Collective imagination or intimate knowledge of other worlds?
Tigermen in Nagaland

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Abstract

Labelled as "lycanthropy", the phenomenon of tiger transformation has been extensively discussed in the colonial monographs. Despite the radical Christianisation of the Naga, it continues to be vividly present even today: Tigermen are a collective "fact" among all Naga tribes – not only as a subject of folktales but also in accounts of personal experiences as or with tigermen and their related "soul tigers". In remote areas of Nagaland (Sangtam-, Yimchungrü-, Chang- and Khiamniungan-area) tigermen even nowadays act as local diviners, spirit mediums, and healers.

Inspired by Ingold ("The Perception of the Environment", 2000), I approach the topic in my M.A. thesis by looking not only at the widespread vague and wild stories about tiger-spirited humans and human tigers but at all aspects of Naga culture. The thesis examins the relationship between human beings and tigers on various levels: origin myths which trace a common origin of men and tiger, general notions of the forest, tiger hunting, traditional political structures and means of conflict resolution. Moreover, this holistic approach shall show that Naga hunters have (or: used to have) extensive zoological knowledge of the "most devilish beast", the "real" tiger of the jungle. Based on my findings, I present an emic worldview that considers the "worlds" of humans, animals and spirits as equally real. This approach will also allow me to address the following two core questions which focus on the social function of the Naga tigermen: To what extent can the tigermen be called religious specialists? How do they manage to "survive" in the present context of the Christian religion? The soul conception(s) of the Naga are a pivotal point and shall be of special interest in the present context of religious syncretism in Nagaland.

This paper is an extract of my M.A. thesis (draft version, written in German), which is based on data collected during several field trips to Nagaland between 2006 and 2011.[1]

[1] During three field trips (between 2006 and 2009) as part of the SNF project *Materielle Kultur, orale Traditionen und Identität bei den Naga Nordostindiens* under the direction of Prof. M. Oppitz and a 3 month long field trip for an ongoing project on Naga logdrums under the direction of Prof. Mareile Flitsch.

Introduction: Where the tiger is supposed to be hidden[2]

Labelled as "lycanthropy", the phenomenon of tiger transformation has been extensively discussed in the colonial monographs (Hutton, Mills, Fürer-Haimendorf). Despite the radical Christianisation of the Naga, it continues to be vividly present even today: Tigermen are a collective "fact" among all Naga tribes – not only as a subject of folktales but also in accounts of personal experiences as or with tigermen and their related "soul tigers". In this paper, I will examine three "scenes"[3] of tiger-people-relationship in Naga culture, present a theoretical framework in which the phenomenon of tigermen could be analysed, and show how Naga myths of origin mirror the very nature of this ancient relationship between human beings, spirits, and tigers[4].

#1: Hunting tigers in the jungle

The somewhat elusive phenomenon of tigermen is, in my view, best approached by a more down-to-earth activity which also plays an important part in Naga culture: tiger hunting. While plenty of accounts exist on tiger hunts in the plains of India[5], there are only few descriptive reports on tiger hunting in Nagaland. Hunting in the steep Naga hills differs considerably from the hunting techniques of the lowlands due to distinct terrain characteristics. The following descriptions give an impression of what it meant for the Nagas to share their living environment with tigers before the predators were decimated almost to extinction,[6] and what refined hunting skills were required to trap the big cats:

"Their dread of tigers is born of bitter experience, for the jungles in the valleys are infested with them, and to the Nagas they are demons incarnate (…)" (Furness 1909: 465).

"(…) a high bamboo wall had been built, and to the left and right of it a bamboo fence went up the hill like a funnel. (…) The bravest warriors of the village had placed themselves at the fence near the wall armed with spears and shields. The old men and small boys kept watch at the upper end because a tiger always attacks downhill. No one had firearms. Spears, *daos* [slashing knife] and tall plaited shields were the only defence" (Fürer-Haimendorf 1936: D1).

