

Xiang Miang, a Trickster of Southeast Asia

(Thailand)

Like most countries in Asia, Thai people hold high respect and great consideration for elders, Buddhist monks, high ranking people, and royalty. They would not be allowed to speak back, disobey, or revolt against them in any way. All this is true in reality, but in the imaginary world of the folktales, all subordinates could outwit or defeat higher authorities if the authorities are not just, or if they do not behave properly. Most trickster stories provide checks for society to re-examine the roles of elders, Buddhist monks, high ranking people, and royalty.

In many parts of north-east Thailand and Laos, the representative of subordinates is a notorious trickster named Xiang Miang (pronounced “syang myang”). In some areas, he is called Khattapa. In central Thailand, he is called Srithanonchai. In Cambodia, he is called Ah Thonchuy Prach. In Myanmar, he is called Saga Dausa.

Xiang Miang stories come in many episodes beginning from the trickster's birth and how he got his name, Xiang Miang and ending with his death at the end of the entire story. Two episodes are related here.



Xiang Miang Sees the King's Face

There was a rule in old times that no one would be able to look at the king's face. If anyone was so curious as to take a glimpse of the king's face, the punishment would be that person's head.

Xiang Miang was also very curious to know what the king looked like and why the king set up such a silly rule. He thought about it very hard and waited for a chance of seeing the king's face.

One day the king was out in Xiang Miang's village to visit the people. He wanted to find out how his people were doing and if they had any troubles. The king was curious also to find out what people ate for their meals. People came with the dish that they liked the most to show the king. Nothing was so interesting to the king. He looked at the food and disregarded them.

Then Xiang Miang came to have an audience with the king. He prepared Chinese watercress vines boiled in brine. He took the longest vines and coiled them in a bowl. They looked pretty interesting to the king.

"Boy, what is that in your bowl," asked the king.

"Oh, it's the most nutritious dish, Your Majesty," said Xiang Miang with his face turned to the ground. "It's called boiled Chinese watercress vines," continued Xiang Miang.

"How do you eat that," asked the king. "Show me how you eat it; I want to



see,” ordered the king.

“Before I eat this, Your Majesty must promise not to punish me if I break any rule,” requested Xiang Miang. “Otherwise, I will not be able to show Your Majesty how to eat it.”

“Come on, now, show me. I promise that you won’t be punished in any way,” confirmed the king.

So, Xiang Miang picked up the vine and lifted up his face to drop the end of the vine in his mouth. As he was doing so, he could not help but see the king’s face. He quickly chewed the Chinese watercress vine and then he brought his face down.

“Now, I don’t wonder why the king does not allow anyone to look at his face,” thought Xiang Miang. “He looks just like a horse.”

