Chapter 4

Tensions between Romantic Love and Marriage: Performing 'Miao Cultural Individuality' in an Upland Miao Love-Song

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Introduction

Pierre Clastres notes that primitive societies are not 'incomplete', even without a state, literacy or written historical records (Clastres 1987). In line with this way of viewing and understanding non-modern or non-Western society, this chapter focuses on a peripheral society that has retained its autonomy by performing individuality within its own cultural contexts. This, however, does not imply an approach towards the morally autonomous individualism found in modern Euro-American societies.

This chapter explores the local expression of individuality in the love-song performance of an upland Miao society in eastern Guizhou in south-west China, illustrated using extracts from a song of over four hundred lines performed as a duet between two female and two male singers.[1]

Sentiment has long been a topic of both attention and contention in the anthropology of kinship, but it is often treated as following from kinship relations (Radcliffe-Brown 1924; Homans and Schneider 1955). This chapter adopts an alternative performative perspective, exploring the sentiments expressed in the love-song performances of upland Miao people. Miao love-songs place thematic emphasis upon humour, sentiment, and social and kin relationships by employing the rhetorical force of various poetic devices. I give special attention to a thematic analysis of the tensions between 'romantic love' (personal sentiments) and 'marriage' (affinal alliances), and outline how this Miao love-song poetically reveals a very common theme: the encounter between individual identity and social ideals.

The dialogic relationship between the individual and society has long been discussed by Durkheim, Mauss, Dumont and others. Examining further the claim that 'individualism pertains to a particular historic-cultural

conceptualization of the person or self' (Rapport and Overing 2000), this chapter concludes that Miao individuality is expressed within performances of Miao love-songs and the social dynamics they embody.

The Individual and Society in Anthropology

There is a long history of debate on the topic of the 'individual' versus 'society' in the anthropological literature. I will not review the entire debate here but concentrate on outlining the general approach of French anthropology, in particular Durkheim, Dumont and Mauss, as well as the work of the British anthropologist Marilyn Strathern. Much of this work gives a significant role to the individual, and to the encounter between the individual and society. From their work, one can see how the concepts of 'individual', 'individuality' and 'individualism' developed by considering them within their specific ethnographic, cultural and historical contexts. An article by Rapport and Overing in their *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts* (2000) reviewing Durkheim's notion of the individual is my starting point.

Émile Durkheim was the 'key exponent of collectivist narratives which subsumed the individual actor within grand-societal workings' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 179). He saw human beings in terms of the concept of *homo duplex*. As Rapport and Overing note, for Durkheim the individual 'led a double existence; one rooted in the physical organism and one … in a social organism. … Between the two there was constant antagonism and tension, but through inculcation into a public language and culture humankind was capable of rising above mean (animal) individuality and becoming part of a collective conscience in which the (sacred) traditions of a society were enshrined' (ibid.: 180).

The narratives of Durkheim, Marcel Mauss and Louis Dumont all combine individualism and individuality. Again citing Rapport and Overing (2000: 180), in 'A Category of the Human Mind' (1979), Mauss shows 'how society exerted its force on the physiological individual: how, through collective representations and collectively determined habitual behaviours, it submerged the individual within "a collective rhythm"'. Combining universal individuality with cultural individualism, Mauss proceeds to outline an evolutionary account of how people in different ages and societies have been aware of themselves differently as individual beings, and how these differences can be traced back to different forms of social structuration. Mauss dismisses self-awareness early on in his paper as of no interest to him, considering it to be basically psychological and a human universal: what he is interested in is social constructions of the person. What constitutes 'an individual' is not a universal – it has its own expression in different societies.

In his *Essays on Individualism* (1986), Dumont agrees with Mauss that 'the Western notion of the individual—an autonomous actor, bearing supreme moral value—is an exceptional stage in the evolution of civilisations' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 181). For Dumont, Hinduism offers a social insight: 'the

crucial difference between the Hindu world renouncer and the modern individualist is that the former can [*ideologically*] continue to exist only outside the everyday social world', while the notion of the modern individual is central to Western society (ibid.).

On the basis of Melanesian and English models, Marilyn Strathern discusses how indigenous conceptualizations of the individual and society differ in different cultures and in different historical periods. Her theoretical position regarding the individual and society is clearly articulated in *After Nature*, a work on modern English kinship:

> [The English model] depicted mid-twentieth century English kinship as a model for the reproduction of individuals and suggested a contrast with the Melanesian interest in the reproduction of relations. As individuals, persons in the English model do not symbolize whole social entities and cannot be isomorphic with a collectivity or a span of relationships. Rather, individuals are held to exist as parts of numerous different systems—a part of the kinship system, part of a naming system, part of society—and do not replicate in total any one systemic configuration. I referred to the conceptualization as merographic. … We are now in a position, I think, to give this merographically conceptualized English person its *aesthetic* or *iconic* dimension. … The individual person who is the microcosm of convention becomes elided with the individual person who makes his or her own choice. In the process, this figure will present a different kind of image, a composite, a montage, of itself. (Strathern 1992: 125–27, *my emphasis*)

Four points follow from the above quote that deserve to be highlighted. The first is that there is a tension, or antithesis, between the individual and society. The second is the valuing of the individual. Strathern found that different cultures understand what an individual is quite differently. It seems that Durkheim saw individualism 'as a value', although not explicitly stating this (Lukes 1973: 338ff.; Dumont 1986: 16). Moreover, Mauss and Dumont address autonomy and morality as the defining values of the Western individual. Comparing the Melanesian model with the English one, Strathern found that in Melanesia individuals are seen in terms of the relationships between them, that is, as producing the relationships which constitute their collectivity, their sociality; in mid-twentieth-century English society individuals were simply understood as being various discrete parts of the whole system.