"One of the most dangerous tasks which the leaders of the *morung* [men's dormitory] assign to the young boys even today is to catch a tiger. They take the youngsters to a prepared trap and leave them there to watch. The boys bring food and drink with them and thus endure long hours of sitting in the branches of the trees. If the tiger does not show itself by late afternoon they go home and the following day return to the jungle to resume their vigil. It often takes as long as a week before they manage to lure the beast to the trap" (Ganguli 1984: 118).

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[2] Caption for a series of historical photos by Fürer-Haimendorf of a tiger hunt in Merangkong, Nagaland. The photos are accessible online at the SOAS photo archive:
http://digital.info.soas.ac.uk/cgi/c/Furer%2DHaimendorf/F%C3%BCrer-Haimendorf%20Collection_Homepage

[3] A complete ethnographic account of these scenes goes beyond the scope of this paper.

[4] For an overview on the phenomenon of tigermen in Southeast Asia and detailed ethnographic accounts the following works are most relevant: Bakels (1994, 2000), Boomgaard (2001), Kaiser (2003), Wessing (1986) and Winstedt (1982)

[5] For an overview on tiger hunting and its imperialistic dimension in British India see Sramek 2006.

[6] Even though most of my Naga informants claimed that there are still tigers in the area, according to recent statistics (WWF 2010) tigers seem to be virtually extinct, with the possible exception of a small population on Burmese territory. Leopards and smaller species of the cat family are still found – and hunted notoriously.

Nowadays, tigers are hunted with rifles. Nevertheless, it remains a difficult task, as one of my informants pointed out:

"It's very difficult to hunt tigers. Even if we don't see them, they will see us" (Chingpah Nyam, tigerman in Yongnyah, 18.1.2009).

Nonwithstanding with the general passion of the Naga for hunting, tigers were never hunted for their flesh. Most of the Naga tribes even have strong taboos regarding the consumption of tiger meat, and no spiritual benefit could be gained by trapping tigers. Skulls and skins were rather thrown away or burnt than displayed in the village (Saul 2005: 183). The only reason to hunt tigers was their immediate threat to people and cattle. Yet, once a tiger was killed, the celebrations were elaborate. Particularly striking are the parallels between tiger hunts and head hunts: killing a tiger brought a similar gain in status as killing an enemy (Mills 1926: 140), and the hunter's return to the village with the decapitated head of a tiger or an enemy was celebrated in the same manner. In both cases, the new status was woven into a shawl (Hutton 1921: 159; Ao 1968) or denoted by decorations on their spears (Mills 1922: 17). Also, a mourning ceremony would be conducted for a slain tiger in the same manner as if a member of the village had been killed (Hutton 1921: 92).

#2: Deluding (tiger) spirits

The killing of a tiger[7] put an end to the dangers of its immediate physical presence as a predator; yet what remained was perhaps of no less potential harm to the hunter and his companions: the spirit of the deceased tiger and the spirits of its surviving companions. In order to avoid their revenge (in this world or the next) the hunters had to take several precautionary measures.[8] For instance, right after the killing the mouth of the tiger was speared open and the eyes pierced with bamboo spikes in order to prevent the tiger to call his friends (cf. ill. in Joshi 2004: 58). A common ritual was also the feeding of the dead tiger with betel (Fürer-Haimendorf 1937, unpublished Manuscript, notebook 14).

Details varied from village to village – but everywhere the intention of these accompanying rituals while/after skinning, eating and/or burying the tiger was the same: deluding the spirit of the killed tiger as well as its tiger companions in the jungle. The rituals are therefore attempts to reduce both spiritual and physical threats.
Old men from Wapher village who participated in tiger hunts themselves remembered that those who were involved in the hunting (or/and eating tiger meat) had to fix a stone on the top of a bamboo pole – in the very same manner as human heads of enemies caught in a headhunt

[7] "Tiger" is used among the Nagas as generic term for tigers, leopards as well as other small species of the cat family such as civet cat, golden cat or caracal. However, the description on tiger hunting here refers explicitly to the big striped tiger (*panthera tigris*).

