

**Hua-Miao Archive
Songs and Stories**

Miao Social Life

Love songs, songs of runaway lovers and song lamenting the "old people"

Songs M321 to M344

Introduction and Translation

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The Hua-Miao Archive

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M321
Miao love songs.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

Among the songs sung by the Miao there was a considerable number which concerned love and sex. When the people embraced Christianity these were classified as “the devil’s songs”, no longer to be sung. Other Christian singing took its place, but there is no doubt that many of the old songs continued, although frowned upon by the leaders.

In conversation with a Miao friend, I pointed out that every people had its love songs, and since by no means all of these are evil, surely many of the Miao love songs were likewise good. Why consign to the devil that which is good? The present little collection was the result. These songs were written down by Wang Ming-ji, but unfortunately he did not indicate when or where or by whom they might have been sung.

Song of a youth and a maiden.

In this song the maiden was not prepared to respond to the youth’s amorous advances, and she employed two devices to discourage him. The one made reference to the old cosmology songs where the sun is always personified as “The Sun-maid”, and the moon as “The Moon-youth”. Each had its appointed course to travel, and these courses did not coincide. So she tells him that she will “go round and about to her home”, and bids him likewise return to his place. The second metaphor also concerns travelling, but this time it is following a track through wooded countryside, a track which can be easily hidden by fallen leaves and plants. So she urges the youth not to obscure her destined path with his attentions.

A woman’s song.

In Miao society there were originally strict rules governing which families could intermarry. The rules were known and understood by elders within the community who would be consulted before a union took place. In this song the names that had to be checked were not personal names but the names of the clans and sub-clans to which the couple belonged. Illegitimate relationships could result in the parties concerned, and their offspring, being excluded from the ancestral rites of their clan, which, in turn, might incur dire retribution from the offended ancestors. So this young woman, though perfectly happy with her young man, was also keen that their marriage should be within the rules.

Song of a woman and a man.

The economy of a Miao household was such that it required both partners in a marriage to be fully committed. If either proved to be lazy or incompetent, the family would quickly be reduced to poverty. The chief qualities, therefore, that were looked for in a prospective daughter or son-in-law were skill and the willingness to work hard on the farm and in the home. This explains the foreboding of both the young woman and the young man in this song at the prospect of meeting the other’s parents. The young woman was fearful that she would be expected to be able to produce the most difficult designs of the tribal costume, while the young man was afraid of being challenged with a ploughing ox which would be beyond his strength and skill to control.

For some reason, unexplained, the two prospective mothers-in-law are simply called “your mother”, but the two fathers-in-law are given the respectful title, “the man, the father” by both of the young people.

A cautionary song.

The Miao word “kao” in the title of this song has no exact equivalent in English. According to the context it can mean “to reason with”, “to persuade”, “to coax”, “to encourage”, “to rebuke”, “to warn” or “to exhort”. In the present song, with its slightly cynical view of marriage relationships, “cautionary” is an appropriate translation.

In common conversation, there is a reticence among Miao people to use the words “wife” and “husband”. A man, with reference to his wife, will much prefer to say “the child’s mother”, and likewise, a woman will speak of “the child’s father”, and everyone will know that she means her husband. The same circumlocution occurs in this song. The Miao text reads, “father” and “mother” where the actual meaning is “husband” and “wife”.

Busy bees.

In the Miao text each of the four lines of this song comprises just five words. Sadly, such succinctness cannot be reproduced in English translation.

M321
Miao love songs.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Song of a youth and a maiden.

The youth sings.

The young man is on the high hill,
The young woman there below.
The young man with sighing and yearning called,
Called to the young woman below.

- 5 Then the young woman below called back,
Called to the young man on the high hill,
And the young man was overcome with restless longing.

The maiden sings in response to the youth.

- Young man, oh young man!
When you see a flower do not pluck it,
10 When you see maiden do not deceive her!
Just let the flower drop in the place where it stood.

So I will go round and about and return to my home,
And you shall go round and about and return to your place.

Youth, oh youth!
Do not be like dropping yellow leaves fallen in my way,
Do not be like drooping flowers fallen in my path!

For I, the maiden, the young woman, am like the rising sun,
While you, the youth, the young man, are like the full moon.
O youth, so it is!

A woman's song.

- From what landlord's estates do you come,
And of what clan are you a son?
Come let us two, maid and youth, check our names.
If careful checking shows us unrelated,
5 Let us two, maid and youth, go on together.
But if we are related,
Let us two, maid and youth, not hesitate to go our separate ways.

Song of a woman and a man.

The woman sings.

If you are a bachelor
I am willing to go with you,
But I fear your mother and the man, your father, will not approve of the bride!
That your mother and the man, your father, will bring out
5 The most complicated costumes to test me.

The man sings.

My mother is good and my father is good,
They are not people like that.
I am willing to marry you,
But I fear your mother and the man, your father, will not approve of the bridegroom!
10 That your mother and the man, your father, will bring out
The untrained ox out of doors,
And the untrained ox will drag me across three hills and three valleys.

A cautionary song.

Do not be another's husband and go ragged,
Just be a bachelor for her to long for,
Then you may stay or go as you please.

Do not be another's wife and go hungry,
5 Just be a spinster for him to grieve over,
Then you may go or stay as you please.

Busy bees.

While flowers bloom, for certain the bees will be busy,
But when flowers fade, the bees will return.
While the girls stay, for certain the young men will come,
But when the girls have gone, the young men will disperse.

M322
Song of maidens and a youth.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

The heading and the brief explanation supplied by Wang Ming-ji before each section of this song, make the general theme clear. However the poetic imagery employed needs a little more elucidation.

The expression “spread bundles of wheat” is a convention meaning “repertoire of songs”. It is in fact a picture drawn from the wheat harvest. The “bundles” are large handfuls of stalks. Ten such handfuls make up a sheaf. When the crop had been harvested, the bundles were brought home and laid out in the sun. A note in the Miao text explains, “the guest’s songs were numerous like bundles of wheat laid out to dry”. In translating the first section, “bundles of wheat” has been expanded into “songs, like bundles of wheat”, but in the second section the simple word “songs” has been used to avoid the mixed simile, permissible in Miao, but not in English, namely, “a flock of bundles of wheat scattering and disappearing behind the hill!”

In the third section the reference to a mushroom seems to mean, that though its roots are insignificant it none the less produces a plant, but the young man, despite much greater incentives, has failed to produce any songs. The fan is a reference to the underside of the mushroom.

The name the girls give themselves, translated “early maids”, is a repudiation of the young man’s aspersion that they had lingered so long over their evening meal that there was no time for songs.

The porcupines which got away were the songs which, for all their endeavours, the girls were unable to coax forth.

M322
Song of maidens and a youth.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

A song of coaxing.

(A guest has come to the village, so the girls go and sing to the youth.)

The sun is shining brightly,
And in the sunshine we saw,
Saw a youth, strong and well-dressed, pass along the road.
Bending his head he entered,
5 Entered his aunt's house.

