

A Story of Hair- Yuan Miao

I was born into the arms of my grandmother Yeshe Tsomu. Not only did she give me my name, Yuan Miao, she also inspired my deep interest in hair and helped me realize the other potential and value of hair.

My grandmother loved to sing, but I didn't understand the lyrics. After I grew older I finally realized that embodied in her chanting were the incantations of the Five Tsheringma Sisters¹, of the water gods of Yarlung Zangbo basin, and of the Five Elements, earth, water, fire, air, and void. As my grandmother sang these Sanskrit tones, she often accompanied them with games around braiding hair. She often gave me rows of tiny, densely-packed braids and then crushed henna into paste and dabbed it right between my eyebrows. That, along with my dark skin, clearly identified me as a little Tibetan girl, and I was recognized by everyone in our dorms. Every time I wanted to cut my hair, my grandma would say, "Long hair can cover up that 'picture' on the back of your head. Eventually someone will recognize that 'picture'." That so-called picture is a large red birth-mark. According to grandma, that is a mark only a superior being will recognize. When I came to the United States, indeed I met someone who "authenticated" me with this birth mark.

Sometimes grandma braided her own hair, even as her hair became more and more sparse. But it was very long. After she rubbed in some bay oil, it looked shiny and straight. Sometimes she gave herself lots of tiny little braids and sang and laughed like a young girl. She said, "When I braid your hair, that is a form of practicing Dharma. Do you know what practicing Dharma means? I'm not practicing hair arrangement, I'm practicing the Buddhadharma." When I eventually began to understand life and then traveled the world to teach the methods of attaining the wisdom of joy and happiness, this felt even more like my point of awakening.

When I was eight or nine, the Cultural Revolution happened. The schools closed down, and my grandma was driven to the countryside. In the blazing summer heat, aside from eating watermelons and tomatoes, my younger brother and I showed the greatest amount of interest in causing trouble and tormenting each other. The big scissors at home were heavy and rusty, and difficult to use. But with a great sense of curiosity and childish innocence and fearlessness, I found a source of endless joy on my brother's head. First I cut off a tuft. Then I got creative with my styling. His "stylish" hair attracted a group of children around our age. They formed a line and waited for me to cut their hair. Everyone looked different. They were "stylish" in so many different ways. Their haircut was completely uneven, but we were all incredibly happy. As we kept looking at each other, the sounds of happiness and laughter seemed heavenly...

At night, when our parents came home from their political activities, I heard a horrible shriek from our neighbor, Mr. Ho. Then a voice thundered in Cantonese-accented Mandarin, "Who

¹ the Five Sisters of Long Life, female protectors of the Himalayas

did this? It looks like a dog gnawed on it!" That night, a pair of parents came to my house. Followed by the child with the "hair gnawed by dogs," they came to complain to my parents. For many days after that, I didn't dare leave the house. That trauma is probably the reason there is one fewer famous hairdresser now.

When I grew into adulthood, people nicknamed me "the Tall One" and "Big Braid". This was particularly relevant when I played basketball. When I swung my braid, I can force my opponents to lose their positions. But I also confused people on my team.

My coach said, "Your height gives you an advantage, but too bad your braid is too long. Why don't you cut it?"

I said, "I won't cut it!"

When I joined CCTV and became a director, I dressed in designer clothing and tried to stay fashionable. Because of the suggestions of a stylist who came back from France, for a while, with the prerequisite that I can grow a long pigtail in the back, I allowed my hair in the front to coolly slant to one side. It was puffy and stood upright.

Later when I was learning Buddhism, I became critical when I saw myself in the mirror. My grandma's words rang in my mind, "Your hair is useful to people; keep it." I grew out my hair for a long time. But when my daughter died from leukemia, I cut off my long hair and placed it on her head so it can be cremated with her. That night, I saw her spiritual-consciousness singing and dancing joyfully with a few white-clad angels, waving my hair in her hands as she ascended through the nine levels of heaven. So in the midst of my deep sadness, I felt a slight sense of solace.

Then I waited for her at Mt. Lao. I missed her so much and was in so much pain I didn't want to live. Because of this, I experienced many odd encounters from my attempts to die. These experiences are well-known in and beyond China.

My grandma died before my daughter did. This pair, old and young, were my most beloved. They gave me so much and also took away so much. All this is recorded in my hair, which is nurtured by my mind-consciousness and my wind channels.

I entered America with short hair. I lived on top of the mountains of Malibu for about five years in retreat and my hair grew long again during that time. Then I traveled to many places in the world to transmit the wisdom of life, joy and happiness and met many people. Among them were sages from the Himalayas and many spiritual practitioners who asked me for a strand of hair. They treasured it and kept it close to them. Some even placed it on their Buddha altar. My secretary Dai Dai noticed this and she smartly kept all the hair that fell when I combed my hair and put them in a bag. She said, "These strands of hair can really help people. Keeping them will be useful." I gave her a look and thought to myself, "She's saying the same thing my grandmother did!"

According to the secret information passed down through oral tradition in the Himalaya Mountains starting over 7000 years ago, hair is a vessel. It can sustain and pass down. My blood contains the holy and sagely genes of the Manchurians and Tibetans. Add to that my experience with being on the verge of death, and the Nirvana of the Phoenix, this is probably why people cherish my hair. And as most people know, a crown woven from the hair of a dakini is a legendary treasure and part of a beautiful and romantic story. Not only is it a sign of respect for the evolution of the spirit that comes from the merging of the parents, its meaning is very deep and long-reaching. Like the Yellow River, the Yangtze River, and the Yarlung Tsangpo River, it flows from the source to the sea.

Some people copy me and grow out their hair. I tell them that they have to be in a spiritual state filled with light and love, plus they have to possess a lineage passed down from ancient saint and sages, for their hair to have the energy of a Dharma-lineage. Hair and genetic inheritance are intimately connected. Otherwise it is only a sign of egotism and arrogance, especially in an industrial world filled with restlessness and goals of material gain.

Long hair is part of my life. It serves as a conductor and a bridge. When it is mounted as part of a yogi Shakti drawing, it will imbue the colors and the lines with blessed and healing energy. That can help people connect with the energy of the universe. My long hair has also been stitched into images of the Guanyin Bodhisattva and the Heart Sutra, etc., and collected by people with good karmic connections. It can take stories of generations of people who seek, practice, and realize spiritual cultivation and manifest it to later generations in the form of tangible art. As one who has inherited all this, I also use the essence of my life as an offering to generations of my ancestors and past saints and ages, and am now making an offering to sentient beings with the affinity to receive it.