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The Court Case of the Mouse against the Cat: A Casebook of Versions Recorded in Recent Decades

translated and edited by
Wilt L. Idema

Victor H. Mair, Editor
Sino-Platonic Papers
Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations
University of Pennsylvania
Philadelphia, PA 19104-6305 USA
vmair@sas.upenn.edu
www.sino-platonic.org

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The Court Case of the Mouse against the Cat:
A Casebook of Versions Recorded in Recent Decades

Translated and edited by Wilt L. Idema

Harvard University

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INTRODUCTION

The underworld court case of the mouse against the cat has been widely popular in China since the Qing dynasty (1644–1911).¹ The earliest preserved texts date from the nineteenth century, but these may well have been composed in the preceding century. These texts have been transmitted both in manuscript and in print, and come from places as far apart as Beijing, Chengdu, and Guangzhou. English translations of two different versions had already appeared before the end of the nineteenth century.² The tale continued to circulate in the twentieth century, not only during the first half of the century,³ but also after the foundation of the People’s Republic and all the huge social and cultural changes that would follow. How popular the tale continued to be became clear when the results started to be published of the huge projects that were undertaken from the 1980s on to document China’s folktales and folksongs, as well as the repertoire of the many genres of “minor arts” (*quyi* 曲艺) such as ballads and prosimetric narratives. Still more texts were published in the early years of the twenty-first century when districts and provinces tried to have their local forms of “intangible cultural heritage” recognized by higher, preferably national, authorities. Other examples were published in the collections of folksongs gathered by local aficionados, many of whom also published their materials on the Web. In recent years performances by (semi)professional *quyi* performers have likewise been uploaded, and some of these artists have published part of their repertoire.⁴

When earlier I published *Mouse vs. Cat in Chinese Literature* I included a number of complete translations of transmitted texts.⁵ Originally I had hoped to include more such translations, but because of the limitations of size I had to make a strict selection. In the end, the texts I selected for inclusion all

¹ The Chinese word for mouse, *shu* 鼠, covers both mice and rats of various kinds. The earliest dictionaries define *shu* as “a small furry animal, living in holes.” As a result, not only squirrels, but also various kinds of small predators such as weasels and martens may be classified as relatives of rodents.

² Stent 1878, pp. 115–135, “The Rat and the Cat in Hades”; Little 1891.

³ For translations of versions that were printed in the 1920s, see Idema 2018b; Idema 2018c.

⁴ For a first survey of the *quyi* genres that include the tale of the court case of the mouse against the cat in their repertoire, see Xi Yingying 2017. Xi Yingying 2018 surveys contemporary performances that are available on the Web.

⁵ Idema 2019.

were texts that were available in pre-1949 manuscripts or printed versions. While I quoted from a number of texts that had only been published after 1978, it was not possible to include any of these texts in their entirety. I regretted this very much because many of these versions make for enjoyable reading, not only because they add their own original details to the story, but also because many of them display considerable literary skill. This anthology is made up of a selection of complete translations of texts that have been published since 1978. Many more works could have been included, but I have aimed for variety in terms of content, format, and place of origin, while only including those texts I personally loved to read and translate.⁶

While I could also have included a number of folktales, this anthology is limited to folksongs and *quyi* 曲艺 texts. Most of these texts are “traditional,” in that form, language, and motifs show little impact of post-1949 culture, apart from the warning that rats and mice may be harmful to humans because of the germs they carry. In a few cases a direct link can be established with texts that also have been preserved in written form from the Qing dynasty or Republican times (1912–1949). For the texts that were recorded after 1978, as a rule the name of the singer is provided by our sources. In a few cases we have more details about the composition of the text. For instance, Kang Yunxiang 康云祥 and Fan Rulin 范汝林, two professional performers from Linxian (Shanxi) produced their rewritten version in 1978, and it may not be too far-fetched to detect in their version references to the rise to power and the subsequent fall of the Gang of Four. The adaptation as a Wenzhou drum ballad, performed by a ten-year-old diva, reflects the phenomenon that the tale of the plaint of the mouse has entered contemporary children’s literature as fairy tale and fable. Both these “modernized” versions do away with the scary “superstitious” setting of the underworld court of King Yama.

From the beginning of the first millennium the Chinese have conceived of the world of the dead as a courthouse, where the deceased are sentenced for their misdeeds while alive, but where they also may try to get even with those who wronged them while alive. Buddhism when introduced into China brought with it the idea of multiple hells. Over the centuries the bureaucratic organization of the underworld was perfected. By the ninth and tenth centuries King Yama had established himself as the

6 For a translation of the *Precious Scroll of the Mouse* (*Laoshu baojuan* 老鼠宝卷), a version that is widely popular in Western Gansu, see Idema 2015a, 355–396. See also Idema 2015b.

prime ruler and judge of the underworld. In his task he was assisted by nine more Yama Kings, each with his own name and court (although in our text we will also encounter the ten Yama kings sitting in court together). King Yama is assisted by throngs of associate judges, demonic clerks, and yaksha demons. Among his runners, Oxhead and Horseface, depicted as men, one with the head of an ox and the other with the head of a horse, stand out.⁷ Not only the souls of humans are judged by the Yama kings—animals too appeal to their courts. Initially they complained about the cruel treatment they had received at the hands of humans, but from the Qing dynasties we also have texts in which animals lodge accusations against other animals, and among these the case of the mouse against the cat is by far the most popular.⁸

Several texts in this selection refer back to earlier stories about the mouse and the cat. Mice and rats love to remember the glory days of their ancestors such as the White Mouse Demon and the Five Rats. The story of the White Mouse Demon is best known from chapters 80–83 in the sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游记), which tells the tale of the pilgrimage of the holy monk Xuanzang 玄奘 to the Western Paradise to receive from the Buddha those sutras that were missing in China. On his long and dangerous journey, the monk is pursued by monsters that want to eat him or bed him in order to acquire the vital force stored in the body of a man who has not spent one drop of semen in seven previous incarnations. One of these monsters is the White Mouse Demon who appears to the monk in the guise of a damsel in distress. The holy monk is eager to help her, whereupon she abducts him to her hide-out, the Bottomless Cave. Xuanzang's able assistant the monkey king Sun Wukong 孙悟空 fails to defeat the monster, but notices that she claims the Heavenly King Li Jing 李靖 as her father. When Sun Wukong goes to heaven for assistance, it transpires that the damsel is a mouse that earlier had been chased from heaven for her misdeeds by Li Jing. The latter, however, had spared her life, whereupon she in her cave on earth had set up a spirit tablet for Li Jing as her adoptive father. With the assistance of Li Jing and the latter's son Nezha 哪吒, Sun Wukong eventually subdues the demon and frees his master, so they can continue their pilgrimage.⁹

⁷ Teiser 1994.

⁸ Idema 2015b; Idema 2019, 11–16.

⁹ Yu 1983, 70–138; Idema 2019, 56–65.

The story of the Five Rats, set in the reign of Emperor Renzong (the Humane Ancestor; 1023–1063) of the Northern Song, also is first known from sixteenth century sources. Like the White Mouse Demon, these Five Rats have great magical powers and can take on human shape. They can do this so well that they can take on the shape of specific individuals. When one of them is taken to court because he had taken on the shape of his lady-love's husband, one brother takes on the shape of the judge, and when the case then is referred to the imperial court, his brothers take on the shape of the chancellor, of the impartial Judge Bao 包公, and of the empress-dowager (depending on the version, one of them may even take on the shape of the emperor). No warriors or clerics are able to subdue the five despite all their martial skills or magical powers, until Judge Bao realizes that these five figures are actually rats and travels (alone or accompanied by Heavenly Master Zhang 张天师) to Thunderpeak Monastery in the Western Heaven to borrow the Buddha's cat. This animal manages to kill four of the rats, but due to one moment of slackened attention allows one of them to escape—as this animal turns out to be pregnant, the cat has since been forced to stay on earth until it will have killed the last rodent. The mice may of course have their own version of these stories, but the cat too may refer to its celestial origin.¹⁰

One also will encounter multiple references to the wedding of the mouse. The wedding of the mouse is a minor festival that was celebrated just before the New Year or at some date in the First Month. Children were put to bed early so as not to disturb the wedding that was supposed to be celebrated at night, because by disturbing the wedding a family might incur the wrath of mice and rats. New Year prints on this topic would show the procession of the mouse bride to the house of her groom, but would also include a large cat, poised to jump on the procession and eat its fill.¹¹

Each translation is preceded by a short introduction in which I discuss the background of the text, its form, and special aspects of its content. In my renditions I have tried to maintain as many formal aspects of the originals as possible, but I have not tried to rhyme the sections in verse. Notes are kept to a minimum.

¹⁰ Idema 2019, 65–81. See also Anonymous 2013.

¹¹ Ma Shaoyi 1998; Zhang Daoyi 2009; Idema 2019, 82–90.

A CONFRONTATION IN COURT IN THE UNDERWORLD

The text translated below was recorded in the 1980s during the campaign to collect the materials for the compilation of the "three complete collections" of folk literature, that is, folk tales, folk songs, and proverbs and sayings. Titled *The Mouse Lodges an Accusation against the Cat* (*Laoshu gao limao* 老鼠告狸猫), it was included in the *Collection of Folksongs and Proverbs from Dongping* (*Dongping geyao yanyu ji* 东平歌谣谚语记), pp. 223–27, that was published in 1988. The song was performed by Guo Xingbang 郭行邦, an eighty-year-old illiterate farmer in Guolou village of Yinshan community in Dongping district (Shandong) and was recorded by Yang Chuanzhen 杨传珍, a thirty-five-year-old high school graduate and amateur writer.¹²

The text is a ballad composed in lines of ten syllables each. Such lines have a very pronounced rhythm, as they are made up of three groups of respectively three, three, and four syllables. I have tried to reproduce some of this effect by typographical means, translating each single line in three short lines. All even lines rhyme, and basically the same rhyme is maintained throughout the text. The ballad starts with a reference to the exploits of the Five Rats that created havoc in the capital at the court of the Song dynasty during the reign of Emperor Renzong. As in some other versions from Shandong, the mouse complains about the unfairness of creation: why has it been created if there also is a cat? The cat in this version counters by telling him that he should work for his food like everyone else.

Earlier versions of this ballad already circulated during the nineteenth century and have been preserved in manuscript and print. One manuscript even claims (quite unconvincingly) to be in the hand of Pu Songling 蒲松龄 (1640–1715). One of the differences between Guo Xingbang's version and that manuscript is that the description of the hell scenes observed by the cat as it is taken to King Yama is much shorter in Guo's version.¹³ Whether these scenes had been shortened by Guo, Yang Chuanzhen, or by the editors is now impossible to determine, but it is perhaps ominous that the author of the preface to the *Collection of Folksongs and Proverbs from Dongping*, one Liu Jinghai 刘静海, expresses his thanks for the considerable number of "precious suggestions for improvements" to three provincial

¹² The text is also available in Shan Man 1996, 81–85.

¹³ For a translation of these hell scenes in the manuscript, see Idema 2019, 94–98.

experts and comrades from Tai'an city who had come to the district to inspect the draft of the collection.¹⁴ On the other hand, in versions of this ballad recorded in the northeastern provinces in recent years, the descriptions of hell are considerably expanded.¹⁵

* * *

THE MOUSE LODGES AN ACCUSATION AGAINST THE CAT

The mouse and the cat are arch-enemies. This feud was started a thousand years ago by their distant ancestors. Once upon a time a mouse had been eaten by a cat, and, filled with indignation over the injustice he had suffered, the mouse upon his death had drawn up a statement, and he arrived in front of King Yama to lodge an accusation against the cat. The mouse knelt down in front of the bench of King Yama, and raising high his statement he presented it to King Yama, who opened the document and perused it carefully:

“In the common world

Everyone knows me

By the name of Mouse;

And I live below

The corner of a wall

In interconnected holes.

My ancestor

By the name of Hongpei

Boasted major magical skills

And once long ago

Created great havoc

At court in the Eastern Capital.

¹⁴ *Dongping geyao yanyu ji* 1988, Preface, 2.

¹⁵ Li Haisheng 2016, 335–339, “Haozi gao limao” 耗子告狸猫.

Now the family line

Has come down to me

After more than a hundred years

And I just dig

My hole in the ground

Without enjoying any distinction:

When I've stolen a bite,

I can eat one bite —

Always hungry, never once sated,

And in my little hole

Every day lasts as long

As the third month of winter.

Every day

I stay in my hole,

Not daring to stir or to move,

And only late at night

Will I leave my hole,

Filled with fear and trepidation.

Then one day,

When the coast was clear

And I came outside for a stroll,

I all of a sudden

To my total surprise

Ran smack into that cat.

Exerting all strength

In my whole body

I tried to make my escape,

But my body is small,
 My strength limited,
 So I had no chance at all!

The cat pounced on me,
 Then released me,
 In order to capture me again,
Ripping my skin till
 My whole body
 Was covered with red blood!

He first bit off my head,
 Then ate my flesh,
 Chewing well before swallowing;
Not sparing a hair,
 Not spitting out one bone,
 He devoured me so nothing was left.

The cat and I
 Have no karmic feud,
 Never had any fight or conflict,
So for what reason
 Did he grab me,
 Treating me as his personal enemy?

Dear King Yama,
 Take pity on me
 And see to it that justice is done:
Dispatch your ghostly underlings
 To arrest the cat
 So he may explain his behavior here!"

His Majesty King Yama,

Having read this statement,

Promptly approved of this request,

And called for

His ghostly underlings

To come and receive their orders.

When Oxhead

And Horseface

Had received their written orders,

They walked on

Spirit-fire wheels

And left as fast as a gust of wind.

Upon entering the village

They first located

The Duke of Zhou, the god of the soil.¹⁶

The god of the soil

Accompanied them

To the gate of the mansion concerned,

And the gods of the doors

Reported their arrival

With a single shout in the main hall.

The god of the house

Then accompanied them

As he took them inside the mansion,

¹⁶ The god of the soil is a low-ranking divinity, so it is somewhat surprising to find him identified here with the Duke of Zhou 周公, one of the most venerated figures in Confucianism.

Where the kitchen god
 Welcomed them warmly,
 Then asked for the cause of their visit.

The little cat
 Was just washing his face
 On the stones supporting the stove:

Around his neck
 They quickly fastened
 The iron chain with a swishing sound!

Ignoring all pleas,
 Ignoring all protests,
 They left while pulling the cat along,

Leaving the world of light,
 Away from the world of men—
 Enough to make one shiver with fear!

As they strode along
 They arrived on their trek
 At the location of the Pass of Ghosts¹⁷

Where he observed
 How all ghostly beings
 Suffered the most terrible tortures:

Those who did good deeds
 Were allowed to walk
 To the other side on the golden bridge;

Those who committed evil
 Were beaten on their backs
 And drowned in the river of death.

¹⁷ The Pass of Ghosts marks the entrance to the underworld.

Those who scolded their fathers-in-law
Or cursed their mothers-in-law,
Had their tongues ripped out, their eyes gouged out!

Those who committed theft or robbery
Or indulged in lechery or idleness
Also were punished in a terrible manner.

As they were walking
The cat kept on looking
At the scenes and spectacles along the way,
But in a short while
They had arrived
At the palace of His Majesty King Yama.

The little cat
Immediately
Knelt down on the floor,
And cried out:
"Dear King Yama,
Please listen carefully to my words!

I this cat
Immediately
Here kneel down on the floor!"

He cried out:
"Dear King Yama,
Please listen carefully to my words!

That mouse
Steals one third
Of the emperor's stored grain;

He takes away

One third of the grain

To the detriment of the common people.

When he enters a study

He nibbles at books

To the damage of the Saint and sages;¹⁸

He eats the holy books,

Chews on the holy sutras,

Instilling fear into the Buddha himself!

He clambers on pots

And climbs onto tables

As easily as walking on level ground;

When at night

He comes outside,

He drives good people mad with rage.

The old man

Will in his panic

Imitate the meowing of a cat,

While the old woman

Will get a sorghum stalk

And beat it in two.

The left-over rice

In the pots on the stove

Will be completely cleared out,

And of the sweets

Placed in a drawer

More than two pounds will be gone!

¹⁸ Confucius and his followers.

A stern mother-in-law,

Not knowing the circumstances,

Will blame her daughter-in-law,

And her daughter-in-law,

Having suffered her rage,

Will beat and question her children.

The mouse creates such damage

That the whole family

Doesn't know what to do,

So as last resort

They take me

Into their home.

In their mouth

They chew on buns

In order to feed me;

They carry me here,

They carry me there,

Treating me as a relative.

Having received their favor

My only task

Is the prevention of theft;

Having received their favor

How could I

Not exert all my energy?"

The mouse replied: "King Yama,

If one receives life,

There has to be a source of food:

There never has been

A man who lived forever

By always keeping his mouth shut.”

The cat then said:

“If you want to eat,

You should work for it yourself:

Other people work hard,

And you steal theirs to eat—

What kind of Heavenly Principle is that?”

The mouse explained:

“Once you were created,

We should have never been created at all.”

The cat replied: “Once there are thieves,

One also needs

People who catch those thieves.

You yourself

Committed a crime,

But have the gall to accuse someone else;

You yourself

Committed a crime

And falsely accused an innocent person!”

When King Yama

Heard this discussion

He flew into a terrible, towering rage,

And he loudly cursed

That thieving mouse

For this brazen act of false deception.

IDEMA, "THE COURT CASE OF THE MOUSE AGAINST THE CAT"

He ordered his underlings

To take the cat

Promptly back to the world of light

And had him devour

For all eternity

The sons and grandsons of that rat!

A FAILED CREATION

The text that is presented here, titled *The Accusation of the Mouse against the Cat* (*Laoshu gao mao* 老鼠告猫), was recorded in the deep south of China, in southeastern Guizhou. According to the information provided by the editors of *A Selection of Folksongs on Social Life* (*Shehui shenghuo mingexuan* 社会生活民歌选), pp. 170–77, of 2004, the text was performed by Lei Da 雷达 and Wen Bin 文彬 and recorded by Yang Yinghai 杨应海.¹⁹ Unfortunately, all we know about the singers is their name, and no more precise information is provided as to when and where the text was collected. Lei Da also contributed other songs to the collection, at least in one case by providing the collector with a manuscript. Yang Yinghai, who is also one of the editors of the collection, most likely did his work in the 1980s or 1990s. While the text was recorded in Guizhou, one still wonders whether it might not have originated in northern China, as the cat sleeps on a *kang* and the walls of a house are made of tamped earth.

The text is written throughout in lines of ten syllables, and maintains the same rhyme down to the end. In the long testimony of the cat in this version, the mouse is described as an accidental creation of the Queen-Mother of the West that was banished to earth after it had made itself impossible in heaven by its misdeeds; on earth it creates so much havoc that the Jade Emperor dispatches the golden cat. That cat would have accomplished its mission if the last couple of mice had not hidden themselves in a monastery below the feet of the Buddha.

* * *

THE ACCUSATION OF THE MOUSE AGAINST THE CAT

The little mouse

Knelt down in front of the hall,
Pearly tears coursing down;

¹⁹ Yang Yinghai, Tan Ying, and Tang Siwen, 2004, pp. 170–177. The only explanatory material in this volume is a one-page preface.

In his mouth he held

The statement of accusation

He presented to King Yama.

King Yama, holding court

In the world of shade,

Is as pure as a bright mirror,

And has judged quite many

Cases of false complaints

With right and great clarity.

When King Yama

Had read the statement,

He questioned the mouse,

Asking him, "You,

Little mouse,

Who is the one you accuse?"

"The one I accuse

Is the little cat

Who is way too cruel by nature:

Without reason he has

Exterminated our

Complete family, every one!

Alas, all members

Of our family

Had to flee for their lives;

They only could

Below the stove

Go and dig out a deep hole.

During the day

We in our hole

Play around to amuse ourselves,

And only at night,

In deepest darkness,

We dare come out of our hole.

We look to the east

And gaze to the west

And when people are sleeping

We search for some

Leftover food

To feed our miserable selves.

When we feel thirsty,

We drink as our tea

The water for washing feet,

And when we are hungry

We search for vegetable roots

At the feet of the kitchen table.

We don't care

Whether cooked or raw—

We promptly gobble them up.

The father calling his son,

The mother leading her daughters,

We then go back to our hole.

But alas! That

Little cat

Is depraved by nature—

We mice

Also never

Dug up his ancestral graves!

Since ancient times

The mouse does not hold

A grudge against the cat,

So for what reason

Has the little cat

To act in such cruel fashion?

Every day

He waits for us mice

At the entrance of our hole,

And when one of us

Runs into the cat,

We are frightened to death.

Once a little mouse

Has left the hole,

He is killed by one bite,

And with hide and hair,

With bones and flesh,

Swallowed down in one gulp.

When he finds a bigger mouse,

He catches him in one bite

And carries him up to the roof.

Then he bites us,

Fathers and mothers,

Till we are covered in blood;

Not eating the head,

Not eating the tail,

He first drinks all our blood.

With a single bite

And a single snort,

Eyes bulging out of their sockets,

He scares us so

That old and young

Flee for their lives in all directions.

Alas that I,

This little mouse,

Had to leave my father and mother!

My mouse father

Is advanced in years

And all year suffers from ailments;

My mouse mother

Is lacking her teeth

And cannot swallow food or drink.

My mouse elder brother

Was just grown up

When he lost his life in early youth,

So my mouse sister-in-law

Now has to support

Their children till they are grown.

My mouse grandparents

Are quite advanced in years

But I cannot show any filial piety,

My mouse younger sister

At fourteen years

Is still only at a very tender age.

My parents

Had promised her in marriage

And presents had been exchanged;

They had promised her

To young sir Brown Mouse,

But she had not yet moved there.