[8] A tradition which is not only followed by the Nagas. Parry mentions an elaborate ritual among the "Lakher" who nowadays call themselves Mara: "The man who shot the tiger dresses up in woman's clothes, lets down his hair like a woman, and smokes a woman's pipe. He carries a spindle and thread in his hand, and while winding the thread dances round the tiger's head, finally running the spindle through the tiger's nostrils. (…) The origin of this ceremony is that once upon a time a woman went to the *jhums* [fields], and a tiger came to eat her. The tiger knocked her down, but as she did so the spindle she was carrying entered his nostrils and killed him, and so the woman escaped. Ever since then it has been the custom to wear woman's clothes when performing the *Ia* ceremony for a tiger. During the *Ia* the dead tiger's brother is said to watch the proceedings from a high hill, and when he sees a woman dancing round the tiger he does not get angry, as he thinks that it is only a woman who killed his brother, and that if the latter was stupid enough to get killed by a woman he had only himself to blame. So, as it is not worth while punishing a woman, he goes away without taking any revenge" (Parry 1932: 142f).

were displayed at bamboo poles. Torüpkiu Youliu, an old Head G.B., built a small model with sticks and pieces of charcoal to illustrate this ritual and commented it as followed:

#00:37:10-2# Even if there are hundred or thousand of people, ALL those who ate tiger flesh will keep one bamboo pole and tie a stone at its end. EVERYONE. Those who ate tiger flesh will keep like this: Stones, hanging from these bamboo poles (…) No women. Only men who participated … not only those who participated hunting but those who were eating [from the tiger's flesh]. Boys can also come and then join and eat.

After having hung the stones on the bamboo poles, those men who were involved in the spearing of the tiger did not sleep in their beds at home but spent the night in their full warrior dress in the *morung* [dormitory] and bedded their heads on a single bamboo – in order not to fall in deep sleep:

And then those who participated in this killing tiger, will go and sleep that night with their full dress: Spears, *daos.* And they will sleep on one bamboo. Only one bamboo. And when they fall down, they will say "ouk!", ah. They will say "ouk!" in order just to be AWARE, ALERT, when other tigers come. The killed tiger's friends.

The hunter who threw the first spear did not go to sleep at all. He prepared a "mock meal" – the last step to ensure that the killed tiger's friends would not attempt to take revenge: He cooked huge yams corms and – instead of having proper rice meals trice a day – nourished himself only from this, and only during nighttime. These restrictive measures were taken to convince the tiger that this human being is not an adequate victim because he is able to bite "white marvel stones" – which the tiger mistakes the white yam in the pot to be – and therefore must have much stronger teeth than himself:

The one who killed the tiger will boil this huge white yam. So when it is cooked, the skin is removed, and then it is white in colour. After boiling they will keep in a basket. And two days he will eat only this kind of food and he will eat only at night. Two days continuously. Then the friends of the killed tiger (…) will come and see the person who killed a tiger. So during nighttime he will eat that. The tiger also thinks: "Oh. They are eating stones, white stones, which is very hard". These white stones are very hard. Like marvel. It is found in the jungle. So the tigers will also eat this kind of stone, they will try. But it is very hard. Cannot eat. [And the tigers will shout:] "Oh! Man's teeth is very strong. Stronger than ours. We cannot eat him. His teeth is stronger than our teeths!" Then the tigers leave him like this. That is why the slayer keeps like this. (T. Y., Wapher, 24.1.2009)

Common of all ritual was that the tiger was never brought into the village without precautions (if it was brought into the village at all). Another elaborate ceremony was described identically by informants from Phelunger- and Sangphurre village. In these Sangtam villages hunters must not feast tiger meat during daytime:

#00:18:40-6# SKJ: When they sit for eating the tiger meat, it will be only in the evening. Not in daytime. Only in the dark they will eat. (…) We make a fire, na, by firewood.

