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4 Transforming tradition

Performing wedding ritual in modern China

Yu Hua and Zhu Yujie

Introduction

This research is focused on the changing roles of wedding rituals from early modern China to the contemporary modern world. Wedding ritual, especially the ritual of 'obstruction' in Gouliang Miao (Hmong) village in Fenghuang town, West Hunan Tujia and Miao Minority Autonomous Prefecture, was interpreted in different cultural contexts, forming a different relationship with the state. Travelling through different national discourses on ritual in three stages of modern China, namely the Qing dynasty (early modern), the modern state (1910s–late 1970s) and post-reform China (1978–), wedding ritual in Gouliang village takes on different practices. The meanings of ritual are fluid with transforming discourses. What is the meaning of wedding ritual when it is transformed into the nature of *other* people, feudal superstition, cultural resources, the object of tourists' gaze and the heritage product? What is the role of wedding ritual in the locals' contemporary life when ethnic tourism and heritage industry gradually penetrate into the village? What is the role of the state in transforming wedding ritual practices? Guided by these questions, this chapter explores diversified meanings of traditional wedding ritual in a transforming process of national discourses and needs.

Wedding ritual of Miao in early modern China

Ritual used to penetrate into every sphere of Chinese life in imperial China. It was said to be 'the determinate fabric of Chinese culture, and further, defines sociopolitical order. It is the language through which the culture is expressed' (Hall and Ames 1998: 269). The emperor, as the Son of Heaven, governed the society and the universe through 'inauguration ceremonies, the diffusion of the calendar, the bestowal of titles and names, the classification of the various cults and deities' and offered sacrifices to the Heaven and his ancestors (Gernet 1985: 105, cited in Rawski 2001: 214). When the Qing empire started to legitimate the expansion of its territory and sought to include different ethnic and linguistic groups in its own rule, one of the techniques of expansion that the Qing employed was the use of ethnography and cartography of customs and

rituals of various peoples based on direct observation within the context of the early modern world (Hostetler 2000). One of the frequent topics recorded in the early ethnography of the Miao area is marriage and courtship practices, which was of great interest to the Confucian literati because of their own strong training in the importance of proper rites (Hostetler 2000). The ultimate goal of direct observation, ethnography and cartography is to govern non-Han peoples. As Tian Wen, who assumed governorship of Guizhou in 1688, observed, 'Consulting literary sources is not as satisfactory as observation ... If one wants to control the barbarian frontier area, one must judge the profitability of the land, and investigate the nature of its people' (Hostetler 2000). The wedding ritual depicted in the local gazetteers thus presents the Confucian scholar and official's observation and interpretation of the Miao practice partly as the object of governance and partly as the cultural Other. While describing the cultural phenomena of another culture, the author is seeing the Other in the perspective of his or her own culture and language. In this case, the official scholar is describing the wedding ceremony in traditional Confucian culture in order to know and investigate the nature of his people.

In the category of 'ethnography of populace customs' (*feng su zhi*) of the *Fenghuang Town Gazetteer* (Vol. 7) composed during the Daoguang period (1820–1850), the wedding in Fenghuang town was described and interpreted in the language of a classic Confucian ritual book, such as *Yili* (*Book of Rites*) or *Zhuxi Jiali* (*Zhuxi Family Rituals*) (Ebrey 1991). It might be the case that the official scholar described the wedding ritual in Fenghuang town according to the Confucian ritual procedures.

Wedding The family of the boy invite an intermediary to ask the family of the girl for the permission (of wedding). The girl's family member writes down the girl's date of birth on a piece of red paper, which is called the phoenix note, to indicate their approval... The boy's family then present such betrothal gifts as hairpins, clothes, pigs and spirit, which is called delivering gifts, bearing the meaning of *na cai* (presenting betrothal gifts, a phrase from *Yili*). When they are ready to get married, an auspicious date of wedding is selected by divination and presented to the girl's family together with some more gifts. It is called *shang tou* (taken as a priority), bearing the meaning of *na ji* (sending news of auspicious divination). On the wedding day, the bridal sedan chair is sent to the bride's to the sound of drums. On the day the groom goes to meet the bride in person, two geese are offered in front of the ancestors' altar, which is called offering sacrifice of goose... At the arrival of the groom's home, the bride and the groom perform the ritual of drinking the wedlock wine, offering sacrifices to the ancestors, kowtowing to the parents and elders of the two families.

