

M134
Song of the Flood.

Sung by a grandmother from Hmao-zu-mu.

Notes

This song is recorded in Document K (no. 2/3, page 9), Document L (no. 6, page 19) and Document N (no. 11, page 374). The entry in Document N is a conflation of three different versions of the Flood story. Only lines 19 - 21 from this version are included.

Line 15. L^u ɔ^u and Lⁿ ɔ^u in line 9, are different forms of the same common expression meaning "simply". There is a note in Chinese in the text which explains that ㄐⁿ ㄌ^ɔ ㄊ^u ㄉ^u ㄘ^u means "small sister". A variant form of this expression, "Lad mas ghak nzeul", is used in another version of this part of the Flood story in Document N (page 379). The Chinese rendering of that song refers to Ndrao-ya and his companion as "go-go" and "mei-mei", that is older brother and younger sister.

Line 16. In Document K, followed by Document L, the punctuation of the text has detached the name Ndrao-ya from the beginning of this line and joined it to the end of the previous line.

Lines 19 and 20. Both documents have a note in Miao explaining that thirteen days make one ㄘ^u, and Document K adds that 3 ㄘ^u are 39 days. This is not correct. A ㄘ^u was a cycle of twelve days each with the same animal names as in the cycle for counting years, viz, Snake, Horse, Sheep, Monkey, Cockerel, Dog, Pig, Rat, Ox, Tiger, Rabbit, Dragon. Thus Ox-day and Tiger-day are the 9th and 10th days of the cycle. The incubation period of a domestic hen's egg is three weeks so that ㄊ^u ㄘⁿ ㄊ^r ㄘ^u in line 19 cannot mean, "for 3 ㄘ^u", that is 36 days, but "approaching the third ㄘ^u". Thus the time when the chick hatched was 1 ㄘ^u plus 9 or 10 days of the second ㄘ^u.

Line 23. In both Document K and Document L the last word of this line is ㄘㄊ. which means "drum", and to make it clear that this was indeed the word he intended, Yang Yong-xin added the Chinese character for "drum" in brackets, but offered no further explanation. Thus the line reads, "Opened a peep-hole (lit. 'eye') in Ndrao-ya's drum". It is hard to know what the word "drum" can mean, because the context makes it clear that Ndrao-ya was inside of it, and that it was floating about on the surface of the water. In this version there is no reference to any boat building as in the other versions of the Flood story, nor any previous or subsequent reference to a drum. Are we to understand that Ndrao-ya escaped the flood inside a drum, used as a boat, or was it a boat built in the shape of a drum? The former seems unlikely. There had to be room enough for Ndrao-ya and for his little sister, together with provisions for as long as the flood lasted. The latter explanation is possible, but one would have expected the fact to be explained somewhere, if not in the text itself, then in a note by Yang Yong-xin. It might be that this is another example of the practice, not uncommon in marriage negotiations and in incantations, of using a code word instead of the normal name of the object concerned. So, it being unpropitious, for some unknown reason, to use the word "boat", the word "drum" has been substituted. If this is the case, it is surprising indeed that Yang Yong-xin did not insert one of his frequent explanatory notes. Despite his insistence that the

word is "drum", the possibility remains of a scribal error in the manuscript that Yang Yong-xin was copying. The difference between 𪛗, "drum" and 𪛘, "boat" is not so great, especially if it were written in bad light, on poor paper with a brush pen. In the English translation the word "drum" has been retained, but set in inverted commas.

Line 28. Document K has 𪛘, "To lie down", wrongly written 𪛗.

Line 29. A note in the Miao explains that the gha-njiw bird is also called 𪛗 𪛘 𪛙 𪛚, and that these birds are said to be "the hens of the spirits" a phrase roughly equivalent to "the devil's chickens". None of this helps to identify what kind of birds they were.

Line 48. A note in Miao at the end of this line reads, " To carry a millstone which was beside the river". The idea that it was a millstone has been introduced from another version of the story. Here the "river stone" was simply a large stone rounded by the action of water, one which would roll well.

Line 52. The final expression in this line is 𪛗 𪛘ⁿⁱ, but it is hard to see what this can mean. The parallel expression in the line before is 𪛗 𪛘ⁿ which means "single" or "as one only". That is, when the stone started to roll from the hill-top, it was a single stone, but when it came to rest it had become a pair. The word required therefore is not 𪛗 𪛘ⁿⁱ but 𪛗 𪛘^{ns}.