Nobody walking into Manshuiwan would suspect that he was in a Nuosu village unless he listened carefully. The village is a few kilometers northeast of the Xichang satellite-launching station, and stands astride both the main north-south highway of the Anning Valley and the Chengdu-Kunming railroad, which stops at a station, also called Manshuiwan, about four kilometers downstream. In the middle of the night, when the express from Chengdu comes through, the whole village shakes; after a few nights, however, one gets used to it and barely wakes up, if at all. All but three of the village’s houses have been built in recent years, and they follow the southwestern Chinese rural variation on the classical Chinese four-sided courtyard, or siheyuan. Bright red couplets adorn the gate arches and doorways, and the front rooms of many houses are adorned with ancestral altars, prepared for the worship of heaven, earth, and country, and of the earth spirit. The little Nuosu-style altar in the corner of the front room is not at all obvious unless you look for it. The three oldest houses, built around the turn of the twentieth century, are even more classically Chinese, with wide concrete porches surrounding the central wells of the courtyards, which are paved with intricate pebble designs and open to the sky and to the full moon on clear nights (fig. 14). A few have elegant perennial and shrub gardens outside the walls, and numerous potted ornamental and medicinal plants in the courtyards. All this gives a sign of permanence that is utterly absent in the “slap it together and leave it when you’re tired of it” style of construction in most highland Nuosu villages. People in ordinary Chinese clothing, many of them quite prosperous-looking, walk on dirt paths or lounge after harvest on piles of straw at the edge of the concrete basketball court, at harvest season temporarily given over to rice drying in the sun. If one did not know about Manshuiwan ahead of time, it would be a shock, when one came near, to hear those people conversing in Nuosu ddoma.

The initial appearance of prosperity in Manshuiwan is fairly accurate. The land is good, productive rice land, and all families received shares at the time
of decollectivization in the early 1980s. Two hundred forty mu (16 ha.) of rice land for 302 people means almost a mu per person, and there is plenty of water for irrigation, so people can grow a spring wheat crop and a summer rice crop on the same land. There is slightly more dry land than wet-rice land, and people grow corn (mostly for pig-feed) on the dry land during the summer season. They also have vegetable gardens around their houses, replete with fruit trees and pumpkin vines; there are fresh vegetables all year long. Unlike highland Nuosu, people here keep their pigs penned, usually in the same room as the toilet, so that all the manure can be collected easily to put on the fields. Members of the Wang, or Jienuo lineage, have also been very successful in educational and bureaucratic mobility, so that in many families of this lineage only older people and small children are left at home, while the young adults are working in Xichang, Mianning, or other nearby cities. There is only one little store in the village; most people go to the town at Xihe, near the railway station, when they need to market. It is not far to walk or bicycle, but there are cars, trucks, and minibuses going up and down the highway at all hours, so that people walking are likely to be able to get a ride, especially in the rain. There are still some quite poor families, particularly in the Li (Aju) lineage and in one branch of the Wang who are descended from slaves, as well as among the ethnically Han
Wu lineage and other Han families who live mostly above the railroad. But even these poorer people have electricity and running water, and some of them also black-and-white television sets and bicycles. It is fair to say that the poorest families in Manshuiwan, in terms of material standard of living, rank with the very wealthiest in the plains villages of Mishi, and with the upper-middle families in Baiwu.

Manshuiwan is one of several Nuosu village islands in the overwhelmingly Han sea of the upper Anning Valley, people who call themselves plains Yi, or pingba Yizu. In material and many other cultural terms, Manshuiwan is an ordinary Chinese village—probably of lower-middle standing on a nationwide scale, but certainly not poor—whose inhabitants just happen to be two-thirds or more minorities, namely Nuosu. This fact of ethnicity, however, is vitally important psychologically for almost all the villagers we spoke to. To understand how this situation came to be, we must take a careful look at Manshuiwan’s village history.