The Qing official scholar tends to integrate the procedures and meanings of each ritual step in the Confucian classic into the writing of the wedding ritual in Fenghuang town in the local gazetteer. There is a cultural integration among

Miao, Tujia and Han in this area, since 'there has been a mutual assimilation in customs and ethnic characteristics (among Miao, Han and Tujia), like the alloying of tin and lead in the making of a pot' (Kinkley 1987: 247). It is not strange to find the traditional Confucian wedding procedures embedded in the wedding ritual practice in the Miao area. Wedding ritual was a process of constructing and negotiating a relationship between the two families to be joined, from presenting the betrothal gifts, to sending news of auspicious divination of the wedding day and offering sacrifice to the ancestors of the groom. The meaning of the wedding narrated in the local gazetteer can be traced in the *Book of Rites* (51–21 BCE):

The ceremony of marriage was intended to be a bond of love between two (families of different) surnames, with a view, in its retrospective character, to secure the services in the ancestral temple, and in its prospective character, to secure the continuance of the family line.

(trans. Legge 1885)

Another form of wedding ritual can also be located in the earlier version of the gazetteer. The wedding ceremony in the Miao area was described as a process of walking and drinking without any rite of drinking wedlock wine or offering sacrifices to the ancestors. The *Qianzhou Town Gazetteer* (Vol. 7), composed during *Qianlong* period (1735–1796), recorded that:

The bride walked to the groom's, holding the umbrella herself on the way. Her brothers carried the bamboo basket filled with wooden pillow, quilts, and dresses. The bride's kinsmen sent her to the groom's and enjoyed the drinking for three days and nights.

This entry described a simpler ritual in which the bride walked to the groom's residence by herself. It was called *zouhun* (walking wedding) later by the Miao in Gouliang village. This form of wedding enjoyed popularity during the 1970s and 1980s when post-Mao China was still in the last wave of 'anti-feudalism' and 'anti-superstition' governance, according to the local villagers.

Struggle of rituals in the modern state

In modern (1840–1919) and contemporary Chinese history (1919–present), conventional and folk ritual as a whole has declined almost to the point of extinction in Chinese culture and life. To pave the way for modernity (famously identified with 'democracy and science' by Chen Duxiu) in China, traditional Chinese culture, especially ritual, was systematically denounced as feudalistic remnants and superstitious practice in the New Culture and May Fourth movements (1916–1919). The New Culture Movement promoted the elimination of tradition, Confucianism and classical language, leading to the rupture of traditional Chinese culture. Through the movement of 'Destroying the Four Olds' – old

ideas, cultures, customs and habits – and the movement of ‘Criticising Confucius’ during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), the ritual tradition has been expunged from ideology and the political domain in the process of Chinese modernisation (Hu 2011: 61).

Rituals and the temples related to ritual performances in Gouliang were inescapably suppressed and destroyed during the Cultural Revolution, but were revived with the onset of Deng Xiaoping’s Opening Up and Reform policy and the rise of ethnic tourism from 1979 onwards. However, the shackles of ‘anti-feudalism’ and anti-ritual were still in the minds of the villagers. In the 1980s, locals in Gouliang did not restore the traditional way of staging a wedding in the Confucian wedding procedure. Instead, they revived the ritual of *zouhun* which was recognised as the typical Miao wedding. The marriage is completed by walking to the groom’s home without wedding banquet or sacrifice to the ancestors. Long Hexiu, who got married in the 1980s, walked to her husband’s home on her wedding day. She recalled:

At that time we did *zou hun*, unlike today’s wedding that is reverting to our traditional way. Now I admire those who had a matchmaker and got a marriage rite. We belonged to the *zou hun* [generation]. Since it was typical of that time, there was no regret for me. But those who were introduced by the matchmaker and got a wedding ceremony are the best. They enjoyed superior status. My status is lower since I walked to my husband’s house. When I walked here, my mother-in-law gave me a wardrobe for my clothes. There was no banquet until I gave birth to Xiao Hui [her first daughter].

(fieldwork notes 2009)

Long thought that the traditional wedding ritual could endow the bride with superior status compared with *zouhun* in which the bride walked to the groom’s house. The ‘superiority’ of the traditional wedding was presided over by Miao song experts. The whole ritual procedure is performed in the form of antiphonal Miao songs, which involves prolonged chanting of the rhymed verses (Ling and Rui 2003: 283). It is regarded as ‘superior’ by the villagers to the equally traditional but simpler *zouhun*. Currently, local villagers prefer the ritual of obstructions instead of *zouhun*, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

