

DEVELOPING PRACTICAL ORTHOGRAPHIES
FOR THE LU MIEN (YAO), 1932-1986: A CASE STUDY¹

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I. INTRODUCTION

On the fringe of that field known as applied linguistics, there is a rather small area called "orthography." It is so small, in fact, that it has been overlooked in most descriptions of the field (e.g., Kaplan, 1980:58). Nevertheless, there *are* people working there. Many of them are linguists concerned with Bible translation (Nida, 1947, 1954; Pike, 1947; Smalley, 1963, 1976) and missionaries, but there are also a few sociolinguists (Berry, 1958; Sjoberg, 1966; Stubbs, 1980), and researchers (such as those from the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing), plus an occasional visitor or two examining writing systems in general or attempting to reform spellings.

Although orthography is not a large area, it is very much a part of applied linguistics since it attempts to solve, in Kaplan's words, "human problems stemming from various uses of language" (1980:63). The problem addressed is a society's lack of a writing system or its use of an inadequate one. The fact that a writing system should ideally be based on a thorough linguistic analysis can sometimes lead one to imagine that devising an orthography is *primarily* a linguistic problem. It is thus useful to have periodic reminders that a variety of *human* factors are the prime determinants in the acceptance or failure of practical orthographies (Berry, 1958; Sjoberg, 1966; Stubbs, 1980). In Stubbs' blunt words, "it does not matter how elegant, rigorous, or systematic your linguistic analysis is, if the native speakers do not like it, then it is a waste of time" (1980:71). Orthography, therefore, must look to several disciplines for insights, not only to linguistics but also to sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, anthropology, history, and others.

To illustrate an applied linguistics approach to orthography design and modification, this paper will first review some of the main factors involved in such an undertaking. It will then briefly look at seven orthographies designed for the Lu Mien over the past 54 years and discuss some of the reasons why, until recently, none of them had received broad enough support to be fully accepted as the "official" Lu Mien script.

II. CONSIDERATIONS IN PRODUCING OR MODIFYING PRACTICAL ORTHOGRAPHIES

The following list of factors to be taken into consideration during orthography design draws heavily on Berry (1958), Smalley (1976), and Stubbs (1980). This list is not complete by any means, and the factors noted will not be further elaborated. The ordering of factors in the list is not significant for the purposes of this paper, since all have an important role to play. Nevertheless, those called "sociolinguistic" and "cultural" will receive greater emphasis in the case study which follows.

¹ This is a revised and updated version of a paper read at the 18th Conference on Sino-Tibetan Languages and Linguistics, Bangkok, Thailand. I would like to thank Christopher Court and David Solnit for their comments on it.

1. Is the phonological representation optimal with respect to economy, consistency, and unambiguous differentiation?
2. Is the phonological analysis supplemented by grammatical information on morpheme structure, grammatically conditioned tone change, etc.?

B. SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS

1. Is the orthography maximally adaptive with respect to internal social and regional dialects?
2. Does the orthography accurately reflect the attitude of the people toward
 - a. their own language in its oral and written forms?
 - b. other writing systems for their language already in use?
 - c. the trade and/or national language (i.e., how similar to or different from these languages do they want their script to be)?

C. CULTURAL FACTORS

1. What is the attitude of the leaders toward the orthography?
2. Are the people motivated to read it?
3. Are there tensions in the culture which are being reduced or aggravated by the orthography?

D. PSYCHOLINGUISTIC FACTORS

1. Do the symbols fit the way that people feel about their language and the way it should be represented?
2. Does the orthography respect the psychological processes involved in reading and writing?