His cape with the black tie-cord, he took off and hung with care,
Hung it with care on his aunt's hand-loom.
Separating and gathering the skirt of his gown, he has taken his seat,
And his songs are like bundles of wheat, spread out and filling,
10 Filling his aunt's hearth.

Thus it is ended.

A song of responding.

(The youth, that is the guest, sings a song in response to the girls.)

Like the haws on the hawthorn, which take so long to ripen,
The hawthorn standing on the river bank,
Through the evening of this day,
15 You have taken so long at your family meal,
That the songs could not wait!

The whole flock has scattered, disappearing behind the hill.
Let the children go and gather them up,
Gather all the songs from the midst of the plain.

20 Thus it is finished.

A song of scolding.

(When the guest is unwilling to sing to them, the girls scold him in song.)

Even a mushroom has its roots,
And its fan has its point of growth.

Throughout the evening of this day,
We cousins, the early maids, have loosed,
25 Loosed the dogs, but they did not follow the porcupines,

For the group of porcupines have scattered, and crossed over the river.

Throughout the evening of this day,
We Miao girls, the early maids, have put on,
Put on our brightest countenances to cheer,
30 To cheer the strong young man, entertaining him as though cheering a lord.

We Miao girls, the early maids, have put on,
Put on our brightest countenances to cheer,
To cheer the strong young man, entertaining him as though cheering an overlord.

Thus it is ended.

M331
The song of the run-away girl.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

Miao marriages were normally arranged with the assistance of a middleman whose duty it was to conduct negotiations between the families, and to fix the marriage settlement that had to be paid. Although in theory the consent of the young people concerned had to be given, their respective families could exert considerable pressure on prospective brides and bridegrooms. Occasionally they rebelled and ran away with a partner of their own choice. The word “fang” was used to describe such people, and might be applied equally to the girl or the youth. The word actually means “run away”, but specifically it was from an unacceptable partner or proposed partner, and usually, though not necessarily, with the intention of getting married to someone else.

The name Yeu-rang features in many stories. It means “dragon man” and is often applied to a rather fierce personage, sometimes possessing magical powers. In this song Yeu-rang appears as a rather strong-willed individual, who, having gone ahead with fixing up his daughter’s marriage without taking her personal wishes properly into consideration, was wise enough, in the end, to rectify the situation, even at considerable cost. He had lost the marriage settlement he was expecting to receive, and then had to provide the young couple with a place to live and a livelihood. How the girl’s brothers reacted to this sharing out of the family land is not recorded.

The song relates that, despite his best efforts Yeu-rang was unable to find a bridegroom who could play the pipes, but it nowhere explains why this accomplishment was deemed so important. Perhaps it was because his daughter, strong-willed as himself, had made this a stipulation. Certainly the man with whom she absconded, though something of a drifter, could play the pipes.

The name of the young man in this song possibly means “the strange one who competes”, rendered “the strange suitor” in translation. When the run-away couple eventually returned home, the girl’s father took the young man’s pipes and rested them carefully against the partition wall in the house, a normal act of courtesy to a newly arrived guest, and in this case, a gesture of acceptance and reconciliation.

M331
The song of the run-away girl.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

.This year we may know,
.Know that Yeu-rang is to give his daughter in marriage,
.To give Yeu-rang's run-away daughter in marriage,
.Away to the country of the Li-sw clan.

5 But Yeu-rang could not find a pipe-player,
 Though Yeu-rang sought,
 Sought for a pipe-player urgently.

 Yeu-rang's run-away daughter saw,
 Saw a strange suitor on the river bank,
10 And Yeu-rang's run-away daughter prepared,
 Prepared food for a journey urgently,
 To carry and follow the strange suitor.

 The strange suitor, the person wearing,
 Wearing a cape with a black tie-cord twisted at the ends,
15 Carried his musical pipes, holding them in his arms.
 The strange suitor, the person wearing,
 Wearing a cape with a black tie-cord twisted at the ends,
 Carried his musical pipes, bearing them in his hands.

 Yeu-rang's run-away daughter called,
20 Called Yeu-rang urgently,
 But Yeu-rang just remained in his fine wooden house,
 And Yeu-rang's run-away daughter could not wait.

 The stranger Shi-dao was bringing,
 Bringing the marriage party, making its way,
25 Making its way in single file along the river bank,
 Shining like fish in the river.
 He was bringing the marriage party making its way,
 Making its way in single file there yonder.

 Yeu-rang's run-away daughter with,
30 With the strange suitor went,
 Went fleeing on their way and passed,
 Passed through ninety-nine valleys.

 They passed through forests, through the edible bamboo,
 They passed through forests, through bamboo hanging low.
35 They passed by forests, by the tall bamboo
 They passed by forests, by the bamboo bending down.

 They went by the great mountain range of Niu-lu,
 And stayed a while on the great mountain range at Drao-zeu,

- For the strange suitor was like a bird of passage.
 40 Yeu-rang's run-away daughter grew hungry,
 Grew hungry and yet more hungry,
 Until Yeu-rang's run-away daughter could not remain.
 But Yeu-rang's run-away daughter did not have,
 Did not have any way of sending back word.
- 45 So to get a message she had to send it,
 Send it by the magpie bird.
 The magpie bird it perched,
 Perched on a branch of Yeu-rang's walnut tree,
 And called Yeu-rang's name over and over.
- 50 When someone becomes a bride she may come home,
 But when Yeu-rang's run-away daughter became,
 Became a bride she could not come.
 So Yeu-rang sent,
 Sent Yeu-rang's eldest son.
- 55 His eldest son followed,
 Followed the Magpie bird,
 The magpie bird flew up in the sky,
 While Yeu-rang's eldest son travelled on the ground,
 And passed through ninety-nine valleys.
- 60 He passed through forests, through the edible bamboo,
 He passed through forests, through the bamboo hanging low,
 He passed by forests, by the tall bamboo,
 He passed by forests, by the bamboo bending down.
- The strange suitor had brought,
 65 Had brought Yeu-rang's run-away daughter and arrived,
 Arrived at the great mountain range of Niu-lu,
 And stayed on the great mountain range at Drao-cie.
- So the magpie bird brought,
 Brought Yeu-rang's eldest son and arrived,
 70 Arrived at the strange suitor and Yeu-rang's run-away daughter's place.
- Then Yeu-rang's run-away daughter declared,
 Declared that the strange suitor behaved,
 Behaved like a bird of passage,
 And Yeu-rang's run-away daughter could not remain.
 75 Therefore Yeu-rang's run-away daughter would accompany,
 Accompany Yeu-rang's eldest son and come back.
- Thus Yeu-rang's run-away daughter and the strange suitor
 Returned then, came back and passed,
 Passed by forests, by the tall bamboo,
 80 Passed by forests, by the bamboo bending down,
 Passed through forests, through the edible bamboo,
 Passed through forests, through the bamboo hanging low.