Given that her English subjects were a 'mid-twentieth-century' group, a third point Strathern's quote raises is the question of modernity. Individualism has to different degrees underlain anthropological thought since Durkheim, being explicit or implicit in revolutionary or progressive ideas. It has long generally been considered a feature of modern Western society. Subsequent debate on the nature of the individual brought about a consideration of modernity. As Dumont notes, 'for Mauss it is sometimes as though everything else were leading up to modernity' (1986: 4). In fact, Durkheim and Dumont himself both have an evolutionist basis to their ideas. Most subsequent discussion contrasts 'traditional' forms with modern ones, or is evolutionist in structure.[2]

The fourth point of interest in Strathern's study of contemporary English kinship is the shift towards the aesthetic and iconic dimension. Her considering the relations between individuality and sociality from such a perspective might also be traced back to her earlier study of Melanesian societies: Strathern's notion of the 'dividual' being was drawn originally from McKim Marriott's work on India (1976), and she applied this notion to Melanesia (Strathern 1988: 348–49, f.7).[3]

> Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as *dividually* as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm. (Strathern 1988: 13, *my emphasis*)

This novel perspective on the individual addressed by Strathern, aesthetic or iconic, offers a new method for uncovering the characteristics and value of the individual. In fact, this perspective is closely related to what I am doing in this chapter, namely examining language in use and the perfomative dimension of social life.

The Turn to 'Language in Use'

The turn towards 'language in use' has its roots in the fields of philosophy and linguistics. Wittgenstein examined ordinary language usage: he 'turned away from meanings and toward speaking habits' (Urban 1996: xii). Picking up this line of thinking, John Austin observed that 'people do much more with words ("performativity") than merely talk about the world ("constativity")' (ibid.).

The Russian linguist Roman Jakobson's teleological view of language also contributed to this trend. For him, change in sound 'therefore, is teleological. It must be measured … against the referential goal of communication, or if the example is from verse [*sic*], against the poetic function.' Such a multifunctional, polysystemic view of language is a radical departure from Saussure, for whom *langue* was homogeneous in both function and system (Caton 1987: 231). Moreover, M.M. Bakhtin's 'homogeneous versus heteroglossic poles of language' could also be built into the Jakobsonian model (ibid.). Bakhtin's emphasis on the system of aesthetics in speech genres deserves more attention. Michael Holquist introduces Bakhtin as follows:

> Since the time of Kant, we have with ever increasing insistence perceived system as a closed order rather than as an open-ended series of connections. System for Kant meant not only the rigorous application of a fully worked out and absolutely coherent set of categories. System also implied that no major question should be treated in isolation: thus, any consideration of reason had to answer demands not only of logic or epistemology, but of *ethics* and *aesthetics* as well. It is *in this latter sense only that Bakhtin's thought might be labeled systematic*: the sense he seeks to invoke when he calls … for an 'open unity'. (Holquist 1986: x, *my emphasis*)

Following the development of this pragmatic view, a critical perspective has emerged which explores the poetics and performance of language and social life, the aesthetic aspect. Bauman and Briggs (1990: 79) comment on these new perspectives as follows: 'the turn to performance marked an effort to establish a broader space within linguistics and anthropology for poetics—verbal artistry… . A focus on the artistic use of language in the conduct of social life—in kinship, politics, economics, religion—opens the way to an understanding of performance as socially constitutive and efficacious, not secondary and derivative.'

Background

There are roughly nine million Miao currently spread across a large part of the massif that covers the Yun-Gui Plateau in south-west China and surrounding uplands in both south-west China and northern parts of South-East Asia (in Vietnam, Laos and Thailand). The Miao within China are usually divided into five groups on the basis of their language and geographical distribution.[4]

The earliest known relations of the central Miao group with the Han Chinese occurred during the Song dynasty (Yang 1998). From the Yuan dynasty onwards, Chinese written records refer to Miao in this area as 'Black Miao'. The region where the central Miao are located, 'an unbroken strip of Black Miao', did not become widely known until the Chinese forced their way into Miao territory in the Qing dynasty period of the Yongzheng (雍正) reign (1724–1736).

Fangf Bil is a Miao village perched high on a hillside in the upper reaches of the Qingshuijiang River.[5] It forms part of the northern subgroup of the central Miao (Yang 1998: 99), and administratively is part of Fanzao township, Taijiang County, in South-Eastern Guizhou Self-Governing Autonomous District in Guizhou Province.[6] Local people speak an eastern Miao dialect of the Miao-Yao subfamily of Sino-Tibetan. The people of Fangf Bil call themselves *Hmub* (cognate with *Hmong*, the usual self-designation). The village is composed of over 330 households with a population of almost 1,500 (1998–2000). It is divided into eleven hamlets (*vangf*), whose names refer to various nearby geographical features. The residents of any single hamlet are generally the agnatic descendants of a lineage subsegment, and share a common Han Chinese surname. The naming system is patronymic. For both males and females, their name is composed of their individual name preceded by their father's name, and their father's name preceded by his father's name. Han Chinese surnames came into use only in the eighteenth century and are seldom heard in everyday Miao discourse. They are nevertheless in keeping with the patrilineal spirit of Fangf Bil naming practices.

The eleven hamlets are organized into five patrilineal marriage groups within which marriage is forbidden. The five marriage groups are designated by the five Han Chinese surnames of Zhang (張, *Zix Zangb*, literally 'Family Zhang'), Tang (唐, *Zix Tangf*), Wang (王, *Zix Uangd*), Yang (楊, *Zix Iangf*) and

Tai (台邰, *Zix Taif*). There is no exclusive correspondence between the name of a marriage group and the surnames of the households and people belonging to it. For example, not everyone in the Zhang marriage group has the surname 'Zhang', and there may be people in other marriage groups with this surname. Hamlets, surnames and patrilineal marriage groups are all, in one way or another, organized around ancestral groups. Those in a marriage group generally live in close proximity, share a common male ancestor, and act as patrilineal descent groups in relation to ancestral rites and the possession of agricultural land. The surnames and hamlets coincide roughly with the marriage groups, but only the marriage groups correspond directly with the ancestral groups.

