

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”.