

**Hua-Miao Archive
Songs and Stories**

Narratives

Creatures wise and creatures foolish and Stories of man and the animals
Songs M401 to M426
Introduction and Translation

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M401
The wise toad.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

This story was widely known and often told. It is one of the many Miao tales in which the weaker animal gets the better of the stronger by using its wits. In this version of the story, the toad challenged the crow to match his story with something equally clever, like an exchange of riddles. The toad's saying, "Toads do not eat salt so toad's eyes bulge", does not reflect any popular belief that lack of salt affects the eyes in this way. The Miao did recognise, however, that salt deficiency was a contributory cause of goitre. It is just possible, therefore, that at some stage this story concerned a bulging neck, not bulging eyes, and the creature concerned was a frog rather than a toad.

The point of the crow's response reflects the Miao custom of making thick felt capes from natural coloured wool. These were worn as overcoats in cold weather and served as bedding at night.

The crow's final cry, an imitation of the crow's cawing, was also a Chinese colloquial expression, common in Yunnan, meaning "all in vain", "it is all for nothing" or "it is useless".

M401
The wise toad.

Told by Wang Ming-ji

They say that a crow happened to meet a toad. The crow said, "Toad, I am going to eat you!" The toad replied, "Very well, but my flesh is bitter. If you are going to eat me you ought to carry me over yonder, to the stream, to the edge of the pool, wash me in the water and then you can eat me". The crow answered the toad, "Toad, I am going to eat you, so there!" The toad said, "Before you eat me let me tell you a story, please!" Then the toad continued,

"Toads do not eat salt
So toads' eyes bulge!"

The crow said,

"Crows keep black sheep,
So crows' capes are black!"

The crow stretched his head up and laughed, "ha, ha!" like this. The toad jumped suddenly away and dropped into the pool. The crow made as though he would wade into the water to look for the toad, but he could not find him. The crow just stretched his head up and cawed,

"ah, ah, be-la-la!
ah, ah, be-la-la!"

M402
The raven and the toad.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

Introduction.

The title of this story was supplied, in English, by the Rev. Samuel Pollard. The Miao name of the bird was translated for him into Chinese, and the Chinese word can mean both crow and raven. Since he chose the latter, although the former is much more likely, “raven” has been used throughout in this translation.

The story differs from Wang Ming-ji’s version in that the element of competition is absent, and the meaning of the couplets has been changed by the introduction of a negative. However, the final result is the same, and so is the raven’s exclamation of frustration at the end, which in colloquial Chinese means, “All that for nothing”, and which Pollard paraphrased, “What a fraud!”

M402
The raven and the toad.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

A raven went and met a toad. The raven wanted to eat him, but the toad said, “If you want to eat my flesh, it is very bitter, so you will need to wash it with water”. The toad continued, “Raven, you had better carry me to the stream and wash me in the water there”. The raven carried the toad and reached the water’s edge. He was about to eat him when the toad said, “Before you eat me, let me tell you a story”. The toad went on,

“Ravens do not keep black sheep,
Yet ravens wear black capes.
Toads eat no salt,
Yet toads’ eyes bulge”.

The raven laughed, looking up at the sky, and the toad jumped over the edge into the pool of water. The raven searched for the toad, cawing,

“Ah, ah, be-la-la!”

M403
The foolish tiger.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

This is a straightforward story, but three short comments will assist in understanding it.

Between the area occupied by the Miao in Yunnan and the Province of Sichuan lay several hundred miles of mountainous country. It is therefore not surprising that the tiger was incredulous when the toad announced that that was where he intended going.

In the first section of the story, having bounded over the gully the tiger turned around to call to the toad, and in so doing lifted the latter, still clinging to his tail, to a point well beyond the place where the tiger had landed. Hence his admission of the toad's superior skill in jumping.

In the final section, the wood ashes which the deer put on the tiger's paw were not hot, that would have wakened him, but, left on the flesh between the pads, for several hours it contained sufficient potash to burn.

M403
The foolish tiger.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

They say that a toad wanted to go to Sichuan and happened to meet a tiger. The tiger said, "Toad, where are you going?" Toad replied, "I am going to Sichuan". The tiger said, "Toad, you silly creature, you are never going to Sichuan! Mother! Where will you be going next?" The toad said to the tiger, "If you don't believe me, come let us compete in jumping over the gully". The tiger said, "You jump across first, toad". The toad replied, "You are big, you jump first". The tiger bounded over the gully, but the toad, clinging to the tiger's tail, also jumped clean over. The tiger said, "Jump over, then, toad". The toad replied, you are nearly treading on me!" So the tiger could not jump like the toad, and the tiger said, "I can't jump like you, toad".

The toad said to the tiger, "Since you cannot jump as well as I can, let the two of us go in search of game and compare results by throwing up. The tiger went in search and ran all day until evening. He found nothing to eat but picked up a blade of grass and swallowed it. The toad just crawled down the bank on the lower side of the road where he saw a patch of large yellow mushrooms, which he gulped and gulped down. When the toad and the tiger met, the tiger told the toad to throw up, but the toad said, "You are big, you throw up first. The tiger urged and urged until the tears ran down his face, but brought up only a blade of grass. So the tiger said, "Toad, you throw up then". The toad brought up a lumpy mass of yellow mushrooms. The tiger said, "What is that, toad?" The toad replied, "This is your mother's and your father's eyes!" the tiger was frightened and began wriggling away, but the toad wriggled after him. "I didn't sort it over properly and got the tiger hair mixed in!" The tiger was so frightened that he got up and fled.

As he ran he met a deer. The deer said, "What are you running from, old man tiger?" Old man tiger replied, "Toad and I went in search of game and to compare results by throwing up. Well, I went in search and ran all day until evening, but found nothing what ever to eat. All I had was a blade of grass, Toad and I came back to compare results by throwing up. I brought up a blade of grass, then toad threw up, and what he brought up was as yellow as could be. I asked him what it was, and toad replied that it was my mother's and my father's eyes. That is why I am afraid and am running away". The deer said, "Well, tonight you have reached me here. Tonight the two of us can sleep here together, but you won't go touching my horns will you, for my horns can burn a person's hand". The deer made as though he was sound asleep, and the tiger crept quietly over and touched one of his horns. It was quite cold, so, reassured, the tiger went to sleep. When he was asleep the deer got up and took some ashes from the fire and put them on the tiger's front paw. When morning came the tiger and the deer got up, but the tiger was covering his front paw. The deer said, "Old man tiger, what is the matter with your hand?" The tiger replied, "There is nothing the matter with it". The deer said, "To be sure, last night you went touching my horn and now you have burnt your hand!"

M404
The toad and the tiger.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

Introduction.

The main difference between the version of this story told by Yang Ya-go and that written by Wang Ming-ji, is that here, the encounter between the tiger and the deer has disappeared. There is no way of determining whether the deer story was an integral part which has been lost from this version, or an extraneous element which has been added to the other.

M404
The toad and the tiger.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

The toad wanted to go to Sichuan. As he went he met a tiger who asked him, "Where are you going?" The toad said, "I am going to Sichuan". The tiger said, "You idiot! How can you possibly get to Sichuan?" The toad said, "Well then, come let us two compete in jumping over the gully". The tiger said to the toad, "You jump on ahead". But the toad said, "You are big, you must jump first, on ahead". So the tiger jumped ahead, but the toad held on to his tail. When the tiger had jumped over the gully, he called, "Come on!" But the toad said, "I am here already".