HISTORY, ETHNICITY, DEMOGRAPHY: HOW MANSHUIWAN CAME TO BE

In the nicest old house in Manshuiwan, an eighty- or ninety-year-old classical-style structure of wooden posts and beams around a central courtyard open to the sky, with intricate carvings of birds and flowers in the windowpanes and live flowers in beds outside the gates and in planters inside, we met Wang Chenghan, a retired translator in the prefectural government at Xichang, whose most glorious moment came when he was called to interpret for Nuosu deputies to the National People’s Congress in Beijing. Here, pieced together but altered very little from my English-language notes of three long conversations with Mr. Wang, is an account of the history of his clan, the Jienuos:

The Wang or Jienuo clan is an offshoot of the Aho, which is one of the biggest nuoho clans in Greater Liangshan. Their original home was in Puxiong, where they did a lot of fishing along the rivers. Each family had a section of the river course where they could catch fish, but one day their earliest ancestor, who was eighteen years old, quarreled with a relative over the ownership of a particular stretch of river. He killed the other guy with a knife, and the penalty was for him to be exiled from the clan and be made into a quho. There is a Yi saying that if you kill someone at eighteen your mother will die when you’re twenty, and sure enough, that happened. So he took his family and animals and slaves, crossed the Anning River, and went to live at the back (west) of Lushan (Lu Mountain)
above Xichang. But he noticed that everyone living there, especially the Han, had goiters, so he moved to someplace called Magong Jia, where the relations between Yi and Han were good, and his line prospered for two generations.

Meanwhile, around Manshuiwan there had been troubles between local Yi and the military colonies (of Han settlers) that had been sent here by various emperors. There was thus very little population, and a local nuoho lord gave the Jienuo clan title to a large area (about 20 km long) from the confluence of the Xiangshui and Mianning Rivers down to the Anning, which took up what is now the better part of two townships. The assignment of this ancestor, whose name was Jienuo Mosi, was to mediate relations between the Yi and the Han, and he did. This was ten generations ago.

Mosi had two sons, named Sada and Sala. Sala was first adopted by a local Han landlord, whose surname was Wang. The landlord had only a daughter—no sons—and so Sala ended up marrying the daughter and taking the name Wang, and his descendants became Han. Because of this relation, however, the descendants of Sada, who remained Yi, have also used the surname Wang. Sala, who took the name Wang Gang, was to be given a Han-style burial, with a Han-style coffin, but when the funeral procession was headed for the burial ground, his Yi relatives stopped it and took the coffin away. He was probably buried anyway (or maybe he was cremated), but there is a tomb about 3 or 4 km from Manshuiwan, and his descendants come every year at Qingming to sweep the grave.

In the Yongzheng period (1722–36) this whole area was subjected to gaitu guiliu (abolition of tusi rule) and this meant, among other things, that the Jienuo clan gave up both the slaveholding system and the distinction between nuoho and quho. This is a reason why they haven’t intermarried in recent years with Yi from the mountains.

In the early and mid-Qing, the Yi were not allowed to take the imperial examinations, though many tried to sneak in. There is a story that in Ningyuan (Xichang), when you went into the examination sheds, there was a basin of water to wash your feet in, and they made it particularly hot. If you yelled “Acigi!” you were Yi, and found out, whereas if you yelled “Aiya!” then you were Han and could go ahead and take the examinations.

Local Yi objected to this and brought suit in a court at Chengdu, with the result that the governor ruled that Ningyuan Prefecture should henceforth have a first-examination quota of eighteen Han and five Yi. After this, at least two members of the Jienuo clan became examination graduates: Wang Wenhuan was a civil xiucai and later juren, and in the early Republic became head of education in Mianning County. This was Mr. Wang’s grandfather. His father wrote
Father was called Wenhuan, and had ambitions to study, so he received a juren degree from the Qing. Wang Wenming (younger brother of Wenhuan) became a military xiucai. Both Wenhuan and Wenming had previously studied at private schools in nearby towns, and later on at the Lufeng Academy in Xichang.

Twenty-two of the village’s current sixty-eight households belong to the Jienuo clan. The other major Nuosu lineage is the Aju, or Li, which has twenty-eight households. It is fairly universally agreed that “in the old society”—that is, before the land reform of the early 1950s—the Jienuos were dominant, and thus their history is clearer. But the Ajus seem to have come through a similar route. Mr. Li Deming, an age-mate of Wang Chenghan, told us that the Ajus originally came from someplace called Dragonhead Mountain and may have already been affines of the Jienuos before they came here. There is a story that they received the surname Li when in their early migrations they ran into a Han official who asked them, in Chinese, what their surname was. They didn’t understand, but wanted to act friendly, so one of them pulled some plums (li in Chinese) out of his shoulder bag, and Li thus became their surname.

The third lineage represented in Manshuiwan are the Wus, who are ethnically Han. According to their tradition, they came from Wujiang County in Jiangsu to Dali in Yunnan in the Qing, and then dispersed to several different areas in the Southwest, eventually settling in Manshuiwan at the end of the dynasty. They were mostly owner-farmers, but one of their ancestors smoked away almost all of their resources right before the land reform.