E. PEDAGOGICAL FACTORS

1. Are the symbols patterned in a culturally appropriate way?
2. How easy is it for adults to learn to read?

F. PRACTICAL FACTORS

1. Are all the special symbols or diacritics used really necessary?
2. Can the orthography be easily printed locally?

III. THE IU MIEN

The Iu Mien (also known simply as Mien) are one of the major branches of the peoples known as "Yao." They are found primarily in the upland areas of southern China and northern Southeast Asia. The total Iu Mien population is estimated to be 350,000 or more (Cushman, 1975). Beginning in the late 1970s, Iu Mien refugees began to arrive in Western countries (Canada, France, and especially the United States) where they now number approximately 12,000.²

The ancestral homeland of the Iu Mien is thought to have been either near Nanjing in Jiangsu (Lemoine, 1982) or further south around Dongting Lake in Hunan, largely on the basis of their legend about crossing the sea. Contacts with Chinese have had considerable effect on their language and culture (Cushman, 1975; Lemoine, 1982). For example, the Iu Mien have, in addition to their vernacular, a literary language and a ritual language, both of which were

² There are some 10,000 Mien in the United States, over 50% of whom live in California.

borrowed as separate systems written in characters, from two types of Cantonese but are now fully integrated into their complex language system (Purnell, 1975, 1986). Characters, on the other hand, were not used to write the vernacular which was left unwritten. A list of Iu Mien phonemes is given in Figure 1 found on page 138.

IV. THE THAI SYSTEM OF WRITING

Because three of the orthographies to be discussed below have used the Thai script, some general and highly simplified remarks on the major features of that script are necessary. Figure 2 lists the Thai phonemes in Roman script for typographical convenience. Note that in Thai (a) there are three classes of consonant symbols, two of which (High and Low) are used to symbolize the same set of phonemes; (b) tone marks are linked to consonant symbols, not to vowels as in many other systems; and (c) vowel symbols may occur in various satellite positions around the initial consonant(s).

V. EIGHT IU MIEN ORTHOGRAPHIES

A. ORTHOGRAPHY 1: THAI SCRIPT (1932)

To my knowledge, the first practical orthography for the vernacular language of the Iu Mien of Thailand/Laos³ was devised by a missionary couple, Mr. and Mrs. Trung, some time prior to 1932.⁴ In February of that year, the Gospel of Mark using this orthography was printed by the American Bible Society (Trung, 1932). This slim volume is the only extant specimen of the orthography.⁵ A one-page key to some of the nonstandard symbols used is found at the end of the book.

Much of the Trungs' orthography is a radical departure from the standard Thai writing system in a number of respects, affecting not only individual symbols but also general constitutive principles. For example, High Class consonants were eliminated, and the tone marks used with the Mid Class were used with fixed values for all consonants, though not always with the standard values; vowel symbols normally written to the left of initial consonants were put to the right of them, etc.

Orthography 1 is difficult to read even for someone who reads both Thai and Iu Mien, not only because of its odd choice of symbolization and the way it altered several fundamental rules of the system, but also because it failed to meet the criteria for a successful script: its linguistic base was inadequate, it had very little transfer value to the national language, it was not aesthetically pleasing, and it must have been very difficult for a typesetter to produce.

³ An earlier, Vietnamese-based orthography used to transcribe Yao is found in Savina's dictionary of the Kim Mun language (Savina, 1926) which is related to Iu Mien. In his introduction to the dictionary proper, Savina included an extensive wordlist comparing the two languages (pp. 14-25). Whether this orthography was ever used by Catholic missionaries in Vietnam to produce materials for the Kim Mun or Iu Mien is not known. In any case, Savina's work has had no effect on the development of Iu Mien practical orthographies and thus will not be considered further here.

⁴ Smalley (1976:8) gives the name as C. K. Trang. I follow the insert to the Gospel of Mark (Trung, 1932) which reads, in part, as follows: Friends of the Bible Society, We take pleasure in presenting you with this copy of the Gospel of Mark in Yao, just off the press. This is the first tangible result of a decade of prayer and labor on the part of the Agency Secretary and of nearly two years of agonizing residence among the Miao of Mr. and Mrs. Trung.

⁵ It also appears to be the first portion of the Bible translated into Mien.

ORTHOGRAPHIES 2 AND 3

The following two orthographies were developed by missionaries in northern Thailand at about the same time, one by the Overseas Missionary Fellowship using Romanized script, the other by the American Churches of Christ using Thai script. They were both based on essentially the same phonological analysis and are linguistically adequate.

