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Lao-gi-jiai and the Man Dao.

Narrated by Wang Ming-ji.

He was a man of the Hmao-dang clan. In the songs he is given the name “Grandfather Dao”. That is because his son was called “The strong one”. [“Dao” means “strong” or “able”.] There are songs which call him by the name Zye-lao-no, the man Si-gyu-zi-lao. (He was one who reared cattle.)

He heard that a Chinese “enchanter” had arisen and that there would be fighting along the borders, so he went in search of Gi-vu and Gi-chi to discuss the situation. When he had found the elder Gi-chi and Gi-vu Gi-ndlw, the three of them went together to relieve the borders. Together they repelled the Zhung-jia and the Chinese, the Man Yellow who came from Cai-sie-mi-fu-di. These three were brothers in law, and whenever there was trouble on the borders they together repelled it. That was during the time of Tang-yao and Yu-shun. In the Chinese books, Shang shu and Yu gong dian it says “Shun defeated three tribes of Miao, pushed them to the north and split them into three groups”.

The elder Gi-yio lived on a mountain called Mount Gi-yio, so everyone called him the Man Gi-yio. Of great strength, he carried a large club to repel the Chinese. When in combat with the Chinese he swung the club round and round making a whirling sound like a flying beetle, so he was called the Man Shai as well, [“shai” means “to whirl” or “to buzz”.] But he could only use a sword or a club, being unable to handle the crossbow. This being the case, when the borders had to be protected, he had to go and seek the elder Gi-chi at Mount Gi-no, and seek the Man Hxai at Mount Gi-vu. Now Gi-vu Gi-ndlw could use the smooth crossbow, shooting down the Chinese at a considerable distance.

Gi-chi Gi-no, Gi-vu Gi-ndlw and the elder Gi-yio, while following game came to the Tracts of Mi-li and the Plains of Li-mo in the four-square country of Ndlo-hlang-dleu-di. Presently they brought all the Miao descendants, and came to live and to fill the Tracts of Mi-li and the Plains of Li-mo, building houses with timber frames and tiled roofs, where they lived in their families, an ever spreading company. The elder Gi-vu organised the Miao community and built Lao-u, the elder Gi-no organised the building of Lao-gu, and the elder Gi-yio, the man Li-dao, organised the building of Lao-gi-jiai. These three at that time were the chief elders and the senior members of the Miao people. (“Chief elders” mean the paramount leaders, while the “senior members” were the governors of the cities and their lands.) These men were also both wise and famous. They secured and held firm the borders for us Miao, so that ensuing generations could continue their farming and enjoy good health. But wherever the Miao went they were pursued by the Chinese. They even pursued and took the Tracts of Mi-li and the Plains of Li-mo. In the Chinese book, “Shi jun lan pian, Lu shi chun qui” there is a passage which reads, “Yao conquered the uncivilised Miao, and occupied the Dan-han area and made his son Shu-dan the ruler”. So it was that there was fighting from the Year of the Cockerel to the Year of the Cockerel. [that is the complete cycle of twelve years] A large number of Chinese were killed, and, on this the Miao side, very many fell. This time must be explained clearly. By this time it was no longer those three old folk who came previously, Gi-no, Gi-vu and Gi-yio. When they were at Mount Mi-lie, this group who came and settled in the middle of the Die-fao-tai country, had gone. In his book,

“Wei du” written by Han Fei-zi it says, “In Shun’s rule there were rebellious Miao. Yu Shun became ruler of Hua-shi. He continued to wage war on these three Miao groups and control them at Mi-li Mountain”. At that time Hmao-ndlw, the man Hxai, wore a grass cape, carried his crossbow for war on his back, and three quivers of arrows at his waist. Now from the top, his chest he appeared speckled like the breast of a chicken, so that everyone called him, “chicken breast man”.

The elder Hmao-chi, also called the elder Hxe, was the commander of soldiers, who marshalled the troops.

Hmao-vu-gi-ndlw built a city in Honan on the banks of the river of yellow water at Ban-chuan. The city he built was Lao-gu. Hmao-dang’s city was Lao-gi-jiai by the bridge at the head of the plain. (It lay in the region to the north west of Ban-chuan.) They fought but could not hold the plain, so the family of the elder Hmao-ndlw Gi-yie fled from Lao-u and crossed to Lao-ndli. Lao-ndli was only a short distance from the Ndu-na-yi-mo river. The Hmao-chi family had crossed to the Di-yi-bang plain. Meanwhile the Hmao-dang family, loath to leave their own land and place, were still living in their native Lao-gi-jiai. After this there arose in the Hmao-jiai clan one who was an outstanding military leader. His name was Gha-sao-hmao-byu, and his family lived on “Pewter plain” at the foot of the plain.

Gha-sao-hmao-byu commanded soldiers mounted on horses trained for war. In fact all the songs sing of Gha-sao-hmao-byu as the foremost cavalry officer in charge of soldiers armed with knives and swords. Together with the elder Gi-chi and the elder Gi-vu he settled in one area of Ndlo-hlang-dleu-di, and became famous. Those three fought with Dlao-jiao-vao-zyu-lao and Gi-yie-vao-zyu-lao by the river, along the seven bends of the riverbank. Our three men fighting the Chinese resembled the felling of the forest. For all their fighting the Ruling Race could not take the land, and the two, Hmao-chi and Hmao-ndlw, laughed aloud.

The family homes of these two brothers-in-law were both not far from the river Ndu-na-yi-mo, and so were only one hundred and twenty li from each other. Meanwhile the Chinese returned, and having constructed flat and keeled boats, placed in them straw effigies covered with thin cloth in order to deceive the Miao into keeping watch and shooting at them. The two despatched their retainers and soldiers to go and defend on the river.

