N. (Young 1961: 46) Linguistic affiliation. The Thailand Meo speak dialects related to those of similar groups of Miao speakers in South China. The linguistic position of Miao (and Yao) is as yet unclear. The dialects of the various categories of Thailand Meo are in some instances mutually intelligible, although rather wide differences do exist (Young 1961: 47). Lao is used as a lingua franca, and many of the older men are in addition fluent speakers of Yunnanese. In the Chiangmai area Shan is an important second language. Demography. The Meo population of Thailand is given "conservatively" by Young (1961: 46) as 45,600. History and cultural relations. The migration of the Meo into Thailand has occurred mainly within the last 50 years. The movement has been generally in a north-south direction coming from Laos and, secondarily from Yunnan. Many of the Meo in northern Thailand are at all probability related to the White Miao of South China, who emigrated in large numbers into Szechuan and northern Laos during the last century. The Meo in their Thailand environment continue to be independent and



averse to intermarriage with other ethnic groups. In the vicinity of Chiangmai and other population centers, however, they are frequently seen in the markets, and the younger Meo here have responded to government and mission schooling. In more remote areas, as in the mountains of the Thailand-Laos border, they remain largely self-sufficient, visited occasionally by Chinese traders and venturing themselves only rarely into the plains areas below. [Young 1961: 56; Bernatzik 1947: 109.]

**SETTLEMENT PATTERN AND HOUSING.** **Settlement pattern.** Villages are rarely located under 3,600 feet, and are generally found above 5,000 feet. The Meo prefer a slope just under the summit of a mountain ridge, near a source of water that can be piped into the village through bamboo troughs. Such sites are generally covered with monsoon forest, which the Meo reduce to low dense bush forest by repeated burning. [Young 1961: 48-49; Bernatzik 1947: 26ff.] Young reports about 35 houses to a village, with an average village population of around 280 (1961: 48-49). Bernatzik reports a lower figure (3 to 13 houses) for Meo villages in the region bordering on Laos (1947: 263). Houses are clustered somewhat irregularly, with the chief's house in the center. There are no village walls or stockades. • The Meo move their villages on the average of once every 10 to 15 years, due to soil exhaustion, high taxes, epidemics, or the urging of a shaman. Such moves may be made over long distances, involving many days of travel, according to Young (1961: 56), although Bernatzik (1947: 260) reports that the Meo never move a distance greater than one day's march if they can help it. A new village site is pioneered for one harvest season by a few selected families before the entire village moves (Bernatzik 1947: 260). **Housing.** Single-story, rectangular houses are built directly on the ground, surrounded by shallow ditches to drain off rainwater. Walls are of wood and bamboo, and roofs of grass thatching. The space inside may be partitioned off, depending on the size of the family. Furnishings include wooden beds and tables. A fireplace is sunk into the floor of the main room, and there is a Chinese-style earthen stove for cooking mash for the livestock. Separate rice storage bins are built on piles, as are the temporary huts in the rice fields. [Bernatzik 1947: 265.]

**ECONOMY.** The people are passionate hunters and fishermen, but agriculture is the main source of food. According to Young (1961: 51-52), hunting is regarded more as a sport than a necessity. Normally, collecting achieves importance only after the harvest, but during times of food shortage collecting may contribute significantly to the diet. Young (1961: 51-52) emphasizes that the Meo are among the most advanced and prosperous of the ethnic minorities in Thailand, due in part to their sales of opium and