In 1914, early in the Republican period, there was a slave rebellion in Yuexi

1. There are a lot of similar stories, usually told by Nuosu, about how Nuosu clans got their Han surnames. For example, the Loho in many parts of Liangshan bear the Han surname Luo, taken from the first syllable of their clan name. But those in Yanyuan and Mianning are called Hu. The story is that when they were crossing the Anning River from Puxiong on their way to Yanyuan, some Han officials stopped them and inquired about their surname. Scared and not understanding, they made hu-hu sounds, and these branches were thus assigned the surname Hu. This story is improbable, since the name is pronounced Fu in the local Han speech.

Another story concerns the Bamos, whose Han surname is An, pronounced Ngan locally. One of their ancestors was apparently better acquainted with Han language than the aforementioned Loho; when the Bamos were asked their surname, he understood but had no way to answer, because he didn’t have a Han surname, so he just said “Nga . . . Nga” (I . . . I) in Nuosu, so the inquiring officials thought their surname must be Ngan.

These tales are typical of the stories Nuosu tell on themselves, about their being frozen with shame when confronted with their own lack of familiarity with Han language and culture.
and Mianning, which lasted two years (Zhou Xiyin 1987). Although the Anning Valley floor was not directly affected, the indirect effects were important, including a campaign from government authorities for the Nuosu in the valley to adopt “civilized” Han customs, under the slogan “Follow the Han example, practice Han customs, change your skirt for Han-style clothes” (Xue Han li, xi Han su, gaile qunzi chuan Han yifu).

During this time there were more private schools established in the northern Anning Valley. At least one member of the Li lineage studied at a school that was founded in nearby Xinghua by a series of nearby plains Yi—Nuosu lineages who, like the Wangs and Lis, had not only “followed Han customs and changed their skirts for Han clothes,” but also had long adopted the Han economic institutions of landlordism and thus, according to local people, had given up the distinction between nuoho and quho for a distinction between rich and poor: “Zhi you pin fu zhi fen, mei you gui jian zhi bie.” At least one of the Lis attended this school. The Wangs, on the other hand, were more prosperous at this time and had their own school in Manshuiwan, where several of their boys and a few of their girls learned the classics from Han teachers.

Slavery was not entirely gone in early twentieth-century Manshuiwan and nearby Nuosu communities, however. They may have given up the caste system, but there were at least four Jienuo families who still had household slaves. In 1918 a marriage was arranged between a bride from one of those Jienuo households and a young man from a Bamo family in Yuexi. As part of her dowry, she was given a domestic slave-girl, or yatou, a type of slave common in Han society in all parts of China (Watson 1980). In return, the Bamos sent a twelve-year-old male gaxy. As a gaxy, his clan affiliation, which was nominally Qumo, was quite weak, and at any rate he had no Han surname. So he took the surname of his new masters, Wang. People in Manshuiwan are unsure whether the little group of close agnatic relatives of the original slave-boy, which now numbers five households and twenty-three people, should be a branch of the Jienuo clan, or whether they are members of the Qumo clan who happen to carry the same Han surname as the Jienuos. At any rate, like almost none of the original Jienuos, all these households are now rather poor, and few of their members have been educated beyond elementary school.

Nearly everyone agrees that in the period immediately before the Communist takeover, the Wangs were dominant in this area. In the 1930s Wang Chenghan’s family were wealthy landlords, with their tenants coming from the Lis, from local Han families, and even from some of the nearby mountain Yi who wanted to grow wet rice. But by the time of the Revolution, their family had already

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lost its land, and the most prominent families were those of Wang Wendou and Li Wanru, who was a minor local official under the Han warlord Deng Xiuting.

Since Manshuiwan lies in the Anning Valley, where the population is overwhelmingly Han, it did not wait until 1956 for full Communist institutional takeover, nor did it undergo the relatively mild form of social transformation known as democratic reform. Instead, like most of China, it underwent land reform, in which village residents were classified as landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, or agricultural laborers, and the exploited classes were mobilized to struggle against the exploiters, eventually confiscating and redistributing their land. In Manshuiwan’s land reform, there were originally no families classified as landlords or rich peasants, but then one of Chenghan’s father’s brothers, a former Guomindang official, went to Chenghan’s family to seek refuge from his pursuers. When he was caught, this spurred an investigation, with the result that the family, having lost most of its property and been classified as “poor peasants,” was reclassified as “bankrupt landlords” (pochan dizhu). By this time, however, it was the very end of the Land Reform campaign, and the family was not struggled against.