The combined population of marriage groups 2 and 4 composes over 90 per cent of Fangf Bil's total population. The proportion of intermarriages between them therefore far exceeds the proportion of intermarriages between any other marriage groups and marriages outside the village. The statistics in Table 4.1 are based on the family genealogies of the *Vangf Dof* and *Ghad Dlongb* hamlets. It is clear that women marry in both directions. The affinal classifications of this village seem to constitute something approaching a binary structure.

Table 4.1 Marriages into and out of the *Vangf Dof* and *Ghad Dlongb* hamlets of marriage group 4

Other marriage group	**Marriages into *Vangf Dof* and *Ghad Dlongb***	**Marriages out of *Vangf Dof* and *Ghad Dlongb***
1	4 (4.2%)	2 (2.2%)
2	84 (89.3%)	71 (80.06%)
3	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Zix Hot hamlet of marriage group 4	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.1%)[7]
5	2 (2.1%)	3 (3.3%)
Marriages out of Fangf Bil village	4 (4.2%)	11 (12.4%)
Totals	**94 (100%)**	**88 (100%)**

Most marriages take place within the village, and the society is organized around classificatory bilateral cross-cousin marriage. The kinship terminology of this village has a similar structure to the Dravidian-type kinship terminology in its ideal and practice of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage. Most women in Fangf Bil still marry either their classificatory matrilateral or patrilateral cross-cousins: that is, both FZD/MBS or MBD/FZS marriages occur.[8]

Nevertheless, the local practice of cross-cousin marriage is still related to how kin are classified in a community which clearly distinguishes between near and distant kin. Thus for female ego, bilateral cross-cousin marriage is not with actual FZS or MBS but occurs between members of patrilineal descent groups:

- who are related to one another as classificatory patrilateral cross-cousins (FZHBS, FZHFBSS, or FZHFFBSSS); or
- who are equated terminologically with the FZS; or
- who are related to one another as classificatory matrilateral cross-cousins (MFBSS, or MFFBSSS); or
- who are equated terminologically with the MBS.

That is, there is again both classificatory FZD/MBS and classificatory MBD/FZS marriage. The binary organization of Fangf Bil is given classificatory reality in the distinction between *gad ghat* (agnates) and *khait* (affines).[9] These are relative categories of the sort found in virtually all societies, rather than sociocentric groups; there is no true dual organization here, despite the quasi-'binary organization' in this village. Marriage is prohibited between *gad ghat* (or simply *ghat*) but permitted with *khait*. The centrality of the relationships between *ghat* and *khait* in Fangf Bil is indicative of the importance of kinship in village social processes.

Traditional formalized flirting and what I call 'delayed transfer marriage', that is, duolocal post-marital residence, are the last specific Miao cultural phenomena I introduce here, though they are far from being the least important. They significantly demonstrate some fluid aspects of Miao marriage which exist simultaneously with the system outlined above, and seem to have done so for a long time.

Courting is commonly understood in the Western tradition as an activity performed with marriage as its goal. Miao flirting is a far more complex phenomenon and is certainly not solely linked to the goal of marriage. Flirting in a Miao village is an institutionalized cultural practice, an expression of local social and cultural arrangements of place, time and person. It partly fits in with the stipulations of the affinal alliance pattern and partly gives expression to the fluid nature of the interplay between personal sentiments, as well as the relatively rigid cross-cousin marriage which is the social ideal.

In contrast with some other Miao villages in eastern Guizhou that permit daytime flirting, in Fangf Bil this traditional activity is only permitted in the evening, but it is also allowed during the daytime following certain ritual activities such as New Year or harvest festivals. Evening flirting takes place in the living room of the house of the young woman being flirted with, or outside but close to the house. Daytime flirting activities take place at different 'flirting places' belonging to specific marriage groups, where opposite-sex affines flirt with each other in conjuction with affinal alliances.

Formal flirting is the most important social activity in Fangf Bil village and is practised exclusively by 'the young'. The local indigenous conceptualization of 'the young' who may and do participate encompasses those from as young as

ten years old, as well as adult men and women who have married within the previous few years. The latter do not usually flirt with their spouses, though this does occasionally occur. This inclusion of recently married people is a critical difference from the Western idea of courting, or courtship, and will be discussed further below. Flirting involves young men and women spending a great deal of time together, sometimes in groups, sometimes in single pairs, talking, singing and exchanging gifts.[10] Sex is expressly prohibited.

Miao flirting is clearly not simply a prelude and pathway to marriage: married people also participate in this quite distinct cultural activity (Chien 2009a). There are, however, specific rules for married men and married women. A married woman can flirt with her opposite-sex affines until she has delivered her first child. In contrast, a married man can participate much longer than most women: he is not prohibited from flirting with his opposite-sex affines until his children reach their teens. Unmarried men or women (single or divorced) are considered to be 'young persons' who can attend flirting activities freely, as long as they flirt with someone appropriate, that is, in conformity with prescriptions of affinal alliance. There is some fluidity in the kinship terminology – for example, sometimes a particular person can be described by two different kinship terms, each having different practical implications.

Like 'flirting', duolocal residence also demonstrates the complex nature of local marriage. The bride does not usually go to live with the groom immediately after their wedding but returns to stay with her natal kin soon after it instead. She only visits the groom's house on festival days or to assist her husband's family do farm work. She does not live with her husband in his house until she has her first child. During the duolocal period, the bride and the groom can both freely attend flirting activities – interacting with other opposite-sex cross-cousins – on their own as they did before they married. The solid, clear binary structures of cross-cousin marriage are juxtaposed with the fluid aspects of marriage, flirting and residence that are clearly seen in the customs of traditional formal 'flirting' activities and duolocal residence. This juxtaposition and the complexity of the social domains associated with flirting and marriage find clear expression in Miao love-songs.

Local Love-Songs

Many Miao songs were published during the 1950s in the series *Minjian wenxue ziliao* (民間文學資料, 'Miao folklore data'), reprinted in the 1980s. The lyrics of these and the Miao songs published in *Miaozu hunyin ge* (苗族婚姻歌, 'Marriage Songs of the Miao', Tang [1959] 1986) are public records expressing the Miao collective experience of marriage, including the personal 'individual' experiences of bride and groom before and after marriage.

