

Sympathetic Relationships between Miao Mothers and Daughters as Mediated by Ethnic
Costumes: Case Studies from Guizhou Province, China *

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Abstract

In this paper, I propose that mother-daughter relationships in the patrilineal kinship system among the Miao, especially after the daughter's separation from her natal family, are constituted through material objects. The case study presented in this paper deals with Miao women in southwest China and their ethnic costumes, and focuses on changes that have taken place since the 1990s regarding the bride's move from the natal to marital home. This paper also considers women's changing affiliations from natal to marital families in marriages with patrilocal residence.

Until the 1980s, the Miao maintained a custom known as *zuo jia*, whereby a bride would continue to live in her natal home even after her wedding until becoming pregnant or reaching childbearing age. During the *zuo jia* period, the status of the bride was liminal, and her affiliation was ambiguous. After living in the natal home for a few years, a bride would move to her marital home along with her costumes, typically indicating the start of her affiliation with her marital family. Among the Miao in L village, my field site, *Zuo jia* had no longer been practiced since the 1990s. Nowadays, the bride's residence in her husband's house and her pregnancy begin immediately after her wedding. The major change among Miao since the 1990s is that a married woman now leaves her costumes with her mother in her natal home until her mothers' death or her own second childbirth.

As a result, both mothers and daughters—each with their own perspectives and logic—support and create a situation in which the daughters' affiliation with natal and marital families and the costumes' possession between the mother and daughter remain ambiguous until the daughters finally take their costumes to the marital home. Furthermore, the ambiguous possession of costumes between mothers and daughters, which has emerged since the 1990s, in part replaces the ambiguous status of brides during the *zuo jia* period before the 1990s, which allows the separation of mothers and daughters to occur gradually over a long period.

In conclusion, I suggest that material objects such as the costumes handcrafted by mothers also constitute a “sympathetic” relationship between mothers and daughters which can be understood as a relationship based on “sympathetic magic” [Shimizu 1989]. That relationship is based on the mothers' continuing involvement in their daughters' lives through the daughters' costumes, even after the daughters move to their marital homes. The daughters also continue to show their consideration for their mothers by leaving their costumes in their natal homes. The costumes mediate the mother-daughter relationship through the physical acts of wearing and

handcrafting and through their value as prestige goods. Such a relationship has emerged in association with socioeconomic changes that have occurred since the 1990s. Here, the mother-daughter relationship is maintained and reinforced through continuing mutual consideration and attention manifested in the physical location and transference of the costumes. I suggest that such continued mother-daughter relationships cannot be taken for granted, especially when the women move from their natal families to their marital families. Such connections are created and reinforced by people's practices, which can be accomplished through the mediation of such material objects as costumes handcrafted by mothers.

Keywords: mother-daughter relationship, "sympathetic" relationship, ethnic costumes, Miao, China

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I Introduction

The objective of this paper is to examine the dynamic relationships between mothers and daughters mediated by ethnic costumes among the Miao in southwestern China. I especially focus on the substantial changes in the timing of daughters' separation from their natal families (the family the woman is born into) and entry into marital homes (the husband's household the woman marries into) as a result of marriage since 1990s and in the production, possession,¹ conveyance, and transfer of costumes. In doing so, I clarify the dynamic and changeable relationship between mothers and daughters mediated by material goods.

Among the Miao, post-marital residence is with the husband's family. Traditionally, Miao women continued to live with natal families for several years after the wedding ceremony before moving into their marital homes, at which time they take their ethnic costumes with them as dowry. Since the 1990s, however, brides began to stay only for several days in their natal homes after the wedding ceremony, moving to their husbands' house or going away with their husbands to work elsewhere. Meanwhile, the brides' ethnic costumes are transferred to the marital homes only after

¹ In this paper, for convenience sake, I use the term "possession" in relation to the "act of assigning a piece of clothing to someone." That said, this "possession" does not refer to the legal private possession or rights that are of western origin. It also does not imply that the Miao have a unique concept of "possession" that is different from private possession. The focus is on a form of "possession" similar to that described by Matsumura [2008: 22] comprising various factors and subject to various constraints related to the object, stakeholders, and place that occur in the everyday practice.

the death of the brides' mothers or after the birth of a second child. Until this transference occurs, the ethnic costumes are kept by the brides' mothers in the natal home. This has resulted in the continuation of a mother-daughter relationship even after the daughter's marriage that is mediated by the ethnic costumes. What does this reveal about the dynamic relationship between mother, daughter, and ethnic costumes?

Recent research has revealed that, in patrilineal kinship systems, daughters continue to maintain relationships with their natal families even after marriage [cf. Stafford 2000; Ueno 2011]. Empson [2007] focused on the role played by body parts in relationships between mothers and children in the patrilineal Buryat (an indigenous people in Mongolia) society. The Buryats have maintained patrilineal kinship system based on the idea of "shared bone". Meanwhile, they keep some hair and umbilical cords in the bottom of chests, which are kept in the backs of houses. These body parts are not inherited by subsequent generations but, rather, maintain relationships among siblings and between mothers and children through the idea of "shared blood". In particular, by maintaining these body parts in the natal homes, daughters are able to return there temporarily when unfortunate events such as miscarriages occur. Meanwhile, mothers provide magical remedies using the children's hair and umbilical cords and aid for the fertility of their children living elsewhere. From this, Empson [2007: 123-125] points out that the placing of body parts in the chest entails the maintenance of mother-child relationship beyond their separate physical location. The body parts used here are physical elements constituting a person, and are even considered to be the powerful essence of the person [Empson 2007: 114].

As demonstrated by Empson [2007] in the above passages, relationships mediated by body parts frequently appear as essential aspects of both the conceptualization and practice of parent-child relationships. Meanwhile, referring to research by Malinowski [1963], which demonstrated that father-child ties among Australian families are based on continuity in the spiritual dimension, Shimizu [1989:58-63] argued that the ideology underlying parent-child relationships is not necessarily based on a physical connection. He contends, rather, that merely the recognition of continuity between two persons (parent-child) will suffice. In other words, Shimizu pointed out that it is the sense of continuity such as that of physical or spiritual elements, which are the fundamental components of a person that forms the parent-child relationship. Furthermore, Shimizu characterized the parent-child relationship as an example of Frazer's "contagious magic" (law of contact) [Frazer 1957: 14] in which "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed." In other words, he identified two essential aspects of the parent-child relationship. Namely, (i) the parent and child are conceptualized as having been parts of a single body or spirit that have separated, while the child retains continuity with the parent through the "elements" of blood, flesh, and spirit even after separation; and (ii) although this continuity is only partial and specific, it symbolically underpins the entire parent-child relationship, which is formed over a long period and is related to all aspects of the person. Shimizu [1989: 60-63] goes on to explain that it is this recognition of shared elements that constitutes the parent-child relationship as that of "sympathetic" magic.

To add my own interpretation here, Shimizu's analytical framework of understanding the parent-child as a "sympathetic" relationship is universal in its applicability as it presents a model that is in concordance with research trends subsequent to Schneider's critique of kinship studies [Schneider 1984], which seek to reexamine parent-child relationships from a different angle than the question of whether it is a biological or social relation [e.g. Carsten (ed.) 2000].

Putting Shimizu's sympathetic relationship in comparative perspective, Yoshida [2012: 29, 47] indicates there are "magical characteristics" and "continuity in both spiritual and bodily dimensions" in the narratives and patterns of several conventions related to family and kinship among the Angatihya people in Papua New Guinea, which do not emphasize their "having shared the same elements in the past." He points out the relationship among family and kin is upheld by sustained exchanges of things (especially food). Thereby, parent-child relationships contain the magical logic that the partial relationship that is the exchange of objects is reinterpreted as a total relationship involving the person [Yoshida 2012:41-42].

I also believe that the specific elements of sympathetic relationships are not limited to the elements, whether physical or spiritual that constitute a person as identified by Shimizu or to direct physical contagious elements. Rather, in this paper, I illustrate how parent-child relationships are formulated by material things (in this case ethnic costumes). Here, I propose broadening the scope of the concept of sympathetic relationships to entail parent-child relationships that are uniquely formed around specific objects.

For the Miao, ethnic costumes are special items that are frequently handled by, and underlie the relationship between mothers and daughters. Frazer's contagious magic treats clothing in the same manner as parts of the body such as teeth, afterbirth, and blood, and allows for the possibility of a sympathetic magic to operate between people and clothing. The contact of clothing with the body or sweat is cited as justification for this treatment [Frazer 1957: 56-57]. However, can the maintenance of a strong connection between clothing and people be explained only by bodily contact and sweat even when the persons are separated by distance?

In this paper, without assuming the intrinsic power of objects to be the basis of mediating the parent-child relationships, I will ask how certain objects are utilized to *de facto* support practical parent-child relationships by focusing on the processes of production, possession, conveyance, and transfer of costumes in the context of China's socioeconomic changes.

At the same time, by doing so, I will examine questions posed by recent kinship research [e.g. Hayami 2011: Udagawa 2011] within a framework of relationships mediated by objects: What are parent-child relationships actually based on in a given society? How are such concrete relationships actually practiced? and How are kin relationships differentiated among various relations? Through case studies and discussion, in addition to elucidating the process by which the formation of mother-daughter relationships in Miao society (whose kinship structure is predominantly patrilineal) is mediated by ethnic costumes, I will propose that the sympathetic relationships between ethnic costumes, mothers, and daughters did not intrinsically exist but, rather, emerged in step with recent changes in social and economic circumstances as well as changes in the value of costumes, the costume-making process, practices regarding post-marital

residence, and the relationship between natal and marital families associated with marriage.