So having crossed ninety-nine mountains,
Yeu-rang's eldest son brought
85 Brought Yeu-rang's run-away daughter,
Along with the strange suitor, and they came and reached,
Reached Yeu-rang's home.

Yeu-rang took the strange suitor's pipes,
And set them down against the partition wall.

90 Then Yeu-rang provided arable land
For the strange suitor to farm,
And Yeu-rang provided a site,
Where the strange suitor might build,
Build a house with timber frame and tiled roof to settle as a family and live.

Thus it is ended.

M332
The run-away girl.

Sung by a man from Hmao-a-gw-gw.

Introduction.

The language of this song is, in places, obscure. It is not always easy to distinguish the facts of the story from the descriptive metaphors, however the main outline of the narrative is clear.

The Miao never spoke of “selling” their daughters, and the expression “bride price” would have been offensive, but it is clear that the size of the marriage settlement was the prime consideration in the minds of these parents as they arranged for their daughter's marriage. Having arrived at the bridegroom's house the bride soon found out that things were not as they had been represented to her. In particular the paddy fields which, by this time of the year, should have been tilled and planted, were just lying fallow, grazed by the cattle. The implication of this discovery was that her bridegroom was, in reality, a lazy, good-for-nothing. Unwilling to acquiesce and accept the situation she decided to return home. When, however, she arrived, she found herself locked out, and realised that her family had tricked her into this marriage; that, in fact, she had been snared like a bird. The twisted silk cord long enough to stretch right across the river is a metaphorical description of the intrigue.

In Miao marriages the bride carried with her a number of garments embroidered in the tribal manner, which she had made over many months, even years, as gifts to the bridegroom's family. This young woman had the presence of mind to bring them back with her when she ran away. These are the “ninety-nine bundles” referred to in line 32. “Ninety-nine” is a convention for a considerable number. These Miao people, the Ahmao, in contrast to other Miao groups, were generally not wealthy enough to possess silver ornaments. The bracelets would have been of copper, relatively inexpensive and bought from the Chinese at the local market. These were prized by young girls, but got in the way when the heavy duties, which were the lot of a married woman, began.

M332
The run-away girl.

Sung by a man from Hmao-a-gw-gw,

Who was it desired cattle for ploughing?
The man, the father, desired cattle for ploughing,
Desired good, long horned cattle.

5 Who was it desired sheep for shearing?
The woman, the mother desired sheep for shearing,
Desired full-grown, long-fleeced sheep for shearing.

So the woman, the mother, and the man, the father took,
Took their fine run-away girl with harshness away,
Away to Hmao-rie, to “the sighing youth” at the near side of the forest.

10 The run-away girl tried to stay there, but she could not,
And it was well that the run-away girl should return.

So the run-away girl planted,
Planted her feet well and firmly till she came,
Came to the woman, the mother, and the man, the father’s door.

15 The door was pressed shut, but sounds came outside.
Though the door was pressed shut, there was a sound,
A sound rising and falling, a sound of voices.

The run-away girl stretched,
Stretched her hands well and firmly and reached out,
20 Reached out well, but the woman, the mother, and the man the father’s door was
locked.

The woman, the mother, was afraid of thieves,
And the man, the father, was afraid of spying eyes.
But a “good” thief had already stolen,
For a “good” spy had already seen!

25 Now because the run-away girl had discovered the deceit,
Had discovered the deceit about the bridegroom’s rice fields,
When the rice fields should have been planted they were just used for grazing,

And because the run-away girl’s parents and relatives had taken,
Had taken a silken cord, all twisted,
30 A cord of silk long enough to stretch over the river,
And cast a noose around the run-away girl’s neck and arms,

Therefore the run-away girl’s ninety-nine bundles tied up with braid,
She took up and followed close to the youth along the sheep path.

Whose son was it who had come?

- 35 The smiling youth was the youth from the Dlu family.
 Whose daughter was it who had come across?
 The laughing girl was the girl from the Dla family,
 Laughing and smiling all the while.
- 40 The run-away girl at last had reached a place for removing the braids,
 At last, united with the youth, had reached a place for removing her bracelets.
- Thus it is ended.

The run-away girl and the run-away youth. 1.

(The woman running away from a man)

Sung by a man from Hmao-go-ndlao.

Introduction.

This, the first of two songs, is about a run-away bride. The second is about a run-away bridegroom. The songs are from different sources and have little in common. They were brought together by Yang Yong-xin, who also provided the title.

The name given to the young woman, “Ngao-shao-ngao-shw”, means, literally, “the girl well cared for, the girl longed for”. “The eligible girl” is a fair rendering.

It would appear from the story that the middleman had already arrived and the marriage agreement was completed except for the consent of the bride who was now under considerable pressure, (the verb used means “to bully”), to say “yes”. The barking dogs during the night roused the household, and the young woman went quickly outside to look. Seeing that her lover was on his way, she went back into the house to report that all was well, and in particular to reassure the recumbent middleman by adjusting the bed covering, before picking up her own clothing and slipping away.

Three nights travel by moonlight brought the couple to the Ndu-na-yi-mo. In the songs about the conflict with the Chinese, this is the name of the great river which flowed through the ancient Miao homeland, but in modern Miao it is that stretch of the Yangtse river which flows north-east through the Province of Yunnan. The latter is most likely the meaning in this song. The pine trees that the youth cut were saplings only about three inches in diameter, to serve as staffs to steady the couple against the current as they crossed the river. At this point, a thousand miles from the sea, the Ndu-na-yi-mo is already a formidable and dangerous river, which only the foolhardy would attempt to ford. The rejoicing of the young couple at having got safely across brings the song to a close. It is a fitting conclusion, for no pursuer would dare to cross the water as they had done.

The run-away girl and the run-away youth. 1.

(The woman running away from a man)

Sung by a man from Hmao-go-ndlao.

This year we may know,
Know that the eligible girl
Has tossed away her neighbours and relations.

5 The time when the dogs barked was the time she was waiting for,
The eligible girl went out quickly to look.
The unmarried youth Yang-nca, well dressed,
Very finely dressed, was coming along the valley below.

The eligible girl drew up the cape and clothing to cover,
To cover the bullying middleman upon the bed.

10 Then the eligible girl returned and took,
Took her skirts and aprons,
And, very early, ran away with the unmarried youth Yang-nca.

The eligible girl together with,
With the unmarried youth Yang-nca travelled,
15 Travelled three nights in the dark.

The eligible girl together with,
With the unmarried youth Yang-nca travelled,
Travelled three nights under the waning moon.

20 The unmarried youth Yang-nca together with
With the eligible girl travelled,
Travelled and reached a river,
The Ndu-na-yi-mo, but could not cross.

25 The unmarried youth Yang-nca cut down,
Cut down pine trees to aid their crossing,
And the unmarried youth Yang-nca together with,
With the eligible girl crossed right over.