They used a sophisticated method to distract the spirits of the killed tiger and its friends: Through a clever construction, glowing pieces of ember were propelled into the pitchdark night sky. Each of the hunters bent down a bamboo pole and attached a small piece of burning firewood. During the whole feast they sat around the fire, holding on to the bamboo with one hand. Only after everyone had finished eating, all hunters released the bamboos simultaneously, and the arched poles flung back up to their upright position, by which the embers became visible against the darkness like hundreds of little fires:

#00:24:33-9# And then pieces of burning firewood will be tied tied at a rope and hung on a bamboo pole.

It is still burning but it will hang on the tree. I'm eating, so my … I have got to … I have to tied one fire-tree with rope and with small … we put some hanging matter, I'll hang like that, hold here… fire is tied there with a rope, it is here, so … I'm eating, I'll be holding that one. One person also holding that fire, with the rope, and eating, all will be done like that. Then… everbody is finished, if all finished eating… they will leave all together at a time.

This ceremony was performed to delude the soul of the killed tiger, which, seeking revenge, would attempt to find its killers by the fireside. In order to return safely to their homes, the hunters distracted the tiger's soul by the numerous little ember "fires" in the sky.

While going … all finished, at that all time that fire will be thrown. And run to the village. Direct to the *morung* house. So when is run away… though there is no light, but fire light is there. So seen that, tiger's soul will not chase the people. (…) [the soul] will be looking at the fire. At that time they will running. That fire is not burning … but light is there, na. So all will hang, na. Then all will run. So that tiger's soul, tiger, will not chase them. So this is practiced always when tiger is killed. That is the belief.

As in Wapher village, among the Sangtam the person who killed the tiger (as opposed to mere participants) had to perform an additional ritual to appease the tiger's soul:

But the one who has killed … for him … a special sacrifice he has to do. Take one ginger, make 30 pieces. And there is one tree which is…it is available in the jungle, that also: 30 leaves. That is called *machu sang*, na. 30 pieces he will take and 30 pieces of ginger. He'll put there one each, ginger… then he will kill a chicken, all this… chicken lungs, 30 pieces, smallsmall pieces he will put and with that chicken's blood. And even… [with] chicken's blood his hands should be washed to clean this … since he has killed tiger, his hands will be washed by the chicken's blood. So that he and his sons and daughters will not be affected. Because tiger is such that… if it is not done like that, son or daughter may die. Without any sickness. So he may die also. Only to avoid that he will do it (…) Then after, the 30 pieces he will have to throw away. Saying this and that, na, he will throw. And sometimes even salt and chilli powder mixup is also been thrown. Saying that "Oh, tiger soul may not affect us, affect to my family and to me". It is thrown like that.

The narration ended with the following comment:

So when tiger is killed it is… very difficult, na. We have to follow up all these things. Otherwise some… the family, any family members will die. That is the belief and that is true. (Supekhyong Kyosukyu, 2011)

Most strictly followed among all Naga tribes were rituals when somebody was killed by a tiger. It was considered as *apotia* (unnatural death) and required immediate and complete purification ceremonies:

"If a man is killed by a tiger, his house and all his belongings are burned, and his whole family must go through elaborate purification, as if to exorcise an evil spirit. If a man's or woman's mangled body be found in the jungle within two or three miles of the village, his whole family divest themselves of every thread of clothing and go to the body, and simply wrapping it in a bamboo mat, leave it where it was found; returning to their village, they burn down their old house and build an entirely new one; new fire is started on the hearth by means of the fire-saw, and they wash themselves carefully, cutting their hair and paring their nails; not a single possession of the one who has been killed may be used again" (Furness 1909: 465).

#3: Transcending realities: tiger-spirited humans

The above two scenes (scene 1: killing the animal; scene 2: deluding of spirits and the killed tiger's surviving friends) of a traditional[9] Naga tiger hunt are incomplete without a third scene, which stands in the centre of my study: the tigermen.