II Miao Ethnic Costumes and Marriage

1 The Miao

There are 56 ethnic groups that are officially recognized by the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Miao are statistically the 5th largest ethnic group in China, with a population of 9,426,007 according to the 6th national population census conducted in 2010. Most of the Miao live in Southwestern China (Guizhou province, Hunan province, and Yunnan province), with the remaining Miao scattered over several provinces. Linguists suggest that there are at least three major Miao language groups (Qiandong, Chuan-Qian-Dian, and Xiangxi) [Miaozu Jianshi Bianxiezu (eds.) 1985: 6] and autonyms are associated with each area in which the different Miao groups are concentrated. It is still a matter of debate whether the Miao can be categorized as a single unified nationality, based largely on the fact that the various “Miao languages” are not mutually intelligible [Diamond 1995]. Meanwhile among those that self-identify as “Miao,” the name affirms their existence as an actual entity and is widely used when referring to the group in Chinese [Taniguchi 2005: 151].

In this paper, I take the case of Hmu (Qiandong language group) in the southeast Guizhou province. Hmu accounts for approximately 60% of Miao population in China. In the context of the PRC's reform policies and openness since 1980s, much of the information published about the Miao that have promoted the most favorable image of the Miao to people outside of China have been about the Hmu [Taniguchi 2003: 137]. In this process, women wearing colorful ethnic costumes unique to the Hmu have played an important role in creating a common, stereotypical Miao image by frequently appearing in the mass media, ethnic tourism, and exhibitions in China and overseas.

2 Costumes and marriage in L village

I conducted fieldwork in L village, Shibing county, Qiandong Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, which is contiguous with northern Taijiang county across the Qingshui river (Map. 1). For this study, I spent a year conducting fieldwork between July 2009 and May 2011, during which I stayed primarily in L village. In the village, there are two sub-groups of Miao who speak two different dialects, wear different clothing, and have different customs. One sub-group is called Hebian zu or Hebian Miao in Chinese. Members of this group refer to themselves as the Hmub² in their language. The other sub-group called Gaopo zu³ in Chinese, refer to themselves as the

² Renderings of Miao words follow the conventions in *Miao Han Cidian: Qiandong Fanyan* [Zhang (ed.) 1990]

³ For convenience sake, I render this term as “Gaopo Miao” below.

Hmaob in their language. There are also ethnic Han in the village. The village consists of 567 people (296 of men and 271 of women) comprising 123 households,⁴ although half of these are absent from the village. Many of the men and women in the productive ages, i.e. 10s to 40s, have gone to coastal areas in China to work as migrant laborer or to cities within the province to receive education etc. The residents of the village at the time (281 individuals) were assigned to different ethnic groups by household based on self reports by the family heads. Table 1 shows the population by ethnic designation and distribution of age range (school-age and pre-school age children are counted separately).⁵

Table 1: Resident population in L village at the time of research

Ethnic affiliation	Household	Resident population in L village												Total
		preschool age	elementary school	junior high school	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	unclear	
Han	37	16	13	4	3	8	17	24	12	7	7	3	9	123
Hebian Miao	45	13	27	6	0	9	7	18	22	20	7	4	3	136
Gaopo Miao	9	3	3	1	0	0	2	4	0	2	7	0	0	22
Total	91	32	43	11	3	17	26	46	34	29	21	7	12	281

According to Jiang and Fang [2000], the ethnic costumes of the Miao living in southeastern Guizhou province can be sorted into 39 types. The Hebian Miao whose costumes are of the Shidong-type primarily live in the Qingshui river basin located in southern Shibing county and northern Taijiang county [Jiang and Fang 2000: 70-81]. The Gaopo Miao whose costumes are of the Gulong-type primarily reside in the neighboring Huangping county and the capital of the Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture, Kaili city (Map. 1), with some scattered settlements in Shibing county and Taijiang county [Jiang and Fang 2000: 384-395]. The difference in spoken language by the subgroups overlaps with the difference in ethnic costumes. For example, the language spoken by the Gaopo Miao, whose costumes differ from those of the Hebian Miao, also differs slightly from the language spoken by the Hebian Miao. These distinct subgroups do not generally intermarry. Below, my discussion will focus primarily on the Hebian Miao who constitutes the majority of residents in L village and surrounding villages in the Qingshui river basin. Unless otherwise stated, the term Miao refers to the Hebian Miao.

⁴ Of these individuals, several children of women who had moved out of L village to marry (three preschool-age boys and four preschool-aged girls) and one household (two men and two women) did not have family registries in L village but lived there year round.

⁵ There are cases in which the “ethnicity” reported by heads of household differs from that recorded in the family registry. In addition, Han and Miao intermarry, so a household with a Han head of household could also include a woman from a Miao household. In the case of intergroup marriage, it is common for one spouse to adopt the language, clothing, and customs of the other. Due to space limitations, this issue will be discussed elsewhere in greater detail.

In this paper, I focus primarily on examples of Miao marrying Miao. In principle, a Miao will marry a Miao from a different clan or lineage. The general rule is that a woman will leave and move to the husband's village or a woman from the outside will move into the husband's residence in the village. A woman coming from the outside enters the husband's family but does not have any claim of inheritance to the house, land, or other assets [Suzuki 2012: 373]. In the husband's family, the husband or one of his brothers inherits the parent's house and assumes filial duties. In the meantime, the other brothers save money to build their own houses and, around the time that they have children and the parents' house becomes too small, they move out to build their own house. At this point, the brothers inherit and divide the parents' farmland and forestland among themselves.

From 1947 to 1982, the age of first marriage among Miao women was never above 20 years (12 to 20); however, from the 1990s onward, it has become commonplace for Miao women to experience first marriage in their twenties.⁶ Furthermore, up until the 1980s, it was customary for a woman to return to her natal home after having a wedding ceremony for a period of several years before moving to her marital home. After the wedding ceremony, a bride was permitted to move to her marital home only when her marital family decided that she had reached an appropriate age or if she became pregnant and was close to giving birth. In Chinese literature, this custom of staying in the bride's natal home after marriage is referred to as *zuo jia*.⁷ In the 1980s and earlier when *zuo jia* was practiced, all women who experienced marriage ceremonies in their teens or who divorced their first husbands and subsequently remarried, first moved into their husbands' houses when they were already at least 20 years old. In other words, the amount of time that women spend in their natal homes has not changed substantially before and after 1990. Meanwhile, starting in the 1990s, the length of the *zuo jia* period during which the bride remains in her natal home has declined from a few years to a few days.

Although marriage between two Miaos was considered the ideal by parents in this region, intermarriage with Han did occur in some cases.⁸ In most cases, when a Miao woman marries a Han man and begins life in her marital home, she starts to wear Han clothing,⁹ and there is no longer any opportunity for her to wear a Miao ethnic costume. It is partly for this reason that mothers do not transfer ethnic costumes to daughters who are marrying into Han households. When a Miao woman marries a Han man, the connection to her ethnic costume is largely severed. In addition, because mothers-in-law do not transfer costumes to their daughters-in-law, a Han woman marrying into a Miao household continues to wear Han clothing.

⁶ The new marriage law adopted in 1980, which encourages "late marriage, late birth," delayed the legal age for getting married by two years to 22 for men and 20 for women. Individuals under these ages are not able to obtain a marriage license and are not permitted to hold a wedding ceremony.

⁷ The Chinese term *buluo fujia* (not living with the husband) is also used; however, for consistency, I use *zuo jia* throughout.

⁸ Of the women in L village married to Han men, 22% were Miao; of the women married to Miao men, 7% were Han.

⁹ The Han women usually wore western clothing and tied their hair in the back in a single tail.

At the time of my fieldwork, the Miao women regularly wore western clothes, but also wore Miao style headbands and silver hairpins. The only occasions when they wore their full ethnic costumes were ceremonies and seasonal festivals. On the occasion of a wedding ceremony, the matchmaker would carry an odd number (e.g. 7, 9, or 11) of jackets prepared by the bride's family, several aprons and skirts, along with shoes and silver accessories (headdresses, earrings, necklaces, bracelets, rings, etc.) to the marital home.¹⁰ It is customary for the bride to visit each house neighboring the marital home where the wedding ceremony is held; it is said that, until a few years ago, the bride would change costumes for each house. Today, although the brides still visit houses in the neighborhood, in many cases they do not change costumes. That said, 7 to 11 jackets and other clothes are carried to the marital home for the wedding ceremony. The costumes presented at the wedding ceremony express the bride's family's economic and social prestige.¹¹

The Miao men also have ethnic costumes, but the occasions on which they wear them include their own wedding ceremonies and a few other extremely rare occasions. Men were not involved in the creation (excluding silver jewelry), storage, presentation, lending and borrowing, transfer, and sale of clothing including women's costumes. There were instances where the husband would ask his wife to sell her costumes to earn cash; but, in most cases, such requests were denied. In addition, the men had very little knowledge of the types and workmanship of the costumes or costume-making skills possessed by their mothers, wives, and daughters. Everything related to costumes, from their creation to storage and transfer, was handled entirely among the women.

¹⁰ The jackets and aprons are placed with the most colorful apron on top in a basket, which is carried on a pole. The skirts and shoes are hung directly from the pole.

¹¹ Even if some of the costumes prepared for the wedding ceremony were borrowed, this was never checked. As pointed out by Chien [2009: 138-139], the costumes reflect the bride's diligence, the bride's mother's virtue, and the bride's family's wealth. The set of costumes prepared by the bride's family for the wedding ceremony did not represent the bride's wealth so much as the entire family's social and economic status (at that point in time).



Map 1: The area in which costume storage location changed since 1990

3 Classification of jackets in the Miao language

In this paper, “ethnic costume” refers to jackets, aprons, skirts, shoes, headbands, and silver accessories. In the Miao language, this set of costumes is called *ud hmub* (*miao yi* in Chinese, means Miao clothes). The Miao term used to refer to clothing in general, which includes western clothing, is *ud*. Among the items comprising the ethnic costume, *ud* is sometimes used to refer to the jacket alone. In this paper, I focus on the jackets, of which there are many kinds and which are still handcrafted (dyed, embroidered, sewn, etc.) by Miao women.

