

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.