

SOME HILLTRIBES OF NORTH THAILAND  
(MIAOS AND YAOS)

by

*John Blofeld*

There is a large and roughly circular area embracing South-West China, the Shan States and the Northern parts of Thailand, Laos and Vietnam, concerning which maps give us inadequate information. The frontier lines drawn there hold good for what may roughly be called ground-level, but a second map representing only those parts of the area lying three thousand feet or more above the sea would indicate no frontiers at all. Here dwell some thirty or forty hilltribes who have only the vaguest idea of what goes on in the world at their feet. Linguistically it is not easy to classify some of them, for their monosyllabic, tonal languages differ as much from each other as from Thai or Chinese. Those regarded as constituting the "Thai" group do in fact speak something more or less like Thai or Lao; but the so-called "Chinese" group is apparently only Chinese insofar as certain items of Chinese dress and a few Chinese customs have been adopted by them. Of these, two of the principal tribes are the Miao and Yao, both of which employ Chinese as a trade-language and lingua franca. My rather fluent knowledge of the Chinese tongue was the decisive factor in my selection of these two tribes for special study.

In May, 1953, Mr. Braine-Hartnell, a colleague from Chulalongkorn University, travelled with me round North Thailand in search of hilltribes. We began by spending a few days in a Miao village north of Chiangmai. This was made possible through the kindness of Mr. Prasit Poonchuxri of that city, who kindly provided us with mules and a Yunnanese guide. Our next attempt to contact tribesmen at Mesai was hindered by bad weather and the unwillingness of the local authorities to allow us to venture along paths which might lead us unwittingly across the Burmese border. We thereupon proceeded to Chiengkam, near the Laotian border, where my colleague fell sick. I was forced to leave him in that charming

little town and ride into the mountains on horses borrowed from some missionaries, who had shown us warm hospitality, with a Chinese guide. On that occasion, I spent a few nights in a large Yao village and briefly glimpsed the homes of some neighboring Miaos. The following year, I went back to the first Miao village, again with Mr. Prasit's assistance, and spent a much longer time there, familiarising myself with Miao customs and asking innumerable questions about their legends and songs, etc. From all this, it will be seen that my acquaintance with the tribes is not very extensive. On the other hand, my knowledge of Chinese enabled me to question the tribesmen in great detail and to understand the information they most willingly supplied.

All journeys to tribal villages in Thailand are much the same. The first was more or less typical of the others. Leaving Mr. Prasit's jeep at a point some sixty kilometres along the Chiangmai-Fang Road, we mounted mules and entered the jungle. Soon the path began to rise steeply and, before long, we were ascending a mountainside so steep that I was astonished by the animals' ability to negotiate it. Gradually, the character of the forest began to change. From being a typical Northern Thai jungle, it became the sort of forest one sees in illustrations to old editions of Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales. Strange purples and golds gleamed among the many sorts of green and the atmosphere became more and more 'friendly'. Instead of the sinister sounds I had expected, there was the cheerful shrilling of birds, including an old friend from Peking, the 'one-more-bottle bird' and another which screamed "Eric, Eric, Eric" with a marked Brooklyn accent. The guide assured us that tigers and cobras lurked near at hand, but it was impossible to imagine them in that friendly atmosphere.

At last we came to a high ridge and rode along it for several hours. For some reason, I was a little in front of Acharn Braine and the guide when, all of a sudden, I reached a spur which had been completely denuded of trees and was dotted with some thirty or forty primitive huts. Here at last was a Miao village. As I rode

down the spur, women and children in colourful clothes ran out to welcome the approaching strangers. It was an experience the feel of which I have never forgotten. Time had slipped away and I was on the threshold of a world which had hardly changed in three or four thousand years. No new arrival on Mars could experience greater pleasure or step from his spaceship with a sharper feeling of excited anticipation.

