

THE FLOOD

Three Northern Kammu Versions of the Story of the Creation¹

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That the world as we know it today emerged after a gigantic flood is an idea shared by many peoples in Southeast Asia.²

Often the new world is repopulated through an incestuous marriage of the only two survivors, who are related to each other in a tabooed bloodline. The young couple is unwilling to have sexual relations, and not until some powerful portent has convinced them of the necessity do they finally get married.³

In the case of the Kammu story of the Flood⁴ it is the malcoha

¹ The stories presented here were recorded in Lampang in northern Thailand at the field station of the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies in the years 1972–1974.

² Cf. Alfred Kühn: *Berichte über den Weltanfang bei den Indochinesen und ihren Nachbarvölkern*, Leipzig 1939, especially pp. 93–109 "Sintflutberichte".

For other Kammu versions from different areas of Laos (Phongsali, Luang Prabang and Vientiane provinces) see Michel Ferlus: "La cosmogonie selon la tradition khmou" in *Langues et techniques. Nature et société. Approche linguistique*, Vol. I, pp. 277–82, Paris 1972.

In this interesting article Dr Ferlus compares the Kammu and Lao stories of the Creation. He points out the remarkable consistency in the structure and the themes of the various Kammu versions. The three versions treated here can only further underline this point. As the storytellers speak Yuan and Rook dialects their ultimate origin would be in the province of Namtha and the northernmost part of the province of Luang Prabang.

³ Cf. also David Crockett Graham: *Songs and stories of the Ch'uan Miao*, *Smithsonian Miscellaneous Collections*, Vol. 136, No 1, Washington 1954, p. 179 f.

⁴ In Kammu the name of the story is Om pek om ɲɛn. Om pek means 'flood,

cuckoo⁵ which persuades the primeval couple to sleep together. This incident is extremely well-known among the Kammu of northern Laos and Thailand. Without exaggeration it may be said that every Kammu speaker in the whole area knows the words the malcoha cooed:

Tok kək kək,
tok kək,
pree kap mək
sərkək yə tee.
'Tok kək kək,
tok kək,
brother and sister⁶
embrace one another.'

Despite the fact that at least the first part of the story is so extremely well known, only one out of 27 storytellers told the story spontaneously (version A below). The reason for this is that the story is considered very difficult to tell because of its many intricate details and its profusion of loosely connected themes.

To an outsider it would seem as if the story could, or even should, end after the section dealing with the repopulation of the world. The Kammu, however, hold a different opinion. In the course of the work the storytellers were often invited to come together and discuss the recorded stories at a kind of improvised seminar.⁷ They were all agreed that the story should explain not

deluge', and om pək om ɲɛn is a reduplicated form meaning the same. The latter half of the reduplication, om ɲɛn, is meaningless in isolation.

⁵ The bird, in Kammu called tokkək or təkək, is the greater Greenbilled Malcoha, *Phoenicophaeus tristis*.

Cf. Bertram E. Smythies: *The Birds of Burma*, London 1953.

⁶ The words pree and mək cannot be adequately translated into English. Pree means 'brother or paternal male cousin in relation to sister or paternal female cousin' and mək 'sister or paternal female cousin in relation to brother or paternal male cousin'. The meaning is here that the two young people were related in a way which made sexual relations between them incestuous. (The explanations of the kinship terms given in these notes are by no means exhaustive. A separate article dealing with the Kammu family system will, however, soon be published.)

⁷ The discussions at these seminars were recorded. Several of the explanations to the stories presented in the footnotes were given by the storytellers.

only how the world was repopulated after the deluge but also explain the present world order in greatest possible detail. As a consequence the story is considered better told the longer it becomes and the more phenomena it explains.

It took quite some persuasion to make the second storyteller tell what he remembered of the story (version B below). Many attempts have been made to persuade storytellers to allow recording of fragments of stories. These attempts have hardly ever been successful. The Kammu are keenly aware that most of their stories will be forgotten within a decade or two. This is in fact the main reason why so many stories could be recorded on tape. The Kammu we met regard the stories as their foremost cultural heritage and they are anxious to have them preserved. Most of the storytellers are agreed that fragments should be recorded. Yet hardly anybody is willing to tell a fragment, for although there are no professional storytellers, there is considerable prestige attached to good telling. To press too hard on this point might even hurt the storyteller's feelings, because, being proud of his art, he might loathe the idea of hearing himself tell a story haltingly.

