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Songs and Stories**

**Miao Social Life**

Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness  
Songs M371 to M390  
Introduction and Translation

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M371

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

Like Wang Ming-ji, Yang Yung-xin began his account of the old Miao worship with a list of the spirits concerned, but, in contrast to the earlier writer, he chose to expand his list with descriptive notes for each item. In the case of the following four entries all that he had to say was set down in this list and he did not return to them again.

|    |                          |
|----|--------------------------|
| 4  | The spirits bi-jio-a-su. |
| 5  | A-she                    |
| 8  | Yeu-jio-dlang-hnu        |
| 13 | Nao-nao.                 |

The remaining nine spirits were all covered in succeeding notes but were not numbered. For the purposes of cross-referencing the numbers in the index list has been added to the titles, but, since their order has been changed, they do not run consecutively.

## Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

- 1 **The Spirit Zu-gi-za.** This was the chief of the spirits. He was the one who was everywhere. Reverence demanded that he should be addressed as Yeu-su-mu.
- 2 **Bi-nzao.** This was one which influenced people and was also a sky-power. It could influence people making them restless, or influence them making them impatient, or influence them making them angry. It made people, thus influenced, liable to hang themselves, or else to fall into water, or kill themselves by jumping off a cliff. Such a person who had died had to go and be a horse for the sky-power to ride. This person had to continue so until he in turn had influenced another to die as well, then he might go and join the ancestors. The bi-nzao were under the Spirit Zu-gi-za, and had to recognise his authority.
- 3 **Water ki-zo.** This kind lived in the water. If people went to wash clothes and encountered it, they would suffer from headaches and become unwell. It would be necessary to seek the shaman-healer to come and cure them, then presently they would recover.
- 4 **The spirits bi-jio-a-su.** These spirits, together with the ki-zo which live in caves and caverns, were of a single kind, but they had two sorts of appearance. One sort took human form and did not harm people, the other sort took the form of cattle and pigs and could cause people to become sick.
- 5 **A-she.** This kind of spirit borrowed the form of snakes, cats and chicken, and could bite children who had not yet grown big.
- 6 **Zi-qiao-bao.** This was a kind of smoke which might be encountered in burial grounds. People who were so encountered were taken violently ill. If such had been encountered it was necessary to pen in the spirit by burning the beard of a goat. Then the person would recover.
- 7 **Yi gi-lao-jiw.** Also called ti-shao-ma. This was a kind of magical object made by the Yi, which they would bring and hide. If it were encountered by cattle or pigs, these would jump around several times and immediately die. It was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and gather it, to dig it up and carry it away. Then all would be well.
- 8 **Yeu-jio-dlang-hnu.** Also called Yeu-dlang-hnu. This was one who, the old people said, made sky and earth and all things.
- 9 **The venerable and the old.** This was the custom of the old people to worship rocks and to worship trees, in order that the rocks and trees might protect people and bring peace. The time for this worship was every year in Horse-month and on Horse-day.
- 10 **Worship of the door.** This was worshipped in order that the door might shut evil and calamity outside, and open that the good and the fortunate might enter the house.
- 11 **Sowing souls.** Also called zao-ki-lao.

12 **Ndao-shu.** This was the pollution of a house caused by a daughter, or by the death of a person from another house, or by that which was ritually unclean. It was necessary to get the shaman-healer to come and gather it up, then things would be well.

13 **Nao-nao.** This concerned one party of people ill-wishing another party. They made a “nao-nao” which they took and buried. The result was that the person whose “nao-nao” had been made died, so punishing the family which had been ill-wished. It was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come, dig it up and carry it away, then things would be well.

Above has been set out thirteen kinds of spirits, some were good, some were evil. If they were encountered, people would become seriously ill. When this happened it was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and cure the disease. Below will be set out how the spirits had to be worshipped, and how the cure was brought about that the patients might recover.

M372

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness  
1. Worshipping the Spirit Zu-gi-za.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

In his description of the Miao spirit worship Yang Yung-xin's treatment of the worship of the Spirit Zu-gi-za and the ancestors was apparently a precis of the second part of Wang Ming-ji's account, that is of M354. Either he had no knowledge of the first part of Wang Ming-ji's description, M352 and M353, or he simply chose to ignore it. He does not add any new information about the beliefs or the worship-procedures except the fact that at the zi sacrifice, in addition to the old ox, one further animal for each surviving brother had to be offered.

Yang Yung-xin's account of spirit worship is preceded in Document F by a miscellaneous collection of material, mostly short incantations, on a variety of different subjects, under the title "Ancient traditions of the Miao old folk". See M339. The last four items in this set, numbers 8 to 11, are in fact incantations which are part of the worship of the Spirit Zu-gi-za and the ancestors. That is where they appear in Wang Ming-ji's record, and why Yang Yung-xin chose to remove them to his miscellaneous group, is not explained.

## Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness

### 1. Worshipping the Spirit Zu-gi-za.

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

When a person was sick it was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and decide its nature. There were four kinds,

1. "The jet-black one". That was to kill and eat the large pig which had been devoted to the spirits.
2. "The place of arriving".
3. "The ancestors want to eat and drink". (Offering livestock to the ancestors.)
4. "The ancestors' ox rope is tangled". ("The end of the road".) It was necessary to kill the old ox.

The time for worship was, "Gather on Rat-day, worship on Ox-day".

In bygone days, if there were sickness, the old folk would call the shaman-healer to come and look, to see what kind of sickness it was. If the shaman-healer said it was this particular kind of sickness, a large pig had to be chosen and devoted. Having waited until the sickness was better, they would then kill and eat the large pig. When they wanted to kill and eat the large pig, it was necessary to call the zu-mu. They would lead the pig out of doors on the eastern side. One person would pour wine into a cup for the ancestors, and this was passed to the zu-mu. Then the zu-mu would say,

Arise, turn back your countenance,  
 Turn your face  
 Smiling, come and take from your children,  
     One cup, one bowl,  
     Two cups, two bowls,  
     Three cups, three bowls,  
 Of this wine to drink, and  
 Smiling come, stretch out your hand  
 To take and hold your livestock, your pig.

Then he would chant,

When we had food to eat, we did not care to eat,  
 But gave it to the large pig to eat.  
 When we had water to drink, we did not care to drink,  
 But gave it to the large pig to drink.

If there are deep holes in the tombs to be filled,  
 Let the large pig be struck down to block them.  
 If there are deep holes in the graves to be covered,  
 Let the large pig run to block them.

When, in the south, Chinese tongues draw near,  
 Let the large pig run to stop them.  
 When, in the north, Yi tongues grow long,

Let the large pig run to stop them.  
When the children go outside, go out of doors,  
From colds and coughs,  
Let the large pig be struck down to protect them.

When the children farm the flat land,  
May good crops fill the flat land.  
When the children farm the level land,  
May good crops fill the level land.

If the children are working the high ground,  
May the good low ground come jumping,  
Jumping to the children's high ground.  
If the children are working the low ground,  
May the good high ground come jumping,  
Jumping to the children's low ground.