The unmarried youth Yang-nca together with,
With the eligible girl went,
Went safely on, reciting together,

30 “The couple, the maid and the youth,
Came upon a strong stake and stood firm,
Stood good and firm trusting to the stake.
They came upon a strong stake and stood firm,
Stood good and firm trusting to the soft-wood tree”.

The run-away girl and the run-away youth. 2.

(The man running away from a woman)

Sung by Wang Jie-chuai.

Introduction.

It is characteristic of Miao songs to build up long, descriptive titles which are repeated over and over as though they were proper names. This song affords an extreme example of the practice. The name given to the young man contains no less than twelve syllables, with two more added when it is fully expressed. He is identified first by reference to his mother, “the young woman Yang-nca”, then by his marital status, “the unmarried youth”, and finally by a nickname which describes his elegance and grace. This nickname is made up of two parts, “gha nza lyu lyu” which means “willow tree”, (for the most part, this is abbreviated to “gha nza”), and “da ngga yao” which means “the child”. The meaning of the nickname is, accordingly, “The child resembling a willow”. In English this has been paraphrased “Willow Sapling”

The young woman, with whom the young man ran away, is given no name of her own, but is always referred to as the young man’s “neighbour and friend”. This consists of two four-syllable expressions. Thus her designation comprises twenty syllables, that is, The young man’s title (12 syllables) plus “neighbour and friend” (8 syllables).

The continual repetition of these long epithets makes it difficult at times to follow the movement of the story and also hard to know how the song was divided into lines for singing. There is no regularity in the punctuation of the Miao manuscript. It seems as though the editor himself was a little perplexed. The arrangement here chosen is fairly consistent, but whether it corresponds to the manner in which the song was originally sung is uncertain.

The egg in the first four lines is a reference to the bridegroom. He turned out to be a problem which was more than the bride, who had been chosen for him, could handle. The prospective bride, a rather older girl, though still unmarried, had apparently already arrived in the bridegroom’s home, but he simply refused to have anything to do with her, and ran away with a local girl of his own choice.

When the couple reached Great Sheep Market it says he “took off” some silk shoes and gave to her, and she “took off” silk braid and gave to him. The verb is the regular one for removing an article of clothing which one is wearing, but here it appears to be used as a periphrasis for “bought”. The shoes would have been of the kind prized by young Miao women, made by the Chinese with leather soles but with the uppers covered in black silk. The silk braid which she bought for him, was made into a double loop for holding back the voluminous sleeves of the Miao tribal costume. Normally this was home-woven from yarn made from hemp. Silk braid was something of a luxury.

In describing the house which the couple built for themselves, mention is made of the beehive hung under the eaves. Miao beehives were logs of wood some four feet long and two feet or a little more in diameter. These were hollowed out forming a wooden tube with

walls several inches thick. The ends were blocked in with circular pieces of wood sealed in place with clay, leaving a small hole at the bottom for the bees to crawl in and out. The hives were often suspended horizontally under the eaves of the house to keep them safe from robbers. To prevent rain from soaking in and for added protection against frost, they were covered over with a number of large pieces of bark from fallen trees.

This song concludes in the manner of a fairy story. The young couple built a fine dwelling in a delectable river valley, and settled down to a happy family life. How they were able to afford such luxury is left unexplained.

The run-away bride and the run-away youth. 2.

(The man running away from a woman)

Sung by Wang Jie-chuai.

This year we may know,
Know that the bridegroom's mother's hen has laid an egg,
Has laid an egg for the bride's hen to hatch in the basket,
But the bride's hen could not hatch it!

- 5 The woman, the mother, and the man, the father chose,
Chose from the neighbourhood in a proper manner,
Chose the relative of a young cousin, a girl,
A girl unmarried, nevertheless an older girl,
To give to the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
10 Willow Sapling, as his consort.

- But the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth refused to consort with her.
The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling, pulled up,
Pulled up the felt cape with the black tie-cord to cover,
15 To cover the relative of the young cousin, the unmarried girl,
The older girl, upon the bed.

- The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling, together with,
With the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
20 Willow Sapling's
Neighbour and friend, fled away and went,
Went on till they reached,
Reached the Great Sheep Market.

- The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
25 Willow Sapling, bought,
Bought silken shoes, bought shoes of silk and gave,
Gave them to the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling's
Neighbour and friend to wear.

- 30 They fitted the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling's
Neighbour and friend, very well.

- The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling's
35 Neighbour and friend, bought,
Bought silken braid, bought braids of silk for
For the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
Willow Sapling, to hold up his sleeves.

40 They fitted the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling, exactly.

The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling, took,
 Took the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling's
 45 Neighbour and friend, and went,
 Went on and arrived at the Great River Valley of Silver.

He took the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling's
 Neighbour and friend, and went
 50 Went on and arrived at the Great River Valley of Gold.

The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling,
 Came and built a house with timber frame and tiled roof at,
 At the Great River Valley of Silver, to make a family and live.

55 The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling,
 Built a house with timber frame and tiled roof at
 At the Great River Valley of Gold, to make a family and dwell.

60 The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling's
 House with timber frame and tiled roof shone,
 Shone new under the blue sky.

The young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling's
 65 House with timber frame and tiled roof shone
 Shone bright under the clear sky.

Beneath the roof the beehive was hung,
 Curved and easy to cover.
 Beneath the eaves the beehive was tied,
 70 Curved and easy to approach.

So the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling secured,
 Secured the young woman Yang-nca's unmarried youth,
 Willow Sapling's
 75 Neighbour and friend, in marriage,
 To make a family and live at the Great River Valley of Silver,
 To make a family and dwell at the Great River Valley of Gold.

Thus it is ended.

M335
The girl who fled.

Singer not recorded.

Introduction.

The reason that this young couple fled from their home was not because arrangements were in hand for either to be married to someone else, nor were they running away from an unacceptable marriage already contracted. Thus the technical term “fang”, “run-away”, is not used. These young people, being first cousins, would not have been eligible to marry one another under normal Miao custom, so that if this is what they wanted to do, they had no option but to run away.

Once again in this song the Ndu-na-yi-mo river is to be identified with the Yangtse, and the Bw-bw country is the independent Yi territory on the western bank.

The house, which they built, was a rough and ready affair. The expression used is that for the temporary shelters of poles and grass thatch, normally erected for guarding crops at harvest time. These were circular in shape, whereas the normal Miao house, with its mud walls, was always rectangular.

M335
The girl who fled.

Singer not recorded.

This year we may know,
Know that the woman, the mother, and the man, the father had,
Had two children, a brother and a sister.
The brother also had a son,
5 And the sister had a daughter.

The sister's daughter was pretty,
Smart and elegant like,
Like a willow tree standing by the river,
Smart as a willow tree standing by the water.

10 She had a beautiful smooth complexion, she was pretty,
Pretty as the lovely pink peach blossom.

The brother had a son,
Had a son who was handsome,
Handsome and slim as leaves of bamboo,
15 Handsome and slim as blades of grass.