livestock, and in part to a natural business ability and independence of spirit, in which respect they are similar to the Yao. **Agriculture.** Swidden agriculture is practiced almost exclusively. Credner (1935a: 168) comments on the absence of terracing and irrigation, probably due to lack of suitable terrain. Young (1961: 56) cites recent reports that a few Meo in northern Nan province have taken up wet-rice agriculture. The main crop is mountain or dry rice, both glutinous and nonglutinous (Bernatzik 1947: 253). Opium poppies constitute the second most important crop. Other field crops include maize and buckwheat, both of considerably less importance than among the Tonkin Meo. Sugar cane, yams, cucumbers, beans, tobacco, onions, hemp, and some cotton are also raised. The Meo plant crops of varying dates of maturity so that some food is available most of the time (Young 1961: 51-52; see also Bernatzik 1947: 353-62 for detailed data on this point). • A new field is cleared by the members of an extended family. A large family may clear a considerable area, dividing it into smaller fields of up to three hectares each. Fields are cleared by repeated burning. Seeds are planted by hand, in holes made with a digging stick. A rice field will continue to yield from one to three years, after which it is fallowed to a new growth of forest trees. Poppy fields, however, will produce continuously for up to 20 years. Rice is cut and partly husked in the field, and then stored in special bins near the houses until used. Some vegetables and fruit trees are raised in kitchen gardens. [Bernatzik 1947: 353-62.] Credner points out that the importance of field crops coupled with the Meo's relatively primitive agricultural techniques requires the exploitation of a considerable land area; fields are sometimes many hours distant, and men may remain in temporary field houses for days or weeks at a time (1935a: 169). **Fishing and hunting.** Hooks, hand nets, and weirs are used, but the favorite method of taking fish is by poisoning. The Meo are avid fishermen, but since suitable fishing grounds may be some distance away, fishing supplies a relatively small portion of the diet. [Bernatzik 1947: 352.] Although the Meo are passionate hunters, hunting does not account for very much of their food supply except in the more remote mountain areas. Traps and snares are used, but the chief weapons of the hunt are the flintlock musket and the crossbow with poisoned arrows. The muskets are manufactured and assembled by Meo gunsmiths, using iron obtained from Chinese traders. Elephants, stags, and wild boar are highly prized. Birds and small game are also taken. [Bernatzik 1947: 340-41.] **Domestic animals.** According to Young (1961: 52), the Meo far surpass the other hill tribes in animal husbandry. Animals are well cared for in pens, coops, and corrals. Pigs are fed a specially cooked corn mash once a day. Castration is common, and is performed by specialists. Pigs, dogs, and chickens are found in every village,



the former raised for both food and sacrifice. Cattle and ponies are raised wherever the terrain is suitable. Buffalo are less common, and, like cattle and ponies, are often raised for sale to the valley-dwelling Lao and Siamese. [Bernatzik 1947: 365-66.] **Food and stimulants.** Staples are rice, vegetables, and beans, commonly spiced with peppers, chilies, or sour (pickled) vegetables. Meat, when available, may be smoked, salted, or dried in the sun, and is often fried in animal fat. Forest plants, roots, insect larvae, and honey are also consumed, particularly in times of poor harvests. There is considerable variety in the Meo diet, particularly in the methods of preparation. [Bernatzik 1947: 372-77.] Native tobacco is smoked in pipes by both sexes, young and old. Alcohol, distilled from corn mash, is very popular, and is consumed in considerable quantities by both sexes (Bernatzik 1947: 381). Next to rice, the most important crop is the poppy, from which the Meo obtain raw opium and seeds for food. Some villages have virtually a cash economy based on the sale of opium and the purchase of foodstuffs and other necessities. The Meo themselves use opium both as a medicine and a stimulant. It is swallowed, chewed, and smoked—mainly by men (Bernatzik 1947: 383). According to Young (1961: 51), the rate of opium addiction among the Thailand Meo is about 12 per cent. **Industrial arts.** The Meo are skilled in wood and bamboo work, and in basketry. Most villages have a blacksmith who works with a piston bellows on iron bars purchased from Chinese traders. Highly skilled silversmiths make women's jewelry from old silver coins. Hemp and cotton are made into cloth in the home by spinning, weaving, and dyeing. The Meo know the technique of batik (wax) dye. Women are highly skilled in embroidery and appliqué work. [Bernatzik 1947: 124, 130, 403-04, 410-11, 425.] Music is highly developed; the Meo are great singers of improvised poetry, particularly love songs, which are occasionally sung antiphonally. Musical instruments include the reed organ (consisting of some eight bamboo pipes and a vibrating metal or wood reed), the jew's-harp, skin-head drums, and small brass gongs. [Bernatzik 1947: 141-43, 146-48.] **Trade.** There appears to be little economic specialization with the exception of a few part-time trades such as blacksmithing and gunsmithing. Bernatzik reports little internal trade, with the work of specialists confined mainly to the needs of members of their own patrilineages (1947: 423). Young (1961: 54), however, reports a brisk internal trade among the Meo. External trading relations consist of periodic visits to the market towns in the valleys and bartering with itinerant traders (the Chinese, or Haw, from Yunnan, or the Lao from northern Thailand). The Meo are said to be good businessmen in their trading relations with other groups. Bernatzik reports a well-developed pattern of borrowing and lending money, including the use of witnesses, fixed interest charges, and legal