Songs in Fangf Bil fall into two categories: 'old' songs, *hxad lok*, and 'young' songs, *hxad vangx*. Most 'young' songs present similar themes; the villagers further classify them into four subcategories based on performance details.[11]

The 'old' songs are generally about Miao mythology, the origins of villages, lineages, clans and ancestors. The song discussed below is in the 'young' song category. These generally have a joyful, joking tone, but at times the tone can also be sentimental, lonely or forlorn. Among other things, they present the inherent tension between traditional marriage and individual personal sentiments.

Methodology

Most of the Miao songs I collected in Fangf Bil village came from natural settings in the sense that almost all were performed as part of the 'flirting' activities in conjunction with the celebration of certain festivals or ritual activities. I recorded such songs on many occasions in both ritual and non-ritual settings. This love-song performance was recorded with a tape recorder, and then transcribed using the Miao phonetic system.[12]

I chose to rely on a small number of local villagers as key cultural consultants to assist me with this – a twenty-year-old girl, her parents and some other relatives – because transcription is extremely tedious, time-consuming work, and the interpretation, translation and analysis of the more than four hundred lines required mutual understanding, trust, familiarity and patience on behalf of both the cultural consultants and myself. We worked together for several days and nights replaying the tapes many times, and transcribed the entire performance.

Love-Song Performance

The extracts cited below come from a love-song performance that took place in the early spring of 1999 in connection with the seasonal festival celebrating the planting of rice. The song, of more than four hundred lines, was performed as a duet between two female singers and two male singers. The social context was that many people, male and female, young and old, from Fangf Bil and four neighbouring villages gathered on the hillside fields to watch bullfights. The event was hosted by Fangf Bil. After the bullfights most of the older men and women and the children left, but the young men and women stayed for the traditional 'flirting'. Men and women from different villages sat or stood close together, some in groups, most in single couples, happily talking, and some, though not all, singing to each other. Love-song performances by some of those who were skilled singers attracted a large audience. More than one of these performances could be happening at any one time.

The two female singers were from Fangf Bil, the two male singers from another village, not very far from Fangf Bil – about 40 or 50 *li.* Similarly, apart from the singers, there were in effect two audiences: one of women from Fangf Bil, the other of men from the other village. The people of both villages speak

the same Miao dialect and wear the same style of Miao clothes.[13] Like the male and female singers, the men and women in the audience were also classificatory affines to each other.

The two male singers (both forty years old) were already married and had become fathers. One female singer (twenty years old) was unmarried; the other (nearly twenty-five years old) had married but not yet become a mother and was still living with her natal kin. We – myself and some young ladies, Fangf Bil villagers, who were accompanying and assisting me – knew that the female singers were descendants of the same patrilineal group, but did not know their actual genealogical relationships to the male singers. During the break, however, and at the end of the song performance, we heard the singers address each other using prescriptive cross-kin terms.

This particular love-song was sung entirely by men and women as a duet.[14] In total, 450 lines were sung and 28 lines were spoken. They were grouped into verses of various lengths from 4 to 8 lines, mostly of 6 or 7 lines. The sequence of these lines was not prescriptive. This love-song performance took the form of a spontaneous competition among the singers. They had a 'data bank', a store of lyrics and verses, but they did not simply memorize and reproduce a long set sequence. They had to listen carefully to what their competitors, the other singers in the duet, were singing. If they did not do so, or were careless, they could get lost among the possible responses and so fail to select an appropriate response to what had just been sung. They could repeat some lines if appropriate. Some lines or verses were gender-specific, some were not. Nouns or pronouns could be changed to express gender-specific contents (Chien 2007).

The duet performance lasted for more than an hour. It was not at all serious or formal. The singers talked to each other, or joked with the audience when they had finished their own lines, and the audiences talked to each other while enjoying the show. They mostly liked commenting on the performance, comparing the skills of the singers, and discussing the contents of the lines with the other members of the audience. The content was much more important than the quality of the singing delivery. But any singer who did not pay attention to when it was their turn to sing, or did not come up with a good line with which to respond, left themselves open to being criticized and commented on negatively by the audience, something not good for their reputation.[15]

Thematic Foci

Miao love-songs place thematic emphasis upon humour, sentiment, and social and kin relationships. A particular feature is their performative expression of the local culturally determined tension between the individual experience of 'love' – equated with the flirting setting – and local cross-cousin marriage, which is the ideal.

To summarize briefly, this love-song describes an encounter between two women and two men meeting each other at just such a traditional flirting event.

On the one hand, the men and the women both express the same shy but joyful emotions they experience when attending such occasions. On the other hand, they tease themselves and their partners about the dialogical relationship between marriage and flirting. They finish the performance by expressing their feelings: forlornness about parting and being alone.

Interwoven with the 'story line' outlined above are four recurring themes: (a) marriage; (b) flirting; (c) the two different local relationships between marriage and flirting; and (d) individuals' experience, through which the aesthetic dimensions of marriage and flirting for the Miao are brought to the fore.

(a) *Marriage* is an obvious thematic thread permeating the love-song. Two particular aspects of local marriage are directly referred to: the individuals' desire for marriage, and the collective ideal of cross-cousin marriage. The following lines are an example of the song and singers expressing individuals' longing for marriage. Viewed somewhat paradoxically from the Western tradition, this longing occurs in the context of assured marriage in keeping with tradition, as referred to in line 349, and line 157 further below:

(male singers) 347 *Xud dongf mongf dot jut*	(male singers) Do not say that you will marry others.
348 *Ninx dongf lel bib mek*	Just say you will be with us forever.
349 *Ghet benf liangf hvib naik*	We have to become husbands and wives, anyway.
(female singers) 352 *Ceit daik las baf pent*, ***mul-diangf***.	(female singers) We come here intentionally to sing with you, **cross-cousins.**
353 *Yel bib mongf lab diuf mek zix*	Bring us to your homes. They (your parents) do not like us, but we still want to marry you.
354 *Neff hfif sax vob diangt*	The flown bird will return to the cage.