The cousins arose and went, they fled,
Fled to the banks of the Ndu-na-yi-mo river,
Fled and crossed the Ndu-na-yi-mo river to the further side,
And went to live on a plain in the Bw-bw border country.

20 They built a grass hut to make a family and live,
They built a round house to make a family and dwell.
They farmed to provide their food and drink,
And planted cotton for clothes to wear.

Thus it is ended.

M336
Concerning cousin Bang-ndlie and the youth,
cousin Mang-shi-ndlie.

Singer not recorded.

Introduction.

The exact meaning of the names of the young people in this song is unknown. It is the fact that they were cousins that is significant. Miao tradition was strongly opposed to marriage between related parties, and the family of this couple had evidently refused consent to their union. Accordingly they made an appointment to meet at a certain market and then ran away together. In so doing they alienated themselves permanently from their family. This is expressed in the final lines about a needle lost in the ashes of the hearth and a star in the depths of the sky. The passage about repairing the collar of the young man's gown and broken thong of the young woman's sandal is probably intended to make the same point, that, from now on, the couple would have to fend for themselves.

M336
Concerning cousin Bang-ndlie and the youth,
cousin Mang-shi-ndlie.

Singer not recorded.

From scattered sky material came the dome,
For cousin Bang-ndlie to come and live.
Woven from scattered earth material came the ranges,
For the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, to come and dwell.

5 Cousin Bang-ndlie was beautiful,
As the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, soon came to know,
But they might not be joined in marriage,
Since cousin Bang-ndlie, the maid, was bride-to-be for someone else,
And cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, the youth, was bridegroom-to-be for someone else.

10 This year we may know,
Know that this year there would be a market at Ndu-nzhi.
Cousin Bang-ndlie together with,
With the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, made,
Made an appointment to meet in what place?
15 They made it for a plot in the middle of the market.

Cousin Bang-ndlie was afoot early,
So cousin Bang-ndlie reached there early.
But the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, was afoot late,
So the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, reached there late.

20 Visitors came, many visitors gathered,
But one person, the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, had not arrived.
Visitors came, all the visitors gathered,
But one person, the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, had not come.

Cousin Bang-ndlie looked all around,
25 And saw the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, standing,
Standing outside the Ndu-nzhi market.
The youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, alone attracted her.
The youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, looked all around,
And saw cousin Bang-ndlie, who alone attracted him.

30 Cousin Bang-ndlie grieved,
Grieved that the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, had got no favourable response.
The youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, grieved,
Grieved that cousin Bang-ndlie had got no marriage arrangement.
Their only choice was to flee. So they went,
35 Went till they reached the midst of the long Njiao-a-bang valley.

Cousin Bang-ndlie looked all around
And saw that the collar of the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie's gown was ripped.
So cousin Bang-ndlie gathered,

40 Gathered drawn silk and drawn thread to sew,
 To sew up the collar of the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie's gown.

 The youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie, looked all around
 And saw that the thong of cousin Bang-ndlie's sandal was broken.
 So the youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie gathered,
45 Gathered drawn hemp, drawn hemp strands to twist,
 To twist into a thong for cousin Bang-ndlie's sandal.

 Cousin Bang-ndlie was like
 A needle lost in the ashes.
 The youth, cousin Mang-shi-ndlie was like
 A star far away yonder in the sky.

50 Thus it is ended.

M337

Song of parents grieving the loss of their daughter's strength.

Singer not recorded.

Introduction.

Nowhere does this song say what exactly had become of the daughter of the family. However, the description of a young woman dressed in all her finery, crossing the river in a small boat which was apparently waiting for her, and going on her way, seems to indicate that, for some reason, she was running away from home, and that her flight had been planned beforehand. This could have been to avoid some unacceptable marriage arrangements, but it does not say so. Her departure meant that tasks, which she normally performed in the home, had now to be undertaken by her parents. These included, in particular, carrying water to keep the household supplied, and pounding grain for the family meals.

M337

Song of parents grieving the loss of their daughter's strength.

Singer not recorded.

As its sheath fits the knife,
So the parents' smooth land made their life easy.

With the girl at home, water for the tub required no effort from her mother to carry
it.

5 The girl's mother could always get up,
Get up and go for water to the tub.
But now her mother's tears were falling.

With the girl at home, corn from the loft required no one else's strength to pound it.
The girl's father could always get up and go out on the farm.
But now her father's tears were flowing.

10 The girl's mother found a bowl of corn for him to eat,
And gave it to the girl's father as he went seeking her down the valley.
On his way he met with some swallows,
And the girl's father spoke.
"Have you seen a well-dressed young woman come by here?"

15 "Did you say, 'a well-dressed young woman'? We certainly saw her,
And we also saw a small boat cross over,
And the girl, whoever she was, clothed,
Clothed in a lavish manner, crossed.
Crossed here, over to the shallow side of the pool, and went on.

20 There was silver all around her neck,
And a silk covering over her head".

Thus it is ended.

Old procedures followed in settling cases of divorce.

Contributed by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

In 1947 in response to my enquiries, Wang Ming-ji wrote an outline of the procedures that used to be followed in settling the dispute that arose between two families if a marriage had broken up. The outline included a short extract of the kind of conversation which would have taken place when the two middlemen sent by one party arrived at the home of the other party. The opening gambit was full of indirect, almost evasive statements, and the quotation of proverbial sayings. In reality the bargaining was probably a protracted process, with each side well aware what the traditional settlement required, but each trying to vary the terms to their own advantage, by pleading special circumstances.

An interesting feature was the use of code words, wheat, barley, and oats, instead of naming the animals actually involved in the payment. Repeated questioning failed to discover the reason for this usage, but apparently it used not to be considered delicate to call a cow, “a cow” in the course of such negotiations.

When matters had been talked through and the required payments made, the parties came together and the formal agreement was recited, presumably by a middleman. This made reference to the “yi-xiu” and the “fu-xiu”, which were some kind of mythical creatures, possibly the male and female of the species. The point about them was that they could never be separated. The “smooth road” and the “bright road”, are one and the same, a paved thoroughfare where the stones were so polished that they shone. The agreement also mentioned the “dang”, a bamboo whistle pipe, rather like pan-pipes, but so constructed that musical notes could be produced both by blowing and by sucking.

After the recitation, the agreement was finally ratified by the handing over of a ploughshare. This was a large triangular object made of iron, which fitted on to the wooden plough much as a garden spade is fitted to its handle. It was secured in position with a large nail. The Miao, having no means of setting out the agreement in written form, chose a ploughshare as a token and a witness, presumably, because it was made of iron, it was one of the more enduring of household objects, and also because its use in the production of crops may have given it some connotation of fertility.

Enquiry into the meaning of “let him enter the hole of the ploughshare”, elicited the explanation that the transgressor of the agreement would drop dead and his spirit would be imprisoned within the ploughshare by way of punishment.

Old procedures followed in settling cases of divorce.