procedures in case of forfeiture (1947: 241). **Division of labor.** The men hunt, make arrow poison, and distill alcohol. They also do most of the carpentry and engage in metal work of various kinds. Women carry firewood and water, spin, sew, cook, and do much of the weeding in the fields. Men and women together work in the fields during planting and harvesting; they go on fishing trips together; and they care for pigs and chickens jointly. Weaving and load carrying may be done by either sex. [Bernatzik 1947: 437ff.] **Land tenure.** Land within the territory of a village (the maximum area of actual or potential economic exploitation) is theoretically the property of the village chief. In practice, cultivated land is worked by members of extended families. The head of each family has the right to allocate and redistribute the plots worked by the various members. [Bernatzik 1947: 239-41.]

**KIN GROUPS.** According to Bernatzik (1947: 30, 35, 54-55, 111), the Meo are characterized by nonsegregated, exogamous patrisibs or surname groups. A village is usually inhabited by members of one surname group. The land-owning and economically important kin group is not, however, the patrisib, but rather the patrilocal extended family occupying a cluster of adjacent houses. The sibs have no insignia and no chief, and function mainly in regulating marriage and in channeling intervillage visiting and borrowing relationships; there are some indications, however, that they may once have played a role or something approaching a politico-military organization. [Judging from Bernatzik's data, the ordinary Meo village is probably an exogamous clan community composed of a localized (lineage) segment of a patrilineal surname group or patrisib.] **Kin terminology.** The following kin terms are given by Bernatzik (1947: page 34):

Fa	<i>tse</i>
Mo	<i>na</i>
FaElBr	<i>ti lou</i>
FaYoBr	<i>nyu ku</i>
FaSi	<i>pu-nya</i>
MoBr	<i>tse tlan</i>
MoElSi	<i>na tay lau</i>
MoYoSi	<i>na tay hau</i>
ElBr	<i>ti lau</i>
YoBr	<i>nyu lau</i>
ElSi	<i>pu-nya</i>
YoSi	<i>ku-nya</i>
Male cousin	<i>ti lau</i>
Female cousin	<i>nyu lau</i>

**MARRIAGE AND FAMILY.** *Mode.* Opportunities for courtship occur at festival times, particularly the new year's festival after the harvest, when boys can



visit girls in nearby villages. Antiphonal singing of love songs to the accompaniment of a jew's-harp and a reed organ usually leads to sexual familiarity and intercourse. Group courtship patterns are lacking among the Thailand Meo. Couples retire alone to secluded spots outside the village. • **Marriage** may be initiated simply by the act of cohabitation and/or announced pregnancy, although in well-to-do families the boy's father usually consults the ancestors as well as the girl's family before setting a date for the wedding. A girl's family rarely goes against her choice of a partner, but a boy's male relatives may attempt to influence his choice by pretending that the ancestors are opposed to the marriage. Where the villages of the couple are far apart, a Chinese trader may be employed as a go-between. A bride price in silver coinage is paid by the members of the groom's family. This sum must be repaid by the girl's family if she later deserts her husband. The bride is escorted to the groom's home by her female relatives, bringing with her a trousseau of blankets, fancy embroidered clothing, and silver ornaments. She is welcomed by the head of the groom's extended family, who sacrifices to the family ancestors and welcomes the new bride into his family and sib. Feasting and drinking, at the expense of the groom's family, may last for two or three days. [Bernatzik 1947: 97-100.] **Form.** Polygynous marriages are allowed, but are in practice limited to village chiefs and older, well-to-do men. The wives of a polygynous marriage share the same quarters and the same bed with their husband. [Bernatzik 1947: 76.] **Extension of incest taboos.** Marriage is theoretically prohibited between persons of the same name [patrilineal surname group exogamy]. In practice, marriage can take place if the relationship is more than three generations removed. [Bernatzik 1947: 110.] **Residence.** Married sons continue to live with their wives in a section of their father's house until they attain majority at age 30. Thereafter they set up an independent household near their father's residence. [Bernatzik 1947: 30-31.] **Domestic unit.** The household unit consists normally of a patrilocal extended [joint] family, including married sons not yet 30 and their families. The oldest male retains authority, including the making of ancestral sacrifices on behalf of all the family members. Large households of up to 30 members may occur, but according to Young (1961: 49) the average number per household is 8. [Bernatzik 1947: 35, 77, 259.] **Inheritance.** At the death of the head of an extended family, the oldest married son still living in the family homestead inherits his father's status, including control of the plots of land cultivated by members of the extended family. When the last of the wives of the original family head dies, all movable property is divided equally among all surviving sons; the original household group is dissolved, with the oldest son retaining rights to the