Two men from the Wang and one from the Li lineage became involved early in local government and Party politics. After the Communist takeover of the area in March 1950, the Communists organized an “ethnic cadres” class in Xichang, presided over by the Han PLA commander Liang Wenying, with the Nuosu reformer and military official Leng Guangdian as vice-head. Men who had joined this class, and several others from the village, have held various levels of political positions in the Communist bureaucracy ever since.

The village was a single production team during the period of collective agriculture, until the land was distributed to households in 1982. Since then, private agriculture has been the main means of livelihood, though there are twenty-two members of the Jienuo clan known to us to have worked outside the village, including one secondary and five elementary teachers, the head of the prefectural construction bank, several cadres in grain and commercial bureaus, and a physician. The Ajus have had only five members work outside, but they have included a county judge, the head of a qu (district), and several teachers. The Shi (Ashy) family, originally married-in affines of the Jienuos, have had a factory manager, a doctor, and a teacher, and even the Wus, the poorest lineage, have had a commercial bureau cadre, a teacher, and two factory workers. So while the Jienuos are clearly the most successful, the village in general has produced a considerable number of cadres, teachers,
and workers—more, per capita, than even the Mgebbu of Baiwu, and certainly more than any single village in Mishi.

In 1994 there was only one industrial enterprise in Manshuiwan, a talc-grinding factory owned jointly by the village and team governments and a group of private investors, the largest of whom was the team head at that time, Wang Kaifu. The talc factory replaced a tannery on the same site in 1994; changes in the prices of hides had rendered tanning unprofitable. The factory employs fifteen workers, many of them local villagers who basically shovel rocks into a couple of crushing machines and bag up the powder that comes out at the other end. For this gritty work they will be paid piece rates, which were projected to run as high as ¥300 per month, but this level had not been reached yet in late 1994, since the larger of the two machines kept breaking down. It was not clear whether the talc operation would end up making any money.

**ETHNIC INTERACTIONS**

If the stories of its origins are true, Manshuiwan was born out of Nuosu-Han interactions, when Jienuo Mosi was called by local powers to “mediate Yi-Han relations.” Since it is clear that the Nuosu lineages—Jienuo and Aju, but particularly Jienuo—have held a locally dominant position ever since, in a certain way local Nuosu-Han interactions have always been asymmetrical, with the Nuosu on top. But for the last hundred years at least, Manshuiwan and other plains Yi villages—such as Yuehua, Xinhua, Mianshan, and Hongmo in Mianning—have been increasingly isolated islands in a Han sea. For example, in the current township of Manshuiwan, there are four administrative villages, of which Xihe is one, and the village of Manshuiwan is one team of Xihe Administrative Village. The total population of the township is six thousand, which makes the 230 Nuosu of Manshuiwan, who are the only Nuosu in the township, about 4 percent of the total township population. At Yuehua, about ten kilometers to the south, the plains Yi are scattered among four villages and number around 1,300 out of a total population of nearly 14,000, or 9 percent of the total.

In this kind of a situation, it seems logical that Nuosu would adopt many of the customs of the surrounding Han majority, and indeed this is the case. At the same time, they have unequivocally retained their sense of ethnic iden-

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2. There is another nearby place called Hongmo, in Xide County, whose inhabitants are mostly Nuosu but are not plains Yi and maintain their caste identities. I am indebted to Nuobu Huojy for this information.
tity. But this identity is not exactly the same as that of the Nuosu living in the hills. People in Manshuiwan and Yuehua emphasize that they are plains Yi, who are to be distinguished both from mountain Yi (gaoshan Yizu) and from Han. Li Deming listed several cultural distinctions between the local Nuosu and their mountain relatives:

1. Our language has slightly different pronunciation, and we have borrowed vocabulary from Han. For example, we call our mother Ma, not Amo.
2. Our women don’t wear skirts anymore, though some women still own them. This is because they’re inconvenient for fieldwork.
3. Instead of painted wooden dishes, we eat from bowls with chopsticks.

He then went on to enumerate differences from Han:

1. They speak only Han, but Yi generally speak both languages. But in this village, the Han speak both languages also.
2. The Han celebrate only the Han New Year; we celebrate both [the Han and Nuosu New Years].
3. The Han celebrate the Fire Festival for only one day; we celebrate it for three days.

In the old society, Mr. Li said, intermarriage with Han was very rare. Now it is still fairly uncommon, but there is some; there has been one intermarriage in Manshuiwan. The reason why intermarriage is so rare is that the Yi are so few that intermarriage would cause them to die out. Relations with mountain Yi have always existed, but there has been little intermarriage. When they have intermarried, mountain women usually have come down to Manshuiwan; the sanitary conditions up in the mountains are not very good.

