

A Note on the Name ‚Green Miao‘

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In establishing the generic name Green Miao, I am no doubt breaking precedent by translating directly from the language of the group under study, who refer to themselves as ‚Mong Njua‘ (*móng njúa*)¹ derived from *móng* ‚Miao‘ and *njúa* ‚to be green‘. In addition, I am not following either Chinese, Vietnamese, Lao, or Thai usage. The reasons for this are many, and I shall elaborate on them in the following paragraphs.

There is a great deal of confusion concerning the exact nomenclature to be applied to the various branches of the Miao stock. These ethnic branches, usually referred to as „tribes“, derive their names primarily from the color or pattern of their women's garments. This is not, however, a highly accurate method of classification since a piece of clothing appearing, for example, as ‚purple‘ to a Vietnamese, might strike a Lao as merely having ‚spots and circles‘ and thus a difference in descriptive terms would arise.

The picture is further complicated by the Chinese historians, who often use the term *Miao* as merely the designator for a barbarian, i.e. anyone who is not Chinese. This trend has carried down to the present day where many ethnic groups in Southwest China listed or called ‚Miao‘ are not Miao at all but actually of Tai, Khe-Lao, Yao, or Lolo origin.

Regarding the identification of Miao tribes living in Thailand, I shall simply repeat what was told me by my informant. He stated that in the area of northern Thailand to the west of the Mekong watershed are to be found four Miao groups only. These are: the Green Miao (*móng njúa*), the White Miao (*móng kláv*), the Banded-Sleeve Miao (*móng quà mbáng*), and the Striped Miao (*móng yáo chûa*). The last-named group is said to be now absorbed by the first two.

In the case of the Mong Njua, the Miao tribe dealt with in this article, the present-day nomenclature is decidedly in conflict. The Thai (Siamese), Lanna

1 The Green Miao symbols used in this paper have mainly the phonetic values given them by the International Phonetic Association (precise description obtainable from the Department of Phonetics, University College, London, W.C. 1). For exceptions and modifications, see T. A. LYMAN, 1973, *English-Meo Dictionary*, The German Cultural Institute (Goethe Institut), Second Edition, Bangkok, Thailand.

(Yon), and Lao populations refer to them as either „Black Miao“ (*máew dam*)² or „Striped Miao“ (*máew laai*). Various ethnologists and writers who have lived in Thailand use the term „Black Meo“. The French savant Father F.M. Savina³ chooses the label „Miao-tseu verts“. Certain missionaries working in Thailand have decided that „Blue Miao“ would be a good appellation. Finally to add to the confusion, the Chinese call the Mong Njua the „Red Miao“ or the „Red-Headed Miao“ (= Peking Mandarin *hóng t'ou miáo*, Szechwan Mandarin *hông t'ou miáo*).⁴

My choice of the tribal designation *Green Miao* was dictated by many other factors than that of simple purism. First of all, the Thai-Lanna term „Black Miao“ is an unfortunate misnomer since the Mong Njua are a distinct sub-stock from the well-known Black Miao of Kweichow Southwest China. The Thai-Lanna appellation *máew dam* is literally translated ‚Black Miao‘. A *literal* translation, however, is not truly applicable in this case. Although Haas and McFarland in their Thai-English dictionaries⁵ give ‚black‘ as the rendering of *dam*, we should note that in popular Thai speech the word *dam* simply means ‚dark‘ or the presence of color in opposition to ‚white‘. (The Thai often refer to a dark-skinned Malay as *dam*). Accordingly, since there were initially only two Miao groups living in Thailand, and since one of them (the Mong Klaw)⁶ was known as „white“, the tendency was to call the other group „dark“. Thus we find in current use in northern Thailand the names *máew khǎaw* for the Mong Klaw and *máew dam* for the Mong Njua.

The true ‚Black Miao‘ (Mong Klu)⁷ called by the Chinese ‚Hei Miao‘ (*hěi miáo*), are to be found in large numbers in Southwest China and in North Vietnam. It was this group, among others, that Father Savina studied and lived with during his many years in Indo-China.

Savina, who perhaps more than any other scholar had a thorough knowledge of many Miao tribes both linguistic and ethnological, makes some pertinent statements in the foreword to his Miao-French dictionary. He writes that there are four principal Miao tribes in Tonkin: the *Miao-tseu blancs*, the *Miao-tseu noirs*, the

2 I use the Haas system of Thai romanization. (See Dr. Mary R. HAAS, *The Thai System of Writing*, A.C.L.S., Washington, D.C., 1956.)

3 F.M. SAVINA, *Dictionnaire Miao-Tseu-Frangais précédé d'un Précis de Grammaire Miao-Tseu et suivi du Vocabulaire Frangais-Miao-Tseu*, BEFEO, vol.16, no.2, 1917.

