

**Hua-Miao Archive
Songs and Stories**

Narratives

Narratives which were or are Songs, part 2

About Tigers

Songs M491 to M500

Introduction and Translation

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The Hua-Miao Archive
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M491
Nbao-chao.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The name “Nbao-chao” means “covered in dust”. It might be used of a child who had been playing among the ashes. So used it would be an indulgent, slightly humorous nickname. When applied to an adult it becomes a term of abuse and insult. His grandfather, aunt and cousins all made no secret of their disgust for their poor relation, who, in self defence, deliberately assumed the role of “dust man”, and threw the name back at the girls when they enquired whether he had seen a stranger go by.

The arrival of the first showers of the rainy season encouraged the growth of fungi around the stump of a dead tree and also the first shoots of the quick growing bamboo.

Some groups of Miao have considerable wealth in silver ornaments, not so the Hua Miao. Enquiries as to what silver trousers and gowns were like, and how they could be worn, brought only the response, “I don’t know”. They appear to owe more to imagination than to any recollection of old custom.

As a Miao girl grew towards marriageable age she would begin making the required clothing. This included not only garments for her own use but also a set for her husband to be. This explains why Nbao-chao approached his female cousins to borrow something to wear to the festival.

M491
Nbao-chao.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time, Nbao-chao having neither mother nor father was very poor. One day, at the beginning of the rains, as Nbao-chao was going along he came to the stump of a tree which had been cut down for firewood. Here he sat down and dropped off to sleep. He dreamt that there was woman, a visitor, who said,

“My liver is very painful,
Whoever will cure the pain in my liver
Has only to clean out the store where he keeps silver,
And clean out the store where he keeps corn,
And silver and corn he shall surely have!”

Nbao-chao awoke, but saw only a mushroom there in the place where he had been asleep. The mushroom had a sprout of bamboo which had penetrated its underside, and emerged at the top. Nbao-chao broke off the bamboo with his hand and said,

“As I have just been dreaming,
Now I will perform it and see!”

So Nbao-chao went and swept out his store and later went to look. His corn store and his silver store were both full to capacity.

One day a maker of silver clothes arrived in their village and asked his grandfather, “Do you want any silver clothes made?” His grandfather said, “I want none made”. So he said to Nbao-chao, “Do you want some made?” Nbao-chao replied, “Yes, I will have some made”. His grandfather said, “You, Nbao-chao, there! What sort of silver clothes are you having made?” Nbao-chao waited until his grandfather was no longer there, then he took the silver clothes maker along to make some silver clothes. He made two suits of silver trousers and gowns, together with a silver hat.

One day the Yeu-rang family was going to hold an ancestral festival. Nbao-chao made as though he would borrow trousers and a gown to wear from his two girl cousins. At that time only his aunt was at home. When his two cousins came in his aunt said to them, “Nbao-chao will come to borrow trousers and a gown to wear from you two. Give him your faded things to wear”. The older one said, “This Nbao-chao, who is going to give to him?” The younger one came and saw him. She spat at Nbao-chao and said, “You Nbao-chao here! Who has anything to lend to you to wear? We have not enough to wear ourselves!” So when they had all gone, Nbao-chao returned. He went and washed off his dust, took his silver clothes and put them on. He took his silver hat to wear and his silver pipes to play, and went on his way following his grandfather and his male cousins. His grandfather and his cousins said, “There is a guest following behind us, let us stay here and see him”. When Nbao-chao arrived, he gave them wine to drink from his silver flask, and went on with them to the gathering place for guests, but his grandfather and cousins all failed to recognise him. That day, in Yeu-rang’s gathering place for guests, Nbao-chao alone was outstanding. Now his two girl cousins saw this and were going to follow him. So they left first and went on ahead to wait for him. They were going to catch and hold him, but with one shake he shook them both off on to the ground, and Nbao-chao returned, took off his suit, scraped up some dust

and shook it over his body and sat down in his house. His two girl cousins came and arrived at his door and asked him, “Nbao-chao, while you have been at home, have you seen a guest pass by here?” Nbao-chao said, “I, this Nbao-chao here, sit at home every day, and I never see anybody!”

After a long time the Yeu-rang family were going to hold an ancestral festival again, and again Nbao-chao went to borrow a suit from his two girl cousins. This time again only his aunt was at home. When his two girl cousins came in, his aunt said, “Nbao-chao wants to borrow clothes again from you two to wear to the festival, well, you lend him faded ones”. The older one said, “We haven’t got any!” The younger one said, “That Nbao-chao who is going to give him anything?” So Nbao-chao could borrow nothing. When his two girl cousins with his grandfather and the others, had all left, Nbao-chao returned home, bathed himself, took his silver gown, his silver suit, and put them on. Taking his silver pipes to play he followed them and reached the gathering place for guests. He took his silver pipes and played, and this day also, only Nbao-chao was outstanding. His two girl cousins saw it and said, “Last time we let him go. This time let us hold him carefully”. This time Nbao-chao’s two girl cousins went ahead and hid, waiting for Nbao-chao to arrive where they were. The two together caught Nbao-chao. The elder sister held on and went along with Nbao-chao, but the younger sister fell down to the ground. Only when the elder sister reached Nbao-chao’s house did she realise it was Nbao-chao.

M492
The Yi slave woman.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The Yi or Nosu, living along the border of Yunnan and Guizhou was a wealthy, land-owning tribe. It comprised two major groups, Black Yi and White Yi. The latter were serfs, and very often the slaves of the former. Occasionally a Miao might be taken as a slave as well, either directly by a landlord on whose estates the Miao were tenants, more often by brigands who caught and sold them into slavery.

The Miao word “zw” is used for every kind of robber from a petty thief to a brigand. Brigands and soldiers were regularly classed together. Both were feared by the common people, for there was little to choose between them in terms of cruelty and oppression.

M492
The Yi slave woman.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a Miao family. The father had died. Only two small boys and their mother were left. One day the mother took them out to wash in the river. At that time there were many brigands and soldiers about, but those three, mother and sons, took no account of them. The brigands came to them, and, taking the mother, carried her off as a slave, leaving the brothers there. The two brothers were still not grown, and there was nothing they could do. Their mother having been taken away by the brigands, all they could do was to return home, though at home there was nobody. The two had no one they could turn to; they simply begged each day's food from friends. In this way they passed their days. After a long time, as the two were growing bigger, day by day they learned to do all kinds of farm work. Now the two brothers persevered in all they did, so that every day they ate and drank better than the day before, and every year they grew more wealthy than the year before.

On one occasion the two brothers went together to market, and they saw that the Yi had brought a slave woman for sale. They went to the lower side of the market and saw them there, and they went to the top of the market and also met them there, but this day the pair returned without buying anything. When the next occasion for market came, the two brothers went, each riding a horse. When they arrived at the market, again they met the Yi bringing the slave woman for sale. The two brothers said to each other, "We have a lot of children but no one to look after them. Come, let us buy this Yi slave woman to look after the children". Having finished speaking the two went and talked price with the Yi, bought the slave woman and took her along.