Wang Chenghan and Wang Kaifu confirmed that intermarriage with either mountain Yi or Han was formerly rare. The reasons that plains Yi did not marry with mountain Yi were:

1. Their lifestyle was different. Plains Yi “followed the Han example and practiced Han customs,” while up in the mountains, Yi retained their original lifestyle.
2. From the time of gaitu guiliu, plains Yi have gotten rid of the slave system and with it the distinction between nuoho and quho.

The reasons why they did not intermarry with Han were also two:
1. The Han still have an arrogant, contemptuous attitude (qiaobuqi) toward the Yi in general.
2. In order to preserve the minzu, they might take in outside daughters-in-law, but would be reluctant to marry their own daughters out.

According to statistics that Bamo Ayi and I compiled, intermarriage with Han is in fact not particularly rare. Although we have more complete statistics on the provenance of Manshuiwan wives than on the marital destination of its daughters, the trend is clear in both directions from table 8.1.

Despite the rather wistful assertion by men of both the Wang and Li clans that it’s better to take in Han daughters-in-law than to marry your daughters to Han, fully one-third of the Manshuiwan Nuosu brides in the last three generations of whom we have record married Han men, while fewer than one-fifth of the men took Han brides. By contrast, the sharp line between plains and mountain Yi seems to hold in fact as well as in ideology, and I think Li Deming probably hit it on the head when he said “the sanitary conditions are not too good up there.” In today’s society, where there is at least a modicum of redress for young people pushed into arranged marriages, no young woman from a place like Manshuiwan would agree to marry into a place like Mishi. Living with running water, rice and fresh vegetables, and a paved highway to market (and, by cheap minibus, eighty minutes to Xichang) is a different world from going to the stream, eating potatoes and buckwheat and pickled turnip greens, and a two-hour walk over a slippery trail to a once-a-week market that doesn’t have much to offer anyway.

When members of the Wang and Li lineage do marry Han, however, they rarely marry with the Wus or the other Han families in Manshuiwan Village itself. This is clearly not a case of village exogamy, because there are a large number of marriages between the Wangs and the Lis. And it is not a case of hostile relations, either. There is just as much latent hostility between the Lis and Wangs, and between various families within each lineage, as there is against the local Han. In fact, there is an institution through which personal ties are regularly cemented between Nuosu and Han in this area: the practice of adopting each other’s children as “dry relatives,” what in the West would be called godchildren or godgrandchildren. Wang Chengliang explained how it works:

You have a child who is doesn’t play very happily [buhao shua], so you look for a person whose birth date is horoscopically compatible with that of the child, and decide to form a dry relationship. The natural parents have to bring the child [usually at the New Year] to the house of the dry parents, where they burn incense
to the dry parents’ ancestors. The dry parents have to bring gifts at the New Year after that—including liquor, candy, and meat. They should also make an item of clothing for the child. These obligations ordinarily go on for only three years.

There is another way to do this, which is to leave a red piece of paper on the road, on which is written, “Tian qing di lü, xiao’er yi ku. Guo lu junzi nianguo, xiao’er bu ku,” or “Green is the earth and blue are the skies; the little baby also cries. Kind Sir, passing by, if you read this off, the baby won’t cry.” Whoever comes by and picks it up assumes the obligations of dry kinship.

When this kind of recognition takes place, the adoptive parent chooses a [Han-style] name, including the adoptive parent’s own surname, and gives it to the child. After this, the adoptive parent sometimes calls the child by this name. For example, Wang Chengliang’s own son is called by his adoptive parents Wu Changshou. If you swear dry kinship with a mountain Yi, they may give the child a Nuosu-style name.

According to both Nuosu and Han villagers, dry kinship is primarily used to cement relationships between individual families across ethnic lines. Local Nuosu rarely do it with each other, they say, because there is already such a thick net of intermarriage as to make any further knitting of social bonds superfluous. We did not compile a complete list of dry relationships in Manshuiwan, but we recorded thirteen, of which two were actually between Nuosu, despite denials in the abstract that this practice exists.

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<th></th>
<th>Manshuiwan</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Mountain</th>
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<td></td>
<td>lowland Yi</td>
<td>lowland Yi</td>
<td>Han</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sons’ wives</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daughters’ husbands</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>8\textsuperscript{a}</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>23</td>
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\textsuperscript{a}The marriages in the top and bottom rows of this column are the same marriages. This is also reflected in the grand total at lower right.