The matchmaker said

They chose the Last Month,²⁰

And the date had also been fixed:

On New Year's Eve,

The night of the thirtieth,

In the hour of *zi* she's to be the bride.²¹

O how I hate

That little cat,

Who is bereft of all conscience!

I hope King Yama

Will summon the cat

And establish the truth of the case!"

When King Yama

Heard these words

He gnashed his teeth,

²⁰ The Last Month is the Twelfth Month of the lunar year.

²¹ The hour of *zi* 子 refers to midnight, from 11 pm till 1 am. On the wedding of the mice, see Idema 2019, 82–90.

“For what reason

Does he want to exterminate

The whole family of the mouse?

My rage rises to heaven!

Grab that tabby cat

And arrest him for interrogation!”

He ordered Impermanence²²

And a little ghost

To bring that cat to his court;

He told Oxhead

And Horseface

Together to rob him of his life.

Carrying in their hands

Their iron chains

They immediately set out.

But neither on East Street

Nor on West Street

They saw a shadow of a cat.

Only after Impermanence

Had figured out

That cats are afraid of cold,

Did they

In front of the oven

Lay their hands on the cat.

²² Impermanence (*wuchang* 无常) is the representative of King Yama who comes to fetch the souls of those who are destined to die. Impermanence may also refer to two of such representatives: one tall and white, and one short and black.

The four of them

Arrested the cat,

Displaying their ferocity,

And frightened

That little cat

So much his souls fled.²³

"This must mean

That King Yama

Demands this cat's life!

Please, Impermanence,

And you little ghost,

Explain the matter to me!"

They shouted to him,

"You little cat,

Carefully listen to our words.

It is actually

The little mouse

That has lodged an accusation.

That little mouse

Is waiting for you

In the palace hall of King Yama."

When the little cat

Heard these words,

He was frightened out of his wits,

"What kind of proof

Did that little mouse

Produce in his plaint against me?"

²³ Ancient Chinese physiology credits human beings with three *hun* 魂 souls and seven *po* 魄 souls.

“The mouse accuses you,
You, cat, defend yourself:
Both sides will argue their case.”

“You gentlemen ghosts,
I this cat will with you
Go to court and make my case.”

And in a short while
They had arrived
At the courts of the Ten Kings.

So somber and grim,
In deepest darkness:
He was shivering all over his body,

And as soon as King Yama
Had observed the cat,
His fury rose up to high heaven.

He loudly shouted,
“You little cat,
You are bereft of all conscience!

For what reason
Did you exterminate
The whole family of the mouse?

I see that you,
Little tabby cat,
Act in an improper manner,

So be smart
And before the hall
Provide a detailed account!

If your statement is wrong,
 You'll be boiled in oil,
 Without any further deliberation.

When your punishment is fixed,
 You will never be allowed
 To be reborn and return to earth."

The little cat
 Knelt before the hall
 And provided a meticulous reply.

The cat stated,
 "Your Majesty King Yama,
 Listen carefully as for the cause!

The Queen-Mother
 Arrived at the Celestial River
 On a walk to dispel her gloom,

Picked up some clay
 And inadvertently
 Fashioned the shape of a mouse.²⁴

She threw it on the ground:
 It turned into a real mouse
 Who hid himself below her skirt.

Following the Queen-Mother
 He came to the golden halls
 And sneaked into the palace.

²⁴ The Queen-Mother of the West (Xiwangmu 西王母) is an ancient Chinese deity. She is said to dwell on the highest mountain of the extreme west as queen of the female immortals. Other legends credit her and her husband Donghua dijun 东华帝君 with the creation of mankind. The Celestial River in heaven is the equivalent of the Milky Way.

The Queen-Mother

Could not catch any sleep:

His squeaking kept her awake,

And inside the palace

He chewed to pieces

Shoes, hats, gowns and skirts!

The Queen-Mother

Ordered the Beast Immortal

To conduct a thorough investigation,

And only so they learned

That his old mouse

Created havoc inside the palace.

She ordered Earth Immortal

To arrest the old mouse

So she might question the critter

For what reason

He disturbed the palace

So no divine being had any rest.

The Queen-Mother

Wanted to annihilate the mouse

And had firmly made up her mind,

But the mouse implored,

Begged the Queen-Mother

To show mercy and let him live.

The Queen-Mother

Listened to the mouse,

To his long disquisition:

On visiting the Celestial River

That old mouse

Had been created by her,

And if asked for grace,

She, the Queen-Mother,

Could not but grant it to him.

As soon as the mouse

Had succeeded in

Escaping from death with his life,

The Jade Emperor

Agreed to her request

But also issued an edict in which

He had that

Old mouse

Chased from the palace grounds.

First there were clouds,

Then there was fog,

So he could not see his own hands;

After drifting for three days

And drifting for four nights

He finally reached the human world.

On arriving there

He looked around

Where he might settle his family,

And before long

He had sired

Countless sons and grandsons.

That old mouse

And the little mice

Spread over hills and ridges,

And within a few years

Each place had,

Each place had its own mice.

By entering buildings

And sneaking outside

They display their capacities:

Even in temples

And palace halls

One has no peace anymore!

The king of the Song

While seated in court

Promulgated an order and law

That the common people

On each hill or field

Should leave three ears of grain:

He asked the mice

Not to disturb

The common people anymore,

Because the mice,

On obtaining this grain,

Could live out the rest of their lives.

But these mice

Did not listen,

Running hither and thither,

And late at night

In the kitchen

Held their races, trained their troops.

In the rice-bucket

Of the owner

They leave their shit and their pee,

And the silken thread

Of the owner's wife

They chew into numerous pieces.

Even white rice,

These mice will say,

Does not have the right taste,

Of the dried meat

On the heated *kang*

They'll then eat several pounds.

The seeds of gourds and beans

That had been preserved

Are completely eaten by mice,

And the best grain seeds

Are by these mice

Hauled into their own holes.

On grain and rice,

Tables, benches and chairs,

One finds their footprints;

Of the grain in the fields

One half is chewed off:

Hauled off, it fills their holes.

Food grains

And also fruits

They chew on and nibble on,

And the rice and vegetables

They don't finish off

Are even a threat to the people:

When elderly people

Eat such mouse food,

They suffer from many diseases;

When younger people

Eat such mouse food,

Nine will die out of ten.

Even if you have

Triple-pounded earth,

Who knows how solid,

They still will

Dig their way inside

To make their many holes.

They don't even fear

The strength of a metal box

Or a black-lacquered table,

And red felt mats

And embroidered blankets

Are all chewed to shreds.

The owner's

Good novels

Will be chewed to pieces;

One hole here,

One hole there:

No way to read them now!

The new clothes

Of the owner

Are all chewed to junk,

So he can only

Ask the tailor

To repair the damage.

And if a young girl's

Embroidered shoes

Haven't been properly stored,

These also will be

By some of these guys

Hauled inside their holes.

They chew to pieces

The traveling trader's

Books of his many accounts;

They chew to pieces

The broker's

Account books—all a mess!

They chew to pieces

The lists of accounts,

So creating people a headache!

The chew to pieces

Reports on activities

Of those who are officials,

And they chew to pieces
 Books needed for study,
 Leaving only dirt and dust.

They create such havoc
 That the owner of the house
 Is woken up from his sleep;

They overturn boxes,
 They overturn chests,
 And ruin the medicine bottles.

When the old man
 Beats on the bed posts,
 The mice don't believe him,

And when the old woman
 Rattles the strainer,
 They jump about as before.

Because these mice
 In the world of men
 Committed these evil deeds,

The common people
 Reported the mutiny of the mice
 To the authorities in heaven.

The Jade Emperor
 Issued an edict,
 Summoning the cats' leader,

And ordered the golden cat
 To descend to the world
 And exterminate all mice:

He had to make sure

That all these mice

Were captured together,

So the common people

Could live in peace

Upon the annihilation of the mice.

That cat came down

And in his loyalty

Displayed his capacities,

He completely wiped out

These old mice,

Annihilating that family.

But there was one pair

Of demonic mice

Who were crafty indeed,

And they hid themselves

In a monastery

Below the feet of the Buddha.

Because this

One couple escaped,

They could not all be destroyed,

And in dark places

In the human realm

They proliferated once again.

Throughout the world,

In every locality,

You can find these mice,

Sons siring grandsons,
Grandsons siring sons,
They populate the whole world.

We these tabby cats
Seek them out everywhere
But never can finish them off,

But old and young mice
Act even more outrageously,
Endangering good citizens!"

When King Yama
Heard the tabby cat's
Statement to the court,

He shouted out,
"You little mouse,
You truly have no conscience!

And you falsely accuse
This small tabby cat
When he exterminates you!

This is the evil karma
That you yourself created:
He has to exterminate you!

The little tabby cat
Has committed no fault,
And acted most loyally;

You little mouse
Falsely accused the cat:
Your evil crime is enormous.

At that time

He should have killed

All mice without exception

So this root of disaster

Would not until now

Still continue to fester.

I hereby order the cat

With all his energy

And most vicious means

To exterminate on earth

All mice and rats

And forever guard the world!"

KING YAMA ON LOCATION

One of the common genres of storytelling in Hubei province is “funeral drumming” (*sanggu* 丧鼓). As part of the mortuary rituals following a person’s death, song and ballads are performed for a number of nights by professional performers.²⁵ The tradition may go back for centuries but the contents of songs, especially the verse narratives that are part of the repertoire, have followed the times. The repertoire includes many stories of filial sons,²⁶ but also many that derive from fiction and drama. Almost every locality had its own local tradition. As performed in Jingshan these rituals are designated as “nighttime gongs and drums” (*yin luogu* 阴锣鼓). The text of *The Mouse Lodges an Accusation* (*Laoshu gaozhuang* 老鼠告状) is included in Hu Zhongcai 胡中才 and Li Su’e 李素娥, *Nighttime Gongs and Drums from Jingshan* (*Jingshan Yin luogu* 荆山阴锣鼓, 2010), pp. 427–36. This volume presents not only an extensive collection of texts, but also a 200-page introduction on the history and function of the local genre, which details the ritual program, discusses local characteristics of the genre, and analyzes the music.

The text of *The Mouse Lodges an Accusation* is made up of quatrains each of four lines of seven-syllable verse. These are sung by three singers who each in turn perform one quatrain. While the Chinese text indicates this feature by numbering the quatrains as 1, 2, 3, 1, 2, 3, etc. I have followed each third quatrain by an extra line space in my translation to bring out this feature. Quite often each set of three quatrains shows a thematic unity.

In this text the bench is made up of the ten Yama Kings. These ten Yama Kings are King Yama and his nine associates, four of which are named in this text. This is rather uncommon, as the souls of the deceased as a rule appear before each of the ten judges in sequence. This text is also the only example I have encountered in the adaptations of the underworld court case of the mouse against the cat in which it is suggested that the underworld judges can be swayed by bribes. However, the text also gives much space to a trip of King Yama to the world of light to check on the conflicting statements of

²⁵ For a brief description of this genre, see *Zhongguo quyizhi Hubei juan* 2000, 117–119.

²⁶ For a translation of an adaptation of the tale of the filial son Dong Yong 董永 in this genre, see Idema 2009, 45–78.

the mouse and the cat. In the world of light, he is in for a fine cursing by the farmer whose cat has been summoned to the underworld.

Yet another typical element of this text is the perplexity of the underworld runners who do not know how to identify the guilty cat when they wander on earth, and then discover the cat they are looking for is sitting on a branch over their heads, munching on a praying mantis. An even more extensive description of the perplexity of the underworld runners is encountered in the related adaptation in Tai Kexiang 台科祥, *A Study on the "Filial Songs" Culture of Southern Shaanxi* (*Shaannan Xiaoge wenhua kaocha* 陕南孝歌文化考察 (2016), pp. 254–260. In that adaptation the runners eventually resort to praying to the bodhisattva Guanyin. In the counter-statement of the cat, this adaptation also includes a detailed description of the havoc created by the Five Rats in the Eastern Capital at the court of Emperor Renzong.

* * *

THE MOUSE LODGES AN ACCUSATION

I have sung you all the interesting songs,
 So it's hard to come up with a song to sing.
 I'll not sing about Pangu dividing yin and yang,²⁷
 Nor about Yao and Shun creating court ritual.²⁸

I'll not sing about the Zhou kings or King Zhou,²⁹
 Nor about the Five Thearchs or Three Sovereigns.³⁰

27 One Chinese legend claims that the world was created from the body of the giant Pangu 盘古 upon his death.

28 In traditional Chinese historiography, Yao 尧 and Shun 舜 ruled the world before the establishment of the Xia, the first dynasty.

29 The Zhou kings are the kings of the Zhou 周 dynasty that was founded in the eleventh century BCE and ruled till 256 BCE (even though during the last five centuries its rule was largely nominal). King Zhou 纣王 was the evil last ruler of the Shang dynasty, which had been founded in the sixteenth century BCE and was succeeded by the Zhou dynasty.

30 The Three Thearchs and the Five Sovereigns ruled China in a mythical past, even before Yao and Shun.

So I'll randomly pick a song to perform for you:
I'll sing about the mouse lodging an accusation.

There was this mouse that was killed by the cat,
So his soul drifted off to accuse him of murder.
Crashing through the underworld's Ghost Gate Pass,
He accused him with the ten courts' Yama Kings.

The ten Yama Kings have extensive responsibilities:
Judging good deeds and bad, they judge yin and yang.
The wrongs one suffers above, one reports below—
The mouse crying injustice was the very first case.

"I who lodge this accusation am the king of the mice,
My family is domiciled in the province of Huguang.³¹
All members of my family are called grey mice,
We live in holes in the wall and in covered drains.

My mouse sons and grandsons are one big crowd,
They're more than enough to fill ten large baskets.
The families of us mice are also quite flourishing,
Our sworn sisters are found all over the world.

The bats, those salty rodents, are our best friends,
The squirrels, those hairy mice, are our daughters.

³¹ Huguang 湖广 covers the area of the modern provinces of Hubei and Hunan.

Then there is another family in a different region
And they call themselves the brown rodent wolves.³²

In the world of light my acquaintances are many,
I have good friends among both the rich and the poor.
I constantly stay in reed sheds and thatched homes,
And often visit noble houses and rich families too.

Ginseng and swallow nests are not my daily fare,
Left-over soup and remnant rice are my main food.
I do not wear silk or gauze, or any kind of brocade,
My bedroom is made of worn rags and old clothes.

I don't act the bully / or throw my weight around:
As soon as I see someone coming, I cede the way.
When I run into a rowdy crowd, I'll make a detour,
Happy to live humbly, I don't deceive my betters.

The tiger and leopard may be the kings of beasts,
But meeting with me, they don't show their force.
The ox and horse, a thousand times bigger than me,
Will never fight with me over any food and fodder.

There's only that cat whose heart is way too cruel,
In the world of light, he acts savagely and fiercely.

³² It was widely believed in traditional China that, upon reaching a certain age, mice and rats could transform themselves into bats, which were also called "immortal rats." Squirrels are called "pine tree rats" in Chinese. The "brown rodent wolf" is the weasel, which, as a small furry animal, is believed to be related to mice and rats.

Each day he keeps guard on the beams of the house,
Guarding the gate of the larder, of the rice granary.

Then at times he watches the entrance of our hole,
Scaring us so much we resemble winnowed chaff.
If one of us leaves the hole, he'll swallow that one;
If two of us leave the hole, he will swallow the pair.

Our stomachs are so hungry they start rumbling;
If we don't dare take a risk, we will surely die.
If we leave the hole in daytime, it is too obvious,
So we can only hunt for rice and soup at night.

Last night when I had waited till early dawn,
I stealthily left the hole and climbed a beam,
But before I had even come near the granary,
I had been captured and killed by that cat!

One pair of sharp claws pierced my breast,
Those two claws held me tight in their grip.
In one movement his maw held my neck
To swallow me whole, with hide and hair!

Having eaten my father, he ate my mother;
Having eaten my brothers, he ate my wife.
Having eaten heart and liver, he ate my flesh;
Eating a baby mouse, he savored the taste.

Our mouse sons and daughters were distraught
As each and everyone thought of their parents.
The sisters of the tenth litter waited for milk;
The brothers of the ninth litter waited for soup.

Because the heads of household had been eaten,
That whole nest of mice lacked all leadership:
Some of those mice cried out to August Heaven,
And some of those mice were all awash in tears.

Then there were some who didn't understand,
So the big ones started to bully the small ones.
Because in the family there was no one in charge,
That nest of mice ended up in a monstrous mess.

My soul has stated the injustice I have suffered:
For generations we mice have suffered this wrong!
Your Majesty King Yama, I implore your mercy,
Please have me, mouse, return to the world of light!"

The mouse stated the facts and also made sense;
As he was talking his eyes were awash in tears.
And when the written accusation was handed in,
Ten ounces of silver were wrapped in that paper.

The Yama King, weighing the facts of the case,
Also noticed the glaring silver inside the paper:
The block to strike awe³³ now was violently struck;
He cried: "That old cat can't be allowed to escape!"

Having said this the Kings ordered the runners
To make haste and travel to the world of light
And quickly arrest the culprit to face the court,
To arrest that cat so he could be interrogated!

When the two runners had received this order,
They passed thru the lanes of the underworld.
Hastily they were running, running so hastily,
And quickly they arrived in the world of light.

After fording small creeks, they climbed hills;
After climbing high hills, they crossed rivers.
By the light of the moon they moved forward;
Before the fifth watch, they reached Huguang.

But Huguang now is such an extensive region!
Which village was the home of this evil cat?
Also, what were the features of this evil cat?
The mouse had failed to provide the details.

³³ The "block to strike awe" is a square piece of wood that is used in place of a gavel to silence the court room.

Along the road they encountered many cats,
But there was not one that was the same:
This one had a long tail and a short body;
That one had a short tail and a long body.

One had a white mouth and colored eyes,
The other a white face and a colored nose;
One was black, one white, and one yellow,
And another striped like the pelt of a tiger.

There was no end to their thousand shapes!
Now what were the features of this evil cat?
There was no end to the area of Huguang—
Where to look for him? Where to find him?

While the two runners were talking together,
They saw that the sun was rising in the east.
Upon that sight those two runners panicked:
The underworld people greatly fear the sun.

So these two runners ran off in great haste,
Running to a shady slope to evade the sun.
As soon as they had reached a willow grove,
They rested below the willows in the shade.

With lowered head these two heaved a sigh,
And leaning against a willow they fell asleep.

In their dream King Yama gave his orders,
So they woke up with a start, all bewildered.

In a panic the first runner looked all around;
In a panic the second one looked all around.
And when they simultaneously looked up,
They both saw that cat there up in the tree!

That cat sat there above them in the tree
And in his mouth he held a praying mantis.
His claws held on to the branch of the tree,
His nails shining like a curved new moon!

When they carefully watched and looked,
This old cat was quite exceptional indeed:
The bridge of the cat's nose was very high
And its pair of eyes gave off a green light.

The underworld runners were filled with joy,
They gave each other a wink, without a word:
The two runners together climbed up the tree
And slid the iron chain around the cat's neck!

Only then did the first runner start to speak,
With his first word calling him a damned beast,
Shouting, "You this old cat deserve to die!
Why did you have to bite a mouse to death?"

The two runners went on by telling the cat,
"That mouse has lodged a formal accusation,
Claiming that you killed him without reason—
Confronted with your accuser, you will die!"

The cat at this moment also started to speak,
Telling the runners, "Now listen to my words.
The people always praise me very highly,
I enjoy their respect for my proper behavior.

We cats have been famous for generations,
We have been praised even by the emperors.
The members of our family are wide-spread
And each of them enjoys a great reputation.

The tiger is my cousin on my mother's side,
The lion is a daughter of my mother-in-law.
The leopard is a cousin on my father's side,
The otter is the equivalent of our daughter.

Because I uphold the law in chasing mice
The court has built a temple hall for me.
In Guangzhou you have the town of Cats
And in Hubei you find the village of Cats.

As a matter of fact, the mice are my food,
So I don't mind any confrontation in court.
If a true hero acts, he confesses his deeds:
By capturing me you're courting disaster."

On hearing this, these runners flew into a rage,
Coming forward they slapped the cat in the face.
"Accused of murder you still speak quite bravely,
But show your courage when death approaches!"

As the eyes of that old cat were awash in tears,
He called out to the runners, "Please listen to me.
At this moment my stomach is empty as can be,
This morning I haven't had any breakfast at all.

I only finished one half of this praying mantis,
One half is still hanging at the corner of my mouth.
Allow me to go back home and bring some food,
It's early enough to leave once I've eaten my fill.

Even though I am taken to hell on a false claim,
I cannot forget the task I was given by Heaven:
Let me tell my children to watch the mouse holes,
And then I will happily appear before the Judges."

The runners didn't listen to any of his pleadings,
And one of them pushed him as the other shoved.

While loudly shouting at him, they beat him up;
If he wasn't hit by a fist, he was hit by a cudgel.

There was no end to the stomping and kicking,
And foul curse words poured from their mouth.
Pushing and shoving they greeted King Yama;
Pulling and hauling they entered the court hall.

The court hall in hell is unlike the one on earth:
Purple mists swirl about as the fog is pervasive.
Oxhead and Horseface are lined up on both sides—
To a chill souging wind they entered the hall.

The cat was unfazed as he entered the court hall
Though the Ten Kings each showed a mean face.
Number one, Qinguang, was the first to ask him,
"So why did you bite that old mouse king to death?"

Number two, Chujiang, shouted at the old cat,
"Provide us with a true and honest confession!"
Number three, Songdi, was still even fiercer,
"Now open the coffin and examine the corpse!"

