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A Group of Yao.



The above photograph, in which are included both men and women, shows the style of dress of both sexes, and in particular the silver torque round the neck, with the silver plaques hanging from it.

THE YAO.

A paper written by Nai Chan Sungsi Yananda and Luang Nonwakorn, in reply to the Questionnaire of the Siam Society ; and translated

BY E. G. SEBASTIAN.

Originally the writers thought that they would take a "Haw" (Chinese) as an interpreter, because the latter can talk with the Yao, but, as this statement was wanted as soon as possible, they could not wait to procure one and so had to go alone and talk Lao. The language spoken by the "Yao" is not easy to understand until one gets the general sense - each individual expression is difficult. Some words could not be understood at all, and therefore the answers are not complete according to the questionnaire of the Siam Society. If there is any question to which no answer appears in this paper, it must be realised that the answer was impossible to obtain for the reasons given above.

A. Origin.

According to the traditions of the Yao, it is stated that the race originally lived in Nanking in China and that, on the capture of Nanking, the inhabitants emigrated to Law Chang Chuan close to Canton. Some earned their living by cultivating the fields and some by gardening in the hills and mountains. Later on they increased considerably in numbers and the place in which they were living became too small for them. They then migrated to Kwang Hsi. Those who had means bought land in the lowlands; those, who had not, lived by cultivating the hills as it was not necessary to buy the land. Later on they increased in numbers still more, and other races came and settled on their land so that the Yao race migrated once more. In consequence of their having no knowledge of the use of manure and also as a consequence of a three year drought the people could not work the fields and were starving. Most of the Yao, then, on the hills and in the lowlands migrated, some to Yunnan in China, and some to Kwae and Luang Prabang in French territory.

The few, who had means and remained behind when the majority migrated, soon became lonely so they sold their lands and went to live in the hills and eventually scattered to different places according to each man's desire, some of them coming to Siam.

B. Physical Characteristics.

1. The usual height is from five to six feet, most of them being of medium size.
2. Mostly of slight build.
3. Their features are like those of the "Haw" in China.
4. Some have thick, some have thin lips. Their complexion is like that of the Chinese, or "Haw".
5. The beard, moustache and hair on the body is, for the most part, yellow and soft, but is not thick and does not curl.
6. The eyes for the most part are brown.
7. The eyes are set on the same level as in the Siamese.
8. Where not exposed to the sun, the skin is white; but, where exposed, it is dark - a few are yellow like the Chinese.
9. The shape of the skull is normal.
10. Face, eyes, ears, jaw, lips and tongue are all normal.
11. The teeth are normal; the gums are dark and not swollen.
12. Other parts of the body are normal, except that they bore both ears when young to take earrings.
13. They are uncircumcised.
14. They neither tattoo nor dye their skin.

C. Their mode of life and customs.

1. *Habitat.*

They live on the hill-tops and cannot live on the plains, because they are accustomed to the high air. If they come down on to the plains for long they get fever. There is no limit to the area they cover, for they have no permanent abode and no land to cultivate. They are perpetually wandering from place to place. As for the cultivation of rice, if the soil is good, they come back to the same place, but if it is not they search for new land. They are

stupid and rough, and they do not know the customs of other races. They call their race "Khē Yao", but their neighbours call them simply "Yao".

2. *Private Dwellings.*

They are in the habit of living in small villages, each separate party having no fence around it, for they do not cultivate the country round. In their compounds they clear the land well, but let the pigs run about at large, causing a great deal of filth and a very unpleasant smell. The houses have no flooring and are built in the same way as those in Manila. They have a verandah on each side, but they are flat and low, as they use the ground as flooring, as the Chinese do who work on the railway. Their beds are raised above the ground.

The roofs are thatched with bamboo laid on like tiles. The walls, too, are some of bamboo and some of planking of "Niw Pa" wood, not sawn planks but cut with an axe, roughly hewn. The rice-mortars they keep in their rooms, for if they leave them outside the pigs destroy them. They always keep a fire burning in the house and the smoke blackens everything in it.

They wash only very occasionally and their bodies and clothing are very dirty and they smell very badly. They have furniture like the Chinese as also clothing, tools for cultivating, plates and dishes, rice and curry pots, etc., all of which they heap together in a basket and keep in absolute disorder. Their ideas on cleanliness are very vague.