Contributed by Wang Ming-ji.

Sending the elders is known as “sending two cattle herds”. When they arrive at the home of the other party, the head of that family opens his mouth and asks, “What urgent business brings you?” The two elders answer, “There is no urgency, we have merely followed the road where the horse fodder grows!” (Following the road where the horse fodder grows means that the two families have trouble, and they have come to the place where the trouble lies.)

The head of the family asks, “What do the in-laws say?” The two elders reply, “We two have come, but the business is not ours. The snake only enters a person’s house because the devil sent it!” The head of the family asks again, “Well, what do the in-laws say?” The two elders respond, “We have come, but can we speak our mind?” The head of the family asks, “Well, what do the in-laws say?” The two elders reply, “The in-laws speak as follows: One bag of wheat, one bag of barley and a green plum.” (A bag of wheat is a sheep, a bag of barley is a goat, and a plum is wine.) “Moreover, this procedure is not only for our two families to follow, but for all the people to follow”.

Then the head of the house replies, “You two go and tell the in-laws, we want seven bags of wheat or barley and two bags of oats.” (Oats means that they want two cows.) The elders say, “Ee! We two, we two cannot answer you in this. All we can do is to carry your words.” The head of the house says, “You should give an answer, it is up to you.

A good horse is not sent to Sichuan without its saddle,
A good ox is not sent to Zhaotung without its yoke.
Flowing water flows from above,
Where there is the sound of water there is a water spring ”.

If a husband divorces his wife he will need nine animals. If a wife divorces her husband she will need nine garments.

The man’s nine animals include,
two cows, which are given to his parents-in-law, together with five sheep or goats, one sheep or goat, which is reckoned to be given to the ancestors of his parents-in-law, and one sheep or goat, which is reckoned to be given to his own ancestors, here.

Thus are all the requirements of Miao tradition fulfilled. “You shall wear my sheep-skin, I will wear your goat-skin”.

In endorsement of the agreement these words are spoken,

When the Yi-xiu travels the smooth road,
Then the Fu-xiu travels the bright road,
For the Yi-xiu is like a pan-pipe blown,
And the Fu-xiu is like a pan-pipe sucked.

Time was when things were as bright light from the south,
But today they are as dull light from the north.

If the two fists cannot rest together,
Let not the two fists get to pushing each other!
If the two fists cannot rest contentedly,
Let not the two fists be pressed into contention.

From today let the fish return to the water,
And let the maid return and be separate.

When the words have been spoken, they exchange a ploughshare and declare, “Whoever transgresses, let him enter the nail hole of the ploughshare”.

M339
Ancient traditions of the Miao Old folk.

Supplied by Yang Yung-xin.

Introduction.

To his second book of songs issued in 1950 (Document F), Yang Yung-xin appended, 1, a miscellaneous collection of incantations connected to old Miao customs, 2, an outline of old Miao spirit worship, and 3, a list of about seventy old Miao words and expressions, found in the songs but no longer in common use. He called the collection of incantations, which comprised ten items, “Ancient traditions of the Miao old folk”.

1. Form of words for the separation of married girls and youths.

A copy of Wang Ming-ji’s description of ancient divorce procedures (M338) appears to have come into the hands of Yang Yung-xin, for he included the material, though in a considerably modified form, in his collection of incantations. There are three significant differences between the two accounts. Firstly, whereas Wang Ming-ji said that the middlemen were sent by only one party to the dispute, Yang Yung-xin states that two middlemen from each side carried out the negotiations. Secondly, the customs described had not been in use for many years, and memories were fading. It is therefore not surprising that the code words used in place of animals’ names do not tally. Wang Ming-ji said that wheat meant sheep, barley meant goat and oats meant cow, whereas, for Yang Yung-xin, oats meant sheep or goat and barley meant cow. Thirdly, Yang Yung-xin replaced Wang Ming-ji’s statement, “Whoever transgresses the agreement let him enter the nail hole of the ploughshare!” by “Let no clamour of argument enter the hole of the ploughshare”.

2. Words used by the old folk in making an agreement.

According to Yang Yung-xin, there was a form of words, by recitation of which, an agreement already reached, might be ratified. It comprised a catalogue of six similes illustrating human relationships. Ideally people should be inseparable as the mythical Yi-xiu and Fu-xiu, or at one like the pipe which produced a musical sound whether it was sucked or blown. However, circumstances could change, fine weather from the south could give way to cloudy weather from the north. But, though fists could no longer rest side by side, there was no need for them to be in contention. As wild clematis differed from a forest tree, so people have contrasting temperaments, but each has his individual troubles as surely as each had his own cooking pot. Therefore let the parties exchange capes, sheep skin for goat skin, and all can be settled.

This form of ratification was appropriate for any agreement that might have been reached, and could be modified to suit the special circumstances. This is precisely what Wang Ming-ji did when he applied it as a conclusion to a divorce agreement. (M338)

3. Tying the long-life cord.

This, the first of three short incantations associated with charms to give long life, is concerned with the ritual of tying a string around a child’s neck. The belief was that, provided it was not removed, it would preserve the child from danger. To be effective it had to be tied by the shaman-healer, who also recited the incantation.

Behind the reference to copper wire was the belief that a living person's spirit could wander away, or be frightened away from his body, and there were rituals by which such wandering spirits had to be recalled. There was also a constant danger that such wandering spirits could be caught and enslaved by the ill-disposed in the spirit world, who set snares of copper wire to trap them.

4. Words used when shaving the head.

The shaving of the head was also thought to be efficacious in giving long life, but this too had to be performed by the appropriate person. He is simply referred to as "the man from the cold country", in the incantation, but it is not clear whether he too was a shaman-healer.

5. Wearing a copper bangle.

The wording of this incantation is very similar to that of number 3, so that presumably, the "iron wire" here has the same significance as the "copper wire" in the earlier piece. Here, however, the long-life charm is not a cord tied round the neck, but a copper bangle worn on the arm. The final line, "without sickness like the copper wire", may refer to the fact that, unlike iron, copper does not become "sick", that is, rust away.

6. Introduction when going to have a discussion with people (1).

This incantation concerns the function of Miao middlemen in their conduct of negotiations. In addition to requiring skill in bargaining and persuasion, middlemen also needed wisdom because they were entrusted with executive authority. They could not only negotiate, but could make decisions which were binding upon the party which sent them. Now if a middleman was not too forthcoming, he might be reminded of his authority to act, by the allegories of the good horse and the good ox. In his account of the negotiations in a case of divorce, (M338), Wang Ming-ji did in fact use part of this incantation.

7. Introduction when going to have a discussion with people (2).

Although Yang Yung-xin used the same title for this and for the previous piece, the present incantation is not an admonition addressed to a middleman reminding him of his responsibilities, but a form of apology that he himself might use at the commencement of his mission.

