

The peaks of the Central Range trace the spine of Formosa south to north. Among them is fabled Giòksan, scraper of skies, witness to fog and rain and sun and sometimes wind and snow — a changeful landscape of beauty and grandeur. Here lies a secret, some say. Not far but deeper in, in a place few have known and none have been, lives an old lady who salvages the dolls we have cast aside. She straightens them out. She puts them in cupboards to look at. This has been going on for ages, it is said.

On this day she finds a little china doll down at Back Pool River. It is old, but unfaded. Pity the face is broken here and there, the body badly worn. A leg is broken off below the knee. The old lady pieces the doll back together into the pretty young woman it had been and puts it up in a cupboard.

Then she notices writing stamped on the underside of the base: “雲” *hûn, cloud* and “xx”... And a bracelet of red gems is missing from the right forearm. Where could it have gotten to? She quickly summons her daughter to look for it.

Down comes the daughter from Giòksan, over the Alísan Range, over the Black Hills, down to a creek named U’u that comes up to the knees. Around Bih’ákha, in Tōalāi, the U’u twists as it tumbles and smashes into the foot of a cliff, bursting into flower like a full net of fish. Past there the trail enters dense woodland and forks, one way leading west into the plains, the other skirting the slopes eastward.

She veers east till she meets a great stream with dense thickets of pandanus on its banks, and great big mango trees, and *póküu*ⁿ. This is Back Pool River of County Tâilâm. A storm has just passed. The stream is gushing, its waters abundant. On its banks stand two men and a mother and daughter, drenched, gazing into the hills. The long-haired girl is eighteen or nineteen, nesting at her mother’s wing, a bracelet of red gems around her wrist.

She approaches the girl. “Give me those red beads back.”

The girl replies, “My grandma gave me this bracelet.”

“What was her name?”

“Her name was Chúi Hún.” *Powder*.

“Who was Chúi Hún’s mother?”

“Her name was Chúi Khoân.”

“Who was Chúí Khoân’s mother?”

The girl shakes her head, not knowing.

“Your grandma’s grandma’s name was Hûn” *Cloud* “just like yours. This bracelet was hers.”

The girl slips off the bracelet and hands it over. “Who are you?”

Two rainbows one high, one low arch into view on the valley horizon, propping up sky over hills. “I am Hônglâi,” she answers. Then she is gone. A chorus seems to chant from vanishingly far...

Ever green is the earth, but in the heights
White are the clouds, and ever changing
Be the mood mellow, or raging
Inborn beauty needs no makeup to wear
Home is where Giòksan is near
Giòksan is our crush, a lovemate
Not some dreamtime fairyscape
She bathes in the rain
Winds ply her with many-flowered scent
Mist drapes her in the stripped-down essentials
Sun-times veil her goldenly
I call this our Home Land
Our secret, open wonderland
Our peaks never cloy the eye hear me!
The spirit of Hônglâi dwells on Giòksan