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DISTICH AND ANTIPHONAL SINGING: ORIGINATION EPIC AND HEROIC EPIC OF THE MIAO PEOPLE

Abstract. Miao, who mainly dwells in the southwest part of China, is a large ethnic group that maintains broad diversity in dialects and cultures. Miao's dialects could be divided into three dialect areas with great differences in language and culture among each other, and this difference is also well manifested in their epics. This paper, based on the Miao epics that the author has collected during his fieldwork among Miao groups, employs the comparative method and makes a thorough introduction of the Miao epics according to their different dialect areas. This introduction comprises both the forms and the contents of the Miao epics. As to the forms, the epics from the eastern and western dialect areas are usually performed by one singer at a time with antithesis verses. As to the contents, the epics from eastern and central dialect areas are mainly creation epics while those from western dialect area are mainly heroic epics. Though there are no heroic epics in the eastern dialect area depicting wars, there are migration epics depicting the migrations caused by wars, especially those migrations along the river. By exploring and navigating Miao's history, this paper maintains that the relation between the dialect areas, the epic forms, and contents might be caused by migration and wars. For instance, the Miao in the western dialect area had more wars and migrations, and thus they have more heroic epics. While in the eastern dialect area and central dialect area where they enjoyed a long-term peaceful life, their epics are mainly creation epics.

Keywords: Miao people, ethnic group, origination epic, heroic epic, distich, antithesis, migration and wars, dialect, Miao ancient song, King Yalu.

Сяодонг Ву

Дистих и антифонное пение: эпос о происхождении и героический эпос народа Мяо

Аннотация. Мяо, проживающие в основном на юго-западной части Китая, являются большой этнической группой, которая поддерживает широкое разнообразие диалектов и культур. Народ Мяо можно разделить на три диалектные группы с большими различиями между собой в языке и культуре, и это различие также хорошо проявляется в их эпосах. В данной работе материалом исследования служат тексты эпосов Мяо, записанные автором во время полевой работы среди групп Мяо, и используется сравнительный метод. Подробно раскрываются особенности эпосов различных диалектов Мяо. В работе рассматриваются как формы, так и содержание эпосов Мяо. Что касается форм, то эпосы восточных и западных диалектных групп обычно исполняются одним певцом за один раз со стихами-антитезами. Содержание эпосов восточных и центральных диалектных групп – это, в основном, эпос о сотворении мира, а эпосы западных диалектных групп – героические сказания. В диалекте восточной части отсутствуют героические эпосы, изображающие войны, но есть эпосы о миграции, о переселениях, вызванных войнами, особенно вдоль реки. Изучая историю народа Мяо, мы утверждаем, что связь между диалектными группами, эпическими формами и содержанием может быть вызвана миграцией и войнами. Например, у Мяо в западной области было много войн и миграций, и поэтому у них было больше героических эпосов. А в восточной и центральной областях, где они наслаждались долгой мирной жизнью, главным образом бытовали эпосы о создании мира.

Ключевые слова: народ Мяо, этническая группа, эпос о происхождении, героический эпос, дистих, антитеза, миграция и войны, диалект, древняя песня Мяо, король Ялу.