So shall the fertile land and place,  
Come to the midst of the children's land,  
And the children will gather crops and harvest,  
To fill the houses and fill the place.

May the children live to fill the walls,  
May their men-folk live to fill the place.  
May their offspring fill the terraces of the fields,  
With cattle and pigs like water flowing.

Let the Nji-vang-bi-lao strike down,  
Strike down the large pig to the ground.

Striking down the old ox. Also called zi.

This ritual, called zi, was performed when a family had died to the point of having no seed. Then they would devote livestock, and sacrifice the old ox. (The old folk used to say, "The ancestors' ox rope is tangled", or it was "The end of the road".) They would sacrifice the old ox, and see whether they would beget off spring.

When this zi was performed, it was necessary to see how many brothers there were, and that number of animals had to be offered. First they offered livestock to the ancestors, then zi could be performed. The time table for zi was,

On Rat-day the zu-mu together with the brothers gathered. (Called "Guests arrive".)  
On Ox-day, at the time of the morning meal, they killed the pig to worship the Spirit  
Yeu-su-mu, and in the evening they led out livestock for the ancestors.  
On reaching Tiger-day they struck down the old ox. (Called "The ox falls".)  
On Rabbit-day the guests dispersed. (Called "Guests depart".)

M373

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness.  
11. Be-a-dli. (Sowing souls.)**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

The Miao winnowed grain by tossing it up in the air from a flat basket. The breeze blew the chaff away, and the heavier grain fell back into the basket. In his list of Miao spirits, (M371), Yang Yung-xin gives “zao-ki-lao”, which means “winnowing spirits” as an alternative to “be-a-dli”, “sowing souls”, as a name for this fertility rite. During the performance of the ritual some kind of seed was thrown into the air, and had to be caught by members of the family holding up the skirt of their nether garments by the hem.

Yang Yung-xin’s account of this ritual is even briefer than that of Wang Ming-ji, (M365), and again the impression is given that there was more to it than we are actually being told.

The remark that, when they were sowing the souls of people, “each family sowed for itself”, is not altogether clear. Possibly it implies that though this was normally a private, family affair, if the object was to improve the flocks and herds or the crops, several families might share it together.

M373

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness.  
11. Be-a-dli. (Sowing souls.)**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

There were three forms of sowing souls. One form was sowing souls for people. Each Miao family “sowed” for itself. The second form was sowing souls for crops. The third form was sowing souls for livestock.

In the course of this sowing souls ritual, the mother had to hold up the hem of her skirt to catch, and the father had to hold up the hem of his gown to catch. When they had finished catching they looked to see if it was much or little, then they took and poured it on to the bed.

In addition they had to take seven eggs, and, in the case of sowing for crops, they had to set seven baskets of grain in the loft. They also had to set seven additional baskets for the shaman–healer. Below they set out a basket of maize meal and a pot of meat. They took spoons, pushing the bowls of the spoons into the basket, with the handles of the spoons sticking up.

M374

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness.  
10. Worship of the door a-nzhang.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

In his account of the worship of the door, Yang Yung-xin follows Wang Ming-ji's manuscript fairly closely, but whereas the latter said that only male members of the family might eat the sacrificial meat, Yang Yung-xin suggests that, though the daughters were excluded, the mother of the family did partake. A possible reason for not including the girls was that the time would come when they would marry and join other families, whereas the boys would always remain part of this family, and would therefore always be involved with the spirit of this particular door.

M374

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness.  
10. Worship of the door a-nzhang.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

(The old people used to say this was worshipping the spirit a-nzhang)

When there had been sickness in a family and they had called the shaman-healer to come and investigate it, then they would worship. A gilt which had had no progeny was required, one which had no blemish at all.

First it had to be killed at the foot of the door, and then lifted to the fireside for the removal of the bristles, which were burned in the fire hole. At the foot of the door a pit was dug. The washings from the intestines, the dung and the blood were all buried in the pit. The meat was brought and boiled in the pot.

The time for doing this could only be an Ox, or a Horse-day, and it had to be a time when there was no thunder. Only the father of the family himself could officiate. On the night that they did it, no Chinese person might come into the house, and no word of Chinese at all might be spoken, for fear of invalidating the sacrifice. Only Miao might be spoken.

When the meat was cooked, the four trotters were cut off. Early in the morning, when it was getting light, the father rose and took the brothers to eat the meat before going outside. Only the father, mother and the sons ate, the daughters did not eat it. When they had eaten the meat the father went and opened the door and said,

Open that prosperity may come in,  
Close that calamity may be shut out.  
When the family, all its many members,  
Keep going and coming and knocking against you, do not be angry.

M375

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**  
**9. Worship of the venerable and the old.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

The Miao title is “Worship of Mi-si-mi-lao”. The word “si” means an elder in the village, “lao” means old, and the whole expression is an honorific name accorded to sacred trees and rocks. The hill on which these stood was called “Drao-mi-si”, meaning the venerable mountain.

This account of the worship, by the village, of its local sacred tree or rock stops just before it reaches its climax. All the preparations were apparently completed, the food and the offering were duly prepared, the incantation had been chanted and the sacred rock or tree alerted by the cry, “It is ready! It is ready!” but there the record breaks off without saying that the offering was actually presented. Instead we are informed that the worship culminated with a libation in honour of the Spirit Zu-gi-za. A detailed discussion of the question that this raises and of the relationship between the worship of the sacred rocks and trees to the worship of the Great Spirit, will be found in the introduction to Wang Ming-ji’s account of the worship of Mi-si-mi-lao. (M357)

M375

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**  
**9. Worship of the venerable and the old.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Every year in Horse-month and on Horse-day they used to worship. When they worshipped it was necessary to carry a chicken and bring a flask of wine, a person also carried a basin of maize meal as well. They went to worship together. Then, when they had eaten they dispersed.

On the Venerable Mountain, neither before nor afterwards, might trees be felled or firewood gathered. Only on the day of worship was tree felling permissible. If they were felled before or afterwards, there would certainly be sickness. If, however, they had been felled in ignorance, and the sickness came, it was necessary to carry a chicken and bring wine and worship at that time, then it would get well.

When they went to worship they would say,

Grandfather rock, Grandfather tree,  
You live on high you can see clearly.

Do you take care of the children,  
When the children go out,  
And as they walk the rocky, the precipitous paths,  
And as they walk through the waters.

From thieves and soldiers, tigers and wolves,  
Do you defend them  
And give them protection.

Next year on this day,  
The children will bring,  
Bring wine for you to drink,  
Bring meat for you to eat.

(They then said, "It is ready! It is ready!" and the ritual was finished.) Having finished the worship, some wine was poured out and presented on the left side, an offering to the Spirit Zu-gi-za. So the requirements were fully complete.