In cultural practices, the villagers seem to have restored their traditional way. In discourses and ideology, conflicts persist. Due to the continuous control of local ritual practices by the state (Oakes and Sutton 2010), a tension exists among the state’s socialistic discourses and the discourse of developing ethnic tourism. A large billboard headed ‘Village Rules and Folk Covenants’ hangs on the wall of an old wooden mansion which is both the tourists’ site and the officials’ office. One of the folk laws issues the order of keeping away from feudalism and superstition, and simplifying the wedding ceremony and funeral ritual and acting in accordance with Socialist Spiritual Civilisation. On one hand, the tourism industry has appropriated some elements in the wedding ritual and performs the artistic and amusing parts in front of the tourists. On the other hand,

the state discourse insists on the simplification of wedding ritual and warns the villagers away from the ‘superstitious’ part of it. If the ‘feudalist’ and superstitious part refers to the sacrificing to the ancestors during the wedding, the traditional meaning of a wedding will be lost. If the wedding were to be simplified, then what will be reserved for the ethnic culture? If the wedding performance for the tourists can be complex, why not the wedding in the locals’ everyday life? We suppose that it is under such tension that the traditional wedding ceremony is enjoying more and more popularity among the locals.

Wedding ritual in the Intangible Heritage Movement

China was one of the first countries to ratify the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Heritage (Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, ICHC) in 2004. In the following years, intangible cultural heritage has been promoted in China through a number of policies and practices at the national, provincial and local levels. Although ‘Intangible Cultural Heritage’ is used to maintain and promote local cultural diversity, the government’s adoption of the notion has become a tool to legitimise its cultural and social control, particularly over ethnic minorities, through defining and formulating local folklore, performing arts, rituals and social practices, and transforming them into a unified national body of knowledge.

Intangible heritage in China has thus become a new form of social-cultural ‘movement’ (*yundong*) (Peng 2008) by local governments and related agencies. The discourse of intangible heritage includes culture and ethnic traditions, which are packaged as consumable tourist attractions. The growth of ethnic tourism – both by domestic and international tourists – has motivated a search for and consumption of original culture and intangible heritage, especially in the minority areas.

West Hunan Tujia and Miao Autonomous Prefecture is hailed as a ‘treasure house’ of intangible heritage (Wang *et al.* 2013). A recent government report (Ministry of Culture of the People’s Republic of China 2013) claims that West Hunan has taken possession of 3,200 items of intangible heritage cultural resources, among which 24 were listed on the national level. The increasing number of intangible heritage items demonstrates the achievements of the officials, who are working hard for the bidding. Wedding ritual is segmented into the prescribed categories with aesthetic and artistic significance rather than its ritual and moral value. The antiphonal Miao songs were taken as a form of art and listed in the category of ‘folk music’ in the bidding. The ‘Miao ancient words’, which can be chanted during the ritual of ‘paying the mother’s milk’ in the wedding to thank the bride’s parents and elders, is decontextualised and categorised as ‘folk literature’ (Huang 2012: 173). Officials from the Cultural Department are trained to write up application reports to apply for the next, higher level of the intangible heritage programme. The intangible heritage movement, on the one hand, has forced local officials to enter normal villagers’ lives and listen to their stories. Large numbers of local legends and folklore have been collected, recorded and stored in the Cultural Department across the country. On the other hand, the writing of these collected stories is channelled

by the categories of intangible heritage prescribed by UNESCO and turned into standardised expert knowledge aiming for success in bidding, compared with the Qing officials' writings which were largely shaped by the ritual meaning in the Confucian ritual classics.

Despite of being categorised as a branch of knowledge and forced to stand outside its life context, the intangible heritage movement does liberate the cultural practices that were once labelled as the remnants of 'superstition' and offers a free space for the locals to perform the rituals in their everyday life without suspicion.

Traditional Miao weddings in the contemporary world

Contemporary Miao weddings are found to follow the wedding ritual shared among Miao, Tujia and Han in Fenghuang town during the Daoguang period (1820–1850). The whole wedding involves negotiating and constructing the relationship between the two families to be conjoined through the chanting of Miao songs. This section describes in detail the ritual of the 'obstruction of song', recorded as a part of wedding rituals in 2008 in Gouliang Miao village. Note that the following section describes the ritual of 'obstruction of songs' in its original context for the comparison of the same ritual genre in the context of tourism. The ritual of 'song obstruction' is performed in the style of antiphonal Miao chanting. The bride's family attempts to obstruct the way of the groom's party by blocking its way and singing traditional songs.