As they were going, the pair rode their horses while the slave woman followed behind. They reached a stream where there was water and rested for their midday meal. As they were having their meal the two brothers brought out good food to eat, but the slave woman took out some buckwheat cake to eat. When they had finished their meal, the slave woman thought of how, long ago, she had brought her two sons here to wash, and how she had been taken away by the brigands, and had left her two sons here. She was broken hearted, and lamenting and crying she said,

"In time gone by I was in this place,
I brought my Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghe here to wash.
But the brigands carried me off,
And my Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghe, where have they gone?"

The two brothers came and said to her, "What is your family background?" The slave woman told them in detail, and presently the two realised that the slave woman whom the Yi had sold them was indeed their mother. So they gave her a horse to ride and took her home. They cared for her, and provided for her well as long as she lived.

M493

The man Li-ndang and the woman Ndu-ni-ndang.

Sung by Pan Xie.

Introduction.

In this piece the singer has spliced together two quite disparate songs. The first belongs to the legendary time when magic and superhuman feats of strength were commonplace. The second, though it might be described as fanciful, is set against a background and in a context which Miao living in Yunnan and Guizhou at any time in the last few hundred years would immediately recognise. The two have been linked together by identifying the wife of the main character in the first, where she plays a comparatively minor role, with the central character in the second story. That this conjunction has taken place is corroborated by the fact that Yang Xiu-gong included the second story in his collection, but when asked, had no knowledge of the first.

The first of the two songs, that about the man Li-ndang is basically a contest between the Miao wonder-worker and the Chinese king. The reason for the complaint of the neighbours against him was trivial. The charge they brought, though unspecified, was obviously trumped up, and apparently ignored by the king, who was concerned to examine Li-ndang on a wide variety of matters with a view to discovering what he was afraid of, and hence where he was vulnerable. What exactly the “saw thing” was is not explained. Apparently it operated, not by direct physical action but magically and at a distance, namely far away on the top of a mountain. The end of the story suggests that though, ultimately, the Chinese magic proved more potent, it could not finally destroy the Miao man whose organs continued to live in the swallows “for all to see”. The story could be an allegorical statement of the relationship between the Miao and Chinese races. The migration of the swallows reflecting the wanderings of the Miao people after their eviction from the ancient homeland by the Chinese.

The clump of bamboo in front of the man Li-ndang’s house was the large tall variety. To pull up one of the stalks and to break it to pieces with the bear hands was a feat of phenomenal strength. The wings that the man Li-ndang made, were cut out with scissors from the inner lining of large flat bamboo storage baskets.

In the second song Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv are traditional names for twins. Certain varieties of wild bamboo bear seed, which can be eaten. Miao children, particularly, would collect such seed and eat it for fun as they might eat sunflower seed, pine seeds or melon seeds. To collect enough to feed a family would require hours of work. The bamboo did not bear every year. Rape was widely grown as a source of oil, which could be extracted from the seed. The plant could also be eaten as a vegetable. It was prolific, and often, self-seeded, might be growing in inaccessible places.

M493

The man Li-ndang and the woman Ndu-ni-ndang.

Sung by Pan Xie.

This year we may know,
Know that the woman Ndu-ni-ndang had collected bowls of copper and silver,
But the neighbours would borrow,
Borrow the woman Ndu-ni-ndang's bowls of copper and silver to drink wine.

5 The next year the woman Ndu-ni-ndang collected bowls of copper and silver,
And the neighbours would borrow,
Borrow the woman Ndu-ni-ndang's bowls of copper and silver to drink wine.

But the woman Ndu-ni-ndang and the man Li-ndang were unwilling to lend,
And the neighbours brought an accusation,
10 Accusing the woman Ndu-ni-ndang and the man Li-ndang,
Accusing them before the Ruler-king.

So the Ruler-king sent,
Sent his two soldiers marching,
Marching smartly on their way.

15 Then the Ruler-king's two soldiers
Haughtily came seeking,
And seeking, reached the woman Ndu-ni-ndang and the man Li-ndang's house.

The Ruler-kings two soldiers opened,
Opened their mouths, opened their lips and asked,
20 "Where has the man Li-ndang gone?"

The woman Ndu-ni-ndang made reply,
"The sun is shining brightly,
And the man Li-ndang has gone to channel water,
To channel clear water to fertilise the rice fields.

25 So the clear water will flow,
Flow to fertilise the man Li-ndang's ricefields.
Also in the sunshine the man Li-ndang has gone to plough the fields,
To plough the man Li-ndang's rice fields".

The Ruler-king's two soldiers sought,
30 Sought the man Li-ndang and reached the rice fields.
The man Li-ndang opened,
Opened his mouth, opened his lips and spoke,

"Let the Ruler-king's two soldiers wait a little,
While the man Li-ndang looses,
35 Looses the water buffalo's harness and leading rope".

The man Li-ndang slipped them over,

Slipped them down over the water buffalo's back
The man Li-ndang took off the yoke and hung it,
Hung it on the man Li-ndang's plough.

40 With outspread arms the man Li-ndang drove,
Drove the water buffalo to bask in the sun,
To bask on the bank between the man Li-ndang's fields.

The Ruler-king's two soldiers could not arrest him,
But the man Li-ndang, with the Ruler-king's two soldiers,
45 Then returned and reached,
Reached the front of the man Li-ndang's house.

In the front of the man Li-ndang's house,
There was a clump of sheltering bamboo standing.
The man Li-ndang stretched,
50 Stretched out his hand and quickly pulled up,
Pulled up a plant of sheltering bamboo from the ground.

With outspread arms the man Li-ndang broke up,
Broke up the plant of bamboo, smashing it to pieces.
Then the man Li-ndang took,
55 Took the plant of bamboo and set it alight.

Having set the plant of bamboo alight, he made food,
Made it for the Ruler-king's two soldiers to eat.
Then the man Li-ndang spoke,
"Let the Ruler-king's two soldiers go on ahead,
60 The man Li-ndang will follow after".

The man Li-ndang took,
Took the bottom of a flat basket and cut out wings,
And took a hearth brush and made a tail.
Taking the wings the man Li-ndang fixed them to his body,

65 And the man Li-ndang flew whistling up into the sky,
Flew following the Ruler-king's two soldiers.
The man Li-ndang flew whistling and alighted,
Alighted in the courtyard of the Ruler-king.

The man Li-ndang rose quickly and together with,
70 With the Ruler-king discussed and disputed.
The Ruler-king examined him,
Examined him concerning all kinds of things,
Yet the man Li-ndang was not afraid.

The man Li-ndang said,
75 "I only fear the Ruler-king's instrument,
The instrument sawing back and forth right down to the ground".
The Ruler-king puzzled,
For seven years puzzled over it before he thought it out.

So the Ruler-king invited,
 80 Invited the Ruling Race's blacksmith,
 To forge a saw that would saw straight,
 To forge a saw that would saw true.

Then the Ruler-king dispatched,
 Dispatched his two soldiers to begin sawing,
 85 Sawing up on the high mountain,
 Sawing back and forth right down to the ground.

They sawed through the man Li-ndang's liver,
 They sawed through the man Li-ndang's heart,
 So that the man Li-ndang's flesh decayed,
 90 And his blood flowed and drained away.

Yet the man Li-ndang's liver and lungs did not remain infertile.
 The man Li-ndang's liver and lungs changed,
 Changed into swallows flying about the earth.

In Ox month and Tiger month,
 95 The swallows flock together,
 And the swallows fly,
 Fly from north to south in search of insects to eat.