Some lines more explicitly refer to or articulate details of cross-cousin marriage, for example:

(female singers) 154 *Bib* ***mul-diangf*** *naik jut*	(female singers) We are **cross-cousins.**
155 *Bib def diangf dak niangt*	We separate temporarily then return to sit together again and talk a while.
156 *Bib nal diangf dak ghent*	Our mothers come to say something to the boys.

157 *Bib naf neif jek dint*	We will become husbands and wives anyway.
158 *Bib del diangf liak ciet*	Do not mind if we have to part right now.

There are implicit allusions to the prescriptive alliance involving village endogamy:

(male singers) 359 *Hvid cet liuk lel lait*	(male singers) We come here just now as done for thousands of years.
360 *Liuk gheb mangk lel ghet*	We still cannot take you as our wives even in our next lives.
366 *Ghat but vangf hveb bif*	You girls will marry someone else within your own village.
367 *Vob diut dak jut liuk*	Become other men's wives.

The young men cannot marry the young women they are singing to; village endogamy requires that both parties marry within their own village. The emphasis on the relatively prescriptive cross-cousin alliance aspect of marriage is realized both by the lyrics and also by the repetitive use of the prescriptive affinal kin terms throughout the entire song, indicated in bold in the extracts.

(b) *Flirting*. There are various illustrations of flirting and institutionalized formal flirting occasions, this being the second thematic thread. Some lines vividly describe the flirting scene. Descriptions of the singing and talking mirror what occurs in real life. Line 385 can be understood in two ways: as a reference to how flirting also occurs in the living room of the flirted girls, or to talking more 'after we marry':

(female singers) 343 *Dak lait iauf dak ceit*, ***mul-diangf***	(female singers) Once you have come here, come and sing together, **cross-cousins**.
344 *Ceit daik las baf pent*	We come here on purpose to sing with you.
(male singers) 383 *Ghaib qub mangk juk ghof*, ***mul-diangf***	(male singers) Like chickens, we cannot stop pecking the rice, **cross-cousins**.
384 *Bib pot mangk juk jib*	We cannot stop talking to each other.
385 *Dleit diut ghab diuk nail*	Leave something to be said inside the house.

Some lines describe a scene of everyone gathered for an event such as the one where this performance was underway, and the playful atmosphere that is characteristic of such flirting events:

(male singers) 428 *Bib sint sint ghenf jek wek*	(male singers) We just sit together in groups.
429 *Sint sint ninf jek cangk*	Just sit together creating this spectacular scene.
430 *Dit lit deif liuk deik*	The girls do not want the boys immediately.
431 *Deif liud daif rangk dok*	They throw the boys away like straw or firewood.
432 *Qit wab iauf dak ninf*	The boys are very put out, so they come to tease the girls.

(c) *Two Relationships between Marriage and Flirting*. The two themes outlined above address marriage and flirting. The most pervasive thematic focus in the song, however, is the conflict inherent in the relationship between marriage and flirting experienced by the individuals concerned. Two different relationships are presented. In the first, marriage and flirting are sequentially connected; the logical progression of flirting is towards cross-cousin marriage. This is the sentiment expressed in line 45:

(female singers) 42 *Naik liat dangk git qet*	(female singers) People thinking of each other come to rest midway.
43 ***mul-diagngf*** *eb*	**Cross-cousins**.
44 *Niongk liat dangk git qet*	The girls want to sit and talk with the boys, so they rest midway.
45 *Mak dint mongf vux diut*	If you have wives, boys, then go home and take care of them.

Another example is at lines 90 and 91:

(female singers) 88 *Daik sat het deif dot*	(female singers) No matter what the truth is, we will say the boys have wives.

89 *Hlaib sak het deif dot*	No matter whether it is false, we will say the boys have wives.
90 *Diangt zix lius mek dint bongf heix*	Go home and part with your wives.
91 *Diuf niongk hveb lel ghob*	Only then will we two be willing to accompany both of you.

In contrast with the themes outlined above, many lines present a more complex and perhaps problematic model of the relationship between marriage and flirting, a dialogical one. Generally in these scenarios, the flirting does not lead to marriage; in that regard both are simply independent of each other. The next two extracts both vividly express the second complex relationship between marriage and flirting. The first two lines, 29 and 30, are like a Greek chorus in their effect; line 30 offers another vivid metaphor portraying the flirting scene, and the pleasure of those there:

(female singers) 29 *Liob huf yiok*	(female singers) The boys love to talk to us.
30 *Ghas hfaf seik*	The boys and girls are talking and singing together like ducks playing joyfully in the water.
31 *Bongt neif meb niangt gait nongt*	We do not know why we sit next to you all the time.
32 *Bongt lif dak jut liuk*	We do not know we are accompanying others' husbands.

Another example is:

(male singers) 263 *Benf vux ob vak liuf*	(male singers) The girls are good looking and speak well, but have two hearts.
264 *Lal vux ob vak ghek*	Like the good fields, which can grow millet twice each year.
265 *Ib pit hvib qongk bongf*	One heart accompanies their husbands.
266 *Ib pit hvib dak lif*	Another heart accompanies us.

(d) *Personal Sentiments*. Another obvious thematic thread is the various individual personal sentiments, feelings and emotions – including shyness, joy, solitude, longing and passion – in connection with marriage or flirting. Some

lines describe the shyness with which both the boys and girls approach flirting, for example:

(male singers) 22 *Naik liuf ment let lab.*	(male singers) Strangers will become familiar with each other by singing and talking.
23 *Meit ob lab nit nil.*	Just come to say a few words.
24 *Lab def lab det jaf.*	But we do not know how to talk to you.
25 *Xid xeit meb gid weif.*	We feel very shy to you.

(female singers) 72 *Ob lik git ment let xef*	(female singers) The girls do not love to talk,
73 *Naik liuf ment let lal*	until meeting the strangers like you.
74 *Diut ux qib ux naif*	Look, we do not wear our clothes appropriately.
75 *Heb ghaf heb det ghaf*	Put on one sleeve of our coat only.
76 *Heb neif heb det rinf*[16]	Put on one sleeve of our coat only.
77 *Xid xeit meb gait weis*	We feel very shy to you.