I don't suppose men with blue eyes and high-bridged noses were a common or even a remembered sight in that village, but the people could not have behaved better. They stared, of course, yet without fear, mockery or impudence. And, as soon as we dismounted, someone ran forward politely welcoming us in to the Headman's hut.

Miaos are seen at their best in the open air. The interior of a Miao hut is not a pretty sight. The floor was of beaten earth, the walls of axe-hewn planks so roughly fitted as to admit almost as much light as if there had been windows, and the roof formed of dried leaves contained similar gaps. (I learnt later that, at the first sign of approaching rain, someone would walk over to some bushes near the door, pluck a few armfuls of leaves and render the roof tolerably watertight.) About one fifth of the oblong interior was partitioned off to form the bedroom of the senior couple of the family—a bedroom which contained a couch of split bamboo and a couple of shelves for storing things. The main room was sparsely furnished. There was a large split-bamboo couch in a recess, capable of sleeping about eight people; a huge cauldron in an earthen stove, used as a sink except when needed for some great feast; two or three wooden benches less than a foot high; a table for storing oddments; and a smaller table facing a bit of the wall where decorations of white perforated paper indicated the presence of ancestral spirits. All eating was done off the floor; there was no other furniture of any kind, unless we count a primitive grain-pounder and the stone hearth, just inside the door, where an ever-burning fire smouldered by day and flamed by night. Although it was the height of the Thai summer, we found this fire very pleasant

and necessary at nights; on the other hand, the smoke finding no chimney billowed about the room leaving a thick layer of black soot on everything there.

After glancing round this room, my heart sank a little. It seemed that the Miaos must surely be lacking in most of those traits which make human beings worthy of study. But almost at once my spirits revived. Acharn Braine pointed at various objects I had not noticed. There were all sorts of instruments and utensils fashioned of wood, bamboo, gourds and fibre, which showed great ingenuity and some of which possessed that beauty of utter simplicity which is brought to perfection by the interiors of Japanese houses. Well, at least these people were ingenious. A further example of their ingenuity was their excellent water-supply. A long bamboo pipeline brought fresh water into the heart of the village from a neighbouring mountain spring. (In some villages there is a branch pipeline leading to a trough of hollowed wood in every house.) The villagers were thereby assured of a more constant supply of water than the great city of Bangkok could boast at that time. Unfortunately, it was seldom used for anything but cooking, drinking and washing clothes. Questioned about the layers of dirt on their bodies, the Miaos declared that bathing is a dangerous practice which leads to severe illness. Perhaps it does, if one is not used to the process.

As soon as our hosts had seen to our animals, they crowded in to talk to us, giving us an opportunity to study their dress. The men, especially the youths wearing clean, new-looking clothes, were a fine sight—symphonies in black, scarlet and silver. Many of them wore their hair in embryo queues surmounted by black Chinese skull-caps with a red bobble in the centre. Their black jackets were buttoned at the side with silver buttons in the shape of filigree balls attached to inch-long scarlet frogs. These jackets were so short as to leave an inch or two of flesh exposed above their vast scarlet sashes with embroidered ends. From the front, their trousers looked like the ordinary Chinese variety, but what should

have been the seat hung down behind to well below the knees. This extraordinary fashion may have given rise to the Chinese legend that Miaos possess formidable tails! There was no sort of foot covering. Around their necks hung massive silver ornaments of two kinds—chains and padlocks to chain their innate luck to their persons and great horseshoes to keep off ill-fortune from outside. A few wore pieces of string round their wrists. These had been placed there by their friends who had a little good luck to spare. Acharn Braine and I passed some of our superfluous luck to the Headman in this way. (Perhaps it wasn't superfluous, which would explain why each of us suffered severe illness at later dates.)