The toad said to the tiger, "Well then, let us two go in search of game to eat, and then demonstrate our success by throwing up". The tiger went everywhere in search for half a day, but did not find anything at all to eat. He ate just a bit of grass. For his part, the toad found a patch of yellow mushrooms. There he ate, and he ate a lot. When the tiger arrived back, the toad said, "You throw up first". The tiger said, "No, you should throw up". But the toad replied, "You are big, you must throw up first". The tiger urged and urged until he was tired, but all that came forth was a bit of grass. The toad threw up the yellow mushrooms, a great deal indeed. The tiger said, "What is this?" The toad said, "These are your mother and father's eyes!" The tiger was afraid and fled.

M405
The rabbit's great idea.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

This story reflects the social conditions in which, through many generations, the Miao had lived. In the border area of Yunnan and Guizhou they were tenants on the estates of feudal landlords who often held the power of life and death over them. The tyrannical tiger was exactly parallel to the tyrannical landlord.

M405
The rabbit's great idea.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a forest where lived a tiger. The wild creatures in the forest had to give one animal each day for the tiger to eat, the various kinds of animal taking it in turn. On one occasion it was the turn of the rabbits, when a rabbit had to be eaten, but at the time he should have gone, the rabbit did not go. Two days went by, and then he went. The tiger said, "You little rabbit there! I expected you much earlier, why have you only today turned out and come?" The rabbit said, "I came very early, but down yonder is a white tiger. He is stronger than you, and he wanted to eat me. Well, I told him that you were here waiting to eat me, and I had to talk to him nicely before he eventually allowed me to come". Now the tiger was angry and said, "How is it that there is someone stronger than I? You take me to see him!" The rabbit took the tiger along until they came to a large pool of water. The rabbit said, "You go and look, he is here all right!" The tiger went and looked and saw his reflection in the bottom of the water pool. The tiger jumped down to catch his reflection and was drowned in the water. All the wild animals in the forest praised the rabbit greatly.

M406
Disaster for the frogs.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

This story is a fable. Disaster overtook the frogs because they had not the wit to see through the fox's flattery.

M406
Disaster for the frogs.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

They say that a fox climbed to the edge of a bog, where he heard the frogs croaking and making a great noise. The fox said, "Oh! friends, how beautifully you sing! Do go and bring your other friends and sing to me!" The whole tribe of frogs gathered to croak to the fox, but he gathered them all and ate them.

M407
The fox tricks the crow.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The ending of this story was borrowed from the earlier tale of the toad and the crow. Here again, the frustrated crow is depicted as lapsing into colloquial Chinese with a phrase meaning, "It is all for nothing".

M407
The fox tricks the crow.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that, once upon a time, a crow went to a Miao village in search of meat to eat. He went and saw a Miao woman cutting up meat at the doorway of the house. When the Miao woman went into the house to find a basin, the crow flew over, took a piece of meat and then flew away. He went and perched on the branch of a tree with the piece of meat in his beak. He thought, "Now I shall have meat to eat!" and felt very pleased with himself indeed.

In this place there was a fox. The fox was very hungry, for all night long he had been searching for food and had found nothing at all. He raised his head and saw the piece of meat in the crow's beak, and muttered to himself, "I am so hungry, how I would love to eat that piece of meat!" So he said to the crow, "Big brother crow, are you well? My word, today you look fine! I wonder whether you are also in good voice, for I love to listen to your singing!" Because the crow had not many friends, and for days on end no one had a good word for him, when the fox praised him in this way he was very pleased, and opened his beak and sang, "Ah-la, ah-la", like this, and the piece of meat fell to the ground. The fox did not wait for the crow to finish his singing. He quickly took the piece of meat and ran home and ate it. Now the crow realised that the fox had tricked him, but all he could do was to caw, "Ah, ah, be-la-la! Ah, ah, be-la-la!"

M408

The deception of the fox brings bitterness to the goat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

In this story the fox is shown to be not only cunning but callous. The goat may have been foolish and gullible but hardly deserved the treatment he received. His plight would have struck a sympathetic chord in the Miao heart, for such was their own history.

M408

The deception of the fox brings bitterness to the goat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time there was a fox who went for a drink of water, and happened to fall into the water hole. Because the hole was deep and in it there was nothing to stand upon to jump, the fox could not get out. One day a goat went for a drink of water and saw the fox. The goat said, "Fox, what are you doing there?" The fox replied, "I am here drinking the water. The water here is very sweet! Come and we can drink together". When the goat jumped down the fox jumped up and stood on his back, then with a single bound he was out. He turned around, looked at the goat and said, "Good-bye, then! If I should return here again I will come and see you!"

M409
The wise goat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

Among the various animals in this story it is the mother goat which is outstanding. Her concern that her youngsters were getting sufficient food, her firm discipline, her resourcefulness and her courage are all in marked contrast to father goat's timorous nature. Not infrequently in a Miao household it was the mother who played a leading role. This may explain why in common speech parents are always referred to as "mother and father" and never as "father and mother".

Of the two predators, the tiger appears as the greater coward. It was his fear that the fox would run off and leave him to the fury of mother goat that prompted the tying together of their tails, with such disastrous results for the fox. In translation the force of the personification of the animals is rather lost by the fact that in English, "coat" is regularly used for an animal's pelt, and "tail" is often used for the nether extremity of an article of human clothing. Miao does not normally use either metaphor.

M409
The wise goat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

People tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a herd of goats. Every day father goat took the little goats out to graze while mother goat remained at home. One day, mother goat said, "Every day when you take them out you come back so very early". Father goat replied, "The road we have to travel is very long, and when we are on the road we are so afraid that we come back early". Mother goat said, "In that case, today you stay at home and I will take them out".

Mother goat took the children out to graze. Everyone ate with a will, not one played around. When they had eaten their fill, mother goat raised her head and looked up. The moon was already in the middle of the sky. Mother goat said, "We shall not be able to get home, we will go and stay at the foot of the cliff on ahead of us ". So here they went to sleep.

Now there was a fox, which saw them. The fox said, "I would like some goat's flesh to eat, if I can find a way". Then he said, "First I will go and have a look". So the fox went up and barked, "Nghao, nghao, I'm going to eat goat's flesh!" Mother goat struck her horns against the cliff until the sparks flew and bleated, "Bie-ie-ie, let's drink fox broth!" When the fox heard this, he got up and ran away. While he was running he met a tiger. The tiger said to him, "Fox, why are you running?" The fox replied, "I saw a herd of goats over yonder and I was going to eat them. I barked, 'I'm going to eat you!' but they said they were going to drink my broth. So I was frightened and ran away!" The tiger said, "You take me along, and the two of us will go and eat them", but the tiger made the fox go ahead while he followed behind. When they reached the place where the goats were, the tiger roared, "Nggao, I'm going to eat goat's flesh!" The goat bleated, "Bie-ie-ie, let's drink tiger broth!" The tiger said to the fox, "There are ever so many of them, we two cannot possibly eat them. Bring your coat tail and tie it to my coat tail, and we will run away together". So the tiger and the fox knotted their tails together and ran a long way. The tiger looked around at the fox and said, "Fox, it is all very well for you to laugh at me, but I have run till I am tired!" But the fox was not laughing, he had been dragged to his death by the tiger.