\textsuperscript{b}One man, the father of our landlady, took a wife from one of the Xifan or Zang peoples who live along the western rim of the valley.
Apparently the ethnic otherness of the dry parent or grandparent is of concern to natural parents, or I would not have been asked to be one by a family in the Wang clan—a household that had a twenty-day-old baby and a mother who was complaining that her breasts hurt and the baby was crying because he did not have enough milk. Like a mountain Nuosu, I chose a name in my own language—Henry—and left money to buy a suit of clothes at the coming New Year.

**ACCLERATION TO HAN WAYS**

When I first visited the plains Yi village of Yuehua in 1993, I met a professor from the Southwest Nationalities Institute there; she was a native of the area and had come to visit on a family matter. Used to teaching language, and perhaps thus to speaking more clearly than the average person, she conversed with me mostly in Nuosu. I remember asking her a series of questions about cultural practices and remarking, “Here people don’t wear Nuosu clothing, do they?” and her answering, “There are those who wear them and those who don’t.”

I think the professor was trying to impress me with her ethnicity, however, because I didn’t see a single skirt in my brief visit there, nor did I see any even on the oldest women in my much longer stay in Manshuiwan. In fact, the early Republican injunction to “Follow Han ways, practice Han customs, and change your skirts for Han-style clothes” seems to have been successful, if indeed people in Manshuiwan in 1916 were still living like highland Nuosu, itself an unprovable proposition. Almost every material aspect of life in Manshuiwan is identical to those of surrounding Han villages, and contrasts with those of the highland Nuosu. Even ritual and spiritual life has acculturated significantly toward Han norms, though it is not so completely transformed as material existence.

Material life needs little emphasis here aside from the observations I have made earlier. The houses, old and new, are Chinese style, and the efforts of one village resident to demonstrate to me that the architecture was really characteristically Yi, because there were some diaozhu (“hanging” vertical posts that reach from the rafters to the beams but not to the ground), were drowned out by the overall plan, by the lack of hearths in the main sitting rooms, and by the ubiquitous presence of red couplets on the gates and doorways. Clothing is ordinary Chinese clothing—there is not much to say about it—and food is ordinary Chinese food, with the addition of an ethnic-marking pig or goat slaughtered and eaten in chunks at a holiday or in honor of a guest. With this latter exception, there is no material reminder of the Nuosu origins of the Wangs and Lis.
Spiritually, things are a bit more complex, but acculturation is still obvious, in the ancestral altars with incense burners; in the worship of heaven, earth, and country; in the observance of all the major Han holidays. But in other ways, characteristically Nuosu expressive forms reveal themselves, resulting in surprising mixtures. Some people are cremated, in the Nuosu style, but others are buried, and I went one morning with Bamo Ayi and her great aunt, in whose house we lived, to worship at the elaborate grave of the recently deceased great-uncle. They brought offerings of food and liquor, just as Han people would do when visiting a grave at Qingming. The grave was inscribed in the conventional way, with Han characters. And this is not a new practice; there is a grave in the village that was built in 1865 for a Jienuo ancestor, and it looks identical to a Han grave that might be found anywhere in China.

Other people, however, cremate their dead, in the Nuosu fashion, and some of them just build a little mound over the ashes, while others cremate and then build a grave, with or without an inscription. For the soul, however, a lot of people still insist on inviting a bimo (of which there are none in the area) to come and do the ritual of cobi, or conducting the soul back to the ancestral homeland. Others, however, never get around to having the ritual performed. And when people have a lingering illness or other problem, they may travel to a distant mountain village to invite a bimo to come perform a ritual.

It seems clear from these observations that culture is not a big part of ethnic identity in Manshuiwan. Nuosu people, in fact, are at pains to distinguish themselves from the Nuosu up in the mountains, where sanitary conditions are not so good, and nobody would ever think of marrying (one villager referred to mountain Nuosu as manzi, or barbarians). It is still absolutely clear in most cases who is Nuosu and who is not, and what that means, but it means common descent and history more than it means culture. The only cultural characteristic that is important to the ethnic identity of all Nuosu in the Manshuiwan area is language.

**THE PERSISTENCE OF NUOSU LANGUAGE**

Wang Chenghan tells a hilarious story about his experience as a young boy in the private Confucian school, or sishu, set up in the early twentieth century to educate the sons (and at least five daughters) of the Jienuos by the classical method.

