



A Study on Translations in Hutton’s Hmu Writing in Southwest China

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Abstract

Since the 1920s, the missionaries like Hutton and Clarke have successively translated the English version of Christian classics, such as *Hymn* and *New Testament of the Holy Bible*, into Hutton’s Hmu writing. The miao translation of Christian classics has exerted great influence on the cultural life of black miao people, instituting written system for them and consistently introducing the Christian culture and ideology into the miao region.

Key words: Translating culture; Hutton’s Hmu writing; Southwest China

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INTRODUCTION

During the missionary work in China, the missionaries adopted the tactics closely linked with the historical background of China at that time, which brought more difficulties to their work compared to their missionaries in Europe. In order to achieve the missionary goal, a churchman must “possess both morality and wisdom, be prudent in his words and deeds, and take advantage of his wit and intelligence”; he must be a scholar himself, thus winning trust from Chinese (Chen, 1948, p.44) . In early days when Christian clerics came to China, they fit into Chinese society mainly by spreading advanced western

scientific, medical and the analogous technologies. To some extent, the introduction of western scientific technology and medical science have broadened Chinese insight into the world, promoting the development of media industry and illuminating the transformation of ideas of scholars in modern times. In early 1900s, western clerics shifted their focus from spreading scientific culture to religious one and from cities where Han nationality inhabited to remote mountainous area where minorities lives in. In southeast of Guizhou Province in which Black Miao people inhabited, the missionaries translated many English Christian classics, such as *Hymns* and *the New Testament*, into Hutton’s Hmu writing (Miao script writing) to better conduct their missionary work. These translations have had on the local life great effect mainly embodied in two aspects: the creation of characters and the introduction of biblical culture.

1. THE CREATION OF THE MIAO’S WRITING SYSTEM

Miao language was for a long time a language with colloquialism but without written system. There was no traditional script writing in Miao language not only because of the effect from the scattering Miao population but also because of its direct relations with Miao dialects with complicated branches. Samuel R. Clarke once pointed out that there existed such great differences among dialects of Miao language that the Black Miao in Southeast Guizhou were unable to understand what was said by the same minority in West Guizhou. “...the differences of dialect in tribes which are only thirty or forty miles apart are sometimes very great...it is very often the commonest words which show the greatest changes; for instance, the pronounns, the negatives and such common words as the verbs ‘to be’ and ‘to have’... (Clarke, 1911, p.23) ”. He at the same time indicated that the Miao language used in the two places are varieties

from the same language. The disparity between different branches is affected not only by space but by time. It is generally acknowledged that Miao language is part of Miaoyao language family of Sino-Tibetan one while some scholars hold different opinions that it belongs to South-Asia language family or Menggaomian lingual system. According to the linguistic research conducted by Wang Fushi and Luo Jiguang in 1959, it suggests that "Miao language has three dialects: xiangxi dialect (also called eastern dialect), East Guizhou dialect (also called central dialect), and Chuan-Qian-Dian dialect (also named western dialect)" (Wu & Long, 1992, p.2). "Xiangxi dialect is divided into western and eastern local ones; East Guizhou dialect is divided into northern, southern and eastern local ones; Chuan-Qian-Dian dialect includes seven subordinate ones, that is, Diandongbei, Luobohe, Chong'anjiang, Chuanqianzhen, Guiyang, Huishui and Majiang dialect, the last four of which contain different local dialects as well" (Li, 2002, pp.39-41). As there are major distinctions among Miao dialects and subordinate ones, they could not be in common use, which results in great difficulties for uniting characters.

It is reported that about 1.1 million Miao people use eastern dialect, about 2.1 million Miao use central dialect and more than 2.5 million Miao speak western dialect. Besides Black Miao, the Miao minority who settle in Qiandongnan and Qiannan Prefecture, Guizhou Province, in Rongshui and Sanjiang, Guangxi Province and so on all use central dialect. The majority of Miao know Chinese and even some of them also know Buyi or Yi language.

1.1 The Historical Legend of Miao's Script Writing

In accordance with the Miao epics and folklores in many places, Miao people in ancient times once had written words only to be lost from past generations who were displaced in turmoil circumstances:

Miao once owned their characters but unfortunately lost them, for in the battle between Chiyu and Xuanyuan (two legendary figures in ancient China) in Zhulu, Miao people were forced to move downward after they were defeated. Upon crossing a river, as ships failed to catch up, Miao had no choice but to put books on head to cross it for fear that the books be drenched by water. But the middle river was extremely torrential that it submerged most of the people, thus the books being unable to be kept. In later times, some Miao tried to embroider the pattern of Miao's characters on clothes in memory of them. So today, the patterns on Miao's colored clothes still imply the meaning of historical heritage.