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Introduction

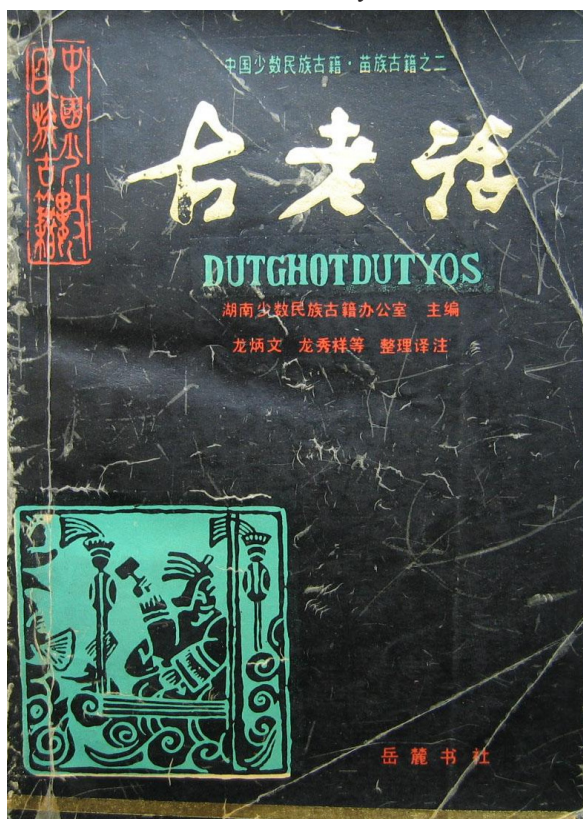
The origination and heroic epics of the Miao people shall be described from the ancient Kingdom of Chu. The people in Kingdom of Chu in the Western Zhou Dynasty and the Spring and Autumn Period were still the Nanman (literally, Southern aborigines) of the Siyi (four native tribes on the Chinese borders). The territory of the current Hunan Province belonged to the then Kingdom of Chu, and there was the Dongting Lake of taking in and sending out the water from the Yangtze River in the north of the Kingdom. The four major rivers in Hunan Province – the Xiang River, the Zi River, the Yuan River, and the Li River flow into this vast lake from the south and west respectively. The ancestors of the Miao people in those days migrated to the South and West along these rivers. The ancestors who migrated to the West along the Yuan River formed the Miao people of speaking the eastern dialect, and they live in western Hunan Province and the northeastern Guizhou Province now. These Miao people kept on moving and passed the north of Guizhou Province and the south of Sichuan Province, and then reached the northeast of Yunnan Province and the northwest of Guizhou Province; and they moved farther to the southeast of Yunnan Province, and even to the Vietnam, Laos and other countries in Southeast Asia, and formed the Miao people of speaking the western dialect now. The ancestors who migrated upstream the Zi River, climbed over the mountains, and then went upstream the Qingshui River and Duli River formed the Miao people of speaking the central dialect now [1, p. 89]. Such massive migrations constitute the main contents of the epics of the Miao people. Through these epics, we could sketch the scene of the migration along the rivers of ancient Miao ancestors with their families.

The Origination Epic of the Miao People in Western Hunan

The origination history of the Miao Ethnic Minority of speaking the eastern dialect (i. e. the Miao Ethnic Minority in western Hunan) is mainly recorded in a literature genre called “dut ghaot” (historical storytelling). Although it is called “dut” (storytelling), it is constituted by neatly balanced distich-sentences. The reason why it is called “dut” is that in the literary genre classification, the genre

of singing is called “sead”, and the genre of chanting is called “dut”, namely the speech [2, p. 15]. There are two major origination epics among the Miao people of speaking the eastern dialect. The first epic is *Xeud Bad Xeud Mab*, which is the uppermost origination epic of the eastern Miao people and is collected in *Selected Works of the Eastern Folk Literature* in the Chinese Miao Literature Series with the Chinese title translated as *The Travels Across the Mountains and Rivers*. A fraction at the beginning of the epic can be narrated separately, and the contents are mainly the retrospect of ancient origin of the slaughter of the buffalo. There is an epic variant entitled *Neb ghunb Mat ghuoud in dut ghot dut yos* (*Ancient Stories*) published by Yuelu Press in 1990, with the Chinese title translated as *Gou Fu Shen Mu* (*Divine Mother and Dog Father*). The other epic is *dut qub dut lanl* (*Words and Speeches for Relatives by Marriage*), which is also collected in the *dut ghot dut yos*.

