

M143
The song of Zhyu-shi-lang.

Sung by Zhang Ming.

Notes

This song is found in Document K (no. 3/3, page 13) and in Document L (no. 9, page 29). Odd fragments are also preserved in the conflated version of the song in Document N.

A note in Miao at the beginning reads, "This song was sung at the time when the people sealed hollow trees for houses, and lived among the rocks and forests".

Lines 14 and 15. In these lines and throughout the song Document L reads C" L_n J- and C" L_n C[̄]' for tigers and lions instead of C" L³ J- and C" L³ C[̄]' as in Document K.

Line 15. Document K reads C" †'。 C†' 〃 instead of C" L³ C[̄]', a mistake corrected in Document L.

Line 16. A note in Miao at the end of this line explains that †'。 C†'〃 is "to fix poles up in a tree as a place to stay". With tigers and lions about Zhyu-shi-lang felt safer lodged in a tree.

Line 17. Following this line in both documents the five lines 7 to 11 are repeated verbatim. It could be argued that the whole passage comprises four stanzas,

- Stanza A, lines 7 to 11.
- Stanza B, lines 12 to 17.
- Stanza C, lines 7 to 11 again.
- Stanza D, lines 18 to 23.

In this case the repetition of stanza A would have to be regarded as part of the parallelism in the construction of the song. Against this it must be pointed out that, if this were the case, then stanzas B and D ought to be strictly parallel to one another. Clearly they are not so. Normally parallelism requires that lines or stanzas are constructed with identical patterns but not using identical words. There are occasions when a line may be repeated without change to the wording, but for a whole stanza to be repeated would be most improbable. It is therefore far more likely that here we have a case of dittography, and the repeated lines have been left out.

Lines 20 and 21. In both documents these two lines are joined together into a single line.

Line 23. J⁻ T" J⁰ Δ³ means "spirit axe", and is equivalent to the English "magic axe" or "enchanted axe".

Lines 25 and 26. The sound of axe strokes in other versions is represented by the sounds T_ε T^ε, but in this version by T^ʳ T^ʳ.

Lines 28 and 29. The meaning of these two lines and that of the similar couplet in lines 34 and 35, would appear to be that, for three days, Zhyu-shi-lang cut a swath straight through the forest, and then for three months, went back and forth, until he had cleared a substantial rectangular area. Later he burned it off in the same manner.

Line 40. As in line 15, $C'' L^3 C\bar{t}'$ has been wrongly written $C'' t'$. Ct' „, but this time Document L has not corrected the error.

Line 41. The four words which immediately follow the name Zhyu-shi-lang read T' , $T\epsilon T'$, C_- in both documents. The line also appears in Document N on page 390, in the conflated version of the song, and there is a foot note on page 395 (with an incorrect reference number) which reads,

(in Miao) "this expression says" (in Chinese) "engraved wood remembering business". (in Miao) "taik gheut njot nrus". That is, "taik gheut remembering business".

According to this note therefore, "taik gheut", T' , $T\epsilon$, is the Miao for "engraved wood", so that the whole expression would describe some kind of memorial tablet or plaque. In fact T' , normally means a slab of stone. C_- means "wedged", so that T' , C_- would be a stone slab set upright. $T\epsilon$ can mean either "twisted" or "tangled", or it can mean "a stick", neither of which seems to fit the context particularly well. If the note in Document N is on the right lines, then it seems likely that the word which appears as $T\epsilon$, "gheut", is a simple scribal error for ㄓ , which does indeed mean "carved out" or "engraved", and in the present text this emendation has been chosen. The expression thus means "an engraved stone set upright". The Miao themselves did not set up such memorial stones, but they were very familiar with them, since their Chinese neighbours excelled in the art. In the present context the expression is entirely metaphorical. It is saying, "This, namely the land cleared of forest and ready for tilling, this was Zhyu-shi-lang's memorial".