Number four, Wuguan, spoke in a most cruel way,
He wanted the cat pushed into a vat of boiling oil!
The other six Yama kings sang to the same tune,
"He deserves to be quartered by five strong horses!"

On hearing this, the cat felt his body on fire,
 But having calmed his liver,³⁴ he spoke clearly,
 Saying, "Dear Yama Kings, please listen to me!
 Of every nine mice, ten are loafers and parasites!

The evil deeds they commit are without limit,
 The men all are thieves, the women all whores.
 Whisperers whispering, squeakers squeaking,
 With daughters and sons coming by the basket!

Chase them below the earth and they dig holes,
 Chase them upstairs and they climb the beams.
 They will run into the ivory bed of the owner
 And chew his beddings and clothes to shreds.

Because the mice refuse to live in a decent way
 The Jade Emperor ordered me to eat them all.
 The Buddha of the Western Paradise decreed
 That the mice were to serve as my sustenance."

On hearing this, King Yama was quite surprised:
 So heaven and hell had not coordinated their acts.
 The Jade Emperor and the Buddha hadn't told them—
 What would happen if they were hauled to heaven?

³⁴ In the theory of cosmic correspondences, the liver is the organ that is associated with fire.

He gave a wink to the other nine Yama kings,
Better add some noodle soup to the rice congee.
The other nine kings lightly nodded their heads
And ordered the cat to continue his statement.

Once it had started the cat couldn't be bridled,
It provided a detailed account of all the facts.
"A mouse crossing the street is hit by everyone,
This is the factual truth and no exaggeration.

If a bunch of mice worm their way into a temple
They damage the divinities both small and large.
They pee and shit on the heads of the divinities
And haul dog meat into the shrines of the gods.

The curtains they carry off to make their nests,
The offerings they finish off till nothing's left.
Celestial troops and generals may have power,
But their swords and their lances are of no use.

If a bunch of mice worm their way into a kitchen,
Plates and dishes, bowls and chopsticks all rattle.
They reverse the jugs and they reverse the jars,
They reverse pots and pans, defile the water vat.

First they eat dog shit and then they eat rice,
First they drink pee and then they drink soup.

From the drain they clamber up to the oven;
Having climbed the stove, it's the chamber pot.

These mice pee and shit wherever they like,
Using rice jar and noodle jar as chamber pot.
The proverb says it in the most direct manner:
One drop of mouse pee ruins one pan of soup.

If a bunch of mice worm their way into a school,
Both the teacher and students will meet disaster.
The mice will steal *The One Hundred Surnames*,
So no lessons anymore on 'Zhao, Qian, Sun, Li.'³⁵

The mice will steal *Poems of a Thousand Authors*,³⁶
So the teacher will have no poems and no essays.
The mice will steal the *Classic for Teaching Boys*,³⁷
So the teacher then will have to return to farming.

If a mouse worms his way into a box of books,
He will chew the book and its contents to shreds.
As one litter of mice is followed by yet another,
They ruin the teacher's nice and decent living."

35 "Zhao, Qian, Sun, Li 赵钱孙李" is the first line of *The One Hundred Surnames* (*Baijia xing* 百家姓), a common primer.

36 *Poems of a Thousand Authors* (*Qianjia shi* 千家诗) is an anthology of popular poems that was widely used in schools.

37 The *Classic for Teaching Boys* (*Jiao'er jing* 教儿经) is yet another primer, written in rhyming lines of seven-syllable verse.

He shouted, "Yama Kings, please listen to me!
These mice are also guilty of causing a suicide.
If you consult your registers of life and death,
You will find in the list of the dead, one maid.

The wedding trousseau of a just-married wife
Is chewed up by those mice till nothing is left.
They chew through the fine boxes of the bride
And drag her hairpins and rings into their hole.

When at dawn the new bride is doing her hair,
She misses her hairpins and beats the maid.
The maid gets a beating and falls to weeping,
Complaining that good food turns into sugar.

As the maid receives this unjustified beating,
She loudly weeps in a most heart-rending way.
One moment she calls 'mother,' one moment 'ma'
And she blames her parents for being so poor.

'You shouldn't have sent me off to be a maid,
It is really insupportable to become a servant.
For all your complaints you remain lower status,
And don't dare argue when you're in the right.'

When she had wept till midnight and all slept,
She got a hemp cord, hung herself from a beam!

Now these mice were really far too depraved,
As they caused the suicide of this poor maid.”

The cat shouted, “Yama Kings, please listen to me.
When these mice cause damage, I suffer disaster.
The owner will berate me for not doing my job,
And being the cause that the house has no food.

If a bunch of mice bore into a poor man’s house,
There’s no place to store sweet potatoes and yams.
The mice will even finish off their survival stores,
Causing such a family to suffer spring starvation.³⁸

On the bed and below it they’re like racing horses,
They chew your clothes and bed curtains to shreds.
While asleep at night, they’ll nibble on one’s ears,
So my owner, enraged, will bang on the doors.

Then the owner will call me to appear before him,
He’ll berate me to my face, ‘You damned creature!
Each day you dine thrice on fish, meat and rice—
What’s the point of keeping you here in the house?’

³⁸ “Spring starvation” refers to the situation that a peasant family has finished its winter stores, but the new harvest has not yet been brought in.

In this world there are three hundred sixty jobs,
For a cat catching mice is his one and only job.
When I've caught the male rat, I catch the female,
And go on to catch all mouse sons and daughters.

The crimes of mice are as vast as heaven,
This maid is not the only victim they made.
In order to ensure the safety of the people,
I, this cat, will do my duty as is only right.

I implore you Kings to consider this carefully;
You should support the good and remove the bad.
If you today in this case make the wrong decision,
How can you after this day still serve as Kings?"

Hearing this, the Ten Kings were quite excited,
And the mouse, in the wrong, was quite unsure.
The pupils in his eyes turned some tens of times,
Then his weeping tune played a deceptive tune.

He said, "Great Kings, please listen to my words.
This old cat commits many acts of lèse-majesté.
He shows no respect for Your Majesties at all,
And each of his sentences is a clear defamation.

First he says Your Majesties act way too rashly,
Secondly he says Your Majesties have no clue.

Thirdly he says Your Majesties misjudge the case,
Fourthly he says you don't deserve to be kings.

On the basis of items one, two, three, and four,
He has again and again transgressed the law.
Even if we forget about my accusation of murder,
He would still deserve to die without that case.”

The old cat stepped forward to dispute his words,
But the mouse interrupted him again and again.
The Ten Kings gave each other a wink and decided
That the session this day was over, and they retired.

When the Ten Yama Kings had left the court hall,
They gathered together to discuss this court case.
King Qinguang, King Chujiang, and King Songdi
Were all lost in thought as they pondered this case.

Grandfathers all say that they as men make sense,
Grandmothers all say that they as women are right—
That old cat had made clear he made sense,
But the statement of the mouse had presented silver.

If they wronged the cat that was hard to explain;
If they fined the mouse, then the silver was lost.
And if they would sentence each to forty strokes,
Then that also could not be seen as a conclusion.

The one to come up with an idea was King Qinguang,
He wanted to check the merit records of cat and mouse.
But he had barely opened the book box to have a look,
When a foul stench immediately assailed his nose.

When he rubbed his nose and had a careful look,
The box was filled with mouse shit and mouse pee.
When he also had a look at each of the chronicles,
Each of them had been chewed into a pile of junk.

He read some of the separate pages that survived,
And came across one event of the Song dynasty:
The Old Cat Zhan Zhao and the heroic Five Rats
In close collaboration had saved the crown prince.³⁹

As he checked one chronicle and then another one,
None of these books provided him with all details.
Some had the beginning but then lacked the ending,
Some had beginning and end, but lacked the middle.

Having read through all books he still didn't know
Who was right and who wrong—it remained a riddle.

39 In the nineteenth-century novel *Three Heroes and Five Gallants* (*Sanxia wuyi* 三侠五义; in a later version also known as *Seven Heroes and Five Gallants* [*Qixia wuyi* 七侠五义]), "the Old Cat Zhan Zhao 展昭" and the "Five Rats" (a group of noble bandits) all collaborate with Judge Bao in saving the crown prince who is in danger of being killed by a jealous imperial concubine. See Shi Yukun and Yu Yue 1997.

If the accuser accused the cat of taking his life,
One could not count it simply as settling scores.

King Chujiang and King Songdi were enraged
And proposed to immediately reopen the session:
First to sentence the cat for his insubordination,
Then to condemn the mouse to a term in prison.

King Yama repeatedly said that this was not proper,
And he proposed to conduct an enquiry on the spot.
A report by hearsay cannot match one's observation:
To get at the facts he wanted to go there in disguise.

When the cat heard this, he was secretly pleased,
But he hid his smile, pretending to wash his face.
When the mouse heard this, he was very worried—
His whole body was shaking like winnowed chaff.

When King Yama had left the hall of King Yama,
He looked in all directions, and listened all around:
When listening, his ears distinguished good and bad,
While watching, he eyes made clear distinctions.

On his road he passed by a large field of wheat,
The earth was covered by ears, was covered by stalks.
A large group of rats was occupied stealing the grain,
But when they saw King Yama, they hid in their holes.

On his road he passed by the house of a farmer.
A large group of rats had climbed up the beams.
They entered between the tiles, hid above the poles,
So the tiles were clattering with quite a noise.

In front of the house the farmer started to rant,
"Damn your sire / and fuck your dame!
If my cat hadn't been killed by who knows,
How could you enjoy yourselves like this?"

As soon as King Yama heard he made sense,
He quickly stepped forward and said to him,
"I hear you are talking about mice and cats,
Please compare the merits of both animals."

Once the farmer heard this, he grew very angry:
"What merit has a mouse that needs a reward?
Talking about the merits of mice makes no sense,
Talk about their faults and they have plenty!"

First of all, they damage my granary by gnawing,
Secondly they ruin my clothes by their chewing.
Thirdly they make their holes below our walls,
And fourthly they befoul the rice we've stored.

The mouse sons and mouse grandsons, the whole lot,
Use the planks of the loft as their training grounds.
At night it is such a racket a man cannot sleep—
As soon as you sleep they again hurt your ears.”

When King Yama heard this, he asked the question,
“What is the best method to subdue these rodents?
Should we apply presses?⁴⁰ Beat them with cudgels?
Fill their holes with water and drown the bastards?”

When the farmer heard this, he replied as follows,
“None of these methods is as good as a single cat.
It is only a cat that has the required great qualities,
Only he is capable of subduing those mice and rats.

As soon as a mouse but hears a cat meowing,
He’s so scared his legs collapse, his heart shakes.
And as soon as a mouse is spotted by the cat,
He’s bound to die and meet with King Yama.”

Hearing this, King Yama then asked the question,
“If so, then why don’t you have a cat in your house?
One cat would be able to control the whole stretch.
And where would those mice then be able to hide?”

⁴⁰ Finger-presses are common instruments of torture in the courts of law. Perhaps a local type of mouse trap is intended here.

Hearing this, the old farmer exploded for rage,
"We here at house had a cat, a great king of cats.
But yesterday he went off into a willow grove,
Then meowed once, and since has been lost.

If it hasn't been the cat-stealing nine-tailed fox,
It must have been King Yama who stole my cat.
I hope that those black turtles, those blind pimps,
May soon meet with an evil and miserable end."

Hearing this, King Yama was filled with rage;
As he carefully rethought the case, all made sense.
He could only return and go to the underworld
And there in the Yama Hall reopen the session.

When today he held court, it was unlike before,
The ether of death was rising in an exceptional way.
His blue face and long fangs displayed his violence;
Oxhead and Horseface took their place on both sides.

In the Yama Hall a chill wind started blowing,
Below Alas Bridge⁴¹ evil billows started to rise.
The Ten Yama Kings were seated in one row,
Cat and mouse were ordered to enter the hall.

⁴¹ The Alas 阿鼻河 is a river in the underworld. Sinners are thrown into its raging billows of blood, but virtuous people cross it by means of a golden bridge.

The old cat still displayed his old proud mien,
 The old mouse was still his old wheedling self.
 King Yama asked the old cat to take a seat
 And ordered the mouse to kneel to the side.

The old mouse over here was shaking with fear,
 And King Yama over there was showing his rage.
 He loudly shouted three times, "You damned beast!
 Committing all evil you falsely accused the good!

Oxhead and Horseface, now give him a beating,
 He'll receive forty strokes of the heavy cudgel.
 After the beating you're thrown in hell, forever—
 Let's see if you still dare lodge an accusation!"

As the mouse was beaten, he weakly squeaked;
 As he was weeping he shouted, still stubborn,
 "One mouse each year will have twelve litters,
 You never can behead us all and kill us off!"

Hearing this, King Yama exploded in rage,
 He ordered the cat to devour them each day.
 In the Yama Hall a new rule was established:
 No mouse was allowed to lodge a complaint.

The cat had great merit, committed no crime:
He was returned to earth in an eight-man chair.⁴²
At his departure King Yama instructed him
To finish off all mice and rats he could find.

"If you see one of them, / then eat that one;
If you see two of them, / then eat that couple.
If you feel bloated because you ate so many,
I here have a laxative to clean out your guts.

Then there still is something you can't forget,
You have to be good in protecting the people.
Guard the clothes and the bedding for them,
Securely guard the storehouses and granaries."

With this order the old cat returned to earth.
The mouse was thrown into jail, kept in prison.
The good deeds of the cat got a good reward,
The evil deeds of the mouse brought no gain.

A rat crossing the street is beaten by all men;
Each house keeps a cat to catch mice and rats.
If a cat meows only once, the mice are scared,
And the old mice can only hide in their holes.

⁴² A sedan chair carried by eight carriers.

So till this very day each family keeps a cat,
Till this very day the mice hide in their holes.
King Yama gave a fair sentence in this case,
And we people should all follow his example.

A NIGHTTIME CONVERSATION

The Complaint of the Mouse (*Laoshu gaozhuang*) is part of the repertoire of "clear songs" (*qingqu* 清曲) in Yangzhou. It has been translated on the basis of its edition in Wei Ren 韦人 and Wei Minghua 韦明铎, comps., *Clear Songs from Yangzhou* (*Yangzhou qingqu* 扬州清曲, 1985), pp. 110–13.⁴³ The genre of Yangzhou *qingqu* traces its history back to the Yuan dynasty and enjoyed great popularity during the eighteenth century, Yangzhou's gilded age.⁴⁴ The singers make use of a great number of different traditional melodies,⁴⁵ each melody making its own demands as to the number of lines and the length of each line. The overwhelming majority of this repertoire is made up of short songs, but it also includes a number of longer songs, sung to a series of different tunes. In my rendition I have left the names of the tunes untranslated. In performance the singer is accompanied by string instruments, played by the singer and/or his or her companions.

Whereas usually the same word will refer to mouse and rat, this text is unique in distinguishing between the two rodents. At the same time, mouse and rat are referred to together as "the two mice/rats/rodents" while martens and weasels are also listed as members of the family of "small furry animals that live in holes." The account of the underworld court case is preceded in this version by an account of the meeting of the mouse and the rat, and of the conversation in which they both vaunt their pedigree, their pleasures, and their power. That power turns out to be illusionary as soon as the cat makes its appearance. While the rat makes its escape, the mouse is captured and killed, whereupon it decides to appeal to King Yama. Usually prequels to the court case try to raise sympathy for the little mouse on the part of the audience, but this prequel is unique in showing the rodents as vainglorious rogues. Another remarkable element of this adaptation is the appearance of the God of the Stove in the court of King Yama as witness, confirming the damages caused by mice and rats.⁴⁶

43 A far larger collection of texts is provided in Wei Ren 韦人 2006a. In that work, the Chinese text of *The Complaint of the Mouse* is found on pp. 375–82.

44 Studies on the genre are collected in Wei Ren 2006c.

45 For transcriptions of melodies see Wei Ren 2006b.

46 On the God of the Stove (Stove God, Stove King), see Chard 1995.

* * *

THE PLAINT OF THE MOUSE

(Jingtuozi)

Late at night, at a silent hour,
 They quietly left their holes:
 The mouse and the rat hadn't seen each other for long,
 And when they met with each other, they started to talk.

(Shuban)

“Come talk of us mice,
 we are very renowned!
 From, the beginning of time
 right down to today!
 Of the twelve birth-year animals
 we are counted most lofty.⁴⁷
 Our many subsequent ancestors
 have greatly displayed their might.
 One met with the Monk of the Tang
 on his Journey to the West,
 And battled in magic with Acolyte Sun—
 the match ended in a draw.
 The Heavenly King who Supports a Pagoda—
 he is our father,

⁴⁷ The Rat is counted as the first of the twelve birth-year signs. Many folk tales relate how the animal achieved this position by cheating. See Idema 2019, 31–34.

And Crown-Prince Nezha

we can call our brother!⁴⁸

The Five Rats by their transformations

created havoc in the Eastern Capital,

Even when Judge Bao sat in court,

he could not distinguish true from false.

He used the Precious Mirror for Unmasking Demons

to display our original form,

And reported to the Jade Emperor,

who dispatched heavenly soldiers and gods.

Those subdued our ancestors,

but many descendants remained!⁴⁹

Come talk of our races,

you have noble and base:

The marten is most noble

for his light and warm pelt.

The yellow weasel is the merriest

as he eats meat each day.

48 In the sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji* 西游记), which narrates the pilgrimage of the holy monk Xuanzang 玄奘 to the Western Paradise, the White Mouse Demon takes on the shape of a lovely maiden in chapters 80–83 in order to seduce Xuanzang. Xuanzang is called “the monk of the Tang” because the historic Xuanzang, who made a famous pilgrimage to South Asia, lived during the Tang dynasty. Despite his formidable magical skills Xuanzang’s disciple Sun Wukong 孙悟空, a monkey that fights using a rod that can extend at will, initially fails to subdue her, until he discovers that she was an adoptive daughter of Li Jing 李靖, “the Heavenly King Who Supports a Pagoda,” which made her also an adoptive brother of Li Jing’s son Nezha 哪吒. With the assistance of their troops, Sun Wukong forces the White Mouse Demon to reveal her original shape as a white mouse and submit. See Idema 2019, 57–65.

49 The Five Rats had the uncanny ability not only to take on human form, but also to transform themselves into specific individuals. In this way they created great havoc at the court of Emperor Renzong (r. 1023–1063). Judge Bao restored order after he had traveled to heaven and borrowed the Buddha’s own cat. That animal eventually allowed one rat to escape. Idema 2019, 65–81.

The water rat is the most pitiable
as he swims and dives in rivers and ditches.

The squirrel is the busiest
as he schemes to survive in trees and forests.⁵⁰

In the first month of winter the field mouse
can transform himself into a quail.

On grain boats the “honey-rat”
is given as a present.

A rat that is white as snow
was borne in an intercalary month.

A rat that is counting money
predicts prosperity for the owner.⁵¹

Bai Sheng in *Water Margin*
has taken his byname from us,⁵²

‘A rat crossing the street’
is the term of praise for heroes.⁵³

We also have many benefits,
but people don’t know of them.

The whiskers of a mouse made into a brush
can write poetry and prose,

⁵⁰ The common word for mouse and rat in China is *shu* 鼠, which in the earliest dictionary is defined as “a small furry mammal that lives in holes.” This means that not only rodents such as squirrels are classified as *shu* and may include the word as part of their name, but also some small hunters such as martens and weasels.

⁵¹ The squeaking of mice and rats is often said to mean that the animals are counting money.

⁵² The sixteenth-century novel *Water Margin* (*Shuihu zhuan* 水浒传) describes the adventures of a band of noble bandits. One of these is Daytime Rat Bai Sheng 白日鼠白胜.

⁵³ The proverb is, “A rat crossing the street is beaten by each and everyone.”

'A rat's eyes' and 'a rat's ears'
are listed in handbooks of physiognomy.
Fire-works shops
always make gadgets in our image:
As soon as the powder is lighted,
these scurry away across the water.
The friends of rivers and lakes
rely on us to make a living,
Falsely wearing a horse-coat,
they push the pedal to entice people.⁵⁴
'Mouse' is our original designation,
But the secret name of 'rat' is also widely known.
We live in out-of-the way places,
and hide ourselves in holes.
Above us we have our parents,
below us we have our children.
Each year on the fifteenth of the First Month
the young brides leave their homes,
And, whispering and muttering,
the marriages are concluded.⁵⁵
The neighbors to the left and right
bring rouge and powder as presents.
Our only problem is our landlord,
a mean-spirited sycophant!

⁵⁴ "Rivers and lakes" are the domain of vagrants. The meaning of this line escapes me and the translation is tentative.

⁵⁵ The wedding of the mouse is celebrated in many places. The date varies locally, but usually falls just before or after New Year. The event is often depicted on New Year prints. These show not only the wedding procession of the mice, but also a big cat that will be attracted by the noise and kill off the vermin. Idema 2019, 82–90.

He will give his presents to others,
 but he never gives any to us!
 He does not treat us properly,
 So we pester him till he's never at ease.
 We have our fights in the Buddha-shrine,
 so the candle-sticks will fall over,
 We have our horse races on the beams,
 raising our arms and displaying our troops,
 And we take a leak on the mosquito curtains above the bed,
 dripping till he's wet all over.
 The wax candles in the lantern shade—
 we chew them through till their very center,
 The paintings on paper by famous masters—
 we tear them all to pieces,
 His clothes and silks—
 all suffer a plague!
 In the boxes for fruits
 we open a backdoor,
 So we can go in and out at will,
 eating as tigers, gobbling like wolfs.
 Whether it rains or snows,
 we are not concerned at all:
 Cotton floss and rice straw
 are sufficient to ward off the cold.
 Come to think of it,
 Which animal in the world can even come near to a mouse?"