There is a legend of Panhu recorded in *Sou Shen Ji* (*Anecdotes about Spirits and Immortals*), which is when translated into vernacular Chinese as follows: When Emperor Ku (also known as Gaoxin Shi) was alive, a woman who lived in the palace got



Pic. 1. *Dut ghot dut yos* (*Ancient Stories*) published in Chinese in 1990.

something wrong with one of her ears. One day, a doctor treated the illness for her, and took out a golden worm from her ear. The old woman put the worm in a wooden dipper and covered it with a plate. Soon, the worm changed into a colorful dog, and the old woman named the dog Panhu and fed it. At that time, a powerful and prosperous tribe called Rongwu often invaded the border, and the Emperor had sent generals to fight back the invasion for many times, but only to be defeated every time. With no alternative, the Emperor declared to his people that whoever could decapitate the Rongwu general would be given a thousand catties of gold and a city with ten thousand households and allowed to marry the little daughter of the Emperor. Later, Panhu held a head in its mouth and walked to the palace. The Emperor found that it was the head of the Rongwu general after careful examination. What to do with this? The Emperor asked the ministers, and all the ministers said: "Panhu is not a man, so it shall not be granted the official position or the official's salary, and it cannot also marry a human girl. Though it has made a contribution, we shall not grant the rewards to it". When the little princess heard of this, she said to the Emperor: "Your Majesty has declared to the whole people the marriage to me as the reward to the hero. Now Panhu fetched the head, and it has eliminated a major enemy of the state, so this is not the wisdom power of a dog but the decree of the Heaven! As an Emperor, you shall value the promise and, as a hegemon, you should value your credit. You must not break the promise in front of the people all over the state just because it concerns your daughter, or it will bring disasters to the state". Being awed, the Emperor yielded to the little princess, and then she married Panhu. Panhu led the little princess to the South Mountain, which was flourishing with trees and grass, and there was no trace of people. The little princess took off the costumes and dressed like a servant, and then she climbed the mountains, travelled across the deep valleys, and lived in a stone house with Panhu. The Emperor became very sad and missed his daughter very much. He sent many people to the mountains to find the princess, but when they went into the mountains, there would be windy rain with the sky clouded over; the earth would tremble and the mountains would sway. No one could find where the Princess lived. Three years later, Panhu and the little princess gave birth to six boys and six girls [3, p. 382]. *Neb ghumb Mat ghuoud* is the continuation of this story:

Doub Nex gave birth to the divine mother,
And the Emperor's concubine fed the dog father.
The divine mother gave birth to seven Deb Xongb Deb Yix,
And the dog father fed seven Deb Zhal Deb Kheat.
Seven Deb Xongb,
Seven Deb Zhal;
They looked different from the divine mother,
And from the dog father.
They were quite strong,
With powerful back and shoulders.
So they asked,
Who is our natural father;
And they wondered,
Who is our natural mother [4, p. 62].

Thus, the story started. Deb Xongb Deb Yix did not know who their father was, so they inquired all around. They asked a variety of animals in the mountains, but none of them knew. They had no choice but to go down the mountain to the plain area to ask the cattle and buffalo. The buffalo answered, "I know who your father is and I am familiar with your mother. Your father was the dog, and your mother was the divine mother". After knowing the truth, Deb Xongb Deb Yix became unhappy with grievance, and they decided to "cut off the tongue of the divine mother with a copper sickle, and dig out the heart and liver of the dog father with a silver sword". In this way, Deb Xongb Deb Yix killed the dog father with a copper sickle when the divine mother went out to visit the relatives. Deb Zhal deb kheat felt restless and went to the site to bury the dog father when they heard of the news, and they fled to Yunhu and Yunwei and lived there for fear that the divine mother would blame them. Only a few Deb Xongb Deb Yix still lived in the mountains. When the divine mother went back home and could not find the beloved dog, she asked what had happened. Several Miao people told her the truth. The divine mother was furious on hearing the news, and asked them to kill the buffalo, which had revealed the secret. The

several Deb Xongb Deb Yix went to find the buffalo, but the buffalo refused to obey and fled into a temper. The Deb Xongb Deb Yix became scared and fled without completing their mission. Later, they practiced the skills hard, and finally they surrendered the buffalo, and slaughtered it to sacrifice the dog father. Thus, there was the ancestor-worshipping ritual by slaughtering of the buffalo:

All the men came to beat drums,
All the women came to dance.
Beat eight drums,
And sing the songs on all sides.
Beat the buffalo drum and barbarian drum,
Spring drum and Tuimo drum.
The drum for combing your hair and getting you well dressed,
and the drum for receiving and seeing off the guests.

...
Kill the buffalo,
Offer it as sacrifice to the ancestors [4, p. 77].