In the traditional wedding, the Miao song masters who improvise the lyrics are called *Geshi* (master composer) and the singers are called *Geshou* (chanter). The *Geshi* composes the lyrics according to the repertoire and immediate context. The male *Geshi* (song composer for the groom's family) and female *Geniang* (song composer and chanter for the bride's family) learn a complex repertoire of formulaic chants from the Miao song masters in the village by oral transmission in their daily life (Zhao 2008: 86). The chanters are the apprentices of the master composer. Together, they serve as ritual instructors throughout the traditional wedding process, namely in how to receive the bride, obstruct the gate and set the feast for the groom, as well as on how the bride should depart from her natal home, enter into the groom's house, prepare the wedding banquet at the groom's house and see the guests off at the end of the celebration.

Ritual, as the texture of traditional Chinese culture, discloses its meaning in images revealed in the ritual performances rather than in propositions established within a system of signs (Wu and Hu 2010). The following attempts to describe in detail the 'obstruction' ritual in the traditional wedding form and to present the cultural fabric of the traditional ritual in a contemporary context.

In the afternoon, the groom's party arrived. As the bride's home was located at the bottom of a hill, cars cannot drive directly to the door. They unloaded all the betrothal gifts onto a spacious terrace. The bridegroom's four kinsmen carried a heavy pig, the groom took the bride's new wedding dress, a red umbrella and a silver crown in the two baskets. Also, the Assistant carried the

two muttering geese and the Helper took the wine, soft drinks and the two full baskets of grain. The bride and her relatives were waiting for the groom on the terrace. The *Geniang* stood opposite the groom's group, chanting to them. Two *Geniang* chanted their welcome and compliments on the groom's betrothal gifts slowly and loudly. The surrounding mountains echoed with their song:

We are here waiting for the guests aye~aye~aye~
 We come here to see new in-laws aye~aye~aye~
 You come to our place for the first time aye~
 We see you carry such a large pig aye~aye~aye~
 Every basket you are carrying is loaded so full aye~aye~aye~
 We are obstructing the way for your songs aye~
 Your arrival has gained much fame for us aye~aye~aye~
 You must sing us some songs to pass here aye~

The groom's *Geshi* spoke to them: 'You asked us to sing. We do not know how. We come to receive the bride. Our love for the bride can be expressed by mouth? As you asked us to sing, we will chant one or two sentences.' Instead of immediately returning a song, the groom's *Geshi* responded humbly by saying that they did not know how to chant Miao songs, signifying that they have no talent for singing. They did not chant until the *Geniang* pleaded again. A classic Chinese ritual book *Liji* (475–221 BCE) states: 'When the elder asks a question, to reply without acknowledging one's incompetency and (trying to) decline answering, is contrary to propriety (ritual)' (Legge 1885). This may also explain why the Chinese tend to decline a kind offer of food or answering immediately on some social occasions. On this occasion, *Geshi* claimed themselves to be incompetent before they began to answer the *Geniang*. This action is taken to be in accordance with ritual propriety.

As '*li* is seen in humbling oneself and giving honour to others' (Legge 1885), the lyrics improvised by the groom's *Geshi* constitute one of the rhetorical constructions of ritual performance that one can easily find in both ancient and contemporary Chinese cultural phenomena. The two families officially met for the first time during the ritual of obstruction, in which the groom presented the betrothal gifts. They praised the bride's kinsmen and belittled their own betrothal gifts by chanting:

You all know well *li* aye~aye~aye~
 You come out to receive us with your smiling faces aye~aye~aye~
 And treat us as if we were high officials oh~aye~
 We see you aunts stood there aye~aye~aye~
 Your mouths are as sweet as candy aye~aye~aye~
 You are here with smiling faces aye~
 The things we carry here are only a few aye~aye~aye~
 We are sorry for it aye~

Immediately after they honoured the bride's kinsmen and humbled themselves, they proposed to enter the bride's home, a suggestion to go through the

obstruction. The bride's *Geniang* did not easily give way to their request. The rule is that if they obviously lose the singing competition, they have to unlock the obstruction. Yet, obstructing the groom's way is a ritual performance rather than a real intention. Forced to confront the 'obstruction' directly as the groom's *Geshi* had proposed, they started to negotiate and banter with each other. We will see how the bride concedes without losing face and passes the 'obstruction' in the following dialogue:

THE GROOM'S GESHI: We know ourselves. Our gifts are so few. Come on! Let's go to your home [in a beseeching way].

THE BRIDE'S GENIANG: No, you cannot enter the door now [steadily and loudly refuse for the first time].

THE GROOM'S GESHI: We feel sorry for our bride. Others will see our shabby betrothal presents. We could compete neither with the wealthy nor the poor. We feel sorry [grinning].

THE BRIDE'S AUNT: Your presents are so many. You are good at singing and speaking. Find a stone. Let us sit down and chat along [everyone laughs. Gently refuse for the second time].