The types of Miao ethnic costumes have previously been identified in studies covering a wide area of southeastern Guizhou province and southwestern China. These previous studies categorize ethnic costumes based on the characteristics and distributions and identify them by type designations using the Chinese name of the region where they are worn [e.g. Jiang and Fang 2000]. In contrast, Ho [2011: 292-308] described the detailed classification scheme for costumes used by the Miao in Shidong town (Map. 1).¹² For example, the Miao name for a certain type of jacket, *ud hob mongl hnob*, consists of the term *ud*, which identifies the item as a jacket, *hob*

¹² Ho first divided costumes into three categories based on usage: (1) formal, (2) everyday, and (3) clothes worn by the dead. She then categorizes jackets (1) and (2) based on the sleeve embroidery into (1) *hob mongl, ob ait, khait mongl, hob jub* and (2) *ib ait, ub jub bangx*, and further classifies into smaller groups based on the color, pattern, number and arrangement of embroidery (and this paper adopts this scheme) [Ho 2011: 292-308]. The types, colors, Miao names for, classification scheme, and usage introduced by Ho largely overlap with those that I have identified through interviews but differ in some instances. The classification in Table 2 is constructed based on interviews conducted in L village.

mongl, which identifies the type and arrangement of embroidery on the sleeves, and *hnob* (red), which identifies the jacket color or the color of the thread most used for embroidery. The term at the end of the name can also be the color of the cloth onto which the embroidery is stitched rather than the color of the embroidery thread or can include both the color of the embroidery thread and the cloth. There are approximately eight different terms such as *hob mongl* that identify the sleeve embroidery type and arrangement (Table 2).

Table 2: Classification of jackets in Miao language and changes in the possession of jackets

No.	Jacket name in Miao language	Type	Changes in the possession of jackets (see IV)
Type (1)	<i>hob mongl</i>	A	Only landowners and rich farmers possessed A-Type jackets until 1949. Since the late 1970s, A-type jackets spread over Miao as formal wear in ceremonies or seasonal festivals.
Type (2)	<i>jal duk (ib ghab duk, ob ghab duk)</i>	A	
Type (3)	<i>pub duk</i>	A	
Type (4)	<i>ob pib hseed</i>	A	
Type (5)	<i>deeb denb</i>	B	Most of the Miao only possessed B- and C-type jackets until 1970s. In that period, they wore B-type jackets as formal wear, and C-type jackets as everyday clothing. Since 1980s, they wear B-type jackets as formal jackets for 50s and older, and usage of C-type decline.
Type (6)	<i>jub bangl</i>	C	
Type (7)	<i>gangb jiak</i>		
Type (8)	<i>khait mongl</i>		

Jacket types (1) to (4) are considered formal costumes. In L village, only these four jacket types varied in terms of the color of the embroidery thread (red, blue, light blue) and the cloth that was embroidered (black, red, etc.). At the time of my fieldwork, the jackets that the brides wore during wedding ceremonies were red type (1) to (4) jackets adorned with silver ornaments (called *ub nix* in the Miao language). The jackets prepared for the wedding ceremony were types (1) to (4), (5), and (7). The majority of women in their fifties and above owned type (5) jackets, which are not quite formal costumes but would be worn by the women when participating in ceremonies in other villages as guests. Type (6) jackets were worn when pouring alcohol for guests during relatively small ceremonies or when going to the market. Type (7) jackets are considered formal wear, and type (8) jackets are formal costumes that are only worn by women in their fifties and above. Due to a variety of reasons including the difficulty in making these types of jackets, they were only worn by a small number of women in L village. Below, type (1) to (4) jackets are designated as A-type jackets, type (5) jackets are designated as B-type jackets, and type (6) jackets are designated as C-type jackets depending on their purpose at the time of fieldwork.¹³

¹³ Much of the sleeve of A-type jackets is covered with satin stitch embroidery applied over a cutout pattern [Torimaru 2008: 54-55]. The difference between jackets (1) to (4) has to do with the location of the embroidery and whether other embroidery techniques are used or not. Much of the sleeve of B-type jackets is covered with satin stitch embroidery applied by counting the grains of the cloth [Torimaru 2008: 56-57]. The embroidery thread of B-type jackets used in L

III Transference of Women and Miao Ethnic Costumes between Natal and Marital Families through Marriage

1 Changes in costume storage location since 1990

At the time of fieldwork, it was considered Miao custom for a mother to continue keeping her daughter’s costumes in her own house even after the daughter has moved out due to marriage. As one woman (29 years old) explained, “since my mother and father are still both alive, as soon as the wedding ceremony was over, I brought the costumes back (to my natal home), because it is a Miao custom” (hereafter, items in parentheses are added by the author). Another woman (54 years old, with a daughter who left house due to marriage seven years earlier) also stated, “Because it’s a Miao custom. As long as I am alive, I will keep (the costumes) at home. When (I) die, my daughter will take them to her mother-in-law’s.” However, despite such explanations that seem to suggest that the storage of costumes for a daughter who has left due to marriage is a long-standing custom, in fact, I found out that such storage and delayed transfer only began in the 1990s. Below, I outline the temporal sequence of changes in costume storage.

In this paper, I examine the cases of 46 women in L village, whose ages range from their 20s to 80s and who belonged to Miao households at the time of the study (Table 3). School-aged and preschool-aged children and two married women (in their twenties) who were originally from Han households are excluded. These 46 women, all of whom were originally from Miao households, comprised 43 married women, one widower (in her thirties), and two unmarried women (in their twenties). In L village, there are only a small number of men and women in their teens to thirties who are unmarried and yet continue to reside in the village after graduating from junior high school.¹⁴

Table 3: Hebian zu female resident population in L village at the research time

Household	Hebian zu female resident population												Total
	preschool age	elementary school	junior high school	10s	20s	30s	40s	50s	60s	70s	80s	unclear	
45	6	12	4	0	6	4	10	10	11	4	3	1	71

village was blue. The sleeves of B-type and C-type jackets are very similar. However, whereas the upper portions of B-type jacket sleeves are embroidered, the upper portion of C-type jacket sleeves feature sashes with woven patterns. For more detailed information, see Ho [2011: 284-289].

¹⁴ Interviews of migrant workers were conducted with men and women who had returned home temporarily during the study period. As such, the number of daughters interviewed was smaller than the number of mothers interviewed.

At the time of the study, seven married women in their 20s to 40s reported that their ethnic costumes were being kept by their natal families. Of the 23 women in their 40s to 80s who had daughters who had married into other Miao families, 14 women in their 40s to 70s confirmed that they were still in possession of their daughters' ethnic costumes. I was unable to confirm the location of the daughters' ethnic costumes for four of the women. Of the five remaining women, three were in their 70s and 80s and one did not possess any ethnic costume as a result of being economically distressed. In the case of the last woman who only had one daughter that married into a Miao family, the daughter had eloped and married a Miao against the mothers' wishes. As such, she had been disowned and was not permitted to return to her natal family.

A quick overview of the villages of origin of women who have come to L village by marriage and the destination villages of women who have left L village due to marriage reveals that marriages among Miao occurred within the Qingshui river basin located in southern Shibing county and northern Taijiang county. Accordingly, the storage locations of costumes, which are the subject of this study, are likely limited to the Qingshui river basin including L village (Map 1).

Meanwhile, in interviews regarding the storage of ethnic costumes prior to the study period, with the exception of two women in their 40s, all women in their 40s to 80s said that they had never kept their ethnic costumes with their natal families after moving to their marital homes. With the exception of three women in their 40s who began living with their husbands in 1991, the women who responded that they had never kept their costumes with their natal families had gotten married and began living with their husbands prior to the 1990. Meanwhile the women in their 20s to 40s who replied that they kept their ethnic costumes with their natal families had held wedding ceremonies and began living with their husbands in 1990 or later. In other words, the storage location of ethnic costumes appears to have changed sometime around 1990.

With a few exceptions, there were a number of characteristics that distinguished the women in their 20s to 40s who kept their ethnic costumes with their natal families after moving in with their husbands on the one hand, and the women in their 40s to 80s who never kept their costumes with their natal families on the other. First, women in the former group did not possess the full range of skills necessary for making ethnic costumes and had either had their mothers make the costumes outright or had made the costumes themselves with their mothers' help. The women in the latter group had made the ethnic costumes that they brought to their wedding ceremony and marital homes themselves without their mothers' help. The majority of these women were in the process of making or had already made ethnic costumes for their own daughters and were storing the ethnic costumes of daughters who had moved out due to marriage. Other distinguishing characteristics included the fact that the women in the former group in their 20s to 40s had received more years of compulsory education in Chinese, had experience of working outside their villages prior to marriage, and had not experienced the traditional practice of *zuo jia*. Meanwhile, the women in the latter group in their 40s to 80s had life courses and costume-related experiences that were, by and large, consistent with those previously reported and explained in greater detail in the next section.

2 Marriage and transference of clothes before 1990

According to a survey of ethnic minorities conducted in the 1950s as part of the PRC's ethnic policy, the Miao practice of *zuo jia* at the time can be summarized as follows:

With the exception of a small number of locations, married Miao couples residing in the Qingshui river basin did not live together immediately after getting married. Brides continued to live with their natal families for at least one or two years and sometimes as much as four to five years after getting married. When called for by their husbands' families, the brides stayed for short periods with them just during busy farming seasons as well as seasonal festivals such as the New Year. In Shibing county, brides visited their husbands' families three times a year, in February and during rice planting and rice harvest. In this newlywed period, brides were treated more or less as guests by their husbands' families and were given gifts such as bamboo-wrapped cakes and sticky rice cakes when returning to their natal families. After getting married, new brides began making costumes for themselves along with baby slings, shoes, and hats. As the brides had to take these with them when they left their natal families, the brides were relieved of major household duties while they were engaged in making these items. Meanwhile, during this period, brides were permitted to participate in events known as *youfang* in Chinese,¹⁵ which were opportunities for unmarried men and women to meet and socialize. The stay with their natal families ended when the bride became pregnant or reached the appropriate age (almost 20). The substantial time required for making ethnic costumes and the young age of marriage (12 to 15) of the Miao were often cited as reasons for the continued practice of *zuo jia*. The practice was maintained to alleviate worry on the part of the brides' parents for the young age of marriage and worry on the part of the grooms' parents regarding the brides' inability to effectively perform agricultural work and housework due to her young age [Guizhou Sheng Bianzhizu (eds.) 1987: 141-151].