They fly to the people's warmer lands,
 That all the people may know.

100 In Sheep month and Monkey month,
 The swallows return
 Return from south to north in search of insects to eat,
 That all the people may see.

This year we may know,
 105 Know that the man Li-ndang being truly dead,
 The woman Ndu-ni-ndang was distraught.

The woman Ndu-ni-ndang did no farming,
 So that hunger and thirst together reached,
 Reached the woman Ndu-ni-ndang alone.

110 This year we may know,
 Know that the woman Ndu-ni-ndang has given birth,
 Has given birth to two brothers.
 The elder was named Ndrao-ghu,
 And the younger was named Ndrao-ghv.

115 The seed-bearing bamboo was bearing seed on the bamboo.
 So the woman Ndu-ni-ndang spoke,
 "Is the seed-bearing bamboo indeed bearing fruit,
 And is the seed-bearing bamboo enough to eat to the end of the year?"
 (In fact seed-bearing bamboo is only eaten as a pastime!)

120 The seed-bearing bamboo was bearing seed on the bamboo,
The seed-bearing bamboo was indeed bearing,
And the woman Ndu-ni-ndang gathered the seed-bearing bamboo every day,
Gathered the seed-bearing bamboo into a bag.

Then the woman Ndu-ni-ndang returned, came back and reached,
125 Reached the woman Ndu-ni-ndang's house.
The woman Ndu-ni-ndang put,
Put the seed-bearing bamboo into a bowl.

She gave it to Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv to eat,
To eat seed-bearing bamboo from a basin,
130 To eat seed-bearing bamboo from a dish.

The sunshine was shining brightly,
In the sunshine the woman Ndu-ni-ndang saw,
Saw rape plants growing on the riverbank,
And the woman Ndu-ni-ndang stretched and stretched to cut it,
135 To cut the patch of rape on the river bank.

The Yi robbers did no good,
For the Yi robbers came and took
Took the woman Ndu-ni-ndang away.
But the woman Ndu-ni-ndang spoke up,
140 "The Yi robbers are doing no good,
For the woman Ndu-ni-ndang has wrapped,
Wrapped up Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv there upon the bed".
But the Yi robbers would not listen,
They took the woman Ndu-ni-ndang and were gone.

145 After nearly sixteen years,
The Yi robbers took,
Took the woman Ndu-ni-ndang to sell,
To sell at the Ga-dro family's ox market.

Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv had grown up,
150 But Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv still remembered her.

Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv were going to market.
On what date was the market held?
It was held on the fifteenth or sixteenth of the month.
Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv took,
155 Took shining silver carried in their belts.

So Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv went to market.
Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv went looking for horses,
But though they looked, there were no horses.
Now Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv met,
160 Met the Yi slave woman in the lower market.

Still looking for horses, they made their way to the upper market.

And though they looked, there were no horses.
But again Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv met,
Met the Yi slave woman in the upper market.

165 The elder brother called,
Called the younger brother back and asked,
“What might we do if we bought the slave woman?”
“We might buy the Yi slave woman to look after the chicken”.

Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv weighed shining silver,
170 Weighed shining silver in the scales.
They paid out a thousand four hundred and bought her,
Bought the Yi slave woman.

Taking her, they returned, came back and reached,
Reached the place where Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv ate lunch.
175 Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv ate white food from copper bowls,
The Yi slave woman ate coarse food from a leather pouch.

Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv smoked tobacco using a copper pipe,
The Yi slave woman smoked tobacco using a twisted leaf.
Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv travelled on horseback,
180 While the Yi slave woman went on foot.

Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv brought the Yi slave woman along,
Brought her along until they reached,
Reached the swampy valley, the valley of small fields.
Reached the place where of old the Yi slave woman used to wash cloth,
185 Reached the place where the Yi slave woman used to soak yarn.

The Yi slave woman wailed,
Wailed lamenting to herself and saying,
“We have reached the place where the Yi slave woman used to wash cloth,
Reached the place where the Yi slave woman used to soak yarn!”

190 Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv did not hear distinctly,
So the elder brother sent the younger brother,
Sent him back to ask,
“What are you wailing for, wailing and lamenting to yourself?”

The slave woman replied,
195 “I am wailing and lamenting to myself because we have reached,
Reached the place where the Yi slave woman used to soak yarn”.

So Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv enquired,
“Are you the woman Ndu-ni ndang who used to be?”
“I am the woman Ndu-ni-ndang who used to be”.

200 Then the Yi slave woman spoke,
“Are you two Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv who used to be?”
“We two are Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv who used to be”.
Then the Yi slave woman, mother and sons wept together.

The elder brother went and held the horse,
205 While the younger brother lifted,
Lifted the woman Ndu-ni-ndang upon its back.
So Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv brought the woman Ndu-ni-ndang,
Bringing her they returned, came back and reached,
Reached Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv’s house.
210 But no one knew the woman Ndu-ni-ndang,
Knew the woman Ndu-ni-ndang with her hair white as wood ash.

The woman Ndu-ni-ndang had reared,
Reared a pair of spotted dogs,
Spotted dogs, which were sound asleep.

215 But the pair of spotted dogs knew,
Knew the woman Ndu-ni-ndang’s voice,
And the dogs barked and jumped about, barking for joy.

The woman Ndu-ni-ndang fed,
Fed a spotted pig which grew bristles,
220 Fed a speckled chicken which grew spurs.

Then the woman Ndu-ni-ndang killed,
Killed the speckled chicken which grew spurs,
And killed the spotted pig which grew bristles,
To call back the spirits for Ndrao-ghu and Ndrao-ghv,
225 In fact for all three, mother and sons, to the home.

This is sung that all the old folk may know,
It is sung that every child may recall,
It is sung that all the descendants may remember.

Thus it is ended.

M494
Lyu-shao.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

This song begins with a dispute over a piece of land, which resulted in a Chinese being killed by the Miao Lyu-shao. It then goes on to say that the Yi woman and the Chinese woman arrested Lyu-shao, and had him imprisoned by the Chinese. What presumably happened was that the widow of the dead man complained to the Yi landlord, and the landlord's wife, often a person of considerable influence, took up the case on her behalf. The result was that Lyu-shao was carried off and imprisoned in "Vao-ti", that is in Sichuan,

It is not clear how the man Jiai secured Lyu-shao's release. It may have been by arguing the case in court, but the song seems to suggest that he simply bluffed the guards, who took him for a highly placed official or a powerful landlord.

"The man Jiai" means a man from the Jiai clan. It is not a personal name. The Chinese equivalent of Jiai in the common surname Li. The meaning of Lyu-shao is not known..