THE GROOM'S GESHI: No. No. No. Shall we go home and sit? [in a pleading tone, his face broadened out into a grin].

THE BRIDE'S AUNT: Our home is poor and shabby, very shabby. Let us have a rest on the flagstone [expressing her refusal with a smile for the third time].

THE GROOM'S GESHI: We are here to receive the bride. You are very good at receiving the guests. Let's go to your home. You know *li* [ritual] very well. Let us sit at home instead of standing on the path [in an imploring way].

THE BRIDE'S GESHI: You always said that you did not know how. We are here as if we have stirred up a nest of hornets. You have so many songs. Sing one more. Though we do not know how to sing back, we put them on credit. Others owe money on credit. We owe Miao songs on credit as we have already stirred up the hornet's nest [everyone laughed].

For the first time the groom's *Geshi* requested to go to the bride's home, which was the suggestion to go through the 'obstruction', which the bride's *Geniang* sternly refused with her apparent negative response. Then an excuse was raised by the groom's *Geshi* that their shabby betrothal gifts would be exposed to others and mocked by outsiders. They humbly expressed their apology, dropping a hint of hiding the wretched gifts at home as soon as possible. The bride's aunt reacted with the opposite observations of the betrothal gifts. They praised the betrothal gifts and Miao songs, which presented sufficient reason to ask the groom's *Geshi* to stay and sing. They insisted on deterring the groom's proceeding by saying that they would like to find a stone, sit down and chat. Thus the groom's *Geshi* were denied their request for the second time. They immediately replied with three 'nos' and proposed to go home again in a pleading tone after the second refusal. The bride's aunt found a third excuse to turn down the request by articulating that their home was 'poor and shabby'. Finally the *li* was proposed to support their appeal of

entering the bride's home. The groom's *Geshi* complimented the bride's *Geniang*: 'you are very good at receiving the guests... You know *li* very well.' Instead of directly replying the *Geshi*'s request, the bride's *Geniang* compared their opponents' chanting to 'a nest of hornets'. They negotiated in the metaphoric language: 'Others owe money on credit. We owe Miao songs on credit.' The imagery of the hornet's nest was employed to compliment the groom's *Geshi* as well as to mock themselves facing their strong opponent. When they stirred up the hornet's nest, the numerous hornets (Miao songs) flew out. They had to put the Miao songs on credit and let the 'hornets' play. The imagery of a hornet's nest acted as a funny rhetorical device to deter the groom and obstruct the gate. By saying 'putting Miao songs on credit', the bride's *Geniang* euphemistically expressed that they would not or could not respond to the songs and continue to obstruct the way. The ones who were eager to move on, and who got the hint, laughed. The groom's cousin, who was increasingly feeling the difficulty of keeping a heavy pig on his right shoulder, could not help asking for clarification.

THE GROOM'S COUSIN: Owe what? You owe the Miao songs? If you are not singing back, we will go ahead [carrying the heavy white pig on his shoulder, grinning].

EVERYONE IN THE GROOM'S GROUP ECHOED: Great! [Amused.]

THE BRIDEGROOM: Oh! Let's go ahead! Go ahead! Go ahead! [Laughed and stepped forward.]

Thus the groom finally went through the obstruction. With smiles on everyone's face, they walked forward to the bride's home. It is the initial stage to establish the relationship between the bride's and the groom's family, as well as a chance to inaugurate a relaxed and fun atmosphere for the wedding. For the bride's family, Miao songs were chanted to express their welcome of the groom and appreciation for the gifts. For the groom's family, Miao songs were chanted to express their humility and sincerity. The composition of the lyrics they were chanting to each other was improvised from their repertoire as well as from the immediate surroundings.

When they revived the tradition, they also introduced some new elements. In this case, the Miao songs chanted by the elders and the middle-aged during the young couple's wedding preserved a traditional way of thinking and acting. Local stories, legends and metaphors were inherited through composing and chanting the Miao songs (Yu 2013). So the content of the singing demonstrated established sayings, metaphors, legends and improvised sayings based on the immediate surroundings. This aspect of the ritual of 'obstruction of song' makes a space to embrace both old traditions and new invention in a specific context.

