

M203
A bundle of Miao traditions.

Written by Yang Ya-go.

Stage 1

They tell a story that in the olden times our old folk did not build houses to live in, but simply lived at the foot of rocks and cliffs or in the hollow of trees. In those days the forests were very great, and full of wild animals. So it was that the old folk simply lived on wild fruit, and spent their time hunting. If they went out hunting they had to go as a group, and they hunted together. When they were returning home, they would play on flutes or other instruments as a signal, so that those who had remained at home would know. Thus when the folk at home heard that the others had come, they would go out and call, "Are you human or spirits?" On hearing the voices of the home folk the others would reply, "We are human!" and so would come home to the place where the young women were staying. They did this in order to give reassurance, because, at that time, the seizure by one group of another group's living place was common, and they were afraid that it might be some other people coming whom they did not know.

At that time, while the men were away, the young women remained at home, and, whatever the pretext, good or ill, the women would cry. However, on one occasion the men, who had been away, were returning, and, as they neared home, they heard the women who had stayed behind, singing songs, which were very good to listen to. So they said, "From now on, be matters good or ill, we want no more crying, only singing, because crying is not good to listen to!" Because, come good or ill, these women would cry, the children all called them "nie". [Pronounced with the tone value 45 it means, "crying".] As time went by, in common use this became "nie". [Pronounced with the tone value 55 it means "mother".] This is the origin of the word "mother" used for women.

A young woman, if she had a man, [i.e. a lover] she would "hide" ["vai", pronounced with the tone value 11] him. Now, everyone calls a man "father" ["vai", pronounced with the tone value 21] and this is how it began.

Stage 2

The ancestors later left that place and removed elsewhere. There was an old man called the Elder Gi-zi or the Man Jio-bi-khao who led them till they arrived on a very wide plain, of which they did not know the name. However, they saw an old man there planting millet, so they simply called it "Millet Plain". Here they remained and planted only millet for food. The seed for the present day millet was derived from here.

Stage 3

Afterwards there came a year which was a time of calamity. Robbers and soldiers abounded, and the world was full of fighting. So it was they sang a song which said,

This year we may know,
Know that wizards and enchanter's of the under-world were training their troops,
For this was an evil time and an evil year.

The millet was planted but did not ripen,
The millet was planted but the crop was ruined,

And people in the world rose up to fight each other.
The Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao
Could not dwell there.
So the Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao took,
Took the children and fled,
Fled to the great river in the east.

The Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao took,
Took the children and went that they might pick,
Pick the bamboo seed on the hills for food.

But the Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao
Could not eat it.
So the Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao took,
Took the children and went,
Went to cut wild herbs on the river bank.

Upon the river bank there stood,
Stood the hill rice ripening or fully ripe,
With the swamp rice ripening in the sunshine,
And the glutinous rice ripening in the breeze.

The Elder Gi-zi, the Man Jio-bi-khao
Had no name to give it,
So they called the hill rice "river bank grain",
The swamp rice they simply called "rice",
And the glutinous rice they called "glutinous".

That which we now call hill rice together with ordinary rice and glutinous rice all originated from this source.

Stage 4

Not long after they came to live on the banks of this river, fighting broke out again all over the world, with one group attacking another. At the time the Elder Gi-zi was very old. He said to the children, "Throughout my life I have always done things without delay. When I die you will bury me in the same manner, won't you?" When he died, the children followed his instructions and buried him in this way. This is the origin of our Miao custom of burying in the grave in this manner.

Stage 5

After the Elder Gi-zi died, the Miao living there were led by his son whose name was the Elder Gi-myu. Now there were other people who wanted to attack them so they had a song which said,

While the sky remained constant,
The Elder Gi-zi having died,
The Ruling Race came,
Came from the Ruling Race's land,
Came to seize the children and carry them off.

The Elder Gi-myu was heavy hearted,
The Elder Gi-myu was sad at heart.

The Elder Gi-myu led,
Led the children to go and seek,
Seek a crossbow tree together.

They sought, and they found one,
One mulberry tree still thriving.
The Elder Gi-myu felled,
Felled the mulberry tree to make crossbows.