The practice of *zuo jia* was continued in L village until the 1980s, with the majority of women responding that the *zuo jia* period was two or three years. Brides visited their husbands' families once a year (in the 5th, 9th, or 12th month of the lunisolar calendar)¹⁶ and received gifts of bamboo-wrapped cakes in the 5th month or sticky rice cakes in the 12th or 9th month. In L village, such visits to the husband's family were referred to a *ghanjt jed* in the Miao language (directly translated as "suspending sticky rice cakes from a shoulder carrying pole"). Depending on historical background, including economic circumstances in the husband's family and the bride's divorce history, *ghanjt jed* sometimes occurred a total of two times or less, but never occurred more than three times for any marriage. In addition to the above, the *zuo jia* period ranged from a minimum of one year to a maximum of nine years depending on the bride's age at the time of marriage.

During the *zuo jia* period, a woman's status was ambiguous, neither being unmarried nor

¹⁵ A customary form of courting wherein couples sing to each other in the mountains, etc.

¹⁶ For example, visits in the ninth month of the Chinese calendar in the first year, in the twelfth month in the second year, and in the fifth month of the third year.

married. Even though the wedding ceremony had been completed, the brides resided in their natal homes and were permitted to participate in events that served as opportunities for unmarried men and women to socialize. Furthermore, on the one hand, brides were treated as guests by their husbands' families and, on the other hand, were relieved of work duties in their natal families while they prepared ethnic costumes to take to their marital homes. Thus, Miao women experienced a period after marriage in which their status was ambiguous and during which the brides themselves made the majority of their own costumes for use at their marital families while staying with their natal families. Similarly, in L village, women in their 40s to 80s made their own costumes. With the exception of two women (one woman in her 50s and another in her 80s), none of the women in their 40s to 80s had ever received any costumes from their mothers.

In a more recent investigation on Miao marriages, Chien [2009: 141] conducted fieldwork in a highland region in southeastern Taijiang county (the area of Fangzhao-type [Jiang and Fang 2000: 92-97]), and reported that, "Miao women typically move their dowry (including ethnic costumes and silver accessories) from their natal families to their marital homes after the marriage ceremony and the period of residing in both households is over, which also marks the point when they go to live permanently with their marital families."¹⁷ Here, the "period of residing in both households" refers to the practice of *zuo jia*. The women of L village in their 40s to 80s who had experienced *zuo jia* also reported that they took their ethnic costumes with them when they moved to their husbands' homes. Starting in the 1990s, brides either began living in their marital houses or leaving the village with their husbands to work after spending only a few days with their natal families subsequent to the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, the wives did not bring their ethnic costumes made by their mothers, with them when moving to their husbands' homes but, rather, left them with their natal families.

3 Maternal line in charge of costumes

As we have seen, starting from around 1990, mothers began making the costumes worn by their daughters in wedding ceremonies and other occasions. Meanwhile, there were no instances in which the mother-in-law made or transferred costumes for her daughter-in-law, including the period prior to 1990. As a rule, mothers-in-law have nothing to do with the costumes of their daughters-in-law. That said, it was customary for the husband's family to present silver ornaments and dyed cloth (at the time of the study, approximately 25 to 30 kg) to the bride's family. Approximately half of the cloth was dyed by the mother-in-law, while the other half was given to the husband's family by relatives or neighbors as wedding gifts. The brides' mothers either used this cloth as material to make jackets and aprons or gave them out on the occasion of another wedding ceremony.

It was also rare for daughters-in-law to learn costume-making skills from their mothers-in-

¹⁷ Chien [2009: 156] pointed out that *zuo jia* is not practiced if a Miao woman leaves the village with her husband to work soon after getting married or elopes to a village that is relatively far away.

law. Four of the women (in their 60s and 70s) reported that they had learned only how to weave cloth from their mothers-in-law.¹⁸ In general, the women learned costume-making skills from their own mothers, older sisters, relatives, or neighbors while living in their natal homes. However, starting in the 1990s, nine years of compulsory education followed by migrant work were incorporated into the Miao women's life course. During this period, the women neither make costumes nor acquire costume-making skills. Instead, there were instances in which women learned embroidery skills from their own mothers or neighbor women during the few years in which they were pregnant or giving birth. Here as well, no woman reported that they had learned such skills from their mothers-in-law. To summarize the foregoing discussion, the connection between mothers- and daughters-in-law is, for all intents and purposes, not mediated by ethnic costumes or costume-making skills. Instead, such connections occur between mothers and daughters, between sisters, relatives, or neighborhood women centered around women's natal homes.

In addition, in L village, mothers began storing the costumes of daughters who left the village due to marriage starting in the 1990s. The majority of these costumes were made by the mothers for their daughters. The mothers also stored and maintained other costumes, including those made by the daughters themselves while pregnant or those commissioned to be made by someone else (discussed below) while their daughters were away working in other villages. To prevent mold from growing on the costumes, the costumes must be periodically removed from the wooden boxes in which they are stored and allowed to dry in the sun. It was considered out of the question that a daughter-in-law would ask her mother-in-law to perform such maintenance activities.

4 Why Miao married women no longer keep their costumes in the marital family

The mothers who kept their daughters' ethnic costumes explained that they did so because "(if their daughters' ethnic costumes were kept at their marital homes), they might be stolen (by the marital family) in the event of a divorce." However, there were no women whose daughters had actually had their ethnic costumes taken by their marital families on the occasion of a divorce or annulment of a marriage. The example below does not involve an actual divorce but provides a clue as to how a marital household might take a daughter-in-law's ethnic costume in the case of a divorce.

P (67 years old) had a daughter (39 years old) with her husband. The daughter's wedding ceremony took place in the late 1990s in the 1st month of the lunisolar calendar. P prepared seven jackets for her daughter. The ethnic costumes were returned to P's family after the wedding ceremony. However, before the bride took the costumes home, the

¹⁸ Similarly, in nearby villages in Shidong town, Taijiang county, the women did not learn how to weave at home but rather from the husband's brothers' wives, the father-in-law's brothers' wives, or the mother-in-law [Ho 2011: 199].

groom's parents took one jacket out of the basket in which they were being carried, and kept it with them. According to P, the jacket that was kept by the marital family was a Type (7) jacket embroidered with bright-colors and was probably chosen because the groom's parents thought it was pretty. P asked that the jacket be returned, explaining that "there are many sisters in our household, so we are facing a severe shortage of clothes,¹⁹" but the marital family refused to return it. P explained to me that the groom's parents did not return the jacket because they feared that the bride would not return to their family, but would stay in the natal home. The jacket was eventually returned to the natal family approximately one year after the wedding ceremony in the 12th month of the lunisolar calendar on the occasion of the first *ghanjt jed*. When the bride, who had been away working near the coast, returned and visited her marital home, she was permitted to take her jacket back to her natal family along with a gift of sticky rice cakes. Soon thereafter, the bride returned to her marital home, then left the village again with her husband to work.

P explains the situation at the time as follows.

"My daughter went to her marital home once (at the time of the wedding ceremony). When I went again for *ghanjt jed*, I was given (the jacket) back. If she hadn't gone to the marital home, they probably wouldn't have returned the jacket. If she had gotten divorced (without having gone back to her marital home), the jacket probably would have been taken. We Miao are stupid, aren't we? The marital family tries to ensure that the bride will return by doing such a thing."

"In some cases, the marital family gives up and returns the ethnic costumes saying, 'you (= the bride) won't come back. Not even an ethnic costume is enough to keep your heart (= the bride herself) from leaving.' I think it is rare for them not to return a costume."

In other words, for marital families, keeping an ethnic costume is understood to mean keeping the bride—i.e. preventing divorce. The interviews revealed that mothers hold on to the ethnic costumes because they imagine this potential situation. However, to the best of my knowledge, in L village, P's case is the only case in which a marital family has taken possession of a costume, at least temporarily, in order to prevent divorce.

To begin with, the divorce rate is on the decline. Up to the 1980s, the average age of first marriage was in the teens, with almost all marriages being arranged by the parents. For this reason, many divorces occurred after a bride stayed with her marital family for a few days or if a bride refused to go to her marital family and simply continued to practice *zuo jia*. Since the 1990s, however, the average age of marriage has increased to the 20s, and, as explained previously, *zuo jia* is no longer practiced. With this change, the wedding ceremony, the bride's move to the martial

¹⁹ P only has one daughter. Thus, the term "sisters" here either means relatives or is simply used as a pretext for getting the costumes returned.

house, and her pregnancy have come to occur in close succession with little time in between. In addition to divorce traditionally being rare after the birth of a child, the trend towards lower divorce rates after the birth of a child has been bolstered by the fact the majority of women in rural China undergo a type of sterilization surgery known as “*jueyu*” in Chinese after the birth of a second child. It is difficult for women who are unable to bear children to remarry. Another factor contributing to the declining divorce rate is the fact that, with the exception of a few prestigious kinship groups, parents no longer forcibly arrange children’s marriages and rather comply with their children’s wishes.

I felt there is a slight contradiction with the way the mother talked about her fear that the in-laws would steal her daughter’s costumes as a way to prevent divorce, especially given the declining divorce rate, the scarcity of actual examples in which the marital family has stolen the daughter-in-law’s costumes, and the mothers’ general opinion that the marital families would eventually return the costumes. In Chapter V, I examine this point from the standpoint of the positioning and treatment by mothers and daughters of costumes stored by the natal family. Here, I discuss the intentions of the marital homes.