Having stood guard for three days and three nights and seeing no movement they realised that the Chinese had wrapped straw effigies in thin cloth, setting them in boats to deceive the retainers and soldiers into shooting their arrows into what were only straw effigies. So the elder Gi-chi and the elder Gi-vu laughed, “Ha! ha!” saying, “The Chinese, unable to overcome us fighting, are trying to deceive us by making straw effigies!” Accordingly they relaxed, and all came to drink wine, until the retainers were spread around like small wine jars beside the fire. Drinking wine, enjoying themselves and laughing they all became drunk as rabbits and rats. They collapsed on the bed, and around the walls of the room, lying scattered all about.

Meanwhile the Chinese retainers and soldiers came by a round about way to the foot of the plain, and the Hmao-dang family who lived there came quickly to say that Dlao-jiao-vao-zyu-lao and Gi-yie-vao-zyu-lao had come to the bottom of the plain by a round about way.

Unfortunately the elder Gi-chi was relaxed and said, “The Chinese are still acting like children and there is nothing on earth, or in the sky, to be afraid of”. He did not prepare the soldiers or set a watch, choosing to drink himself drunk, so that, stretched out on the bed, he was quite unaware of the great Chinese army, coming by a round about way, was arriving like sand blowing in the wind. The drunken Miao retainers and soldiers, given into their hand, suffered great loss.

The elder Gi-chi and the elder Gi-no were completely defeated. All they could do was to raise their voices and weep to the sky. The Chinese took the elder Gi-yie and the elder Gi-chi and bound them on the top of a rock on the mountain. Presently the Chinese returned to attack the family Hmao-jiai and the family Hmao-dang, the soldiers of the Man Li-dao. By that time the earlier Hmao-dang, the Man Li-dao, was no longer living. There remained only a Hmao-ndlw and a Man Li-dao with Zie-lao-no of Si-gyu-zi-lao. Zie-lao-no was one who pastured cattle. He was a descendant of Hmao-dang, the Man Li-dao. The Chinese chose the day when all the able-bodied were out celebrating the festival to come and set fire to Lao-gi-jiai, making a cloud of smoke which turned the sky black. The corn in flower became evil smelling and dropped because of the smell of the smoke. All over, Lao-gi-jiai was going up in flames, every place bright with fire. As the old people’s proverb has it,

“To turn back on the road even to nurse a child,
is to die on the road despite the best of health”.

Unfortunately the Man Li-dao’s ‘ears were relaxed’. He allowed the old folk to spend their time pleasantly, every year concerned only with the supply of food and clothes, with worshipping the spirits and in convivial entertainment, and gave no thought to security. So then with the coming of Rabbit month in the year of the Monkey, when everybody was busy preparing for the Miao celebration, Gi-yie-vao-zyu-lao and Diao-jiao-vao-zyu-lao chose the day when the Miao, all the able-bodied, had gathered for celebrations, to come and set fire to Lao-gi-jiai. They attacked and pursued the people, cutting them down and killing them as they tried to flee. Our old folk, mothers and fathers simply took the children, took the women and the babies, and fled out of Lao-gi-jiai, away to the dark forest.

On their way to hide, as they fled, they snatched up some festival meat, and taking some partially cooked rice, carried it out to the forest, where they warmed up the meat for the children to eat, while the adults simply scooped up partially cooked rice to go with it. Because of this, their descendants, on the first day of the festival celebration, prepare the food, but snatch up some festival meat for the children going out to pasture the cattle. They also pack up meat for lunch, which, with meal cakes, they carry out into the fields to be warmed up and eaten. The root and origin of this custom is in remembrance of these events.

Presently they followed in the footsteps of those who had first fled before them. Coming, and coming on, they reached a place called Ngga-yi-shi-lw, and the plain of Ngga-yi-shi-lw. In this country there were Hmong who had first come and settled there. It was indeed Hmong country.

The Man Li-dao and the man Hmao-ndlw took their clans to live among the Hmong. When they came to settle in the Hmong country the offspring of the Man Li-dao erected a new city on the Ngga-yi-shi-lw plain. They led the people out to level paddy fields, farming to support their descendants. They planted cotton, which they spun into yarn to

make clothes. Afterwards, as they began to spread, group after group migrated to Lao-dlu.

The Hmao-dang family, who fled later and came to live with the Hmong, built rough shelters on the far side of the Ndu-gi-njie river for rearing cattle. At that time the man Si-gyu-zi-lao came right at the end. Therefore they called him the man “Hmao-finish”. [A pun on the word “dang” which is both the clan name and also means “finished”.] The man Gi-dang came to live for a short time only and settled on the plain of Go-dleu, the plain of Gao and the plain of Zi-sie.

So it was that the Man Li-dao died here. Then Nza-lyu-lyu arose to resist along the Chinese borders, and a man of the Hmao-dang family, escorting the offspring, followed to the head-waters of the river Gi-nzhe, and then followed the river, and came to settle in Na-no country. At that time the woman Cao and the Man Cao were living on the far side of the river Gi-nzhe, not yet having come to Byu-no, but they had reached the limits of “Blossom open country”. Moreover the Hmao-ndlw family, which came to live in Ngga-yi-shi-lw country, because the borders were increasingly disturbed, with the Chinese killing many men of Hmao-ndlw, brought all their descendants to “Blossom open country”. (According to tradition “Blossom open country” in the song is Quiyang and Kaiyang. All twelve tribes were there.)