homestead. [Bernatzik 1947: 244-47.] **Divorce.** A widow normally marries her deceased husband's brother. Divorce is said to be rare, in part because of family pressures on both sides to avoid trouble over the bride price (Bernatzik 1947: 111-13).

**SOCIOPOLITICAL ORGANIZATION.** **Political organization.** The highest level of political integration at the native level is the village. Most village chiefs have been legally installed by Siamese government officials, and in a few cases Meo leaders have been recognized as *kammans*, or circle headmen (Young 1961: 56). A village chief who has gained power and wealth through plural marriages and many offspring may have judiciary functions not only in his own village but also in neighboring ones—particularly if he has also acquired a reputation as a specialist in divination and magic. He is likely to be a repository of tribal lore and technical knowledge, and is expected to offer periodic sacrifices to the ancestors—on behalf of the village and also of his own extended family (Bernatzik 1947: 114-15, 190). • Bernatzik (1947: 40) mentions the tradition among the Meo of a "king" and a "kingdom" in China, and of repeated battles with the Chinese. The Meo of Thailand believe that a Meo king will rise again among them and lead them to victory. Even more vivid, according to Bernatzik, are their memories of "great chieftains" who had power over 20 or more villages. The Meo on the Laos border claim that their grandfathers were led out of Yunnan to the Thailand-Indochina border by one such chieftain. According to present-day Meo, the territory of a great chieftain was organized primarily for warfare. The chieftain was elected by vote of all arms-bearing men in his jurisdiction, and acted as supreme judicial authority and war leader. He appointed village chiefs within his territory to collect fines and taxes. Important matters were settled by general assemblies, presided over by the great chieftain and attended by village chiefs and heads of families. It was the function of the great chieftain to offer animal sacrifices and invoke the spirits on behalf of the assembly (Bernatzik 1947: 41-44). • The kinship basis, if any, of the kind of politico-military organization described by Bernatzik is unclear, but it may have rested on some form of nonlocalized kin group such as the sib. Today, according to Bernatzik (1947: 253-59), most disputes within a village are handled by the heads of extended families. If they fail to settle the matter, it is brought before the village chief, who can impose fines and order punishment, and who may resort to divination. Major matters, such as the decision to move to a new location, are decided by a popular assembly of all men able to bear arms. Here the opinions of the village chief and the village shaman bear great weight. **Warfare.** Bernatzik (1947: 394-97) characterized the Meo as fiercely independent



and warlike when aroused. According to Bernatzik's informants, all able-bodied men were once liable to military service. In time of war they were called up by the "great chieftain," and organized under a hierarchical system of officers and leaders, with a basic unit of 60 to 100 men. Meo warfare was carried on by small units which would attempt to take all strategic points and passes by means of advance planning and coordination. Ambush was a favorite tactic. Weapons included crossbows, long-handled spears with poisoned points, flexible wooden clubs joined by chain links, two-bladed swords, and a sort of bolas consisting of iron balls attached to the end of a long thin rope. Defensive armor was made by attaching iron plates to pieces of animal hide. Present-day weapons are limited to the crossbow and flintlock muskets. The Meo make their own guns and gunpowder from materials purchased from Chinese traders (Bernatzik 1947: 386-92).