Seemingly, this part of the epic relates to the origin of slaughter of the buffalo. In fact, it is the narration of the origination by tracking the origin of the slaughter of the buffalo, so this epic is chanted by the sorcerer bax deib at the Fiesta of the Slaughter of the Buffalo. At the scheduled time, the people of the uncle generation kill the buffalo with spears, just thus as described in the epic: "Our bamboo sprout from your bamboo rhizome, / our seedlings grow from your branches. / On that very day, / please take the sharp spears, / please carry the lances. / We tie the buffalo up, / we bind the buffalo, / you shall pierce its chest at first, / and then cut it open / pierce it to pay for the life of the dog father, / and pierce it to sacrifice the spirit of the dog father" [4, p. 73]. Such a fiesta of the Miao people in western Hunan Province is more spectacular among the Miao people in southeast of Guizhou Province. In western Hunan Province, the Miao people will pierce a buffalo to offer a sacrifice in a single family, but in the southeast of Guizhou Province, the Miao people of the same branch will offer sacrifice at the same time. Each family will slaughter one or more buffaloes, and friends and relatives around will gather at the same place. The scene is very grand, and it will last for more than ten days; this is the well-known ritual *nongx niel* [5, p. 58]. There are many contents about the origination in the epic, and the magnificent origination scene is soul-stirring:

The fish in the water went upstream,
The people on the shore migrated upstream;
Several Deb Lel Deb kheat,
Followed the Deb Xongb Deb Yix,
The women missed their kinsfolk,
And the men missed their relatives;
The younger missed their elder brothers,
And the older missed their younger brothers;
They followed us,
Moved together,
And migrated upstream together.

The footsteps were heavier and heavier,
The roads were steeper and steeper;
It was hard for horses to pass in the land route,
And it was hard for boats to pass in the water route;
Men cut down the bamboo to make the boats,
Women made the dresses into ropes;
Alas alas they climbed over the mountains,
Ah ho ah ho they boated across the dangerous shoals.

The seven tribes migrated upstream together,
And the seven clans migrated upstream together;

They climbed to the Laha full of sheer cliffs,
They went to the Laxiong full of deep valleys.
Horses could not move on in Laha,
And the boats could not move on in Laxiong.
In the trouble,
They went to visit Ali and Awu.

They borrowed the divine spade of Ali,
And the divine hoe of Awu;
They borrowed the divine drill of Ali,
And the divine axe of Awu;
They beat the rock clangorously,
And they drill the rock clangorously.
They moved a mountain by one spade,
They excavated a valley by one hoe,
They drilled down the stars in the sky by one drill,
And they split the cliff with one axe.

They broke through the water route,
And the boats could continue to move forward;
They broke through the land route,
And the people could continue to migrate forward;
Migrated along the rivers,
And tramped over hills and dales;
The seven tribes reached Zan Cux simultaneously,
And the seven clans reached Zan Pud simultaneously [4, p. 78].



Fig. 2. Piercing the buffalo among the Miao people (photo by Xiaolin Wu).

The Miao people won some time to rehabilitate when they migrated to the places mentioned above, and they were relieved to slaughter buffaloes and offer the sacrifice to their ancestors. As part of the *Xeud Bad Xeud Mab*, Neb ghunb Mat ghuoud comes to the end here. But the epic of narrating the whole migration process of the eastern Miao people is not completed, and then the epic narrates the upcoming hardships: “Jad Gat sneaked into the stockaded village of the Miao people, / and Jad Nis sneaked into the Miao villages. / They sneaked into the stockaded village to devour the men, / they sneaked into the village to eat the women. / Among the men in nine Ping and nine Ling, / only men