The third storyteller (version C below) had heard the others tell their versions. He remarked that he remembered several incidents which he thought ought not to be left out and declared that there were many others which he could not recollect clearly. Thus his story was told as a kind of amendment to the two other versions.

The three storytellers who have told the present story are all living in or near the city of Lampang in northern Thailand. Mr Pong and Mr Kam are speakers of the Yuan dialect while Mr Nuan speaks the Rook dialect.⁸

Mr Pong is in his middle forties. As a storyteller he is lively and entertaining, and he prefers to tell humorous stories. He always took part in the discussions of the tales, and he proved to be well acquainted with the lore of his people. When asked, he gladly tells a story or two, but he does not actively seek an opportunity either to tell or to hear a story.

Mr Nuan is in his middle seventies. He has a small repertoire,

⁸ Cf. note 2 above.

but tells it rather well, although he says that he has not told any stories for over 30 years. The present story is not representative of his ability. He was persuaded to make an attempt, although he protested that he had forgotten the major part of the story.

Mr Kam is in his middle thirties. He prefers to tell explanatory tales, and in telling he is careful to get all the details right. As a consequence he is usually unwilling to tell a story unless he knows it very well and is given ample time to think. He speaks slowly and thoughtfully and he hardly ever corrects himself. Thus the present story suits his way of telling very well. The reason why he did not tell it spontaneously is that he is not quite satisfied with his own knowledge. There are still some sections which he is unable to recall. Mr Kam has been interested in stories as long as he can remember, and he seeks his friends among storytellers. Of the three storytellers represented here Mr Kam is the most active bearer of the tradition, although in actual fact he prefers listening to telling.

A. Mr Pong:

(I) I will tell the beginning of the story first. Now, at the beginning of it there were two brothers, you see, they . . . no, it was a brother and a sister⁹ who went to dig out a bamboo rat, you see. They dug on and on, dug on and dug on. The bamboo rat went deeper and deeper down, and then it turned around and said to the two young people: "Eh, why do you dig me out? (Now other people will . . .)"¹⁰ The water will rise and flood our villages and our land. We must dig a deep, deep hole, dig deep, deep down. You ought to go and make a very good house for yourselves you see." "Well, how should we do it?" they asked. The bamboo rat answered: "Cut wood, well cut a round, round piece of wood, hollow it out till you get a hole in it and stay inside the hole, inside it."

(II) The two young people went back and made a drum for themselves, crawled in and stayed inside the hollow and caulked it with wax along the rim.

⁹ Mr Pong uses the words *taay hæm* 'elder and younger sibling in relation to the same sex' but corrects himself saying *pree kap mǝk*. Cf. note 6 above.

¹⁰ Mistakes in the telling are always included but are put in parentheses.

Some time passed and then the water came and flooded the land, rose higher and higher. Those who had bronze and silver, they were sitting on rafts and in boats which rose higher and higher with the water, but when it receded again these vessels came down flop and they all died.

(But those that, the man . . .) The two people, that brother and sister, they stayed in the drum. They looked outside, and as the water was still there they closed the hole again. They looked again and as the water had dried up they went outside.

Because the water had flooded all the villages and the whole land there was nobody left, just the brother and the sister alone. ("Well, brother, go seek for a . . .") "You, sister, go seek for a husband for yourself, go down south! I will go seek a wife for me up north." They went and went, back and forth, but oh! However much they sought there was nobody. They only caught sight of each other. "Oh, I will marry her up there and make her my wife," the young man thought, and went there, but it was his own sister.

(III) There still remained a single bird, one bird, it was a malcoha cuckoo. The malcoha began cooing: "Tok kək kək, tok kək, brother and sister should embrace one another—" Finally, in the end they slept with each other, had each other and got a child, after seven years they had a child, but lo and behold it did not come out, it stayed inside the womb and died there, and it was born as a dry shell of a gourd, it was a gourd. They kept it behind their house and went about their work.