Jiang, 1945, p.285

However, it was only a legend without any historical material to prove it so far. *Tongxixianzhi* (1968) written by Lu Ciyun, a scholar in Qing dynasty, is the written material first recording Miao's characters in history, in which he recorded some Miao songs by translating them into Chinese.

Chen Qiguang, a scholar, thought that the Miao's script writing in *Tongxixianzhi* is only the translation

of Miao's script to Chinese. But the academia hasn't decided whether this kind of script is that of Miao, for the recording by Lu Ciyun is the only existing proof.

It is also said that the Miao embroidery on the dresses of Miao girls becomes "new Miao's characters" after the loss of Miao's script. Here is a story in Miao minority: when Lan Juan, a chief of ancient Miao, led her compatriots to move south, she came up with a method to take down the course of the migration by use of colored threads to record it, that is, "upon leaving the Yellow River, she stitched a yellow thread on her left sleeve; when crossing the Yangtze River, she stitched a blue thread on her right sleeve; upon crossing the Dongting Lake, she embroidered a wave pattern on her chest clothes; later on, she would sew a sign on her dress every time they crossed a river and climbed a mountain; in this way, the signs were so dense and numerous that they covered her clothes from collarband to the bottom of trousers" (A Duo 2007, p.69). Among all our minorities, Miao has the most complicated and various costumes. According to the relative statistics, the Miao's costumes all over the country have over 103 kinds which embody a common subject depicting the migration course in thousand years and recalling the hometown in ancient times. The embroideries on Miao girls' dresses record the history of their hard migration when the Miao ancestors galloped across battle fields and crossed the Yellow River and Yangtze River etc.

Besides, in the Black Miao region of Qiandongnan Prefecture, Guizhou Province circulates the ancient Miao song: Kaiqin song. Some other scholars argue that "on the song stick of Kaiqin song engraves the pictographic symbol system which is the wood-carved recording in early period" (Yang & dang 1991, pp.331-364). Kaiqin song, the longest song of ancient Miao songs, narrates the content of Miao families who get in relationship of marriage. The song with over 10,000 lines can be sung three whole days. Miao people sing the song with the bamboo song stick in hand, on which the main content of the song was carved in pictographic symbol.

Even though there spread many legends, what are truly handed down with acknowledgement are the Miao's characters instituted by foreign missionaries.

1.2 The Old Miao's Writing System Instituted by Western Missionaries

In early 20th century, the western missionaries institute two kinds of Miao's script (also called old Miao's script) for the Miao minority of Guizhou Province, namely, the Pollard Script which is created by Pollard and others for the Hua Miao of Shimenkan and Hutton's NPS-writing created by Hutton and others, as well as some others for the Black Miao in Qiandongnan Prefecture, Guizhou Province. "Inspired by the missionary work in African tribes and Indian ones of North America", Pollard instituted characters for the Big Hua Miao (Diamond 1996, p.147). In line with the historical materials, since

1904, after the reference of the Bible of the Greek, English and Chinese versions, Pollard with both his English colleagues and the Chinese ones of Big Hua Miao translated the New Testament and part of the Old Testament in Miao's script. During the translating course, they instituted the so-called "Pollard Letters" from the inspiration of Latin letters, Cree's script from Canada and the shorthand script of Pitman. In around 1920, Hutton with some other scholars created characters for the Black Miao in Qiandongnan Prefecture. He introduced the way of marking Miao language through Chinese pinyin instead of Roman alphabet. This kind of Miao's script is called "Chinese National Phonetic Script Writing, NPS-writing" or "Hutton's Hmu Writing". In 1921, Hutton left Panghai with his family. He once referred to the use of Miao's characters in the letter.

The translations of Christian classics in NPS-Writing are as follows: St Matthew (ㄇㄩ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄘㄨ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1928), St Mark (ㄇㄩ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1928), St Matthew (ㄇㄩ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1932), St Luke (ㄌㄨㄝ-ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1932), St John (ㄐㄨㄞ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1932), Acts of the Apostles (ㄇ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄊㄞ-ㄌ-ㄕㄨㄞ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1932), the New Testament (ㄍㄨㄞ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1934), Romans (ㄌㄞ-ㄇㄩ ㄍㄨㄞ ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄒㄧㄣ ㄌㄞ Shanghai: BFBS, 1935) and so on.