(Kuaiban)

Just as the rodents were engaged in animated conversation,

Out of the blue their great adversary arrived on the scene:
They suddenly saw a cat, that animal fierce as a tiger,
Shaking his head, raising his tail, with menacing eyes!
The mouse was so terrified he was stuck to the ground,
But the rat managed to flee and so escaped with his life.
The cat tore the little mouse to pieces, and
Swallowed him whole, with hide and hair!

(Shuzhuangtai)

"Alas for me, this mouse, I've all of a sudden lost my life!
I am covered with blood, my head separated from my tail."
The soul of the mouse drifted off into the underworld,
Weeping all the way, he went to the City of Those Who Died before Their Time.⁵⁶
"That I have died is not of great concern,
But I leave a family behind—on whom are old and young to rely?
My mouse parents are still alive—there's none to take care of them.
I'm casting aside my mousy wife in her room—she is just in the prime of her spring.
And then I have three sons and four daughters,
They are only naked mice who cannot yet find their own food.
Who understands my myriads of sufferings?
I only can hold back my tears, suppress my grief, and lament the five watches of the night!

(Dieduanqiao)⁵⁷

The drum of the first watch sounds. (bis)

⁵⁶ The City of Those Who Died before Their Time (Wangsicheng 枉死城) is one of the many locations of the underworld. Any space surrounded on all four sides by high walls is a "city" (*cheng* 城), so the word might also be translated as "fort" or "prison." Here must stay the souls of those people who died before their time, because of an accident, murder, or other reasons; when their predestined moment of death arrives, they will be judged.

⁵⁷ In traditional China the night was divided into five watches of equal duration. In cities, the watches were announced by

Ever since my birth, my fate has been against me.
 I live in a hole in the wall,
 and hide myself throughout the day.
 I am loyal and honest by nature—
 when did I ever do anything evil?

The drum of the second watch is beaten. (bis)
 I, this mouse, have died a sorry death.
 Since the Three Thearchs and Five Sovereigns,⁵⁸
 we mice have been tolerated.
 Emperor Taizu of the Song
 once sent us a shipment of food.⁵⁹

The drum of the third watch rolls. (bis)
 Only at night do I leave my hole to search for food.
 Spying east and watching west,
 in constant fear and trepidation:
 All because I have to provide for
 a whole family, old and young.

drum rolls from the drum tower. Laments structured by the five watches of the night are quite popular in Chinese folksong.

⁵⁸ The Three Thearchs and the Five Sovereigns succeeded each other as rulers of China in a mythical past.

⁵⁹ Emperor Taizu of the Song is Zhao Kuangyin 赵匡胤, the founder of the Song dynasty. In many adaptations of the underworld court case of the mouse against the cat, the mouse claims that he once saved the life of Li Shimin 李世民 or an unspecified Song emperor, either by saving the emperor concerned from starvation while besieged, by stealthily bringing grains into his encampment, or by chewing through huge wax candles that had been offered in tribute by a barbarian nation and thus revealing the explosives hidden inside. As a reward the mice would since then be entitled to their share of every bushel of grain. Idema 2019, 90–102.

The drum of the fourth watch quickens. (bis)

The more I ponder this matter, the greater my grief.

I do not know what sin

I may have committed in a former life,

That today I have to leave behind

my father and mother, my brothers and sisters.

The drum of the fifth watch stops. (bis)

I see heaven is about to break into dawn.

Overcome by grief

I have arrived before King Yama's hall,

And weeping I will lay my plaint

before King Yama!"

(Manjianghong)

Our little mouse

loudly raised his sad voice in King Yama's hall,

As he cried out:

"Emperor Yama, please avenge the injustice I've suffered!

Because the cat in the world of light commits his atrocious crimes:

Without reason he has killed me, this mouse, and I lost my life.

I, this one person, was held in his maw—

At first he only played with me,

but later it was for real.

With hide and hair, he chewed me into little pieces.

I too have a body of flesh and blood—

could I not suffer pain?

If you, Clear Sky, do not trust me,

Just question the gods who patrol by day and the gods who patrol by night.

Let them in the world of light submit that cat to questioning!
I wish Your Majesty an eternal life, myriads and myriads of years!"

(Yinniusi)

King Yama immediately addressed him as follows,

Calling out: "You, little mouse,

do not shed such a profusion of tears!

We will take your complaint into consideration,

But I do not know whether all the facts of the case

are false perhaps or true.

I will immediately dispatch Horseface and Oxhead:

Once they have received their order they will quickly set out,

To arrest in the world of light that cat so he may be questioned.

Our instruments of torture never have shown any partiality.

But if you falsely accuse him,

your punishment will be increased threefold!

Oh, little mouse,

If I find out that that is the truth,

It will be utterly impossible to be reborn!"

Horseface and Oxhead both hastily set out,

In their hands the hemp rope and iron fork for catching souls.

Once in the world of red dust

they ran into the cat and tied him up.

"In the world of darkness the mouse has lodged a complaint against you,

you claim you didn't know?"

At these words the cat was quite surprised:

"So now the bad guys make accusations against the good guys!

The proverb goes:

'If you are right you need not fear ghosts knocking on your gate.'

So let's go,

and before King Yama I will set things straight."

(Xue yong Languan)

When the little cat arrived in the Office of Darkness, the underworld,

He noticed a reeking storm hollering,

a somber fog rising.

After crossing the Alas-Bridge,⁶⁰

he arrived at the Village of Evil Dogs,

And then there were the sword-tree and mountain of knives,

enough to scare anyone out of his wits!

(Jian dianhua)

From afar he espied

King Yama seated in his palace hall,

And the infernal judges and ghostly runners arranged on both sides.

In their hands they were holding the records of life and death,

Determining who was going to die and who was going to live.

(Ma zahuo)

Horseface and Oxhead stepped forward

to report on their mission:

"We have arrested the evil soul of that cat,

so punishment may be served."

⁶⁰ On arrival in the Underworld the souls of the deceased have to cross the Alas-River. Those who have spent their lives doing good deeds, walk across a broad golden bridge, but sinners have to fight their way through raging billows of blood.

(Hahadiao)

As soon as King Yama heard this,

the fire of his fury rose up,

And he cursed the cat:

“You, reckless beast!

Why don't you live your days while accepting your fate and guarding yourself—

Without cause or reason you murder at will!”

(Ku xiaolang)

That little cat

addressed King Yama: “Please listen to my defense!

Who is right,

who is wrong—

may Your Majesty decide.

It is not that I will twist the facts and falsely plead innocence—

It's all because the evil of that mouse is hated by all.

The farmer busily plows and plants, sweating blood,

But as soon as in autumn the grain has entered the bin, the mouse is the first to taste it.

Stealthily he eats the grain,

stealthily he eats the rice,

stealthily he even drinks the oil.

When he's eaten his fill,

when he's filled his belly,

and has nothing else to do,

He gnaws on the posts,

gnaws at the chests,

and also gnaws on door and gate.

An excellent house

because of gnawing mice soon has hundreds of holes.

Just mention his name,

and all people will gnash their teeth out of hatred for him!

It's only because the common people don't know what to do,

That they tell me to extirpate and annihilate all mice and rats.

Yesterday I managed to grab and kill this man-damaging mouse,

But that thoroughly evil rat still escaped with his life.

(Xianhuadiao)

I hate this man-damaging monster,

Which commits every evil under the sun.

Your Majesty, may you pronounce your verdict,

Make clear who is right, who is wrong!"

(Pingdiao)

As King Yama was listening,

he ended up completely befuddled:

"How do I have to decide

in such an exceptional case?"

(Xiangjiang lang)

Suddenly he was informed that His Majesty the God of the Stove⁶¹ had arrived,

Only because of this strange affair of the suit of the mouse and the cat.

King Yama repeatedly extended his invitation to the God of the Stove,

And the God of the Stove,

filled with fury, stared at the soul of the mouse.

⁶¹ The God of the Stove keeps a record of the good and bad deeds of all members of the family that live in a house, and reports his findings once each year (on the twenty-fourth day of the Twelfth Month) to the Jade Emperor.

(Yangliu qing)

He addressed King Yama: "Dear Brother, this is the truth.
 Just to mention that mouse really drives me mad!
 When I left on the twenty-fourth of the Last Month to visit Heaven
 My Easterly Kitchen Establishment really suffered disaster!
 That mouse rose in open revolt in my palace.
 He even used my candles as his dragon-lanterns,
 He stealthily ate all the white rice and cooked rice,
 Went so far as to use the incense burner as outhouse.
 The crimes of this mouse are truly indescribable,
 So I hope you will punish him sternly, allow no mercy!"

(Dieban)

King Yama then exploded in a thundering rage,
 And he cursed our mouse: "You evil creature!
 In the world of light, you are the source of evil,
 Yet in the halls of darkness you falsely accused someone else!

(Luoban)

If the God of the Stove had not arrived in time,
 We almost would have been fooled by you."
 He called out: "Horseface and Oxhead, come quickly!
 Take this mouse away and pitch him down in a pit of fire for eternity!"
 Then he called out: "Cat, listen to Our appointment:
 We appoint you as Little Tiger and allow you to return to life,
 Make sure you devour all the mice of the whole wide world,
 Make sure you don't leave a single rat on earth!"

THE WEDDING - CRASHER

The text translated here, *The Accusation of the Mouse* (*Laoshu gaozhuang*), was part of the repertoire of Li Kejin 李克金 (1938–2006) from Xinlu village of Damuchang township in Fangxian district in northwestern Hubei. At the age of ten he started singing, and at one time served as director of the village opera troupe. He had a formidable memory, and his repertoire included not only a number of traditional songs, but also included some of his own compositions. This translation is based on the text as printed in Chen Hongbin 陈宏斌, comp. *Folk Song Books, Second Collection* (*Minjian changben* 民间唱本第二集, 2009), 553–59, which is said to have been copied out by Chen on the basis of a performance by Li.⁶²

In this version the text is made up of nineteen stanzas. Basically all lines are made up of ten syllables, divided into three groups of respectively three, three, and four syllables. Each stanza opens with a three-line intro, which is followed by a varying but even number of lines (in the opening stanza, the introductory section is made up of seven-syllable lines). Each stanza may use a different rhyme. The text is interrupted at a few places by short passages in prose.

In this adaptation too the story of the underworld court case is preceded by a prequel, in this case an account of the wedding of the mouse. The tale starts with the worries of the parents of the bride that the cat may raid the procession of the bride-fetching party, and proceeds with the maternal advice of the mother mouse to its daughter on the eve of the wedding day.⁶³ The cat, counter to all expectations, does not attack the bride fetching party on its way to the house of the bride or on its way back to the house of the groom. Knowing that the owl (in Chinese the “cat-headed eagle” [*maotouying* 猫头鹰]) is a good friend of the mice, it crashes the wedding party in the disguise of an owl and is warmly welcomed. The friendship of the mice and the owls is an old one as it dates back to the beginning of time when, according to local legend, a mouse and an owl cooperated in opening darkness and releasing the sun,

62 Chen Hongbin discusses his editorial principles in his “Afterword” (pp. 575–580), but these are mostly concerned with songs that are printed on the basis of the manuscripts he collected.

63 Such maternal advice has a long tradition in Chinese literature. Recent archaeological finds even have found an example of the genre that predates *Precepts for My Daughters* (*Nijie* 女戒) by the Han-dynasty poet Ban Zhao 班昭 (ca.48–ca.118).

only to be blinded by its lights, which explains why both are creatures of the night.⁶⁴ Once the cat has had a few drinks, it starts to dine on the groom and the guests, whereupon the head of the household appeals to King Yama. In its statement to King Yama the mouse also claims that in times long past it had saved mankind from extinction by chewing a whole in the Old Master's gourd and stealing the seeds of the five grains. This is a legend that is widely encountered in China's rice-growing areas.⁶⁵

An alternative version of this ballad, also from the Damuchang area and as performed by one Wang Shirong 王世荣, is included in Zhang Geying 张哥莺 and Du Mingliang 杜明亮, comps. *A Collections of Folk Songs from Fangxian (Fangxian minge ji 房县民歌集, 2007)*, 199–206.

* * *

THE ACCUSATION OF THE MOUSE

1.

When a little mouse is born he squeaks and squeaks and squeaks,
And when a little cat is born he keeps on meowing and meowing.
Listen as I sing how the mouse lodged an accusation against the cat.

In the first part

I will sing
How the mouse married off his daughter,

In the second part

I will sing
How the mouse lodged his accusation.

In his great hall

King Yama
Rendered a fair verdict in this case,

⁶⁴ Ma Changyi 1998, 8, provides a more detailed account of this legend, which he introduces as a legend of the Pumi in Sichuan. This text shows that the legend also must have been known in Fangxian.

⁶⁵ Ma Changyi 1998, 13–21.

Proving again

That under the law

One cannot escape one's punishment!

2.

This little mouse

Was three inches tall

But had the head and mind of a thief,

Below the wall

He had dug his hole

To live there in peace with his folks,

But in order to survive,

In search for food,

He scurried wildly around in all places.

"I do not fear

Out in the mountains

Jackals or wolves, tigers or leopards,

I only fear

Up on the roof

That o so little little cat:

In case that I

Run into him,

I may be unable to run off,

Eight or nine times

Of every ten times

I may end up losing my life!

That little cat—

For what reason

Does he immediately want to kill me?

That little cat—

For what reason

Does he want to be the king of the road?

Now very soon

The lucky date will arrive

That our daughter will leave to be married—

If we would run into

That little cat,

We will not be spared from disaster!”

3.

The mother mouse

Pondered this matter

And heaved a heavy sigh.

Then she called

Her young daughter,

“Now listen carefully,

Your mother has

Something to say,

She wants to tell you.

Your mother-in-law’s family

Asked the match-maker

To come over and tell us the date:

The twenty-fourth

Of the Last Month

They want to come and fetch you.

Over at their house

Treat your mother-in-law

With the filial piety that's her due:

Scrape together

Some left-over rice

To show her your filial respect.

You and your husband

Are both still young

And have to live in good harmony;

As for your sisters-in-law—

Don't quarrel with them,

And do not indulge in mean gossip.

Each late evening

When leaving the hole

You have to be very careful indeed:

As soon as the cat

Will have seen you,

He will want to kill you immediately!

Please make sure

To remember these words

That I now have entrusted to you—

In that case

Your mother

Will have no need to be worried."

4

The little mice readied

 Their daughter for marriage,

 But let's not talk about that for now.

The happy day had arrived

 For the family of the groom

 To go and welcome the new bride.

They hired helping hands,

 They welcomed the guests:

 The mother-in-law was busy without end.

Inside the gate

 And outside the gate

 They sprinkled water, swept the ground;

They hung up lanterns,

 Displayed decorations,

 And set off no end off firecrackers.

They welcomed their friends

 And their acquaintances,

 As well as their numerous relatives.

They invited messengers

 To carry the boxes with gifts

 And hired a decorated sedan chair.

The main messenger,

 The long-haired mouse,

 Was their relative by marriage;

The golden "painted-eyebrows,"⁶⁶

 Their cousins by marriage,

 Carried the presents on poles.

The flowery happy magpie

 Welcomed the new bride,

 She was an elder sister-in-law;

Black Brother Eight⁶⁷

 Was master of ceremony

 Because he was such a good talker.

A red foreign umbrella,

 A pair of gongs,

 The *suona*⁶⁸ and the firecrackers:

When these mice

 Welcomed the bride

 The house was one noisy bustle.

5.

The little cat,

 Dozing on the stove,

 Gave this matter careful thought:

"At Li Family Bay

 That family of mice

 Is sending off their daughter in marriage,

66 This bird is the hwamei or *Garrulax canorus*.

67 This bird is the crested mynah or *Acridoteres cristatellus*.

68 The *suona* 唢呐 is a trumpet-like instrument.

And at her new home

They receive the bride

Today in the evening.

This Heaven-given

Good opportunity

Definitely cannot be missed,

So I will turn into

A hooting owl

By dressing up in disguise.

The hooting owl

And I, we share

A face that is very similar:

I will make

A hooked nose

That I'll place above my mouth.

My whole body

Is one ball of hair

And I don't have any wings,

But I will make

A bird-skin gown

That I can wear on my body.

I'll grab my chance

And join the procession

To crash into the hole of the mice;

Each one I see

I will swallow whole:

This will be one great battle!"

6.

The little cat

Joined the procession

And arrived at the gate of the hole.

The many mice

Came out of the hole

And all welcomed them warmly,

And when they saw

Their old uncle,

They showed him all due respect.

Eight tables inside,

Eight tables outside:

Tables and benches were set out:

The assembled mice

Drank marriage wine

And all were filled with great joy.

The little cat

Had taken his place

And also drank of the wine;

He pushed his cup,

Exchanged a glass,

And three rounds were done.

When the groom

Arrived at his table

In order to pour him some wine,

This old uncle

Took off his gown

And showed his original shape:

He opened his maw,

And he snorted once,

His eyes resembling bronze bells.

He killed in one bite

The groom and also

Those who had escorted the bride;

He killed in one bite

The assembled guests

And also the many messengers.

For each mouse swallowed

The cat snorted once,

Gulping them down like tiger or wolf.

He created such havoc

That, there in the great hall,

Tables and benches were overturned;

The cups and plates

Were all broken into

Small shreds and dusty powder.

The grown-up mice

Were so scared

They scampered to east and west,

The little mice

Could only squeak

And keep on begging for mercy.

7.

After this disaster

The many mice

Wept in a heartrending manner;

Some of them cried,

And some them called

That they wanted to take revenge:

Only a condemnation

Of this little cat

Would be able to undo their hatred!

(prose) Some of them said, "Uncle, don't weep, there's no use in going on weeping." And others said, "Sir, don't weep! Let's go to King Yama and lodge a complaint."

The head of the family

Wrote down their

Accusation against the cat,

And upon entering

The hall of King Yama

He knelt down on both knees.

(prose) "Your Lordship, I this mouse have been wronged and I lodge a complaint." "What kind of wrong? Explain in all detail!"

"King Yama,

You in your hall

Are a judge who is honest and fair.

I, this mouse,

Have met with misfortune

And want to lodge a complaint.

The cat

And I

Have no old feud whatsoever,

But digging up sprouts

And cutting off roots

He exterminates my whole family!

During broad daylight

I do not even dare

Go outside the door of my hole,

And during nighttime

I continue to be

Filled with fear and apprehension.

During the year

I only eat

Some leftover soup and rice,

Only at New Year

Will I enjoy

Some dishes of fish and meat.

The master of the chest

Strews rat poison,

So I am flustered and anxious,

But that little cat

Is even worse

Than the master of the chest.

When he opens his eyes

And snorts only once,

My soul will flee for fright;

When he stretches his claws

And catches me in his maw,

My one life is off to the shades!

From the top of my head

He swallows me down,

Munching and chewing at ease.

He takes off my skin

And pulls out my tendons

In order to swallow me whole.

On the twenty-fourth

Of the Last Month

The maiden was sent off in marriage.

He grabbed this chance

To mix with the crowd

In order to kill all our relatives;

He left behind

The new bride

To live the life of a lone widow,

He left behind

Me this old man—

On whom am I to rely in future?

If I this mouse

Am not vindicated

In my court case against the cat,

Only all too soon

All other mice too

Will be without son and grandson!"

8.

The little mouse

Accused the cat,

Narrating the wrong he had suffered,

With each word he spoke

He wept for a while,

Tears coursing down in profusion,

And next at length

Told the unfounded tale

Of his many great deeds and acts.

“In origin I am

The divine rat

From before the celestial throne.

It was Heavenly King Li

Who brought me with him

When he descended to the red dust.⁶⁹

In the *yinmao* year

A disaster occurred:

Not a single seed of grain was left;

After first a flood

And later a drought

No grass or tree showed sign of life.

People lacked grain,

Horses lacked fodder,

So it was impossible to survive,

And very soon

All living beings

Below the sky would have died.

⁶⁹ This is a reference to the tale of the White Mouse Demon as told in *Journey to the West*.

Seeing this situation

I in my heart

Could really not bear this sight,

So I chewed a hole

In the Old Lord's

Gourd and his precious vase,

And stealthily

Took the five grains

Down the world of red dust.

Below the sky

The five grains

Were only revived in this way,

So I had saved

The untold millions

Of the many kinds of living beings.

For saving the people

I was considered to be

The number one meritorious vassal,

And because of this

I received title and reward

From His Majesty the Jade Emperor.

Of each stone of grain

The Jade Emperor

Awarded me three cups as my share;

From each bushel of rice

He awarded me

Nothing less than a full thirty percent.

When I eat some grain

One has to admit

That I only take what's my due,

So for what reason

Do people insist

That a mouse is harmful to man?

In days gone by

In the palace of heaven

I've been a meritorious minister,

But at present

It has come to pass

That I can nowhere live in peace!

King Yama,

You as a judge are

Pure and fair, honest and clear,

May you now

On behalf of us mice

Right this wrong we have suffered!"

9.

King Yama

Beat his desk,

His eyes bulging out of their sockets,

And called Oxhead

And Horseface

To come forward and take their orders:

"Go the human realm

And arrest that cat

So he may be questioned in person!"

(prose) "Oxhead and Horseface!" "Present!" "Go and arrest that cat for questioning!" "Understood!"

The two underlings,

On receiving their orders,

Moved as fast as a thunderstorm;

They stepped forward,

And arrested the cat

To be questioned about the facts.

The little cat

Did not meekly submit

And asked these two sergeants,

"What is the reason

Why the two of you

Have come here to arrest me?"

When the two ghosts

Heard this question,

They answered in these words,

"The little mouse

Has accused you

Of premeditated murder!

On this trip

We will be so kind

Not to shackle you in chains;

When you see King Yama

In his high court hall

You must tell your side clearly."