(IV) After a long time there was the sound of speaking "ij, ij, ij, ij" and they said: "Eh, what is this here?" They went to have a look, and it was the gourd, and they moved it further away. Then there was the sound of speaking and chatting. "Eh, what is this here?" They went to look and it was the gourd. The man heated a long, long iron rod and burnt a hole, burnt a hole and out came, out came the Rəmeet.¹¹ The Rəmeet began, the first

¹¹ The Rəmeet live close to the Kammu in northern Laos. In Western literature they are often called Lamet. They speak a language related to Kammu, but the languages are not mutually intelligible.

The idea is that the Rəmeet got a darker skin than the other ethnic groups

time it was they, they were the first to come out. Further on came the Kammu, the Thai, the Westerners, and the Chinese. When they came out they did not know any language, they did not know anything. They just lived like that. When they wanted to say something they could not, and if they wanted to speak they were not able to.

Later there was a professor,¹² and he said: "Shall we discuss the question of words, try to learn words?" There was a long tree trunk across a dry valley, there was a trunk of a red cotton tree, the one we call a "kwaay". They sat down together in a row like that, more and more people came. The trunk broke, it broke and that moment they all laughed. They laughed and were thus able to speak human words. The Kammu said: "Haan le!" The Rømeet said: "Yam pə'oh!" The Lao said: "Taay læw!" The Chinese said: "Sii ɲɛ le!"¹³ It came out as words. The Westerner said something, too, but I do not know their language.

(VI) Then they went to study letters, to study letters.¹⁴ They ripped off a rəkpak leaf and made it float with the water, on and because they wiped off most of the soot left at the rim of the hole burnt by the hot iron rod. Much social prestige is attached to fair skin, and in having the Rømeet come out first the story-tellers place them one rung below the Kammu on the social scale.

Dr Ferlus' remark (op. cit. p. 280) that the Kammu always are the ones to exit first is not valid for any of the recordings presented here.

¹² Mr Pong says aacaan and not khuu which is the usual word for 'teacher'.

¹³ The imitative phrases here are cries of astonishment, and according to the storytellers are meant as a mild swear word 'oh golly!'. To get closer to the actual meaning of the several phrases, which all mean the same, they could perhaps be translated as 'dead and out!'.

¹⁴ This and the following paragraphs would be difficult to understand without the explanations given by the story-tellers.

In the recording Mr Pong uses *nɔɔ* 'they' sometimes referring to the Lao and the Thai, sometimes to the Kammu, and sometimes to all the different ethnic groups. According to the explanations, letters could not be studied in the area where the peoples were. Therefore they had to make boats to go abroad and learn letters there. To build a boat the Lao and the Thai observed the rəkpak fruit floating on the water (Mr Pong says mistakenly "leaf" but this unidentified plant has long, slender fruits somewhat like a canoe), while the Kammu thought of food only. When the teacher began to teach and the other peoples repeated their lessons, the Kammu munched their buffalo hide so noisily that they were unable to hear what was said.

on. They looked at it and said: "Well, if we prepare a boat like this, it will be all right." The Kammu, however, said: "No, we won't have it. We will get a buffalo hide instead." They slaughtered a water buffalo, made a big boat for themselves, and put it into the water. In the course of time it rotted away bit by bit, and the Kammu cut pieces out of it to cook soup from, while they punted their boat down the river. The Lao and the Thai, however, made their rəkpak leaf float down the river and observed it and then cut a wooden boat like it and sailed down the river.

Their teacher came and said to them: "Go and study letters then. Each one of you should learn his own letters, the letters that will be his, each one should wait for his proper books and documents." We Kammu, however, we don't know any letters, because we ate that buffalo hide. We took that hide and munched it: CRUNCH, CRUNCH, CRUNCH! The Lao, the Thai, the Westerners and the Chinese fried eggs for food, and they were listening while eating, they ate and listened. Then the others said: "Well, who knows what? Let us read and see." Well, the Kammu were unable to read and said: "Oh, we don't know!"