After the churchmen creating characters for Black Miao, many traditional songs of them can be recorded and handed down. The disciples of Black Miao who possessed and mastered their own characters began to learn the biblical culture in their script. Much concerned about the question of Miao's script, after the foundation of PRC, the Communist Party of China and the government organized specialists to do research about Miao's language in the region where Miao lived. In October, 1956, the Chinese central government instituted Latin Phonetic Script Writing for three major Miao dialects, among which, on the basis of Hutton's Hmu Writing, the Miao's dialect of eastern Guizhou was created with the pronunciation of Yanghao village of Sankeshu county of Kaili, Guizhou Province as the standard pronunciation.

2. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE BIBLICAL CULTURE

Taking advantage of Miao's traditional belief, the churchmen artfully connected the biblical story of "Noah's Ark" with Miao's legend of "Surging Flood", as well as associating the sufferings of Miao's generations with those of Israeli, which made Miao consider the bible as their lost-years Holy Book (inside Miao minority has been circulating the tale that they've lost a Holy Book) and themselves as God's people, thus believing in God. In

this manner, their missionary end was reached and great Christian ideology and culture were spread among Miao's disciples. With the translation and spread of Christian classics like Hymns and New Testament in Black Miao region, the Christian doctrines and ideas have been disseminated among Black Miao, of which the concepts of God and charity as well as church's ceremonies and norms are the most representative.

2.1 The Concept of God

Although the early-coming Christian missionaries from the west regarded Chinese Taoism and Confucianism as paganism, they often intentionally made use of the terms of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism and found theoretical evidence from Chinese "Confucian classics, history, philosophy and literature" during their gospel-disseminating course. In terms of the translation of "God", in order to find the cultural connotation of "God" in Chinese, Matteo Ricci went into great lengths to quote eleven paragraphs as arguments from such ancient Chinese classics as Doctrine of the Mean, Book of Songs, Book of Changes and Book of Rites, like "our Lord of Heaven is the Sovereign on High mentioned in the ancient Chinese canonical writings"; the Doctrine of the Mean cited from Confucius says that "the ceremonies of sacrifices to Heaven and Earth are meant for the service of the Sovereign on High. (Ricci, 1985, pp.122-123)", thus suggesting that God is also the deity worshiped by the Confucian School, the orthodoxy of China.

During the course of translating ancient Christian books and records into Miao's script writing, the early western churchmen noted the matter of cultural disparity and fusion as well. In Miao's version of Hymns and the New Testament vocabularies about "God" appear many times which are mainly generalized as 万九-万秀 (God), 一世-么 (Jesus), ㄎㄨㄞ-ㄕㄨㄞ (Christ), ㄍㄨㄞ (Lord), ㄕㄨㄞ-ㄉㄨㄛ ㄌㄞ (Comforter) and so on. They belong to the Miao's loanwords, of which the rest ones are transliterated except that 万九-万秀 and ㄍㄨㄞ are the paraphrases associated with Miao's culture. "万九-万秀" is literally translated as "the heavenly king" in Chinese while translating God as "万九-万秀" means "the king of celestial beings", for there exist legends of celestial beings among Black Miao since ancient times (for example, "hsenb nenx" in Miao's language represents "supernatural being") and they think these gods live in the sky. "ㄍㄨㄞ" means "master" in Miao's language, implicating that God is the master of Black Miao. Although the culture of Black Miao contains the concept of deity, the idea of God is completely introduced to the social culture of Black Miao after the introduction of Christianity.

2.2 The Concept of Love

Black Miao has the idea of liking and the corresponding lingual expression, but the concept of love is chiefly

standard of behavior of Christian disciples. This part covers the discussion about laws, anger, adultery, divorce, vow, revenge, enemies, charity, prayer, fasting, worry, judgment and so on.

Christianity has not set severe limitation on drinking, but the believers in the Black Miao parish in Qiandongnan are often edified not to drink willfully. Seldom do they drink except during festivals they would drink some. But compared to other Black Miao who don't believe in God, they drink much less.

CONCLUSION

The Miao's translation of such Christian classics as Hymns and the New Testament brings characters to Black Miao, making them take down their culture and lives with their own script writing. Following the translation and propagation of Christian classics in Black Miao region, the Christian doctrines and ideas like the concept of God and charity, church ceremonies and canons have been constantly introduced into the region. In the meantime, the introduction of gospel has changed their life style, with their religious belief and customs in transition influenced by Christian culture.

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