M494
Lyu-shao.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

- This year able come know,
Know that Lyu-shao and a man of the Ruling Race
Were disputing about the land, disputing about the place.
The man of the Ruling Race struck,
5 Struck Lyu-shao a resounding blow.
- Lyu-shao's heart was burning,
Lyu-shao's heart was boiling.
Lyu-shao took the knife from the man of the Ruling Race and killed'
Killed the man of the Ruling Race dead.
- 10 The Yi woman together with the Chinese woman,
The Yi woman and the Chinese woman brought,
Brought Lyu-shao and accused him in Sichuan.
There the Ruling Race took,
Took Lyu-shao, shut him in prison and held him.
- 15 Lyu-shao had no one who had followed,
Who had followed after Lyu-shao,
So Lyu-shao had no way of sending back word.
- Lyu-shao therefore sent to his brother who had remained behind.
He prepared provisions every day,
20 He wove straw sandals every night,
And he reached the man Jiai at Byu-di.
- The man Jiai was so old his hair was completely white,
But the man Jiai was willing to undertake,
To undertake Lyu-shao's fight,
25 To undertake the man Jiai's contest.
- When the next day came,
The man Jiai took silk clothes to wear,
And took silken shoes to put on,
Then the man Jiai gave his horse a good feed of barley,
30 And the man Jiai rode away.
- As the man Jiai approached from the far side,
The man Jiai shone as the sunrise.
As the man Jiai approached from the near side,
The man Jiai shone bright as the full moon.
- 35 The man Jiai came and reached,
Reached the front of Lyu-shao's prison from the other side.
The man Jiai stamped his foot like a Chinese official,
The man Jiai stamped his foot at the soldiers.

The man Jiai stamped his foot like an Yi official.
40 So the man Jiai undertook,
Undertook Lyu-shao's fight
Undertook the man Jiai's contest.

Bringing Lyu-shao, the man Jiai,
45 Returning, came back and reached,
Reached a stage on the way.

Now the Yi landlord did no good,
He sent his thieving slaves after them,
But the man Jiai tested his sword,
And attacked the thieving slaves who fled.

50 Then the man Jiai and Lyu-shao, returning, came back and reached,
Reached Lyu-shao's home.
Lyu-shao caught and killed the spotted pig to call back,
To call back home the spirits of Lyu-shao and the man Jiai.

Thus it is ended.

M495
Song of the crab-apple tree of Njiao-tai.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji

Introduction.

The title given to this song by Wang Ming-ji is misleading. The crab-apple tree was only one, albeit the first, of a number of objects and places mentioned. The central figure is the blind girl, Gi-yw, who, despite her handicap “saw” things, to which, sighted people, through familiarity or fear, were blind.

Njiao-tai, meaning “bamboo bridge”, is the Miao name of a place called Ban-qiao in Chinese, but the name does not appear in the text.

Striking the water with a stick until it bubbled and foamed was probably an activity the blind girl enjoyed as a child.

“Little deer family” was the Miao name given to an Yi landlord, whose personal name was also given to the land around about. A note in the text says that, alternatively the place was called, “Yi-gi-dlyu”. It was near to Da-guang-jiai.

Many Yi landlords had large formal gardens, like temple gardens, as part of their residence. All around ran a high, whitewashed wall in which were set imposing gateways with massive wooden doors which made a loud crash when they were swung open against the wall, and again when they were closed to. In the normal way the Miao would avoid passing near the landlord’s house, and so would not know exactly what the doors were like. The blind girl did not share the common fear of the landlord, and even had the temerity actually to open the garden doors. This escapade apparently resulted in her being warned off, hence her grieving for the doors.

In the mountains above the homestead of Little deer family was a pine forest. Miao girls were forbidden to go there for fear of being enticed away and abducted by a tiger. However, where others were afraid to go, the blind girl had explored. Likewise she had noticed the masses of azaleas and spring bracken, while others had taken them for granted.

“Sheep”, “Monkey” and “Cockerel” are the names of the third, fourth and fifth lunar months respectively, that is, springtime in South West China.

M495

Song of the crab-apple tree of Njiao-tai.

Collected by Wang Ming-ji.

The girl took her mother's staff and struck the water,
The water boiled till it foamed, boiled foaming,
And the foam boiled away in twisting lines.

5 Where do they say that the crab-apple tree of Little deer family grew?
It grew below the road beside the bridge,
With its branches hanging down into the water.
Where do they say that the wild pepper of Little deer family grew?
The wild pepper of Little deer family grew among the hills.

10 Now the people said,
Said that the people had not seen them,
But Gi-yw, the blind girl, said,
Said that Gi-yw, the blind girl, has been and has seen them.

15 "The crab-apple of Little deer family puts out,
Puts out blossom as big as a basket.
And its fruit as big as a small bowl,
But when I, Gi-yw, the blind girl, picked,
Picked one and put it to my lips,
It soured Gi-yw, the blind girl's mouth till night!

20 The wild pepper of Little deer family puts out,
Puts out flowers as big as a basin,
And fruit as big as cupped hands,
But when I, Gi-yw, the blind girl, picked,
Picked one and put it in my mouth,
It made Gi-yw, the blind girl's mouth burn all day!"

25 Where do they say the doors of Little deer family's herb garden stood?
The doors of Little deer family's herb garden stood on the plain.
The people said,
Said that the people had not seen them,
But Gi-yw, the blind girl, said,
30 Said that Gi-yw, the blind girl, had been and had seen them,

"The doors of Little deer family's herb garden are bound with copper,
And when Little deer family open,
Open the doors of Little deer family's herb garden wide,
It resounds to the cross-roads in Ngga-sha country.

35 When Gi-yw, the blind girl, opened,
Opened the doors of Little deer family's herb garden wide,
It resounded to the crossroads on the Ngga-sha plain.
So Gi-yw, the blind girl, grieves,
Grieves for the doors of Little deer family's herb garden, bound with copper".

40 Where do they say the pine-clad range of Little deer family stood?
It stood up there in the mountains,
Up there, where people might expect a wild creature.
Where was it that the pine clad-range of Little deer family stood?
It stood up there among the ridges,
45 Up there, where people might expect a fierce creature.

Yet Gi-yw, the blind girl said,
Said that Gi-yw, the blind girl had been and had seen them.

Where do they say that the patches of azalea grow?
The patches of azaleas grow in the mountains.
50 With the coming of Sheep month and Monkey month,
The patches of azaleas in the mountains come out into flower,
Come out in clusters every where.

Where do the patches of bracken grow?
The patches of bracken grow up in the pass,
55 And in Cockerel month and Monkey month,
The patches of bracken grow up beautifully green,
The patches of bracken grow green in the pass.

Now the people said,
Said that the people had not seen them,
60 But Gi-yw, the blind girl said,
Said that Gi-yw, the blind girl, had been and had seen them.

Thus it is ended.

M496
An orphan's song.

Sung by Zhang Wei-qing.

Introduction.

The theme of this song, a simple kindness being rewarded with undreamed of riches, is a favourite one among the Miao storytellers. The orphan is given no name, but is characterised as “the sighing youth”, here translated “the sorrowful youth”.

There is nothing to identify the orphan's benefactor. His name, “Yeu-vang”, or in its full, four syllable form, “Yeu-jio-li-vang”, probably means “the yellow man”. Since by entering through his “door”, which is the same thing as his “great lips”, the orphan found, inside his “body” and in his “heart”, silver and gold for the taking, the probability is that Yeu-vang was in fact a great rock which opened magically to reveal its treasure.

In the last line the Miao reads “white head”, in English it would be “grey head”, but it simply means an older person. Age was respected by the Miao, and white hair was the badge of wisdom. At any feast of festival, the “old folk” always ate first. His newly gotten wealth conferred upon the orphan privileges usually accorded to age.

M496
An orphan's song.

Sung by Zhang Wei-qing.

This year we may know,
Know that the orphan, the sorrowful youth, was out digging,
But the orphan, the sorrowful youth, had no home.