of one Ping and one Ling were left. / Among the beauties in nine Gu and nine Chong, / only beauties of one Gu and one Chong were left. / Therefore, / the villages were not peaceful, / the people could not live there. / So the Deb Xongb Deb Yix Deb Sut, / and the Deb Mus Deb Lel Deb kheat; / kept on migrating, / and boating upstream with the young and the old. In the latter part of the migration, many geographical names matching the modern names appeared in the epic. For example: moved from the Qiangdi and Qiangsa, / move from the Lizhou and Lixian; / moved from the Taohua Brook and Taohuagou, / moved from the Taohua Garden and Taohuadong / ... / they continued to move upstream, / and they continued to boat upstream with the young and the old; / the water routes were along the river dikes and shoals, / and the land routes were along the sheer cliffs; / the seven branches boated upstream together, / and the seven tribes moved upstream together. / All the men and women arrived at Luxidong, / all the young and the old reached Luxixian" [4, p. 79]. The "Qiangdi and Qiangsa" are the Changde City and Cahngsha City in Hunan Province; "Lizhou and Lixian" are the Lizhou and Lixian County in Hunan Province, and the "Luxidong" and "Luxixian" are located in the Luxi County in western Hunan Province [6, p. 42]. At this time, the Miao people reached the western Hunan Province.

Dut qub dut lanl, another epic of the Miao people in the western Hunan Province, traces back to the root of marriage, and also shows the rough migration history of the Miao people. Because it is related to the marriage, so the epic is mainly about the marriage celebrations. The opening part is: "Today is a good day, / today is a fine time; / the rolling yarn is put on the loom, / the hemp thread is put into the bamboo basket; / like climbing up the bank of the pond, / like climbing to the top of the tree. / Vintage wine is put in the grand central hall, / rice wine and sweet drinks are put in the bright central hall; / there are bowls of pork on the table, / there are bowls of pork liver on the table. / The seats of bridesmaid and groomsmen are in the north, / the seat of the matchmaker is in the east; / singers are in the west, / and storytellers are in the south. / Wise men come here, / good people gather here; / grandparents arrive here, / and parents reach here; / maternal grandparents arrive here, / and biological parents reach here. / The morning star is hanging in the east, / and luminous pearls are hanging in the west; / giant rocks from the plain have arrived, / and village celebrities from the basin have arrived; / high bamboos from the Chaoshan mountain have arrived, / and giant trees from the Chaoling valleys have arrived; / all relatives come here, / and all clansmen gather here; / and other relatives all around, / and other friends all around" [4, p. 119]. The "giant rocks," "village celebrities," "high bamboos," and "giant trees" are the metaphors of wise and distinguished men.

In the lively scene with a gathering of many people, the storytellers shall narrate the marriage and migration according to the different family names of the Miao people in the western Hunan Province. The storytellers first narrate the migration of Deb Hlongb (the family name of Wu), and then of the Poub Sat followed by the migration of Deb Longd, Deb liol, Deb Ghueas, Deb Khad, Deb Xot, and Deb kheat, and finally the migration of Deb Lel: "The fish moved upstream, / the beasts climbed up the mountains. / Deb lel came from the Yil Weit, / deb Lel came from the Yil hud (the cloud lake); / women came to find relatives, / men came to find friends. / They gave birth to Dab Sand Panb Lix Sand Pianb, / they gave birth to Dab Sand Panb Lix Sand Maol; / Dab Sand Panb lived in Dud lel Dud Had, / Lix Sand Maol lived in Pind Dib Bix LiuX; / and Lel Wub Daob lived in God Jad, / Lel Biod lived in Banx Bud" [4, p. 133].

The Origination Epic of the Miao People in Southeast of Guizhou Province

It is speculated from the situation of the continuation of dialect atlas that the Miao people in the southeast of Guizhou Province ought to have moved upstream along the Zi River in Hunan Province, next migrated to the mountainous area bit by bit, and then migrated along the Dulu River and Qingshui River, and finally reached the present geographical location. The migration of the Miao people in the southeast of Guizhou Province is not a large-scale and long migration accomplished in one action, but a migration step by step. Along the route, such as in the Shaoyang City and Suining City, there are still the Miao people who are close to this branch, but they have a high degree of Chinesization. At present, several epics have been collected from the Miao people in the southeast of Guizhou Province, including *Tid Waix Xit Dab* (Create the Universe), *Det Mangx Diangl* (Man Was Born from Maple Tree), *Yangb Nangl Zek Jes* (Heavy Flooding), *Nangx Eb Jit Bil* (Move Westward along the River) and so on [7, p. 67]. All of these epics are separate but not an indivisible whole.