Another notable characteristic of P’s daughter’s case is the fact that, even though the marriage took place in the late 1990s, she practiced *zuo jia*, albeit for the short period of a year. During the *zuo jia* period, a woman’s status is ambiguous. In addition, the bride resided neither with her natal family nor with her marital family but, rather, had left the village to work elsewhere. Thus, it is likely that, for the marital family, the bride’s existence was something intangible.²⁰ Furthermore, although the average age of first marriage in L village has increased, if women in their late 20s and men over 30 remain unmarried, their families gain a bad reputation related to their children’s inability to find partners, etc. Moreover, in rural China, the one-child policy, which was enacted in 1979, has resulted in an imbalance of male and female populations that has led to a shortage of marriageable women. This, in turn, has caused families, and particularly those with sons, to feel increased pressure to quickly find brides, marry them, and bring them into the family. It is possible, then, that this idea that “(if ethnic costumes are left with the marital family) they will be taken (by the marital family) in the event of a divorce” spread against this backdrop of increasing marriage age and the fact that it is a seller’s market for women.

This negotiation between natal and marital families over the bride and her ethnic costumes indicates that ethnic costumes are considered to be something of value to keep the daughter/bride from leaving. For the natal families, especially, the taking of the costumes would be equivalent to taking away their daughters. In order to examine the value of ethnic costumes at the time of the study, in the following section, I will describe and compare the type, number, and purpose of ethnic costumes possessed by Miao in three time periods while taking into consideration the region’s social and economic history. In addition, I will discuss the change in storage location of ethnic costumes and the concomitant change in the costume-making process and transfer of ethnic

²⁰ Because P’s daughter returned to her natal home after her wedding ceremony and then left on her own to work from her natal home, she is seen as having practiced *zuo jia* by both the natal and the marital families.

costumes.

IV Changes in the Value and the Production Process of the Costumes

1 Latter era of the Republic of China (from the 1930s to 1949)

The traditional system of land possession continued up until the establishment of the Republic of China. The disparity in wealth and the influence of landowners was clear to see but was not accompanied by a power relationship based on social position [Kishimoto 2007: 159]. Similarly, with regard to ethnic costumes around this period, I often heard comments related to the differences in storage circumstances between landowners/rich farmers and tenant farmers. Only landowners and rich farmers possessed A-type jackets and silver accessories, while others only possessed B- and C-type jackets.

In interviews conducted as part of the study, women in their 80s explained that, because tenant farmers did not possess A-type jackets at the time, for wedding ceremonies, either the bride's mother would borrow one from the landowner or the bride would wear a B-type jacket. At the time, the B-type jacket was considered to be a "valuable wear" (*ud vut* or *ud hlieb* in Miao language) and was treated as valuable ceremonial dress. In contrast, by the time of the interviews, only A-type jackets were considered "valuable wear."

One Miao woman (83 years old) reported that she had brought five jackets to her wedding in 1947, which took place when she was 20 years old. Three of these jackets were A-type jackets that her mother had borrowed from the landowner, while the remaining two were B- and C-type jackets that she had made herself. Furthermore, when she moved into the marital home, she brought with her three or four B- and C-type jackets that she had made herself and one or two B-type jackets that were passed down from her mother.

Shortly after the establishment of the PRC in 1949, landowners and rich farmers had their land taken away as part of the full-fledged implementation of land reform in 1951. This land was then distributed to poor farmers. At the same time, it is said that the ethnic costumes owned by landowners along with silver accessories were seized and similarly distributed [Ho 2011: 167].

Traditionally, costume making began with the spinning of yarn, and included steps such as yarn dyeing and weaving that are rarely performed today. In L village, women aged 64 or older had had the experience of spinning and dyeing yarn, but, at the time of the study, all women bought pre-dyed yarn from the market as a regular practice. The front piece, back piece, and sleeves of costumes are made from three different pieces of cloth with different patterns. While a number of women in their 40s and 50s and women in their 60s and older had had the experience of weaving these three types of cloth on a loom, at the time of the study, all women purchased pre-woven white cloth, which they dyed themselves.

In the past, C-type jackets were worn as everyday clothing. It is said that, "(in the past) if we didn't make it ourselves, we didn't have anything to wear," and everyday clothing was, for

the most part, made by the wearer. Although it is reported that some landowners commissioned other women to design and make their clothing, the details of this are not certain. To summarize the above, given the disparity in wealth, the time and effort required to create costumes, and the use of costumes as everyday clothing, most women only possessed B- and C-type jackets, and owned fewer items than at the time of the study. Furthermore, the expectation was that the brides themselves would make the clothes they wore and brought to their marital homes.

2 People's Republic of China era (1949 to the early 1970s)

The agricultural collectivization and severe famine are central themes of narratives about this time period. When asked about ethnic costumes, the women would often reply, “we were not in a position to think about ethnic costumes.” Agricultural collectivization progressed rapidly through the 1950s and, by the end of 1956, 96% of farms had been organized into advanced-stage cooperatives [Kishimoto 2007: 169].²¹ During this period, the amount of labor supplied to collective production activities was indicated by the work points (*gongfen* in Chinese) on which basis the harvested agricultural products were distributed. When speaking of the time period, the expression “robbing labor points” (*qiang gongfen* in Chinese) frequently emerges, indicating the desperation felt by all—young and old, men and women—with regard to securing food.

In 1958, with the establishment of people's communes and the start of the Great Leap Forward, private plots and livestock previously owned by individuals were seized and put under collective possession, marking the advance of full-scale collectivism in which people no longer ate meals at homes but, rather, in the village's common dining hall [Kishimoto 2007: 172]. It was strictly forbidden for individual households to cook rice, and collectivism came to be imposed not only on production but also on consumption. It is said that the famine started around this time. Many individuals lost family members as a result of starvation or disease brought on by the famine. Among the women interviewed, there were even some who moved into their marital homes but eventually returned to their natal families due to constant quarreling caused by hunger. Under such circumstances, neither mothers nor daughters had the spare energy to make ethnic costumes. There was not enough cloth, as this was also rationed. Some women reported that they were unable to bring costumes with them when they moved in with their marital families. While C- and worn-out B-type jackets were worn as everyday clothing, A-type jackets, which are the central elements of ethnic jackets today, were not seen.

In Section III, I noted that the majority of women in their 40s to 80s reported that their mothers had never made or passed down ethnic costumes to them. This was because the expectation was that the brides themselves would make the costumes that they wore and brought to the marital home. Although there were some women who, despite such expectation, received ethnic costumes from their mothers when they moved to their marital families, this was not

²¹ An agricultural system in which the farmland and all means of production are owned collectively.

possible around the time of establishment of the PRC, given the shortage of materials and absence of mothers who were engaged in time-consuming agricultural collectivization work, etc.

3 After the reform and opening-up policy (the late 1970s to present)

In 1974, in the latter half of the people's commune period, agricultural collectivization continued to be practiced but was not as strictly controlled, and it gradually became easier to secure food. The women of L village reported that it was around this period that women began to make ethnic costumes again in their spare time between agricultural works. In 1978, governmental policy shifted towards economic reform, resulting in the assignment of land-use rights. Flexibility in lifestyle began to increase with the switch to agricultural production responsibility system. It is also around this time that A-type jackets started to be made. While it is not clear how A-type jackets, which were not common in the past, spread, it was confirmed in an interview conducted in another village in Shuangjing town, Shibing county (Map 1) that a woman (76 years old) who had bought an A-type jacket from a relative around 1984, used it as a model at the same time and began making and selling paper pattern stencils for the embroidery on the jackets.

Furthermore, the practice of migrating to coastal areas (e.g. Guangzhou) for work, which began in L village in 1993, substantially changed rural village life. Cash income earned outside the village made it possible to purchase silver accessories as well as the materials needed to make ethnic costumes, which stimulated and changed the manufacture of costumes. Around the same time the number of ethnic costumes owned increased, raising the number of jackets brought to wedding ceremonies to somewhere between seven to as many as eleven, with the majority of these being A-type jackets. It became commonplace for people to own A-type jackets and rare for people to borrow costumes to bring to wedding ceremonies. Villagers began wearing western-style clothing as everyday clothing, and costumes were reserved for ceremonies or seasonal festivals. Furthermore, with the development of ethnic tourism in Shidong town starting in 1987, costumes have become goods to be traded [Ho 2011: 168, 330]. However, in L village, although some worn out costumes were sold, such sales were not as common as in Shidong town, which is a tourist spot.

Meanwhile, starting in the 1990s, it became common practice for the majority of women in their 20s to 40s to spend most of the year, with the exception of the lunisolar New Year, working outside of the province. During this time, the practice of making ethnic costumes has all but disappeared. Of the Miao women in the village in their 40s or older, only one had finished elementary school. This is because, up to that point, it was considered shameful for a girl to attend school and there was a shortage of labor in the context of agricultural collectivization. In contrast, the majority of women in their 30s or younger had graduated from junior high school. These women's mothers did not encourage their daughters to make costumes because to do so would interfere with their schoolwork. For this reason, the women did not acquire costume-making skills prior to marriage and have begun to learn these skills when they are no longer able to leave the village to work after becoming pregnant or having children. While traditional costume making

has seen a resurgence and is being promoted, circumstances have made it difficult for unmarried women to make ethnic costumes. As a result, the majority of ethnic costumes worn in wedding ceremonies are made by the brides' mothers.²²

4 Discussion

Yang [1998: 305-306] pointed out that the Miao's ethnic costumes underwent three dramatic changes starting in the 1980s: specifically, these are (1) a transformation of traditional everyday costumes into ceremonial dress; (2) the use of materials manufactured out of province; and (3) the decline of traditional handicraft skills. Here, Yang is referring to the fact that pre-made clothing have replaced ethnic costumes as everyday wear and the fact that ethnic costumes are worn only at seasonal festivals and ceremonies. He also noted that yarn and cloth manufactured in other provinces is being used and that various steps of the costume creation process (cotton cultivation, silkworm culture, yarn spinning, loom weaving, and cultivation and mixing of dye materials) are no longer performed.