The women's dress was less striking as to colour, but quite charming. They wore no hats, but had massive buns of various shapes straight above their heads. Their long-sleeved jackets were of blue cloth ornamented with many bands of colour around the collar, which came down in front almost to the waist like the collar of a kimono or a dressing-gown. Below these they wore kilts of pleated material some twenty-one feet long, which they swung with all the grace of Scottish Highlanders and a great deal more charm. The upper parts of the kilts were of blue cloth stamped with a whitish pattern, below which were several inches of delicate cross-stitch embroidery. One girl told me that she had spent the leisure hours of seven years on a single kilt. The embroidery patterns resemble those of Eastern European peasants, but the work is so fine that the reverse side is hardly distinguishable from the side meant to be seen. Owing to the absence of underclothes, the kilts have to be weighted down against the effects of the wind by heavy bands of black cloth hanging from the belt before and behind. No shoes were worn, but many girls had blue gaiters to protect their legs from jungle thorns. Their ornaments were all of silver and resembled those of the men. Miao dress varies from place to place, but those described are typical for Thailand. These were Red Miaos; there are also White and varicoloured Miaos, distinguishable by the colours of their dress and by their dialect.

What follows is based not only upon our first visit, but also upon my subsequent investigations in that village and others. For the sake of brevity, I shall deal with each aspect of their lives under separate heads.

## Daily Life

Miaos use their village as headquarters. Quite a lot of their time is spent in the opium and maize fields, where they erect temporary shelters for sleeping two together. Cultivation is by means of jungle-burning, the burnt trees serving as manure. After perhaps four years, the yield begins to lessen; whereupon the whole village is transported to new pastures, the empty huts being left to the mercy of nature. In the busier seasons, the village contains only old people and young children—though old is a relative term including people in their late forties, for the life-span is rather brief. No land is cultivated much below a level of three thousand feet, the Miaos believing that the valleys hold death for them. This may be true as they have no immunity to the diseases of the valleys. There are no fixed meal-time—they eat when hungry; the food is very plain and sometimes limited to rice and salt washed down with water. They own quite a range of animals—pigs, cows, chickens, cattle, mules, horses, cats and the most lovely long-haired dogs like Yorkshire terriers; but they feel themselves too poor to eat meat, except during feasts and after sacrifices, unless they manage to kill some game. Maize is their traditional diet, as they are unable to cultivate rice on those high slopes, but those who can afford it eat rice purchased from the Thais below. They also cultivate a little crude tobacco and gather wild tea-leaves. Grain spirit is drunk during festivals, but the Miaos I saw struck me as normally very abstemious. My hosts had to hunt for some spirit when I asked to try a cupful. They are a very hardworking people who toil from dawn till dusk, after which the elders gather round their fires to chat and exchange stories; the younger people go out lovmaking, and the children fall asleep.

There is no written language, so the children have no education in our sense of the word. Their earlier years are spent in one long game of Robinson Crusoe, roaming the jungle with their little crossbows in search of birds or playing games among the trees. Gradually they are broken in to domestic life and to work in the fields, which they take as another sort of game. They are generally pink-cheeked, happy, healthy and intelligent—so much so that I would like my children to live with them if it were not an unsuitable preparation for their adult life. I never saw Miao children quarrelling or fighting, nor even exhibiting signs of jealousy when some received the presents I had brought and others had to go without.

### Economy

The principal crop is opium, yet I saw very few signs of addiction among them. When questioned, they answered simply: "Who eats his own money?" Having a wise disbelief in the lasting value of paper-money, they sell the opium for silver Burmese rupees, with which they purchase horses, mules, needles, coloured thread, rice, steel and salt. Of these only the last two are necessities, the steel being used for implements, knives and so on. Given a good supply of steel and salt, they could live quite independently of the rest of humanity. They weave their own cloth and make all their own utensils, weapons, agricultural implements furniture and other requirements, often showing admirable ingenuity. Much of the silver is retained to be made into ornaments and for bride-money, a bride costing between three and five hundred silver rupees. Formerly Chinese traders roamed the hills selling various necessities and pretty oddments such as plastic toothbrushes; now Chinese are unable to cross the border, so sometimes the elders walk or ride down to the main road and take a bus to the nearest city. I often noticed that, unlike other people, they put on their oldest and most tattered clothes for journeys to town, probably to convince the shopkeepers of their poverty. Thus their economy is a simple and uniform process of selling opium for silver and exchanging silver for whatever they happen to want. Though delighted to receive presents

in the form of mirrors, torches, plastic bowls and so on, they are wise enough to waste almost no money at all on anything inessential to their traditional way of life.