**M376**  
**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those which caused**  
**sickness.**

**12. Ndao-shu.**

(shu is blood)

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

This is a shortened version of Wang Ming-ji's account of the ndao-shu ritual and the explanations in the introduction to that account, M366IN, apply here as well. There are, however, two small pieces of additional information. The length of cloth required for the shaman-healer's trousers was four Chinese feet. A Chinese foot was about fourteen inches long. None of the young woman's family had any role to play in the house cleansing except that her father had to indicate with his foot the location of the child's birth. He was not permitted to speak. However, when the house-cleansing party left and had travelled less than half a mile, he followed them, sharing a smoke and a drink before they finally departed.

In his list of spirits, M371, Yang Yung-xin notes that a similar ritual was required to cleanse the house if a stranger died there.

M376

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness.  
12. Ndao-shu.**

(shu is blood.)

***Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.***

This was the pollution of a house by a daughter and it had to be cleansed to put things right. The ritual was called “striking the blood”. The shaman-healer had to be brought. A dog was required and it was also necessary to set seven baskets or else nine baskets of “horse food”, together with a piece of cloth, four Chinese feet in length, for trousers, and one thousand two hundred cash as well. When the shaman-healer had arrived, seven lengths, or else nine lengths of hemp stalk had to be cut and tied up with red yarn. Seven lengths were bound with seven bands, nine lengths were bound with nine bands, and placed on a table in the middle of the house. With a brush, the dust in the room from front to back was swept to the table, there in the middle of the house. The shaman-healer took a hi-zhi, (a piece of bamboo split into four) and poked out anything under the bed or under the shelf, bringing it to the table. While stirring a basin of water, the shaman-healer recited at length an incantation. Two helpers who were with him, one leading the dog went ahead, the other carrying the chicken followed behind, going around the fireplace, three times to the right and three times to the left. Then another helper brought the washing dolly. According to the number of baskets he struck that number of times with the washing dolly. The head of the family might not speak, but only with his foot indicate the place where the child had been born. The father-in-law who had come to cleanse the house, would bring a felt cape and wrap up the child. He would spread the skirt of his gown and gather up the spirit of the child and the spirits of his descendants. He gathered up the blood also by wrapping up the dust. The shaman-healer went ahead leading the dog and carrying the chicken, and they all went outside together. When they had gone about one li, the father of the family would follow them, and they would smoke and drink wine together. Then each would go his own way, except that, if they had come by one road, when they returned, they would have to use another road.

M377

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**  
**3. Water Ki-zo.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

Introduction.

The services of the shaman-healer had to be paid for. First he had to be given special hospitality. The staple maize meal and green vegetables were taken for granted, but in addition Wang Ming-ji listed chicken and red beans, while Yang Yung-xin mentioned chicken and boiled meat. The latter was probably goat's flesh, but may have been pork. A professional fee was also necessary. This could be money, but was much more likely to have been so many measures of corn, the quantity varying according to the particular service requested. The fee was euphemistically referred to as "horse food".

Wang Ming-ji's account says that immediately after the burst of flame, everyone dropped whatever they were carrying and hurried away in a body, not looking back. Yang Yung-xin says that they all scattered to their own houses. Probably Yang Yung-xin was thinking of the casual spectators who had gathered to watch the proceedings while Wang Ming-ji was specifically concerned with the actors in the drama.

M377

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those which caused  
sickness**

**3. Water Ki-zo.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

If a woman had been washing clothes and returned with a pain in her head, it was said that she had encountered a water ki-zo, and it was therefore necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and cure it. They had to set out a basket of "horse food", kill a chicken and boil meat in preparation. When the shaman-healer arrived, first they had to go and dig a hole to separate the water ki-zo. When he was going to take the sick person to separate the water ki-zo, it was necessary to carry a cross for winding yarn, and one person unwound it, except that this cross had no thread on it. Then another assistant was required to bring a wooden bowl of water and place it at the top of the hole. The hole was on the left and the bowl of water was on the right side. The cross was below the bowl of water. One person unwound yarn, another played a reed pipe, another beat on the bowl of water (the bowl of water represented a drum), while the shaman-healer played a mouth harp. There were also two assistants one of whom lit a torch and the other brought a bowl of pork fat, or else vegetable oil. It was necessary to heat this until it was very hot. When the person who was sick had entered the hole that had been dug and was about half way through, the shaman-healer who had been playing on the mouth harp, took a mouthful of liquid fat and spewed it on to the torch setting it alight. The person who was sick was startled and as a result the sickness recovered. In this way it was reckoned that the water ki-zo had been separated. At once the sick person came away and all the people who were there scattered, each going his own way. When all was finished, the water in the bowl was thrown out by hand, the cross and the reed pipe were dropped, and all came away to the house. They might not look back.

M378

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness  
2. Striking the bi-nzao.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin*

Introduction.

In his list of spirits (M371), Yang Yung-xin inserted a summary of Wang Ming-ji's account of the spirits called bi-nzao and of their activities, so that when he returned to the subject he concentrated on curing patients who had been attacked by one of these spirits.

Three different cures are described. The third one was to lure the bi-nzao from the patient into an egg which was then destroyed, and the second was to administer a potion of arrowroot and fern at sunrise. The first cure was a little more complicated. Very early in the morning the shaman-healer concealed himself, and lay in wait until the patient, quite unsuspecting, emerged from the house to answer the call of nature. While he was so preoccupied the shaman healer dealt him a sudden heavy blow with a leather boot and then speedily withdrew. This shock treatment had the effect of driving the bi-nzao away.

M378

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness  
2. Striking the bi-nzao.**

*Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.*

People, whether men or women, if they had been influenced by a bi-nzao, would need the shaman-healer to be called to come and separate it, then they would be well. Striking the bi-nzao was variously described. Some said that it was “to strike” the bi-nzao, there were those who said it was “to break” the bi-nzao, and it was also said that it was “to separate” the bi-nzao.

When they were striking the bi-nzao, the methods which were used, varied. There was one kind where it was necessary to choose a very early morning. Without the knowledge of the person who was influenced, the shaman-healer would come outside and bring a slip-on boot, with which he would strike the person who was possessed by the bi-nzao, and then return. The patient was so startled that he would recover.

There was another kind for which it was necessary to choose an early morning, just at sunrise, and to prepare powdered arrowroot. When this was boiled together with some ferns and given to the person with the bi-nzao to drink, he would be well.

Then, in another case, it was necessary to take a chicken’s egg. This was tied up and hung on the branch of a peach tree. The shaman-healer shook a string of bells which caused the bi-nzao to come. When the egg began to move they took a knife and struck it. Then the sufferer would be well.

**M379**

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**  
**6. Fanned by the zi-qiao-bao.**

(Also described as encountering smoke.)

***Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.***

Introduction.

In his list of the Miao spirits, (M371), Yang Yung-xin suggested that the sickness caused by the zi-qiao-bao could be cured by cutting off and burning the beard of a goat,. This had the effect of “penning” the spirit. The word used is that commonly used for penning cattle. This form of treatment, however, seems unrelated to that described by Wang Ming-ji (M361) and here repeated by Yang Yung-xin, except that in both cases a goat was involved.

