According to this Mao-Naga myth, Tiger, Spirit and Humankind (man) were three brothers who came into existence through the miraculous union between the already existing first woman and the clouds of the sky. How the first human being, that is, the woman came into existence is not explained but her existence is taken for granted. This is perhaps because the earth is already there and its origin cannot be fully explained. The woman represents the reproductive power of nature. The first woman’s name was called Dziiliimosiiro which approximately means the ‘purest water’ or ‘crystal clear water’. One day, she was resting under a tree with her legs wide apart, at a place called Makhriifii or Makhel which is supposed to the last halting place on the migration route of the Tengimie (Angami, Chakhesung, Mao and Poumei) and their closely allied Naga tribes. This place is in the present Mao Naga country.

Suddenly a cluster of clouds came over her and some drops of liquid came down over her private part and she became pregnant. Subsequently she gave birth to a Tiger, Spirit and Man or human being.

By the time the three children became adults, their mother was quite old and sick. So the three brothers took turns to look after their ailing mother. When the Tiger looked after her, the mother used to become sicker with anxiety and her worry seemed to be intensified. The reason for this was that the Tiger used to touch the mother’s body to identify the fleshy, good muscles which he could eat after her death. During the turn of the Spirit, the mother used to become more feverish and develop acute headaches. The mother felt at ease and relaxed only when the Man looked after her because he tended his mother with great care and concern.

Before their mother’s death, there was a dispute among the three brothers as to who should inherit her land. When the quarrels became more frequent and threatened to result in violence, the mother decided that something had to be done in order to settle the dispute. So she devised a contest among them. For this purpose, she created a ball-like grass at a distance and said that the three brothers were to race for it. The Man being the youngest and a good fellow, his mother instructed him to make a bow and arrow to shoot at the grass target as she knew that he could not compete with the powers of the Tiger and Spirit in such a race. The Man following his mother’s instruction succeeded in touching the grass target first by firing the arrow and finally inherited his mother’s land. The Tiger in disgust went to the thick jungles and the Spirit disappeared in the far south (Kashiipii). Thus the three brothers parted ways forever. Incidentally, this myth is also prevalent among the neighbouring Angami and Chakesang Nagas.

Myth-making is one of the primary and basic functions of human beings. Mythology reflects the socio-economic, cultural and historical conditions of the community or society. Creation of myth is creation of meaning, and there can be many levels of meanings. Obviously there cannot be any competition between science and mythology. James Frazer argues that human beings think alike. Analysis of myths, folklores, folktales etc. reveals the universal structure of human thought. Even I. Kant argues that basic forms of human thought are similar. The above myth represents evolution rather than the creation of Adam & Eve of Judao-Christian-Islamic world-view.

Tiger and Man representing the animal kingdom and Spirit representing the supernatural realm are shown as all related, since they are born of a common mother. In attempting to decipher the meaning of the myth, the question of truth and falsity does not arise. The tiger wanting to eat the mother after her death is perhaps the reflection of the poverty-ridden society at that time. The woman represents reproductive energy. Her name signifying pure water, being fertilized by a cluster of clouds is perhaps a metaphor of the union between the sky God father and the receptive earth mother from which all things have originated. This is perhaps like the Chinese Yin & Yan principles of female and male or like the Indian principles of Purusha and Prakriti.

A variant of this myth is also prevalent in Ao-Naga folklore.