Oh, the Chinese came now, he arrived after the others. When he arrived he looked at the prints of the hens, regarded the hens. The tracks went this direction and that direction, and he began to write like that and said: "Good, I might keep this!" The Chinese write like this to this day. The Thai write Thai letters, the Lao write Lao letters, the Westerners have Western letters. We Kammu, however, do not know letters, because we did not hear anything, did not hear what the others said.

(VII) Then they¹⁵ said: "Well, let us return!" They returned. "Now, as for you, who will be the elder brother, and who will be the younger?"¹⁶ We are Kammu, and in the beginning we were their elder brothers, you see, to begin with we were their elder

¹⁵ In this and the following paragraph the word i 'we' stands for the Kammu. (Probably also the Rəmeet are meant, for they are regarded as a brother people. Thus the word pru used by the Kammu speakers in Thailand designates Kammu and Rəmeet. The word seems to be unknown in Laos.) Nəə 'they' are the socially more fortunate peoples.

¹⁶ It is impossible to say who the speaker is here, but probably all the peoples discuss this.

brothers.¹⁷ The Westerners, the Chinese, the Lao were the younger brothers, while we were the elder brothers, for we were the eldest. They all went and sat down together: "Well, shall we divide up the things between us?" "Oh yes, let us divide them up then and see who will get what". They were the younger ones. They had banana plants, and they set about to divide up the bananas first. "Yes, divide up the banana plants!" They did, and the others got the root and stem while we got the top. We were the elder, therefore we got the top. When we planted our part, however, it did not grow.

"Let us divide up the sugar-cane now!" the Lao said. "You are the elder, and this time you will get the root and stem. We are the younger and will have the top." They were the younger and got the top, while we got the root and stem. They planted their part of the sugar-cane and it grew, we got the root and stem and it did not grow. We got the top of the banana plant, while they got the top of the sugar-cane, and thus only the parts they got grew at all.

This went on and on, and at last they were to divide up the elephants. Regarding the elephants, as they were the younger, because they were the younger they got the baby elephant, you see. Because we were the elders we were bigger and we got the mother elephant. We got the mother elephant and tied it up. The Lao said: "Let us write a contract and keep it: If the mother elephant goes to find her child, then the younger brothers will get her, too. If the baby elephant goes to find its mother the elder brothers will have both." "Yes", we agreed. We had tied our elephant but not very tightly and now she began to pull forwards and backwards, did the mother elephant. The mother elephant was strong, and she pulled and pushed until the rope broke. Then she went to join her baby, and thus they got both of them, as for us we got nothing, for she went to join her child.

¹⁷ Seniority seems to be of far less importance among the Kammu than it is among the Chinese and the Thai, although the eldest brother should be shown some respect. Here the Kammu claim seniority over the Lao because they were the first to leave the gourd. They are not aware of the fact that the Lao are fairly recent settlers in Laos.

(VIII) At last they (took) made us go—they came to see us, you know, earlier they had come to see us, you know—because they were the younger. We said: “Younger brothers, you will have to come to see your seniors!” “Yes”, they agreed. As a matter of fact, they came to see us every day, every day. However, now they said: “No, we won’t go, we are too lazy. The elder brothers will have to come to see their juniors. We are the younger brothers, why should we go to see our seniors? If you want to get material and clothes then come to see us who are your juniors. You are the elder brothers, we are your juniors and we will make them for you. As you are the elder brothers and we the younger, we will not go to see you any more.”

They did not come to see us any more. Now it is we who go to see them every day, every day. We do not have any material and do not have any clothes. We have to go and get it from them, because they know how to make it. We are the elder brothers, only just the elder brothers, and we are unable to make anything at all. Our younger brothers make everything for us, make everything for us.

In the summer of 1974 the story was recorded anew with the same storyteller. The story is repeated almost word for word, which is enough to prove that in his case it is a repetition of a story he has learnt by heart and not a free rendering.¹⁸ As the two recordings are practically identical, the second one has not been included in full in this article. At the very end of the story, however, the teller adds a new motif, which is presented here. It seems to be of special interest, because it is so strikingly modern. Concrete is still not used as building material in the Kammu villages, and one wonders when and how it found its way into Kammu folklore. However, as long as the stories are capable of incorporating new phenomena they are most decidedly alive.