To date, much of the literature produced in vernacular Iu Mien has been for the relatively small Christian population (numbering probably not much more than 5% of the roughly 35,000 Iu Mien in Thailand and, as refugees, in Western countries). Much of it has been printed in both orthographies to reduce the divisive effect which the presence of two scripts has had on the Christian community. The reasons why two orthographies were developed in the first place will be discussed next.

B. ORTHOGRAPHY 2: ROMANIZED SCRIPT (1954-PRESENT)

The Overseas Missionary Fellowship (OMF) and the American Churches of Christ (ACC) both began their work among the Iu Mien in Chiangrai province early in the 1950s, the OMF in the western part around Maechan and the ACC in the eastern section near Chiangkham (now part of Phayao province). Those in the OMF area were recent immigrants from Laos and, given the loose control exercised in the mountainous border regions by the Thai government at that time, they owed little allegiance to Thailand. Before long, the influential headman of the village of Maesalong and many of the villagers became Christians. The OMF missionaries began to learn the language and analyze it in preparation for developing a practical orthography.

C. ORTHOGRAPHY 3: THAI SCRIPT (1956-PRESENT)

As was mentioned above, the American Churches of Christ opened their work among the Iu Mien in what was then eastern Chiangrai. The ACC started off using the OMF Romanized script but soon switched to a Thai script when it became apparent that the Iu Mien themselves preferred it. Unlike those in western Chiangrai, the Iu Mien in the east had lived in Thailand for about a hundred years and, by the 1950s, saw their future as being there. Thus, to them, a Romanized script was not in their best interests. Instead, they preferred a transfer value Thai script. Accordingly, in 1956, the ACC missionaries began to develop a Thai orthography, staying as close to the standard Thai rules and symbol patterns as possible.

Orthography 3 is certainly more complex than Orthography 2, both because it is based on a more complex writing system and also because it aims for a high transfer product.

There is no question that the presence of two scripts for the Iu Mien in Thailand has been a source of tension within the Christian community. At least two factors contributed to this. First, a Christian community emerged sooner and grew much more rapidly in the OMF area than in the ACC area. This put pressure on the OMF workers to develop an orthography for Bible translation, etc. while they were still learning the language. Within a few years the amount of literature produced was sufficient to legitimize the script. A second factor was that although the script was never restricted along religious lines, only Christians were motivated to read it since Mien traditional ritual manuals are written with Chinese characters and used by specialists literate in that writing system. These factors, together with the western Chiangrai group's lack of

identification with Thailand, led to Orthography 2 being called the "Christian" script. The gradual emergence of a Christian community in the east who had a completely different preference for an orthography because of its different orientation to Thailand was therefore viewed by the western group as a challenge to group unity in general and to their leadership in particular.

From 1960 on, the Iu Mien in both areas began to have increasing contact with the Thai language and culture. Many villages moved out of the mountains and settled in the foothills or on the plains for various political and economic reasons. Most of the Christians in the western area joined this exodus from the hills, and their children began to attend Thai schools. Nevertheless, their opposition to using the Thai script for writing their language did not diminish. Even a move far south to a new homestead area in central Thailand by many of them in 1978 has done little to change their attitude.

In the late 1970s, however, time began to run out for the Romanized script. The Christian community in the eastern area was growing, Orthography 3 was being promoted among refugees in the camps located there, and the government saw the value of using the Thai script for writing minority languages as a bridge to literacy in standard Thai as well as a means to promote greater national unity among disparate ethnic groups.

By 1980, the Thai government had decided to forbid the printing of materials in the Romanized script among most minorities, including the Iu Mien. This obviously tipped the balance firmly in the direction of Orthography 3. A combination of more materials available in the Thai script and an aggressive literacy program has produced a number of new literates in the OMF area, primarily children and young people who have had contact with the Thai letters in school. A few adults are also becoming literate, but most of the church leaders firmly refuse either to give up the Romanized script or even to attempt to become literate in the Thai script. Nevertheless, it appears to be only a matter of time until the Romanized script ceases to be used entirely.