Usually, when Naga hunters leave the village for a tiger hunt in the jungle, a curious scene takes place in certain houses: So-called tigermen – individuals who supposedly have a spiritual relation with a tiger – will start to behave in a strange way: They will scratch the walls, stamp on the ground as caged animals do, and emit loud animal growls (Ao 1999: 70). In order to help the tiger escape, the family members of the tigermen must take several ritual measures. Most common was rubbing the skin with ginger[10]. Another possibility is to "set up certain obstacles in the house for the man to jump over. They help him and encourage him to overcome the hurdle and it is believed that if he can jump across the barrier at one go, his tiger-soul too can escape from the trap. Otherwise, the man continues his animal behaviour until the animal is either freed or dead" (ibid.).

Toshi Jiangkhiangrü, a 45 year old tigerman from Luthor village (Chirr-Yimchungrü) gave further details on what he is expected to experience in case his tiger is trapped:

#01:43:00-1# If the tiger dies, I will die. If the tiger dies, then me myself I will tell my family: "I don't have a chance to survive. I'm also dying". That's the only last thing I'll be able to tell. But I will mention the name, the person who shot me, the place where I was shot, the area where I was shot, I will tell. Because I know where I was shot.

In fact, as he specified later on, even if his tiger were shot dead, he would not die immediately but only on the sixth[11] day – at the very moment the tiger's teeth are pierced through:

#01:45:28-4# (…) So [they] bring the tiger in the village, have a big party like kill one pig and have a big party. We'll eat the tiger also. And on the sixth day, the teeth of the tiger, they will pierce it. And on the sixth day, the person dies. Like … the tigerman will die. The tiger will die on the same day, the villagers brought the tiger, had a big party, ate the tiger also. But on the sixth day, when the day of piercing the tiger's teeth, on the sixth day the tigerman will day. (T. J., Luthor 2009)

J. H. Hutton, who served as an administrative officer in the Naga hills between 1909 and 1939, got involved as a magistrate in one of these fateful "twofold" tiger hunts. Stationed in Ungma, he was asked for adjudgement in a "tigerman case": A tigerman accused the villagers of Ungma of "sheer murder" as they were hunting "his" soul leopard. Hutton finally decided in favour of the tigerman – by remarking at the end of the report that he unfortunately missed an "interesting experiment" which could have revealed the genuine truth about the tigermen phenomenon:

"On one occasion the elders (…) came to me for permission to tie up a certain man in the village, while they hunted a leopard which had been giving a great trouble. The man in question was, by the way, a Christian convert, also appeared to protest against the action of the village elders. He said that he was very sorry that he was a were-leopard; he did not want to be one, and it was not his fault, but seeing that he

[9] What is now regarded as "traditional" is often equated with terms "pre-colonial" and "pre-Christian" (Oppitz et al. 2008: 18). While proselytisation by the American Baptists started already by the second half of the nineteenth century, Christian mission was set up only in the middle of the twentieth century.

[10] Freshly ground ginger is applied directly on the whole body because it is believed to have a calming as well as stimulating effect on the spirit-possessed tigerman.

[11] The meaning of the figure 6 is analysed in my M.A. thesis. The above mentioned detail is of crucial importance, resp. in perfect accordance with the soul conception of the Yimchungrü Naga.

was one, he supposed that his leopard body must kill to eat, and if it did not, both the leopard and himself would die. He said that if he were tied up the leopard would certainly be killed and he would die. To tie him up and hunt the leopard was, he said, sheer murder. In the end I gave leave to the elders to tie the man up and hunt the leopard, but told them that if the man died as a result of their killing the leopard, whoever had speared the leopard would of course be tried, and no doubt hanged, for murder, and the elders committed for abetment of the same. On this the elders unanimously refused to take advantage of my permission to tie up the man. I was sorry for this, though I had foreseen it, as it would have been an interesting experiment" (Hutton 1920: 44f).

