

CHAPTER 4 MYTHS AND ORIGINS OF THE NOSE

FLUTES AND FORMATION OF

NOSE-FLUTE CULTURE

4.1. Myth of Nose Flutes: Expression the Sound of the Hundred-Pace Snake

The Classification of Myth

There are three ways to classify myths—those that deal with the origin of the universe, those that deal with the origin of human beings and those that deal with the origin of culture. The last generally deals with animals, plants, water, fire and daily tools, and so on.¹

Snake Origin

There are many Paiwan legends about snake origins.

Once upon a time, a piece of bamboo on a Dawu mountain split open, giving birth to many snakes. After maturing the snakes transformed into human beings. Thus did their ancestors originate.²

¹ Yuan-Qing Cheng. *The Struggle for Renaissance: Taiwan's Indigenou*. Sinorama Magazine published, 1985, p 230.

² Yuan-Qing Cheng. 1985, p 25.

And in other book³, it showed that there are six legends about Paiwan origins. One of them suggests people originated from snakes. The Paiwan believe they are the descendents of the hundred-pace snake. Dawu Mountain is extremely important to the Paiwan because legends closely associate the hundred-pace snakes with the mountain.

Paiwan retain the belief that snakes transformed into our ancestors, so must not be killed and pottery jugs provided the shelter for our ancestors, so must be treasured and cannot be moved about willy-nilly.⁴

The symbol of the hundred-pace snakes occupies a very important place in the Paiwan culture. The ancestors of the Paiwan showed great respect to the hundred-pace snake and modern Paiwan have continued to follow their example.

The carving of hundred-pace snakes in wood has a religious meaning for the Paiwan. This is because the Paiwan believe that hundred-pace snakes are the ancestors of their noblemen. We may see the concept in that the hundred-pace snakes are called *Vorovoroy* or *Sura puluyu* in the Paiwanese language. *Vorovoroy* means eldest people and *Sura puluyu* means spirits, so Paiwan value and respect hundred-pace snakes.⁵

According to Zhong-Xin Jiang, the older Paiwan believed that the sound of the hundred-pace snakes was similar to the sound of nose flute. There are some debates as to whether or not the hundred-pace snake is able to make any sound. Zhong-Xin Jiang speaking in one training workshop held by the Bureau of Cultural Park, Council of Indigenous People, Executive Yuan on August 26th of 2007, explained that at an

³ Hai Jiang. *Wandering two thousand year*, 2000, p 6.

⁴ Yuan-Qing Cheng. 1985, p 26.

⁵ Tsui-Feng Shih, 2005, p 73, p 74.

international conference discussing the cultural of varieties of wild animals in 2002, Hua-Qing Lin (林華慶), as chief of Taipei City Zoo, questioned whether the hundred pace snake makes any sound.

Hua-Qing Lin has been caring for the hundred-pace snakes for about two or three years and has not heard any sounds made by the snakes. His research on captive hundred-pace snakes also shows that the snakes do not make any sound. However, in the same conference, an Australian scholar explained that if hundred-pace snakes were enclosed in the cages for a long time, they stopped making sounds.

Zheng-Xin Jiang also said that the Paiwan people believe that Paiwan nose flutes imitate the sound of hundred-pace snakes and as such the nose flutes are often made with designs of the Paiwan totem of the snake. It is known fact that animals in captivity overtime lose their natural survival skills and habits. This may explain why Hua-Qing Lin's research contradicts the beliefs of the Paiwan people.

Actually, Zhong-Xin Jiang⁶ heard the sounds of hundred-pace snakes. Chug-Fa Tung⁷ explained that when he was a child the old people in his tribe mentioned the sounds of hundred-pace snakes. He also claims to have heard the hundred-pace snakes' sounds when he was young. He further explained that the tribe left the old tribe and moved from high mountain to the plains, so nowadays people on the plains rarely hear the sound of hundred-pace snakes. Also, he mentioned that if people did not hurt hundred-pace snakes, the snakes would not hurt people, either. Yu-He Fu⁸ mentioned the same thing and she also explained that hundred-pace snakes would protect people if people did not hurt them. If people did hurt these snakes, hundred-pace snakes would hurt people, too. Before typhoons or when major disasters happen, hundred-pace snakes can be heard and are viewed as a

⁶ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai, 2001. p 23, p 24.

⁷ Comments on January 17th of 2008.

⁸ Interviewing on January 27th of 2006.

warning to the tribe.

Chung-Fa Tung mentioned that before Christianity came to the tribes, hundred-pace snakes came to Paiwan houses and stayed near people who were embroidering. However, after Christianity came to the tribes near the trees where hundred-pace snakes lived were hit by lightening. After that hundred-pace snakes never returned to the tribe. This held another meaning for religious purposes. In the researcher's opinion, Christianity's coming was a big event for the Paiwan. The lightening signified a destruction similar to the cultural destruction linked to Christianity. After being hit by lightening, the hundred pace snakes were afraid to come near the tribes again. This was in many ways a tragedy for the Paiwan.