When the cat

 Heard these words,

 He knew what he had to do,

And without any fear,

 Not frightened at all,

 He set out on the journey.

10.

That little cat

 And the two ghosts

 Traveled together on that journey,

And on entering

 King Yama's hall,

 He knelt down on both knees, asking,

“For what reason,

 Your Majesty Lord Yama,

 Did you order me to appear in court?”

When King Yama

 Heard these words,

 His rage flared up to high heavens,

And he shouted,

 “You little cat

 Had the gall to act without reason!

The little mouse

 Presented an accusation

 That you greatly disturbed a wedding;

The little mouse

Accuses you also

Of exterminating his whole family,

So I summoned you here

So you may be in court

Questioned in person about the case,

And according to the law

We'll distinguish good and evil,

Definitely without any partial favor."

11.

The little cat

Moved somewhat forward

And quickly replied in these words,

"Your Majesty

King Yama,

Please listen carefully to me:

Don't give any credence

To that little mouse--

He is spitting blood on good people!

Many years ago

My elder brother

Rushed off to the southern mountains,

He is the mountain tiger,

The king of the beasts,

To whom all beasts owe allegiance.

Right afterwards

My second elder brother

Rushed off to the northern ridges,

And on those ridges

Brother Leopard

Displays his frightening might.”

(prose) “King Yama, I am the third of these brothers!”

“Well, if you are number three, tell us what you have to say!”

“They left behind me,

This little cat,

That was at a loss what to do.

Only mankind

Happily loved me

And took me into their homes.

I the cat

Am not an animal

That lives without a sense of duty,

To pay back this favor

I serve my master

With a burning loyalty.

To catch mice

Has always been

My divine mission;

To catch mice

Has always been

My natural ability.

Now if I don't

Massacre mice,

I oppose my destiny,

And if I don't

Massacre mice,

I cannot repay my master.

In the human realm

That little mouse

Commits no end of crimes,

So King Yama,

Please listen to me

As I narrate them in detail.

12.

That little mouse—

He truly is

A demon that harms people.

During nighttime

He sneaks into

The main hall of the house

And on the altar table

Chews on the spirit tablets,

Offending the family gods.

Running back and forth

On that altar table

They leave their shit and urine,

They overturn incense sticks
And overturn burning candles,
Sneakily eating the offerings.

When the boss
Early in the morning
Enters the hall of the house,

He complains
That I, the cat,
Haven't fulfilled my duty;

He blames me,
This little cat,
For a lack of filial loyalty,

And as a result
I, this little cat,
Am cursed with foul names.

13.

That little mouse—
He truly is
A demon that harms people!

During nighttime
He also sneaks
Into the kitchen to harm people

And running about
On the stove
He offends the God of the Stove.

In the vats of rice

And the vats of flour

He lolls about at will,

In the bottle of oil

And the bottle of salt

He crazily jumps up and down.

When in the early morning

The daughter-in-law

Comes and enters the kitchen,

She blames me,

This little cat,

For not fulfilling my duties;

She vilifies me,

This little cat,

As useless and ineffective,

And as a result,

I, this little cat,

Am cursed with foul names.

14.

That little mouse—

He truly is

A demon that harms people!

At nighttime

He also sneaks into

The study with all its books.

Nibbling at volumes,

Chewing on texts

He offends the Sage Teacher!⁷⁰

Brushes and ink

On the table

He pulls into his own hole;

Inside book boxes

And inside book chests

He makes a nest to dwell.

When in the early morning

The old family teacher

Comes and enters the study,

He blames me,

This little cat,

For not fulfilling my duties.

He curses me,

This little cat,

For scandalizing the sages,

And down to today

I, this little cat,

Am cursed with foul names.

15.

That little mouse—

He truly is

A demon that harms people.

⁷⁰ The Sage Teacher is Confucius.

At nighttime

He also sneaks

Into the embroidery room.

On top of the bed curtains

They all get together

Creating a ruckus all night long.

On the make-up table

They overturn

The boxes with rouge and powder;

In the boxes for clothes

They ruin by their chewing

Gowns and dresses of silk and satin.

When in the early morning

The young girls of the house

Wake up from their sweet dreams,

They blame me,

This little cat,

For failing to fulfill my duties.

They vilify me,

This little cat,

As a lazy and indolent parasite,

And down to this day

As a result I am

Cursed with many foul names!

16.

That little mouse—

He truly is

A demon that harms people.

In the world of men

He really commits

No end of rotten crimes,

If on behalf of mankind

I remove this harmful pest,

My actions are proper and right.

These little mice,

Those harmful demons,

Are infamous throughout the world:

All people would like

To boil them in oil

And use them as candles at night!

When those big rats

Cross the main road,

All people scream and beat them;

Ripping off their skins

And pulling out their tendons

Is the only way to vent my rage!

What I, the cat,

Have stated in court,

Each and every word, is the truth;

I never would dare

To speak a lie

And try and deceive King Yama.

If you don't believe,

Go to the world of men

And question the common people:

I dare claim

There will be no one

Who will speak in defense of mice."

17.

When the cat

Had set out

His unshakable, iron arguments,

His statement

Enraged King Yama:

His eyes bulged out of their sockets!

And he ordered Oxhead

As well as Horseface

To apply the most extreme torture.

When these two ghosts

Had received their order,

They immediately applied torture

And they beat

That little mouse

Until it was all covered in blood.

The little mouse

Wanted to speak,

But it had no breath and no voice,

But still it said,

“Your Majesty King Yama,
Please listen attentively to me.

People all say

That you in your judgments
Clearly apportion reward and fine,

But now at present

You lend your ear
And give credence to only one side.

In the past

I have once
Saved the common people from death,

But all my effort

Has brought me pain—
Now I receive this torture and beating.

When I today

Lodged my accusation,
I only sought fairness and justice,

And I still hope

That Your Lordship
Will judge on the basis of facts.”

18.

The little cat

Was greatly upset
And again addressed the court,

“Your Lordship,

Seated at your desk,
Please listen carefully to me:

Let me tell you how

That little mouse

Committed even more serious crimes!

It even dared to nibble

On the jade imperial crown

On His Majesty the Emperor's head!

It made holes in the dragon gowns,

Gnawed through the jade belts,

And chewed the jade seal to pieces!

(prose) Yes, that the jade imperial seal lacks a corner is because he chewed on it!

He claims that he

Brought the five grains

Down to the world of red dust:

That record of merit

Is one big dream,

Devoid of any basis in fact.⁷¹

He eats the grains

And nibbles on meat,

A wastage without any measure.

He makes his way

Throughout the world

Without any concern for hygiene.

⁷¹ Tentative translation.

Both his feet

And his mouth

Are all covered with germs

That have brought

To mankind

Quite a number of diseases.

King Yama,

If you would now

Show him any sympathy,

The human world

Will from now on

Never enjoy any peace!"

19.

King Yama

Slapped his desk

In a display of thunderous rage,

And cursed

The little mouse

For the full list of his crimes,

"You evil mouse,

Because you accused the cat

Your punishment is increased.

In the world of shade

Good and evil

Are clearly distinguished;

In their rewards and fines

The associate judges

Show no favor or partiality.

In the world above

You should not have

Committed crimes without end,

So you, little mouse,

Are now condemned

To the eighteenth layer of hell.

Your karmic retribution

Has been determined

By your acts during your life:

You, little mouse,

Will be boiled in oil

For all eternity, without rebirth!"

King Yama

Addressed the cat,

"Now please listen carefully.

By catching mice

And removing this pest

You are a meritorious official.

From now on

You should make sure

That all mice will be captured:

Each one that you find

You must swallow at once—

Definitely don't show any mercy.

When you will have

Devoured all mice

Throughout all-under-heaven,

The state will be rich,

The people live at ease

And the world enjoy Great Peace.”

The little mouse

Lodged an accusation

But did not win his court case;

The little cat

By removing this pest

Has gained a fine reputation.

THE MOBILIZATION OF THE MICE

This chapter introduces two ballads from Shandong, one from Linqu district and one from Linyi district. Both arrange their contents by the five watches of the night, and both introduce the theme of the mobilization of the mice in preparation for a final battle against the cats.

Both these texts are clearly indebted to a "big drum ballad" (*dagu* 大鼓) titled *The Revolt of the Mice* (*Shujing zuofan* 鼠精作反), which is known from an edition of the 1920s.⁷² The genre of big-drum ballads was quite popular in Beijing and surrounding areas of northern Hebei. Depending on the musical style of performance, several regional subgenres were distinguished. The texts, which tend to be narrative in nature, usually run to about two hundred lines. The basic line consists of seven syllables but there are many longer lines. Some texts tell one story in its entirety, but others narrate episodes from well-known novels, plays, and folk epics, while a few consist of a number of chapters telling a more complicated story. Many of the texts of drum ballads derive from the repertoire of youth books (also known as bannermen tales, *zidishu* 子弟书), a genre of narrative ballads that was very popular with the Manchu bannermen of the eighteenth and nineteenth century. The opening lines of *The Revolt of the Mice* in which the anonymous author laments the absence of a proper introduction to *The Complaint of the Mouse*, reminds one of the conventional eight-line poem that begins a youth book, but no youth book of this title is included in the most recent catalogue of the genre. The story of the short-lived war of the mice against the cat is structured by the five watches of the night. By the end of the fifth watch, the mice have been utterly defeated.

The first ballad from Shandong, *Mouse Accusing Cat* (*Laoshu gaozhuang*), hails from Linqu district and is included in the *Complete Collection of Folk Literature from Linqu District (Materials, Part One)* (*Linqu minjian wenxue jicheng (ziliao ben diyi juan)* 临朐民间文学集成资料本第一卷), pp. 383–88, of 1989. The text was narrated by Ma Yiqin 马一琴, at the time of the recording an illiterate woman

⁷² For a translation of this text see Wilt L. Idema 2018c. The text is translated on the basis of the digital version of a little songbook from the 1920s in the Sokodo collection in the Institute of Advanced Studies on Asia, Tokyo University. Whereas the theme of the war of the rodents against the cats has a long history and at times enjoyed a great popularity in the Middle East and Western Europe, it only made its appearance in East Asia from the early nineteenth century onwards.

of 68 from Sanyuan village in Chengguan town. The text was recorded by Ma Tongxiu 马佟秀. Ma Yiqin had a more extensive repertoire, including animal songs. The *Complete Collection* on pp. 389–90 includes for instance also her ballad titled *The Funeral of the Mandarin Ducks* (*Yuanyang chubin* 鸳鸯出殡).

Ma Yiqin's *Mouse Accusing Cat* is composed in lines of seven syllables. Such lines have a caesura following the fourth syllable. From time to time a seven-syllable line is replaced by two short lines each of three syllables (in translation I separate these two short lines by a /). The even lines rhyme. The story is structured by the five watches of the night, a common device in folk songs.

The underworld dispute of the mouse and the cat in front of King Yama takes up relatively little space in this text, as the first watch is taken up by a lament of the mouse, the second watch by the war of the mice against the cat, and the third watch by the mouse paying a clerk to write his accusation against the cat. In the fourth watch the mouse is then allowed to make his statement to the court, and in the fifth watch the cat is brought in to respond.

The second text from Shandong, *The Accusation Lodged by the Mice* (*Laoshu gaozhuang*), was recorded in Linyi district. It was published in no. 8, 1982, of the monthly *Folk Literature* (*Minjian wenxue*). The translation is based on the reproduction of this text in Zhang Daoyi, *The Mouse Marries Off His Daughter—Mouse Customs and the Related Arts* (*Laoshu jianü—Shu minsu ji qi xiangguan yishu* (2009), pp. 58–62. The performer is identified only as “an old farmer” from Beitusu village in Yitang township.

As in the case of the first ballad, this text too is composed in lines of seven syllables, but these are sometimes replaced by longer lines. The even lines rhyme and the same rhyme is maintained throughout the whole piece. The text is again divided by the five watches of the night. The first watch is again devoted to the lament of the mouse, and the second to the description of the war of the mice against the cat, but in the third watch the mouse is already in the court of King Yama. The fourth watch is taken up by an account of the way in which the underworld runners have to gain the permission of the house gods to enter the house before they can arrest the cat, who then in the fifth watch makes his counter-statement. The text concludes with a short (nonexistent) sixth watch in which the associate judges report on their research on earth, which results in a judgment in favor of the cat. The sixth watch may have been added to highlight the fantastical nature of the tale.

* * *

MOUSE ACCUSING CAT

In the first watch / as the moon rose above the hills,
A tiny little mouse was all awash in tears.
You'd like to know why this mouse was so sad?
He had no food in his belly, his heart was all sour!
"I really hate Earth / and I really hate Heaven,
King Yama has done his job in an unfair fashion!
He may have granted me life but I have no food,
So I steal some at night, and all people despise me.
If I have no food / that is still not a major problem,
But my parents and children are yelling and screaming.
My white-haired old mother has tears in her eyes,
And my father who's eighty is crying without end!
My grandsons are hollering that they are hungry,
My granddaughters are so starved they don't move.
My wife is so starved she is only a bag of bones,
And I'm so starved I can barely stand on my legs.
From all sides considered there is no other way
But to secretly go outside and have a peek and see
Whether I can steal some food to save my family—
It's really hard for a little mouse to make a living!"
After passing that trap-door cage by the wall,
He left the pincers of the iron cat to one side.⁷³
As he walked forward in fear and trepidation,
He only feared that he might run into the cat!
"You leopard cat, / you are truly ferocious!
You really harm us, mice, in a most cruel way.

⁷³ These two lines describe two different kinds of mouse traps.

When you catch my children you swallow them whole,
 When you catch my parents you eat them skin and all!
 Even the bones you all chew to little pieces,
 Even the blood you drink till not a drop is left.
 It's easy to avoid the trap-door and the pincers,
 But if you run into him, you're doomed to die."
 As he was so annoyed, he started to curse him,
 And he cursed the cat for being bereft of reason:
 "The two of us both belong to the animal world,
 You shouldn't assist human beings by harming us!"
 The more he thought of it, the more he was vexed,
 Our mouse became so mad he was shaking all over!
 "If we don't do away once and for all with that cat,
 We mice will never live a single day in peace!
 So let's raise our spirits and bolster our courage!
 Let's bring out the troops and engage him in battle!
 If we can defeat that leopard cat once and for all,
 We all, young and old, will be able to live in peace!"

In the second watch / when the moon stood in the east,
 Our little mouse returned home to mobilize the troops.
 He beat the general's drum / which boomed and boomed,
 He fired the general's cannon / which resounded repeatedly.
 Old and young, three armies strong, stood to east and west,
 Wearing helmets, clad in armor, they were quite impressive.
 Their bronze helmets / were provided with straps,
 Their chain-mail armor / brilliantly blinded your eyes.
 The darts with their flags / were stuck in their backs,

The heart-protecting mirrors / hung before their breasts.⁷⁴
Around their waist a silk belt twisted into nine parts.
The army's commander-in-chief had his messengers,
And a flagpole with a huge banner stood in the middle.
The younger soldiers / marched in the front,
And behind them followed a battalion of widows.⁷⁵
They had poles; / they had swinging hammers;
Lances, sabers, swords and spears in many layers!
You'd like to know how many mice there were?
It was impossible to count those roaring crowds!
Those advanced in years brought up the rear;
Those healthy and strong formed the vanguard.
Waving flags, beating drums, they marched forward;
Their battle cries rose to the skies without ending.
When these massed mice emerged from their hole,
They carefully looked around, craning their necks.
"Move forward fast!" / But they secretly stalled,
Unsure whether that leopard cat would show up.
If it would happen that today they would see him,
They would throw their hooks / and raise their poles.
Attacking with lances and sabers, and whips in a row,
They'd take on that cat and throw him on the ground.
The four gathered hooves of a horse: they'd tie him up,

74 These two lines describe the costume of military roles in traditional Chinese opera, not the outfit of actual soldiers past or present.

75 The best-known fighting widows in traditional Chinese fiction and drama are the twelve widows of the Yang family. The generals of the Yang family (Yangjiajiang 杨家将) defend the northern border of the Song dynasty against incursions by the Khitan Liao dynasty. When the male members of the family have all passed away, the female members of the family, dressing in mourning white, take to the field when called upon by the emperor. Idema and West 2013.

And then take him to the Terrace for Decapitation.
 They would pull out his tendons to twist into ropes,
 They'd flay his skin to make glue for straw sandals.
 They'd extract oil from his bones to burn in lamps—
 The remaining shards could still be used for heating.
 That big leopard cat, / that happy fox demon,
 Saw those massed mice as they marched on the floor.
 As soon as he saw them, his heart was filled with joy,
 Involuntarily he secretly urged himself as follows:
 "All day I've had nothing to eat till this very hour,
 My belly is suffering unbearable pangs of hunger.
 But now these massed mice have risen in rebellion,
 I will be able this time at last to break my fast!"
 He twisted three times / his long and curving tail:
 Heaven-shaking, earth-shattering—quite impressive!
 He roused his tiger-might and then rushed forward,
 And the terrified mice were shaking and trembling.
 They threw away their banner, dropped helmet and armor,
 Lances and sabers were abandoned flat on the floor.
 Brothers and relatives did not care for each other, as
 They only cared for themselves, fleeing for their lives.
 Those whose courage was greatest ran to escape,
 Those with small courage were paralyzed, couldn't run!⁷⁶
 Those who ran fastest escaped with their lives, but
 Those who ran slower went off to the realm of shade!
 The seven or eight of the mice who ended up captured,
 Were all together cruelly gobbled down by the cat,

⁷⁶ Tentative translation.

Who didn't use salt / and who didn't use onions,
Who didn't fry them in a wok with sauce and oil.
When he had eaten them all, gnashing and chewing,
His belly was so stuffed it was bigger than a bushel.
When he had to pass his bowels, he failed to run off,
And noisily deposited his shit in the middle of the courtyard.

In the third watch / when the moon stood high,
Our tiny little mouse had gone off to the realm of shade.
The more he thought about it / the more vexed he became,
And he decided to go to King Yama and accuse that cat!
"Once that King Yama agrees to act on my accusation,
That leopard cat will be arrested, and I'll be revenged!
He will be condemned to a thousand-cut decapitation,⁷⁷
And this will dissolve the hatred of my whole family.
From then on we can go and steal food without hindrance,
And we do not have to be concerned to be on our alert for the cat.
We can go and eat beef and mutton in the butcher's shop,
We can go and eat cakes and cookies at the candy shop.
We can go and drink soy bean oil in the Qingyi oil shop,
We can go and eat steamed buns in the inn for guests.
We will stuff ourselves again and again till we're round,
Without a worry in the world, we'll be happy and free!"
The more he thought about this, the happier he became,
And involuntarily our little mouse even started to laugh!
But a blustering / gust of wind

⁷⁷ In traditional Chinese law, death by a thousand cuts was the most extreme form of punishment. The aim of the punishment was to utterly destroy the body of the criminal (so he or she could not be buried), and not the infliction of pain, so the condemned was usually killed after the first few cuts. Brook, Bourgon and Blue, 2008.

Suddenly terrified our little mouse, now filled with fear:

“I was really too enthusiastic there for one moment,

I was really on the verge there of laughing out loud!

In case that leopard cat would have heard me laughing,

My little life too would have been a blown-out candle!

The time of happy rejoicing has not yet arrived,

I should hurry up and not tarry to lodge my complaint.”

He ran in great haste / and walked very fast,

And the City God’s temple soon rose before him.⁷⁸

As soon as he saw the gate and went on inside,

A little ghost blocked his way, refusing him entrance.

“Who do you think you are, and what is your business

That you brazenly rush through courtyard and gate?”

The little mouse immediately bowed to him, saying,

“Dear Mr. Ghost, please be so kind as to listen to me.

In the world of light I was a little mouse, and I’ve come

To lodge an accusation against the cat, if I may.”

“An accusation against the cat!” / So he promptly replied:

“Please follow me to where they take down your deposition.”

When the little mouse and the little ghost went inside,

He knelt down on all fours on seeing the clerk, crying:

“Dear Mr. Clerk, please be so kind as to take down

My deposition concerning the injustice I’ve suffered!”

When the clerk heard him, he smiled with pursed lips:

“Hand me the money and I’ll take down the deposition!”

That little mouse / was awash in tears,

⁷⁸ The City God is responsible for all contacts between the world of light and the world of darkness in his district, so souls on their way to the underworld have to pass by the City God, and underworld runners who come to fetch a soul also have to report to the City God.

As he begged the clerk: "Dear Mr. Magistrate,
In the world of light I was only a little animal,
I never even had half a penny to my name!"
"I don't care whether you were an animal or not,
But without money I can't take down a deposition."
For the little mouse / there was nothing else to do
But to hastily hurry back and return to his house.
That night he went to steal some food in the mansion of Magnate Zhang,
And in that house he stole one golden hairpin.
When he presented that hairpin to the old clerk,
He was smiling all over as soon as he saw it.
With a lot of noise he prepared the ink, and then
Lifted his brush to take down that deposition.
Within an hour he had finished that deposition,
And our little mouse appeared before King Yama to lodge his complaint.

In the fourth watch / when the moon stood in the sky,
Our tiny little mouse finally lodged his complaint.
With big strides he entered King Yama's hall, and
Loudly called his complaint, shouting again and again.
When King Yama heard him, he spoke as follows:
"My dear mouse, what's the injustice you suffered?"
The little mouse handed him the written-out deposition,
Which clearly described every detail, every aspect.

The deposition read:

"I am a tiny little mouse from the world of light, and I
Formally accuse the leopard cat of excessive cruelty.
Between him and me there existed no enmity or hatred,
So he had no reason at all to harm my complete family.