M410
How the goat saved the deer.

Told by Wang ming-ji.

Introduction.

In common speech the Miao call lions “red tigers”, and though they are not found in the country now occupied by the Miao, they figure occasionally in Miao stories, and quite frequently in those songs which have to do with the beginnings of things. In this particular story the lion was frightened off, partly by the goat’s tale of eating lions, but chiefly by the great commotion he made, stamping of his hooves at the entrance of the cavern and the echo that this set up all around the rock walls.

M410
How the goat saved the deer.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

They say that in a forest lived a large herd of deer. There came a lion, which caught the deer in the forest and ate them until only one little one was left. The deer was afraid and ran away. As he ran he met a goat who said, "Deer, what are you running away from?" The deer replied, "Oh! There used to be a great number of us living in this forest, but a lion came and has caught and eaten us all, until I am the only one left. So I was afraid and I am running away". The goat said, "Don't be afraid, where is he? You take me along to see him". The deer took the goat along until they reached the cave where the lion lived. The goat said, "Old man lion, you come out here to me!" The lion said, "Who is that?" The goat stamped his feet at the lion and said, "It's me, the lion eater! So far I have eaten two hundred and ninety-nine. Now there is only one that I have not eaten to make up the full three hundred!" Again the goat stamped his feet at the lion. The lion was so frightened that he got up and fled. The deer praised the goat very much.

M411
The goldcrest.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

Introduction.

The bird in this story is described as being considerably smaller than a sparrow. It is grey-brown and makes a nest suspended under the branch of a pine tree, a description which suggests that it was a goldcrest. The fox has the same reputation for slyness and cunning among the Miao as it has in Western countries, but in this story it is the victim of tricks played upon it by a cheeky little bird.

The small bells in the story were made of brass and were about the size and shape of a peanut shell. They made a tiny, tinkling sound, and were attached by braids to the collar of the Miao tribal gown. The point of the final section of the story depends on plays on words in Miao, which cannot be translated, though the following explanation may help. It will be remembered that in the Pinyin system of writing Chinese, as it has been adapted for writing Miao, a final letter is added to each word. This is not pronounced but simply marks the tone in which the word has to be spoken. Thus *d* is a high tone, *k* is a low even tone, while *f* is a low falling tone. The little bells are “*hlid-hleuk*”, and are often called “*hleuk-hleuk*”. To burn off dry grass is “*hleud*”, and a big blaze is “*hleud-hleuf*”, while the crackling sound of burning sticks is “*hleuf-hleuf*”. So the fox was expecting to see one kind of “*hleu*”, but was shown a very different kind. The sound written “*hl*” in Miao is the same as “*ll*” in Welsh.

M411
The goldcrest.

Told by Wang Ming-ji.

They say that a goldcrest met a fox. The goldcrest said to the fox, "Fox, would you like to eat really well?" The fox said, "Yes, I would". The goldcrest went and saw that the Yi were fighting, and an Yi woman was carrying out rice porridge for their lunch. The goldcrest flew over immediately and perched in front of the Yi woman. The goldcrest chirruped, "zyu-lyu-lyu, zyu-lyu-lyu. The Yi woman set down the wooden tub of rice porridge, in order to chase and kill the goldcrest. Meanwhile the fox took and ate the tub of rice porridge. Then the goldcrest got up and flew away. He came and said to the fox, "Have you eaten really well, fox?" The fox replied, "Yes, I have eaten very well indeed".

The goldcrest said, "Would you like some more to eat?" The fox said, "Yes, I would". Taking the fox with him the goldcrest went and saw that the Yi had brought some dogs and were rounding up the sheep. The goldcrest immediately flew over the Yi dogs, at which they got up to give chase to the goldcrest. They came and took the fox by surprise. They chased him and tore at him until he was all rags and tatters. The goldcrest got up and flew off. He came and said "Fox, did you eat well?" The fox replied, "Oh! This time I got caught and torn by the dogs, and my fur coat is all rags and tatters!"

The goldcrest said, "Fox, would you like to look at some little bells?" The fox said, "People talk about little bells, but I have never seen any. I should like to look at some". So the goldcrest took the fox to a hill where the grass was very deep. The goldcrest flew to an old Miao man over yonder, then he flew back and dropped on the top of the hill into the grass. The old Miao man lit a torch and went and set fire to the grass right around the hilltop. The goldcrest got up and flew away, but the flames came burning along, and though the fox ran and ran all around the hilltop above he could find no way out. The flames scorched the fox and made him all patchy. The goldcrest flew back to the fox and said, "Were the little bells pretty, fox?" The fox said, "Oh! Very pretty indeed! But my fur coat has got scorched until it is all patchy!"

M412
The fox and the goldcrest.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

Introduction.

Samuel Pollard, who recorded this story in his diary, was not given a title for it in Miao, so he supplied one in English, “The fox and the bird”. At a later stage “bird” was crossed out and “quail” substituted. Where the name first occurs in the text, a note in brackets explains that it was “a small bird”. This explanation was not deleted, but the word “quail”, together with the Chinese equivalent in Romanization was written in the space above it. Clearly the narrator did not know the Chinese name for this particular kind of bird, and the guess, which produced the translation “quail”, was not correct.

In this version of the story, the statement that the Yi woman was taking lunch out to some people who were busy threshing, seems rather more likely than that she was taking it to folk who were engaged in fighting each other, as Wang Ming-ji’s version would have us believe. On the other hand the elaborate play on words in his account, which gives zest and point to the last section of the story, is here missing altogether.

M412
The fox and the goldcrest.

Told by Yang Ya-go.

The little fox was seeking scraps to eat when he met a goldcrest who said to him, "Where are you going?" The little fox said, "I am going to seek scraps to eat". The goldcrest replied, "If it is scraps to eat that you are looking for, I will take you to find some". One day when the Yi were threshing buckwheat, an Yi woman was carrying out the lunch, a tub of porridge on her back. The goldcrest took the little fox along, and flew round and round the Yi woman's feet. She set down the lunch and ran in pursuit, while the little fox ate up the porridge. Then the goldcrest flew away.

The goldcrest came to the little fox and said, "Did you find a lot of scraps to eat?" He replied, "I have eaten a great deal!" So then the goldcrest said to the little fox, "Would you like still more scraps to eat?" He replied, "I would". So one day the goldcrest again took the little fox to find scraps to eat, and he said to him, "When I have gone, if you hear me calling to you, you must bark with all your might". The goldcrest brought the fox to where the Yi were tending the sheep, and then called to him. At this the fox barked with all his might, and the dogs which the Yi had brought with them gave chase. The goldcrest rose up and flew away, but the dogs chased the fox all day. Afterwards the goldcrest came to the fox and said, "Did you get any scraps to eat?" The fox replied, "Eating scraps is dangerous! See what happened, my leather jacket was very nearly torn off by the dogs.