5 The time was about midday,
When the orphan looked around him,
Looked and saw a bird of prey fly over to catch,
To catch a little mouse.

10 The orphan, the sorrowful youth, shouted,
Shouted, and the bird of prey was gone,
While the mouse fled down a hole.
Who was it that was kind-hearted?
The orphan, the sorrowful youth, was kind-hearted.

15 When the next day came,
A great one was sent, who came and called,
Called the kind-hearted orphan, the sorrowful youth.
Yeu-vang was going to raise,
Raise the orphan, the sorrowful youth and make him like,
Like other people, with a house and a place to live.

20 When the next day came,
The orphan, the sorrowful youth, went,
Went, and reaching Yeu-vang's door,
He opened Yeu-vang's door wide.

25 It parted like great lips,
And the orphan, the sorrowful youth, went in,
Went in as though entering Yeu-jio-li-vang's heart,
Went in as though entering Yeu-jio-li-vang's body.

30 The orphan, the sorrowful youth stretched out his hand and took,
Took shining silver and gold.
Then he returned, came back and reached,
Reached the orphan, the sorrowful youth's home.

This year we may know,
Know that before, the orphan, the sorrowful youth,
Had no house, no place to live.

35 But now, Yeu-jio-li-vang has raised,
Raised the orphan, the sorrowful youth, to be an honoured guest,
Raised the orphan, the sorrowful youth, to be a wealthy man.
So the orphan, the sorrowful youth, could eat,
Eat as one of the people's grey-heads.

Thus it is ended.

M497
Song of a poor man moving house.

Sung by a man from Hmao-a-gw-gw.

Introduction.

This song appears to be a cautionary tale. If a man will not work, the result will be destitution. The individual in the story is simply described as “the man who moved”. Being too lazy to till the land, he soon developed the mentality of a mendicant. Presumably, through the goodness of neighbours the family survived. However, the urge to move away came upon him. Having no land of their own, it was relatively easy for the Miao to migrate, and they often did, but never without proper preparation and provision for the journey. The man in this song had no food stock, so that when he decided to go, there was soon nothing to eat and no one to beg from. The only thing he could do was to sell what few animals he had and live on the proceeds. The song pointedly refrains from spelling out what the final result must surely have been when these were exhausted, but the formal, concluding line has a special eloquence.

M497
Song of a poor man moving house,
Sung by a man from Hmao-a-gw-gw.

This year we may know,
Know that the man who moved was indolent.
The man who moved raised no crops,
The man who moved gathered no harvest,
5 The man who moved simply waited,
Waited each day for charity.

The sun was shining brightly,
And the sunshine made the man who moved restless.
The man who moved led,
10 Led his family away, climbing,
Climbing over mountain ranges, crying as they went.

In the sunshine the man who moved was impatient.
The man who moved led his family away, climbing,
Climbing over mountain ridges, weeping as they went,
15 For the man who moved had raised no crops,
The man who moved had gathered no harvest.

So the man who moved having no crops,
The man who moved having no harvest,
The family of the man who moved was crying,
20 Crying from hunger, hunger unsatisfied.

Since the man who moved had neglected the harvest,
What could the man who moved do for the best?
The man who moved devised a plan of action,
Devised and prepared a plan as follows:

25 The man who moved took,
Took the grazing cattle and sold them.
Sold them to get from the Chinese,
Shining silver and gold to be wrapped in his girdle and brought back.

On what was it to be spent?
30 He brought it back to relieve his family's hunger,
He brought it back to relieve his family's thirst.

Thus it is ended.

M498
**How a swallow and a toad went to the king's country to see an
elephant.**

Singer not recorded.

Introduction.

In this song the knowledge which the swallow and the toad possessed is constantly contrasted with the ignorance of "the people". This device, not uncommon in the songs, is intended to highlight the achievements of the heroes.

The parallelism of various groups of lines is clear, but it will also be observed that the scheme is not carried through completely. With a little rearrangement, however, a balanced scheme could easily be produced in which the toad describes the walls of the elephant house and the swallow its roof; then the swallow describes the elephant itself and the toad what it eats.

There are no elephants in North Yunnan but the ancient caravan route to Burma passed right through the country where the Miao lived, and descriptions of an animal which they had, no doubt, heard have been faithfully reproduced, except that the elephant appears to have been presented with a tiger's tail! The animal's "nose" was said to be as long as a "leg band". The bands worn wound around their legs by Miao women were five or six inches wide and four or five feet long.

Exactly who the Chinese king may have been is not clear. That the swallow should be the carrier of news from afar is not surprising. The toad is a less obvious messenger. However, the toad does appear in the stories as a clever, wily creature, and in one story, actually announced that he was on a journey to Sichuan, which, in Miao, is "Vao ti", that is "King's country".

M498
How a swallow and a toad went to the king's country to see an elephant.

Singer not recorded.

They fixed a time of ten days,
But though they searched the land they saw nothing.
They fixed a time of ten days,
But though they searched the land they heard nothing.

5 Yet it was said that the Chinese king had built,
Had built a house, but where?

The people said,
Said that the people had not seen it.
But the swallow said,
10 The swallow had been and seen.

The swallow said,
That the swallow had eaten,
Had eaten eighty-eight measures
Of popped-corn meal and stone fragments as travelling rations,
15 While his curved, iron walking stick was three hand-breadths long.

Where was the Chinese king's house?
The people said,
Said the people had not seen it.
But the toad was able to say,
20 The toad had been and seen.

For the toad had eaten,
Had eaten eighty-eight measures
Of popped-corn meal and iron fragments as travelling rations,
While his curved, iron walking stick was three spans long.

25 It was said that the Chinese king had built,
Had built a house, but what was it like?
The interior of the Chinese king's house was like a rock face,
And the exterior was like the face of a cliff.

The people said,
30 The people had not seen it.
But the toad said,
Said the toad had been and seen.

The Chinese king's house,
The house had copper roofing inside,
35 And iron roofing outside.

Who was it kept an elephant,

An elephant with coloured markings on its tail?
The people said,
The people said they had not seen it.
40 But the swallow said,
Said that the swallow had been and seen,
Had seen the elephant.

Its attentive ears were as big as fans,
Its glowing eyes as big as small basins,
45 And its grey trunk as long as a leg band.

With its mouth it ate,
Ate ninety-nine kinds of fresh grain,
While with its mouth it drank,
Drank ninety-nine tubs of fresh water.

50 Thus it is ended.

M499
The song of Nggü-nza and Ndrao-jio-shi-nang.

Singer not recorded.

Introduction.

There is no indication in Document K, which alone records this song, as to its origin. At the head of the song there is a note in Miao saying that the Chinese king was called, “Shi-niao-no”, and at the close, also in Miao, a further note, which reads, “We Miao were literate and educated up to the time of Nggü-nza only. Afterwards we had no books at all until 1905. From this year we gradually acquired writing”.

In 1952, when Document K was compiled, no doubt driven by the political upheaval of the time, it was felt important to establish the fact that once, long ago, the Miao had writing but it had been lost. The song about the ordering of sky and earth, M105, and the present song, both of which speak of Miao people writing, were adduced as evidence. The attempt to fix the date by naming the Chinese king, is however of little value. Without corroborative evidence it is only a guess, for there is no suggestion of a name in the song itself. Moreover the whole narrative is obviously a piece of fiction.