A. (continued)

(IX) They ¹⁹ were casting cement, using cement mortar to lay the

¹⁸ This is certainly not true of all the story-tellers, and the section Mr Pong adds here seems doubtful in this respect.

¹⁹ Again “they” means the Lao.

foundation for their houses. Our lord²⁰ went to see it and said: "Oh, they can make foundations of stone, then we can make foundations of stone, too. You should make foundations of stone for us, too." He made one of his underlings go to cut stone. He hit the stone but a splinter hurt his body. Then another one hit the stone and a splinter hurt him, too. They then killed the lord, killed their own lord. When he was dead we had no lord, we had no master at all. Thus we have the same lord as the Lao, the same lord as our younger brothers.

B. Mr Nuan:

(II) Now I will tell the story of the Flood. Long ago, it is said, the great flood was going to come. There were those two brothers, no, I mean that brother and his sister, and they helped each other to make a wooden drum. When they had finished the drum, someone said: "Today, you see, the flood will come." They had already finished the drum, and now they crept into the drum and stayed inside the drum. Together they brought along wax to caulk it with and a needle to keep, and then they crept into the drum. The flood did come, indeed, and then oh, how many years, how many months went by, I don't know. How many mountains and how many ridges the drum floated past, I don't know, nor how many villages or how many towns. It just floated along like that. The two of them inside took the needle and pricked a hole in the wax to look, but as the water trickled in they closed the hole again. The drum just floated along like that.

Again they pricked a hole to look, and as there was no water at all they crept out. They looked around, and oh! they did not know at all where they were, they looked around and did not see a single person, there was not even a single leaf.

"Well, what are we to do now? A woman wants to get a husband, and a man wants to get a wife. Let us go and make a search!"

One of them went south and the other one went north. They searched and looked but there was nobody, looked and looked and the fact remained, however much they looked there were only they themselves, there was no one else but the brother

²⁰ The implication is that in ancient times the Kammu had a ruler of their own and that it was the Kammu themselves who killed him.

and sister. They set out again, sought here and sought there and sought everywhere, but there was no one at all.

There was a bird, a malcoha cuckoo there was, and it was cooing: "Tok kək kək, tok keey keey, brother and sister, embrace one another."

(III) "Oh, that bird will make us marry each other," they thought, and thus they got married, they married each other.

The wife was pregnant for three years, and when she gave birth it was to a gourd, it was but a gourd.

(IV) "What are we to do?" they said. Every day, every day, when the two went to work in the field, there was the sound of speaking "thiit, thiit" inside the gourd, and they could do nothing to it. "What are we to do? Well, let us heat up an iron rod, and when it is hot let us press it in and see what will happen."

They heated up an iron rod and when it was hot they pressed it in to see, and wruuum! before the others the Rəmeet came out, first the Rəmeet, and then the Indians came out, out came the Indians and out came the Kammu, and then came the Chinese, the Shan, the Mon and the Westerners "thiit, thiit", out they came.

Now they were out already, but they did not know any words as yet. "What are we to do about it?" they thought. "If we got to study words, some people will go to learn from the water, others will study all sorts of things."

There was an old man, who said: "Well . . .!" . . . They made a bridge and went to sit down together on it. They sat down for a while and "criat" the bridge broke in two. "Oh, what are we to do?" And thus they learnt some words there . . . Then . . . oh well, I will stop here.

C. Mr Kam:

This is the story of the Flood

(I) There was a young boy, who went to dig out a bamboo rat. As he dug for the bamboo rat, the rat was burrowing a hole for itself. As the boy dug further in, the bamboo rat burrowed further in, and this went on for quite some time, until the rat came up and said to the boy: "Why are you digging me out? Don't you

understand that I am burrowing a hole for myself and a good one at that?"

The young boy said: "Oh, I am going to kill you now, for I dig because I want to eat you."