**RELIGION.** Bernatzik characterized Meo religion as based on belief in ancestors and spirits. Most Meo are animists, according to Young. Only about 100 Meo in Thailand are Christians. **Supernaturals.** In addition to the souls of the ancestors, the Meo believe in a variety of spirits, some of which inhabit trees, rocks, and fields. Others are patron spirits of activities, such as blacksmithing, or teacher-spirits of medicine men and shamans. A guardian dog spirit protects the house and its inhabitants. These spirits and souls live in a spirit world, and look and behave as human beings. There is also a supreme spirit who has no particular form and is present everywhere. Malevolent spirits must be propitiated by animal sacrifices, particularly when they have been inadvertently offended. [Bernatzik 1947: 164-65, 169.] **Practitioners.** Among the Meo there are both male and female shamans. The occupation is not necessarily hereditary—a person may become a shaman involuntarily through being possessed by a spirit, after which he can communicate with his teacher-spirit. In practice, the shaman goes into a trance, stamps his feet, shakes his body, rolls on the ground, and may lapse into an unconscious state. He manipulates swords, rattles, sacrificial animal blood, and spirit money while chanting and reciting incantations. Shamans interpret omens, foretell the future, and exorcise evil spirits, but they do not engage in black magic or sorcery. When not engaged as shamans, they function as ordinary members of society. [Bernatzik 1947: 176-80.] The shaman's political role, if any, is unclear, but it is known that a village chief may at the same time be a recognized shaman with a wide reputation in divination and exorcism. The chances for such an individual to extend his political control in times of crisis would seem considerable. • Heads of families and ordinary citizens may carry out ancestral sacrifices and make

hunting magic. The Meo believe strongly in the interpretation of dreams and omens and in the efficacy of divination, activities which may be carried out either by shamans or by other individuals, including the village chief. **Ceremonies and ritual.** The most important annual ceremony is the new year's festival, which begins in December after the harvest. Animal sacrifices to the souls of the ancestors and to other spirits occupy the first day after which there may be several days of drinking, visiting, courting, and general merriment and relaxation. Animal sacrifices, which make up a good portion of Meo ritual behavior, are made by heads of families and others on a variety of occasions. Small altars are set up in the homes, in the fields, and along paths outside the village. The Meo characteristically do not sacrifice cattle, horses, or buffalo, but prefer pigs and chickens instead. Divination is practiced with the aid of chicken bones or with cracked bamboo stalks. [Bernatzik 1947: 193, 204-07.] **Illness and medicine.** Illness may be caused either by angry spirits or soul loss. Black magic does not cause sickness or death among the Thailand Meo (Bernatzik 1947: 189). Shamans carry out rituals designed to exorcise evil spirits causing illness; other specialists may administer herbs and medicines, but only after the guilty spirit has been discovered through divination. The Meo have an extensive pharmacopoeia, and also make much use of Chinese medicines which they obtain from traders. They are skilled in obstetrics and bone-setting. [Bernatzik 1947: 235-37.] **Birth.** Takes place in the house with the husband assisting. The Meo try to prolong confinement of the mother after delivery as long as possible, in the case of prosperous families up to 30 days (Bernatzik 1947: 49). **Soul, death, and afterlife.** The Meo believe in the existence of three souls (Young 1961: 47). After death, a person's soul is reborn in the next child born into the sib. When a village migrates, the souls of the ancestors not yet reborn are ceremonially informed of the move and migrate with the group. [Bernatzik 1947: 189.] The corpse is washed, dressed in new clothes, and laid out in the home for one or two days while immediate relatives keep vigil. The body is borne to a grave in the woods in a wooden coffin. The funeral procession is attended by members of the deceased's sib. Much care is taken to "show the right road" to the departing soul, and a priest-shaman functions to exorcise evil spirits during the period between death and burial. After burial an animal sacrifice is made, and some of the food offered to the soul of the deceased. Additional sacrifices and ceremonies are carried out for three days following burial and are followed by a festival of the dead one year after burial. [Bernatzik 1947: 115-19; Young 1961: 47-48.]

**BIBLIOGRAPHY.** Bernatzik 1947, Credner 1935a; Young 1961.