The goldcrest said to him, "You would still like some scraps to eat?" He answered, "I would". The goldcrest said, "In that case, I will take you again to go in search". The goldcrest took the fox along and saw that the Yi were tending the cattle. He led the fox to the top of the hill where there was a lot of grass and said, "You stay here while I go and search for scraps for you to come and eat". The goldcrest went and chirruped, and the Yi began burning the grass all around the hilltop. As the flames climbed upward, the goldcrest rose and flew away, but they scorched the fox until he was all patchy. Afterwards the goldcrest again came to the fox and said to him, "Did you get any scraps to eat?" He said, "Eating scraps is dangerous! You look, this is what has happened to my leather jacket".

M413

The chicken and the wildcat, a matter of comparing mouths.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

It is interesting that in this story not only are the animals and birds personified but inanimate objects as well; the needle, the rope, the washing dolly, the acorn and even the cow dung. In a subsequent tale where the goat, the table and several other things broke into human speech, the man declared that they were “possessed”, and proceeded to destroy them. In this story no people are involved, so the question of “possession” does not arise. In fact the objects concerned were all ordinary things to be found in or around a Miao house. The washing dolly was a heavy object made of wood, rather like an Indian club, and used for beating the washing laid on a stone in a stream of running water. Individually they could have done nothing about the wildcat but collectively this miscellaneous collection proved most effective. The story may well have an allegorical meaning.

The chicken and the wildcat, a matter of comparing mouths.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time, there was a family of chicken. One day father chick said to mother chick, "I must go out digging, you stay at home and prepare breakfast, and at breakfast time bring mine out to me, please". Presently mother chick prepared breakfast and carried it out for father chick to eat. As she was going along the road she met the wildcat. The wildcat said, "What are you doing?" Mother chick said, "Father chick has gone digging and I am taking him his breakfast". The wildcat said, "Well, let us two compare mouths and see who has the bigger. If my mouth is the bigger I shall eat you, if your mouth is bigger then you can eat me". The wildcat went on, "Now you open your mouth and I will ease my head inside. If you can hold my head in your mouth you shall eat me". So mother chick opened her mouth for the wildcat to ease his head in, but mother chick's mouth not being very big, the wildcat's head would not go in. The wildcat said to mother chick, "My head will not go in. Now I will open my mouth, you ease your head in". So the wildcat opened his mouth and mother chick eased her head in, and it went right inside the wildcat's mouth. The wildcat took mother chick and dragged her to the foot of the cliff and ate her there.

Father chick went on digging until breakfast time, but there was no sign of mother chick bringing his breakfast, so father chick returned home and asked the children, "What did your mother go out to do?" The little chicks replied, "Mother has taken your breakfast out to you". Father chick said, "Your mother did not arrive. If she came out with my breakfast and I did not meet her on the way back, then she must have met the wildcat, and the wildcat has caught and eaten her. You stay at home while I go and look for her".

While father chick was going to look for mother chick, he first met the rope. The rope said, "Father chick, what are you going out to do?" Father chick replied, "Mother chick has disappeared, and I am going to look for her". The rope said, "I will go with you to look". The two of them went on and met the washing dolly. The washing dolly said, "What are you two going out to do?" They replied, "Mother chick has disappeared, and we are going to look for her". The washing dolly said, "I will go with you to look". They went on and met the needle, the cow dung and the acorn who all said, "We will go with you to look".

They went on and came to the foot of the cliff. When they saw the chicken feathers in the middle of the space at the bottom of the cliff, they knew that it was here that the wildcat had eaten mother chick. Next they searched and found the wildcat's hole, and this is what they did. The rope tied up the washing dolly over the entrance of the hole. The cow dung lay on the ground to be stepped on. The needle hid beside the fire and the acorn hid in the fireplace. Then father chick went inside the hole to lure the wildcat out. The wild cat ran into the middle of the hole, slipped on the cow dung and fell down. He got up and went to blow the fire. The acorn came out and rapped him on the head, which made him sit down on the ground. At this the needle pricked him so that he got up and ran outside. Then the washing dolly swung down and struck him on the head. So the wildcat was killed.

The deception of the rang is bitterness for the bear.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

In reading this story, and in several others that use the word “rang”, it should be remembered that the letter “r” in the Pinyin convention for writing Miao, is pronounced as “z “ in English.

In this story the bear became a victim of the “rang”, which was a mythical animal whose one characteristic was a delight in playing spiteful tricks on others. All enquiries as to what a rang looked like, simply provoked laughter, and the answer, “I don’t know”. It seems to have been thought of, sometimes as a quadruped, and sometimes as a monkey. From the stories it appears that on the one hand the rang was small enough to be carried in a basket on a person’s back, and to be able to move about inside the basket, and also small enough to get into a woodpecker’s hole in a tree. On the other hand it was big enough to put a bridle over a tiger’s head, and ride him as a man might ride a horse, and to lie on a bed dressed in an adult woman’s clothes and to look sufficiently realistic to deceive the woman’s own daughter. Fortunately mythical animals are not required to be self-consistent. This kind of “rang”, pronounced in a high falling tone, is not to be confused with the “rang” pronounced in a low rising tone. The latter is the Miao word for a dragon, and is identified with the rainbow.

The opening sentence of the story seems hardly relevant. The rang’s motive was sadistic not gastronomic.

The Miao regularly felled pine trees for fuel. The top would first be lopped off, and then the stump split down with wedges and cut off at ground level. The tree in this story had been left overnight with the wedges holding the split open. The Miao kept bees in hives made from hollowed tree trunks, but they would also take the honey of wild bees, an operation which always began by poking a stick into the hive to discover whether there was any honey there. This was the point of the bear poking its tail into the crack in the tree. Though he did not realise it, his tail went right through the tree so that the rang was able to sprinkle it with salt. The bear withdrew his tail, and, licking it, was puzzled by the taste. Accordingly the rang bade him try again and put his tail in as far as it would go. The rang then pulled out the wedge, and the bear’s tail was caught in the tree as the crack sprang closed.

M414

The deception of the rang is bitterness for the bear.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong

They say that the rang liked to eat bear's flesh. Seeking a way to trick the bear he said, "Over there is a tree, which someone has chopped and split open, and the bees have gone and settled inside. Let us two go and get the honey to eat". The bear said, "All right." So the rang took the bear along and they reached the tree that had been chopped. The rang said, "The bees are here. You ease your tail in first and poke, then have a lick". The bear eased his tail in and poked, but the rang on the other side of the tree took salt and sprinkled it on the bear's tail. The bear pulled his tail out and licked it. The bear said, "It certainly tastes!" The rang said, "You poke hard!" so the bear poked hard, but the rang on the far side was also working hard. He pulled out the wedge and caught the bear's tail in the tree. Today bears have no tails and it comes from this incident.

M415
How the rang deceived the tiger.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The Miao word for “rainbow” and “dragon” is also used as a proper name in a number of songs. It appears in the form “Yeu Rang”, literally “Man Rang”, and this is approximately equivalent to “old man Rang” in English. In the present piece old man Rang plays no active role, but elsewhere he is portrayed as a wealthy, formidable, even fierce personage, often possessing supernatural powers. His name, pronounced on a low rising tone, has nothing to do with the mythical creature, the rang, pronounced in a high falling tone, from whose tricks both the tiger and the bear in this tale suffered.

Very occasionally, in extreme circumstances a family, afraid that it was in danger of dying out, would perform an ancestral rite called a “Zi”. Lavish hospitality was extended to a wide circle of relatives and friends and stabling was provided for those who came on horse back. It was as horse thieves that the rang and the tiger approached the gathering.