Nangx Eb Jit Bil is one epic that enjoys a greater fame. It is hard to take the textual research on

the rivers mentioned in the epic, so they are generally called River. They carried out the westward migration to find a broader home, but not because of the war. They passed numerous places such as Nine Stones, Caowo Ping, Weicha Ling, Wild Boar Chong, Water Dragon Ping, Grass Slope, and Sharp Stone Chong, and they encountered wild boars, water dragon, pheasants and other wild beasts and birds. The journey was full of difficulties and hardships: “Just after they walked through the Grass Slope, / reached the Sharp Stone Chong, / the sharp stones cut the trouser legs, / and the heels were all scratched” [8, p. 709]. The eagle that they encountered was “as big as a buffalo”, and it was changed into the present size by the execration of the wizards; the frog that they encountered was also quite fierce and could eat the people, and it was killed by the hero Long Nuo with a long shovel and a hammer, and sealed it with execration to prevent it from becoming “as big as a buffalo” [9, p. 122]. These descriptions are extremely exaggerated at first glance; but in fact, they are the expansion of the collective memory on the hardships suffered by this branch of the Miao people in migration.

This epic can be sung at festivals, or weddings or funerals in the form of antiphonal singing: Two people constitute one side, and sing in antiphonal style between two sides. In addition to the four lead singers, there is one substitute on each side as backup in case that the absence of someone would interrupt the singing. There is a primary and a secondary lead singer on each side. The better one is the primary lead singer, and the other one is the secondary singer. There is a function of teaching and learning between the primary singer and the secondary singer [10, p. 67]. Yan Bao wrote in *Miaozu Guge (Ancient Songs of Miao People)* (translated and annotated by him) like this: the form of singing (antiphonal singing) is that when one side raises a question, the other side gives an answer; and then the side which gives the answer asks, and the other party gives an answer. Then the pattern continues in this way to the end of the performance. Generally, the side which gives the answer will repeat the question, and the contents of the questions and answers form the principal part, which is called the bone of the song by the Miao people. Prior to the answer, the side bound to give an answer shall first sing a separate song that has no necessary connection with the principal part, which is called the flower of the song by the Miao people. The flowers of the song are mainly the extemporization, and some are also traditional beautiful lines. The contents may contain the lines showing modesty, the praise to the other side, and the challenges against the opponent. There is always the success or failure in the antiphonal singing of the epic. It is regarded to be as a failure if one side is not able to answer the question or gives the wrong answer; and it is also regarded to be as a failure if the flowers of the song are not beautiful nor much enough to stir the heartstrings of the other side and the audiences although the answer is right.



Pic. 3. The Miao epic performers in Shibing County, Guizhou Province are singing the *Nangx Eb Jit Bil* (*Move Westward along the River*) in antiphonal style (photo by Xiaodong Wu).

Origination Epic and Heroic Epic of the Miao People who Speaking the Western Dialect

This branch of the Miao people of speaking the western dialect has migrated to the most distant places among the Miao people, and the Southeast Asia is not their destination and paradise. In the 20th century, this branch of the Miao people was involved in the swirls of the US-Vietnam War, and later they migrated to the United States, Australia and other countries with the help of the United Nations. War, heroes and migration have become the theme of their epics.