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness**  
**6. Fanned by the zi-qiao-bao.**

(Also described as encountering smoke.)

***Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.***

When a person went out to work, if he encountered the zi-qiao-bao he simply fell down, his eyes rolled from side to side and were open. He could not speak and he could not hear. In such a case he was said to have been fanned by the zi-qiao-bao, and it was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and cure him. When the shaman-healer arrived a male goat had to be led in, and an assistant rode it three times around the place where the sick person was lying, three times to the right and three times to the left. If this was not effective, then it was necessary to roll a spinning wheel, three times to the right and three times to the left, and he would be well.

**M380**  
**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those which caused sickness.**

**7. The Yi gi-lao-jiw.**

(Also called the ti-shao-ma.)

***Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.***

Introduction.

Yang Yung-xin's description of the "dlang", which caused the death of cattle when thrown into the cattle shed, is not quite the same as that offered by Wang Ming-ji. Small sections of bamboo stuffed with cloth or yarn were traditional homes for spirits. The Yi people were sometimes called "Lo-lo", meaning "basket", by the Chinese, on account of the spirit baskets which hung against the ceilings of their houses. These baskets contained, among other things, a number of sections of bamboo an inch or two long, where the spirits could hide. Finding such a small object in the litter of a cattle pen, must have presented even a shaman-healer with something of a problem.

**M380**

**Miao spirits that were worshipped and those that caused sickness  
7. The Yi gi-lao-jiw.**

(Also called the ti-shao-ma.)

***Compiled by Yang Yung-xin.***

This spirit was one which touched livestock and pigs only. It did not touch people. This was an Yi spirit. If one should get on bad terms with an Yi person he would make this “dlang” which he placed in the person’s cattle shed, and the cattle and pigs there would become sick and die. Silk thread was packed into a small section of bamboo which was brought and put in the cattle shed, or else put beside the road. If livestock or pigs knocked against it they quickly died. It was necessary to call the shaman-healer to come and investigate, then it would be well.

**M381**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Offering a chicken and a pig to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

Offerings to the ancestors were only made when the departed indicated that something was due. Normally the intimation came in the form of sickness visited on a member of the family, but in this song it was a bad dream, which the shaman-healer interpreted as ancestor-trouble. Worship of the ancestors could take place only at certain times in the year, and only the zu-mu, a kind of family priest, could officiate.

In this, and in two of the following songs (M383 and M384) the ancestors are referred to as “dlang-su-mu” and “dlang-su-nzi”, which presumably mean “spirits of the first people” and “spirits of the first names” respectively. In a note in the Miao text Wang Ming-ji explained that the former name applied to spirits of the departed which no longer have any progeny on earth, while the latter name is for ancestors who do have descendants still living. This explanation may well be correct, and there may also be some correlation with the duality, described in the spirit worship document (M352 to M354), between the Spirit Zu-gi-za, who had always to be addressed as “Yeu-su-mu” and the immediate ancestors. However, in the present songs, though the names may be used separately they are often brought together as a compound appellation, or else appear in parallel lines where the meaning is virtually identical. Nowhere in the text is a distinction drawn between them.

The efficacy of hemp sandals as a protection against the “gang-nzhi”, large caterpillars whose colourful hairs could inflict painful stings like a nettle, is described. However, we are not told whether those made for the ancestors were full size to fit a human foot or some miniature or token offerings. Sandals were usually made of straw, and hemp, though it made excellent sandals, was a valuable commodity, grown for making clothes. We are not told either how the sandals were offered. The ritual killing of an animal released its spirit, which the ancestral spirits could carry or lead away. The ritual scattering of a spoonful of rice with a few shreds of meat and a little wine poured on the top, became a feast in the spirit world. (The remainder of the food was shared by the family and their many guests.) In the Chinese tradition, imitation money and various articles made of paper, or of paper stuck on bamboo frames might be offered to the ancestors by burning, but there is no trace of sacrifice by burning in the accounts of Miao spirit worship, so how the ancestors took possession of their hemp sandals remains unexplained.

**M381**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Offering a chicken and a pig to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji*

The man Li-dao slept,  
Slept in the midst of the man Li-dao's bed,  
And the man Li-dao had an evil dream.

5     The man Li-dao went to consult the shaman-healer,  
The man Li-dao went to consult the enchanter.  
He consulted the shaman-healer, consulted the enchanter, who revealed,  
Revealed that the man Li-dao must offer the great sacrifice,

The man Li-dao prepared rations to carry on his back,  
He went out and about and reached the zu-mu.

10    The man Li-dao together with,  
With the zu-mu went and fixed the time.  
They fixed a time and fixed a date which fell  
In Dragon or Rabbit month,  
And upon an Ox-day or a Horse-day.

15    The zu-mu arrived early,  
And the brothers forgathered.  
The brothers came together with  
With the man Li-dao to make,  
To make the man Li-dao's great sacrifice.

20    The zu-mu used,  
Used a shining knife so as to slice,  
To slice open a section of bamboo  
And make divining sticks, in order to enquire,  
To enquire if the forebears had come.

25    The forebears had arrived on a spider's web,  
For the divining sticks fell spread apart.

30    So call the forebears and offer a chicken,  
Call the ancestors and offer a pig.  
The forebears will carry their chicken in their hands,  
The ancestors will carry their pig on their backs.

35    The women prepared food for the forebears' journey,  
While the men were making,  
Making sandals for the ancestors,  
So the forebears wore hemp sandals,  
And the ancestors wore sandals made of hemp.

The forebears and ancestors climbed together,

40 Climbed the mountain of caterpillars in the abode of the spirits.  
Wearing their hemp sandals, sandals made of hemp, they trod down,  
Trod down the crawling caterpillars, as big as small sheep,  
Trod down the caterpillars on the farther side.

Where was the forebears' dwelling place?  
It was in the red earth of the land of the abode of spirits.  
Where was the ancestors' place of sleeping?  
It was in the coloured earth of the land of the abode of spirits.

**M382**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Devoting an ox and a pig to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

In this song, it was the calling of a flock of birds, which prompted the man to seek the shaman-healer. The expression used to describe the bird-calls means “to wail” or “to lament”, and refers in particular to mourning for the dead, hence the translation “keening”. To the mind of someone who was probably already anxious about his lack of posterity, the bird-song sounded like a dirge, and it seemed to him that, in their lamentation the birds were repeating his name over and over. Accordingly the shaman-healer directed that the ultimate offering, that of the ploughing ox, was called for, that is the ritual called “zr” should be performed. Before the ox could be offered, as Wang Ming-ji explained in his account of Miao ancestor worship, M352 to M354, the regular offering of a pig was required.

The zu-mu came and performed the incantations devoting the sacrificial animals to the ancestors, although the sacrifice itself would have to wait until the proper time of year. He then used divining sticks and ascertained that the ancestors were contented with the promises made, and by means of a further incantation sent the spirits of the ancestors back to their dwelling place. The song does not continue and describe the actual sacrifice, which ultimately took place.