## Arts and Amusements

A totally uncivilised people, the Miaos are by no means unenlured. Of visual arts they have none besides embroidery and simple silver-work, but there are several others. They play pleasant tunes on a sort of 'Jow's harp' with which they prelude their extemporary lovesongs; and they have a delightful form of 'kan' with horizontal bamboo pipes attached to a vertical mouth-piece which descends into a sort of hollow wooden bulb which acts like the bag on a set of bagpipes. A youth will play a merry tune on this, dancing very slowly as he plays. Gradually the dance quickens and he whirls round and round, somehow finding the breath both for violent movement and the music to which he dances. The effect is rather like that of a butterfly dancing, the horizontal bamboos forming one wing and the musician's left leg stretched out behind to form the other. Many Miaos can recite long poems committed to memory solely by ear and, best of all, the youths and maidens are adepts at improvised lovesongs, alternately capping each other's with rhyming refrains in similar metre. The greatest of the world's poets would be hard put to it to improvise at such a speed. Their other amusements include a performance with sword-sticks or swords, somewhere between fighting and dancing, and competitions between men or boys armed with crossbows. For the elders, there is the solace of their heavy bamboo water-pipes, which gurgle throughout their nightly fireside discussions, and the occasionally indulged in pleasures of opium and grain-spirit. The happiest time is a week or ten days of fun ushered in by the (Chinese) New Year. Then, everybody hastens back to the village prepared for ten days of feasting, drinking, music and merriment. Second to this come the great family feasts when chickens and animals have been sacrificed to appease the spirits in times of sickness and death.

## Religion

Properly speaking, the Miaos and Yaos have no religion. They worship nothing and offer no prayers or sacrifices except in times of trouble. They are doubtful about the existence of ghosts or demons, excepting the spirits of their own ancestors who seem a rather unkind lot, very different from the warm-hearted, kindly living Miaos. When a man dies, the Meng-goong (Magician? Priest? Doctor?) is called in. By means of certain pieces of horn or pigs' bones, he discovers where the dead man wishes to be buried. Within ten days, the corpse is escorted to his chosen place and buried in the centre of a ring of stones. For three days the mourners remain at his side feasting his spirit with the savour of many sacrifices. On the fourth, they return home, but not without leaving him a water-dipper and a rice-container together with instructions as to where to find the sweetest water and the best grain. There the spirit remains for three years, after which he goes to rejoin his ancestors in their 'home-place'. But during that period he watches over the survivors with a jealous eye. Any fancied discourtesy to him, any departure from custom is met with severe punishment in the form of misfortune or sickness. Nothing will appease him but the sacrifice of the number of animals he indicates to the Meng-goong. For example, my taking photographs of the villagers infuriated the ancestor-demons; to avert calamity, I paid for several chickens and a small pig to be sacrificed for their pleasure. On another occasion, somebody fell seriously ill. Hour after hour, I heard the booming of the Meng-goong's drum proceeding from a neighbouring house.

"May I go and see?" I asked.

"Why not?"