Some lines describe the joy and delight associated with flirting:[17]

(female singers) 60 *Liuf del let*	(female singers) When we hear the drums, we feel delighted.
61 *Deif del ghait*	When we hear the words of the boys, we feel happy.

Other examples are:

(male singers) 238 *Nef huf yiok*	(male singers) The girls love to talk to us
239 Ghas hfaf saik	like ducks joyfully playing in the water.

(male singers) 196 *Dad nef mak qet ninf*	(male singers) The girls will fool people.
197 *Xongx juf daik qet liuf*	The boys are happy about that.

In addition to joy and similar emotions, the lyrics also express strong longing, often in combination with a sense of anticipated solitude or forlornness. These sentiments mostly arise in contexts of the second, complex relationship between marriage and flirting:

(female singers) 277 *Mek hveb at nit hfuf*	(female singers) Your words are just talk.
278 *Mek hvib at yat yiok*	Your hearts are far away.
279 *Juk eb fat hongx vongf*	Your hearts are like a river flowing to the falls.
280 *Juk hob fat hongx bif*	Like a fog in the midst of the hillsides which has lifted.
281 *Mek zod but mek bongf*	You will go back to be with your wives.
(male singers) 284 *Nef cent niangt diek vik*, ***mul-diangf***	(male singers) The bird is singing in the nest. **cross-cousins**
285 *Dliut diut dot jut mongf*	Let the girls marry others.
286 *Nongf heit ob dak nif*	We two can only sit together a while, and talk a while.

Finally, desire and passion are expressed and alluded to in the song. This, however, is not done as explicitly as are the emotions and feelings outlined above. Only a few lines have such descriptions and allusions, for example, in line 226:

(male singers) 224 *Meb dlab let lil rak renf*	(male singers) You two are good at talking.
225 *Lab qet juf wak wek*	Your hearts are distant.
226 *Ment ghad ghuf dek deif*	Girls touch the boys with their bodies.
227 *Dlek xongx dangf dlek dok*	You desire to be close to the boys, as you desire to be near the fire in the winter cold.
228 *Diuf xongx nongf wek yef*	We two boys are all alone.

Another example is line 106:

(female singers) 106 *Mangk hongx xangt bif deif.*	(female singers) We just do not want to let go the boys' hands.

Discussion

The various themes and scenarios presented in the lyrics of this love-song, examples of which are given above, provide complex expressions of the nature of Miao marriage and flirting, and more. They include both the entangled relationships between marriage and flirting, and associated individual personal sentiments. This section discusses the role of love-songs such as this one – with its specific aesthetic and iconic performance – in constructing Miao social life, as well as social reproduction.

The Miao love-song emphasizes a central, highly visible social feature of Fangf Bil village: affinal alliance or cross-cousin marriage. This is clearly noticeable in certain linguistic and social phenomena, such as the Dravidian kinship terminology, in conjunction with the ideal and practice of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage. Citing my own earlier research,

> the principle of prescriptive marriage is particularly obvious in the changes in address terms for cross relatives. Unmarried male speakers are addressed as *but*, male cross-cousin, and *mul*, cross-cousin; unmarried female speakers are also addressed as *mul*. This is an abbreviated form of *mul diangf* (FZS/MBS), that is, an unmarried woman whose relationship with her cross-cousins – including potential husbands – is thereby indicated. She may, and indeed is expected to, marry a male having the same relationship with her. (Chien 1999: 46)

In effect this means that classificatory cross-cousins within the village are under very strong pressure to marry among themselves.

This situation is highly visible performatively within the love-song duet and the iconic content of certain lines. Singers and audience are all classificatory opposite-sex affines. This is social evidence that instantiates the core structure of the Miao terminology system and its bilateral marriage system within the village. The ideal of affinal alliance is a thematic focus within the text, highlighted both implicitly and explicitly. For example, in lines 154 to 157, we read: 'We are cross-cousins to each other. … We will become husbands and wives anyway. Do not mind if we have to part from each other for now', as in village endogamy, for example, lines 366 and 367: 'You girls marry someone else *within your own village*' (emphasis added). The lyrics reinforce this with the repetitive use of affinal kin terms by both male and female singers – mainly *but*, *mul*, *mul diangf*, *maib yut*, indicating cross-cousins – throughout the more than four hundred lines.

The consistent presentation and reaffirmation of local cross-cousin marriage contrast with lines which make highly visible the coexistent fluid nature of Miao marriage and the associated conflict in flirting contexts. The tension inherent in marriage and flirting in this Miao village is obvious. Elopement is a social dimension that throws some light on this. In this Miao village, much like before 1949, marriage occurs after a brief period of flirting; it may or may not involve romantic love and is divided more or less evenly between public

marriages and elopements. This is not just a relatively recent or post-1949 development (Chien 2005a).

Public marriages are conducted according to – and must comply with – the positive rule of prescriptive cross-cousin marriage with village endogamy. Most elopements, however, violate village endogamy. They may or may not be between cross-cousins; they are very occasionally with non-Miao. They occur without the prior consent or knowledge of the bride's family and are finalized when she crosses the threshold with her groom in the middle of the night. A bride considering elopement must weigh the uncertainties and far greater ambivalence of a cognatic marriage against the alternative: the certainties and normal ambivalence of a restricted marriage. Nevertheless elopements do occur – in fact, in approximately half of all marriages – highlighting Miao ambivalence about the collective marital ideal. This also raises the issue of individuality: individuals strongly resist the severe social constraints represented not just by cross-cousin marriage, but by cross-cousin marriage with village endogamy (Chien 2005a).

The recorded love song performatively highlights the uncertainties about marriage and flirtation, in particular, the two different relationships between marriage and flirtation as experienced by individuals. In the first the natural development of the flirting is towards the local ideal of cross-cousin marriage: they are connected. For example, lines 42 to 45 and 88 to 91: 'If you want to court the girls, go home to separate from your wives first. If you don't, then let's stop our flirtation and you guys go home and take care of your own wives.' In these lines, flirting and being married cannot exist at the same time, even though on the surface it seems that extra-marital flirting is in fact underway at that moment.