The second half of the story is a variation on the theme, “How the bear lost its tail”.

M415

How the rang deceived the tiger.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

People tell a story that, once upon a time, old man Rang and his people were performing the ancestral sacrifice. The rang wanted to go in search of a horse to ride at the place where old man Rang's guests were assembled. The rang happened to meet old man tiger and said to him, "Old man tiger, old man Rang and his people are performing ancestral rites. Come, let us each seek a horse to ride". Old man tiger said, "Good!" So the two of them went along together. The rang said, "When we arrive no one must speak a word, but let each of us find a horse which is very good and very fat". Old man tiger replied, "That's right". When evening came the rang took old man tiger to the stable to feel the horses. Old man tiger felt every one, and all had protruding back-bones, very thin indeed. There was not one which was fat, with a backbone which did not protrude. The rang also felt them and found that not one was any good. Then he reached old man tiger. Now he was very fat, there were no protruding bones on his back, so the rang forced a bit into old man tiger's mouth, led him outside, jumped on to his back and whipped him until he began to run. Old man tiger ran over several hills and several valleys before presently he stopped and looked on his back. There he saw that it was the rang that was riding him. He said, "Today I have been caught and ridden by you until I am tired out!" The rang said to old man tiger, "Don't stay talking any more. You run on quickly for the people are hunting us". Old man tiger got up and ran on over several hills and several valleys. The rang, still on old man tiger's back, saw a large tree with a hole in it that the woodpecker had dig out. The rang said, "Old man tiger, you stop. I have got something to tell you". Old man tiger stopped in front of the tree, and the rang jumped right into the hole.

There was nothing that old man tiger could do. Still afraid that people were coming behind, he had no option but to keep running straight on. As he was running he met the bear. The bear asked him, "Old man tiger, what are you running for?" Old man tiger said, "Old man Rang and his people were performing the ancestral sacrifice, the rang wanted to take me to seek a horse to ride. He took me along, but among old man Rang's horses we found none fit to ride, but I got ridden by the rang well and truly! He rode me until we came to the hill yonder, where there was a tree with a hole in it. Seeing this he ran and dropped down inside the hole in the tree, but I was afraid the people were chasing me so I kept on running". The bear said, "Do not be afraid. Take me along and we will both go and have a look". So old man tiger took the bear, and when they arrived old man tiger said, "The rang ran into that hole there". The bear climbed up, took his tail and poked it into the hole. Inside the hole the rang tugged on the bears tail, while the bear pulled with all his strength until his tail snapped off. Old man tiger said, "What has happened to you?" The bear replied, "It's only the tail of my coat that has got torn off!" Old man tiger said, "That rang! We are never going to catch him. Another time do not have anything to do with him!"

M416
The rang gets food by deception.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

In this story the mischievous rang had something of a field day at the expense of the young couple, the mother-in-law and the Chinese traveller.

The basket into which the young couple put their present of food for mother-in-law was carried on the back, so it was quite possible for the rang to throw out the cakes and the eggs, the latter being hard boiled and ready to eat, without the bearer realizing what was going on, until the rang itself leapt out and disappeared.

In Miao villages, the cattle, sheep and goats were taken out every day to graze on the hillsides. The pigs remained at home foraging around the village. The older women kept an eye on them. If a pig wandered away it had to be brought back, and there was a special cry for calling pigs: “ao, ao, ao, ao,” It was this cry that alerted the rang to the mother-in-law’s return.

The rang gets food by deception.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that, once upon a time a young couple were going to visit their mother and father-in-law. The wife said, "People are saying that, up there in the pass, the monkeys are dying off like anything. My mother is very fond of monkey, so let us take a big one and carry it along for her to boil and eat". Now the rang overheard this, and running quickly went and lay down up there in the pass. When the couple reached the pass where the monkeys were dying, beginning from the bottom of the valley until they came right out at the top they turned the monkeys over, but every one was decayed. The rang alone was good. The wife said, "Each of these monkeys is decayed. Let us just take this rang and carry it along for my mother to boil and eat". So they took the rang, put it into the basket and carried it along.

Inside the basket the rang took the meal cakes and ate them. He would eat one and throw another on the lower or higher side of the road. Then he took the eggs, eating one and throwing another on the lower or higher side of the road. Thus they went on until they had nearly reached the parents' home, then the rang jumped out of the basket and ran on. He took mother-in-law's skirt and gown and, putting them on, went and lay down on mother-in-law's bed. When the daughter arrived, she went and said to mother-in-law, "When we reached the pass where the monkeys were dying, we were going to take one of them and bring it along for you to boil and eat. We turned every one over and had a look, but every one was decayed. There was only a rang there that was good, so we picked it up to bring, but that damned rang, that cunning rang took and ate the food! All that remains are these two meal cakes and these two eggs. Please accept them and eat them". The rang remained lying on mother-in-law's bed until he heard mother-in-law calling to the pig. Then he got up and ran away.

Later the rang went back to the road where he had thrown the meal cakes and the eggs. The rang took a stick and each time he poked on the lower side of the road he got a meal cake, and each time he poked on the higher side of the road he got an egg. A Chinese took the stick with which the rang had been poking, but every time he poked on the lower side of the road he got a lump of dung, and every time he poked on the higher side of the road he got another lump of dung!

M417
The lad who looked after goats.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

This story belongs in the same category as those concerning wise and foolish animals, though in this case it is the man who is the fool.

The basic food of the Miao was maize-meal, cooked in a wooden steamer. Without something else, vegetables or meat to go with it, the maize-meal was dry and uninteresting. The word “nza” was used to describe the function of these other dishes which made the maize-meal palatable and appetising. It has the same meaning as the English “with” when we say, “Do have some jam with your bread and butter”, meaning, although it is not expressed in so many words, “in order to make the bread and butter more interesting to eat”. So the goat said, “Mother goat eats green leaves with (nza) yellow leaves”, meaning that the former is eaten in order to make the latter more appetising and to give them relish.

The couplets spoken by the goat are called “bi-dao” which generally means a story or a tale. Here, however, as in the story of the wise toad, the expression signifies a short, clever saying. These are in fact the answers to unspoken riddles; “ why does a goat eat both green leaves and yellow leaves?” etc. Here also, as in the tale of the wise toad, each saying was a challenge, demanding a similar saying in response, but neither the lad nor the man was bright enough to make one. In the battle of wits mother goat was the undisputed victor.

The wooden ram, mentioned in the story, was an implement used for ramming down the earth in the process of building mud walls. In burning it, the man lost one essential tool for the rebuilding of his house. It was made from a log of wood four to five feet long and five or six inches in diameter. All the central section was thinned down to some two or three inches so that it could be handled easily, leaving a foot or rather more of the full thickness at either end. The resulting wooden ram resembled a large, elongated dumb-bell.

M417
The lad who looked after goats.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a lad who went to look after the goats. He looked after them until lunchtime when mother goat grew thirsty. Mother goat said to the lad, "Now lad, take me for a drink of water, and I will tell you a tale". So the lad took mother goat for a drink of water, and when she had finished he said, "Come on, mother goat, tell me a tale". The mother goat said

"Bie-ie-ie!
Mother goat eats green leaves as a relish with yellow leaves,
She eats yellow leaves as a relish with green leaves!"