The stone tablet, specially cut and smoothed, provided a good firm surface on which to do her writing, though why it was so important for Nggü-nza to get it back, when it had been lost, is not exactly clear. Surely a small slab of stone was not irreplaceable. It almost looks as if the original singer thought that the writing was somehow engraved in the stone. It says that the writing was “inside” and “within” the stone tablet. (The Miao words are “ndlo” in line 24, and “ndrai” in line 29.) In the English translation these words have been “glossed” as “on” and “upon”. What the writing actually contained is quite vague, “All kinds of matters concerning the people”.

The expression translated “creature”, also means “spirit” or even “devil”. Left to their own devices the superstitious soldiers would doubtless have killed it on sight. Thus, when Nggü-nza gave the word, they were ready to despatch the creature the moment it got back from its short run, not aware that it was the king they were actually killing.

M499

The song of Nggü-nza and Ndrao-jio-shi-nang.

Singer not recorded.

This year we may know,
Know for certain that the woman Bu-ba has had a daughter,
And know also that the man Ba-li-byu is nurturing a son.

5 The woman Bu-ba having no way of finding a name,
The woman Bu-ba took her daughter and called her Nggü-nza.
The man Ba-li-byu having no way of finding a name,
Took his eldest son and called him Ndrao-jio-shi-nang .

10 When the woman Bu-ba was busy joining her hemp strands,
She took Nggü-nza to accompany her joining hemp strands.
When the man Ba-li-byu was busy at his farm work,
He took Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to accompany him farming.

15 When the woman Bu-ba was busy making hemp yarn,
She took Nggü-nza to accompany her making her hemp yarn.
When the man Ba-li-byu was busy with his important tasks,
He took Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to accompany him in his important tasks.

Now the woman Bu-ba took Nggü-nza accompanying her to be taught books,
While the man Ba-li-byu took Ndrao-jio-shi-nang accompanying him to be taught
farming.

20 Thus there came a day when the woman Bu-ba could take,
Take legal documents for Nggü-nza to tackle,
But the man Ba-li-byu took,
Took the man Ba-li-byu's farming for Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to learn.

25 So there came a day when Nggü-nza using,
Using her stone tablet wrote.
Wrote upon it of all kinds of matters that concerned the people.
The day also came when the man Ba-li-byu taught,
Taught, while Ndrao-jio-shi-nang learned, to snare all kinds of game and birds.

30 Thus Nggü-nza would carry,
Carry her stone tablet out to sit in the shade,
And write on it all kinds of matters that concerned the people.

35 Meanwhile Ndrao-jio-shi-nang was out hunting,
And set up a snare out in the scrubland.
Nggü-nza heard the commotion
And Nggü-nza was frightened.

35 So Nggü-nza rose hurriedly and fled,
Fled home as quickly as she could run.
But Nggü-nza left behind,

Left Ngguzza's stone tablet there in the shade.
 When Ndrao-jio-shi-nang reached,
 Reached the place where Ngguzza hid in the shade,
 40 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang picked up,
 Picked up Ngguzza's stone tablet and brought it away.

The day came when people sent messages to ask,
 To ask Ngguzza to come as a bride.

But Ngguzza said,
 45 "With any bachelor son among the people,
 Unless he suits my idea, I will not go.

What I want is someone among the people to bring,
 To bring me a stone tablet to check,
 If it tallies with my stone tablet, then I shall be willing to go"

50 When Ndrao-jio-shi-nang heard it,
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang, smiling broadly, brought,
 Brought Ndrao-jio-shi-nang's stone tablet to be checked,
 To be checked against Ngguzza's stone tablet.

Ndrao-jio-shi-nang's stone tablet fitted exactly,
 55 Fitted exactly with Ngguzza's stone tablet.
 So Ngguzza could make no excuse,
 But acquiesced, and together with,
 With Ndrao-jio-shi-nang made a family to live.

The trouble was that Ngguzza was truly pretty,
 60 So Ndrao-jio-shi-nang watched,
 Sat and watched Ngguzza each day,
 In fact sat and watched Ngguzza for two months!

Now the people were all busy ploughing,
 Why then was Ndrao-jio-shi-nang ploughing?
 65 Accordingly Ngguzza said,
 "The people are busy ploughing,
 Why is Ndrao-jio-shi-nang not ploughing too?"

Ndrao-jio-shi-nang made reply,
 Replied to Ngguzza and said,

70 "Ngguzza, you are pretty, so very pretty,
 You are pretty and so good to see,
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang wants to admire you all day,
 Wants to admire you all night.
 You make Ndrao-jio-shi-nang too lazy to go ploughing!"

75 Ngguzza rose immediately and took,
 Took two sheets of white paper and drew,
 Drew pictures of her pretty self,
 Drew them for Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to carry and go ploughing.

80 So Ndrao-jio-shi-nang ploughed,
 Ploughed energetically over there.
 Then Ndrao-jio-shi-nang hung
 Hung one sheet of paper up over there.
 With a broad smile Ndrao-jio-shi-nang looked at it.

85 Having hung the other sheet over here,
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang ploughed energetically back over here.
 With a broad smile Ndrao-jio-shi-nang studied it,
 Looking at the picture of Nggu-nza's pretty self.

90 Thus Ndrao-jio-shi-nang ploughed,
 Ploughed on until time for morning meal.
 When he loosed the ox to come in for breakfast,
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang collected the one sheet over here,
 But left the other sheet over there.

95 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang arrived home
 And ate his breakfast. Having had a good meal,
 He remembered the sheet of paper he had forgotten to collect.
 So Ndrao-jio-shi-nang returned to pick it up.

100 But a strong wind did no good,
 A strong wind blew up,
 Blowing Nggu-nza's white paper, flying and fluttering, till it landed,
 Landed beside the Chinese king's road.

Retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race picked it up and took it away,
 Giving it to the Chinese king to look at.
 The Chinese king said,
 "How is that Nggu-nza can be as pretty as this?"

105 So the Chinese king sent,
 Sent his retainers and soldiers to come back and seek,
 Seek for Nggu-nza there,
 There in the people's neighbourhood and village.

110 When Ndrao-jio-shi-nang came to hear it,
 What should he do for the best?
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang took Nggu-nza and hid her,
 Hid her out of sight in the bottom of a grain-bin.

115 The retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race sought, but did not see her,
 The retainers and soldiers sought, but did not find her.
 So the retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race returned and reported,
 Reported everything to the Chinese king.