In complete contrast, there are lines which express the much more fluid and negotiable relationship which also exists between marriage and flirting in this Miao village. Marriage does not necessarily follow flirting, nor preclude it. Similarly, extra-marital flirting occurs (institutionalized extra-marital flirtation; see also Chien 2009a); flirting simply does not naturally or necessarily stop because of marriage. The two are simply independent of each other for the individuals involved. Lines 29 to 32, sung by the women, illustrate this using a rhetorical strategy: 'The girls do not know why they desire to sit next to the boys always; they do not know their flirting companions are somebody else's husbands.' And again, lines 263 to 266 use a clearly poetic metaphor: 'The girl has two hearts: one is for her husband, and the other is for the boy.' The lyrics poetically reveal the fluid, conflicting and dialogical features of marriage and flirtation.

Finally, individual personal sentiments, which also highlight the ambivalence between marriage and flirtation, are another major feature and thematic focus. The emotional element is significant. These elements are also seen in non-festival flirting activities. These not only index how kinship and affinal alliance are valued, and their social connotations: a polite tone and playful, cheerful atmosphere is also created as Miao boys and girls take conversational turns while flirting (Chien 2005b).

The personal emotions presented through the lyrics, however, are more complicated than simply playful interaction. In addition, personal feelings such as shyness, joy, solitude, longing and passion are also performatively presented, and thereby legitimated. In contrast to the joyful emotions that are mostly linked to marriage-connected flirtation, sentiments such as personal longing and feeling solitary are usually expressed in the context of the more complex dialogical relationship between marriage and flirtation.

Lines 277 and 281 create a strong impression of such lonely feelings using metaphors:

(female singers) 277 *Mek hveb at nit hfuf*	(female singers) Your words are just talk.
278 *Mek hvib at yat yiok*	Your hearts are far away.
279 *Juk eb fat hongx vongf*	Your hearts are like a river flowing to the falls.
280 *Juk hob fat hongx bif*	Like a fog in the hills which has lifted.
281 *Mek zod but mek bongf*	You will go back to be with your wives.

In these lines, the personal feelings – forlornness, anticipation of parting and loneliness – are expressed metaphorically by images from nature such as the 'river flowing to the falls' and the 'fog in the hills which has lifted', that is, gone away. They also express ambivalence over how those who participate in the extra-marital, 'flirtation'-style of Miao courtship feel, this time focusing on the negative aspect: 'Your words are just talk. Your hearts are far away… . You will go back to be with your wives.' The emotions lyrically expressed in this love-song, which belong to the personal, the individual sphere, are not simply a panhuman or universal psychological 'thing' – they are closely linked to the tension and ambivalence inherent in the local flirting and marriage context. And it is this sociological context which informs and celebrates the nature of 'Miao individuality'.

Conclusion: Performing Miao Individuality

Following Strathern's aesthetic and iconic approach, studying individuals in their specific cultural context, this chapter has focused on an example of the performative use of language in the conduct of social life, thereby foregrounding Miao individuality.

Tensions such as the antithesis between the individual and society, the value of the individual and the modern sense related to the indigenous conceptualization of individuality have been discussed in anthropology since Durkheim. Miao love-songs offer an opportunity to rethink this debate: they imaginatively expose the tensions between local individuals and their society.

Tensions between individuals and society are common, it would seem, in most human societies. A Durkheimian view suggests that the individual is always struggling with an awareness of his or her individuality as opposed to collective forces and representations on the level of ideology.[18] The Miao in Fangf Bil face this dilemma too, as is clearly demonstrated by certain social institutions, such as duolocal residence and institutionalized extra-marital flirtation, and brought into high relief performatively in the contrast and tensions between marriage and flirting, expressed in the lyrics of love-songs. The content and thematic emphasis of Miao love-songs – particularly the dialogical relationships between flirtation and marriage – make the tensions between individual experience and sentiment and affinal alliance clearly visible.

Different cultures have different concepts of the 'individual': the Western notion of the modern individual is of someone morally autonomous. Hindu world renouncers ideologically exist outside their social world but sociologically remain part of it. Fangf Bil Miao have their individuality, which has its own aesthetic linguistic dimensions: the love-song discussed above highlights individual personal experience and sentiments, while at the same time showing the ambivalent position of the individual with regard to a central aspect of local society.

Rapport and Overing (2000: 185) describe individuality as 'tied inextricably to individual consciousness, to that unique awareness and awareness of awareness, which is the mark of human embodiment. … human beings come to know themselves within the world by way of cognition and perception, thoughts, feelings and imaging, which are unique to them.' Faced by the collective social ideal of marriage, Fangf Bil Miao villagers address their consciousness to performatively highlighting the political nature – in the sense of social dynamics – of feelings and imagination, that is, of individuals' sentiments, emotions and desires. In this way they performatively legitimate the experience of the individual, thereby countermanding the strong forces of the collective ideal of marriage.

Significantly, like Strathern's notion of the 'dividual being' in Melanesian society, the Miao indigenous conceptualization of individuality is the 'paired individual'. There are recurrent pervasive linguistic references to people in pairs throughout the more than four hundred lines of this Miao love-song. Consider lines 224 to 227:

(male singers) 224 *Meb dlab let lil rak renf*	(male singers) You two are good at talking.
225 *Lab qet juf wak wek*	Your hearts are distant.
226 *Ment ghad ghuf dek deif*	Girls touch the boys with their bodies.
227 *Dlek xongx dangf dlek dok*	You desire to be close to the boys, as you desire to be near the fire in the winter cold.

228 *Diuf xongx nongf wek yef*	We two boys are all alone.

The thematic emphases here are individual personal desire, strong longing and loneliness. In every line, however, the singing voice and the addressee are in fact not 'one person', but 'two persons'. I argue that this is a performative device which demonstrates that the individual is essentially a social being, and further, that individuals identify themselves that way, happily. In brief, Fangf Bil Miao villagers performatively express their unique indigenous individuality using this text.