3. *Clothing.*

The men wear black trousers similar to the Shan, the edges being bound with red cloth. They wear a short black jacket with narrow sleeves like the Chinese and the edge of the sleeve is bound with strips of red and yellow. Some wear a turban like the Shan and some wear a hat like the "Haw" bound with black cloth, in shape like a coconut - for the turban they use red and black cloth. They wear their hair long like the Chinese used to, but not plaited and tied. They wear a belt of black cloth embroidered

with red, yellow, black and blue cotton. They wear silver torques similar in shape to anklets, but the two ends are finished off in the form of an arrow-head. They also wear silver bangles, flattened in the middle but with the two ends square with an engraved pattern on them.

The women wear black trousers and a coat with narrow sleeves but reaching down to the ankle and full at the bottom like a skirt, the neck being like those worn in Java. From the neck to the waist is embroidered with red cotton or silk in patterns which resemble bunches of flowers. They wear a double waistband, one inside and one outside the coat, their length being from four to eight metres—the inside one being narrow and short and embroidered with three bands of colour, the ends hanging down in front. The trousers they embroider with silk in patterns resembling Chinese characters. They wear silver bangles like the men but smaller and they have several of them, but of these the men wear only one. They pierce their ears and wear earrings. They wear their hair long and they tie it up on their heads; they shave the hair above the ears leaving a tuft on each side. They smear their hair with a mixture of wax and wood-ash, so that it gives it a sleek appearance as if it were covered with a bag. They tie their heads round with thin red cloth so that it has a cone-shaped appearance and this again they cover with a large black or red outer cloth. Hanging from the neck to the waist they wear a chain made up of several square engraved silver plaques about one inch broad by two inches long. Neither men nor women wear shoes. Their clothes are very dirty as they never wash them. If they have many suits they occasionally change. This is the only kind of dress they possess. At festivals they change their clothes if they have more than one suit. They hold their festivals on the same days as the Chinese.

4. Food.

They eat the same food as the Chinese "Haw", e.g., rice, fish meat, vegetables, chillies, salt, etc. They all drink alcohol, both men and women, but not very much for they drink only after they have sacrificed to the spirits, thinking that the spirits like those who drink

after them. They all smoke opium, for they consider it one of the best medicines if they catch cold or fever, or have stomach trouble or diarrhoea. They even blow the smoke of the opium in the faces of the young children when they are sick. Both men and women are always smoking, but they do not chew betel-nut. They have cooking pots and pans like those of the "Haw".

5. *Their methods of hunting and fishing.*

Sometimes they hunt deer and catch fish, but they are not experienced at it. For hunting deer they use guns and also make wooden traps. The animals they shoot are stag, bison, wild boar and barking deer. When they have shot them they invoke the spirits, by name if the feast is for any particular spirit, but if not they invite them all. In the invocation they say that it was the spirits who brought them the deer, and they thank them for it and invite them to eat what they have shot. They ask the spirits to protect them and give them all prosperity. They imagine that all animals belong to the spirits, and that it is not right to shoot them without letting the spirits know; and this is why they carry out the following rite of buying and selling the animals they shoot. The money which they give to the spirits consists of paper with a mark on it similar to that found on a Chinese cent, giving the value as one rupee.* When they have informed the spirits, they burn all the paper money, and they imagine that, by this means, the money passes to the spirits. For fishing they use their hands, for they have no fishing tackle.

6. *Conveyances.*

They never use wheeled vehicles, but some families have pack animals, no single family possessing more than ten. In this respect their habits are similar to those of the "Haw".

7. *Industries.*

Their method of cultivating rice and vegetables is the same as ours and they use the same farm-tools, but they are unable to use cattle as they plant on the hill-side. In particular they keep pigs, dogs and poultry, but they do not know how to keep bees or silk-

* The Rupee has long been used in the north of Siam as current coin.

worms. They plant rice, corn, potatoes, pumpkins, gourds of various kinds, onions, ginger, chillies, peas, turnips, tobacco, etc.

8. *Sale and Exchange.*

They have no established markets. Their weights are the same as those used by the Chinese, but I am unable to find out what measures they use. They use the same money as we do.

9. *Labour.*

They work in iron and silver and they make a paper with lime, but they are not experienced in any of these crafts. Their women both sew and embroider. For making paper they use the bamboo shoots when a month old, taking out the centre of the shoot and throwing away the outside. They chop it up into thin slices about one inch long and boil it with lime and, after boiling, soak it in cold water for three or four days. This pulp they put in a basket and dry for ten to fifteen days, afterwards pounding it in a mortar. This again they mix with water and pour into a cloth mould until it has a smooth consistency. The water then soaks through, leaving the paper, which they dry in the sun until ready for use. The cloth moulds are stretched on frames. This kind of paper is similar to that used by the Chinese for sacrificing to the spirits, and the Yao use it for the same purpose. They are only able to dye cloth black, and for this they use the leaves of the indigo tree.