**M382**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Devoting an ox and a pig to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

The sun was shining brightly,  
And in the sunshine the birds, flocking together, were keening,  
Keening at the head of the river,  
Repeating the man, the father's name over and over.

5        So the man, the father, went to consult the shaman healer,  
          To consult the shaman-healer, the enchanter, who revealed,  
          Revealed that the man the father must offer an ox.

10       The sun was shining brightly,  
          And in the sunshine the birds, flocking together, were keening.  
          Repeating the man, the father's name over and over.

So the man, the father went to consult the enchanter,  
To consult the shaman-healer, the enchanter, who revealed,  
Revealed that the man, the father, must offer a pig.  
Then the man, the father, returned and reached home.

15       The man, the father, went and called,  
          Called the people's zu-mu to come and to devote,  
          Devote to grandfather, the grandfather's ox.

20       The man, the father, went and called,  
          Called the people's zu-mu to come and to devote,  
          Devote to grandmother, the grandmother's pig.

So the grandmother might lead,  
Lead the pig with her hand,  
And the grandfather might lead,  
Lead the ox with his arm.

25       The people's zu-mu made divination with sliced divining sticks,  
          And the divining sticks fell all together.  
          So the people's zu-mu was able to escort,  
          Escort grandmother and grandfather to their home.

30       Where was the grandmother and the grandfather's homeland?  
          It was there in the pile of red earth.  
          Where was the grandfather and grandmother's homeland?  
          It was there in the pile of black earth.

**M383**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Washing the ancestors' feet.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

This short piece suggests that, in addition to the rituals described by Wang Ming-ji in his account of Miao ancestor worship, M352 to M354, the spirits were welcomed on their arrival for a sacrificial offering, by having their feet washed, and this ritual was repeated before they were escorted on their way back to their abode. Unfortunately there is no description of how it was carried out, beyond the fact that some water was heated and poured into a bowl for washing. It may be that there was nothing more. The water was simply placed in the bowl, an incantation recited, and then the water was thrown away. According to song M384, the women performed the foot-washing duty, but, of course, any incantation would have been chanted by the zu-mu.

**M383**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**Washing the ancestors' feet.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Bring a copper pan for heating water,  
And a copper bowl for washing feet.  
Wash the forebears' and ancestors' feet and make them white,  
Wash the forebears' and ancestors' feet and bid them enter.

- 5      Bring a copper pan for heating water,  
          And a copper bowl for washing feet.  
          Wash the forebears' and ancestors' feet and make them clean,  
          Wash the forebears' and ancestors' feet and bid them depart.

**M384**  
**A song of spirit worship.**  
**The Hmao-dang clan's song of offering an ox to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

This song tells how the ancestors of the whole of the Hmao-dang clan, including all seven sub-clans, were disturbed from their rest by large black ants gnawing at their bones. Accordingly they arose and demanded the offering of an ox. The Man Li-dang, presumably the head of the clan, supported by the seven sub-clans, acceded to their demand, and the ancestral spirits were escorted back to their dwelling, satisfied. The problem with this sequence of events is to determine how it accords with the normal pattern of rituals as they are described in M382 to M384.

The Hmao-dang clan was traditionally divided into seven sub-groups the names of which are listed at the end of the song. Ordinary Miao people who were questioned were well aware of the existence of these sub-groups, and that “the old people” took note of them, but for exactly what purpose was not clear. No information was forthcoming about sub-groups in other clans, beyond the fact that they certainly existed.

The ritual described in the song was that of “the great sacrifice”, that is the offering of an ox to the ancestors. Normally this ritual would have been performed by a particular family. It was an extreme and very costly procedure, only undertaken when there was a real danger of the family actually dying out. However, it is possible that just occasionally it was carried out, as a kind of insurance, on behalf of the whole clan, with each of the sub-clans contributing.

It seems that the clan was alerted to the need for a sacrifice by the appearance of large black ants swarming among the graves. This was something that could be observed, but starting from this point, someone deduced, first that the ancestors were being pestered and were unhappy, second that they had risen up from their abode and were demanding a sacrifice, and third that it must be “the great sacrifice”, the offering of an ox. The person who alone was in a position to make these pronouncements would have been the shaman-healer, and although the song makes no mention of it, it is certain that such a consultation with a shaman-healer must have taken place.

M384

**A song of spirit worship.**

**The Hmao-dang clan's song of offering an ox to the ancestors.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

The seven communities of the Gi-dang clan,  
The seven communities of the Gi-dang spirit,  
Their forebears were sleeping mound by mound in their coffins.  
But the great black ants all gathered together,  
5 And the great black ants came gnawing,  
Gnawing at the ancestors' bones, tormenting them,  
Until the ancestors could not endure it,  
And the ancestors rose up demanding an ox.

10 The seven companies of the Gi-dang clan,  
The seven companies of the Gi-dang spirit,  
Seven companies led seven sheep,  
Led them, and with the man Li-dang,  
They offered the great sacrifice.  
So the man Li-dang killed,  
15 Killed an ox for the ancestors.

When the morrow came,  
The man Li-dang's daughter-in-law washed,  
Washed the ancestors' feet and made them white,  
And caused the ancestors to return to their home.

The names of the seven Gi-dang sub-clans are set out below.

Gi-dang tiger.  
Gi-dang dragon.  
Gi-dang Chinese.  
Gi-dang who climb from the valley floor.  
Gi-dang who climb up the land.  
Gi-dang who plant bamboo.  
Gi-dang wormwood.

**M385**  
**Song of the spirit woman and the widower.**

***Sung by Tao Zi-gai.***

Introduction

Behind this song is the story of a married couple in the full vigour of youth, but the wife was struck down by some wasting disease from which, in the space of a short time she died. Shortly after, the same fate overtook her husband.

The Miao believed that each person possessed a spiritual element called, in common speech, the “a-dli”, or, in the songs “dli-a-dlo”, as well as a physical body. The a-dli was free to wander away, or could be frightened away from the body, so that if a person had any traumatic experience, especially while away from home, the two might get separated. In these circumstances a ritual had to be performed to call back the a-dli to the body.

In the present song the a-dli of all the people in a community are described as climbing upwards swiftly together, rather like a herd of deer ascending a mountain side, but where they were going and why is not explained. Nzyu-gi-niao is the name of the abode of the spirits of the dead. Here it is personified and pictured as a hunter setting snares to catch any unwary a-dli that might be passing. Once caught, the a-dli was confined in nzyu-gi-niao, and the person concerned, bereft of his a-dli, would sicken and die.

This song falls into two exactly parallel sections each containing 14 lines. In the course of transmission some disruption has occurred in the text of the second section. A full discussion will be found in the notes (M385NT).

**M385**  
**Song of the spirit woman and the widower.**

*Sung by Tao Zi-gai.*

This year we may know,  
Know that the abode of spirits has set a snare of copper wire.  
Now the souls of the people were climbing, carefree and at speed,  
And the soul of the woman Ko-li-ndang climbed too, carefree and at speed,  
5 But the soul of the woman Ko-li-ndang was snared by the neck and the arm.