The Iu Mien at first wanted to use Chinese characters for their vernacular since China was their ancestral homeland and their ritual and literary languages were already written in characters. This was neither practical nor politically feasible, however. They therefore opted to have their language written in a Romanized script. The Thai script was unacceptable for two reasons. First, it was too highly localized; second, it carried few positive cultural attachments for the recent arrivals who had no citizenship and limited civil rights.

Once the decision was made to develop a Romanized orthography, the OMF missionaries attempted to produce one that was uncomplicated, without diacritics or special symbols, and restricted to a normal English typewriter keyboard so that the Iu Mien could eventually produce their own literature. They thus used letters at the end of syllables to represent tones, employed upper-case letters with different values from their lower-case counterparts in order to avoid consonant di- or trigraphs, and used three consonant symbols to write the vowels /æ/, /ə/, and /a/ (see Figure 3).

Although there were a few indeterminacies, as well as some odd features such as the use of capital letters, the orthography worked well and was reasonably easy to learn. In fact, the apparent strangeness of the script when compared to English was not a factor in its development. After all, in the 1950s the Iu Mien were a rather remote highland ethnic group that had no foreseeable use for English. Hence, transfer value to English was not even considered.

At present, Orthography 2 is in rather limited use. Some of the older Christians, both in Thailand and among the refugees, continue to read in it, but

even some of these are beginning to learn another script (see discussions of other orthographies below).

D. ORTHOGRAPHY 4: THAI SCRIPT (1981)

The impending demise of the Romanized script has not automatically meant that the ACC transfer value Thai script has become firmly established. In actual fact, its ultimate future is still somewhat uncertain at this point because of a simplified Thai script developed as an alternative to it.

Since 1980, simplified Thai scripts have been developed and implemented by some missionaries for several minority languages in the north. Although the script prepared for Iu Mien has not yet been implemented, it will be described here because of its potential use.

The rationale given for developing simplified Thai scripts focuses on the actual and potential readers in the OMF area and stresses several points:

- a. The standard Thai orthography is very complex.
- b. Adult rural literacy programs, even for ethnic Thais, have not been particularly successful.
- c. Although Iu Mien children and young people will be able to learn Thai in school, church leaders, particularly those 30 and older, will find it difficult to learn a standard Thai orthography because of lack of time, ability, or motivation.
- d. Nevertheless, since these leaders will no longer have access to Romanized materials, they must learn some type of Thai orthography.
- e. Therefore, the most useful type of Thai script for church leaders and the adult Christian community is a simplified script.

Simplification has focused on the consonants and tones. Most of the High Class consonants have been dropped since they duplicate sounds in the Low Class, and the five tone marks previously used only with Mid Class consonants have been given fixed values for all consonants.⁶

There are two reasons why this simplified script has not yet been implemented among the Iu Mien. First, the transfer value script has been in existence for some 25 years and has been learned by perhaps as many as 200 people. Furthermore, it is known to Thai officials in several areas of the government. A second reason is that some in the missionary community objected that a simplified script would not be in the best interests of the Iu Mien over the long run. They favor the transfer value script and stress the deep nationalistic feeling Thais have toward their distinctive script in its standard form. They also question whether the low success rate in Thai adult literacy programs might actually be due more to ineffective teaching methods or a failure to sufficiently motivate students than to excessive complexity in the writing system itself.

The simplified Thai script has been shelved for the time being. The proponents of the transfer value script have been given a few years by their colleagues to show whether or not better teaching methods can, in fact, enable adults as well as young people to become literate. It is thus not at all certain that the regular Thai script orthography will, in the end, be adopted for use in

⁶ Interestingly, these were some of the changes made 50 years previously by the Trungs, whose work these later developers were unaware of.

all the Iu Mien areas.

E. ORTHOGRAPHY 5: ROMANIZED SCRIPT (1982-1984)

In June 1982, the Iu Mien Association of Oregon sponsored a conference to discuss matters relating to their written language as it affected their cultural preservation and adaptation. Several factors led up to the conference. First, the leaders of the refugee communities on the West Coast of the United States realized that their cultural identity was in danger. They were not particularly numerous, were not (at that time) recognized as a separate ethnic group, and unlike the Vietnamese, Cambodians, and even the Hmong (Meo, Miao), lacked the unifying force of a written language.