In L village, in terms of jacket type, the centerpiece of the ethnic costumes possessed by Miao women has changed from B- and C-type jackets to A-type jackets. Interviews in L village regarding costume types revealed that (1) above did not result from a transformation of everyday wear into ceremonial dress. Rather, it was a result of a declining usage of C-type jackets, which were traditionally worn as everyday wear, and increasing usage of A-type jackets, which were traditionally used as ceremonial dress. The increasing popularity of the elaborate A-type costumes, which previously could only be afforded by landowners and rich farmers, and the earning of cash income by working away from home have all served to emphasize the value of ethnic costumes as assets. The possession of costumes can enhance a Miao family's economic prestige. With the adoption of western-style clothing as everyday wear, ethnic costumes have become items that are typically stored and only brought out and worn during ceremonies and seasonal festivals. In other words, ethnic costumes have become valuable prestige goods that are "kept" and are no longer consumable goods to be worn.

It will be pertinent, then, to re-examine the narratives of the mothers discussed in section III who explained that "it would be a problem if (the costumes) were taken by the marital family in the case of (my daughter's) divorce" not from the standpoint of negotiation between natal and marital families or the recent circumstances surrounding marriage, but, rather, from the standpoint of costumes as valuable prestige goods. Both the natal and marital families have come to "retain" their daughters (or daughters-in-law) through the possession of the daughters' valuable costumes.

²² Ho divided the costumes into four ages based on differences in embroidery, etc.—classic period (1910s to 1950s), pinch period (1960s to 1980s), exaggerated period (1980s and 1990s), and tourism period (1990s to the present)—and briefly discussed their possession and creation [Ho 2011: 189-191]. She also pointed out that fewer younger people were learning embroidery skills in Shidong town because they were too busy operating businesses aimed at tourists and working elsewhere [Ho 2011: 324-326].

In the next section, I examine the mother-daughter relationships mediated by the costumes kept in the natal home by focusing on how mothers and daughters deal with these costumes.

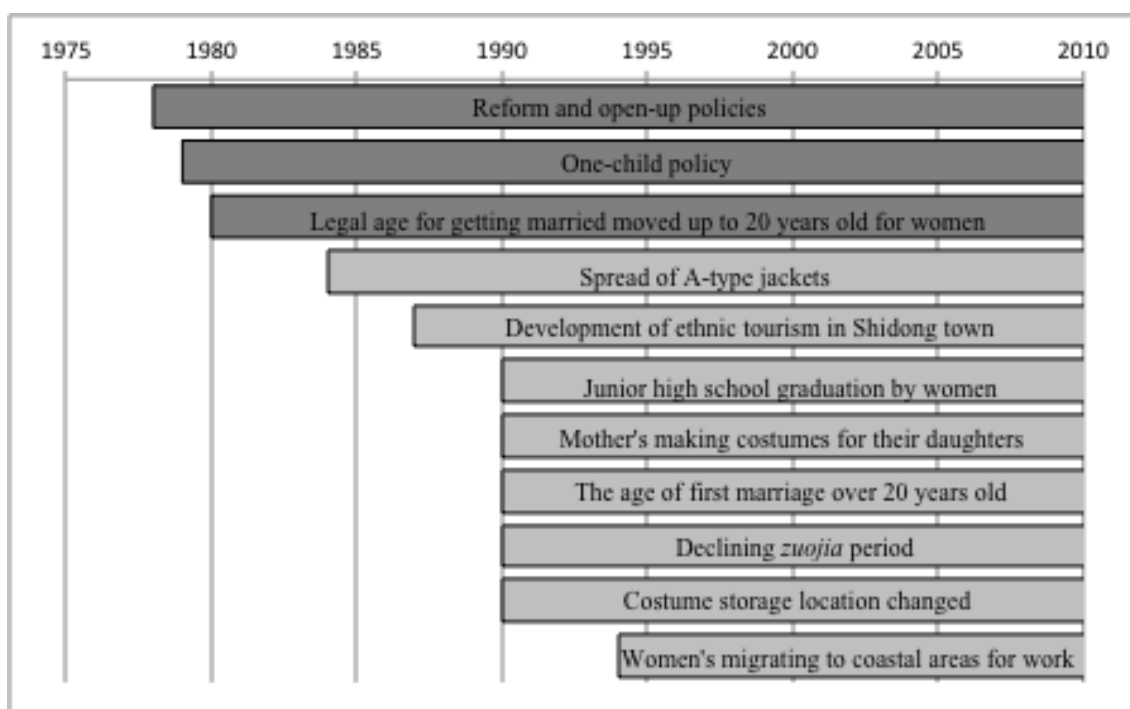


Fig 1: Chronological table related to changes in women's life-course and costume storage location

V Mother-Daughter Relationships as Mediated by Costumes

1 Mother's costume-making and emerging relationships regarding costume possession

Up to this point, I have outlined the change in storage location of ethnic costumes while focusing on the change of women's residence after marriage, the relationships between natal and marital families, and elucidated the change in type and value of costumes in the context of changing social and economic circumstances. In this section, I will contextualize the transference of women themselves between the natal and marital homes, and the transference of ethnic costumes between mothers and daughters that results from marriage and change in residence experienced over a woman's life course while tracing the changes related to the creation and storage of costumes in the natal home. I demonstrate that mothers are able to maintain ties with their married daughters who have left the natal home by storing their "daughters'" costumes. First, I will consider how ethnic costumes are handled between P and her daughter, who were introduced in section III, by examining the negotiation related to the purchase and selling of a costume in which I also

participated.

During my stay in L village, I asked P if I could purchase a type (7) jacket, which is out of fashion. Hardly any of the women make them anymore. Generically, Miao women in L village are unwilling to sell their costumes even under strained circumstances. This is especially true of A-type jackets, which take approximately three years to make, and B-type jackets that they wear on a regular basis.

P's response was, "This is my daughter's costume, so I will have to ask her (if it's okay to sell it)." P felt that she could not make the decision on her own. Thereafter, P phoned her daughter, who was working in a different province, to discuss whether it would be okay to sell the costume and for what price. The jacket had been made by P. Meanwhile, when I asked P when the costumes that belonged to her daughter would be taken to the marital home, she explained, "I have only one daughter. When I die, all of the clothes will go to her." From my perspective, this was a perplexing answer that indicated an ambiguous situation in which her "daughter's" ethnic costumes had not been taken to the marital home and, perhaps, had not even been transferred to the daughter.

P made seven jackets for her daughter. Her daughter comes back to her natal home to pick up the ethnic costumes when she needs to wear them. These costumes belong to P's daughter, and P respected the wishes of her daughter when it came to selling the jacket. Meanwhile, regarding the time her daughter will take her costumes to the marital home, P explained that the costumes had not been completely transferred to her daughter even after the mother had finished making them. This is why she continues to keep her daughter's costumes. P will permit her daughter to bring ten jackets including P's own jacket, which P has kept with her since her marriage and the daughter's jackets made by P to the marital home upon her (P's) death.

In L village, the mothers' narratives regarding the ethnic costumes they make for their daughters tended to emphasize the daughters' ownership in the context of the mother-daughter relationship, but tended more to emphasize the mothers' ownership in the context of the relationship between the natal and marital families. Similarly, although the daughters are the ones who primarily wear the costumes made by their mothers and are also the one to make decisions regarding its sales, it is the mothers who primarily keep and care for the costumes. In the mothers' narratives, possession of the costumes tends to switch between mothers and daughters depending on the mother-daughter relationship or the relationship between natal and marital families. The following example shows how daughters' costumes kept by natal families are worn.

Q (47 years old) showed me three A-type jackets that she had just finished making and explained that she had made them for her two daughters (a 27-year-old widow and a 21-year-old married woman). At the time, Q's second daughter had just left her natal home after marrying a Miao man. Q explained that she had finished the A-type jackets just in time for her second daughter's wedding ceremony. Both of her daughters had spent a

significant amount of time away from home working and had had very little experience making ethnic costumes. The A-type jacket's value came from its elaborate and colorful embroidery work and the smoothness of the yarn while it was still new. Acknowledging that the embroidery would begin to fray and fade with use, Q had chosen a classic design and light-colored thread with the thought that she could eventually sell the jackets as antiques to tourists after the daughters finished wearing them. The costumes were made with both the daughters' use and their eventual sales in mind. However, at a wedding ceremony held in L village, Q herself was seen wearing one of the A-type jackets she had made for her daughters (Type (2) jacket, blue).

From this example, if there is more than one daughter, possession of a given costume made by the mother may not be limited to one daughter, and all daughters can wear them, at least while kept by the natal family. In the example above, until the transfer to the daughter is complete, costumes are worn by the daughters at ceremonies and are not only kept by but, at times, are even worn by the mothers. In other words, the daughters' ownership of the costumes and the mothers' wearing of them were not mutually exclusive. Costumes made by mothers for their daughters that are suitable in terms of the mother's age and purpose may be shared by the mothers and daughters. The mothers had a hard time explaining exactly why it was okay for them to share their daughters' costumes. I think circumstances in which a given costume may be worn by either the mother or her unmarried and married daughters have arisen due to the less frequent (i.e. non-everyday) use of ethnic costumes. Meanwhile, as illustrated by the following example, there are cases in which costumes kept by the natal family belong to a specific daughter and are not shared among mothers and daughters:

R (47 years old) has three daughters. Because the eldest daughter (27 years old, married) struggled with her schoolwork, she did not go on to junior high school and began making ethnic costumes at the age of 16. As a result, she has acquired basic costume making skills, which is unusual for girls of her generation. The eldest daughter possessed eight jackets that she had made herself, which she wore at her wedding ceremony and took with her to her marital family. Her husband is a civil servant who works for the county government. As such, she does not need to move away to work and keeps the majority of costumes that she had made at her marital home except one jacket in the natal home.