Zhong-Cheng Pu's (浦忠成) notes⁹ that in the Tsou tribe's opinion the hundred-pace snake also sounds like a deity. People can not provoke hundred-pace snakes; otherwise they will take vengeance on people. If hundred-pace snakes come near, people can say some words to the snakes and the hundred-pace snakes will not hurt anyone.

⁹ Comments on January 17th of 2008.

4.2. The Origins of the Nose Flute

The Paiwan nose flute is called ‘*lalingedan*’ in the Paiwanese language¹⁰. In his book¹¹, Zhong-Xin Jiang tells a few stories about the myths behind nose flutes. One myth suggests that a long time ago, the nose flute was played by a man, who always accompanied Paiwan storytellers whenever they sang songs or relayed folklore. Another story tells of a man named *Kulelele*, who falls in love with a beautiful girl name *Muakakai*. But, *Muakakai* hid her beauty from him and stayed at home without going outside. *Kulelele* is said to have played the nose flute to win her affection and entice her out of the house.

Chung-Fa Tung,¹² Yu-Ho Fu,¹³ Shui-Neng Xie,¹⁴ Zheng-Xin Jiang,¹⁵ and Chao-Cai Lai¹⁶ all mentioned that originally people imitated hundred-pace snakes’ sounds in making the nose flutes.

Zhong-Xin Jiang¹⁷ explained that some people said the sound of hundred-pace snakes were similar to nose flutes, which for the Paiwan emphasized the importance of the hundred-pace snakes. Moreover, Zhong-Xin Jinag mentioned that the sounds of hundred-pace snakes¹⁸ were similar to the sounds of nose flutes and when hundred-pace snakes ‘blow’, it was similar to the sound made when playing the nose flute.

Jin-Cheng ShihYu remarked¹⁹ the breath, ‘qi’ (氣), of nose flutes represented a symbol of existence and connected mystical feelings and inspiration. When playing

¹⁰ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p104.

¹¹ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai, 2001. p 23, p 104.

¹² Comments on January 17th of 2008.

¹³ Interviewing on January 27th of 2006.

¹⁴ Interviewing on January 27th of 2006.

¹⁵ Interviewing on January 23rd of 2006.

¹⁶ Comments on December 1st of 2007.

¹⁷ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p24.

¹⁸ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p25.

¹⁹ Sauniaw, 2000. p 60.

the nose flute, it seemed that the breath was beyond the supernatural.

Xui-Ji Li explained²⁰ that long ago people heard hundred-pace snake and had the nose flute, named '*lalingedan*.' If the nose flute, '*lalingedan*', was touched by people, the hundred-pace snake with '*lalingedan*' would die.

Nose flute players in Pinghe village and Paiwan village remarked that hundred-pace snakes were the ancestors of the nobility. One side of the nose of hundred-pace snakes could 'play the nose flute.' The sound of nose flute was similar to the sound of hundred-pace snakes.²¹

Xian-Neng Jian remarked²² that sounds of hundred-pace snakes were the sounds of nose flutes. The beginning sound of nose flute was similar to hundred-pace snakes' sounds. Long ago, when the Paiwan tribe was in the mountains, nose-flute players played the nose flute and hundred-pace snakes would stand and would listen to the sound. The researcher found this story strange.

²⁰ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p31.

²¹ Tai-LI Hu and Xiu-Liang Nang, 1995, p 101.

²² Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p32.

4.3. Formation of Nose Flute Culture

The nose flute originated both to honor and to imitate the hundred-pace snake, which was sacred to the Paiwan. The Paiwan played the nose flute to show their respect to the hundred-pace snakes. It eventually developed into an art form of its own and a symbol of power among the Paiwan elite.

In Pinghe village, a picture of a boy playing a nose flute can still be seen carved on the wall. It was extremely exciting to see the boy shown on the wall. In the restroom of Lai Yi High School, the researcher saw hundred-pace snake images on wooden-doors. They were also shown in the Nei-Pu Senior Agricultural-Industrial Vocational High School on the outside of classrooms and on the outside of the water tower. This emphasizes the importance of hundred-pace snakes to the Paiwan.

Chung-Fa Tung explained²³ that music was an important part of Paiwan life from childhood. For example, in the evening when the work was done, people could hear songs, which were sung by people everywhere. Sometimes people sang to each other. In the researcher's estimation, this was the foundation for the culture of the nose flute. When young men chased young ladies, they simply did so by using nose flutes instead of singing songs.

The fieldwork of this study found that the Paiwan knew the nose flute and they would readily introduce people who could play and make nose flutes. In modern times, even young people in Paiwan communities understand the culture of nose flutes. It is good to see this.

The sounds of nose flutes represent the sounds of hundred-pace snakes. The hundred-pace snakes were extremely important to Paiwan people since the time of

²³ Tai-Li Hu, Shan-Hua Qian and Chao-Cai Lai . 2001. p32, p 33.

their ancestors. Generations have passed this tradition down and in so doing have formed an important culture.