A second factor was a 1981 writer's conference for Iu Mien held in California for the purpose of producing a periodic newsletter that would enable refugees in Canada, France, and the United States to keep in touch with each other. It soon became apparent to the participants that they did not have an acceptable common orthography to use.

Third, there was a growing dissatisfaction with the suitability of their previous literacy experiences for their present situation. The Thai script which some of them had learned in the refugee camps was no longer relevant to their needs in America. The old Romanized script, on the other hand, looked very odd next to English and certainly had very little transfer value to their new language. Furthermore, it was still viewed as the "Christian" script and was thus unacceptable in principle to many non-Christians.

The Portland conference was attended by some 30 representatives from Oregon, Washington, and California along with three Iu Mien-speaking missionaries as non-participants. The Association asked me to present a variety of orthographic options for their consideration. They wanted, among other things, a Romanized script which would be acceptable to all the Iu Mien whatever their religious preference and which would have optimal transfer value for learning to read English.

F. PARENTHESIS-ORTHOGRAPHY 6: CHINESE PHONETIC SCRIPT (1982)

Toward the beginning of the Portland conference there was a serious attempt to move in a completely different direction. Mr. Yao Heng Saeteurn, a representative from Seattle, had spent a considerable amount of time and effort developing an orthography based on the old Chinese phonetic alphabet. Yao Heng's script was attractive to many at the conference for several reasons. First, it was devised by an Iu Mien. Second, it was so different from any of the previous scripts that they thought it might provide a new beginning for all factions. And third, it provided a visible link with things Chinese. Furthermore, Yao Heng's script appeared to be linguistically adequate. Nevertheless, after considering the practical and pedagogical implications of such a script for the refugee communities, the representatives voted to proceed with a Romanized script.

G. DISCUSSION OF ORTHOGRAPHY 5 RESUMED

The script that the conference finally adopted eliminated the use of upper-case letters to indicate separate phonemes,⁷ used appropriate symbols for vowels instead of the three consonant symbols which had been used for that

⁷ This bears out Smalley's prophetic criticism of such scripts: "I believe . . . that attempts to use capital letters as having distinct values from their lower-case counterparts will often be abortive, and will be rejected in time by members of the group who gain wider education." (1963:15).

purpose, and included symbols to write Lao and Thai words (see Figure 4). Soon after the conference nearly 80 people began attending literacy classes in several cities on the West coast. The script received the blessing of two influential Lu Mien in Thailand, one the most well-known Christian, the other the titular political leader of the refugees from Laos. And yet its future was clouded because of personal misunderstandings.

One of the Mien invited to the Portland conference but who did not attend was Mr. A⁸, a prominent refugee leader in California whose father and grandfather had been powerful leaders in Laos. During 1979-80, one of his relatives had, in Mr. A's stead, worked as a language informant for a linguistics class at a nearby university, and the next spring another relative was similarly engaged. One of the Americans who had worked on Mien with these two relatives of Mr. A then went to China for field research on Yao. Although only a phonemic transcription had been used during the informant sessions, this linguistic activity, together with the later China research by one of the linguists involved, led to suspicion about Mr. A's non-involvement with the 1982 orthography.

Suspicion of Mr. A increased when, not long after the Portland conference, he approached another linguist at the same university and asked him to evaluate the newly-adopted script to see whether it did, in fact, have sufficient transfer value with English. He also expressed his concern that the new script was perhaps another Christian script and that those who followed Mien traditional religion might come under some pressure to become Christians if they used it.