The bamboo rat said: "Well, I will tell you something very carefully. The water will rise and overflow, it will flood the villages, flood the houses. I am burrowing a deep, deep hole for myself, for I fear the flood to come. If you want to survive then go home and make you a drum, and then crawl into it and stay inside the drum!"

The boy: "Is that true?"

The bamboo rat said: "Yes, that is true."

Now the boy returned and came to the village. He returned and made a drum for himself, and when it was finished he took a tinderbox and took rice and meat and anything he needed with him. He took his sister, a pig and a dog along and crawled into the drum and stayed inside it.

Then the water flooded the villages, flooded the houses, the mountain fields and the paddy fields. The two young people were inside the drum. They took a needle and pricked a hole in the drumskin. The water still poured in and they plugged it up.

The drum floated back and forth with the water, and there was no knowing where it went. The two young people took the needle and pricked a hole again. The water had subsided, there was no water at all. They went out together. They went outside and oh, there was nothing left but the naked earth. All the trees had toppled and all the people were dead.

The two of them looked around, and they did not know at all in what direction they should go. The boy said: "You go and seek a husband for yourself, sister. I will go and seek a wife for myself." Thus she went to seek a husband, and he went to seek a wife.

They walked and walked, walked back and forth. In the end they met one another. He looked into the distance and saw someone walking on a mountain over there. He thought: "Oh I will go and get married to her over there." He went there and saw that it was only his sister. She looked and saw someone

walking on the mountain over there and she thought: "Oh, I will go and get married to him over there."

She went there and saw that it was only her brother.

(III) They walked together, and there was a malcoha cuckoo cooing: "Tok kək kək, tok kək, brother and sister, embrace one another!"

The two young people heard the bird coo like that, and they thought: "Well, all the others are dead and gone, we will marry each other", and thus they slept together.

Time passed. They worked a field but had no rice to sow. The young man took some string, made a snare and went to set it. It snared a pidgeon. He went to check his snare, and found the pidgeon in it. When he came home with it, the bird said: "If you don't kill me, I will give you some rice seed." He said: "Well, where would you get any rice from to give me?" The bird said: "Oh, I have some here." Then the bird spat up rice from its gizzard and gave it to the man. The man took the rice seed and went to sow it in their field, and then they worked their field.

The woman was pregnant for three years, but when she gave birth, that which came out was a round bottle gourd. They took the gourd and kept it at the bathing place. They went to their mountain field, and when they returned they heard people talking "iŋ, iŋ." They sent the dog down to have a look. The dog went down to look and barked continuously. They went down to look, but there was nothing, and they took the dog and the pig with them and went home.

(IV) The following day they went to their mountain field again, and when they returned they heard the sound of talking again. This was repeated every day, every single day.

During that time they worked their mountain field but did not eat rice as yet. They did not eat its grain as yet, they were eating only its leaves. The two young people tore off the tips of the paddy leaves, nipping the leaves between thumb and little finger. And that is why when today we look at the paddy leaves we see that they have a notch near the tip. That is where they nipped the leaves in the olden days. Thus in working their field they got more and more rice as time went by.

She did not allow anyone to look at the paddy leaves while she cooked them. She put the leaves over the fire and went to fetch water. She said to her husband: "You are at home, but don't look at the leaves I am cooking. I will go to fetch water." When she had left the husband uncovered the leaves to have a look.

It was only paddy leaves and they were not cooked yet.

The wife returned and when she came home and looked at the leaves, they were still not cooked. She said to her husband: "I told you that I didn't want you to look at the leaves I was cooking. Now they are still not cooked, what are we to eat now?" Her husband answered: "Let us eat the rice now instead of the paddy leaves. Let us thrash the rice and cook it." And that is why people now eat rice.

One day they thought: "Well, what is it that is inside the gourd talking all the time, every day, every day?"

The man took an iron rod, heated it up in the fire and burnt a hole in the gourd. The Rømeet came out first and following after them, other peoples came out. The Rømeet thus rubbed off the charcoal left by the red-hot iron rod as they came out and that is why to this very day the Rømeet are blacker than others. From that day there were people, but they still had no knowledge.