In the evening when the lad took her home he said, "Father, today mother goat here was able to talk!" The lad's father said, "In that case tomorrow I will go and look after them and see". So the following day the lad's father went to look after them. He looked after them, until midday, lunchtime, when the mother goat said, "Old man, take me for a drink of water and I will tell you a tale". The man took mother goat for a drink of water then he said, "Come on, tell me a tale!" Mother goat said,

"Bie-ie-ie!
Mother goat eats soya beans as a relish with lentils,
She eats lentils as a relish with soya beans!"

In the evening when the man took her home he said, "This goat is possessed, let us take it and kill it to eat". So the man took the goat and slaughtered it. While they were eating it the table said, "Old man spare some for me to eat!" Then the man said, "This table is possessed, take it, chop it up and burn it!" After that the wooden ram said, "Old man, spare me some to eat!" The man said, "The wooden ram is possessed, take it, chop it up and burn it!" After that the cat also said, "Old man spare me some to eat!" The man said, "This cat is possessed, take it and slaughter it to eat!" Now the rats saw it and said, "The man has slaughtered and eaten the cat. Here is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate!" The man, hearing them set to and burnt the house down, but he did not burn the rats, for they stayed safe in their holes.

M421

The Miao man and the seven brothers of the tiger family hold a contest of strength.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The Miao have a number of stories in which the strength of the wild animals is pitted against man. The usual pattern is that some kind of a contest takes place in which the man is shown to be superior because his wits more than compensate for his lack of physical strength. In this story the following points need a little further explanation.

The two sides of the front of a Miao gown were crossed over like a jacket, but there were no buttons. The gown was held in place by a girdle, tightly bound around the waist. It was quite normal to carry all kinds of articles inside the flap of the gown above the girdle. A broody hen would find itself warm and comfortable in there, and being broody, would not try to get out.

After resting, and having had his smoke beside the ploughman's plot of land, the Miao man crossed over to the undergrowth at the foot of the rocks on the other side, where the tiger had hidden himself. The Miao text, by using the phrase "ncheu mao", "desired to go", delicately implies, without actually saying so, that the reason for this little excursion was to relieve himself, and not because he suspected that the tiger was there.

In, or near, many Miao villages there were small pieces of ground where the earth was rolled down smooth and hard for the purpose of threshing corn and beans. The threshing was done with flails made of two stout sticks some four or five feet long and fixed together with a leather thong. As the work progressed a considerable pile of straw and chaff accumulated at the edge of the threshing floor, a good hiding place for a field mouse, but about the last place one would expect to find a tiger, and therefore ideal for the tiger's purpose. It was just bad luck that the Miao man should have chosen it as a place to sit and rest. But then it was not the tiger's lucky day!

The Miao man and the seven brothers of the tiger family hold a contest of strength.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a Miao man who went climbing up through the forest, where he chanced to meet a tiger. The tiger said to him, "Miao man, how many brothers have you?" The Miao man replied, "I have seven brothers". Old man tiger said, "You have seven brothers, I too have seven brothers, so that on both sides the numbers of brothers are equal. Let us then have a contest together to see which side is the stronger. If you are the stronger you shall eat us, if we are the stronger we will eat you". The Miao man said, "That will be fine, but which day shall we have the contest?" Old man tiger replied, "When seven days are past, let us on both sides take our brothers up there to the big pass. We will come and determine which side is greater and which side is less". When they had finished speaking, the Miao man and old man tiger each went his own way.

Seven days were done and the eighth day was rising. This was the day that they must fight together. Now the Miao man had no brothers. His mother and father had him alone, an only child. Thus he had no one to go with him. So he took a broody hen in front of him, and his crossbow on his back. He was the first to go up to the pass and wait. When he arrived, the tigers having not yet come, he climbed up a large tree and hid himself well.

He saw the seven tiger brothers arrive, but the tigers did not see him, they only heard the broody hen clucking, "gho-gho-gho". The seven tiger brothers said, "The seven Miao brothers are coming but what a noise they are making!" The eldest tiger said, "You watch me and I will show you! If the seven Miao brothers come we will jump like this, and like this!" The eldest tiger went and jumped up and jumped down. The Miao man up in the tree above loosed a shot at the eldest tiger and hit him in the armpit. The eldest tiger said, this armpit of mine is very painful. Let me lie down here. If the seven Miao brothers come, you will call me, won't you?"

Now of the tigers there were only six left. Then the Miao man's hen clucked again, "gho-gho-gho". The second eldest tiger said, "The seven Miao brothers are making a lot of noise as they come. Eldest brother is lying down so if they come we shall do this and this!" The second tiger ran out and jumped up and jumped down. The Miao man loosed a shot and hit the second tiger in the small of the back. The second tiger said, "This back of mine is very painful, so I will lie down here. If the seven Miao brothers come, you will call me, won't you?"

The Miao man's hen clucked again, "gho-gho-gho". The five tiger brothers heard it, and the third one said, "Eldest brother and middle brother have both got a pain and are lying down, so we five remain. If the seven Miao brothers come we must do this and this!" The third tiger went and jumped up and jumped down. The Miao man up above in the tree loosed a shot and hit the third tiger's forepaw. The third tiger said, "This forepaw of mine is rather painful, so I will lie down here for a while. If the seven Miao brothers come, you call us".

Then the Miao man's hen clucked again. "gho-gho-gho". The four tiger brothers said. "This time the seven Miao brothers are coming for certain. Those three older ones are all lying down, there are only the four of us left!" The fourth tiger said, "Don't be afraid, if the seven Miao brothers come we will do this and this!" The fourth tiger ran out and jumped up and

jumped down, but the Miao man let loose another shot and hit the fourth tiger in the head. The fourth tiger said, "My head is rather painful, so I will lie down here. If the seven Miao brothers come, you call us".

The Miao man's hen clucked, "gho-gho-gho". The fifth tiger said to the sixth and seventh tigers, "The seven Miao brothers are coming for certain. Those four older ones are all not well and are lying down, so there are only we three left. If they come we will do this and this". The fifth tiger ran out and jumped up and jumped down, but the Miao man let loose another shot and hit the fifth tiger in the back. The fifth tiger said, "This back of mine is very painful, so I will lie down here for a while. If the seven Miao brothers come, you call us".

Now again the Miao man's hen clucked, "gho-gho-gho". The sixth tiger and the seventh tiger heard it. The sixth tiger said, "Those five older brothers are all not well and are lying down. Now only the two of us are well. If the seven Miao brothers come we will do this and this". The sixth tiger ran out and jumped up and jumped down. The Miao man loosed a shot and hit the sixth tiger in the thigh. The sixth tiger said, "This thigh of mine is painful. I will lie down here for a short while. If the seven Miao brothers come, you call us".

The Miao man's hen clucked again, "gho-gho-gho". The seventh tiger looked upwards and looked downwards, and then he said, "Of us seven brothers those six have all been taken ill and are lying down. If the seven Miao brothers come, I don't know what I shall do!" When the seventh tiger had finished speaking, the Miao man came, climbing from above down the branch of the tree. When the seventh tiger saw him he got up and ran away, while the Miao man ran in pursuit.