Constructing a Naga world view: Towards a theoretical framework

In the preceding chapter, I presented 3 **scenes** which I consider relevant to the understanding of the tigermen phenomenon:

#1 KILLING ANIMALS (> BODY): Killing the tiger in the jungle
#2 DELUDING SPIRITS (> SPIRIT): Deluding (tiger) spirits
#3 TRANSCENDING REALITIES (> ANIMAL-SPIRITED PERSONS and HUMAN-SPIRITED ANIMALS): The elusive phenomenon of tigermen

As can be seen from these titles, each scene has a distinct (meta-)physical focus: the body as physical reality, the spiritual existence of the animal tiger, and realities beyond this body/spirit-duality as narrated by tigermen. All three scenes pose numerous **questions** which would each be worth discussing at length. In my M.A. thesis, I have chosen to focus on the following:

(1) What are the cultural roots of the ambiguous and complex relationship between the Naga and tigers?
(2) How are we to conceptualise the relationship between body and spirit from a Naga point of view?
(3) How can we understand the tigermen's experiences and their ability to transcend physical and spiritual realities? What is the role of these tigermen in Naga society?

To construct a **theoretical framework**, answers to the above questions shall be approached from different perspectives:

(1) The relationship between tigers and human beings in Nagaland shall be illuminated from two different perspectives: On the one hand by looking at the oral traditions (myths of origin) and on the other hand by examining the history of coexistence of human beings and tigers in the Naga hills.
(2) To understand the relationship between spirited and non-spirited worlds, between humans and non-humans, Naga cosmology and perceptions of the spirited environment need to be taken into account.
(3) The key to understanding tigerman narratives, their underlying cosmologies and their role in society is the soul conception of the Naga.

The ethnographic aim of my M.A. thesis is to outline an emic view of the Naga cosmology in pre-Christian time. I attempt to show how myth (of origin), cultural practices and collective imagination are interrelated in traditional Naga culture. The tigermen narratives give insight into a worldview in which spiritual realities are no less real than physical realites.

Tigers in Naga Oral Tradition

Myths and folktales in which the tiger plays a (central) part are widespread all over Southeast Asia. Compared to the extensive collections and excellent research of tiger myths and folktales of peoples of Eastern Asia[12], Naga oral tradition has not yet been adequately researched.[13] I concentrate here on the origin myths that characterise the relationship between humans and tigers. By no means a thorough analysis, the following remarks shall show that in the traditional Naga societies, various actions that people performed in real life were directly related back to the mythical kinship between human beings and tigers as told in different origin myths.

Tracing the origins of tiger, spirit, and man: Naga origin myths with tigers

Comprehensive versions of the Naga origin myth that narrate the separation of man and tiger in mythical times are found in Dutta (1990: 222), Fürer-Haimendorf (1939: 196) and Hutton (1921a: 261f). Further Naga folktales that focus on this mythical relationship can be found in Elwin (1958, 1969, 1970), Temsula Ao (1999: 98f, 109ff), and *Folktales of Nagaland* (1971: 9f). The following comments will be limited to origin myths, even though folktales would also reveal interesting parallels between oral tradition, cultural practices and tiger behaviour.

Roughly two types of origin myths involving tigers can be distinguished – I have labelled them as "type 1" and "type 2":

Myths of type 1 tell of a time when humans and animals were living together; in some versions they could even speak to each other (cf. Ao 1999: 65). Myths of type 2 are narratives of a fraternal alliance between three brothers born from the same (human) mother: a man, a tiger and a spirit.

What I have labelled "type 1" is usually told only in a few sentences or referred to in songs. The longest version was told to me by tigerman Hankiumong Jangkhiungrü from Leankongrü (Yimchungrü Naga) village:

#00:12:53-8# Before… in forefathers time, means… in the BEGINNING… tigers were giving birth in the village, house. One day… a tigress came in a house in a village and then gave birth to a tiger… and then in the morning, the tigress mother left somewhere. So when the family got up… they saw tiger baby lying in the… just outside, in the corner. In the corner. So they took the tiger baby and then wrapped with cloth and then went… took towards jungle. They took the tiger baby to the jungle and then left it. And then they shouted: "Your baby is here! Where are you? Come and take, and go!" Then the tigress, the mother of the tiger baby, came and then took her tiger baby and then went somewhere. From that time onwards, they… how to say… they give birth in the jungle, they live in the jungle. They don't come to the house and to the

[12] Of the numerous origin myths in which the tiger plays a part, the following sources should be taken as representative: Elwin (1958, 1970) for various Northeast Indian ethnic groups, but especially the Naga tribes in Arunachal; Abbott (2000) for the Burmese ethnic groups; Oppitz (1997) and Bai (2001) for the Naxi. Tiger totems and rituals can be found for instance among the Chin (Stevenson 1943: 63), the Qiang (Norbu 1999), and numerous ethnic groups in South China, such as the Yi, the Luoba, the Tujia and the Pumi (de Groot 1897, Hammond 1991/93, Naumann 1997, Norbu 1999: 189).