Ritual of 'obstructions' in the realm of tourism

Ethnic cultures have been exploited as cultural resources since 2000 in West Hunan. The local tourism company made Miao rituals a key selling point. The

ritual features prominently in public performances created for the entertainment and edification of tourists. In Miao wedding programmes on stage, tourists are invited to act either as the bride or the groom to experience a staged Miao wedding. These performances are designed by the villager Mr Long, who had travelled to various sites of ethnic tourism in Guizhou, Yunan, Hainan and Guangxi provinces. As head of the Miao cultural performance team, he is responsible for designing the cultural performances and training the tourist guides, as well as the actors and actresses. In creating these touristic performances, however, Long has incorporated a wide variety of elements that are not historically part of Miao tradition. For instance, the bamboo pole dance was imported from the *li* ethnic group in Hainan province. Performance of Miao bullfighting and the use of the farm tools are derived from Mr Long's agricultural life. And the wedding ritual is derived from the Miao wedding ritual. He said the design of the performances was intended to entertain tourists by involving them in order to experience the local agricultural and ethnic life. In his words, the main point of these performances is to enable the tourists to have fun.

The wedding ritual of 'obstruction of song' was appropriated to welcome the tourists. When the village was opened to tourists in 2002, local villagers built a wooden frame gate at the south-west entrance of the village and designed the performance of 'obstruction of song', 'obstruction of alcohol' and 'obstruction of drums' at the gate as the Miao's first encounter with the tourists. The ritual of 'obstructions at the gate' is the first 'ritual performance' most tourists experience when they enter the village.

It is typical for a tour guide, usually a Miao girl, to introduce to tourists the ritual of obstructions as the highest form of ritual to receive the guests from afar while a tourist group is on their way to the village. Tourists will be taught to sing a simple song, either in Mandarin or Miao language, to deal with the 'obstruction of songs'. As soon as the tourists get off the bus, six or seven girls in blue embroidered Miao attire begin to sing a welcoming song in Miao (Figure 4.1). They stand in a line in front of the wooden gate, holding a long strip of red silk in their hands as the obstruction for the tourists. A big red flower hangs in the middle of the silk band, which seems to express the actual welcome to the tourists. The girls chant in Miao:

Welcome to Gouliang Miao village!
We have sweet wine and beautiful song to welcome you.
Welcome to our village.

At the end of the song, the leading girl speaks in Mandarin to explain the ritual:

The ritual of obstructions at the gate is our Miao's highest form of ceremony to welcome the distinguished guests. We have obstruction of songs, obstruction of alcohol and obstruction of drums. According to our custom, you have to sing a song, drink a cup of sweet wine, and play the drum to gain the right to pass the gate. Now it is your turn to sing a song!

(fieldwork notes 2008)



Figure 4.1 The Miao girls during the obstruction of songs ritual in the village of Gouliang, China (source: Y. Hua).

Tourists, scattered in front of the girls, are required to sing a song back (Figure 4.2). Sometimes, the tourists sing the song they learnt in the minibus. Sometimes they choose a song they are familiar with. One or two representatives will be selected to answer the song. I heard some middle-aged tourists chant:

There is no new China without the Communist Party.
There is no new China without the Communist Party.
Communist Party works very hard for the nation.
Communist Party intends to save China.
He showed the way for the people's liberation.
He leads China to the enlightenment.

I also heard a young man chant the song he had learnt during his childhood:

I picked up a one cent coin at the roadside,
Immediately I delivered it to the police uncle's hand,
The police uncle took the money and nodded at me.
I joyfully said to him, 'Goodbye, uncle!'

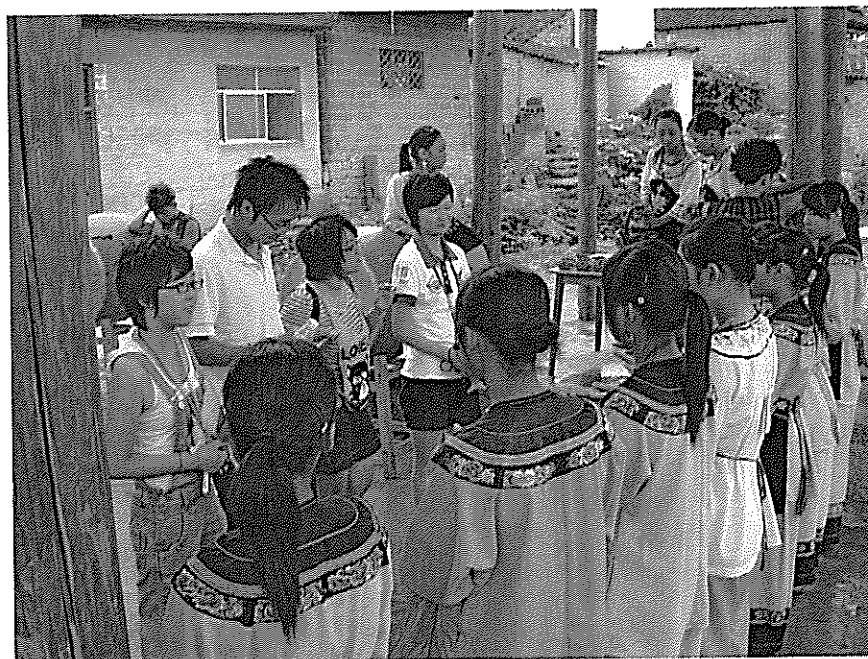


Figure 4.2 Obstruction of songs between the tourists and the Miao girls, Gouliang, China (source: Y. Hua).