In contrast to the eldest daughter, the second (25 years old, married) and third daughters (20 years old, unmarried) have not acquired costume-making skills. Furthermore, the second daughter and her family, and third daughter spend the majority of the year away from the village working and do not have time to make ethnic costumes. It has been decided that, since the eldest daughter already has enough costumes of her own, the costumes made by R belong to the second and third daughters. The situation, however, is not so clear, because the third daughter is planning to marry a Han man that she met while working away from the village and is saying she doesn't need the costumes. R is opposed to her

third daughter marrying a Han man and has not given up on the idea of handing the costumes to her because she will need them if she marries a Miao man. With regard to handing over costumes to her second daughter, who is married but does not have a child yet, R explains, “When my second daughter has her second child, she can take the costumes (from the natal home). (At the moment) I’m still afraid of the possibility of a divorce. That’s because (if there is a divorce) the costumes won’t come back (from the marital home).”

Unlike the eldest daughter, the second daughter did not possess any costumes of her own. As such, the second daughter commissioned the eldest daughter to make her a jacket and paid 2600 Yuan²³ from earnings made by working outside the village. R was involved, at least partly, in the making of the jacket. However, R did not receive any compensation for her part explaining that “mothers don’t take money (from their daughters).” The jacket she commissioned her elder sister to make is recognized as her own, which her sisters and mother cannot wear. Since the second daughter continues to work outside the village, the jacket is also being kept at the natal home.

As in Q’s case, R has decided (or at least desires) that the costumes she made will be handed down to her second and third daughters, yet it has not been decided specifically who will be given what. It appears that that decision will be postponed until the third daughter gets married (to the Han man) or the second daughter has a second child. Unmarried women in L village who want to marry a Han man (like R’s third daughter) tend to decline costumes made by their mothers. R and her second daughter, at the very least, share the understanding that the costumes kept at the natal home belong to the second and third daughters. The eldest daughter also consents to this arrangement.

Meanwhile, it is evident that the eldest daughter’s ethnic costumes are clearly separate from the costumes being kept at the natal home. The eldest daughter’s case may be rare, as there are admittedly few women who do not advance to junior high school and still have the opportunity to marry a civil servant. However, it appears that, even since the 1990s, costumes made by a daughter still belong to the daughter, and, as was customary in the 1980s and earlier, these are brought to the marital home when the daughter begins living with her husband. Furthermore, in the case of costumes that are commissioned and paid for, a practice that has become increasingly prevalent in recent years, it is clear that the owner of the costume is the individual who commissioned it, and even if the transaction is between sisters, there is no question as to who owns it.²⁴

²³ At the time of the study, one Yuan was approximately 12.6 JPY.

²⁴ While costumes belonging to the daughter are kept by the natal home, there are increasing cases such as the second daughter above, in which the daughters commission someone to make costumes or cases in which the daughters do their own embroidery (when they become pregnant or give birth). This is in part, because the daughters need their own costumes and do not like the designs of their mothers’ costumes. There is a tendency to prefer wearing jackets at ceremonies and seasonal festivals, which have similar embroidery motifs as those worn by other women, i.e. costumes that are “in style.” That said, there are no daughters who commission and pay their own

The costumes made or commissioned and paid for by the daughter herself simply belong to her. The daughter can wear them and take them with her to the marital home except when daughters have left the village to work. Meanwhile the costumes made by the mother necessarily continue to be kept in the natal home as “daughters’ costumes”, regardless of the daughters’ situation. All the daughters, and sometimes even their mother can wear and engage to sell them. From this, it is apparent that the question of who made a given costume or paid compensation for making costumes is an important factor in determining who owns the costume and where it will be kept.²⁵

As we saw in the three cases above, with the exception of storage by the mothers, the involvement of mothers and daughters in the possession, wearing, and sale of costumes have come to intersect in different ways since the 1990s when mothers began to make the costumes for their daughters. The costumes made by mothers for their daughters and stored in the natal homes have created a new relationship between mothers and daughters revolving around their possession. The mothers, on their part, explained that although the costumes they had made for their daughters belonged to their daughters, they had not yet transferred them to their daughters (preventing the daughters from taking the costumes to the marital home). It can be seen that costumes made by mothers are always passed down to the daughters. It was understood that possession of the costumes undergoes a process of transfer from mother to daughter. However, by postponing the completion of this transfer, the mother can maintain that the costume she made belongs to both/either the mother herself and/or to the daughter.

The new relationship between mothers and daughters revolving around costume possession and the mothers’ positioning of costumes can be interpreted as a logical management method that allows the shared use of costumes by mothers and daughters or as a means taken by the mothers to secure the costumes as goods. However, if we consider the local context in the 1990s and later, the costumes have not been treated simply as valuable ceremonial dress or goods by the mothers and daughters. In the next section, I take another look at the new relationship between mothers and daughters revolving around costume possession based on the daughter’s comments and consider the changes in the process of moving to the marital home that has occurred since 1990.

2 Daughter’s marriage and transfer of ethnic costumes from mothers to daughters

When I asked women in their 20s to 40s who did not leave the village to work, why they did not bring their costumes with them to their marital homes, they explained, “I didn’t want to dishearten my mother (or parents),” or, “my mother would think that I (her daughter) had forgotten her.”

mothers to make costumes. This is because it is taken for granted that mothers will make or, at least, take part in making costumes for their daughters.

²⁵ In the case of a woman in her 40s who married in 1991, around the time that the costume storage practices changed, she stored the costumes made for her by her mother in her natal home, whereas the costumes that she had made (at least most of it) and completed by herself, she stored in her marital home.

Furthermore, while I explained in the previous section that R's eldest daughter kept the majority of costumes that she herself had made at the marital home, she left one jacket with her natal family, which, according to the eldest daughter herself, she did to keep her mother from becoming disheartened. For a daughter to continue keeping costumes that are considered to be her belongings with her natal family even after marriage means that the daughter is entrusting a portion of the assets to her natal family. This serves as an expression of the intent and desire to return home and is said to be related to the daughter's consideration for the mother. By leaving her costumes with her natal family, the daughter is acting in accordance with her mother's desires and is attempting to demonstrate that she has not completely cut ties with her mother (or natal family). Here, let us examine how mothers' views of their daughters moving to marital homes changed in the 1990s.

As I mentioned in section III, *zuo jia* was practiced in L village up until the 1980s, and newlywed brides continued to live with their natal families for two or three years after the wedding ceremony. During this period, *ghanjt jed* was practiced approximately three times, and the brides moved to the marital homes, bringing their ethnic costumes with them, when they became pregnant or reached the appropriate age. P, who appeared in section III and the previous section, explained her daughter's moving to the marital home after approximately one year of *zuo jia* as follows.

“There were approximately nine months between the time my daughter returned home after her wedding ceremony and the time she moved to her marital home. These days it is quick. In the past, you needed three years. It was only after that that you became one family. My daughter is the same, but, these days, everyone's so bold. They leave as soon as they get married.”

In the past, it was not the wedding ceremony but, rather, the move to the marital home after *zuo jia* that brought about the change in affiliation from the natal to the marital family. It was not unusual for couples to divorce during the *zuo jia* period. As such, the marriage was not considered to be confirmed at the time of the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, for Miao women, the transition in social status and affiliation—from being unmarried to being married, from being a daughter to being a daughter-in-law, from being a member of the natal family to being a member of the marital family—required approximately three years. During this time, the transition occurred as a stepwise process which entailed *ghanjt jed* and the making of one's own costumes. In other words, during the *zuo jia*, a woman's status was not tied to either the natal or the marital family but was liminal. Bringing costumes to the marital home marked the conclusion of this liminal state and the conclusion of the transition in affiliation, which was accompanied by a change in social status.

Since the 1990s, however, the wedding ceremony and the move to the marital home have come to take place almost simultaneously. Along with this change, the wedding ceremony and pregnancy are no longer separated by time. Conversations among groups of women frequently

involve discussion and jokes about sex. One topic that emerges in such conversations is the fact that women who have not experienced *zuo jia* begin sexual relations with their husbands immediately after the wedding ceremony. This is an issue that is often talked about by women in their 40s and older who experienced *zuo jia*. In the past, whenever a bride stayed for short periods of time with her marital family on the occasion of the wedding ceremony or a *ghangt jed*, the bride would sleep with the husband's sisters or unmarried women in the neighborhood and would only begin to sleep with her husband during the final *ghangt jed* or after moving to the marital home. There are many women who consider that starting to live with a husband immediately after the wedding ceremony would mean starting to sleep (to have sexual relationships) with the husbands, and they would half-jokingly and half-lamentingly say, "young people are like pigs and cattle." As a result of the older age of marriage, the age at which a bride first begins living with her marital family remains in the 20s and has not changed substantially before and after 1990. What has changed is the fact that the wedding ceremony, the move to the marital home, and pregnancy/child birth have come to occur in close succession. The daughter's practice of leaving her costumes with her mother had the effect of mitigating the strain brought on by the sudden changes of her affiliation.

In other words, the daughter leaves her costumes with her mother in order to continue the relationships with her mother, or to express her will to continue the relationships. If we re-examine the narratives and practices of the mothers discussed in previous section, the mothers on their part also willingly continue to involve themselves in their daughters' future even after their marriage and leaving the natal home, by making costumes for their daughters and by sharing the costumes with them. For example, even in the case where the daughter chose a Han man as her boyfriend, the mother made and kept her costumes with the idea in mind that her daughter might wear them at marriage and other ceremonies. In another case, the mother assumed that, at some point, the costumes would become well-worn and her daughters would no longer want to wear them in public. She chose antique designs so that they might sell the costumes off to earn money after wearing them. Furthermore, the mothers kept the costumes with them, considering the possibility that their daughters might divorce their current husbands and return to their natal families. The mothers' making and storing of costumes for their daughters is inseparable from consideration of these possibilities. The daughters on their part entrusted their mothers with keeping their costumes to demonstrate continued consideration for their mothers. Here, the interactions between mothers and daughters mediated by the costumes involve conjecturing by both parties with regard to their respective futures.