They brought the pig and the dog along when they went to work the mountain field. The pig rooted up the grass and ate it. The dog, however, on coming to the field just slept in the shade. When it was time to return home, the pig called the dog and said: "Dog, let us go home!" The dog: "All right, let us go home then!" The dog rose from its sleeping place and rushed back and forth, back and forth tramping on the work the pig had done. Then they returned home. And when they got home, the pig said: "The dog went to the field and slept, I worked the field alone." The dog answered: "It was the pig that went to sleep, I worked alone. If you don't believe it, just go there and have a look." They went to look, and they saw only the traces of the dog. They could see no traces of the pig. Thus they thought: "Yes, it is indeed the pig, who is lazy. Looking at the field there are no traces of the pig, there are only traces of the dog." When they returned home they slaughtered and ate the pig, but kept the dog.

as a pet. Today people slaughter pigs and eat pork, but they do not slaughter dogs and do not eat dog's meat.²¹

(IV) At that time the people stayed together but they still could not speak. Once the people were out walking and came to a place where there was a tree trunk lying across a valley like that. They sat down on the tree trunk. More and more and more people came, and in the end the trunk broke and fell to the bottom of the valley. All the people fell off and then they got up and called out: "Ho, hey!" Anyone could say anything, but they still had no writing.

(VI) "Well, those of us who shall go and study writing for us should go now", the people said. Four people went in different directions to study writing. One of them said: "It would be good if we wrote like this, you know." Another one said: "It will be nice, if we write like this." Still another one said: "If we wrote this way it would be nice." The fourth one said: "If we do like this, it will be nice." They said like this and like that and each took his own production, took his own and returned home. When they came home people quarrelled with each other and then broke up in groups. The groups of people went to stay in different areas from then on, because everybody who wanted to learn to read and write went to study with one of these four. Of these four people who taught others to read and write, one was a Westerner, one was a Thai, one was a Chinese and one was an Indian. Thus there were people in all different parts of the world, for they studied writing with these four. The Japanese went to study with the Chinese, the Burmese went to study with the Indian, and the people of the West went to study with the Westerner.

The Lao went to study with the Thai. When he had finished his studies, however, he drank rice wine and got drunk. The Lao returned to his village and taught them his knowledge, but he was drunk. The Thai write the letter ၵၵ ၵၵ short (ၵ), but now when the Lao taught in his drunkenness he wrote the letter ၵၵ ၵၵ long like this (ၵ).

²¹ Sometimes dog's meat is in fact eaten by the Kammu although they seem to be against the habit.

Regarding the people of this earth, in the olden days people said that they were the children of only one father and one mother. But then the four people went to study writing and people quarrelled with each other and went away, and that is why there are people in all different parts of the world.

Some Folklore Notes

1. Remarks on the contents of the texts.

The epic core of the three texts is the same, although version B is fragmentary. In the other versions some interesting additions are found.

In version A Mr Pong has added a rather modern variation of the theme "Kammu inferiority" in the section dealing with the acquisition of the art of casting cement. This passage may in fact be of his own making.²² The second addition "Deceptive crop division" on the other hand is known in several parts of Eurasia as an independent tale having no connection with the present cosmogonic myth. In the index of folktale types²³ it is listed both as an animal-fable²⁴ and under the heading "Tales of the stupid ogre."²⁵ In a form pertaining to man it is known from Assam and Ceylon²⁶ as well as from Indonesia.²⁷

In version C Mr Kam has also told two sections which are not found in the other versions. One section is the tale of "How man learnt to eat rice". There seems to be no direct parallel to this one, although Wolfram Eberhard²⁸ reports some similar variations of the theme. Epically these differ strongly from the one found here, however. The other section is the tale of how the dog cheated the pig when they worked the mountain field. According to available motif indexes²⁹ this story is found as a separate folktale

²² As the passage was recorded on one of the very last days of the stay in Lampang it was never discussed at the seminars.

²³ Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson: *The Types of the Folktale*, Helsinki 1961.

²⁴ Type 9B.

²⁵ Type 1030.

²⁶ Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys: *The Oral Tales of India*, Bloomington, Ind., 1958, p. 294.

²⁷ Waldemar Liungman: *Varifrån kommer våra sagor?*, Djursholm 1952, p. 312ff.