Some popular songs concerning love are also chanted to get the tourists past the obstruction. For example:

There is a girl named *Xiaofang* in the village,
She looked lovely and beautiful,
A pair of bright large eyes,
A long and thick hair braid.

The songs chanted by the tourists in Mandarin are popular songs in mainstream Chinese culture. The Miao girls chant the welcoming song in the Miao language, which is unintelligible to tourists from other areas in China and abroad. They sing in Miao to demonstrate their ethnic identity and construct for the tourists a sense of an ethnic and exotic place. Thus, obviously, they did not construct a dialogue with the Miao girls in terms of semantic meaning, nor did they fit into the ethnic Miao context. The tourists chanted a song in Mandarin with more interest in fitting into the genre of a dialogue rather than the meaningful dialogue in the obstruction ritual. Though the tourists' songs are not a direct response to the Miao girls' welcoming song in content, they show their cooperation and sincerity in this communication genre. The welcoming Miao girls and the

tourists are involved in a communication without fully understanding each other. And they are still communicating with each other in a pleasant way. The ritual performance helps provide a strong interaction with tourists at local community events (Schein 2000). In this case, it is the genre of the obstruction ritual that has provided an interactive space for the tourists and the local cultural performers to meet and communicate.

Sometimes, when tourists are reluctant to sing, the girls still unfurl the red silk band and invite them to have a small bowl of rice wine, which is called the second obstruction of alcohol. Meanwhile, four local boys in blue Miao attire played the bass drum in their local style, which is termed Miao Flower-Drum. After a few seconds of drum performance, they invite the tourists to strike once on the drum, saying that 'play the drum once and you will have a safe and sound life for a whole lifetime'. After the three obstructions, the tourists are invited into the village.

During the drumming and songs, most tourists took out their cameras and captured the moment with the Miao girls and boys. Afterwards they put these pictures on their blogs and wrote about their exciting, romantic or disappointing experiences in Gouliang. The pictures of these singing girls, drumming boys and drinking tourists dominated their memory of this village tour. The value of the 'three obstructions' lies more in its fabricated symbolic meaning and depiction of ethnicity for tourists to consume and enjoy rather than the revival of ritual in the form of 'reified tradition' (Oakes 1993; Wood 1984).

The appropriation of the traditional rituals into tourism brought to the locals a sense of pride in their traditional life and culture. The manager of a Miao restaurant said:

Through tourism, we realized the value of our culture, including our customs, our attires and silver decorations. Many tourists are willing to travel afar and pay a lot of money to see our old mud houses. In the past, we dare not wear Miao clothes to go to the town, because others would laugh at us. But now, we are so proud to wear Miao attire, even to the city.

(interview notes 2009)

Ethnic tourism also creates job opportunities for youths. A mother of four children, who set up a stand to sell Miao snacks to tourists, said: 'The development of tourism retains some young Miao to stay in the village, acting as tour guide and actors. A very good thing to keep children around.' For the locals, the appropriation of rituals in tourism has not only enhanced their ethnic pride but also kept many young people in the village to inherit the ritual performance both in the secular context of tourism and the sacred context in everyday life.

Discussion and conclusion

This chapter attempts to construct the genealogy of the meanings of ritual, especially wedding ritual, in Fenghuang town and its village Gouliang. Wedding

ritual in Fenghuang town and neighbouring Miao villages was recorded by the Qing officials from the perspective of Confucian ritual classics in early modern China. The ethnography of the ritual in Qing dynasty was intended to explore the nature of the 'Other' people, govern the ethnic groups and legitimise the expansion of the empire. Later the ritual practices as a whole were demonised as 'feudalism' and 'superstition' in the Cultural Revolution during the Mao period in China. The officials as well as the villagers have been involved in an ideological struggle and a rupture from the past. With the opening-up policy in the 1980s, villagers were still in the shadow of accusations of superstition and carried out the wedding ritual in a simple but proper Miao way. The state's control over the ritual practices loosened during this period. Involved in the bidding process of the intangible heritage movement and the development of ethnic tourism, wedding ritual has been segmented and used in a different context for different purposes in post-Mao China. A wedding, as the transitional life ritual in everyday life, is still performed in the traditional Confucian way. The traditional meaning of the wedding is expressed in the act of offering sacrifices to the ancestors and the chanting of Miao songs throughout the wedding.