Individualism has long been considered a definitive aspect of modern, Western ideology. Consequently debate on individuality has also involved the concept of modernity (Dumont 1986: 4). This chapter has argued that the Miao view of individuality also demonstrates a sense of the modern. It has presented observations of the collective social ideal of affinal alliance, the Miao awareness of individual personal identity and the tensions between individual sentiments and affinal alliance in various institutionalized contexts, all performatively instantiated in the love-songs. The sense of the modern present in Miao individuality as indicated in the love-song lyrics is, however, not a development in the direction of an extreme, strictly Western individualism. Miao individuality is characterized by an ongoing negotiated competition between a collective ideal – cross-cousin marriage within the village – and individual sentiment, including the playfulness and thinly veiled erotic nature of extra-marital flirtation in the local Miao flirtation and feelings of personal solitude expressed by the local love-song lyrics. The complex but essentially resolved relationship between Miao society and the Miao individual is performatively legitimated. And it is important to note that the audience consists of precisely those 'young people' who will give birth, literally and figuratively, to the next Miao generation.

This can be linked to Dumont's rethinking of Western individualism. Dumont saw totalitarianism as an attempt to 'turn the clock back' and restore the collectivism that Western individualism had undermined:

> Indeed, totalitarianism expresses in a dramatic way something we keep running into in the contemporary world: individualism is all powerful on the one hand and, on the other is perpetually and irremediably haunted by its opposite. … This coexistence in the contemporary ideology of individualism and its opposite comes forth more forcefully than ever at the present stage of research. In this sense, the individualistic configuration of ideas and values characterizes modernity, but it is by no means coextensive with it. (Dumont 1986: 17)

Examining how individualism relates to a local, historical and cultural view of the person or self, I conclude that 'Miao individuality' has a substantial aesthetic dimension in the performance and social dynamics of this Miao love-song in the form in which it has been conventionally transmitted, both before and after 1949; moreover, 'Miao individuality' is essentially modern.[19]

In response to the general approach of the classical debates and theories on Western individualism and modern development in the field of anthropology, and in line with Dumont's reflective aspect and with the linguistic, aesthetic dimension articulated by Marilyn Strathern, this chapter further suggests that the performance is an imaginative outlet whereby these contemporary Miao villagers in eastern Guizhou can release emotional and ideological tensions between the ideal of marriage and their individually lived experiences embodying personal feelings, eroticism and various freedoms.

Secondly, the lyrics and performance of the love-song clearly demonstrate that Miao villagers construct 'individuality' and 'modernity' in their own terms, both in their lives and performatively. Miao individuality challenges the whole evolutionist positioning of 'individuality' and 'individualism' in the historical Western anthropology tradition, outlined with its thinly veiled implied heirarchy predicated on Western individualism occupying a superior and more advanced position. There is an irony to this: contemporary Miao villagers' vibrant maintainence of their own particular individuality is itself an expression of cultural individuality in international society. In this sense, it constitutes a modern-day 'morally autonomous individualism'.

Notes

1. I collected this material at an institutionalized flirting event that took place in conjunction with a bullfight during my village-based fieldwork related to marriage and flirting conducted for more than fifteen months between November 1998 and February 2000.
2. This is clear from Dumont's own words (1986: 9, 16, original emphasis): 'A system of ideas and values current in a given social milieu I call an ideology. I am calling the system of ideas and values that characterizes modern societies modern ideology … . Certainly, Durkheim saw individualism quite clearly as a value, but he did not work it indelibly into his vocabulary: he did not adequately emphasize the distance created by this value between modern man and all others; only by failing to do so could he come, in the passage from *The Elementary Forms* that Descombes pinpoints, to imagine that modern societies might go through a communal "effervescence" similar to that of Australian tribes.'
3. According to Marriott, the South Asian theory of a person was as 'dividual' or 'divisible'. Each person absorbs different material influences (1976: 11).
4. The five groups are the southern, central, western, eastern and northern Miao (Yang 1998).
5. I am using the dialect pronunciation of Miao in eastern Guizhou for Hmub terms, in which the final consonants are not pronounced but indicate tones. For example, I refer to the village of *Fang*^{31} *Bi*^{11} as 'Fangf Bil' in the discussion and the song extracts, following village pronunciation as closely as possible.
6. The central group comprises the northern subgroup in the Wuyang and Qingshuijiang river basins, a southern subgroup living in the mountain region of the Duliujiang River and an eastern subgroup in the transitional region between the Yun-Gui Plateau proper and adjacent uplands.
7. The case was identified as a 'real' sibling marriage, which should have been avoided.
8. FZD stands for father's sister's daughter; MBS, mother's brother's son; MBD, mother's brother's daughter; FZS, father's sister's son. Hereafter, I follow the kin abbreviations:

F=father, M=mother, B=brother, Z=sister, G=sibling, E=spouse, S=son, D=daughter, P=parent, C=child, e=elder, y=younger, ms=man speaker, ws=woman speaker, etc. (Barnard and Good 1984: 4).

9. *Gad ghat*, agnates, 'hosts', refers to the in-group, and khait, affines, 'guests', is used to refer globally to non-in-group members and other outsiders.
10. Flower belts or clothes are exchanged as gifts.
11. The four subcategories of the 'young' songs are *diut hxad vangx*, *qint hxad*, *et hed* and *iof het*. The love-song discussed below belongs to *diut hxad vangx*.
12. The Miao phonetic system is composed of 31 consonants, 26 vowels and 8 tones.
13. Wearing the same style of Miao clothes is in fact a strict requirement for marriageability (Chien 2005a, 2009b).
14. Unlike Western 'duet' performances, the four never all sang together.
15. Reputation is extremely important in Miao society (Chien 2005a, 2009b).
16. The meanings of lines 75 and 76 are the same.
17. Joyful emotions are linked in some lines with joking and teasing, but it is difficult to convey the jokes across languages.
18. Though this is different from Mauss (see above).
19. That is, both before and after 1949.

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