He ate my mother's brother in the early morning,
 And he ate my sister's son later in the evening.
 He ate twenty of my sons and grandsons, and
 He ate seven or eight of my elder and younger brothers.
 He ate all of my elder and younger sisters, and
 My father and mother too both lost their lives."
 When King Yama had read this, he flew into a rage,
 Pulled out a bamboo slip and threw it on the ground.
 He shouted his order to two little ghosts
 To quickly go and arrest that leopard cat:
 "Bring him in for questioning, without any delay!"
 Hearing this, the little ghosts shouted "Yes sir!"
 After picking up the "urgent slip," they went outside.
 The two warrants for catching souls and arresting lives—
 In their hands they held their big wolf-teeth cudgels!
 The iron-leaf big cangue was bigger than a door,
 The iron-clanging chains were clanging and banging,
 They went on their way like a gust of wind, to
 Arrest that cat and take him to the realm of shade.
 In the blink of an eye they came to the cat's house;
 In one big step they stormed inside, into the room.
 The leopard cat was lying asleep on the *kang*,⁷⁹ and
 Once the ghosts saw him, they got out their ropes.
 Like a duck floating on water—thrown on the floor!
 The four gathered hooves of a horse: tied with a rope!
 Three knots on the left and three knots on the right,
 Knots not tight enough they pressed with their feet.

79 The *kang* 炕 is a heated brick platform that is found in traditional houses all over northern China.

Three times eight is twenty-four knots all together,
These colored big ropes were knotted ever so tightly.
While big iron shackles shackled both his hands,
The iron-leaf big cangue was locked around his neck.
The leopard cat was just enjoying a sweet dream,
When all of a sudden he suffered a terrible fright—
"I am a decent citizen who never committed a crime,
So what is the case for which you come and arrest me?"
"The little mouse has lodged a complaint against you,
You'll have to confront him and prove your innocence."
Pulling the leopard cat along, they went outside, and
In the blink of an eye they entered the City of the Dead.

In the fifth watch / when the sky was about to brighten,
The arrested leopard cat entered the City of Darkness.
When he looked up while walking to look around,
Our terrified cat was shaking and trembling all over!
The City of the Unjustly Dead was really terrifying,
Everywhere a chilly wind was whistling and blowing.
Numberless, the ghosts without a head or lacking arms:
Coming, they came without shadow, leaving, they left no trace.
The evil demons of Impermanence were vicious and fiendish,
The yaksha-devils that captured souls were truly ferocious.
On the mountain of swords sharp daggers were gleaming,
And in the ocean of fire fierce flames were blazing away.
Going on ahead, they arrived at the Hall of Darkness,
The Hall of Darkness which truly is quite impressive:
Golden bricks and red walls and glazed roof-tiles,
And stone lions of white marble arrayed in rows.

The great gate, painted red, opened left and right,
 Bronze rings in beast heads fixed with bronze nails.
 King Yama took his seat inside the precious hall,
 And the two associate judges sat each on one side.
 Oxhead and Horseface, these stood on both sides,
 And numberless yaksha-devils filled the courtyard.
 The cat was filled with fear as soon as he saw them,
 He promptly knelt down on all fours, flat on the floor.
 King Yama confronted him with the following question:
 As he called out to the cat: "You there, now listen!
 There's no enmity or hatred between you and the mouse,
 Why have you harmed him, again and again, each time more?"
 Hearing this, the leopard cat immediately kowtowed,
 Calling out: "Your Majesty Yama, please listen to me!
 There's no enmity or hatred between me and the mouse
 But he is the source of disaster in the human world!
 During daytime he makes his holes in the corners of rooms,
 Then late at night, at midnight, he enters house and garden.
 By chewing through the Three Treasures of the Study,⁸⁰
 He brings damage to students seeking glory and fame.
 By chewing through the silks and threads for embroidery,
 Their little sisters cannot finish their flowery shoes.
 He chews holes in the emperor's dragon robes;
 He chews holes in the empress' phoenix tiara.
 He chews holes in the crown of the Jade Emperor,
 And in the Old Master's *Book of the Way and Virtue*.⁸¹

80 The Four Treasures of the Study are ink, inkstone, brush, and paper. The inkstone will defy even the toughest rodent.

81 This is the *Daode jing* 道德经. Books written by the Sages are believed to possess great exorcist power, but even if they

In heaven his chewing damages the Sky-Dome Hall,
In the ocean his chewing damages the dragons' palace.
He chews on the tables and chairs of the Zhang family,
And chews through the chests and baskets of the Lis.⁸²
When I eat these mice, I free the world from a pest,
And all common people of the world sing my praises."
Once King Yama had heard this, he spoke as follows,
Addressing the associate judges, the clerks by his side:
"Write a red poster, and put it up on the biggest streets:
Throughout the world all cats are allowed to eat mice!"
This is the short piece on the mouse accusing the cat,
Which only resulted in stressing the merits of the cat!

THE ACCUSATION LODGED BY THE MICE

In the first watch, when the sun has sunk behind the hills,
A little mouse was overwhelmed by feelings of distress.
He carried a grudge against Earth, and against Heaven,
He carried a grudge against the partiality of King Yama:
"As you have assigned us mice to live in the human realm,
Why did you also allow the cat to live in the world of light?
A cat is born with a head that from birth is enormous;
Jumping and pounding, its martial skills are complete.
It controls us during the day and also during the night,
And it fills us at every hour with fear and trepidation."
He cried out: "You damned cat, your heart is too cruel,

can scare ghosts away, the books cannot defend themselves against mice and rats.

⁸² Zhang and Li are common Chinese surnames like Jones and Smith.

Since which generation did we contract this feud with you?
 You kill one generation of us and then the next generation;
 You do away with us one time and then again another time.
 You have killed old and young, never to be reunited again;
 You have killed our sons and grandsons, now forever apart!"
 The more the mouse kept thinking, the more he grew enraged,
 And his little eyes bulged out till they were perfect bulbs:
 "These killings of the cat have caused us true misery;
 As long as this enmity is not avenged, I will have no rest!"
 The little mouse gnashed his teeth as he made up his mind:
 Promptly he hoisted the flag and summoned his troops.

In the second watch, when the temperature was cooling,
 The little mouse inside his hole drilled his troops.
 When he addressed them, he did not call on anyone else,
 But only said: "Dear brothers, dear cousins and nephews,
 Ever since the cat has appeared in this world of ours,
 He has killed so many of us that it is no minor matter.
 How many of our ancestors have entered that tiger's maw?
 How many of the younger generations have lost their lives?
 If we now do not eradicate this cat once and for all,
 We will never be at peace for generations to come!
 Let's grasp this opportunity that the cat is fast asleep
 And without delay arrange our troops for the attack.
 Once we will have inflicted a defeat on that cat,
 We can steal as much as we want to eat and drink!
 Eldest cousin, you will be the commander-in-chief;
 You, dear nephew, will be captain of the vanguard."
 When his cousin heard this, he was not sluggish;

When his nephew heard this, he showed his mettle.
And once they had received the arrow of command,
They had disposed their troops well before midnight.
Hundred Years White and Thousand Years Black
Were trusted heroes of over a hundred years of age:
Hundred Years White escorted the commander-in-chief;
Thousand Years Black protected the vanguard's captain.
Those placed in the front were the youngest recruits;
Those who came in the middle were the adult troops,
While those in the back were the women battalions—
The old and infirm, the disabled and sick all showed up.
The staves and the cudgels and falling-star hammers,
The lances, swords, sabers and spears shining brightly;
The commander's flag on its staff fluttering in the wind;
Their murderous shouts shaking both heaven and earth!

In the third watch of the night not a single soul stirred:
The cat feigned to sleep—it made no sound at all.
Suddenly he heard the noise of many marching feet—
It turned out the mice had sent out all their troops.
As soon as he saw this, the cat was filled with joy:
His tail rose straight as a rod, and his eyes bulged out.
He lightly shook his battle dress made of tiger skin
And put on his battle boots as white as snowflakes.
Using every muscle in his body he jumped across
Just like a fierce tiger descending from a mountain,
And as he touched down he nabbed the commander-in-chief;
In the wink of an eye he had grabbed the vanguard's captain!
With one sweep of his tail he toppled Hundred Years White;

Once he opened his maw, he captured Thousand Years Black.
 The youngest recruits turned around and tried to escape;
 The battalions of women were fried in their barracks.⁸³
 Those who could run ran away, who could flee fled away;
 Everyone was so scared they were trembling and shaking.
 Those who could run fastest managed to save their lives,
 But those who ran slower did not manage to survive.
 That big cat, now he had achieved victory in battle,
 Was filled with arrogance as he celebrated this feat:
 He did not add any salt and he did not add any onions,
 Nor did he use any soybean oil to fry them in a wok,
 But he just gobbled them down, alive and oh so fresh,
 And stuffed his belly with mice till it seemed to burst!
 Each and every mouse there lost his life;
 Each and every soul went to the land of shade,
 There to lodge an accusation against the cat,
 To tell King Yama the wrongs they suffered.

In the fourth watch, when the sky is pitch black,
 The high hall of King Yama fills one with terror:
 Little black-faced ghosts display curved fangs;
 While blue-faced judges roll their bulging eyes.
 Those whose faces are colored act with pride;
 Those who sport red beards are filled with rage.
 His Majesty King Yama took his seat in the hall:
 The mice were so scared they trembled with fear.
 They walked forward, knelt down on their knees,

⁸³ Tentative translation.

And cried to King Yama: "We suffered a wrong!
Today we lodge an accusation against no one else
But that cat—we accuse that murderous monster!"
Hearing this, King Yama couldn't suppress a smile:
"Mice cannot lodge an accusation against the cat—
It takes eight generations of virtuous self-cultivation
To be transformed into a cat and be reborn on earth.
What crime did the cat commit in the common world?
It's a major offense to lodge an unfounded accusation!"
The mice kowtowed like chicken picking up grains,
Weeping and crying they voiced their lamentations:
"The cat has behaved in a criminal way since birth,
Both by night and by day he indulges in violence!
His killings have destroyed our families and friends—
So many have died and only a few have survived!
He has wounded our officers, he has wounded our troops,
He has wounded our commander and vanguard captain!
He has killed our fathers, he has killed our elder brothers,
He has killed our relatives by marriage and our guests!
Our elder and younger aunts have all been massacred;
Our younger and elder uncles have all lost their lives!
He has devoured our wives and our virtuous daughters,
He has devoured our sons, these fine young gentlemen!
Even our elderly mothers of eighty also were killed
And entered together with us into this realm of shade."
Now when King Yama had heard this explanation,
His two bulging eyes manifested his towering rage,
And when he spoke, he cursed no other person
But only the cat, cursing that creature as follows:

“If you act in the world of light without any restraints,
 We here will boil you in water, fry you in seething oil!”
 As he was speaking King Yama quickly gave his orders,
 And he called to one tall ghost and to one small ghost:⁸⁴
 “I give you this warrant for the arrest of one criminal;
 I give you a rope to tie up a person who scoffs the law.
 Now quickly leave and make haste while you travel
 And quickly bring that cat down to the realm of shade.”

Before the fifth watch, while the sky was still dark,
 The tall ghost and small ghost left the realm of shade.
 All their journey they walked as fast as they could—
 The temple of the god of the soil soon showed up.
 When they had entered the temple, they made a bow,
 And they addressed the god of soil properly, saying:
 “The mice have lodged an accusation against the cat,
 And King Yama now wants him for an interrogation.”
 The god of the soil was all smiles and he replied:
 “Ghostly emissaries, please listen to what I’ll say.
 If you want to arrest that cat, it will be no problem,
 I will be your guide when we go into the village.”
 The god of the soil and the ghosts went northward,
 And they arrived at a low gate to the east of the road.
 But it was not possible for them to enter that gate:
 The door gods kept it closed, refused them entrance.
 “No crime or offense has been committed in this family,

84 These two ghosts are the two Wuchang 无常 (Impermanence). They lead the souls of the deceased to the underworld. One is depicted as tall and dressed in white, the other as short and dressed in black.

So for what reason do you want to enter this mansion?"
The god of the soil explained the circumstances, and
The kitchen god and door gods welcomed them inside.
His Majesty the Kitchen God thereupon directed them
To the *kang*, where they found the cat, soundly asleep.
The tall ghost now flashed the warrant for his arrest,
The small ghost tied him up with his warden's rope.
This was quite a nasty surprise for our big cat—
Suddenly the drum tower sounded the fifth watch!

In the fifth watch, when the sky was turning bright,
The cat arrived in the offices of the underworld.
He entered the high hall and there hastily knelt down,
Imploring Lord Yama to kindly listen to his plea:
"I, the cat, have not committed any crime at all,
So why have I now been shackled and bound?"
When King Yama heard this, he flew into a rage,
And he cursed the cat as a thoroughly evil creature:
"What kind of feud did you have with these mice
That you killed their family members and friends?"
When the cat heard this, he hastily kowtowed,
And repeatedly appealed to King Yama, saying:
"It is the truth that I have harmed all his relatives,
And it is a fact that I have killed his kith and kin.
But that's because everyone hates these mice for their crimes—
People won't be satisfied until they're eradicated!"
Hearing this, King Yama hastily questioned him:
"Quickly explain to me the crimes they commit!"
The cat promptly addressed King Yama, saying:

“Your Majesty, please be so kind as to listen!
 The mouse is a monster that harms all people,
 He harms them so much they cannot find peace.
 During the day they hide themselves in their holes,
 But at night they come out, acting without restraint.
 They damage the spinning wheel for spinning thread;
 They damage the rope harness for plowing the fields.⁸⁵
 They damage the oil lamp’s wick that sheds light;
 They damage the fire-making down for striking fire.
 They damage the Three Treasures of the civil official,
 And they damage an officer’s precious carved bow.
 They bore their way into the study of a student
 And damage the Four Books and Five Classics.
 Even if we forget the damage caused by their teeth,
 Their crimes of stealing and pilfering are not minor:
 They not only steal rice but they also steal noodles,
 They steal what is cooked and steal what’s still raw.
 On the first day of the year they steal the sacrificial dishes for the gods;
 On the second of the Second⁸⁶ they take stolen fried beans to their holes.
 On the fifth of the Fifth⁸⁷ they steal the festival dumplings of sticky rice,
 And at the Mid-Autumn Festival⁸⁸ they steal the sacrificial moon cakes.
 The crimes of the mice are counted by the millions;
 Even if I had many more days, I couldn’t tell you all!”
 When he had heard this counter-statement of the cat,

85 Tentative translation.

86 The Second Month in the traditional lunar calendar.

87 The Fifth Month in the traditional lunar calendar.

88 The Mid-Autumn Festival takes place on the fifteenth of the Eighth Month of the traditional lunar calendar.

King Yama was so enraged that his face turned blue.
He ordered his associate judges and ghostly clerks
To conduct as quickly as possible a full investigation.
The judges and underlings didn't tarry for a moment,
But left the world of shade in a hurry, in great haste.

In the sixth watch of the night (a watch that was added)
The judges and underlings returned to the underworld.
Upon greeting King Yama, they hurriedly reported
That the statement of the cat conformed to the truth.
When he had heard this, King Yama hastily decreed
That the years of life of the cat should be increased.
"From now on the cat commits no crime when devouring a mouse;
On his merit file that will instead be counted a merit!"

7

A WEDDING AND A WAR

The most detailed adaptation of the underworld court case of the mouse against the cat is *A Tale without Shape or Shadow* (*Wuying zhuan* 无影传). In this prosimetric adaptation, the account of the court case is preceded by an account of the cats raiding the wedding procession of the mice and an account of the full-fledged war of the mice against the cats. *A Tale without Shape or Shadow* circulated in northern China in manuscript form at least as early as the first half of the nineteenth century, and these manuscripts could show considerable differences amongst one another.⁸⁹

The first version of *A Tale without Shape of Shadow* translated here was published by Zhong Shengyang 钟声扬 in *Shanxi Popular Literature* (*Shanxi minjian wenxue* 山西民间文学) 1992/1, 26–30. This text is based on his memories of his father's telling of the story and his own reading of a manuscript that used to be in the possession of his family but got lost during the Cultural Revolution, as we are informed in a short notice at the end of the publication:

Note of the author:

I love popular literature. The story of the rat marrying a bride (the *Tale without Shape or Shadow*) is popular all over northern China. In my youth I often heard my father tell this story, and I almost knew it all by heart. In those days we at home had my father's hand-written copy. Later I carried that with me, but in the early days of the Cultural Revolution I inadvertently lost it, so now I have recorded it on the basis of my memory, so it may serve as a small literary memory of my late father to remember him by.

The second text translated here, *The Cat Accused by the Mouse* (*Laoshu gao limao*) was published in the January 1989 issue of the journal *Folk Literature* (*Minjian wenxue* 民间文学), 3–7. The only information that is provided about the origin of the text is that it was “collected” (*souji* 搜集) by one Hao Wanhui 郝万慧. This, and the content of the text, suggest to me that this version is based on an

⁸⁹ A full translation based on an undated manuscript in the collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library at Harvard University is included in Idema 2019, 131–153.

oral retelling. One of the remarkable features of this text is that it not only describes how the mice amass their troops, but also narrates a resulting fierce battle in which the rodents are supported by a marten, and the cats by a dog. At the court of King Yama, the counter-statement of the cat falls on deaf ears, and King Yama is only convinced of the evil nature of the mouse when it starts to chew holes in the cloth that covers the bench of the judge.

Both texts are composed in an alternation of prose and verse. Most of the verse passages are written in seven-syllable lines, but in the second text we also encounter short sections in five-syllable lines and four-syllable lines. The layout of the translations is intended as much as possible to follow the layout of the Chinese texts.

* * *

Zhong Shengyang

A TALE WITHOUT SHAPE OR SHADOW

(Old Mouse Lodges an Accusation against Fierce Cat)

There was an animal that lived in the prefecture Earth, in the village Hole of the district Corner of the Wall. His name was Old Mouse, also known as Rat. In his house he stored some pounds of grass seeds and broken grain, so he was counted a nabob. One day, as husband and wife were chatting about household affairs, he suddenly came to think of the great business of later generations and inheritors. "Since ancient times it is said that of the three forms of lack of filial piety the worst is remaining without an heir. When a son becomes an adult he should marry a wife, and when a daughter grows up she should join another family as bride. It is the first rule of ethics that man and wife share a room. Our son now has reached the age for receiving his wife. Some years ago we settled on his marriage to a daughter of a family from Vat City. That was three years ago, so it is proper that she should join our household. If he doesn't marry her now, I'm afraid that our in-laws will complain." On the spur of the moment he got out the almanac and with due care selected the tenth of the First Month as a good day and propitious hour for the wedding. When his wife heard this, she said, "There's one man who takes the decisions in all the many affairs of a family!"

If one raises a son and never brings home a bride for him,
 How will one ever be able to hold a grandson in her arms?
 To marry one's son and engage a wife is proper behavior:
 People leave sons and grandsons, and grasses leave roots.
 Since ancient times one generation is followed by the next:
 Generations of roosters call in generation upon generation.”
 When Old Mouse heard the words that his wife had spoken,
 His face was all wrapped in smiles, he was overcome by joy.
 “Only when we will have brought home a bride for our son,
 Can the two of us old people finally set our worries aside.”

But then Old Mouse started to think, “Now the wedding has been settled, I'm not afraid of all the effort it will take, and I'm also not afraid of the money we'll have to spend, but I am afraid that [the bride-fetching party] may run into our enemy. In case he is out to harm us, how would we be able to cope?” But mother mouse said, “That is not a problem. Tomorrow we will hire some capable young men. We will wait until people have gone to sleep, and furtively go over there to fetch the bride. Even if our enemy would be around, how could he have any clue?” Hearing this, Old Mouse clapped his hands and laughed out loud, “None is as smart as my wife!” Thereupon he got out paper and brush to invite the people who would be needed.

First of all he invited Master Huang⁹⁰ from Eastern Slope,
 Renowned for the clear management of his household.
 Next he also invited Brother Leopard⁹¹ and Brother Silver:⁹²
 In gown and cap to be hosts of the father of the bride.

⁹⁰ The ground squirrel.

⁹¹ The chipmunk.

⁹² The snow weasel (ermine).

The striped granary one⁹³ came to take charge of the wine;
The Huang family rat⁹⁴ entertained relatives and friends.
Their nephew the hopping rabbit would present the plates;
Old Brother Ash Mouse⁹⁵ would accompany the guests.

They did away with the lanterns as well as the torches;
They would go silently with no music of pipes and drums.

Then Old Mouse said, "The road to Vat City I've traveled in my young days. It's extremely dangerous. Let me write out a list of the stages of the road for you—you cannot get lost on any account!"

Holding his brush, he wrote out the stages of the road:
Each character and each column he wrote very clearly.
"Once you have left Shit-Rapids Pass of Throughton,
You reach after twenty miles the gate of the main hall.
After ten more miles you then reach Black-Storm Hole,
But don't linger in front there of Oil-Basket Terrace.
Don't dare to enter into the city of Ricebin,
Don't sniff and smell on the Altar of Mutton.
Evil violence hides at the foot of Wok-Stand Cliff:
Our enemy lives in the prefecture of Kangton.⁹⁶
Once you have passed this place it is Vat City.
Memorize this exactly and don't be careless!"

93 The hamster.

94 The brown rat?

95 The squirrel.

96 The *kang* is a brick platform heated from below by the smoke of the stove as found in rural homes in north China. In wintertime it is the most comfortable place in the house.

He then handed the list to little Mr. Pointed
 Who was to lead the party to fetch the bride.
 The sun went under and dusk blurred the eyes,
 Every house, every family had lit their lamps.
 The incense smoke before the hall rose in the sky
 As the mice who went to fetch the bride set out.