The Jienuo boys and girls studied the classics in one of the old homes that is now standing in the village. There were several teachers over the years, all Han from nearby communities, and none of them spoke Nuosu. So when the
little children started with *The Three Character Classic*, they had to have an interpreter to know what they were reading about. This led to classic little-boy deliberate misreadings. For example, for a text that read, in Chinese, “Can tu si; feng niang mi” (Silkworms extrude silk; bees ferment honey), the Nuosu boys read, “Cha du sy; vu nza hmi” (The string beans die; the sausages are done).

This story illustrates the linguistic tangle that is Manshuiwan even more graphically than appears at first glance. The Nuosu children heard nonsense syllables in a foreign tongue and gave them meaning, in much the same way as an American might hear a Chinese person saying *mai shu* and assume she was talking about her footwear rather than buying books. But the Nuosu words they heard in their mischievous bewilderment were, at least in part, borrowed from that very same language: *cha du* is a Nuosu pronunciation of the Chinese word for string beans, *can dou*.

Nowadays, children in Manshuiwan may learn either language or both, depending on where in the village they grow up. If they live below the highway, where all but one household is Nuosu, then they may well grow up knowing some Han but not speaking it fluently. In fact, some Nuosu families in this part of the village, if they have Han aines or friends, like to make sure their children get chances to play with their friends’ or relatives’ children so that they will not be at a disadvantage when they start school, which now, as in Republican days, is entirely in Han. If they grow up in the Wu lineage cluster way above the railroad, they might speak only Han. But even if they grow up in this upper section, depending on whom they play with, they may learn serviceable Nuosu, and children who grow up near the highway or between the highway and the railroad play with Nuosu and Han indiscriminately and will probably know both languages fluently before they start school.

It has probably been several decades since there were any monolingual adult Nuosu speakers in Manshuiwan; everyone, whether they have been to school or not (and almost everyone has had some schooling), speaks the local dialect of Han, at minimum as a fluent second language, and almost always equally well as they speak Nuosu. Manshuiwan Nuosu people are thus in a situation similar to those faced by people in small ethnic enclaves all over Liangshan and southwest China: they are no longer members of a speech community of any size and are thus uniformly fluent in the surrounding language, which here, as almost everywhere else, is Han.3 In almost all of those other enclaves that I

3. As illustrated in the case of Baiwu, above, however, there are certain Prmi and Naze who are surrounded not by Han but by Nuosu, and whose second language is thus *Nuosu ddoma*. 166
have visited, once the number of speakers of the surrounded language goes below a few hundred, the language dies out in that community (see chap. 13). It is startling, therefore, to observe the resilience of Nuosu language in Manshuiwan, Yuehua, and other plains Yi villages in the Anning Valley. Very few people read and write it; everybody speaks fluent Han; most people also read and write Han— even farmers often read newspapers, notices, and technical books and magazines, and the large number of people working outside the village interact daily with an almost exclusively Hanophone world.

Yet there is no sign whatsoever that Nuosu language is declining in this village. Most overheard conversations in Nuosu families are in the Nuosu language, and it is still the first language of all children in the lower part of the village. Even some members of the Wu lineage speak it. The resiliency of the language requires some explanation, so I asked several people. The industrialist Wang Kaifu, who told me he had thought about this question a lot, had the most interesting answers:

1. The Yi came to Manshuiwan as clans and established their position early, and when the Han came later on, they came in small groups. So the Yi were always the majority in the immediate area.
2. The Yi and Han for the most part, even though they live in the same village and cooperate closely, generally live separated. The Han who live below the road or just above it generally speak Yi well, and all the children understand it, but those who live way up above the railroad don’t necessarily. So the Yi have had a concentrated geographical environment in which to speak their own language.
3. The Yi feel strongly that their language is an important part of their identity and ought to be preserved, so they make a conscious effort to do so, even though obviously everybody is also fluent in Han.

Wang’s third answer, I think, is the most interesting when viewed in comparison to similarly concentrated small communities elsewhere who have lost their former languages. It is, in fact, a conscious effort, which stems from a sense of ethnic identity. They do not identify as Nuosu because they speak the language; rather they speak the language because they identify as Nuosu. They have local traditions of common descent and common history (Keyes 1976) that shape their identity as a group, and part of those traditions is the idea that they are a group that has a language of its own. So they speak it.