Before, the woman Ko-li-ndang was like the sunrise,  
But afterwards,  
The woman Ko-li-ndang was like the sunset,  
For this year the harbingers of death, coming stealthily, had imprisoned,  
10 Had imprisoned the woman Ko-li-ndang, and there was no getting away.

Before, the woman Ko-li-ndang was like a flower in full bloom,  
But afterwards,  
The woman Ko-li-ndang was like a flower dropping.  
Grieve that, for the woman Ko-li-ndang, the sky is dark

15 This year we may know,  
Know that the abode of spirits has set a snare of iron wire.  
Now the souls of the people were climbing, quickly and yet more quickly,  
And the soul of the man Ko-li-ndang climbed too, quickly and yet more quickly,  
But the soul of the man Ko-li-ndang was snared by the neck and the hand.

20 Before, the man Ko-li-ndang was like the sunrise,  
But afterwards,  
The man Ko-li-ndang was like the sunset,  
For this year the harbingers of death, coming stealthily, had trapped,  
Had trapped the man Ko-li-ndang, and there was no escape.

25 Before, the man Ko-li-ndang was like a flower in full bloom,  
But afterwards,  
The man Ko-li-ndang was like a flower drooping.  
Grieve that, for the man Ko-li-ndang the road is blocked.

Thus it is ended.

**M386**  
**A song about head-shaving.**

***Sung by Zhang De-jiu from Hmao-lo.***

Introduction.

This song falls into two sections with some thirty lines in each. The sections are almost, though not exactly parallel, line for line. They describe two harvests, which produced unusually heavy yields of buckwheat and barley respectively. These did not occur in consecutive years, for, on the first occasion, the daughter of the home was “the naked one”, that is, a baby, while on the second she was “the adult young woman”, that is approaching marriageable age.

A feature of the song is the repeated use of the word “su” which means “first”. Although its significance is not entirely clear, the probable meaning is that, in the two seasons in question, the woman and the man were the first in the neighbourhood to complete the process of planting, reaping and threshing.

These bumper crops, however, caused the couple concerned some anxiety, which was only relieved when, at a family gathering specially called, the daughter’s head was ceremonially shaved. The reason for this is not explained, but possibly it was feared that the good harvests might attract to the household the attention of some evil spirit which could harm the daughter, and the head-shaving was calculated, in some way, to act as a deterrent. Whatever the explanation, the result seems to have been entirely satisfactory.

**M386**  
**A song about head-shaving.**

***Sung by Zhang De-jiu from Hmao-lo.***

- The sun was shining brightly,  
And the sunshine was good,  
Good for the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, to plant their buckwheat  
early.
- 5 The growing buckwheat showed dark on the ground,  
And the ripened buckwheat would provide food.
- The woman, the mother, and the man, the father, were the first to take,  
Take their curved sickles, carrying them to reap,  
To reap the buckwheat and clear the ground,  
And they set up the sheaves like a flock of pigeons feeding.
- 10 With the arrival of the next day, as it came,  
Early at dawn, with the breaking of the day,  
The sun came shining brightly,  
And the sunshine was good,  
Good for the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, to thresh their buckwheat  
early.
- 15 The man, the father, levelled,  
Levelled the threshing floor, flat and smooth.  
The woman, the mother, came and took,  
Took a rope, and coming to the thirty rows,  
Gathered the buckwheat and cleared the ground.
- 20 So the man, the father was the first to thresh,  
To thresh the rows of buckwheat.  
This year has been a good season, a good year.  
The woman, the mother, and the man, the father, were first to gather,  
And they gathered buckwheat enough to fill the building.
- 25 But the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, were uncertain in mind,  
So the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, arranged,  
Arranged for all the relatives to come,  
To come and shave the naked one's head.
- 30 Then the naked one grew,  
Grew steadily and vigorously,  
Grew like the rising sun.
- The sun was shining brightly  
And the sunshine was good,  
Good for the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, to plant their barley early.
- 35 The growing barley filled the ground,  
And the ripened barley was like a flock of flying birds.  
The woman, the mother and the man, the father, were the first to take,

Take their curved sickles in their hands,  
And they came, the first to reap,  
40 To reap the barley and clear the ground,  
And they set up the sheaves like a flock of cranes feeding.

With the arrival of the next day, as it came,  
Early at dawn, with the breaking of the day,  
The sun came shining brightly,  
45 And the sunshine was good,  
Good for the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, to gather their barley  
early.

The woman, the mother, and the man, the father, were the first to come and take,  
To take a rope, and coming to the forty rows,  
To carry the barley and clear the ground

50 The woman, the mother, and the man, the father, threshed,  
Threshed the rows of barley.  
This year has been a good season, a good year.  
The woman, the mother, and the man, the father, were the first to gather,  
And they gathered barley enough to fill the house.

55 But the woman, the mother, and the man, the father, could not settle down,  
So the woman, the mother, and the man, the father were the first to arrange,  
Arrange for all the relatives to come,  
To come and shave the head of the daughter, the adult young woman.

60 Then the daughter, the adult young woman, grew,  
Grew steadily like the full moon.

Thus it is ended.

**M387**

**Song of Hmao-chi borrowing a drum for spirit worship.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

In the two accounts of the old spirit worship, M351 to M380, the use of a drum is only mentioned once, and although drums do feature in two or three of the songs, references to them are quite rare. This song says that the Hmao-chi clan originally had no drums of their own and if they wanted them for ancestral rites they had to borrow from their Hmong, or Chuan Miao cousins.

A time came, however when having migrated, “crossed over”, to a new locality, the Hmao-chi family inadvertently felled a sacred tree in the course of procuring timber for a new house, and discovered that the wood was good for making drums. The approval of the ancestors of the introduction of drums into the traditional worship was at once demonstrated by an increase in the clan.

There was, nevertheless, danger in the possession of drums, for they were not regarded simply as things, but were believed to embody spirit messengers. Thus if the drums were beaten by unauthorised persons or at the wrong time, the spirits of the ancestors, being disturbed, might wreak vengeance on the people. This explains the violent reaction of the Chuan Miao when the inquisitive Chinese began beating the drum which the man Chi had borrowed.