Mr. A's absence at the 1982 Portland conference, together with these two matters, was taken personally by several of the representatives, especially one of the conference organizers, Mr. L. The two men had known each other well in Laos and had worked together on refugee matters, but some disagreements had arisen between them. Not long after the conference, when word came from China that work on a Romanized script was underway, Mr. L and several of the delegates were quite upset. First, they assumed that Mr. A did not attend the conference because he had produced a rival script through his contacts with linguists at the university. They were offended that Mr. A had apparently gotten this script to China, the ancestral homeland, and that it was this script that the scholars there had referred to. It appeared to them that in doing this Mr. A was trying to assert his personal superiority. Why, they asked, should the activity of one person working with a couple of linguists be able to overturn the group decisions of some 30 Mien representatives working openly? Second, some felt that he had tried to reopen the divisive issue of religion and *Orthography 5* with that brush, whereas his own would be neutral. In actual fact, however, there was no such rival script.

Despite the tension and uncertainty over *Orthography 5* engendered by these misunderstandings, primers were retranscribed into the new script, and literacy classes got underway in several areas in France and the United States. Furthermore, it was adopted for use in the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp in

⁸ Names have been altered to protect the individuals concerned. No criticism of any of the persons involved is intended. This account is recorded simply for what it contributes to the point of the paper, namely that a non-linguistic factor such as interpersonal relationships can have a profound effect on the development of an orthography.

Thailand by the Consortium (The Experiment in International Living, World Education, and Save the Children). By late 1983, Mr. L and Mr. A had resolved their differences over the orthography and planned to discuss the issue at the Lu Mien New Year's celebration to be held in Portland in January 1984. Early in 1984, however, a new development took place which totally overshadowed previous discussions of orthographies and led to yet one more script.

H. ORTHOGRAPHY 7: ROMANIZED SCRIPT (1984)

Not long after the 1982 orthography conference, three of the Portland leaders sent a letter to China via an American tourist, hoping that it would somehow find its way to Lu Mien people there. In a remarkable way, the letter was taken to the Central Institute for Nationalities in Beijing, and ended up in the hands of the wife of one of the Yao professors there. The letter contained greetings, photographs of Lu Mien in the United States, and a copy of the new 1982 script.

One of the results of this letter and the correspondence that followed⁹, was that a mutual desire for a unified Lu Mien script emerged. Another was that the Chinese side adopted parts of Orthography 5 for use in their literacy classes.

In early 1984, the Portland Lu Mien received an invitation from the China professors involved with the Yao languages (Lakkja, Punu, and Mien) to visit them in order to establish personal contacts, meet Lu Mien and other Yao, and discuss orthography matters. Accordingly, an official delegation comprised of four Mien and me as their linguistic advisor visited China from April 24 to May 11. On May 8, an orthography conference was held in Ruyuan County, Guangdong, to discuss whether a unified script could be developed. In the end, the China side agreed to use most of the U.S. 1982 script except for the initial stops and affricates. They insisted that these 15 consonants follow the Chinese romanized system (*pinyin*) adapted for minority languages. The U.S. side accepted these changes even though the *pinyin* letters have much less transfer value to English. By the end of the day, agreement had been reached on nearly all of the existing differences (see Figure 5).

Upon returning to the United States, the delegation called for a second conference on Lu Mien orthography to discuss the results of the Ruyuan meeting. The conference was held in Portland on July 21 and was attended by some 85 representatives. After careful deliberation, they voted 78 to 7 to ratify the Ruyuan agreement and accept the unified script. Predictably, the area of greatest dissatisfaction was the set of initial stops. For a comparison of the three Romanized orthographies (2, 5, and 7), see Figure 6.

Since the second conference, the literacy primers have been retranscribed once again for use in classes held in a number of places, including the Phanat Nikhom refugee camp in Thailand. In China, literacy classes are being held in several areas, with special emphasis on the training of literacy teachers. Additional materials (e.g., dictionary, folktales, traditional songs, newsletter) in the new script are either being planned or are already in progress.

Nevertheless, some dissatisfaction remains among Lu Mien in the West. The initial stops have been accepted only grudgingly by some. Others are upset

⁹ One letter from China contained a three-page song text in a romanized script which the Portland group took to be a sample of Mr A's. However, it appears to be in a script similar to one developed by Chinese scholars for the Miao (Hmong) some 30 years ago (cf. Ma, 1957).

in general by the numerous changes of orthographies in recent years, particularly by the shift away from the 1982 script. Moreover, one very prominent Mien leader in Thailand was extremely disturbed over the 1984 script, assuming that it was the work of a Westerner, despite having been informed that it had been adopted by Iu Mien in both China and America only after considerable discussion. On the other hand, most are excited by contacts made with their people in the ancestral homeland and see the common orthography as having opened up possibilities for international communication and provided a somewhat more prestigious means whereby their language can be written and their ethnic identity preserved.