The epics of the Miao people in the northeast of Yunnan Province and the southwest of Guizhou Province are mostly short, but they have formed a group of the origination epics, including *Zieb Ghat Laol*, *Nzhil Mik Lik Dib Maol Ndaok Shal*, *Ghat Saod Hmaoh Byus*, *Gid Yieb Yeul Laol and Gid Chib Yeul Laol*, *Ngaox Dut Sieb Njix Hlaot*, and *Ngaox Dleud Rangx* and so on. The contents are focused on the war with the *Shab Draos Jox Dib Vaos* (the Han Chinese People). About the causes of the war, there is a legendary saying: At the beginning, when the Miao people would unite the Han people by marriage, the Han people decided to kill a pig as a sacrifice offered to the ghosts and gods, and they invited You Lou, the leader of the Miao people, to preside over the ritual. You Lou went with his younger brother and the younger male cousin, but these two brothers were suspected of having stolen and eaten up the heart and spleen of the pig for sacrifice. In order to prove the innocence, You Lou “cut apart the bellies of his two brothers”, but no pig heart or spleen were found, and finally they found that the pig heart or spleen pasted on the bottom of the pan. So the two ethnic groups started a feud and made war. The other saying is: the *Shab Draos Jox Dib Vaos* were jealous about the fertile land of the Miao people, and then they attacked from *Caix Sieb Mib Fub Dib*. The war mainly happened on the bank of the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol River* with battles on land and above the water: “*Gib Yieb Vaos Zyul Laol* tried his best to make stratagems, / commanded the troops to make boats, / and at the same time he commanded the people to make ropes, / they made seventy rafts and boats, / which were tied up with ropes. / The rafts moved fast, / and the wooden boats moved slowly, / they took the ropes to cross the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol River*, / they pulled the raft ropes to cross the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol River*. / Where did *Ghat Saod Hmaoh Byus* live? He lived in the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol* plain. / He stood straight on the bank of the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol River*, / led the troops and waited to fight and defense. / He led nearly ten thousand soldiers, / he assembled one thousand and seven hundred cavalry pioneers, / one thousand sailors, / and seven thousand fully armed infantries” [11, p. 99].

This group of epics has not formed a relatively large long epic in the folk, but what those epics describe are the historical themes of war in the same period of time. The epics have shaped a group of courageous heroes of the Miao people, such as *Hmonb Yeus loul*, *Hmongb Bos Loul*, *Gid Chib Yeul Laol*, *Gid Ndlwb Yeul Laol*, *Gid Yieb Yeul Laol*, *Ghat Saod Hmaoh Byus*, *Gid Wub Yeul Laol*, *Gid Nob Yeul Laol*, *Gid zid Yeul Laol*, *Gid Myub Yeul Laol* and *Yeul Jox Bit Khaod*. There were both male heroes and female heroes. They should be real person instead of the figures fabricated by imagination. But at present, many Miao scholars believe that the hero *Gid Chib Yeul Laol* is *Chi You* who engaged in fighting with the Yellow Emperor in *Zhuolu County*, for they think that “*Chib Yeul*”, in the middle of “*Gid Chib Yeul Laol*” has a close pronunciation with “*Chi You*”. In fact, “*Gid*” is an unmeaningful prefix, “*Chib*” is a name, and “*Yeul Laol*” has the meaning of grandfather, which cannot be separated by removing the word “*Laol*” [12, p. 12]. In addition, the *Ndux Naf Yik Mol River* where the war happened refers to the *Jinsha River*, which is borrowed from the language of the *Yi* people living in the *Big and Small Liangshan* [13, p. 485]. Therefore, what the epics describe is not the wars between *Chi You* and the Yellow Emperor, but the conflicts between Miao people with the Han people in southern *Sichuan Province* and northern *Guizhou Province* before their migration to northwestern *Guizhou Province* and northeastern *Yunnan Province*.

The result of the war is another migration of the Miao people. In result, several origination epics have been created such as *Ad Hmaob Lol Njaol Saod Nof Dib* (*The Miao came to Saod Nof place*), *Ad Hmaob Bwd Dlat Huas Zhoud* (*The Miao migrated to Huanzhou*), and *Nghaf Dib Nghaf Qeut Deuf Huas Zhoud* (*Departure from Homeland to Huanzhou*). These epics describe the situation of living with the *Yi* people after entering the concentrated area of the *Yi* people. There was no war between the Miao people and the *Yi* people, but most of the Miao people became the slaves. The epic *Chat Dib Qeut Guk Daot Dlox Leuf* (*Missing the Lost Place*) sings like this: “*Gib Yieb Vaos Zyul Laol* came from *Caix Sieb Mib Fub Dib*, / they invaded *Laos Gub*, *Laos Wub*, and *Laos Ndli*, and other places.

