

M305
Old Miao songs about marriage. 4.

Song about entertaining the middleman and the headman.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Notes.

This song is recorded in Document B (no. 11, page 35).

Line 1. In the manuscript the word ㄘㄥ is missing. It has been restored here to maintain the proper balance with the parallel line 3.

Lines 5, 6 and 7. These lines have been strung together into a single long sentence in the Miao manuscript.

Line 8. There appears to have been some disruption of the text by which this line was moved to a place following line 11. This upsets the poetic balance of lines 9 to 14, where lines 9, 10 and 11 are exactly balanced by lines 12, 13 and 14. The sense and symmetry of the whole passage is restored when line 8 is returned to its rightful place following line 7.

Line 18. The last two words of this line, ㄉㄨ ㄊㄨ, "went to meet", have disappeared from the manuscript, and with them the whole of the next line. The proper sense of the passage and the parallelism with the next stanza require their restoration.

Line 25. The Miao text omits ㄘㄨ ㄉㄨ ㄊㄨ, "thus did take hold of", at the end of this line. It has been restored to preserve the parallelism with line 16.

Line 27. The expression ㄐㄨ ㄐㄨ ㄉㄨ, "aunt", has been incorrectly written ㄐㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄉㄨ here and again in line 32. In the manuscript this line stops at the word 'ㄘ', and is followed by a repetition of the whole line with the words ㄉㄨ ㄊㄨ added at the end.

Line 32. Following the second section of the song, lines 15 to 32 the Miao manuscript inserts the following lines:

ㄕㄨ ㄐㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄌㄨ ㄊㄨ,
man father able come arrange for,

ㄊㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄐㄨ ㄐㄨ ㄘㄨ ㄐㄨ,
arrange for place at bottom completed for whom,

ㄘㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄊㄨ ㄕㄨ ㄕㄨ.
completed for the middleman oh.

The man, the father entertained,
And kept the lowest place for whom?

He kept it for the middleman.

These lines seem to be entirely out of place. They do not connect with either the section that precedes them or with that which follows. If they belong anywhere it is in section one, lines 1 to 14, for it is there that the places at table are described. Moreover they do not preserve the poetic pattern. Throughout the song a mention of the middleman is always balanced with a mention of the headman. Here the latter has disappeared altogether. However the chief problem is that these lines contradict directly what has been said before. Far from being welcomed and given the place of honour, the middleman is here snubbed and insulted by having to sit in the lowest seat. Why this sudden change of attitude? There is no hint of a reason anywhere in the song, and the final section implies that the middleman's mission was ultimately accomplished. A marriage was indeed arranged. The conclusion seems to be that these three lines are in fact an intrusion into the text, and would be better left out, but where and how they originated remains unexplained.

Lines 49 and 50. In the manuscript these two lines follow line 52. However discussion of the projected marriage must have taken place before the men subsided, dead drunk, on to the floor.