To explore diversified uses of ritual in the modern world in this chapter, we selected the ritual of 'obstruction of songs' in the present practice of the traditional wedding and the appropriation of it in a tourism context. In the contemporary practice of traditional wedding in the life domain, the antiphonal songs chanted in the obstruction ritual in the traditional wedding ceremony construct a dialogue between the bride's *Geniang* and the groom's *Geshi*. The two sides of the chanters' dialogue revolve around the rituals in the initial meeting, compliments to others, self-humility and blessings for the new couple. Unless the answers chanted in the songs are satisfactory, the obstruction will not come to an end. The improvised and fluid content of their antiphonal songs is woven in an attempt to initiate a good relationship between the two families in a ritual way.

In comparison, the obstruction of songs in a tourism context appropriates the genre of the antiphonal songs without taking in its content. The content of the songs chanted by the tourists are randomly selected without considering the meaning of the song in front of the Miao girls. It can be irrelevant what the Miao girls are chanting. According to Cohen (1988), old meanings of ritual do not thereby necessarily disappear in tourism, but may remain silent on a different level. As a response to Cohen, our case shows that old meanings can be replaced by new ones without affecting the communicative function and relationship-building effect of the traditional ritual. The genre of the ritual of obstruction can embrace any songs, regardless of their semantic content. Either meaningful or meaningless in the communication, the ritual of obstruction still constructs a joyous and jovial atmosphere for the further interaction between the tourists and the Miao.

As a welcoming ritual for the two sides to meet for the first time, the ritual of obstruction in the wedding context and the tourism context shares some

similarities as well. In either context, this ritual is to establish a relaxed and friendly relationship between the two who are to establish some relationship for the first time. The content of the antiphonal songs are mostly based on the chanters' own repertoire. And the ritual of obstruction at the gate, either for the locals in the wedding or for the tourists, has always involved a continuous process of social recognition, imagination and construction of Miao culture and identity.

Ultimately, this chapter presents the transforming interpretations of ritual from early modern China to contemporary China, appreciating the messiness of the state with its internal contradictions (Oakes and Sutton 2010). Transcending the dichotomies of modernity and tradition, state and private, secular and sacred, the thick description and detailed analysis of ritual performances in a different context open up a space to understand ritual as a living organism that can accommodate transforming discourses in a flexible manner.

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5 Re-creation of traditional ritual into festival

The case of the Kangnung Danoje festival in South Korea

Sunny Lee and Aise Kim

Introduction

In many cultures festivals are closely associated with religion and rituals prescribed by the traditions of the community (Getz 2010). Rituals typically involve special gestures and words, performance of special music, songs or dances, processions, manipulation of certain objects, use of special costumes and consumption of particular food or drink with a special meaning or history. Some of these activities are exclusively and privately performed but in many cases the ritual involves community members and guests sharing sacred and spiritual experiences and these naturally take on the character of an event. They may include *rituals of affliction*, performed to placate or exorcise preternatural beings or forces believed to have afflicted community members with illness, bad luck, gynaecological troubles, severe physical injuries and the like (Turner 1973).

In the modern world, many traditional ritual performances such as rites of affliction are re-created into a form of touristified cultural festival that is used for tourism purposes. These events are religious and traditional in origin or theme, and incorporate rituals into event programming, but also include non-ritual or non-tradition-related activities to attract not only people who seek sacred and cultural experiences related to the particular ritual in the community, but also non-local visitors who are looking for secular festival experiences to enjoy.

Such original rituals that form part of a community's traditional culture are becoming commoditised *cultures on display* as theatrical ritual-like performances at touristified cultural festivals. One criticism is that through this process they lose a sense of their true and original meaning. Authenticity and commodification have been, therefore, issues of concern with respect to such tourism development, particularly cultural tourism. Tourism development has been viewed as a destroyer of culture as it has been argued that tourism development turns culture into a commodity, packaged and sold to tourists, resulting in a loss of authenticity. Although there are numerous discussions about how mass tourism and tourism development negatively impact on traditional cultures, it has also been argued that traditional cultures can be preserved through tourism development (Esman 1984; McKean 1973; Xie 2003) and cultural reproduction in festival settings (McCabe 2006; Quinn 2005).