Ideas of what is civilized and what is not, especially in light of the generally
negative views expressed by Manshuiwan people about mountain Nuosu, may also help us understand the persistence of language. As mentioned above, there are very few “cultural traits” that Manshuiwan people have in common with Nuosu from outside the valley, and this is one perceived reason for not marrying them. Not only are such frequently used ethnic markers as dress, food, and housing in this village completely identical to what one would find one or two settlements away in exclusively Han communities, but also the kinds of ethnic stereotypes that are so common in highland villages of whatever ethnicity—of minorities as honest, lazy, straightforward, hospitable, generous, cruel—are notably absent in Manshuiwan people’s discourse about themselves. But most villagers feel that this extreme acculturation cannot and should not lead to assimilation—because not only are Han people in general accurately perceived as looking down on all minorities, including the Yi, so that people might not be able to assimilate if they wanted to—but also they do not seem to want to assimilate. They are proud of their heritage, though they have no desire to readopt many of its habitual practices. So they need things to hang onto, and the language is an obvious one, especially since they have determined that it is no obstacle to mobility in the wider society, as some of the habitual behaviors or even stereotypical behavioral attributes might well be. So for the time being, at least, the Nuosu language, which in practical terms has very little use in the Anning Valley, continues to flourish, consciously employed as an ethnic marker and an important part of ethnic identity, in places like Yuehua and Manshuiwan.

**KIN-BASED IDENTITY**

Having completed a brief tour of three very different Nuosu communities, we can begin to look for things they all have in common. We can immediately rule out culture, in the conventional sense of common practices. Mishi and Baiwu may be culturally similar in this way, but they are not identical; in language and other areas, people in Baiwu have picked up a lot more Han “customs and habits,” as the Chinese would say. And in Manshuiwan the habitual practices of daily life often thought to distinguish one ethnic group from another serve much better to distinguish the local plains Yi from highlanders in places like Mishi and Baiwu than they do to distinguish local Nuosu from local Han. Clearly the observation that Edmund Leach originally made in the 1950s still holds true at this level: whatever holds an ethnic group together, it is not common culture (Leach 1954).

This is not to imply, however, that culture is irrelevant to understanding
Nuosu identity in any of the three areas. In Mishi, people are immediately identifiable by their practices, which are unself-consciously different from what little they know of corresponding Han forms. In Baiwu, where Han are neighbors, friends, and rivals, cultural differences are acute, and consciously manipulated, even exaggerated, in order to display ethnic group unity and contrast. In Manshuiwan, where most aspects of distinctively Nuosu culture are gone, still people consciously hang on to one cultural form—Nuosu language—because they feel they ought to preserve things that belong to them as an ethnic group.

All this suggests that culture really does play the part of an ethnic marker, even where most of it has already acculturated to majority forms. But as a marker, culture’s role in ethnic identity is secondary. The primary role, I think, must be given to ideas about kinship and about history. The Nuosu emphasis on genealogy (a feature of Nuosu thinking that probably stems originally more from the clan basis of social organization in the acephalous polity of Old Liangshan than from any concerns about preserving ethnic distinctions) is a prime example of an ideology of common descent as an important factor in ethnic consciousness. But kinship is more than descent; it is also affinity and intermarriage. And just as descent, the warp of the old political system, became a foundation of ethnic identity in situations of ethnic contact, patterns of exogamy and endogamy by clan and caste, the woof of the old system, have come to play an equally important part in ethnic identity. In places where the caste distinction still holds—much of the highland Nuosu muddi—caste endogamy and ethnic endogamy work in much the same way, to achieve in-group solidarity and out-group distinction. But even where caste no longer pertains—the Anning River plain—ethnic-group endogamy is an important aspect of ethnic solidarity. The fact that Manshuiwan people deny the prevalence of intermarriage with Han, even when it accounts for about a fourth of their unions, serves to illustrate the importance of endogamy, like descent, as an aspect of the kinship ideology that ultimately portrays all Nuosu as related, and as belonging to a “different family” from the Han.

As long as kinship—a primordial notion if there ever was one—remains the most important basis of ethnic identity for Nuosu people, Nuosu ethnic identity takes on two characteristics that distinguish it from the other forms of ethnic identity treated in parts 3 and 4 of this book. In an endogamous kin group, the boundaries are absolute; there is no room for absorption or leakage. Culture can acculturate to majority norms, or it can exaggerate the differences schismogenetically, and it makes little difference. None of the other groups described in this volume has in recent history been as endogamous as
the Nuosu; at the opposite extreme, of course, are the Han, who will intermarry with anybody and thus absorb them into their ethnic community, making cultural practices (Chinese culturalism) the primary basis of Han identity throughout history (see chap. 14). Other groups lie in between on this dimension, but in all cases their identity is somewhat contextual. For the Nuosu, descended from common ancestors and marrying only within the group, identity is absolute no matter how culture does or does not change.