So I strolled over and walked into the dark chamber. The Meng-goong, wearing a black mask and dressed entirely in sombre black, was seated facing the spirit-shrine. He was thumping a drum and gabbling some sort of ritualistic chant. Now and then he would scream and rise some four feet into the air--this movement by a seated

man appearing so uncanny that I felt myself shiver. The sick man was lying on skins spread on the floor. Soon after I came in, his wife raised him into a sitting position; some youths quickly slaughtered some chickens and piglets and the fresh blood was rubbed on his back. More of the blood was placed on a divining-horn to discover the omens, and then the chanting and drumming went on as before. There was something about the whole procedure which was obscurely frightening to me, but to the Miaos it seemed quite devoid of terror. The victims had hardly ceased to live when they were being prepared for the pot. I left quickly, unwilling to stay there longer, but not before I had noticed how tender and affectionate they all were to the sick man.

## Administration

Each village elects a Headman, who has very few duties beyond keeping in touch with the Thai Authorities as represented by the Nai Amphur, to whom he reports all changes of location and acquisitions of virgin jungle. Internal administration is dealt with by the Elders. It is they who decide the amount of the fines to be paid by thoughtless young people who break the custom in some way, or for the very rare offence of wife-stealing. In general, Miaos and Yaos are singularly free from crime. They have no word for 'to lie' and do not seem ever to resort to lying. Offences against personal property are nil, for fear of ancestral wrath and, no doubt, because in a small community consisting of groups of some twenty people confined in the space of an ordinary 'civilized' diningroom, stealing would be almost impossible. Larger property offences would not make sense. The jungle is huge and every man free to take as much land as his family can cultivate. Sexual crimes are very rare for reasons explained below, and the Miaos have a horror of fighting and scolding. It displeases the Ancestors too much.

"But what would you do if some other people attacked you?" I asked.

"We should run away. The jungle is big. It goes on forever. There is plenty of land for all." I obtained this sort of reply in several villages, and I imagine it is the truth. Certainly I never witnessed a fight or a squabble, though I lived at such very close quarters with numbers of them. Twice I heard an old man's voice raised scoldingly, but everyone else laughed so much that the poor old fellow couldn't keep a straight face himself.

## Sex

Between the age of puberty and the time of marriage, young people are perfectly free to sleep with whom they will. Every night, at dusk, they gather together in small groups and spend an hour or two making fun of each other or competing in verse and song. Then, gradually, they slip away in pairs, returning to their houses at about three or four in the morning. Their parents have not the least objection, so long as they do not show disrespect by cohabiting under the same roof as their elders. Very often a couple will be faithful to each other from puberty to marriage. In other cases, varied degrees of promiscuity take place, according to individual preference. The only restriction placed on Miaos (it does not exist among the Yaos) is that no relationship, casual or serious, shall be formed with non-Miaos. Even Varicoloured Miaos are beyond the pale, though White Miaos are permitted to court Red Miaos and vice-versa. This objection to the former is strange, because all three types of Miao are designated as Meng (human-beings), whereas Thais, Chinese and other races do not qualify for that name.

Such promiscuity is shocking judged by our standards, but it does seem to have some advantages in addition to being the universal practice of man in his natural state. By the time a Miao youth seeks a wife, he is more or less free of 'love's blindness' and chooses a girl who will be a good manager and a suitable addition to his family in other ways, being thrifty, hardworking, and so on. Divorce is very rare, in spite of being easy, and unfaithfulness scarcely more common. Besides, as women are married for themselves rather than for their faces, there are hardly any would-be

wives debarred from marriage for lack of physical charm. In those few cases where a wife does run off with another man, the husband is generally willing to relinquish her, for he considers that a wife held against her will does not make a very good mate. Besides, whoever runs off with her is forced by the Elders to reimburse him to the exact extent of the bride-money paid by him to her parents at the time of his marriage. The commonest form of irregularity is the elopement of a pair who cannot get their parents' consent to their marriage. With such cases, the Elders deal very leniently, merely stipulating that the bride-money be ultimately paid either in cash or by work done on the land of the girl's parents. Curiously, very few children are born of premarital unions; those who do get born are warmly welcomed by the girl's parents. The possession of one or more potential farmers increases her value and puts the bride-money up by a considerable amount. On marrying, the girl takes her children into her new home.

