

Remembering China's Christian Pioneers

Among China's ethnic minorities, the Miao, Yi and Lisu have the most Christians—making up about 30 percent to 60 percent of their population. In certain ethnic regions in Yunnan and Guizhou, the Christian population exceeds 80 percent. More than a century ago, many **missionaries** came from afar to sow the **gospel** seeds in Yunnan and Guizhou resulting in these two provinces having the largest concentration of ethnic believers. Let's look at three of these missionaries who committed their lives to serving these people groups.

Samuel Pollard: blessing the Miao: In 1887, a 23-year-old British missionary named Samuel Pollard arrived in China in response to God's call to evangelize a people group. Initially Samuel labored in the city of Zhaotong, Yunnan. Later he took on more of a risk and began to work among the Yi people of Liangshan in the Jinsha Jiang region. And in 1905, he relocated to Guizhou to begin his ministry among the Miao. In those days, the Miao lived under very harsh conditions in extreme poverty, but Samuel chose to live among them and live like them.

His devotion to them won him their trust and Samuel had a very successful ministry among them. He built churches, created the Miao written script (the Miao previously only had a spoken language) and translated the Bible into the Miao language. As a result, the gospel spread rapidly among the Miao in the surrounding regions. Other ethnic groups like the Lisu, Nu, Dulong, Yi, Jingpo, Lahu and Wa also began to receive the gospel message.

Pollard continued his ministry, which included the setting-up of more than a hundred schools, hospitals, orphanages and also China's first leprosarium. Ten years after this

accomplishment, he died at the age of 51. By then, an estimated 10,000 Miao had become believers.

James Fraser: pioneering in Yunnan: James Outram Fraser was born into a wealthy family in Britain. Because of his burden for lost souls, in 1908 at the age of 22 he came to southwestern Yunnan to serve among the Lisu people of Nu Jiang. He traversed the Yunnan-Guizhou highland, learning the Lisu language and **sharing the gospel** with them. For 14 years, his ministry bore no fruit and he had no converts among the Lisu villagers. In fact, the Lisu attempted to kill him by setting fire to his house one night.

Fraser escaped death because of an alert by a young man and he later appeared before the petrified Lisu villagers who thought they were seeing a ghost. He said: "Do not be afraid for I am not a ghost. It's just that my God is the true God and He has saved me from your plan to kill me. What you should do now is to believe in Jesus who is the savior of the world!" The villagers believed in Jesus that morning. After this, Fraser ministered in more than 30 Lisu villages and all were won to God's kingdom. This happened in 1930 and started the great spiritual transformation among the Lisu people.

For the backward and desolate Lisu people, Fraser created a written language. With that, he wrote a question-and-answer guide on Christian practices and also translated the Gospels of Mark and John into the Lisu language. He went on to write about Lisu history and produced a handbook on the Lisu language.

By 1936 Fraser completed the translation of the New Testament. Furthermore, he learned about and taught vine-growing and other agricultural skills to help the Lisu people upgrade their livelihood. To promote culture, Fraser built churches and schools to benefit thousands of Lisu children. Like Pollard, Fraser also set up hospitals and clinics. He died of sickness due to overworking at the age of 52.

Isobel Kuhn: handmaid to the Lisu: In 1923 at a small retreat in England, Isobel Selina Miller heard Fraser sharing on his Lisu ministry in China. Deeply touched, Isobel committed her life to serve the Lisu people.

In 1934, Isobel and her husband John Becker Kuhn went to China and started their work among the Lisu people, assisted later by a Mandarin-speaking local co-worker. Yunnan's living conditions then were very bad and basic necessities were lacking. But in spite of this, they were able to build a fairly spacious and durable meeting place, which they called the "House of Grace." Their ministry faced an uphill task owing to difficulties of local traveling and the animistic practices of the people. However, the Kuhns persevered in taking the gospel to the unreached places.

To help the Lisu believers in understanding the Bible, they brought along with them hand-copied New Testament Lisu Bibles. They also had a typewriter for the Lisu language. Each year from June to August, Isobel conducted their Bible school—"The Rainy Season Bible School." The intensive Bible-training classes helped train many Lisu co-workers and build strong Lisu churches.

In 1950, the Kuhns left China following changes in domestic politics. They relocated to Thailand to continue serving the Lisu there. In 1954 they returned to their home country due to sickness. By then the Lisu believers were estimated at 3,600 in number or about one-third of its population. Today, the Lisu believers in China exceed 80 percent of its population.

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