



The Art of Ethnography: A Chinese "Miao Album" (Studies on Ethnic Groups in China)

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The Art of Ethnography is a fully illustrated translation of a "Miao album" -- a Chinese genre originating in the eighteenth century that used prose, poetry, and detailed illustrations to represent minority ethnic groups living in frontier regions under imperial Chinese control. These bound collections of hand-painted illustrations and handwritten text reveal how imperial China viewed culturally "other" frontier populations. They also contain valuable information for anthropologists, geographers, and historians, and are coveted by art collectors for their beautiful imagery. "Miao" in this context refers not just to groups that called themselves Miao (Hmong) or were classified as such by the majority Han culture, but generally to the many minority peoples in China's southwest.

This lovely volume reproduces each of the eighty-two illustrations from the original album and the corresponding Chinese calligraphic text, along with an annotated English translation. Each entry depicts a different ethnic group residing in Guizhou. The album is anonymous and dates from sometime after 1797.

Laura Hostetler's Introduction discusses the genesis and evolution of the Miao album genre and the sociopolitical context in which the albums were first made, the ethnographic content of the texts, the composition of the illustrations, and the albums' authorship and production. She situates the albums within the context of early modern imperial expansion internationally by introducing comparative examples of Japanese and Ottoman ethnography. Color illustrations from other Miao albums and comparable works from other cultures give the reader a sense of the chromatic richness of Miao album illustrations and of their place in world ethnography.

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