

# Miao Mission (1937–1939)

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## MILTON HOOK

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## Introduction

The Miao (Miáo Zú ) people are counted among the earliest tribes in China. They are different to the Han Chinese and are usually divided into four sub-groups: The Red Miao of western Hunan Province; the Black Miao of south-east Guizhou Province; the White Miao of south Sichuan, west Guizhou and south Yunnan Provinces; and the Big Flowery Miao of north-east Yunnan and north-west Guizhou Provinces. They practiced ancestor veneration, cultivated maize, sorghum, potatoes, beans, peanuts, sugar cane, and cotton on the plateaus in the mountainous regions. They wore colorfully embroidered costumes and enjoyed singing and dancing.<sup>1</sup> To many people from the West, they are also known as Hmong. In reality, they are a subgroup of the Miao people who live in Southwest China and Southeast Asia (Vietnam, Laos, and Thailand). After the Vietnam war, a large number emigrated to the United States.<sup>2</sup>

## Preliminary Activities

Seventh-day Adventists first attempted evangelism among the Miao in 1929 when a national worker, Kwang Yu Tsen of the West Kweichow Mission, visited Chaotung (now Zhaotong) in the north-eastern arm of Yunnan Province. He found many Miao in the surrounding villages developing an interest in his message. Unfortunately, he became ill and had to return home where he passed away soon after.<sup>3</sup>

Late in 1930 five Miao young men walked south to the mission headquarters at Yunnanfu (now Kunming) to stay for a few days. They enjoyed singing during the evening services.<sup>4</sup> Another Miao man became a baptized member and did translation work for the mission and wrote songs into the Miao language beginning in 1929.<sup>5</sup> Claude Miller, stationed at Yunnanfu, toured north among the Miao in 1932 conducting evening Bible studies. He reported “at least fifty families have begun keeping the Sabbath. We have opened three day-schools among them and have over fifty students.”<sup>6</sup>

In July 1934 nearly one hundred Miao were conspicuous by their colorful costumes at the annual East Kweichow Conference meetings. One Miao young lady, Pan Shu Lo, had trained at the Shanghai Missionary College and

graduated as a nurse from the Shenyang Sanitarium. It was planned that she would start a dispensary in Kweiyang (now Guiyang),<sup>7</sup> but she was utilized instead as the Sabbath School secretary for the East Kweichow Mission.<sup>8</sup>

A national evangelist, Pan Tsung Seng, went among the Miao at Zhaotong and Pukwai in 1935.<sup>9</sup> His efforts initially yielded eighteen who were baptized. Later other baptisms were held, including one of seventy believers, making a total of 112 Miao members in the area by mid-1938. One convert, Tao Fang Djeng, joined the evangelistic team in the Yunnan Mission and later transferred to the East Kweichow Mission. Sadly, he was murdered in April 1936 by bandits while in the course of his evangelism.<sup>10</sup>

## Official Formation of the Mission

In February 1937 Dallas White was appointed to pioneer work in western Hunan Province among the Red Miao people in that territory. The earlier converts among the Big Flowery Miao in the north-eastern arm of Yunnan Province would come under the responsibility of the Yunnan Mission.<sup>11</sup> The new enterprise in Hunan was expected to meet with similar success. A national evangelist, Ai Deng Ho, was selected as White's assistant, and he went ahead to Chiencheng, western Hunan, to secure suitable premises for accommodation and a chapel. First attempts to attract an audience met with mockery from the locals. In order to break down prejudice, White used medical evangelism by extracting teeth, treating lepers, and other common ailments. Within eighteen months, progress was "highly gratifying" because of "a large interest."<sup>12</sup>

Early optimism did not guarantee a harvest. The Miao Mission was listed in the statistical summaries from all the missions in China, but as of December 1939 no attainment figures were recorded for the entity.<sup>13</sup> Unlike the Miao people of Yunnan and east Guizhou, the Miao of west Hunan resisted Christianity but were happy to accept medical aid. After three years of special attention, the Miao Mission in west Hunan was closed. Any further evangelism for these tribes was conducted by the broader Hunan Mission.

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## NOTES

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