

The Nose Flute



A long time ago the ancestor of the Kadazan lived together at the foot of a mountain. They built their homes on higher ground and used the lower grounds and valleys for farming. They planted hill rice, vegetables and many other crops. Over time, the Kadazan race grew populous and the land grew too small for farming and food became scarce. Soon enough there was no farming land left and no land to build homes.

One day, a family decided to move away to look for their own land. The name of the father in the family was Olu and his wife's name was Tindai. They had only one child, a boy whose name was Otu. Otu was still a very young boy when they moved away with his parents. Olu and Tindai found a suitable place to settle down and started cultivating their plot of land for rice and other crops. They lived in their home for ten years without ever having gone back to visit. It was a great distance away and there were no roads that led them back to where they had come from. Furthermore, Olu and Tindai were also afraid to make the journey back because there were headhunters around the area.

Then Olu and Tindai became old and Olu passed away. Tindai and Otu became lonely after that. Otu, who used to go hunting with his father, had to hunt all by himself. Tindai herself was also growing older and soon she felt that her time to die was grow-

ing near. She began to give final instructions to Otu. She told him of many things regarding their culture and advised him on how he should manage when he was on his own later.

Not long after that Tindai died. Otu was so overcome by grief when he realised that he had now lost both his parents. Because he was a man, he was not allowed to weep for this brings disaster into the household. Otu suddenly saw a thin bamboo plant outside his house. He had an idea and took the piece and started to smoothen the bamboo and made small holes into the stick.

He brought the flute to his nose and breathed out into the holes of the bamboo and a mournful sound came out. Otu continued to play the flute to express the grief he had for his mother. The music from the flute went out from the house and was heard by the people from the neighbouring villages. The villagers went out of their houses to look for the source of the sound and found Otu and his unburied mother.

From this came the tradition of the Kadazans to play the nose flute to convey the news of the death of a loved one.

Taken from "Kadazan Folklore", a book compiled and edited by Rita Lasimbang. **The book is available at Kadaiku, Lot 5, Ground Floor, Block L Sinsuran Complex, 88000 Kota Kinabalu. Contact Kadaiku at 088 232121, fax 265540 or email kadaiku@sabahtourism.com**

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