10. *Weapons.*

They use knives, swords and old-fashioned guns.

11. *Administration.*

The management of the family and the respect shown to elders is similar to that found among us, but their method of looking after children is quite different. The mother or person looking after the child straps it on her back, where it is able to sleep, and then carries on with her work. For this they pass a strap over the shoulders, crossing it in front and then tying it round the waist. The child is covered over with a cloth to protect it from sun and rain. The children never sleep on mattresses or in swinging hammocks. They can buy and adopt children and, once a buyer has paid money

to the parents of a child, the parents immediately lose all right over it. They can disown their children, as we can, at any time. Marriage consists in the buying and selling of girls and the parents fix the price of their daughters according to their looks, the lowest price being fifty and the highest three hundred rupees. Before the marriage the parents hold a discussion, and the agreement between the parties depends on the utterances of the fortune-tellers. When an agreement has been reached the bridegroom's party make a deposit according to the price to be paid for the bride and they fix a day on which to fetch her, this depending again on what the fortune-teller says. When the appointed day arrives, the parents of the bride bring her to the bridegroom's house together with her attendants. The bridegroom then sacrifices to the spirits, asking them to protect them and give them prosperity. Afterwards a feast is held consisting of pork and chicken, washed down with spirits, and then the bridegroom's party pay the remainder of the purchase money and the bride becomes the man's property. The parents or guardians of the girl have then lost their right, as when money is paid for chattels. Once they have become man and wife they never separate, for they think that this is against the wish of the spirits and that they will punish them, and not only the guilty couple but all the village, for which reason they are very strict on this point.

As regards giving birth; for the first three days after the birth the mother has to sit still and is not allowed to sleep until the three days are accomplished, and for the first month she may eat only chicken curry (ไก่ต้ม) and they give her no medicine. When the child is born, they take the blood out of the mouth and, after cutting it free, give it a hot bath the same as we do, but the umbilical cord they put in a basket and hang in the forest. They are very careless about looking after their children. At the age of one month they shave the child once or twice and, afterwards, let a tuft grow on the top of the head.

When a child dies they invite the spirits to a feast and beg them to bring the dead one to a place of happiness. If they are rich, they make a coffin and bury it and fence it round and roof it over;

but if they are poor, they simply bury it in the ground. They do not cremate as we do. When they migrate to other places they invite the spirits of the dead to go with them.

When they build a new house they invite the spirits of their grandparents to a feast, in accordance with the dictates of the fortune-tellers, and they ask these spirits to drive away the spirits inhabiting that place.

12. *Learning.*

They have some knowledge of drawing, engraving and moulding, but they have no knowledge of musical instruments (the writers were unable to find out anything about singing or playing games). They use an alphabet similar to the Chinese. They have fables and the following is one which the writers were told:—

Once upon a time there was a Yao couple, who had been married for three years, but, as they had no children, the husband blamed his wife and made her cry. Then she walked off to where the pipe-line brought water down from the hill-side and, on the way, met an old hunchback with white hair carrying a stick. He asked her why she was crying and she told him the whole story. The old man told her not to cry and added that, if she wished to have children, she must take a certain fruit which he gave her and eat one section of it each year. The fruit had twelve sections. The old man then disappeared and the woman brought back the fruit and gave it to her husband, telling him what had occurred. He was delighted and told his wife to eat the fruit but she, on retiring by herself and tasting it, found it so good that she ate the whole fruit at once. Soon afterwards she became pregnant and gave birth at one and the same time to twelve boys, as alike as twelve peas. The parents used to feed them with gruel from a trough, as the mother had not sufficient milk for them. When they were seven days old they were as strong as grown men. Their names are not known but we will call them Number One, Number Two, Number Three, etc., up to Number Twelve. One day the villagers were summoned to cut timber to build a palace for the King, and each family was ordered to provide one post. The father sent