Since mid-1984, contacts between Iu Mien in the West and those in China have continued, both through personal visits and, significantly, through correspondence in the unified script. For example, in July 1985, I began to teach an adult literacy class for Mien in Long Beach, California. A few months later, I wrote in Mien to Mr. Pan Cheng Qian, a Mien scholar in Beijing who trains Yao teachers and who was the major spokesman for the China side when the 1984 script was negotiated, telling him what I was doing. Mr. Pan then wrote to my class who, with great excitement, composed their own letters to send to him. In the second round of letters, three of Mr. Pan's students added their letters to his. The letters from China have been copied and circulated among Mien in America, and the American letters, in turn, have been shared with classes in several provinces of China.

One outcome of the correspondence has been that both sides have seen that the script is not yet completely unified. Although the major points had been settled at Ruyuan in 1984, a number of differences have become apparent as a result of each side seeing how the other side actually uses the script. These differences include how tone change is indicated, contractions, punctuation, a variety of specific spellings, and the like. Some Iu Mien are now considering whether a third conference on orthography, attended by representatives from China, might be necessary. Despite these relatively minor differences, however, Orthography 7 is alive and quite well on both sides of the Pacific. The problem now is not how to devise a writing system; it is how to package literacy instruction so that it will be attractive to more people. In the West, motivation to read the unified script is still a problem outside of the Christian groups. It is also a problem for those over age forty, particularly those who are not already literate in Lao, Thai, or English. Literacy programs will need to deal with these and related issues, but the orthography itself appears to be settled.

VI. CONCLUSION

Berry (1958) sounds an appropriate note on which to conclude this paper. He observes that

an alphabet is successful in so far and only in so far as it is scientifically and socially acceptable. The two interests often conflict and it would be a fallacy to assume, as it sometimes is done, that the choice of an orthography can be determined solely on grounds that are linguistically or pedagogically desirable. (p. 737)

The search for an adequate, appropriate, and acceptable practical orthography for the Iu Mien may be nearing an end. In Thailand (except within the refugee camps) the Thai script has won out, but whether the final product will be the present transfer value script or a simplified script (or both!) remains to

be seen. For refugees in Thailand and the West and the Iu Mien in China, the script will be Orthography 7 -- unless the sporadic complaints against it in the West become more widespread and gain a new hearing for a return to Orthography 5.¹⁰

The road to these apparently final solutions has been a rough one indeed. Linguistic factors have not been the major problem, however. All six scripts devised since 1954 have been linguistically sound. Furthermore, at least five of them are pedagogically adequate and feasible in terms of practical factors. Instead, it has been sociolinguistic, cultural, and other factors--including migration and settlement patterns, religion, political developments, and inter-personal relationships--that have militated for so long against any one script becoming *the* Iu Mien orthography.

Figure 1: Mien Phonemes
(adapted from Purnell, 1965)

Consonants:	p	t	ts	c	k	ʔ
	ph	th	tsh	ch	kh	
	b	d	dz	j	g	
	f		s			h
	m	n		ɲ	ŋ	
	mh	nh		ɲh		ŋh
		l				
		lh				
	w			y		
	wh			yh		
Clusters:		Cw-,	Cy-			
Vowels:	i			u		
	e			o		
	æ	a	aa	ɔ		
Diphthongs:	ei, ai, aai, ui, oi, ɔi					
	iu, eu, au, aau, ou					
	ia, ua					
Tones:	1. mid	3. high		5. rise		
	2. fall	4. rise-fall		6. low		

(plus grammatically conditioned tone change)

¹⁰ This paper has not dealt with the literacy needs of the Iu Mien in Laos and Vietnam. However, given the present state of international relations in Southeast Asia, one might surmise that a non-romanized script based on Lao for the former and a romanized one based on Vietnamese for the latter would be preferred by the respective governments.