4 This is based on statements made by the Mong Njua of Naan Province, northern Thailand, during the years 1962–1964.

5 Mary R. HAAS, *Phonetic Dictionary of the Thai Language*, Part I, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 1947, p.56; Georg B. MCFARLAND, *Thai-English Dictionary*, Stanford University Press, Stanford, California, 1944, p.328.

6 See Table I: Listing of Colors in Green Miao.

7 Mong Klu (*móng klú*) equals Savina's *Hmong do*. Mong Klaw (*móng kláw*) equals Savina's *Hmong dou*. These two tribal names illustrate, incidentally, an important phonological contrast between ‚Green Miao‘ and the Miao „dialects“ described by Savina.

Miao-tseu jaunes, and the *Miao-tseu verts*. Savina goes on to say that his dictionary covers the first three „dialects“, but that the speech of the *Miao-tseu verts* is not included as it constitutes a separate „language“. ⁸ (Note: It is my opinion that here one finds the two major flaws in Savina’s work. Firstly, he considers the languages of these three Miao groups („*blancs, noirs, jaunes*“) to be simply minor linguistic divergences from a „standard“ Miao language, supposedly spoken in Tonkin, and labels them „dialects“. Secondly, Savina throws all three „dialects“ into one melting-pot, namely his dictionary, without indicating the source. I definitely do not agree with his statement (footnote No. 8) and personally consider that all four tribes listed by Savina speak four distinct (although related) *languages*.

In the body of the dictionary itself, Savina translates the color term *njúa* as both ‚green‘ and ‚blue‘. ⁹ (In Savina’s orthography, this is given as „*njwa*“.) This translation is not surprising since in many Asian languages one word may stand for both the aforementioned colors. (Cf. Japanese *aoi* and Thai *khǎaw*.) Based on my own linguistic field-work, however, the Miao word *njúa* distinctly translates as ‚green‘ whenever there is a contrast between ‚green‘ and ‚blue‘. In addition, there are two other Miao words which denote ‚blue‘ only, viz: *tshao* and *yilân*. (See Table I.) Later in Savina’s work we find the tribal name „*Hmong Njwa*“ (Mong Njua) definitely equated with *Miao-tseu verts*. ¹⁰ In contrast, we note *Miao-tseu noirs* given as „*Hmong Do*“ (Mong Klu). ¹¹

It should be emphasized here that the actual shades of color denoted by the English words ‚green‘ and ‚blue‘ are those *taught* to English and American school children. The color sense of two ethnic (or linguistic) groups being at times radically different, ¹² I seek to avoid confusion concerning the translation of Green Miao color terms. Henceforth, each Miao gloss is to be interpreted as having the composite semantic value of, not one but *all* the English glosses given as translations in Table I (Listing of Colors in Green Miao).

Turning to the ethnological side, we notice a mention by Savina that the Black Miao women do *not* wear a *col marin* (sailor’s collar). This statement points out an ethnological difference between the two Miao groups, since the women of the

8 See SAVINA, 1917, p. ix: „Les principaux dialectes parlés au Tonkin sont au nombre de trois: celui des Miao-tseu blancs, celui des Miao-tseu noirs et celui des Miao-tseu jaunes. Un quatrième, celui des Miao-tseu verts, qui est très différent des trois précédents, au point de former presque une langue à part, est à peine parlé au Tonkin, et il n’en sera pas question dans le cours de cet ouvrage.“

9 See SAVINA, 1917, p. 110: „*njwa*. Vert, bleu.“

10 See SAVINA, 1917, p. 110: „*Hmong njwa*. Miao-tseu verts. Tribu miao-tseu qui passe pour être anthropophage, et dont la langue diffère sensiblement de celle des autres tribus.“

11 See SAVINA, 1917, p. 26: „*Hmong do*. Miao-tseu noirs (tribu miao-tseu dont les femmes ne portent pas de jupe blanche ni de col marin).“

12 For an interesting treatise on this subject, see W.R. GEDDES: „The Colour Sense of Fijian Natives“, *The British Journal of Psychology (General Section)*, Vol. 37, Part I, September, 1946.

Mong Njua tribe with whom I lived *did* wear the *col marin*. Where costume follows a strict and invariable pattern as with the hill-tribes of Southeast Asia, a small item such as a collar will tell us a great deal concerning tribal identification.

Ernest E. Heimbach, a member of the Overseas Missionary Fellowship and currently in Thailand, has presented me with some further illuminating information. Mr. Heimbach, prior to 1950, had resided among the Black Miao (Hei Miao) of China where he had studied their language. Being forced to leave the country, he removed to northern Thailand where he came into contact with the so-called „Black Miao“ of that region. Mr. Heimbach writes that the languages of the two groups are definitely different. He adds that their dress is different and custom divergent.