Number One to cut the post for the family and, afterwards, handed it over to the officials. When all the posts were ready, the King chose the ones which he liked best, but was particularly pleased with the one cut by Number One, for it was hard and rang like iron. Then the King ordered the carpenters to build the palace but, when they wished to plant Number One's post in its pit, no man could carry it and the King therefore ordered Number One to come and bring it himself. He came and lifted it up with his left hand and put it in its pit with the greatest ease. After the completion of the palace the King held a ceremony to make merit, and Number One sent Number Two to attend it, but when Number Two reached the town he destroyed the latter utterly, whereupon the King held an enquiry and Number Two told him that it was he who had done it. The King then ordered him to be arrested and thrown into prison to await punishment, but however he was bound he broke loose, and so the King gave orders for him to be burnt. Number Two then asked permission to go home and see his parents and his brothers first, to which the King agreed. On arriving at home he told his brothers, and Number Three went to receive punishment in his stead. On his arrival, the soldiers bound him and threw him into the fire but, when the fire had died down, it was found that he was unharmed and he even jeered at the soldiers telling them to bring more fuel, as he was very cold. The soldiers brought the matter to the notice of the King, who ordered him to be roasted; but he asked the King to be allowed to go home first, as Number Two had done, and to this the King agreed. Number Three, on arriving home, sent Number Four in his place and the soldiers roasted him; but he took no hurt and only jeered at them, whereupon the King ordered him to be tied to a buffalo and crushed to death. But Number Four pretended that he would be certain to be killed this time, and he in his turn asked to be allowed to go home first and see his parents, to which the King once more agreed. On reaching home he sent Number Five in his stead and, on his arrival, the soldiers set about carrying out the King's commands, but he made himself grow larger and

larger so that no animal could carry him. This time the King ordered the soldiers to bind him and drown him, but Number Five made the same request as his brothers and sent Number Six in his stead, but no one knew that these substitutions had been made, because all the brothers looked exactly alike. When Number Six arrived, the soldiers bound him and threw him into the water, but he made himself much taller and so escaped unharmed. Then the soldiers stabbed him and shot at him but, on his still remaining unharmed, the King let him go free. Later on the twelve brothers quarrelled with the god, Indra, and at first won, but afterwards they were defeated and became his slaves, and he made them inspectors to see that human beings behaved themselves and, if anyone did wrong, to note it down. This is why, right up to to-day, the people sacrifice to them, because they think that if anyone does wrong the twelve brothers will see them.

13. *Science.*

The writers were unable to find out how they reckon the days, the months and the years. They have no knowledge of medicine, of which they use very little, the only ones they understand being quinine and some roots. To cure sickness they invoke the spirits, which will be dealt with in Section 14.

14. *Rites and Religious Ceremonies.*

They sacrifice to the spirits three times a day, in the morning, afternoon and evening; and when they do so they beat a gong and drums, in order to let the spirits know. In only a few houses they have drums but they have a gong in every house. The drums are shaped like those used in theatres and they make them themselves. Their method of sacrificing to the spirits is the same as that of the Chinese and they believe that the spirits have power to give them prosperity or to punish them. The rites have been handed down to them from their ancestors. They have three altars for sacrifice; the first for the spirits of their ancestors, the second for the spirit of Indra, the spirit of the Heavens, and the third for the spirits of the forests and of the towns. They place food on the altars and burn incense. No one has ever seen the face of the spirits. If there is

sickness they take the omens by tying a piece of iron to a rope and attaching paper money to it. Then they ask the spirits whether the sickness is caused by the spirits or by the sick man. If it is the spirits who have caused the sickness, they ask that the rope shall sway to and fro, and if it does so they believe that it has been caused by the spirits; but if it does not sway, they ask it three times and, if it still remains stationary, they believe it not to have been caused by the spirits. If it has been caused by the spirits, they ask what the spirits want and in conclusion they burn the paper, which is supposed to be money, so as to send it to the spirits. When the sick man is recovered they give a feast to the spirits, but, if he dies, they do not blame the spirits for they think that it has been pre-ordained. To repay the spirits they prepare food shaped like a buffalo horn split down the centre and then they throw the two halves into the air. When they fall on the ground, if they both fall with their flat sides uppermost, it means that the spirit has not yet come; if one flat and one round side are uppermost, it means that the spirit is going to come; if both round sides are uppermost, it means that the spirit has already come. Then the people stand up and sing like the Chinese do, paying homage to the spirits and asking them to accept the feast. The food they give them consists of alcohol, pork, and chicken, and they also burn joss-sticks, which they put on a square table, together with paper money. They find out by the throwing of pieces of wood (ไม้เสียมทอง) how long the spirits are going to stay. Then they burn the paper money for the spirits of Heaven and Hell. If they make merit before they die they are re-born as human beings, but those who have sinned are re-born as animals.