8. Words for divorcing wives and husbands.

Yang Yung-xin's title for this short piece is quite wrong. It has nothing whatsoever to do with divorce, but describes the change in circumstances of the ancestors brought about by "the great sacrifice", the offering of an ox, "the great horned one". Before, they had been so poor that, ashamed, grandmother had crept under the bed to hide, and grandfather squeezed through a crack in the partition to conceal himself in the cattle pen. Now, however, they were the proud possessors of fine cattle fit to plough earth and sky.

9. Introductory words for making an offering during Miao spirit-worship.

Short pieces of bamboo split in half were used as divination sticks. The two halves were tossed into the air and allowed to fall to the ground. The manner in which they fell, face up or face down, provided an answer to the question asked, which was, in the present case, “Has the crop failure been caused by a disgruntled ancestor demanding an offering?”

10. Words which the zu-mu intoned.

In old Miao society the worship of the ancestors was not conducted by a shaman-healer, but by a member in the main branch of the family who had been properly instructed in the rituals and incantations to be used. This person was called a zu-mu. When the sacrifice had been duly offered, the zu-mu presented petitions for the well being and prosperity of the family, at the same time assuring the ancestors that the offering was all prepared and ready.

11. Song which is sung to escort the spirits when the worship is completed.

This is a rather abbreviated form of the incantation used for dismissing the ancestors and escorting them back to their “pine wood homes”, that is to their graves, when the sacrifice is completed.

M339
Ancient traditions of the Miao old folk.

Supplied by Yang Yung-xin.

1. Form of words for the separation of married girls and youths.

If a husband and a wife no longer want one another, it is necessary to send some old people to stand between the two sides, talk it over, and make an agreement, properly witnessed, then the matter can be concluded. One speaker from the wife's side first comes and says, "The in-laws have sent us two cow-herds here with a matter to talk over with you. Will you seek two travellers to stand between. However, the business is not ours. It is because the devil has sent it that the snake actually enters your house!" A speaker from the husband's side replies, "The in-laws have sent you, but is it to bring matters to a conclusion, or simply just to talk about it?" The speaker from the wife's side answers, "We have only now brought a word to lay before you, whether matters turn out well or not, has yet to be discussed". Then the speaker on the husband's side replies, "May we trouble you to return to the in-laws and say,

‘Do you intend to cause barley to travel the road?
Do you intend to cause oats to travel the path?’

Then come and tell us". (Barley means "cow", oats means "sheep and goats".) When they have finished talking in this way, they fix a time and a place to foregather, and when the time comes, everyone assembles there. Then the speaker from the side in the wrong passes over a ploughshare and says,

“Elders of this place, elders who have travelled,
This is a ploughshare used for producing crops.
Elders of this place, elders who have argued together,
Let no clamour of argument enter the hole of the ploughshare,
Let no clamour of words enter the mouth of the ploughshare”.

The speaker from the side in the right accepts the ploughshare and says,

“Elders of this place, elders who have argued together,
Let there be no clamour of argument at all entering the hole of the ploughshare,
Let there be no tumult of words entering the mouth of the ploughshare.
So let the fish return to the water,
So let the girl return and be separate”.

2. Words used by the old people in making an agreement.

When the Yi-xiu travels the smooth road,
Then the Fu-xiu travels the bright road.
(Yi-xiu and Fu-xiu are the names of two animals. Any amount of persistence cannot separate them.)

The Yi-xiu is like a pan-pipe blown,
And the Fu-xiu is like a pan pipe sucked.

Fine light increases from the south,

But cloudy light increases from the north.

If the two fists cannot rest together,
Let not the two fists get to pushing each other!
If the two fists cannot rest contentedly,
Let not the two fists be pressed into contention!

People may resemble wild clematis, dependent on others for support,
But each will have his own cooking pot.
People may resemble standing trees, affording others shade and shelter,
But each will have his own worries.

You shall wear my sheepskin,
I will wear your goatskin.

3. Tying the long-life cord.

Though the spirit-world uses copper wire,
The spirit world cannot tie it.
But I use a cord of yarn, and I can tie it,
Tie it and give life for many, many years.

Climb into the sky, I will lay hold of your foot and pull you down.
Go down into a pit, I will lay hold of your hair and pull you up.

4. Words used when shaving the head.

The man came from the cold land,
Came to shave from the cold city,
Came shaving heads,
Shaving to give life for many, many years.

He made the heads as bald
As the man's leather boots!

5. Wearing a copper bangle.

Though the spirit-world uses iron wire,
The spirit world cannot tie it.
But I use copper wire and I can tie it,
Tie it and give life for many, many years.

Tie it and make life run, make life long,
Without sickness like the copper wire.

6. Introduction when going to have a discussion with people (1).

A good ox is not sent to Zhaotung without its yoke,
A good horse is not sent to Sichuan without its saddle.
People yoke the ox, for if it will not pull, it would not be sent.
People saddle the horse, for if it will not carry, it would not be sent.
A good ox is obedient to the lead rope in its nose,
And a good horse is obedient to the bridle in its mouth.

7. Introduction when going to have a discussion with people (2).

Some good people may not have wished to come to you,
Some good people may not have wished to discuss with other folk,
But I was sent on purpose. Were I unwilling to come I should not have been sent,
So today I have arrived here.
When one meets with good spirits, it is well to worship,
When one meets with good people, it is well to converse.

8. Words for divorcing wives and husbands.

The woman had so little she crept under the bed,
But the woman has received a great horned one to plough the earth,
Great, and as fat as a bear.

The man had so little he crept through a gap in the partition,
But the man has received a trained horned one to plough the sky,
Trained, and as fat as a tiger.

9. Introductory words when making an offering during Miao spirit-worship.

This year is a famine season, a famine year.
The blossom opened but did not set,
The fruit formed but did not mature,
For the ancestors were wanting food and wanting drink.

How did the bamboo strips fall, face down or face up?
Whose father are you,
So full of impatience for a live pig?
Whose mother are you,
So full of impatience for a live chicken?

10. Words which the zu-mu intoned.

Whether they remain within,
Enfold them, and whether they travel without.
Let their posterity spread abroad,
Let their livestock graze back and forth and all around and about.
It is ready! It is ready!

Let their sheep and their goats in flocks,
Resembling the roebuck,
Eat leaves, collect shooting bamboo over the mountains all around and about.
It is ready! It is ready!

Let their fine cattle and horses,
Resembling the deer,
Gather outside and all around and about.
It is ready! It is ready!

11. Song which is sung to escort the spirits when the worship is completed.

Stretch out your hands to lead your pig,
Stretch out your arms to enfold your chicken,
Draw them away to your place of sitting, your place of sleeping,
Away to your house of fir wood planks.

M341
Songs remembering the old folk. 1.

Sung by Yang Zhi.

Introduction.

In the opening lines, and from time to time throughout this song, the Miao words “yeu” and “bo” are used. In normal speech these words simply mean “man” and “woman”. It is clear, however, that in the present context they refer to ancestors. The terms are together synonymous with “li gha lao”, meaning “the old folk”. It is therefore more appropriate in translation to render “yeu” and “bo” as “grandfather” and “grandmother” respectively.