## Song of Hmao-chi borrowing a drum for spirit worship.

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

- This year we may know,  
 Know that this year the man Chi, the man Gi-no, is worshipping the spirits.  
 But the man Chi, the man Gi-no, had no drum.  
 So the man Chi, the man Gi-no, went to borrow a drum,  
 5 To borrow from the Hmao-gha-nzhi brothers.
- The man Chi, the man Gi-no, travelled till he reached,  
 Reached a wrong stage on a wrong road.  
 But he went on and on till he met,  
 Met with a Hmao-gha-nzhi swineherd.
- 10 The man Chi, the man Gi-no, opened his mouth and asked,  
 “Where is the mother-drum hanging?”  
 “The mother-drum is hanging on the side of the sun’s rising”,  
 “Where is the father-drum hanging?”  
 “The father drum is hanging on the side of the sun’s setting”.
- 15 The Hmao-gha-nzhi brothers took,  
 Took the mother-drum and lent it,  
 Lent it to the man Chi, the man Gi-no, to carry away for worshipping the spirits.
- Carrying it, he returned and reached,  
 Reached some Chinese on the road.  
 20 As the Chinese examined it,  
 The sound of the mother-drum carried back
- Then the Hmao-gha-nzhi mustered,  
 Mustered their soldiers and went in hot pursuit.  
 They seized the mother-drum and carried it back,  
 25 While the man Chi, the man Gi-no, returned home.
- This year we may know,  
 Know that the man Chi, the man Gi-no, has crossed over and will build a house.  
 And the Man Chi, the man Gi-no went felling trees.
- 30 One which he felled completely,  
 Was a sacred tree, an ancient tree,  
 And when one struck the sacred tree it sounded,  
 Sounded just like a drum.
- So the man Chi, the man Gi-no, felled a sacred tree, an ancient tree,  
 Felled a sacred tree and made a drum,  
 35 With which, the man Chi, the man Gi-no, could worship the spirits.  
 After this what happened?  
 After this the descendants of the man Chi, the man Gi-no, multiplied greatly.

**M388**  
**Concerning the Man Li-dao, section three.**

***Sung by Tao Zi-gai.***

Introduction.

When compiling Documents F and K Yang Yung-xin took four, originally separate songs by Tao-Zi-gai, and ran them together into a single piece of some 350 lines. This, the third section, is virtually unrelated to the other three sections. It concerns the use of drums in the worship of the ancestors, and is obviously another version of the song by Wang Ming-ji, M387, on the same subject.

This song makes it clear that other Hua Miao clans were involved, not simply the Hmao-chi. It seems that the use of drums in the ancestral rites was not originally practised among the Hua-Miao, but was copied from their cousins the Chuan Miao, called in the song the “Hmao-gha-nzhi”.

The time came when the Hua Miao stopped borrowing drums and began to make their own. Wang Ming-ji’s song suggests that this came about when a sacred tree was inadvertently felled, and turned out to be excellent material for drum making. Tao Zi-gai, on the other hand, says that, led by the Hmao-dang clan, that is the man Li-dao, an inter-clan consultation decided that they would hence-forward make their own drums. The Hmao-ndlw clan would make the large, deep-toned drums, the “father drums”, the Hmao-chi would make the medium sized ones, the “mother drums”, and presumably, although it does not actually say so, the “baby drums” would be made by the Hmao-dang themselves.

The drums were believed to possess spirits of their own. In lines 14 and following, we are informed that they begin sounding of their own accord, presumably in protest at the “baby drum” being taken away from the family.

Being no longer beholden to the Chuan Miao for the supply of drums, was a significant boost to the morale of the Hua Miao, as the final four lines of the song indicate. Whatever the Chuan Miao might do, be it singing or piping or, presumably, drumming, the Hua Miao could do it equally well.

**M388**  
**Concerning the Man Li-dao, section three.**

***Sung by Tao Zi-gai.***

This year we may know,  
Know that this year the man Li-dao is worshipping the spirits.  
So the man Li-dao went to borrow a drum,  
To borrow it away in the Hmao-gha-nzhi country.

5 The man Li-dao sought to borrow the “mother drum”,  
But the Hmao-gha-nzhi were unwilling to permit it.  
The man Li-dao sought to borrow the “father drum”,  
But the Hmao-gha-nzhi would not allow it.

10 The Hmao-gha-nzhi gave,  
Gave the “baby drum” on loan.  
So the man Li-dao secured the “baby drum”, carrying it on his back.  
He carried it until he reached,  
Reached the Hmao-gha-nzhi cliffs and gorge.

15 Then the Hmao-gha-nzhi’s “mother drum” sounded seven times,  
And the man Li-dao heard it.  
The “father drum” sounded three times,  
And the “baby drum” sounded three times,  
At which the man Li-dao, carrying the “baby drum”, returned.

20 The man Li-dao opened his mouth, opened his lips, and made request,  
For he wanted the “mother drum” to carry back.  
The Hmao-gha-nzhi received the “baby drum” and hung it up,  
Hung it under the eaves of the Hmao-gha-nzhi house.

25 The Hmao-gha-nzhi climbed quickly up into the loft,  
And the Hmao-gha-nzhi brought down the “father drum” and lent it,  
Lent it for the man Li-dao to carry away.  
So the man Li-dao, carrying the “father drum”, came and reached,  
Reached the man Li-dao’s homestead.

30 In ox-month or tiger-month,  
On ox-day or tiger day,  
When the man Li-dao’s time came, the time for entertaining spirits,  
When the man Li-dao’s time came, the time for entertaining guests,  
The man Li-dao took the “father drum” and hung it from the roof ridge.

35 The man Li-dao’s pipes sounded within the homestead,  
While the man Li-dao’s “father drum” was there under the roof ridge.  
The man Li-dao entertained the spirits well every day,  
He entertained the spirits well every night,  
Then the man Li-dao escorted the spirits on their way.

The man Li-dao together with,

40 With the brothers discussed and reached a conclusion,  
With the brothers-in-law discussed and completed the matter.

The man Li-dao said,  
“To the Hmao-gha-nzhi country,  
The way is far and the stages are long.  
Let not the family be troubled to go and borrow drums”.

45 The man Li-dao carried,  
Carried the Hmao-gha-nzhi “father drum” and returned it.  
Then the man Li-dao came back and reached,  
Reached the man Li-dao’s homestead.

50 Having called the brothers to gather together,  
And having called the brothers-in-law all to forgather,  
The man Li-dao spoke out.

He directed the Ndlw clan to make a “mother drum”,  
And directed the Gi-chi to make a “father drum”.  
So they took sacred fruit trees and made spirit drums,  
55 And they took sacred trees and made ghost drums.

Henceforth when the Hmao-gha-nzhi enthused about their songs,  
The man Li-dao’s family could enthuse about their pipes,  
And when the Hmao-gha-nzhi boasted about their pipes,  
The man Li-dao’s family could boast about their songs.

M389

## The origin of the Hmao-chi ancestral sacrifice.

*Narrated by Yang Xiu-gong.*

Introduction.

One branch of the Hmao-chi clan had a curious custom that, when certain ancestral rites were performed, they would borrow from the Yi landlord a horse and a flag. In the course of the proceedings, a man carrying the flag would ride the horse several times around the sacrifice. This story is told to explain the origin of the custom.

The lad's request for a wife is understandable. He was the youngest in the family, and when it came to his turn to marry, there would be little enough left to pay the marriage settlement for him. The landlord sent him around to the "back of the house", that is to the quarters occupied by the household slaves, to pick fruit, which was not immediately accessible, and would involve him climbing the tree. This accounts for the girl asking for what she could not reach herself. The promise having been made, the landlord honoured it although a junior member of his own family was involved instead of a slave girl as was intended. Both the young folk were still under age, so that the actual marriage would not have taken place until a considerably later date.