He made crossbows to be carried on the back,
He took shining swords to carry in the hand,
He led the children back to block the way,
And fight the Ruling Race on the river bank.

Seven times they loosed their bows and struck down seven,
Seven arrows they shot and struck seven pairs.
They attacked the Ruling Race, destined to be an offering to the spirits,
They slashed the Ruling Race, destined to be an offering to the idols.

The Ruling Race were afraid,
So afraid, indeed, that they dared not come,
So afraid, in truth, that they did not come out.

The result was the Ruling Race's grand stratagem.
The Ruling Race suggested,
Suggested the making of an agreement just to deceive,
To deceive the Elder Gi-myu. They said,

"Come let us make an agreement fixing the boundaries,
"Come let us make an agreement fixing the roads,
"Come let us make an agreement making all well".

But the Elder Gi-myu was tricked,
Tricked by the Ruling Race's deceit.
So the Ruling Race took,
Took the Elder Gi-myu and made him prisoner.

Stage 6

The retainers of the Chinese,
The soldiers in columns came pursuing,
But the people could not cross the Red Mud River.

The Man Jio-bi-khao caused,
Caused the pig to go and test the water.
It tested the water until noon but could not go.
It could not cross and so returned.

The Man Jio-bi-khao looked all around,
And saw the water buffalo grazing,
Grazing, jet-black, upon the river bank.

The Man Jio-bi-khao caused,
Caused the water buffalo to go and test it,
And the water buffalo crossed right over.

The Man Jio-bi-khao led the children and followed,
Followed the water buffalo and crossed right over.
They crossed and came to the flat banks of the Ndu-na-yi-mo.

The banks of the Ndu-na-yi-mo were wide,
Seven days and seven nights travel could not traverse it.

The banks of the Ndu-na-yi-mo were flat,
There grew the cotton plants,
Bushes as big as water-butts,
With heads as big as eggs.

Here the children built,
Built houses with timber frames and tiled roofs to set up families and live,
Built houses with timber frames and tiled roofs to set up families and dwell.

Stage 7

While the sky remained constant,
The Ruling Race returned again, came back in pursuit,
So the Man Jio-bi-khao led,
Led the children and fled.

But the banks of the Ndu-na-yi-mo were wide,
So the children removed,
Removed their girdles and the braids of their skirts and knotted them together.
They chose the cattle path and were pulled across,
The water buffaloes pulling them with their horns.

The children followed,
Followed behind the water buffaloes and came,
Came and reached the people's Di-njiang-na.
Now this place Di-njiang-na was good land.

Here there grew cotton
On bushes as high as a room,
With seed heads as big as ducks eggs,
Here the swamp rice ripened in the breeze,
And it vexed the eyes of the Ruling Race.

Here there grew hemp,
Thick as an ankle,
Thick as a small arm,
Here the glutinous rice ripened to maturity,
And it pained the hearts of the Ruling Race.

Stage 8

While the sky remained constant,
The Ruling Race again came in pursuit.
So the Man Jio-bi-khao led,
Led the children and fled together.

They fled to the Plain of Be-yi, that level plain,
But it is said that the Plain of Be-yi was a high plain,
And here the children lived,
Lived on the Plain of Be-yi, planting buckwheat for food.

Stage 9

Now the Man Jio-bi-khao and the children could not dwell there,
So the Man Jio-bi-khao led,
Led the children and fled together,
Fled till together they reached,
Reached Hmao-de in the Hmao-li-no country.

The dark forest of Hmao-de, Hmao-li-no was black indeed,
The deer all lived there,
The stags all dwelt there,
Tigers and lions all dwelt there.

The Man Jio-bi-khao led the children to clear the forest,
And the old folk warned the children,
"In clearing the forest do not clear far and wide,
For fear of clearing on to Mang-li-no land".

But the children did not understand.
The children went clearing the forest,
And did indeed clear right on to Mang-li-no land.

While the sky remained constant,
The children had to work on Mang-li-no land,
And the resulting work for Mang-li-no, the work to pay rent, was heavy.
As for compulsory labour, the compulsory labour was hard.

We Miao children did,
Did compulsory labour for Mang-li-no which never finished,
Did compulsory labour which never stopped.
Thus it is ended