

M109
How Ya-ya shot the suns and moons.

Sung by a grandmother from Hmao-zu-mu.

Notes

This song is recorded in Document C (no. 11, page 13) and in Document N (no. 3, page 348).

Line 4. Document C omits the first word, T'."

Line 9. In Document N the latter half of this line reads,

dub lik gyuk xangt dix zeux xangx dix nges.
smiths stretched hand able stretched hand skilful.

There would appear to have been some confusion with line 6, and in any case the tone of "xangx" is incorrect, it should be "xangt". The confusion upsets the exact symmetry of the stanza, lines 5 to 10, which is preserved in Document C.

Lines 11 to 14. In these lines there seems to be an element of ellipsis. Unless one otherwise knew that the golden suns and moons were inlaid on the knives that the cosmic smiths carried, it would be hard to deduce the fact from the text itself. However, given that prior knowledge, the Miao is perfectly straight forward. Doubtless when the songs used to be sung around the fire at night, the hearers, being already familiar with the stories, experienced little difficulty, but now that other singing has supervened, and the old songs are no longer generally known, elliptic passages cause real difficulty. In Document C, Wang Ming-ji inserted a note in Chinese explaining that the suns and moons were gold inlay work on the knives. The compiler of Document N, or some scribe who transmitted the text to him, clearly did not know, for in that document the two couplets are reduced to three lines, and the meaning completely changed.

keuk niex nciel liel traik duf dlad,
took silver shining girded waist,

keuk ghad gub lol hxak hnut,
took gold come fashion sun,

keuk niex nciel liel lol hxak hlik.
took silver shining come fashion moon.

The "shining knives" have become "shining silver", stored in the Miao girdle, a long tube of cloth which often served as a bag for carrying various important articles and in particular food for a journey. From their girdle bags the smiths produced silver and gold, fashioned it into suns and moons, which, presumably, they let loose into the sky.

Line 17. Document N has a variant reading in this line,

Jit Yas yal ndaot mangx ndaot tud lib ndaot
shone Ya-ya trees soft-wood trees pine the trees

khad leuf dangl.
dry gone finished.

Either reading is acceptable. Document C has been chosen as it pre-dates Document N by forty years.

Line 18. Document N has the incorrect tone letter "x" for the word "ndaot" meaning "tree", and an incorrect tone letter "n" for the word "nzab", meaning "green".

Line 20. Document N reads "sieb" instead of "sib" for "returned".

Line 24. In Document C the word ^o between 'C^u and Lⁿ is missing.

Line 30. A note in Chinese over the text in Document C explains that "for practically sixteen years" means "for nearly a year". The same expression is found elsewhere in the songs, and is similarly interpreted. Nowhere, however, is it explained why the code, "Sixteen years", is used rather than "One year" in plain speech. Document N omits "sixteen years" and substitutes,

nis gaox zyussz,
connector whole,

so that the line reads, "for practically the whole". Allowing for the fact that the final "z" is a printing error and must be deleted, this does not make particularly good sense. There is, however, a note in Miao which reads, "Gone for nearly a year".

Line 35. The expression,

C^{nc} T^u Jⁿ L_s,
Mother son complete,

is a metaphor not to be taken literally. It means, "all", "the whole", "completely", "entirely", like the English phrases, "root and branch" or "lock, stock and barrel". In Document N the first word is incorrectly written, "jiex".

Line 37. The tone letter "t" is missing from the word "jiangt" in Document N.

Lines 39 and 40. In Document C the name CT_u Λ_u is substituted for Λ_u Λ_u in these two lines. This is not repeated in Document N, and would appear to be merely a scribal mistake. The suns are missing in line 39 in Document N, again the mistake of a scribe.

Line 41. In Document N, in the expression "lib njieb", the letter "n" has become detached from "njieb" and added to the end of "lib".

Line 42. The word CT^u is mistakenly written CTⁿ in Document C.

Line 44. Document N has misread the word "jiox", meaning "carry", as the link word "jil". This is corrected in line 46 where the word is used again.

Lines 44 and 46. Document C has † instead of T["] meaning "torch".

Lines 47, 53 and 59. In lines 47 and 59 Document C reads,

J^r CT_r T["] J^r CT_r T_v
discussed thought over

This is paralleled by,

J^r CT_r T_u J^r CT_r T_v
discussed considered

in line 53. Document N loses the parallelism by reading:-

shis nzis daot shis nzis dul
discussed considered

in all three lines, and in line 47 "dul" is given the wrong tone letter "k".

Line 55. This line is missing in Document N.

Line 63. The word CT_u, "youth" is missing in Document C.

Lines 70 and 71. In Document N these lines are replaced by lines 47, 49 and 50 drawn from the second version of the Ya-ya song, (M110). This second version is included in Document C, but, except for these odd lines, is not reproduced in Document N.

Line 72. In Document C it says that the sun presented a comb to the cockerel. In Document N it was given by the people.

Lines 73 and 74. In Document N these lines read,

mab bib lub dad cib ras jiox lol traot,
take a painted comb bring come for,

traot ghaib faot ghak.
for cockerel head dress.

This appears to be a conflation of the lines from this version and the corresponding lines of the second version of the Ya-ya song with the word "painted" instead of the word, "lacquered"

Line 75. In Document N "laot" is incorrectly spelt "lact".