## Manners

In the literal sense of the word "manners", the Miaos and Yaos possess none at all. There are no words for 'please', 'thank you', 'excuse me', etc. Yet they are most genuinely polite. The hospitality of their village is free to all comers; everything is done to see to the visitors' comfort, but without intrusion, so that guests feel able to do exactly as they wish; there is no rude staring or rude jests at the 'ignorant stranger's' expense; and the artificial laughter and smiles of social intercourse are as foreign to them as smiles of derision. There is nothing boorish about them; they behave as a 'gentleman' would behave if shorn of every shred of artificiality. The only phrase corresponding to 'goodbye' is 'come again soon'. If you wave your hand and shower smiles upon your hosts at the time of departure, you will get no answering waves or smiles—merely an expression of bewilderment, but there is something in their manner which lets you know you will be very welcome to return.



*The Village Headman ( LaoLang ) outside his house*



*Miao baskets used for carrying produce*



*Miao girls in embroidered kilts*



*Miao musical pipes*



*Miao woman with silver charms*

## Yaos

So far, I have hardly mentioned the Yaos, because in most respects everything said about Miaos applies to them, too. There are, however, some differences. The most obvious is that of dress. The men dress in dark blue clothes almost identical in cut with those of Southern Chinese peasants—skull-cap, jacket buttoning at the side, and floppy trousers. The women, on the contrary, are gorgeous. They wear enormous black turbans, the size of which, a grand Vizier of Bagdad might envy, long jackets with scarlet lambs-wool collars, reaching to the ankles behind, but worn under the belt and trouser in front. Every inch of their vast, full-length trousers is covered with gay embroidery. If the Miao kilts represent seven years' leisure, these must take some fifteen years to produce, or else the women have more leisure.

I liked the Yaos enormously, but found them falling short of "my" beloved Miaos in just one respect. They have taken on rather more of Chinese culture and lost a corresponding amount of spontaneity. In some villages Chinese teachers are employed from time to time to teach the elements of writing, and Chinese wall-scrolls and mirrors decorate some of the houses. I have already mentioned that the Yaos do not limit promiscuity to their own people, and thereby hangs a tale.

On my first night in a Yao village, I noticed that only men, boys, and elderly women dropped in to have a chat. The lovely girls whose beauty I had so often heard praised were strangely absent. Finally, I found the courage to ask where they were.

"Girls?" answered the old Headman-Magician. "Wait until tomorrow. You'll see" There was something sinister in the way he spoke, something I didn't much care for. When we were left alone for the night, I asked my Chinese guide to explain.

"It's like this", he said. "Yao maidens consider they have a right to the person of any male stranger who catches their fancy. Tomorrow, they will come and examine us. If they like

the look of us—well, I'm all right, an old man like me—if they like the look of a man they may detain him here until they tire of him. Sometimes it takes days." He sighed in a manner which indicated he had been among Yaos in his youth.

"But, Good Heavens", I said. "Surely the menfolk won't stand for a guest being held here against his will."

"Ah, they will know nothing of it. On the way down the mountain, the women kidnap a departing guest and take him to a hut in the fields."

I was fortunately so tired that I slept well in spite of this disquieting news. The next morning soon after breakfast, I was startled to see a bevy of women from fourteen to about twenty-five come crowding into the room and gaze at me in silence. Presently a hand was stretched out and rubbed across my chest. They were not at all unattractive in feature, but covered with thick layers of dirt and, in some cases, open sores which might have been yaws or worse. For once I was delighted with my few wrinkles and one or two grey hairs. "I'm old enough to be their father," I reflected, but I wasn't too reassured. Suddenly it occurred to me that this would be a wonderful chance to snap some pretty faces, Yaos being terribly camera-shy and normally difficult to approach with a camera. I had no sooner produced my camera, opened it up and begun to focus it upon the prettiest girl when consternation broke out among them. Before I could say "Jack Robinson" in Chinese, the room was cleared of the whole bevy and my virtue was saved!