Mr. Heimbach at one time translated portions of the Bible into White Miao (Mong Klaw). His fellow field-workers are doing the same with Mong Njua. With a view to making a distinction between the two ethnic sub-groups both known as „Black Miao“, Mr. Heimbach and his associates decided to rename the one they had encountered in Thailand. Taking one of the choices available in translation from Mong Njua to English, the missionaries chose the name ‚Blue Miao‘. This, however, brings us into another conflict. In Kweichow Province of Southwest China there is already a ‚Blue Miao‘ tribe.

Lin Yueh-hwa, in his masterful piece of research *The Miao-Man Peoples of Kweichow*,¹³ makes mention of the ‚Ch'ing (Blue) Miao‘. He also records the ‚Hung (Red) Miao‘ which is one of the conventional Chinese designations for the Mong Njua. (See the fourth paragraph of this article; see also F.M. SAVINA, 1930, p. xv.) Just why the Chinese use the term „red“ (or „red-headed“) it is difficult to say, but it is obvious that we cannot employ the term ‚Blue Miao‘ since confusion with the aforementioned ‚Ch'ing Miao‘ would result. It should be noted in this connection that Lin Yueh-hwa does not mention any Chinese usage of the term ‚green‘ as applied to the Miao. Nor have I, in the course of my research, come across any reference to a ‚Green Miao‘ grouping in China proper.

Reference from F.M. SAVINA, 1930, p. xv:¹⁴

„Le dialecte miao qui diffère le plus des autres, et qui est également le moins répandu, est celui des verts, *Hmong Ngioa*, que les Chinois, je ne sais pas pour quelle raison, appellent Miao rouges, *Houng Miao*. Ce dialecte est aux autres dialectes miao ce que le dialecte gaélique, ou *erse* de l'Ecosse, est aux autres dialectes¹⁵ celtiques cités plus haut.“

Reference from F.M. SAVINA, 1930, p. 187:

„Les tribus Miao sont au nombre de 6 principales, et de 4 ou 5 sous-tribus, soit une dizaine en tout. Elles se distinguent les unes des autres par la couleur ou

13 LIN Yueh-Hwa, „The Miao-Man Peoples of Kweichow“, *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 5, 1940, p. 282.

14 F.M. SAVINA, *Histoire des Miao*, Imprimerie de la Société des Missions Etrangères, Hong Kong, 1930, pp. xv and 187.

15 By „autres dialectes celtiques“, Savina refers to the Kerne, Leoun, Treger, and Vened dialects of Brittany.

la forme des costumes, d'où leurs noms de Miao blancs, Miao noirs, Miao jaunes, Miao verts, Miao reyes, Miao à cornes, ces derniers portant leurs cheveux en forme de corne sur le sommet de la tête. En plus d'un costume particulier, chacune de ces tribus possède un coutumier plus ou moins spécial, et parle un langage quelque peu différent. Nous sommes loin des 40 et quelques tribus Miao que quelques uns se plaisent à énumérer. Ceux qui parlent ainsi n'ont jamais vécu parmi eux, ne connaissent pas leur langue, appellent Miao tous les indigènes non chinois qu'ils rencontrent, et les confondent surtout avec les différentes tribus Man, bien plus nombreuses que les tribus Miao.“

To further add to the confusion concerning Miao tribal nomenclature, the Green Miao — who usually call themselves *móng njúa* — have in addition two „alternate“ tribal names. These are *móng lêng* (< *lêng* mtendon, artery; cord; seam') and *móng pù* (< *pù* ,to close up an opening; to bake'). These alternate names might possibly be translated as the ‚Corded Miao‘ and the ‚Baked Miao‘ were it not for conflicting translations given me by my Miao informants. The Green Miao tribesmen I talked to were not at all in agreement as to just how the words *lêng* and *pù* would be rendered in another language when occurring as part of an ethnic name. All informants were in agreement, however, that *móng njúa*, *móng lêng*, and *móng pù* were three names for the same tribe.

Mr. G. Linwood Barney, an American missionary who extensively studied Miao languages in Laos from 1951 to 1953, will doubtless hold a different opinion re the final statement of the foregoing paragraph. In correspondence with me (23 May 1963), Mr. Barney wrote that there were two major groupings of „Meo“ (Miao) in Xieng Khong Province, Laos, where he had taken up residence. The one commonly called themselves *móng lêng* and referred to the other as *móng kláw*. Mr. Barney then added a significant comment in connection with the *móng lêng*, among whom he lived. „Our people [i. e. the *móng lêng*] spoke of other Meo groups including *móng njúa* but did *not* include themselves in such a group.“

Although Mr. Barney's comment is of interest, I found after lengthy inspection of linguistic and lexical material which he sent me that the languages of his *móng lêng* and my *móng njúa* were, for practical purposes, identical. (Note: The Lao rendering of Barney's *móng lêng* group was *méew laaj* ‚Striped Miao‘.)