As the seventh tiger was running he saw that ahead of him there was a man ploughing. He said to the ploughman, "Old Man, we seven brothers and the seven Miao brothers were to have a contest together, when the other six were all taken ill. Now the seven Miao brothers are coming, chasing me. So I want to ask you if I can go into the thorn scrub on the edge of your land. But if the seven Miao brothers should come chasing here, you won't tell them will you?" The ploughman said, "All right, you go in there and hide". The seventh tiger went in and hid away. When the Miao man came chasing along he saw the ploughman. The Miao man said, "Friend, while you have been ploughing here, have you seen whether a tiger has passed by?" The ploughman said, "While I have been ploughing there has been no tiger past here". The Miao man said, "In that case, let me rest here and have a smoke". When he had rested he wanted to go over to the foot of the cliff. As he reached the edge, at the foot of the cliff the seventh tiger saw where he was going and got up and ran.

As the tiger ran he saw a man threshing oats. The seventh tiger said to the man threshing oats, "Old man, may I trouble you? The seven Miao brothers and we seven brothers were having a contest together when my six older brothers were all taken ill and had to lie down. Now the Miao men are coming, chasing me. If I hide in your straw and the Miao men come chasing here, you won't tell them, will you?" The man who was threshing oats said, "All right, you get in and lie down". Then the Miao man arrived. He said, "My friend threshing oats, have you seen a tiger go past here?" The man who was threshing oats said, "While I have been here no tiger has passed". The man who was chasing the tiger said, "In that case I will sit down here on your straw and rest for a while, then I will go on in search". The Miao man sat down right on top of the tiger, who got up and ran. He ran on into the great forest, so the Miao man gave up the chase. He returned and, from those six tigers he had shot and killed, he made food for eating.

Nowadays tigers are very scarce, because the Miao man and the seven tiger brothers determined together who was the greater and who was the less, and the Miao man shot six, leaving only one.

M422
The man's great feat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

In this story the animals set out to hold a competition to determine which was the strongest. The site they chose which is called a “pass” was in fact a saddle between two hills where the ground was reasonably level. With the animals went thunder here personified as a great beast, but it was the man, who, compelled to accompany them against his will, proved his superiority by his mastery of fire.

The title “yeu”, which means “man” in the sense of an adult male, is accorded to all of the animals including the man himself. In translation it is rendered “old man” in the manner of Rudyard Kipling in his “Just so stories”.

The man's great feat.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Once upon a time old man tiger, old man bear, old man wild boar, old man thunder, old man rabbit, old man fox and old man wild cat were going to perform their feats of strength up in a pass. They happened to meet old man Miao and compelled him to go with them and perform to see whose feat was the greatest. Old man Miao had no option, so he went with them and arrived at the pass.

First they made old man tiger perform. Old man tiger roared until he shook the forest, and bounded splitting and crashing among the trees and the rocks. Everyone praised him and said, "Aye! Old man tiger is strong, strong indeed!"

Then they made old man bear perform. Old man bear bounded with great alacrity, climbing the trees and bending the forest together to form a nest in the trees. Then he leapt down to the ground with a crash, and he growled, "beu!" until the forest swayed. Everyone praised him and said, "Aye! Old man bear is strong, strong indeed!"

Then they made old man wild boar perform his feat. Old man wild boar, thrusting with his snout as he went, tore up the roots of the trees until the trees and rocks were lifted and thrown aside. Then grunting, "Nkheu-nkheu!" he ran through the forest undergrowth, blowing it apart as he went. Everyone praised him and said, "Aye! Old man wild boar is strong, strong indeed!"

Then they made old man thunder perform. Old man thunder rose up and belched into the sky. The clouds billowed up until it grew dark, the wind swayed the trees, the rain came in torrents and the water gurgled in the gullies. Then old man thunder belched again and the sky grew bright and clear. Everyone praised him commenting, "Oo-hu! Old man thunder is strong, strong indeed!"

Then they made old man rabbit perform. Old man rabbit ran and hopped up over there and squeaked, "pi-li!" and ran back here and squeaked, "pi-li!" Everyone commented "Oh dear! Old man rabbit! What a waste of time!" Then they made old man fox perform. Old man fox ran over there and barked, "ghao-ghao!" and ran here and barked, "ghao-ghao!" Each one said, "Oh dear! Old man fox! What a weakling!" Then they made old man wild cat perform. Old man wild cat just went over there and mewed, "niao!" and came back here and mewed, "niao!" Everyone said, "Oh dear! Old man wild cat! What an utter weakling!"

When they had finished performing they said to the Miao man, "This time it is your turn. Perform, and be quick about it!" Old man Miao took out his flint and steel, and he rolled a small piece of tinder. He struck until the sparks flew in all directions, and he said, "You go up into the hill above, and wait there and see what I will bring you". They commented, "Oo! That little, tiny old man Miao there, what is he going to do? Let us go on ahead up the hill and see what he brings". When they had all gone the Miao man struck sparks and caught them on the tinder, which he blew gently among some grass until it flamed up. He took this and set fire right around the foot of the hill. The forest crackled when the flames caught it, and the smoke came billowing up. They said, "He is coming! He is coming!" In a very short time the flames reached the place where they were. They fled, but could not escape, they ran, but could get nowhere. Thunder rose and fled up into the sky, but old man tiger

with old man bear, old man wild boar, old man rabbit, old man fox and old man wild cat, in forcing a way out together had their coats all scorched by the flames.

M423
The foolish monkeys.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

This story is a fable, a warning against the folly of blind copying. Rather different from the majority of Miao animal stories, it does not personify the monkeys. It is just possible that it is not originally Miao, but when the point was put to Yang Xiu-gong, he said that it was told to him as a child in Miao and he had never heard it in Chinese or read it in a Chinese book.

Yi-liang is a small town on the old caravan route from Zhaotung north to the Sichuan border.

M423
The foolish monkeys.

Told by Yan Xiu-gong.

They tell a story that once upon a time, there was a Chinese carrying hats from Sichuan, intending to sell them in Zhaotung. When he reached Yi-liang it was very hot, for it was the time of the fifth and sixth moons. So he went and lay down on the ground at the foot of a large tree, and went to sleep.

In the tree above were many monkeys who saw him sleeping there below. The monkeys came down to look at him. They saw he was wearing a hat, and also that beside him there was a box. The monkeys first came and smelt him. Seeing that he did not move, they then went, opened the box and looked in. They saw a lot of hats inside, they also saw that the Chinese sleeping there had put one on, so the monkeys came and each one took a hat and put it on.

When the Chinese hat-seller woke up he realised that his box was open and saw that all his hats had disappeared. He was too angry for words. He snatched off his hat and flung it down on the ground. The monkeys saw what he did and copied him. Every monkey snatched off his hat and threw it down. So the Chinese man got them all back.

M424
Bitterness for the zu-mu of the plain.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The background to this story is the old Miao spirit worship, in which, very occasionally, a special sacrifice called “zi” was offered to the ancestors. The ritual had to be carried out by the zu-mu, a member of the clan who, chosen while still a youth, had been specifically instructed. He, and he only, might officiate, and tradition demanded that he should be lavishly entertained. The knife which the man seized, was that which, his incantation completed, the zu-mu would have used to dispatch the victim of the sacrifice.