When these mice had gone out of the gate, they were filled with joy and full of happiness. "This Sir Old Mouse has chosen a good day and a propitious hour, so of course we will be blessed and protected." But no more of that for the moment.

Now tell that Tigerstripes that very moment was walking across the eaves. When he saw that the mice were setting out in such a crowd, he immediately reported this to Fierce Cat. "Allow me to report happy news!" When Fierce Cat replied, "What kind of happy news?" Tigerstripes replied, "When a moment ago I was walking on the eaves, I saw a bunch of mice. One of them held a route description in his hands as he was reading it out aloud again and again. They are on their way to Vat City to fetch a bride. Isn't that a piece of happy news?"

Brother, I very much wanted to eat one of them
 But I feared I would scare away all the other mice.
 So I hurried to enter by the way of the cat-door
 To report this to you, my elder brother the cat!"
 When Fierce Cat had heard this, he smiled lightly;
 Of the ten parts of his face, nine were full of joy.
 This would be a blessing for Fierce Cat's mouth:
 Each sip and each bite is preordained by karma.
 From East Village they invited Brother Blackie;
 In the kitchen they reported this to the old cat.

The kitten Snow Carrying Coal also arrived,⁹⁷
And later many elder and younger brothers.
Fierce Cat addressed them in this manner,
"You all are people who will enjoy blessing!"
And once Fierce Cat had spoken these words,
The other cats didn't tarry to obey his orders.
Tigerstripes hurriedly proceed to Troughton,
Old Yellow at Granary Hill didn't make a sound;
Little Blackie had ascended Earthen Vat fort,
While the old cat still was sitting on the *kang*.
The cat commander hid in Black-Storm Hole,
The younger ones waited at Wokstand Cliff.

Now tell that when the cats had taken up position, they squatted down without moving. They saw how little Mr. Pointed, holding the route description in his hands and mumbling and muttering, was on his way to Vat City to fetch the bride. When the mice had passed by the backside of Wok-Stand Cliff, just when they hurried forward without a worry in the world, they all of sudden noticed the battle line of cats, and their souls disappeared beyond the ninth heaven. Now look how these cats vaunted their power and displayed their might: each and every one had nails like dredging hooks and teeth like steel nails; their maws resembled bowls of blood and their eyes were like shooting stars. In one formation they rushed over, some heavily breathing, some loudly grunting. They swallowed them all with hide and hair. Wasn't this a pleasure?

Old Yellow grabbed the bride by her face,
The old cat nabbed the bride-fetching party.
Little Blackie arrested granny matchmaker,
Tigerstripes grabbed the sedan-chair carriers.

⁹⁷ "Snow Carrying Coal" is a common reference to a white cat with a black patch on its back.

All cats, old and young, could eat their fill,
 That bunch of mice all lost their poor lives.
 The cats thought there would be no consequences,
 But who knew that Mr. Pointed had been spared?
 Little Mr. Pointed was really a smart fellow,
 He quickly made his escape, not leaving a trace.
 He only knew to go forward, by a different route,
 But who would know he later lost consciousness?
 If it had not been for the spared little Mr. Pointed,
 Old Mouse would never have learned the facts.

Now tell that when little Mr. Pointed saw that none of the enemies remained, he was still so
 scared that he hurriedly hid behind Cupboard Hill. His gall was atremble and his heart was aflutter, he
 didn't dare come out and furtively crawled into a hole, where he fainted for quite a while. Indeed,

His heart was aflutter and his gall was atremble;
 He anxiously waited for dusk, then later for dawn.
 Day and night both insupportable, his heart on fire:
 So he hurried back home to report the bad news.

Our story now backtracks. Tell how Old Mouse, after the bride-fetching party had left, was
 discussing with Yellow Rat how the guest would be treated. The latter said,

"The master of the house must be quite careful.
 When you entertain guests, you must be lavish.
 Six courses of soup and rice must be provided,
 Wine as much as the ocean, meat like a forest!"
 When Old Mouse heard this, he was overjoyed:
 Pleasure showed on his brow, joy on his face!

All things had to be arranged without any delay,
Hurriedly they set out to treat the guests well.
Sable and Silver, they welcomed the relatives,
Old Master Yellow displayed his rare capacities.
Little nephew Hopping Rabbit set out the plates,
Striped Granary handed out wine, o so carefully!
Addressing Mr. Molehill he repeatedly stated,
"Make sure at the banquet all cups are filled!"

When Old Mouse had made all arrangements, he was only waiting for the bride-fetching party to return. Without stopping he walked outside to watch. But no more about that.

Now tell how Striped Granary and Hopping Rabbit said to Old Mouse, "The bride fetchers are not yet back, but we have nothing else to do, so let's drink a few cups of wine. That will help us to do our jobs." Old Mouse replied, "You, youngsters, don't understand a thing! Since ancient times it is said, 'Drink less and do more!' Just wait until we have treated the guests, and then I will hire you for a few more days, so you will have some more meals and some more drinks. Wouldn't that be better?"

Striped Granary on hearing this didn't say a word;
Hopping Rabbit lowered his head and didn't reply.
One of them thought,

"This way of doing things is way too narrow-minded!"

The other thought,

"This truly doesn't show us poor people any respect!"

Old Mouse thought,

"Before you even ask these slaves to do their work,
They pester you with complaints of hunger and cold.
But in case Fierce Cat will have ruined our business,
None of us will end up with a decent meal!"

Now tell that little Mr. Pointed had seen that someone had placed some faggots in front of Cupboard Hill, hiding the entrance to his hole. His eyes were sharp, his feet were fast: he crawled out of the hole and ran for his life.

Having run for only one pace he looked forward,
 Having run for two paces he turned and listened:
 Not only was he afraid to be noticed by Fierce Cat,
 He was also afraid that others might spot his traces.
 In a panic he fled into the hole in the ground,
 With his face all in tears he greeted Old Mouse,
 And cried out, "Master, things turned out badly!
 Below Wok-Stand Cliff we met with our enemy!
 The bride-fetching party, they went to heaven;
 Your son too was killed and lost his poor life.
 If I, little Pointed, had not been quick-witted,
 Today you had had no one to bring the news!"
 When Old Mouse had heard this narrative,
 His mouth spat out blood—he fainted and fell.
 The mother mouse at this stopped breathing,
 She fell over, collapsed there on the ground.
 Yellow Mouse fled back to his own mansion;
 Sable and Silver disappeared without a trace.
 Striped Granary forced himself to drink three cups;
 Hopping Rabbit also downed five or six goblets.
 Each went back by his own way to his own house,
 There was only Molehill who cared for their lives.
 He covered their noses, loudly called their names,
 And he also threw cold water smack in their face.
 Only then did Old Mouse revive and recover,

But his body, greatly weakened, lacked strength.
As soon as he opened his mouth, he cursed the cat,
He cursed Fierce Cat as totally bereft of feeling.
"Your family and mine had no enmity or feud:
Why did you without a reason kill good people?
Let Heaven be my witness now I make this vow:
If I don't exact revenge I am not a real man!"

Now tell that Old Mouse every day and every night was devising schemes in his heart, as he could not get the thought of revenge out of its mind. That very night he came to the house of Hopping Rabbit to discuss the matter with him, "You and I are originally one family. I am the first of the twelve birth-year images, and my name is listed among the twenty-eight lunar lodges. I have lived quite some years in this world. All my relatives! How can I just sit by and do nothing?" Hopping Rabbit replied, "That would be the proper thing to do, but few are no match for many, so what can we do? Let me invite elder brother Weeds Hare to join our army. Then we can be victorious!"

Hopping Rabbit carried a grudge in his breast;
Thinking of it day and night, in a towering rage.
He despised the tribe of mice as weak and meek,
Unaware his own family housed a strong warrior.

So that night he went to the house of Weeds Hare and told him in great detail that Old Mouse wanted to take revenge. Weeds Hare replied, "How detestable are those damned cats! Brazenly they rely on their might, and they don't show any inkling of fear. But if you and I go up against them, we will immediately arrest those damned cats: we'll have them admit defeat without giving battle, and so we'll wipe out this injustice." But let's not narrate more about this.

Now tell that Old Mouse had set out his troops and dispatched his officers. At home he instructed his wife, "Carefully guard our home.

I will at Eastern Slope set out troops and officers;
 Hare and Rabbit, these two, have answered my call.
 Fat Mouse is volunteering to fill the first battle line,
 Slim Mouse, flaunting his strength, is the vanguard.
 Mr. Pointed with his imposing mien won't be slack,
 Striped Granary is contributing the fodder and straw.
 This whole bunch of mouse soldiers is eager to fight;
 Together they rouse their might to defeat the cats!"

Now Weeds Hare also thought, "This can't be done on the sly. I had better write a declaration of war and send it to Fierce Cat. So even if we will kill him, he will not be a nameless general." Thereupon he took paper and brush, and wrote a declaration of war:

From: the district of Corner of the Wall in the prefecture of Earth

To: the commander's tent of Tigerstripes and Fierce Cat of the district of Kangton

Since ancient times our tribe of mice has accepted its lot and kept its place. What concern was it of yours that we fetch a bride? But without reason you have led the cats in maiming and killing our kith and kin, creating an enmity that demands revenge. If you are aware of your crimes and feel regret and shame, you should immediately ask for proper punishment so you may perhaps escape execution. But if you say only half the word "no," we will kill you all, not even sparing your chickens and dogs.

When Weeds Hare had finished writing this declaration, he immediately dispatched Mountain Rat to deliver it to the commander's tent of Fierce Cat. When Fierce Cat hastily opened its eyes, it turned out to be a letter. When he opened the letter, it turned out to be Old Mouse's declaration of war, as seen above. Tearing the letter to shreds, he loudly started to curse.

Having read the letter, he was overcome by rage,
 Cursing Old Mouse as one who forgot his position.

"You don't keep to your place, but create havoc,
You're a pheasant⁹⁸ wanting to fight the phoenix!"
When he had torn the war declaration to shreds,
He hastily called all his many brothers together.
When the cat officers of all armies had arrived,
He shouted, "Gentlemen, now lend me your ears!
Old Mouse had his declaration of war delivered,
He wants to dispatch his mighty army against us.
Today this business is different from earlier times,
Each of you, one by one, must show his courage!
Whether they are house thieves or field bandits,
I will only be pleased if they are fully exterminated.
Be aware these damned mice may hide in their holes:
Guard these well along the road, don't let them go.
We'll wait for the mice to try and surprise our camp,
Then we will counterattack—of course we will win!"

The next day in the early morning the mice troops were all outfitted in brilliant helmets and shining armor. Young and old, the soldiers all together rushed against the army of the cats. How terrifying was this battle!

You only heard the crash of armor and loud shouts:
Those grabbed were grabbed, those swallowed eaten.
Fierce Cat grabbed commander-in-chief Old Mouse;
The other cats caught the multitude of mouse soldiers.
Hopping Rabbit made his escape to the Eastern Slope,
Weeds Hare dashed into a thicket of tares and brambles.

⁹⁸ "Pheasant" (field chicken 野鸡) also means prostitute.

Little Mr. Pointed was so scared he ran back home,
And he reported to mother mouse the state of affairs.

He shouted, "Mother! A disaster! Today we lost the battle." When mother mouse asked how his father was doing, little Mr. Pointed said, "My father was also eaten by that old Fierce Cat." Mother mouse was in such distress that she spat out fresh blood and collapsed on the floor, utterly unconscious. Little Mr. Pointed hurried over to support her and call back her soul. [When she came back,] she heaved a heavy sigh and started to weep loudly.

Before she wept, her tears came gushing down;
She wept "My husband" and cried out "Heaven!"
"Ever since the year that you married me as bride,
Your love and affection were like mountain and sea.
Half your life you used all your energy and strength;
Rising early and sleeping late you never had any rest.
By the light of stars and moon you bitterly suffered,
Living in fear and trepidation for these tens of years.
You made sure I never lacked any firewood or rice,
You made sure I never suffered any hunger or cold.
To lose my son at this age was a great disaster,
As if a dull knife cut out my heart and my liver,
But I thought that even so I still had my husband—
Who knew you too would leave for Yellow Springs?⁹⁹
Today your life has gone to the world of shades
And I'm left behind to guard the lonely blanket.
Late at night the water clock never stops dripping;
The coverlet of red silk stays unused on one side.

⁹⁹ The Yellow Springs are the home of the dead.

When I weep, it is for my man who died so early,
When I cry out, it is to that Heaven that lacks eyes.
With open eyes I don't see you, with closed eyes I do,
I can't eat in the morning, can't sleep in the night.
But if I would like to go off and marry another,
There is no hope for me as I am old and worn.
Of course I should chastely live a widow's life,
But alas, I have no son at all who can support me,
So I weep 'Dear husband' and cry out to Heaven,
Because of you I can neither advance nor retreat.
And I curse that cat for his ten-thousand evil sins:
He killed off my whole family—really too pitiable!
Even though you would run off to the underworld,
I still would not yet be done with you, damned cat!
I ask, my dear husband, where are you at present?
Where is that son who too early has lost his life?
The more I weep, the more it hurts, I cannot live,
I had better release my life to the Yellow Springs.
In case that Fierce Cat also will explore this hole,
I had better take my precautions in a timely way."

The mother mouse took a strip of silk from a bamboo box and hung herself from one of the rafters. All members of the family of Old Mouse now had died in a most pitiable manner!

Our tale now takes a different direction. When the mother mouse arrived in the underworld, she saw Old Mouse and some other wronged souls as they were crossing the Pass. The mother mouse loudly cried, "My dear husband, wait a while!" When Old Mouse turned around, he saw that she was his wife, and embracing each other they wept. Old Mouse asked, "My wife, how did you get here? It must be that Fierce Cat, his evil nature still unabated, harmed and killed you." The mother mouse replied, "Ever after you and your son had died, I wept and cried all day, and because I had absolutely no other

way out, I committed suicide by hanging myself.” The mother mouse also asked, “Have you seen our son?” “Our son has already entered the Pass,” Old Mouse replied, “I’ve been thinking that now I have been unable to win in the world of light, the best way is that I should submit an accusation to King Yama. If that succeeds, I will have exacted revenge, and the wrong I have suffered will be compensated.”

When the male mouse and the mother mouse together had arrived outside the gate of the nine palaces and met with the responsible official, they hastily kowtowed to him and told him they wanted to lodge an accusation against the cat. After Old Mouse had provided a detailed account from the very beginning, he also presented ten ounces of silver. As soon as the responsible official saw the silver, his face was all smiles, and taking up the brush he wrote out the following statement of accusation:

“The person submitting this accusation is Old Mouse, aged fifty-one years, and a resident of the village of Hole in the district of Corner of the Wall in the prefecture of Earth. Because vicious Fierce Cat bitterly harmed this decent mouse, maimed his son and caused his wife to commit suicide, so he is carrying an unsurpassable grudge, he implores His Lordship to conduct a careful investigation so justice will be done. This was because on the tenth of the First Month, after we had carefully selected a good day, the mouse son went to fetch his bride, as the sacrifices to the ancestors cannot be not continued. Who would have suspected that that Fierce Cat would be so unnaturally violent that he would lead the other cats in maiming and killing all of the mice, old and young, in a most pitiable way. Now the ordinary way of life of the cat is that he does not have any other craft, but

When it is hot, he always lies down to rest in high pavilions;

When it is cold, he shares the food in the embroidery room.

When he will sleep, he doesn’t distinguish male or female,

When he will eat, he doesn’t distinguish noble or base.

When the cat says, “Here I am,” the dog says, “I leave.”

His master feeds the cat in a most assiduous manner.

He spends his days in continuously reciting the sutras:

Why did he have to swallow all of my flesh and blood?

Ever since the day of my birth, my grandfather was listed among the twenty-eight lunar lodges and my father occupied the first place among the birth-year images. All this can be documented.

But with lowered head I go out, and likewise return,
And I also wouldn't dare walk alongside other people.
During daytime I close my door and I stay in hiding,
During the night I pass my time in bitterness and pain.
What I eat is some left-over soup and left-over rice,
Exactly like a starving beggar passing on the streets.
How I hate that evil cat for bullying me as the boss—
Who knows how many relatives of mine he has killed!
Truly, my bosom is bursting with the grudge I carry,
As I pity those many mice—all killed without a cause!
May Your Excellency clear the clouds so I'll see the sun;
May you, Lord Yama, be a clear mirror in your actions!"

When the responsible official had written this statement and read it out once, he handed it to Old Mouse. When Old Mouse held the accusation in his hands, he turned around and ascended the palace stairs. Once inside the hall he presented it, and the associate judge handed it to Lord Yama. When Lord Yama had read this accusation, great rage showed on his divine face, and he subsequently instructed Old Mouse, "You wait there below the eaves of the western corridor. Let me have the cat's soul arrested, and then I will give my verdict in this case." He promptly dispatched Horseface and Oxhead, these two ghostly runners, to go and arrest the cat's soul, so he might attend the case and be interrogated.

When the ghostly runners had received his command,
They went out the gate with hemp rope and iron chain.
They hid the order for catching the soul in their sleeve,

Stuck the placard for arresting souls in their waistband.
 The bigger ghost was holding a cudgel with many rings,
 And the smaller ghost was holding a wolf-tooth needle.
 They were eager to arrest and bring in that cat's soul,
 So they could, on return, claim merit with King Yama.

Now tell that Fierce Cat was quite satisfied after he had achieved his victory and with closed eyes recited the name of the Buddha. But the two ghostly runners with their hempen ropes and iron chains arrested Fierce Cat's three souls and seven spirits and went off to the underworld.

Leisurely and at ease they left the mansion of the cat;
 Barely visible, in a dark haze, they crossed Ghost Gate.
 "I, this cat, haven't done anything that's against the law:
 So why did you arrest me to appear before King Yama?
 It must be that damned rat who has lodged an accusation,
 But in the palace of King Yama I will defend my actions.
 If I see the face of that damned rat in the underworld,
 I will not let that creature get off without any damage!"

Oxhead and Horseface, these two ghostly runners, tied the cat's soul up with their iron chains so he could be interrogated at the crimson steps. The cat said to these ghosts, "He lodged his accusation, so I will need a defense brief. The proverb is right when it says that on entering the gate of government office, one has to bow and scrape, while on entering the gate of a temple, one has to practice virtue. I hope, brother ghosts, that you will do me a little favor. At some later date I will come and visit you to express my thanks." The ghosts considered that it made sense what he asked, so they told a little ghost to escort him as he went off to find someone to write his statement. When the cat had found the responsible official, he kowtowed and said, "Old Mouse lodged an accusation against me, and I would like to submit a defense brief. At present I really have no cash with me, so I implore you most sincerely to write my statement. On some other day I will show my gratitude." Master Hu took into account that

he was destitute, and took the brush to write a statement on his behalf.

"The person submitting this statement is Fierce Cat, a person of ninety years of age, who was originally registered in Thunder Peak Monastery in the Western Paradise. The reason is that a scoundrel brazenly presents himself as a decent man and falsely accuses me of wanton violence. I, this cat, was born in the Western Regions, where every day I recited the name of the Buddha and nurtured my nature, without lusting after wine, sex, riches, or honor. But when during the Song dynasty the Five Rats created havoc and bitterly harmed the common people, the Star of Civil Culture Bao Wenzheng received an order to visit the other world. He drank peacock blood¹⁰⁰ and came to Thunder Peak Monastery in the Western Paradise to borrow me, Fierce Cat. The Old Buddha, afraid that mice and rats might damage the sutras by chewing on them, gave him one of his golden-headed lions. Now Bao Wenzheng was a mortal being with eyes made of flesh. When he had come half way, this man of shade and light ran into the Realized Person Zhang, who told him, "This is not a cat. How could it capture the Five Rats?" So together with the Realized Person Zhang he went once again to the Western Paradise, but the Old Buddha stubbornly refused his request. But one Mahayana arhat said, "The Star of Civil Culture has come here at the behest of His Majesty, and his request concerns a major state issue. Let's lend the cat to him, and once it will have captured the rats, he can bring it back again." The Old Buddha then gave him a red box. Bao Wenzheng took me to Guanyin, from whom I borrowed some willow water that I stored in my stomach, and then he returned to the world of light, where I immediately annihilated these damned rats. When Bao Wenzheng noticed how much merit I had in the annihilation of the rats, he sent up a proposal to the Son of Heaven of the Song dynasty to keep me in the palace so I could guard it against these damned rats for all eternity. I have never committed any other crime. This is something that each and everyone can testify to.

¹⁰⁰ Peacock blood was considered highly poisonous. Judge Bao drinks it in order to commit suicide in order to be able to visit heaven.

Now the mice have come up with a totally unfounded false statement in which they wrongly accuse the cat. Don't you know that they bring no profit to the world at all by their way of life? Each family suffers their damage, everybody shouts at them and beats them—who does not hate and detest them?

They furtively drink the oil in the lamps before the Buddha,
 They brazenly swallow the foodstuffs presented on altars.
 They chew the classic books and holy sutras to little pieces,
 They gnaw the oil baskets and comb cases to smithereens.
 They have nibbled on the faces of people who passed away,
 They would like to eat the eyes of people who are still alive.
 Lord Yama, if you still are inclined not to believe my words,
 Just take a look at the large holes in the cloth on your table.”

When Master Hu on his behalf had written this statement of defense, he read it out once and handed it to the cat. When the cat had received this document, he wanted to present it to Lord Yama, but who could have known that exactly that day Market-Day Rat would be on duty?¹⁰¹ When he saw that this concerned a statement against Old Mouse, he secretly thought to himself, “Would I not annihilate my own tribe of rats and mice if I would hand in this document? Let me scare him away with some big words.” So he sternly said, “If you want to have this defense brief submitted, you have to pay the standard fee.” The cat replied, “I truly don't have any cash. Sir door guard, please do me a favor!” But Market-Day Rat said, “This is standard procedure in this office. If you don't pay the fee, I can't pass it on.”