[13] "We have a reasonable body of folktales available in print, but little in the way of other texts, and even this corpus of tales largely rests on fieldwork done nearly a century ago. Since those days, little work has been carried out on oral traditions among the Nagas; in fact some of the recently published collections of oral stories include texts that are rewritten versions of those first published by Mills or Hutton" (Blackburn 2008: 260).

village. But before… these tigers were coming in the houses of man and gave birth because… they were spirit of men. But once they did that way, then… that became forever like this. Now tigers are living in the jungle, and men are living in the cultivated area.
(H.J., Leangkongrü, 2009)

Myths classified as "type 2" draw a more detailed picture of the nature of the relationship between tiger, man and spirit in mythological times: tiger, man and spirit grow up as close brothers who take loving care of their old (human) mother, but gradually, conflict between the three siblings starts to grow. The reason for the growing conflict varies, but all versions of type 2 describe their final decision to live in separate living areas (*lebensräume*).

The separation of tiger, man, and spirit

Most available oral as well as printed versions of type 2 are short versions[14] of what I consider as complete versions. The following short version was told me by Mr. Daiho Mao. After having narrated the myth in English he wrote it down himself at the same evening. The following is his original, unedited[15] version:

There was once a lady called Dzülia Mosüa. One day she was sleeping on a big flat stone and a mist of cloud covered her and she got pregnant. Subsequently, she gave birth to three children – Spirit, Tiger and Man. The human being was the youngest one amongst them. When their mother died, the tiger and the spirit were outside and the human buried his mother under the fireplace. When the tiger came back, he asked: ›Where is my mother?‹ But the man refused to tell the truth. Later they decided to hold a competition as to who should stay back and inherit their parental property. Since the spirit was the eldest one, he agreed to leave, but the tiger and the human being held a running competition to make out as to who should live in the house, and who should leave. Both of them agreed, and on the appointed day, they put a bamboo-target and decided that the one who reaches first will stay back. The spirit wanted to help his younger brother and made a bow for him. So while tiger and man were running the spirit shot the bamboo-target from behind. And the tiger, seeing the target being touched by something, thought that his brother had already reached, and he left angrily towards the jungle. It is from this very place, that the different Naga tribes spread out. The tribes coming from Makhel stone are the following ones: Angami, Chakhesang, Impui, Liangmai, Mao, Maram, Poumai, Rengma, Pochury, Rongmei, Thangal, Zemi, part of Lotha, Sema and Tangkhul. It was from here, that all these tribes dispersed.

The place mentioned is located below the village of Makhel, a village only few kilometers south of Kohima, though already on Manipur territory. On a spot metalled with natural stones, three stone steles symbolise the fraternal alliance of tiger, spirit and man. The myth tells of the separation of the brothers and names the subsequent descendants of the man – the Naga tribes – who migrated from here to their present settlement areas. While the narrator attached great importance to the fact that this location is a historical (not mythological) place from where the mentioned tribes originated, he didn't give any descriptions of the three brothers' characters. In older versions we get some more details, such as the three brothers' preferences for raw meat, cooked food, etc. (cf. Hutton 1921a).

A more detailed version was recorded this year in the Sema village Sumi (Kaiser & Sutter 2011). Noticeable is the different way in which the story is narrated (compared to the above): Satahi Wozah, the narrator, used a lot of direct speech, *imitating* the different actors. The story was translated by his grandson Vipeto Tara from Sumi into English:

[14] For example Mills' version of the Rengma (1937: 265f).