Finally, a perusal of vocabularies will show that the language of the Mong Njua is distinct from both Black Miao and White Miao. Following the theory of Miao (Mong) phonetic divergence proposed by Savina,¹⁶ we note the first formula:

Black Miao -a = White Miao -e, -i

Mong Njua, in this case, falls under the White Miao grouping. If, however, we employ the second formula:

Black Miao -ang = White Miao -a

we find that Mong Njua comes under the Black Miao heading.

¹⁶ See SAVINA, 1930, p.11: „les miao blanc prononcent ne; tous les a sont des e pour eux; ils transforment également tous les ang en a et tous les o en ao.“

In conclusion, I feel it safe to assert that the Mong Njua tribe now found in Southwest China, Vietnam, Laos, Burma, and Thailand should henceforth be known as the *Green Miao* and that their language should be considered as related to, but equally removed from, both White Miao and Black Miao.

Table I:	Listing of Colors in Green Miao
<i>chí</i>	glistening white, white of skin-color.
<i>klâng</i>	yellow.
<i>klâng kláw</i>	light-brown.
<i>klâng lá</i>	brown.
<i>klâw</i>	white (general).
<i>klú</i>	black.
<i>lá</i>	red.
<i>njúa</i>	green (esp. in contrast to blue), blue, azure.
<i>njúa càu</i>	dark-green.
<i>njúa mǎo</i>	light-green.
<i>njúa tshao</i>	blue-green.
<i>pâng yéng</i>	pink.
<i>shé</i>	coloring characterized by lines or stripes combining white, black, and red.
<i>tshao</i>	gray, gray-blue, blue.
<i>tshao klú</i>	dark-brown.
<i>tshéng</i>	white (of feathers, fur, body hair, hair of the head).
<i>yilâng</i>	blue (in contrast to green), indigo blue, Prussian blue.
<i>yilâng càu</i>	navy-blue.
<i>yilâng njúa</i>	indigo blue, Prussian blue.
<i>yilâng tshao</i>	sky-blue, pastel-blue.

Table II:	Complete Listing of All Miao Tribes <i>Known To the</i> Mong Njua of Naan Province, Thailand.
0. <i>móng (lêng)</i>	Mong, Hmong, Miao, Meo, or Mao (ethnic name). (≡ Sz <i>miào</i> , Pk <i>miáo</i> , Th <i>méew</i> , Japanese <i>myō</i> , <i>byō</i>)
1.1 <i>móng njúa</i>	the Green Miao, blue Miao. (< <i>njúa</i> ,to be green, blue, azure') [Location: observed in Thailand.]
1.2 <i>móng lêng</i>	alternate name for the foregoing tribe. (< <i>lêng</i> ,tendon, artery; cord; seam')
1.3 <i>móng pù</i>	id. (< <i>pù</i> ,to close up an opening; to bake')
2. <i>móng kláw</i>	the White Miao. (< <i>kláw</i> ,to be white') [Location: observed in Thailand.]
3. <i>móng qùa.mbáng</i>	the Banded-Sleeve Miao. (< <i>qùa</i> ,to make vertical lines' + <i>mbáng</i> ,sleeve, arm') [Location: observed in Chiangkham, Chiangrai Province, Thailand.]
4. <i>móng yáo.chùa</i>	the Striped Miao. (< <i>yáo.chùa</i> ,lines running from waist to edge of skirt') [Location: formerly observed in Thailand but now seemingly absorbed by the Green Miao and White Miao.]
5. <i>móng qhảo.táu</i>	the Pumpkin-Hole Miao. (< <i>táu</i> ,pumpkin') [Location: China]
6. <i>móng pŵ</i>	the Tame(d) Miao. (< <i>pŵ</i> ,to be tame') [Location: China]
7. <i>móng nâo.nêng</i>	the Man-Eating Miao. (< <i>nâo nêng</i> ,to eat people') [Location: China]
8. <i>móng teng.kau</i>	the Amulet Miao. (< <i>teng kau</i> ,indigo amulet') [Location: China.]
9. <i>móng chí</i>	the White-Skinned Miao. (< <i>chí</i> ,to be glistening white, white of skin-color') [Location: China.]
10. <i>móng shŷa</i>	the Sinicized Miao. (< <i>shŷa</i> ,Chinese') [Location: China.]
11. <i>móng tua.nyû</i>	the Oxen-Killing Miao. (< <i>tua</i> ,to kill' + <i>nyû</i> ,ox') [Location: China.]
12. <i>móng ndyâu.klě</i>	the Dog-Mouth Miao. (< <i>ndyâu</i> ,mouth' + <i>klě</i> ,dog') [Location: uncertain.]