**The origin of the Hmao-chi ancestral sacrifice.**

*Narrated by Yang Xiu-gong.*

They tell a story that once upon a time the Hmao-chi clan and the Hmao-ndlw clan were close cousins. One day three of the cousins went to fell a tree in order to make crossbows. The two older cousins took the large, the good pieces to use. The youngest Hmao-chi, not yet very big, went and took that which was not so good together with a branch of the tree to use. He made a small crossbow which had to be wedged and was really no good, but the two older ones made a couple of excellent crossbows.

One day these three went together to hunt wild pig. The two older ones said, “We two will go into the middle of the forest and hunt. You are still not very big, so you stay outside and keep watch”. The younger Hmao-chi said, “Very well, I will keep watch here, you two go and hunt”. When the two older ones had gone into the forest this young Hmao-chi saw a large wild pig at the edge of the forest. He stretched his small crossbow, placed an arrow on top, took careful aim, and loosed one shot, which hit the wild pig and killed it. He took his grass cape and covered the pig. When those two older ones returned he took them to see it. They said, “Now you have shot a pig we must carry it to present to the landlord”.

They carried it to present to the landlord, who said to them, “Which of you shot it?” The two older ones said, “This boy here shot it”. The landlord said to the boy, “I will give you a horse”. The young Hmao-chi said, “I do not want it”. The landlord said, “I will give you some silver”. But he said, “I do not want it”. So the landlord said to him, “What do you want?” He said, “I only want a family for myself”. The landlord said to him, “In that case, behind my house is a fruit tree. You go and pick some to eat. Of my slave women, whichever one comes and wants fruit from you to eat, I will give that one to you”. The youngest Hmao-chi went to pick and eat, and a girl from the landlord’s own family came and asked for some. When he returned the landlord said to him, “Who came and wanted fruit from you to eat?” He replied, “Only the landlord’s young sister asked me for some to eat”. The landlord said, “Well then, I will give you my young sister”. He said to the landlord, “If you give me your sister what shall I do in the future when I worship the ancestors?” The landlord answered, “If you want to worship the spirits, come, take my flag and carry it, and take my horse and ride it”. So the matter was concluded, and now, when the Hmao-chi family worship the ancestors, they follow this custom.

**M390**  
**The song of Du-bw the weak one.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Introduction.

The story in this song is substantially the same as that in Yang Xiu-gong's prose version, (M389), except that here the Yi landlord required further proof of the young Hmao-chi's prowess as a marksman. There is also no mention of the landlord's flag, which figures in the prose narrative. The song, however, makes it clear that no religious problem would arise until the landlord's daughter died, and her spirit joined the spirits of the ancestors. Then, the fact that she was of a different race would have to be taken into account, or she, and may be even her forebears, could not rest contentedly, and that might result in retribution being visited on succeeding generations.

The three Miao who feature in the song are not given personal names, but descriptive titles, even though the words are underlined in the manuscript as though they were proper names. Each begins with the word "Du", which simply means "the person". Thus "Du-chi" and "Du-ndlw" mean, respectively, "The person, a member of the Chi clan", and "The person, a member of the Ndlw clan". The youngest of the trio is accorded a more complicated title, which, in the English translation, has been rendered "Du-bw the weak one", but see the Notes (M390NT) for a more detailed discussion.

**M390**  
**The song of Du-bw the weak one.**

*Collected by Wang Ming-ji.*

Who was it saw a crossbow tree, a mulberry tree,  
Standing on the undulating ridges of Ngga-yi-gi-zai?  
Who went and saw it?  
Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, went and saw it.

5 Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, whetted,  
Whetted the knives, which they carried to fell,  
Fell a tree trunk for fashioning crossbows.

Du-bw the weak one carried.  
Carried a knife, not extremely sharp,  
10 And cut a branch from an immature tree.

Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, made,  
Made bows and stocks, crossbows finished with lacquer.  
Du-bw the weak one made,  
Made a bow and stock, a crossbow fixed with wedges.

15 Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, found the trail of the animals,  
Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, followed after the game,  
And the old folk waited in the tracks of the game.  
But Du-bw the weak one just waited in the road.

Du-bw the weak one built a hide in the road,  
20 And at the time when breakfast is eaten,  
The wild boar came warily by.

Du-bw the weak one shot,  
Shot the wild boar beside the road.  
He took off his grass cape and covered,  
25 Covered the wild boar at the edge of the forest.

Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, together with,  
Together with the old folk arrived.  
Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, enquired,  
“Have you seen the wild boar come out here?”

30 Du-bw the weak one spoke the truth,  
“The wild boar has passed by,  
And Du-bw the weak one has taken off his grass cape and covered,  
Covered the wild boar beside the road”.

Du-bw the weak one got Du-chi and Du-ndlw to take the wild boar and carry,  
35 Carry it, and go to drink wine,  
To drink at Gha-sang-ya the Elder’s place.

Gha-sang the Elder poured,  
Poured out the clear wine for,  
For Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, to drink.

40 But Du-chi and Du-ndlw, two brothers-in-law, had not shot it,  
So the two brothers-in-law could not drink.  
Gha-sang the Elder asked Du-chi and Du-ndlw, “Who then did shoot it?”  
“Du-bw the weak one shot it”.

Gha-sang the Elder would not believe it.  
45 So Gha-sang the Elder took,  
Took a ragged skirt for Du-bw the weak one to shoot.  
Du-bw the weak one shot and hit it.

But still Gha-sang the Elder would not believe it.  
Then Gha-sang the elder paid out,  
50 Paid out shining silver to buy,  
To buy a water buffalo from the Ruling Race.

Du-bw the weak one shot,  
Shot the water buffalo away yonder,  
The cow fell on the spot,  
55 And the calf fell gently on the river bank.

Gha-sang the Elder poured out clear wine for,  
For Du-bw the weak one to drink,  
But Du-bw the weak one was unwilling to drink.  
So Gha-sang the Elder asked what Du-bw the weak one wanted.

60 Du-bw the weak one wanted a family of his own.  
Gha-sang the Elder let Du-bw the weak one pick,  
Pick sour fruit to eat, climbing up beside the road.  
“I will give you whoever requests some to eat”.

Now Gha-sang the Elder’s daughter, the Yi girl, came asking for some to eat.  
65 So, in this way Du-bw the weak one gained,  
Gained Gha-sang the Elder’s daughter, the Yi girl, in marriage.

But should a day come when Gha-sang the Elder’s daughter, the Yi girl, was taken  
seriously ill,  
And if Gha-sang the Elder’s daughter, the Yi girl, should die,  
Du-bw the weak one would not know the rituals.  
70 So Du-bw the weak one returned and asked,  
Asked Gha-sang-ya the Elder.

Accordingly Gha-sang the Elder gave,  
Gave a horse, the colour of frost, the colour of wood-ash,  
For Du-bw the weak one to ride and perform,  
75 Perform ancestor worship for the descendants of Gi-chi,  
Perform spirit worship for the families of Gi-chi.

Thus it is ended.