[15] An example of a published version with an obviously strong Christian influence was recently published in *Indian Folklife* (Mao 2009).

#00:55:54-2# One mother, she gave birth to tiger, satan… evil… ghost, and then man. Tiger first and then ghost, second. And then man, third. Man last. One day the mother became very sick and then whenever the tiger is with his mother, that day, the mother almost died, because… the tiger will say…says to his mother that if you die, I'll eat you. Eat here, eat here and then play with his mother the whole day. So the mother becomes very weak. And then whenever the man and the ghost were with their mother, they'll look after their mother very nicely. So the mother becomes very… what to say… strong again. One day, while the ghost and the man, they were with their mother and then tiger went to field. So that very day, the mother died. And then they buried their mother in their… inside their house. And then they make a fire place on top of their mother's grave. And then, they cut one pig and then throw the flesh… say… one part of the leg in the room, inside the room. After the tiger come back, he inquired about his mother: "Where is our mother? I want to eat her. Where is our mother?" - "Eh, don't speak anything, just go to barn. There, you'll find her." - And then he ate that flesh and then they make the fireplace above the oven, so the tiger, he didn't look at the place where his mother was buried. So their mother was safe. After their mother's death they had a discussion and then the ghost he said: "Our mother has died, so what shall we do? Tiger, being the eldest son, you go inside, you'll be roaming in the jungle. And then, man, being the youngest, you'll go in the… what to say… in the clear places". Tiger, he insisted that he will roam around in the open spaces, not the jungle. And then he said, that - being the youngest -, man should roam in the jungle. And then the ghost he told the tiger that: "Let's have a competition". He placed something on that opposite side and then the one who touches that first, will go in the open spaces, and then, the last will roam in the jungle. And then the ghost, he had a pity on the man. So he prepared a catapult for the man. And then the competition started. The tiger he climbed up very fast. But then the man, he stood, and then he shot with his catapult and then shot the target. So… the ghost, he gave his decision that the man touched the symbol first, so he'll be in the wide open spaces and the tiger will be in the jungle. Even after that, the tiger refuses to go to the jungle. And then, he just sat on the side of the road. And the tiger refuses and he sat on the side of the road. So he, the ghost, he gave… what to say… horn of the buffalo. And then he gave that to the man and then: "You blow it from behind the tiger". So the man, obeyingly, he go behind the tiger and then blow from behind. So the tiger, he jumped and then went to the jungle. And then, the ghost, he told the tiger the last thing: "So now that you are in the jungle, so what advice do you want to give to the man, being the youngest? You are the eldest and what do you want to give to your younger brother?" So the tiger: "I don't have anything much to say. But then, the only thing is that, you have to love one another. One another. And then… don't be too lazy. Walk and then watch carefully the *gennas* [ritual ceremonies], field *gennas*. Watch these things carefully. Because if you don't work, you'll not have anything to eat to" So that's the advice of the tiger for the man.

This version explains how tiger and man came to live in seperate places, but not where the spirit found its new living space. When asked about this, our informant told us the following story:

#01:07:30-2# And then, the ghost, one day he told the man that: "We love each other very much, but then, now… we don't have anything much. So we'll have to separate from each other. And the man, he insisted: "We'll not be separated from each other, we'll live together forever". And then the ghost, the spirit, he told the man: "Now, do you see me?" - "I'm loosing your sight, you are becoming like a shadow, your face doesn't seem like before". The ghost, he replied that "the situation will become worse. Finally you will not be able to see me anymore".

Even though this version is considered to be a complete version, the translator added the following comment:

"It seems, it's a long story about… due to time constrain, he cut. He may have cut short".

Long version or short, all the above versions of the origin myths trace back the complex connections between human beings, tigers, and the spiritual world to a mythological past. A more thorough analysis of the Naga oral tradition will surely provide important insights that help to understand the phenomenon of tigermen in Naga culture.

Collective imagination or intimate knowledge of other worlds? In this paper, I tried to enter the field of the pre-Christian Naga cosmology by outlining the framework from which I develop my M.A. thesis on Naga tigermen.

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