### A Yao Legend

"Long, long ago we lived in a land far away, we the children of the Emperor's dog. Ah, the dog! Of course you know nothing of him. In the earliest times, a Miao prince ruled in that land, whom the Emperor of China detested. One day the Emperor said to that dog 'Bite me the Miao Prince to death and I shall be pleased with you! 'Good', said the dog, 'but what reward shall I have?' The Emperor answered that it was early to speak of that. Let the dog do his bidding and the reward should be as he

chose. So the dog swam the great water and came to that land and bit the Miao Prince so that he died. This done, he swam back to land and came quickly to his Master again. 'Well?' said the Emperor. 'It is done', answered the dog. 'Name your reward, my good dog. Whatever you ask, that you shall have.' So the dog, being wise, asked for the Emperor's daughter. The Emperor was not too glad to give his only daughter to such a queer son-in-law, but what could he do? He had spoken and a word must always be kept. So the marriage took place. The dog returned with his bride to the land of the Miao, where many children were born to them. We Yaos are the offspring of those children. Now you know of the dog.

"As I was saying, we children of the dog were once hungry. There was no food in the land. We grew thin and died. Some there were who tried to cross the great water in boats. But the winds blew and they died in the water. Then came nine families to the shore, carrying three boats. These had the wisdom to pray to the Great Devil, Pan. 'O Pan', they said, 'Take us safely to the other shore and we will give you a pig.' So Pan carried them across the water and they went up on the land. Then they remembered that there was no pig. So they fashioned a pig out of paper and other things and offered it to Pan, who was pleased. Since then, we Yaos have had but nine surnames among us, and since then we have offered pigs to Pan and honoured our pigs by keeping their thigh-bones in our houses."

This story has one important point of contact with the Miao story to the effect that their ancestors "came out of a cave bearing torches of flax and crossed the great water". For this reason, together with the fact that their migrations have always been westward, and the resemblance between the dress of Miao women and the Formosan aborigines, all tend to support the theory that both Miaos and Yaos came originally from Formosa (Taiwan), or Hainan, or from both. Of course, a comparison of languages would be needed to confirm this theory.

## Conclusions

The people of these two tribes, but especially the Miaos, struck me as being the hardest-working, least quarrelsome, kindest, and most cheerful people I had ever met. Given the civilized man's solace of a few good books, I believe I could live among them for years in the greatest happiness. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that they have certain qualities and habits of which it is difficult to approve. The squalor of their houses and persons is fortunately less harmful than it sounds; no doubt the clean mountain air robs it of dangerous effect. Their superstition is primitive in the extreme, but it must be confessed that all of us are more or less guilty on that count. I know 'civilized' men who have a childish faith in the great god Vitamin, and my own father would put on his hat while still within the doors of the church where he worshipped rather than risk his life by baring his head for half a second to the fresh air—yet he was a highly civilized and cultured man. In any case, other people's dirt and particular brands of superstition call for no outside interference. The same applies to their sexual life. Judging from their appearance, it undoubtedly suits them; and there would seem to be fewer disappointed wives and spinsters among them than in any community I have ever known.

There remain two very serious drawbacks to their way of life which cannot be lightly dismissed, because they do or ultimately will affect the lives of other people. The first of these is their wasteful method of agriculture which entails the systematic destruction of valuable jungle. Complaints have already been made about this by Thai persons in places of high authority. To me, these complaints seem a little premature, in view of the enormous area of jungle in Thailand which has hitherto been put to no use whatever. All the same, such complaints are right in principle and the day must surely come when every inch of the earth's cultivatable or afforested surface will be required.