From this point on, I will reconsider the transfer of costumes from mothers to daughters. The storage of costumes by the natal family starting in the 1990s can be understood as continuing the relationships with the married daughter and the natal home, and also securing the opportunity and the possibility to return to the natal home especially in the event of a divorce. On the one hand, the step-wise and prolonged transfer of the bride from the natal to the marital household as seen in the practice of *zuo jia* up until the 1980s has disappeared. However, a similar (or a partially alternative) step-wise and prolonged relationship between the bride and her mother has been

formulated through the prolonged conveyance/transference of the costume from mother to daughter from the 1990s. In the 1990s and onwards, the mothers began keeping the costumes after making them. During this period, the costumes' ownership became ambiguous between the mothers and the daughters, all of whom could claim to wear and even dispose of the costumes. After this period of transition, the costumes are finally transferred to the daughters in their marital homes. In this manner, (with the exception of cases in which a daughter marries a non-Miao or elopes) the transfer of costumes is accomplished in a two-step and long-time process. The stepwise transfer of costumes has come to be practiced as if to compensate for the loss of the stepwise move of daughters to their marital homes. This, in turn, allows for a stepwise separation between the mother and the daughter over a prolonged period.

3 Finalizing the transfer of costumes

In the past, the bride took her costumes with her to the marital home after the end of *zuo jia*, at which point the bride's affiliation changed from the natal home to the marital home. But since the 1990s, it has become customary for the bride to take her costumes to the marital home after the birth of a second child or upon the death of her mother—both of these events mark points when social distance between the bride and her mother increases. Below, I examine why the completion of transfer occurs after the birth of the second child.

During the study period, S, a Miao woman (22 years old) who had returned to her natal home in L village, had a 13-month-old female infant. S's wedding ceremony had taken place in the lunisolar New Year of 2008. Soon thereafter, S left the village with her husband to work in Hangzhou. Two months later, it was discovered that S was pregnant, and S returned to live with her marital family. S and her child were prohibited from leaving the house (marital home) for 30 days after childbirth. Aside from that period, S moved irregularly between her natal and marital homes. While staying with her natal family, S took care of her child, made costumes, and helped with household chores. When I asked why she went back to her natal home so frequently, she explained, "many women return to their natal homes to raise their first child. In many cases, a first-month ceremony (*manyue jiu* in Chinese) is performed (in the case of the first child, on the 30th day after birth) at the natal home. After the birth of a second child, many people raise their children where they work outside the village."

Typically, the mother visits the daughter's marital home several days before the first-month ceremony and takes care of the daughter and her grandchild. On the 30th day after the child's birth, the daughter and mother return to the natal home along with the child to perform the first-month ceremony to which the natal family's neighborhood is invited. When the ceremony is completed, the daughter returns to the marital home. However, the daughter may frequently visit her natal family and ask for her mother's help in taking care of the child. In some cases, the daughters cite

the fact that the husbands have left the village to work and are not at home as a reason for doing so. Since the daughter already has experience with child rearing, for the second and subsequent children, the daughters raise their children at the marital home or outside the village where they work and rarely return to their natal homes. In other words, the birth of the second child marks a daughter's independence from her natal home in terms of child rearing,²⁶ with a decreased frequency of returning to their natal homes.

In this manner, in the period starting when the daughter moves into the marital home and ending with the birth of a second child, there are interactions between mothers and daughters that are not only mediated by costumes but also involve frequent cooperation in terms of child care as well as a costume-making and housework. At the time that the daughters no longer frequently return to their natal homes, they move their costumes to the marital home. Meanwhile, in cases where daughters move their costumes to the marital home after their mothers' death, the mother-daughter relationship after the birth of a second child and up to the mother's death is continued by mediation of the costumes, as described in the previous section. In such cases, the relationship between the mothers and daughters cease with the mothers' death, and it is only then that the transfer of the costumes to the daughters is completed. As discussed in the previous section, since the 1990s, the timing of the transfer of costumes to the marital home has less to do with the change in the bride's affiliation and status and has more to do with the process by which the bride's close relationship with her mother (or natal home) comes to an end.

VI Conclusion

Up to the 1980s, among the Miao, it was customary for the bride to bring ethnic costumes with her as a dowry to the husband's family at more or less the same time that the bride began living with the husband. This marked the transfer in the bride's affiliation to the marital family. However, in L village, by the 1990s, the bride's move and the transfer of ethnic costumes to the marital family no longer occurred simultaneously, and it became evident that a woman's affiliation in either the natal or marital family could no longer be understood simply from the transition in residence or transfer of objects. Strathern [1984: 44] argued that, in the discussion of marriage

²⁶ Due to China's one-child policy, all couples (either the husband or wife) in rural China must undergo surgical sterilization surgery upon registration of a second child. Because it is considered especially important to have male children in rural China, if a couple's first two children are girls, (many mothers) temporarily avoid the requirement for surgical sterilization by not registering the second child and raising her in the coastal area where the mother works. In such cases, it is common for only the first child to be registered (regardless of whether it is male or female) and to be left with the in-laws and sent to school in the village. In most cases, when a male child is born, the couple pays a fine and undergoes surgical sterilization and, in return, is able to register the male child with the birth of the second or subsequent child, the female child whose registration was postponed must also be registered. As such, due to problems related to the family registry, the birth of a second child also means that the daughter must raise her children independently with her husband where they work away from their village and parents.

exchanges, it is important to construct theory based on the process by which people mutually affect and influence each other, and create relationships via objects. She further pointed out that, to do so, the issues should be examined not starting with the social relations of marriage or the structure of the exchange of property but, rather, with the interactions between the people and objects. How are the transfer of costumes and transfer of the daughters' affiliation to the marital home contextualized by Miao mothers and daughters? In this paper, I examined the process of the sympathetic relationship among Miao mothers and daughters mediated by costumes by re-evaluating this question in the context of changes in the type, use, and value of ethnic costumes that has occurred against the backdrop of changes in women's life course, practices related to the storage and making of costumes, and historical changes in local social and economic circumstances.

I will now summarize the discussion up to this point and reconfirm the factors leading to the practice of storing costumes at natal homes that started in the 1990s. I will conclude by arguing that Miao mother-daughter relationships are sympathetically formed through the mediation of costumes.

Up to the 1980s, the Miao practiced *zuo jia*, a custom entailing a long liminal period between the wedding ceremony and the point at which a bride moved into her marital family's home, during which time the bride's social status and affiliation transitioned through a long-term, step-wise process. This also served as a preparatory period for marriage during which time, in addition to visiting the marital family for short periods and potentially conceiving a child, the brides would make their own costumes to bring to the marital home. However, starting in the 1990s, *zuo jia* is no longer practiced, and brides either move into their marital homes a few days after the wedding ceremony or leave with their husbands to work elsewhere, resulting in earlier pregnancy (although not necessarily at a younger age, since the marriage age itself is delayed) than before. Mothers in their 40s and older, while not resisting the fact that their daughters begin living with their husbands earlier than before, express their disappointment and disapproval of current practices.

Around the same period, substantial changes in regard to the making of costumes were also observed. Since the 1990s, a Miao woman's typical life course entails moving to a different province to work after graduating from junior high school, with time thereafter spent in the village only to participate in the wedding ceremony, during pregnancy and childbirth, and while raising the first child. The costumes worn at the wedding ceremony and in marital life are now made by the mothers. While the costumes made by the mothers for their daughters are considered to "belong to the daughters," they are kept by the mothers even after the wedding ceremony and are worn by both the mothers and daughters, with a decision being made, in some cases, to sell off the costumes. It should be noted that the mothers do not consider the transfer of costumes to their daughters to be complete at this point. Because the mothers fear there is a possibility that their daughters, who have gone off to live with their husbands soon after holding a wedding ceremony, may still divorce. It appears that, in their minds, the mothers want to avoid a situation in which the marital families keep the costumes, which are considered valuable properties, as a way of

guaranteeing that the daughters won't leave. The possession of costumes stored in natal homes starting in the 1990s could be interchangeable between mothers and daughters.

Meanwhile, the daughters reported that, if they were to take the costumes to their marital homes, they worried their mothers would feel that their daughters no longer cared for them and would become disheartened. The daughters leave their costumes with their mothers, to avoid a sudden change in their affiliation and as an expression of their continuing consideration for their mothers even after their marriage. From this, I have reached the conclusion that, in practical terms, mothers and daughters who have left the village due to marriage continue to have a relationship mediated by costumes even after they have left. Since the 1990s, the costumes left with their natal families have served as a proxy for the daughters themselves and as an expression of the daughters' continuing concern for their mothers, opening up the possibility for mothers to remain involved in their daughters' lives into the future. From this, it can be seen that the mothers' postponement of handing over costumes to their daughters and the daughters' participation in this practice creates ambiguity with regard to the possession of costumes in which they cannot be said to clearly belong to the mother or the daughter and, at the same time, also enables long-term and step-wise separation between mothers (or natal families) and daughters who leave the natal home.

Relationships between mothers and daughters mediated by costumes undoubtedly existed from before the 1990s based on the transmission of costume-making skills, etc. That said, the relationship between mothers and daughters mediated by costumes observed since the 1990s differs markedly from that which existed prior to the 1980s. Specifically, the acts of taking possession, making and storing, or leaving costumes in the care of others have taken on a variety of meanings that go beyond the simple handling of costumes. The commonality in the implications of these different acts is that they influence the household affiliation of newly-married women. Since the 1990s, interaction involving costumes has affected the bride's household affiliation, maintaining some ambiguity in the possession of costumes, and has led to the development of "sympathetic" mother-daughter relationships with regard to costumes. Several factors have helped create such relationships, including the increased value of costumes, a shortage of marriageable women, shortening of the *zuo jia* period, and conditions that allow mothers to make costumes for their daughters.

The costumes, which mediate the mother-daughter relationship, are objects that are made by hand, objects that are worn on the human body, and, in addition, that are stored. They are also objects that have value and are used as dowry. They are objects that are specific to the mother-daughter relationship. It is based on these characters that Miao ethnic costumes create a sympathetic relationship between mother and daughter. This relationship has dynamically emerged in the context of changing local social and economic circumstances starting in the 1990s.

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