120 "We sought Nggu-nza but did not find her,
 We sought Nggu-nza but did not see her".
 But the Chinese king said,
 "It will be well if you go back quickly and seek,"

- Seek Nggü-nza and find her!”
 Now Ndrao-jio-shi-nang had been building,
 A small house for keeping his chicken
 And a small house for keeping his pigs.
 125 But Ndrao-jio-shi-nang took Ngu-nza and hid her in a little hut.
- When the retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race came seeking,
 Seeking in the people’s neighbourhood and village,
 Seeking through the village from bottom to top.
 They sought Nggü-nza but did not see her,
 130 They sought Nggü-nza but did not find her.
- While the sky remained constant,
 The Chinese king came to hear,
 To hear that Nggü-nza might be found,
 There in the new chicken house or pigsty.
- 135 So the retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race sought,
 Sought for Nggü-nza in the chicken house,
 And sought for Nggü-nza in the pigsty.
 The retainers and soldiers sought Nggü-nza but failed to find her,
 They sought Nggü-nza but did not see her.
- 140 So the retainers and soldiers of the Ruling Race returned and reached,
 Reached the neighbourhood of the Chinese king’s city.
- They said to the Chinese king,
 “We sought for Nggü-nza but did not find her,
 We sought for Nggü-nza but did not see her.
 145 She was not in the chicken house
 And she was not in the pigsty”.
- The Chinese king went back to think out,
 To think out his master plan.
 The Chinese king dispatched a seller of needles and thread
 150 To go and hawk needles and thread in the people’s village.
- The dogs are barking and snarling, barking at what?
 They are barking at the seller of needles and thread climbing through the village.
 Now Nggü-nza dashed out to buy needles,
 And the Ruling Race caught her,
 155 They finally managed to catch Nggü-nza.
- Nggü-nza said,
 “It is all because Ndrao-jio-shi-nang was so lazy
 That this has befallen Nggü-nza!”
 Then Nggü-nza said,
- 160 “For this couple, maid and youth, the way,
 The way has been only sunshine until today,
 But a day will come when you will ask the way,
 And you will come following after”.

Then Nggü-nza instructed,
 165 Instructed Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to go and snare game and birds of all kinds,
 Taking the skins of the game and birds to wear,
 To wear and follow after Nggü-nza.

Where did Ndrao-jio-shi-nang go to snare game and birds?
 He went to the Ndu-nzhi-gu forest.
 170 But the Ruling Race took Nggü-nza and, returning, went back and reached,
 Reached the Chinese king's neighbourhood and city.

There Nggü-nza lived in the Chinese king's palace,
 Wearing the Chinese king's silk.
 She ate rice from fine silver bowls,
 175 And white pork from fine bowls of gold.

She drank clear water from fine silver bowls,
 But when she thought of Ndrao-jio-shi-nang,
 And the sunlit road the two had travelled together,
 Bitter tears fell from Nggü-nza's eyes,
 180 And her anguish of heart was inconsolable.

While the sky remained constant,
 Ndrao-jio-shi-nang was snaring,
 Snakes, birds and game for food,
 And from the skins he made clothes to wear.

185 So Ndrao-jio-shi-nang followed,
 Followed Nggü-nza and went,
 Went and reached the Chinese king's neighbourhood and city,
 And, clad in his clothes of animal skins, he went up to the market place.

The Chinese king's retainers and soldiers saw him,
 190 Saw Ndrao-jio-shi-nang going up to the market place in his clothing of skins,
 And the retainers and soldiers said,
 "Whatever creature is it that has arrived here?"

They called Nggü-nza to come and look,
 And Nggü-nza burst out laughing.
 195 At this the Chinese king said,

"Nggü-nza is living in the king's palace,
 With rice to eat from fine silver bowls,
 And clear water to drink from bowls of fine silver.

She has white pork to eat in fine golden bowls,
 200 And silks to wear all bright and new,
 Yet Nggü-nza is unwilling to smile.

But at some creature, whatever it is,
 Dressed up in animal skins,
 Nggü-nza bursts out laughing!"

205 The Chinese king continued,
“For the king wearing beautiful clothes of silk and satin,
Nggü-nza is unwilling to smile.

Why, when some creature or other,
Dressed in animal skins turns up,
210 Does Nggü-nza behave like this?”

Thus Nggü-nza responded,
“You take off your clothes of silk and satin and exchange them,
Exchange them for the animal skins the creature, what ever it is, is wearing,
Then look and see what Nggü-nza will do”.

215 So the Chinese king took off,
Took off his clothes of silk and satin and exchanged,
Exchanged them for the animal skins.

The Chinese king took off,
Took off his clothes of silk and satin,
220 For Ndrao-jio-shi-nang to put on.

Then Nggü-nza said,
Speaking to the Chinese king.
“Now you run to the gap up there,
Then, returning, run back again
225 And see what Nggü-nza will do”.

Meanwhile Nggü-nza had pushed,
Pushed Ndrao-jio-shi-nang away into the Chinese king’s palace.

When the Chinese king, returning, came back and arrived,
Nggü-nza had called out,
230 Called out the retainers and soldiers to come and kill,
Kill the Chinese king and make an end.

So Nggü-nza and Ndrao-jio-shi-nang lived,
Lived in the Chinese king’s house.
They administered the surrounding country and established it,
235 They regulated the surrounding country and secured it.

Thus it is ended.

M500
Song of the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu.

Recorded by Wang Jian-guo.

Introduction.

This song, like many others, was probably collected by Wang Jian-guo's father Wang Ming-ji. It is a straightforward story, but at a number of points requires some further explanation.

First there is the matter of names and titles. The young man in the song bears a double name, the significance of which is nowhere explained. Occasionally, and particularly towards the end of the piece, the Miao text of Document N misses out one or other of the names. These omissions may not go back to the original singer, but are more likely lapses in concentration on the part of some scribe during the process of transmission. Their restoration not only preserves consistency in the song, but generally helps to maintain balance in the length of the lines.

The full name of the young woman in the story is,

Hmaob saod gib niaot ncail nggus bangx nzeul
Hmao-sao master daughter young woman blossom youngest

That is “the youngest daughter, Blossom, of the Master Hmao-sao”. Today Chinese personal names are commonly used, but traditionally in a Miao family children were known by their position in the family, “eldest”, “middle” or “youngest” brother or sister. Occasionally the name “Bang”, meaning “flower” or “blossom”, might be given to a small girl. Probably the young lady in this story, as a child, was called “La-bang-nzeu”, and when she grew up, became “Nggubang-nzeu”, where “nggu” means “young woman”. Her clan name was Hmao-sao, and her father, a man held in some respect in the community, is accorded the title “gi-niao”, “Master”. After line 32 the clan name is dropped out. On the other hand, although it is implied throughout the song, the word “ncail”, “daughter”, actually occurs only in lines 91 and 92. In the English translation the simplest solution is to treat “Nggubang-nzeu” as a proper name.

In lines 101 to 121 we meet another individual who is known only by his title, “nzyu-gi-niao”. In other songs this title is used interchangeably with “gi-niao”, “Master”. However this individual appears to have been somewhat better off than his neighbours, and in a position such that his request for the services of a piper could not be refused. In translation he is differentiated from the “Master” with the title “Overlord”, which, for want of a better, will serve, but is possibly rather too grand.

Miao pipes were constructed using lengths of bamboo. To obtain a true resonance, it was necessary that the insides of these pipes should be pierced through and then scraped and rubbed down until they were perfectly smooth. It is this process which is described in lines 22 to 26.

Traditionally young Miao women wore their hair in plaits wound around the head, with wooden combs inserted to keep the arrangement in place. Often black wool was plaited in with the hair to make the plaits longer and thicker. See lines 37 and 38.

The conversation recorded in lines 45 to 73 was simply light-hearted banter. Each of the young people knew well enough who the other was.