The second drawback can hardly be separated from the first, being at once its cause and its result—the planting of opium. So far, we can hardly dare to criticise the Miaos and Yaos for this on moral grounds, since the governments of Burma, Thailand, Laos and all the countries concerned have been (and in some cases still are) willing to purchase this product. But everybody knows that opium, although in many ways less pernicious than alcohol, is exceedingly harmful at least insofar that addicts of small means are compelled to deprive themselves and their families of the good things of life in order to have the money to satisfy their craving. The time must come quite soon when the growing of opium will be prohibited or narrowly restricted in every country in the world. But merely to pass a law and then restrict the growth of opium by force would be tantamount either to condemning the hilltribes to death and extinction, or to turning them into dangerous armed smugglers and bandits like the so-called Haws (Yunnanese) with whom the Thai police are often in conflict.

The extinction of the hilltribes would be a shame and a disgrace, and not only from the humanitarian-Buddhist point of view. Thailand is fortunate to have side-by-side with its present-day culture another culture hardly changed in thousands of years—a rich source of material for anthropologists and all students of the human race. It is my humble opinion that individual members of the Siam Society, in the name of humanity and culture, should make use of any available opportunity to draw the attention of the Government to this matter and to suggest some means of keeping this ancient people alive and happy. Some may be in favour of educating the tribesmen and absorbing them into the Thai way of life. This would not only entail the destruction of their unique culture, but would have even worse results. Experiments in India and elsewhere have shown that any attempts to bend primitive tribesmen to another way of life completely demoralize them, turning them into fourth or fifth class citizens unable to compete with others and riddled with newly acquired vices and diseases.

I am quite certain that there is only one solution reasonably sure of promoting the happiness both of the tribes and of their Thai neighbors. For this the Government requires a long-term plan. The tribes should be notified that, in a certain number of years, all opium-planting must come to an end, on pain of the severest penalties; but the intervening period should be at least ten and preferably twenty years. During that time, agricultural experts should be sent up to make a prolonged study of the capabilities of the soil in those areas. It will not be enough to say to the tribes "Plant tea or tobacco or coffee", because without expert aid they will certainly be unable to produce anything of the kind which will compete favourably with similar products from elsewhere. In any case, they would not have the means of processing such things for themselves. It is essential that their products be easily transportable over narrow mountain and jungle paths, and that they be readily marketable on arrival at the nearest city. The tribes do not grow opium from choice. Hundreds or thousands of years ago, they were pushed off the best land by their Chinese and other neighbors and forced to take refuge in the mountains to which they have now become accustomed. On those high slopes they find it impossible to grow anything but opium, for which there is sufficient demand to provide them in return with the necessities of life. The substitution of other crops will take years to accomplish, and can never be accomplished at all without expert help and guidance.

Each time I have visited those delightful people in their lovely airy surroundings, I have left them with deep regret, and my affection for them is such that I may perhaps be excused for utilizing this address to a learned audience not only to describe what I saw, but also to plead the cause of those who afforded me so many pleasurable nights and days.

TWO MIAO LOVE - SONGS, taken down at the time of their improvisation.

**The boy :** Goo tsa gao; I sing to you;  
 Goo yoh gao; I love you;  
 Gao na, gao tze, jirr-k'ng. But your parents won't  
 give you to me.  
 Gao yoh ha-li joang? What do you say?  
 Gao da jia, 'Goo yoh gao'? Oh, do say 'I want you'!  
 Gao yiu goo jirr-yiu? Will you take me or not?  
 Gao jirr yoh, goo jia gu-doh If not, I shall die.  
 Gao yoh goo, i-meng or-nao. If yes, we shall go and  
 plant our own field.

**The girl :** Hlung gao. A girl's song (sung for)  
 you.  
 Gao na, gao tze jirr-k'ng Your parents won't let me  
 goo yoh gao; love you;  
 Goo na. goo tze jirr-k'ng My parents won't let you  
 gao yoh goo. love me.  
 Nu-noh i-jirr i-meng Now let us run away and  
 on jiorr, become Thais,  
 I shirr yoh, Sure of our love,  
 Gao dou goo, goo dou gao. You with me and I with  
 you.