In line 11 the expression “beu yeu” occurs. This is the name given to the ritual of rebirth. If a child, in the early months of life, did not seem to be thriving as it should, the ritual of “beu yeu” might be performed. In this the child was passed through a basket from which the bottom had been cut away, a ceremonial re-enactment of its birth.

M341
Songs remembering the old folk. 1.

Sung by Yang Zhi.

Grandfather sleeps in his coffin in the earth.
Grandmother sleeps in her coffin at night.
Would that the good tree yet stood by the edge of the plain,
Would that the old tree might never have fallen!

5 Could grandfather, though sleeping, yet speak,
 Then would the old tree spring to new life,
 So that bees, in their flights to and fro, would drink from its blossoms,
 And wild bees in their flights back and forth would drink of its sap.

10 Would that the old folk had never died,
 That grand father, asleep in his coffin, could speak!
 Or rather, let the old folk be born anew,
 And let them live to a hundred years!

 Then would the children find a hiding place,
 And their descendants, something to which they could cling

15 Then might their descendants spread abroad,
 Spread abroad in their clans and resemble,
 Resemble the seed of the wild clematis,
 Or resemble the seed of the tree-creeper.

 Thus it is ended.

M342
Song remembering the old folk. 2.

Sung by Pan Xie.

Introduction.

This song, lamenting the demise of the old folk, uses exactly the same set of similes as employed in other songs in the group, however, after the two opening lines, each stanza is introduced by the statement that while the “father” was alive he was a “gi a zyu”. Now “gi” is the word for a flat area of ground commonly used for a market, but also for any plot of ground where community or religious gatherings could be held. “a zyu” simply means “to gather together”. That is to say, while this father-figure lived, he was the centre about which the clan or extended family gathered, and, by implication, now he had gone, the clan was in danger of disintegrating.

M342
Song remembering the old folk. 2.

Sung by Pan Xie.

Let the good fish live in good water,
Let the hardwood tree stand in its place.

While Father lived, there was a place to forgather.
Would that the old ones still lived, for they would resemble,
5 Resemble a mother hen brooding her little ones,
 Never allowing the hawk to snatch them.

While Father lived, there was a place to forgather.
Would that the old ones still lived, for they would be,
Be as a mother duck brooding her little ones,
10 Never allowing the hawk to take them.

While Father lived, there was a place to forgather.
Would that the old ones still lived, for they would be,
Be as a protecting tree standing on the mountain ridge,
A protecting tree bursting into blossom,
15 Welcoming the bees to sip from its blossom.

While Father lived, there was a place to forgather.
Would that the old ones still lived, for they would be,
Be a protecting tree standing in the mountain pass,
A protecting tree dripping with sap,
20 Welcoming the bees to drink of its sap.

While Father lived, there was a place to forgather.
Would that the old ones still lived, for they would resemble,
Resemble a firm rock standing in the midst of the plain,
Welcoming the children to hide in its shade.

M343
Songs remembering the old folk. 3.

Sung by Tao Zi-gai.

Introduction.

This song consists of two exactly parallel stanzas of five lines each. Though the general meaning is clear, it is difficult at first sight to understand what the first two lines have to do with the remaining three lines in each stanza. The problem lies in the interpretation of the metaphors employed. What have horns on the heads of cattle and sheep to do with the role of the old folk? This role is then described as resembling a grove of trees which afford shade from the heat, or as way marks to guide the traveller on the right course.

That which links the various pictures together is the word “stand”. The horns, the parents, the grove of trees and the way marks all “stand” in place, fulfilling their proper functions. It is normal and natural that the horns should stand on the heads of sheep and cattle, and in no sense are the animals impeded by their weight. So it is natural and normal, indeed both right and proper, for the old folk to stand in a position of authority and responsibility within the clan, giving reassurance and guidance to the younger generation.

M343
Songs remembering the old folk. 3.

Sung by Tao Zi-gai.

Though the horns of a sheep stand upon the sheep's head,
The sheep's horns are not heavy on its head.
Would that mother and father still lived,
Like a protecting grove standing on the plain,
5 Standing for the children to hide in its shade.

Though the horns of a cow stand on the cow's head,
The cow's horns are not heavy on its head.
Would that mother and father still lived,
Like way marks standing on the mountain tops,
10 Standing that the children might find the way home.

M344
Songs remembering the old folk. 4.

Sung by Wang Shu-xing.

Introduction.

As set out in the Miao manuscript the first five lines of this song read,

Why were the old folk calling the children?
They were calling the children to come and drink wine,
So the children came after.
Why were the old folk calling the children?
They were calling the children to come and eat meat.

Though their meaning is perfectly clear, these lines pose a problem. In songs and stories, in accounts of the old spirit worship and in the incantations that were used, there are numerous references to “the children” inviting “the old folk” to a feast that had been prepared for them. Then, after the sacrifice had been offered and the libations poured, petitions were presented imploring the ancestors for protection against attack, for health and for increase within the family, for fertility of the soil and fecundity of the flocks and herds. Nowhere, however, is it suggested that “the old folk” ever invited the children to eat and drink. When the dead did communicate with the living it was invariably by a visitation of sickness or some disaster. This was a sharp reminder, according to the shaman-healer who would have been called, that a sacrifice to the ancestors was overdue.

Now Wang Shu-xing, who recorded this song was a Christian preacher, and was probably writing what he remembered from distant childhood. It is possible, therefore, even likely, that in writing it down he got “the old folk” and “the children” interchanged. The more so because neither expression was still in common use, and the general worship of the ancestors had ceased many years before. It will also be noted that this section of the song is incomplete. A sixth line, parallel to line 3 has, at some point, been lost .

These considerations have prompted a decision to amend the text by transposing “the old folk” and “the children” in lines 1 to 5, and by supplying the missing line 6. This brings the song into complete harmony with all other songs and stories which have to do with ancestor worship.

M344
Songs remembering the old folk. 4.

Sung by Wang Shu-xing.

Why were the children calling the old folk?
They were calling the old folk to come and drink wine,
So the old folk came, following behind.

5 Why were the children calling the old folk?
They were calling the old folk to come and eat meat,
So the old folk came, following after.

10 Would that the old folk might never have perished,
So would the old folk resemble a mother hen, brooding and watchful.
Would that the old folk might never have grown old,
So would the old folk resemble a mother hen brooding her chicks.

Would that the old folk might never have grown old,
Then would the old folk resemble a protecting tree standing in the midst of the
plain,
Where the children might hide in the shade.

15 Would that the old folk might never have perished,
Then would the old folk resemble a great black rock set on the mountain ridge,
Where the children might go and find shelter.

20 Would that the old folk might never have grown old,
Then would the old folk resemble forested cliffs, cliffs welcoming the bees,
Would resemble forested cliffs, cliffs welcoming the wild bees.
Thus it is ended.