Figure 2. Thai Phonemes

I. CONSONANTS						II. TONES
MID CLASS (1 set of symbols)	p b	t d	c	k	ʔ	4 tone marks plus ๐
HIGH CLASS and	ph	th	ch	kh		2 tone marks plus ๐
LOW CLASS (2 sets of symbols)	f m	s n			h	
		1 r				
	w		y			

III. Vowels are written in 4 positions relative to the initial consonant(s), using either unit symbols as in A, or a combination of symbols as in B. Only long vowels and some diphthongs are shown for purposes of illustration.

A. Unit symbols :

(2)
ii
(1) ee/oo/ay [Consonant] (3) aa/๐๐
(4)
uu

B. Combination symbols :

1 + 3: əə, aw
2 + 3: ๐๐, ua
1 + 2 + 3: ia, ๐a

Figure 3: Orthography 2

Consonants : p t z J k ʔ
P T Z Q K
B D R F G
f s h
m n E v
M N H V
w l Y
W L Y

Clusters : Cw-, Cu-, Cy-, Ci- (depending on the next vowel)*

Vowels : i u
e r o
c a æ x

Diphthongs : ei, ai, aai, ui, oi, xi
iu, eu, au, aau, ru
ia, ua

Tones : 1. (unmarked) 3. -q 5. -j
2. -b 4. -d 6. -g

* A later revision of the script regularized the clusters to Cw- and Cy-.

Figure 4: Orthography 5

Consonants : p t ts jh k -q
 ph th tsh ch kh
 b d dz j g
 f s h
 m n ny ng
 hm hn hny hng
 w l r* y
 hw hl hy

Clusters : Cw-, Cy-

Vowels : i uea* u
 e ue* o
 ae a aa aw

Diphthongs : ei, ai, aai, ui, oei#, oi+
 iu, eu, au, aau, ou
 ie, ia, ua

Tones : 1. (unmarked) 3. -v 5. -x
 2. -h 4. -z 6. -c

Figure 5: Orthography 7

Consonants : b d z j g -q
 p t c q k
 mb nd nz nj nq
 f s h
 m n ny ng
 hm hn hny hng
 w l r* y
 hu hl hi

Clusters : None (treated as Cu-, Ci)

Vowels : i uea* u
 e er* o
 ae a aa or

Diphthongs : ei, ai, aai, ui, oei#, oi+
 iu, eu, au, aau, ou
 ie, uo

Tones : 1. (unmarked) 3. -v 5. -x
 2. -h 4. -z 6. -c

* Indicates letters which are used only to write non-Mien words (e.g., from Lao, Thai, Chinese): *r* = /r/, *uea* = /ʉa/, *ue* and *er* = /ɔ/.

+ Used to write the diphthong /ɔi/ which, following the regular pattern, would have had the awkward sequence *awi* in Orthography 5 and *ori* in Orthography 8.

Used to write the rare diphthong /oi/ so that the letters *oi* could be used for the much more common /ɔi/.

Figure 6: Comparison of Orthographies 2, 5, and 7

Orthography 2 : mavg tu'q siag nxm zxv siag nxm hxvd c'q, Rwrnj taaih, zyrug kxvq Buaj ninh sia'q Bua, Fav Nxi mivb za'q lyavj xij zu'g yetg Nxi za'q Tauj Revg.

Orthography 5 : Mange tuqv siac norm tsornq siac norm hornqz aeqv, dzuanx taaih, tsyouc kornqv buax ninh siaqv bua, jang hnoi mingh tsaqv lyangx. Oix tsuqv yietc hnoi tsaqv thaux dzengc.

Orthography 7 : Mange duqv siec norm zornq siec norm hornqz aeqv, nzuonx daaih, ziouc gornqv mbuox ninh sieqv mbuo, njang hnoi mingh zaqv liangx. Oix zuqv yietc hnoi zaqv taux nzengc.

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