²⁸ Wolfram Eberhard: *Typen chinesischer Volksmärchen*, Helsinki 1937.

²⁹ Stith Thompson and Jonas Balys: *op. cit.*, p. 292.

in the Assam Hills. As it has not been recorded by folklorists until recent years, the number of known records is very small indeed.³⁰

2. List of motifs according to Stith Thompson, Motif-Index of Folk-Literature, Vol. 1-6, Copenhagen and Bloomington, Ind., 1955-58.

References marked with an asterisk are new numbers suggested by the authors. References preceded by "Cf." only imply superficial correspondence to Thompson's numbers. Differences from the numbers given in Graham (See note 3) depend on the fact that Thompson altered these numbers in his second edition, which we have used. After each motif we have indicated its presence by numbers marking the sections in the text (I-IX) and by capital letters marking the different story-tellers (A-C).

- A 1006.2 New race from incest after world calamity.
(III:A,B,C)
- Cf. A 1016.1 Flood from animals' boring into the ground.
(I:A,C)
- A 1021.0.2 Escape from deluge in wooden cask (drum).
(II:A,B,C)
- *A 1029.2.1 Only brother and sister survive flood. (II:
A,B,C)
- A 1101.2.3 Formerly men dumb. (IV:A,B,C)
- *A 1236.3 Tribes emerge from gourd after brother-sister
incest. (IV:A,B,C)
- A 1273.1 Incestuous first parents. (III:A,B,C)
- A 1422 Assignment of edible animals. (V:C)
- A 1423.2 Acquisition of rice. (IV:C)
- A 1441 Acquisition of agriculture. (IV:C)
- *A 1445.2.3 Acquisition of cement mortar for building
houses. (IX:A)

³⁰ "Acquisition of fire", a motif found in one of the versions treated by Dr Ferlus (op. cit., p. 280), is not found here. It is however recorded in the material as part of another tale dealing with the origins of the slash-and-burn technique of agriculture and of the death rites. Either one of these themes could easily be fitted into the present context.

- *A 1482.2 Origin of language: formerly dumb men brought to laughter, after which they start to speak. (IV:A,B,C)
- A 1484 Origin of reading and writing. (VI:A,C)
- A 1484.2 Origin of alphabet. (VI:A,C)
- *A 1484.2.1 Origin of Chinese letters from hens' tracks. (VI:A)
- A 1614.6 Origin of light and dark skin colour (IV: A,B,C)
- A 1616 Origin of particular languages. (V:A,C)
- A 1618 Origin of inequalities among men. (VI:A,C)
- Cf. A 1650 Origin of different classes. (VII,VIII:A)
- *A 1650.3.3 Why the Kammu must go to the Lao for clothes etc. (VIII:A)
- *A 1689.14 Why the Kammu do not know letters. (VI:A)
- A 2685 Origin of cereals. (IV:C)
- B 122.1 Bird as adviser (III:A,B,C)
- *B 437.1.2 Helpful bamboo rat. (I:A,C)
- *B 521.7 Animal warns of flood (I:A,C)
- B 531 Animals provide food for men. (IV:C)
- Cf. C 221.1.1.4 Tabu: eating dog. (V:C)
- C 324 Tabu: looking into jug. (IV:C)
- K 41.2 Pig and dog as plowmen. (V:C)
- K 171.1 Deceptive crop division. (VII:A)
- *K 171.3.2 Deceptive division of banana plants. (VII:A)
- *K 171.3.3 Deceptive division of sugar cane. (VII:A)
- *K 171.7.3 Deceptive division of elephants: will mother elephant join her baby or will baby elephant join its mother? (VII:A)
- M 359.8 Deluge prophesied. (I:A,C)
- *P 16.10 Why the Kammu have no "Lord". (IX:A)
- T 415 Brother-sister incest. (III:A,B,C)
- T 415.5 Brother-sister marriage. (III:A,B,C)
- T 555.1.1 Woman gives birth to pumpkin (gourd). (III:A,B,C)
- T 574.2 Long pregnancy: seven years. (III:A,B,C-B and C three years)