M424

Bitterness for the zu-mu of the plain.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They say that, once upon a time, there was a man who went and planted millet. When the millet was ripe the monkeys kept coming and eating it. The man went to the foot of the cliff staying there to keep guard against the monkeys. One day he fell asleep. The monkeys came and saw him and said, "Come let us carry him along to be a sacrifice". So the monkeys carried the man to their home.

The monkeys said to one another, "Shall we go and seek the zu-mu of the forest, or shall we go and seek the zu-mu of the plain?" (The zu-mu of the forest was the tiger, and the zu-mu of the plain was the rabbit.) There were some who said, "Since the zu-mu of the forest eats so much, let us seek the zu-mu of the plain".

The monkeys went off, called the zu-mu of the plain and he arrived. They took the man to the head of the room, then they brought all kinds of fine things and set them out. The man was lying at the head of the room with one eye open and the other closed, with one leg straight and the other bent. Then the zu-mu began to chant,

“Ta-pa-pi, ta-pa-pu,
One leg straight, one leg bent,
One eye open, one eye closed, ...”

Then the man jumped up to run out. Grabbing the knife he flashed it at the rabbit and cut off its tail. The monkeys said to him, "Where have you been hit, old man zu-mu?" The rabbit replied, "It is only the tail of my coat which has been cut off!" The man, meanwhile, had gathered all the fine things and carried them home.

M425
The man's great resourcefulness.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

Although the initial paragraph links this story with the previous one (M424), it is in fact a separate narrative. With some such sentence as, "Once upon a time a man fell down a cliff and broke his leg so that he could not walk", it could well begin at the second paragraph.

The real reason for the man wanting a needle was that he required it for medical purposes. It was believed that the insertion of a needle would facilitate the healing process. The bear did not realise this, but accepted the suggestion that the needle was a kind of dip-stick measuring the amount of fat that the man was putting on.

The wild cat's offer of help was not disinterested. He intended to get his share of the bear's meat, and arranged that the man should not kill the bear until he was on hand. This was the point of the enigmatic call to let the man know that he had arrived, but not to excite the bear's suspicions.

When asked the meaning of the wild cat's call, Yang Xiu-gong said that it had none. It was simply the noise that the wild cat made. However all the syllables are recognisable Miao words. In the incantations, and in the bargaining conducted by the middlemen in fixing a marriage settlement, code words were often used instead of the name of the animal concerned, and this would appear to be the same kind of thing. Two rather archaic words are employed. "Tub", a large wooden vat for holding water, means "man", and "basket", a large bamboo basket for storing grain, means "bear". In translation the slightly archaic form has been hinted by using "come forth" instead of "come out", and "smite" instead of "kill".

When the bear had been killed the man and the wild cat cut up the carcass into reasonable sized joints to be shared out between them. At this point the man's anger was aroused by the wild cat's greediness, but the latter had the good sense to heed the warning given. The man was pacified, promising that, for the future, the wild cat might take the occasional animal from his farm in recognition for services rendered.

The man's great resourcefulness.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

They say that a man went to see his friend who had good fortune through keeping watch against the monkeys, and he decided to copy him. When his millet was ripe, the monkeys came eating it, and he went to keep watch. He made as though he was heavily asleep. The monkeys came and saw him and said, "Let us take the man and carry him off to be a sacrifice". The monkeys gave the man to a monkey with a deformed hand to carry. He carried him along until they came and reached a very frightening cliff. The man said, "Monkey with a deformed hand, you carry me well". But the monkey threw him off and the man fell down and landed at the bottom breaking his leg so that he could not walk.

There came a bear and saw him. The bear said, "Man, I am going to eat you!" The man said, "I am very thin. If you want to eat me, you first go and find a needle and push it here into my knee. Every day go and find meat for me to eat to make me fatter, then you can eat me!" The bear went and found a needle and pushed it into the man's knee. Every day the bear went in search of meat for the man to eat. Each day he grew fatter than the last, but as he grew fatter he pulled the needle up. Now the bear did not know this, and each day he grew thinner than the last. One day the bear said to the man, "I have grown very thin, so though you may not be fat I am going to eat you!" The man said, "Wait two days, then eat me". The bear said, "No, but tomorrow I will eat you". The man was very troubled.

This day there was a wild cat, which came and saw the man. The man told the wild cat that tomorrow the bear was going to eat him. The wild cat said, "Do not be afraid, I went to a human family and saw that there was an axe there in the doorway. I will go and bring it for you to kill the bear". The wild cat went and brought the axe for the man and said to him, "Tomorrow I will come down there below and call, 'Tub, come forth and smite the basket! Tub, come forth and smite the basket!' then you kill the bear". The next day the wild cat called from the lower side, "Tub, come forth and smite the basket! Tub, come forth and smite the basket!" and the bear said, "Man how is it that you are calling, and what are you calling?" The man said, you stay quiet and I will show you". The man raised the axe up, and the bear said, "Heave it up, but drop it gently!" So the man killed the bear.

The wild cat came running to divide the bear meat with the man. The wild cat said, "Divide out mine first!" Then the wild cat said, "This portion is my grandfather's, this is my grandmother's, this is my father's, this is my mother's, this is my older brother's, this is my sister-in-law's, this is my younger brother's, this is my younger sister's, and this is mine!" When they had finished dividing for all the wild cat's family, for the man, nothing whatever was left. The man was angry and thrust out his stomach. The wild cat saw and said, "What is that for?" The man said, "That is a bag to be filled with wild cat meat!" The wild cat said, "Man, you keep the meat while I run!" The man said, "In that case, I shall eat all this, but in future, if I am keeping livestock, you may come and catch some and go and eat it". Now this is the origin of the wild cat coming and catching people's chicken.

M426

How the eagle carried the man out of Dragon-land.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

Introduction.

The mountainous country occupied by the Miao in Yunnan and Guizhou is full of potholes and caves. From time to time cattle, and even people, fall into them. This story concerns a man who, while out hunting, fell into such a hole and dropped right down into an underground world, the abode of dragons. Having been rescued by an eagle he promised that, in the future, it would be in order for the eagle to come and take the occasional lamb or piglet from his farm by way of thanks for his help. This idea links this story to the previous one where, for the same reason, the wild cat was accorded a similar privilege.

M426

How the eagle carried the man out of Dragon-land.

Told by Yang Xiu-gong.

People tell a story that, once upon a time, there was a man who went hunting and fell down a hole. He fell right through into Dragon-land. From here there was no means of climbing out. Looking up, all he could see was an eagle, so he called to it to come and carry him out. As the eagle was carrying him and had got half way up through the hole, it grew hungry and could not carry him out. There was nothing for it but for the man to tear some flesh from the back of his knee for the eagle to eat. Then the eagle carried him out.

When the eagle came out, he set the man down and let him go, but the man returned to look at the hole. There came a gust of wind which blew the man back into the hole, and there was nothing he could do but to call again and get the eagle to carry him out. As the eagle was carrying him and had got half way up through the hole, it said, "I cannot go on". So the man tore some flesh from his arm pit for the eagle to eat, and presently the eagle carried him out.

This time the eagle said to the man, "Do not go back looking at the hole, now!" The man said to the eagle, "I have nothing with which to thank you, but in future when I am rearing flocks or pigs, then you may come and take away some to eat". So when an eagle takes people's flocks or pigs it is because of the man's promise when he fell down the pit and an eagle carried him out.