That the young people had met and were attracted to one another was no guarantee that their respective families would approve. The elaborate description of the welcome extended to the young man by the girl's family, in particular in receiving and hanging up his musical pipes, is balanced by the men folk from his family coming around playing their pipes. This was a propitious beginning, but there remained all the marriage negotiations, usually conducted through middlemen, central to which was the fixing of the marriage settlement. In Miao society, this had to be paid by the bridegroom's family to the bride's family. On the bride's side there was also much to be done. She not only had to make her own bridal outfit by hand, having first actually woven the cloth, but tradition required that she also make a special embroidered gown as a wedding present for her husband. The song mentions none of these matters, but any Miao listener would be fully aware of the situation.

Matters were further complicated by the young man's enforced absence, probably for several months, attending the Overlord while he was away on an extended visit. They were rendered even more difficult by the fact that the young woman had been abducted by a person called "a controller of the Hmong", presumably some kind of petty official. The Hmong in this case was another branch of the Miao race living on the Sichuan border. It appears that there was no way of getting the young woman back except by force, and this was beyond the capability of her family, if indeed they actually knew what had become of her.

The hostile reception that the young man received from the young woman's family when he returned, may have been due to wounded family pride, because they had "lost" their talented young daughter, and did not like to admit the fact. More likely it was because the marriage settlement offered by his family did not come up to their expectations. Again we are not told, but when the young man, having rescued their daughter, returned and confronted the family, they apparently had no option but to let her go, presumably without paying the customary marriage dues.

M500

Song of the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu.

Recorded by Wang Jian-guo.

All the people declare,
“Among the fine young men,
Alone outstanding is Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu”.

5 All the people declare,
“Among the fine young women,
Alone outstanding is the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu”,
But Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu had never heard.

10 Though praised by all the people,
“Among the fine young women,
Alone outstanding is the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu”,
Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu had not seen her.

Now Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu played,
Played upon pipes with nine finger holes,
Played upon long pipes with nine sections.

15 So Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu played,
Played his musical pipes resounding through the valleys.

20 He played his musical pipes till they resounded.
Resounded over ninety nine mountains,
Resounded over ninety nine ranges,
Resounded over ninety nine plains,
Resounded over ninety nine flat lands.

25 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu's pipes were lacquered and polished,
Inside the pipes had been rubbed down and smoothed well,
So well that posterity took and used them to copy.
Inside the pipes had been rubbed down, well rubbed,
So well that posterity took and used them as the norm.

30 At the time when morning meal was eaten,
The Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu was weaving,
Busily weaving, sitting at home,
When she heard Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu,
Heard the smooth cadence of his pipes.

35 Then the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu arose,
Arose at once and laid aside her weaving,
Arose at once and put on her leg bands,
Arose at once and put her sandals on.

She wrapped her rounded felt cape about her shoulders,
Having wound her hair in attractive plaits around her head,

And fixed them in place with lacquered combs.
 Then she led the cattle back and forth through the gap in the hills,
 40 Driving the cattle back and forth over the ridges,
 So she pastured the cattle back and forth on the mountain.

At the time of eating the midday meal,
 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu was playing,
 Playing his musical pipes when he came,
 45 Came face to face with the Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu.

The Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu spoke,
 "Are you Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu of whom they speak?"
 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu replied,
 "They speak of Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu, but it is not I.
 50 I am the lazy one, the stupid one, the one who slacks on the plain!"

Then Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu stretched out,
 Stretched out his hand and took hold of the young woman.
 "Let us openly go on together,
 I am the stupid one the one that slacks under the sky!"
 55 But the Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu simply did not believe him.

Then Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu spoke,
 "Are you the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu they speak about?"
 The Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu, choosing her words, replied,
 "I am not the Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu.
 60 I am just the girl sent everywhere, the girl pasturing the cattle.
 I follow about, I trail after the Master Hmao-sao's daughter Nggubang-nzeu.
 I am the girl who follows, the girl who trails, the girl companion,
 I am the girl who follows, the girl who trails, the girl in charge of clothing".
 But Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu simply did not believe her.

65 Again Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu spoke,
 "I am the stupid one, the one that slacks on the plain, the wanderer on the road".
 But still the Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu simply did not believe him.

In the evening with night approaching,
 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu could not leave,
 70 But went with "the girl sent everywhere",
 Went to "the girl sent everywhere's" home.
 And Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu smiled,
 Smiled a broad smile of pleasure.

In the evening with night approaching,
 75 The Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu drove,
 Drove the cattle up and down, going on ahead,
 While Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu, playing,
 Playing his musical pipes, followed after,
 The musical pipes tucked under his arm.

80 The woman, her mother, all smiles, stretched out,

Stretched out her crippled hand and took,
Took Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu's hand and caressed it.
The woman, her mother stretched her crippled hand and stroked,
Stroked Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu's head affectionately.

85 Then the woman, her aunt, took from Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu
His musical pipes and hung them up,
Hung them upon a hook in the partition wall.

In the evening, with night approaching,
All the family members arrived home.

90 Then the woman, her mother spoke,

“The Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu went to pasture cattle,
The Master's daughter Nggubang-nzeu found a fine husband!”
The man, her father, was extremely pleased,
And all the family members were full of praise.

95 In the evening, with night approaching,
Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu,
All his relatives took,
Took their musical pipes, passed them around, and played,
Affording the woman, her mother, a source of pleasure,
100 And affording the man, her father, a source of laughter.

This year we may know,
Know this year the Overlord is sacrificing to the spirits.

The Overlord's invitation,
His invitation for a piper, has been extended,
105 Extended to Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu alone.
So Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu has become,
Has become piper for the Overlord.

Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu was gone,
Was gone for a twelve day period, or for thirteen days
110 Before he returned, came back and reached home.
Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu stayed,
Stayed for a twelve day period, or for thirteen days
Before he returned, came back and arrived home.

This year we may know,
115 Know that this year the Overlord is going on a visit.

The Overlord's invitation,
His invitation for a piper, has been extended,
Extended to Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu alone.
So Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu served as piper.

120 He served at the Overlord's spirit worship,
And served when the Overlord went on a visit,
But now Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu was gone for a long time.

The Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu was going to fetch water,
 When she met with the Hmong controller by the river.

125 The Hmong controller took,
 Took the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu and carried her off.

Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu having served,
 Having served as the Overlord's piper,
 Now returned, came back and reached,

130 Reached the homestead of the woman, her mother, and the man, her father.

But the family members did no good,
 The family members took and beat,
 Beat Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu, driving him away.
 So Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu had to go and work,

135 Work as a cattle herdsman for the Ruling Race.

Pasturing the cattle back and forth on the mountain side,
 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu chanced to meet.
 To meet the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu, out cutting green fodder.

Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu spoke,
 140 "Where has the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu gone?"
 The Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu replied,
 "The Hmong controller abducted,
 Abducted the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu to become,
 To become the Hmong controller's wife".

145 Then Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu returned.
 Returned, went back and reached,
 Reached the Ruling Race's home,
 And Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu led out,
 Led out the Ruling Race to go and to attack,

150 Attack and kill the Hmong controller.

Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu then took,
 Took the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu and confronted,
 Confronted the woman, her mother, and the man, her father.

The woman, her mother could make no reply,
 155 And the man, her father had nothing to say,
 While the members of the family could offer no excuse.

So Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu took,
 Took the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu back to live together.
 Do-hmao-byu, Yao-hmao-dlu took,

160 Took the Master's daughter Nggubangnzeu and settled down as a family.

Thus it is ended.