/ The relentless Heaven might also have its weak time, / Gid Yieb Yeul Laol, Gid Chib Yeul Laol, and Ghat Saod Hmaoh Byus missed the lost place, / and missed the central territory of having the shape of square and round; / Gid Yieb Yeul Laol, Gid Chib Yeul Laol, and Ghat Saod Hmaoh Byus missed the lost land, / and they drew the pictures according to the shape of the central territory, / made them into the design of skirts elaborately, / let the girls and women wear, / they were quite beautiful, / they were dressed to show to the old people, / and to the descendants. / ... / They made various ancient objects and preserve, / let all the Miao people miss, / and let all the Miao people memorize" [11, p. 222].

The Heroic Epic *King Yalu*

Not all the war and origination epics of the western Miao people are the short ones. *King Yalu*, the epic collected in Ziyun County in Guizhou Province, is a long heroic epic containing more than six thousand lines. This epic is mainly sung at the funerals, and, in addition to the contents of the war, there are also the contents of the ethnic origin and shooting the sun; while the scene of the wars is particularly soul-stirring. The following part is the description of the battle against the enemy by King Yalu, which is translated and annotated by Yang Zhengjiang and Yang Guangying:

Qi Yang commanded the Han soldiers, responsible for cutting the horse legs, to assault ahead,

Qi Yang commanded the Han soldiers, responsible for cutting the horse limbs, to rush ahead.

Qi Yang led seven thousand Han soldiers and held the line behind,

Qi Yang led seven thousand Han soldiers and followed closely behind.

Moved to the territory of Ya Lu,

Attacked the domain of Ya Lu.

They have invaded the territory of Ya Lu,

And the deafening shout has approached the Ya Lu City.

They have invaded the domain of Ya Lu,

And the piercing clasp has approached the Ya Lu City.

...

Ya Lu called the soldiers in a rush,

Ya Lu appointed the generals in haste.

Ya Lu commanded seventy soldiers to go into the battle, but they were killed immediately,

Ya Lu commanded seven hundred soldiers to go into the battle, but they were killed immediately.

Ya Lu went to guard the gate below, and shot behind the observation tower,

Ya Lu went to guard the gate above, and shot behind the observation tower .

...

Ya Lu put the dragon heart into the water vat,

Three thunderclaps shook the earth in a flash,

The downpour fell down instantly,

As well as the gravel and hail,

The tornado curled up the grass clippings and made them floating in the turbid sky for three days.

It was the gravel that protected the boundary,

And it was the hail that protected the borderland.

Ya Lu put the rabbit heart into the water vat,

Three thunderclaps shook the earth in a flash,

The downpour fell down instantly,

As well as the gravel and ice,

The tornado curled up the grass clippings and made them floating in the turbid sky for three days.

It was the gravel that protected the boundary,

It was the ice that protected the borderland,

And it was the snow that protected the territory,

They covered the entire Ya Lu City.

Gravel and ice attacked directly the soldiers of Qi Yang,

And the gravel and hail smashed directly the generals of Qi Yang.

Qi Yang could not attack,

Qi Yang could not bend the bow,

Qi Yang could not set the fire,

Qi Yang could not attack with fire.
Qi Yang had to recall the soldiers and went back the same way,
Qi Yang had to recall the generals and went back the same way.
Ya Lu had the chance to clean up his homeland,
Ya Lu led the troops to defend the frontier,
Ya Lu led the troops to defend the boundary [14, pp. 234-235].



Pic. 4. The performance of Epic *King Yalu* (photo by Yang Zhengjiang).

Conclusion

The epics of the western Miao people still retain the narrative feature of distich of the epics of the eastern Miao people, where each sentence contains two lines, and they set each other off in rich readability. Such kind of epics has an interesting “tree-like” [15, p. 89] feature. According to Yang Zhengjiang (the translator and annotator of the epics), there are many small branches inside the Miao people, and these branches derive from the same root, just like the branches that grow from the main trunk of a tree. Correspondingly, the part of singing the root at the beginning of the epic is also like the trunk of a tree and artists sing this part with minor differences. But when they sing the reproduction and migration of each branch, they only sing the condition of their own branches. Therefore, it is needed to integrate the singing of the artists of all branches to form a complete tree, and to show overall perspective of the epics.

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