Fierce Cat was so frightened that he could not think of any alternative. After he had descended the crimson steps, just when he was overcome by gloom, he suddenly saw Tail-Fire Tiger.¹⁰² Old Cat told him in all detail how Old Mouse had lodged an accusation against him, how Master Hu had written a statement, and how Market-Day Rat had refused to submit it. Tail-Fire Tiger said, “All rats and mice

¹⁰¹ Market-Day Rat is one of the lunar lodges.

¹⁰² Tail-Fire Tiger is one of the lunar lodges.

throughout the world are one tribe, so shouldn't we, this tribe of tigers, also stick together?" Then he took the defense brief with him into the palace of King Yama. Shortly thereafter they heard the order transmitted that Old Mouse and Fierce Cat had both to be led inside to be interrogated in their case.

When the ghostly runners heard Lord Yama's order,
They hastily called the persons in this case together.
At the main gate the cannons first fired three shots;
Instrumental music was played: the hall was opened!
In a short while King Yama had ascended the palace,
His terrifying mien scared people out of their wits.
The instruments of torture stood all below the hall,
The mountains of knives and vats of oil were outside.
Associate judges held the registers of birth and death,
Little ghosts raised the ropes for requesting one's life.
At the third quarter of the fifth watch all were there;
Before the hall, behind the palace: one milling crowd!

Now tell that King Yama had taken his seat, facing south, in the Dark-Welkin Hall. Market-Day Rat first spread out the accusation, and when Lord Yama had read it, he ordered Old Mouse to approach the bench, and said, "If you have suffered an injustice, provide a detailed account in conformity with your original statement. If you lodge a false accusation, you will be condemned for that crime."

Old Mouse ascended the palace hall and kowtowed,
"Your Excellency Lord Yama, please lend me your ear.
The tribe of cats has in this world no true occupation,
They are idle loafers who are addicted to violence.
They abuse us mice because we're meek and weak—
Who does not know this? Who has not heard this?
During broad daylight we don't dare leave the gate,

During nighttime we make a living, hastily running.
 Among the twenty-eight lodges the Mouse is listed;
 We are the first among the twelve birth-year images.
 Originally we have no feud or enmity with the cats,
 So why is it their single intention to kill us rodents?
 Each day they only hope to survive by eating mice,
 All year long these wicked people don't do any work.
 They eat meat, break the fasts, without any taboos;
 Neither a monk nor a priest, they recite the sutras.
 In summer time they always sleep in high pavilions,
 In winter time they doze in the laps of young girls.
 When ordinarily they harm us, that is still livable,
 But the tenth of the First Month they went way too far!
 The bride-fetching party was completely consumed:
 Whether female or male, they were all swallowed!
 Because I, this Old Mouse, have no other recourse,
 I submit this case of injustice to you, Lord Yama.
 If there is a single fact in his accusation that's a lie,
 I'm willing to accept the punishment for the crime.
 I humbly beseech Your Lordship to accept this plaint,
 May you show your compassion by a strict inquiry."

When King Yama had heard the statement of Old Mouse, his dragon face showed his great rage, and he said, "That you, Fierce Cat, act in such a cruel way in the world! You also don't have the slightest inkling of compassion. You are truly detestable! By rights you are condemned to execution. You will be sent down to a labor camp, and be done away with after the Autumn Assizes." Tail-Fire Tiger saw that the situation was not looking good, and understood that this was all due to the manipulation of Market-Day Rat. Thereupon he gave a wink to the presiding associate judge, and that associate judge grasped his meaning because the two of them were good friends. He then knelt by the side of the bench, and

said, "Old Mouse has made his statement, but Fierce Cat also has a defense brief. Once you read it, all will be clear." When Lord Yama had read the defense brief, he immediately ordered the ghostly runners to bring in the soul of Fierce Cat, and said, "Old Mouse accuses you of committing violence. What do you have to say in your defense?"

With a kowtow Fierce Cat addressed King Yama,
With tears gushing down he stated the true facts.
"I am originally in Eastern Lands an invited guest,
I'm not an autochthonous inhabitant of the place.
I was living in Thunder Peak Monastery in the West,
Where I nurtured my nature by reciting the sutras.
While I cultivated an indestructible Diamond body,
Alas, the damned rats broke the commandments.
During the peaceful era of the Song Son of Heaven
The Five Rats created havoc in the Eastern Capital.
Above they masqueraded as the true emperor,
Below they were a pest for the common people.
There was no end to the huge armies of these rats
That tightly surrounded the walls of the Capital!
One perfectly impersonated the king of the Song,
Another transformed himself into a fake Lord Bao.
In Su Family Village they created quite an uproar,
Scattering beans, they turned these into troops.
No one knew how many infantry and cavalry—
They also could summon rain and call up storms.
They trampled the fields so people had to suffer,
And kidnapped boys and girls against all norms.
They ravaged the Song to such degree it only could

Quickly invite the Realized Person Zhang of Jiangxi.¹⁰³
 Only when he looked carefully with both his eyes,
 He knew these were not truly men but monsters.
 In the demon mirror they didn't show their shape,
 The sword for executing demons couldn't be used:
 Their powers were indeed extremely exceptional!
 This angered Judge Bao, the Star of Civil Culture.
 With the Heavenly Master he sought Buddha's help,
 Hurriedly they ascended to Thunder Peak Monastery
 And together asked the Buddha for his intervention.
 Our Buddha already fully understood the situation.
 He gifted the two of them one red-lacquered box,
 Told them to go to the court and arrest the demons.
 All that was contained in that red-lacquered box
 In fact was nothing else but the body of me, the cat!
 Our Buddha gave his instructions to Master Zhang,
 And also addressed some words to Civil Culture Star.
 These took me along with them to the Eastern Lands—
 Once I had nabbed the rats to return to Thunder Peak.
 Judge Bao promised that he would escort me back,
 The Heavenly Master also said I would not stay long.
 They carried the box with them to the Eastern Capital
 And told me to arrest all those many mice and rats.
 The court indeed was filled with their demonic aura,
 So I immediately displayed my supernatural powers.

103 Realized Person Zhang (Zhang zhenren 张真人; also known as Heavenly Master Zhang or the Daoist pope) refers to the hereditary head (from the Zhang family) of the Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正一) School of Daoism. During the last millennium of imperial China, these masters were based on Mt. Longhu in Jiangxi Province. In vernacular literature these masters are renowned for their magical abilities.

The Five Rats were that moment seated at a banquet,
But once they saw me, a cat, they showed their shape.
With one bite I killed the eldest rat, removing a pest,
And my forelegs trampled Rat Two and Rat Three.
With my hind legs I captured Rat Four and Rat Five,
So I thought I now had fully exterminated the race.
But unawares I failed to use my utmost strength,
And one sneaky shrewd mouse escaped into a hole.
Ever since I allowed that one old mouse to escape,
None dared send me back to Thunder Peak Temple.
Only after I would have captured that demonic rat,
They would send me off to the Western Regions.
Who had any idea that that rodent was pregnant,
And in her hole would quickly start to proliferate?
She raised a crowd of seven or eight daughters,
Their sons and grandsons were beyond counting.
So me, the cat, they kept there to capture these rats—
All over the world these rats rampaged in crowds!
Boring through walls' foundations they ruin houses,
They steal and devour the five grains and fine flour.
They chew holes in clothes, kerchiefs, shoes, hats;
They abuse the sages by chewing on the classics.
They dare drink the oil from the Buddha lamps,
And important documents they swallow whole.
They steal and rob grain from the granary stores:
Below they abuse the officials, above the ruler.
Their manifold evil crimes are beyond counting.
They rob numerous families of a peaceful night.
As I, the cat, have sworn to exterminate the rats,

How could I allow them to go and fetch a bride?
 They ruined my self-cultivation and transcendence,
 Stuck here in these Eastern Lands I can't go home.
 All these facts can be documented and be proven,
 There is nothing false or unfounded in my words.
 What I, the cat, have provided is a truthful account:
 It's obvious who here is good and who here is evil."

Only when King Yama had heard the statement of the cat did he understand, and said, "When I read the statements of the two sides in this case, the cat truly is right on each and every point, and truthful in each and every item. These rats have been a pest for a long time already, and they definitely cannot be allowed to stay in the three worlds¹⁰⁴ of the world of light. Order the small ghosts to throw them into the hells behind Mt. Shade, and for all eternity they will not be allowed to enter the cycle of transmigration."

Lord Yama lifted his brush and wrote his verdict:
 Each characters and each column was very clear.
 "We found on investigation the rats to be guilty
 And order Fierce Cat to swallow these rodents.
 By rights he should annihilate the whole tribe,
 But alas, they would die too pitiable a death.
 The cosmos assigns male and female their role;
 By the union of yin and yang we engender life.
 Fetching a bride is the custom for each family,
 But how can these vicious mice fetch a bride?
 Embodying the Jade Emperor's kind compassion
 For the moment I will not condemn you for that.

¹⁰⁴ The three worlds of past, present, and future.

You are banished to the foot of the western wall
And not allowed to come out and harm people.
The cat is originally a guest who was invited,
Its only means of livelihood is catching rodents.
He is a commanding general in the state granaries
And a tested soldier in the houses of the people."
He thereupon ordered Horseface and Oxhead
To escort the cat so it could come back to life.

When King Yama had finished writing his verdict in this case, he also ordered the associate judge in charge of this case to seal the scroll and establish this as precedent: if later there were going to be cases like this one, these would be judged in the same way. When the cat had been able to return to the world of light, he felt hungry and it happened that he saw a little mouse hopping hither and thither at the foot of the western wall. When the cat saw that state of affairs, rage flared up in his heart. Lightly he walked over and furtively squatted down below the wall. Old Mouse had been able to consult the trigrams, and by raising its front legs it would have been able to figure out that the cat had returned to life. But this little mouse was ignorant and ran in and out of the hole, unaware that disaster was about to strike. Fierce Cat caught the right moment, and as he grunted once, he nabbed him with one of its legs. Closing his maw, he clenched him between his jaws, and next swallowed him with hide and hair. Later he spat out a story, this *Tale without a Shape or Shadow*.

THE CAT ACCUSED BY THE MOUSE

Our story tells that there was a man named Old Mouse, also known as Rat, who was living in Hole Village of Corner of the Wall District in Ground Province. His only son was called Ash-Crawler, and had been engaged to a daughter of a family in Small Vat City.

On this day the mouse was seated in the hall, and asked the mother mouse to come out and to discuss a matter of importance.

"Our daughter-in-law in Vat City

Is now as beautiful as a flower,
And our own little Ash-Crawler
Has also reached the proper age.
I would like to bring the bride home for the wedding ceremony,
But because the road to that place is not safe and reliable at all,
I'm afraid that the bride-fetching party may run into our enemy
And that halfway down the road they may encounter those cats!"

When the mother cat had heard these words, she answered as follows,

"A tree has branches and leaves, and grass has its roots;
From a womb or an egg each new generation is born.
Since ancient times the generations follow each other,
So in each generation the rooster can announce dawn.
If we have a son but don't allow him to marry his wife,
How will I ever be able to hold a grandson in my arms?
We will select a lucky day and also a propitious hour,
And we will then wait till the third watch of that night.
We will choose a number of capable young men
And have them stealthily proceed to Vat City.
If on their way they don't sound gongs and drums,
How can they run into that bunch of enemies?"

When the mouse heard this, he laughed happily and could not help himself from praising his wife.

"My dear wife, what you say is a pleasure to hear!

You may be compared to Jiang Taigong of the Zhou!¹⁰⁵

Even if you may not be a Zhuge Liang who is reborn,¹⁰⁶

You do surpass that Liu Bowen of the Ming dynasty.¹⁰⁷

"Perfect! My dear wife, we will follow your advice." Thereupon he found an almanac, and when he opened the Imperial Calendar for Ten-Thousand Years, looked at the advantageous months and avoided the Black Way,¹⁰⁸ he computed that the tenth day of the First Month was the best. But when the lucky day and the propitious hour had been selected, the mouse again suddenly heaved a sigh, and said, "Alas! Too bad that my parents had to die so early, leaving us behind while we are still so young and without any experience of organizing such happy events as weddings. I'm afraid we'll be wasting money and still make a mess of it."

When the mother mouse heard this, she became angry, "You good for nothing! At every moment you have to sigh and moan, and on every occasion you have to lock your brow in a frown. That Master Molehill in the eastern village is an expert in arranging wedding banquets, so let's ask him to serve as host. What would you have to worry about that way?"

A single sentence can wake up a muddleheaded person:

When the mouse had heard this, his frown disappeared.

He took paper and ink, inkstone and brush

To write out the wedding announcement:

¹⁰⁵ Jiang Taigong 姜太公 (eleventh century BCE) assisted King Wu in the defeat of the Shang dynasty and the establishment of the Zhou dynasty.

¹⁰⁶ Zhuge Liang 诸葛亮 (181–234) was the advisor of Liu Bei 刘备 (161–223), the founder of the Shu-Han dynasty, one of the Three Kingdoms.

¹⁰⁷ Liu Ji 刘基 (a.k.a. Liu Bowen 刘伯温, 1311–1375) was the advisor of Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), the founder of the Ming dynasty.

¹⁰⁸ Unlucky days are said to be Black Way days.

The mother mouse was quite adept at rubbing the ink;
The old mouse wielded the brush like a major author!

In a moment he had finished writing the wedding invitation. It said,

Having selected the evening of the tenth of the First Month as an auspicious hour for the celebration of the wedding of our son, we hereby sincerely invite our relatives and friends to attend.

— Old Mouse, also on behalf of his son
The First Month of the year XXXX

When the wedding invitation was written, the rat called for his nephew Sharphead, and instructed him as follows, “On the tenth we’ll celebrate the wedding of your cousin. Now take these wedding invitations and deliver them to our relatives and friends, and then go to the eastern village to invite Master Molehill to come and serve as host. We count on you as the smartest of the lot. Make sure to pay attention to the proper formalities. Be careful on your way, and make sure to be back quickly.”

Now tell that when Sharphead had come to the eastern village and invited Master Molehill, the latter wasted no moment but turned around and disappeared below the ground. Having put on his shoes he left home and accompanied Sharphead back home to the mansion of Old Mouse. Upon arrival he first had tea and then had wine. After the wine they had a meal, and when the meal was done, they started to talk. “I have invited you here,” said Old Mouse, “because our son will be married. Because I have no experience at all in organizing such a happy event, I would like to ask you to serve as host instead.”

When Molehill had heard this, he replied,

“Our two families are united by a deep friendship,
You and I are closer than brothers of the same womb.
My dear brother, there is no need to be so polite,

Let's immediately get down to the business at hand.
Because the lucky day is already quickly approaching,
The first thing to do is to hire a band and sedan chair."

Hearing this, Sharphead also added a word,

"Now as for a band and sedan chair,
I know where those can be found:
Molehill Ditch may only be a small place,
But its blind musicians are quite famous.
People say it a thousand times but they have it right:
If it comes to a band none are as good as the blind.
They can play a trumpet and they can play a shawn;
After blowing a short song they'll play a long tune.
On the single-hide drum they beat out a roll
As the bronze gong resounds in an intricate rhythm.
The little hand gongs are struck to the eight tunes;
The two-strings and four-strings¹⁰⁹ mournfully whine.
The eight sedan-chair carriers can really run well,
And they have a sedan chair with windows of glass."

"Perfect! Wonderful!" said Old Mouse, "Go there quickly and hire the band and the sedan chair."
While Sharphead went off to Molehill Ditch, Master Molehill continued, "The courtyard inside and
outside has to be tiptop, and the wedding room has to be arranged with care. As I see it,

The heaps of earth before the gate must be levelled,
Sprinkle the floors with clear water to settle the dust.

¹⁰⁹ Fiddles with respectively two and four strings.

Don't strike up any tune before the wedding banquet;
 Inside the courtyard the floor should be swept clean.
 Glue a "Double Happiness" above the main gate,
 Affix red decorations to the wedding room door.
 Place an incense burner in front of the ancestral hall,
 The red felt mat on the floor should be brand new.
 After bowing to Heaven and Earth, the couple goes
 To the wedding room, that requires the most care:
 One table is placed on the *kang* with two candles
 To enable the new bride to guard the happy lamp.
 In front of the toilet table put a blackwood bench,
 And on the toilet table put a mirror made of bronze.
 In one of the corners place a face-washing basin—
 Hygiene is important each morning and evening."

Old Mouse offered him a cup of tea, and then discussed the details of the banquet with him.

Master Molehill explained, "My dear elder brother,
 If you arrange it this way, it will be most impressive:
 Have eight-immortals tables¹¹⁰ set out in a square;
 On them blackwood chopsticks are laid out in pairs.
 Four cold cuts, four hot snacks when drinking wine;
 Three bowls, large plates, and a big bowl of soup.
 Mountain delicacies and seafood dishes are served,
 That will make relatives and friends be overjoyed.
 Red-braised goose together with roasted duck;
 Silver ears, salted eggs, and fragrant sausages.

¹¹⁰ An eight-immortals table is an eight-sided table seating eight guests.

When mutton is steamed its taste is delicious;
A whole chicken, shrimps, and fresh bear claws.
For pork we serve halved hams and spare ribs;
Caramelized apples and eight-jewel porridge.
Once meatballs are served, vegetables follow,
With rice, flower rolls, and swallow-nest soup.

This truly is: With each mouthful of wine comes one mouthful of food; / when they put down the chopsticks they chew on the bones. / When friends and relatives have eaten their fill, / who will say that we are not wealthy and blessed?"

Old Mouse was so happy his tail stood up, and as he slowly stroked his whiskers he said, "What other families have, we will have too: / who dares say that we are any less than the rich?"

Master Molehill also said, "But as to the welcoming of relatives and the employment of friends and the people who will fetch the bride I cannot take any decisions on my own authority. I have to discuss these matters with the two of you."

The mouse mother promptly had made up her mind,
She provided Master Molehill with a detailed account,
"The silver-eyed sable rat is our preeminent relative;
If the boring mouse comes, they will escort the bride:
With these two relatives I'll have a fine daughter-in-law.
At Yellow-Earth Bridge we will invite the lucky rabbit."¹¹¹
That little lucky rabbit is truly quite intelligent;
His face is round, his cheeks are big, his eyes sparkling.
He can artfully wrinkle his face in wrinkle upon wrinkle:
For a hundred miles he really has the best facial features.

¹¹¹ The rabbit is invited to take part in the wedding procession as it is a lucky animal, well-known for its fertility. While in New Year prints of the wedding of the mice, the groom accompanying the bride from her natal home to his home often is depicted as riding a horse, one also finds examples in which he appears to be riding a rabbit.

His only problem is that his ears are somewhat too long,
So he will have to wear a phoenix cap to cover those up.
The party for fetching the bride must be well-composed:
Let's invite the ground squirrel from South Grass Rapids!
That person was born in a family of great standing,
I guarantee he will speak well and act courteously."

She had barely finished speaking when Sharphead returned. "When fetching the bride, I also want to go." Master Molehill said with a smile,

"Little Sharphead, you are quite smart,
Big things and small things you all can handle.
To lead the way when fetching the bride, we rely on you,
But you are not allowed to blindly mess things up!"

Light and shadow resembled an arrow, sun and moon moved like a shuttle: in the wink of an eye the tenth day of the First Month had arrived.

As the sun sank between two hills the houses were bright, / As lamps were lit by every family, in every house.

Just look at the mansion of the mice: everyone in the family was busily occupied with placing lamps and putting up decorations; / Dressed in red and clad in green they were one bustling crowd. / In the hall and outside the hall people were filled with expectation, / So old and young, high and low showed a happy face.

Suddenly they heard the music for welcoming guests:
The family of the bride in Vat City was sending her boxes.
Red-lacquered big chests and black-lacquered boxes
Were carried into the courtyard by a throng of mice.
With a smile on their faces they opened the chests,

Allowing the foreign chains of yellow bronze to clink.
Inside the courtyard they spanned two long ropes:
The clothes of the bride were hung out in a row.
Padded with cotton for winter, sheer for summer;
Of gauze and of silk, all made to the latest fashion;
Gowns and caps, and small articles for daily use:
The trousseau of the bride was beyond counting.
A face-washing basin as well as powder boxes;
Mouth-water and rouge, and toothbrushes too.
A new mattress and new duvet were also there,
In the hope that the maiden soon would bloom.

Here truly applied:

Families matched in status, an ideal situation:
A phoenix about to descend on a wutong tree.¹¹²
Might she soon give birth to sons, multiplying,
Giving the grandparents a grandson to cuddle.
At midnight, when all was still, the hour had arrived:
The iron cannon fired its roaring three shots.
Gongs and drums resounded, the army set out:
The bride-fetching party of mice was ready to go
When Old Mouse rushed out from his inside room
And cried out to the bride-fetching people to stop.
"Don't go! Wait a while!
When you go to Vat City, the road is dangerous, so you must be careful.
I have here for you a map of all stages of the journey,
And I also would like to add a few words of advice.
Once outside the gate here, don't sound the drum,

¹¹² The phoenix is an auspicious bird that will alight only on a wutong tree.

All along the road you're not allowed to make noise.
 Sharphead, in leading the way, now please be careful,
 Follow the map in making your way and watch out!
 When opening the gate, don't open it way too wide,
 Just push it open a little, enough to let you sneak out.
 Run along the wall, watch before turning a corner,
 Make sure to quickly walk through any pile of faggots.
 That old brown dog must be sleeping soundly,
 So make sure not to wake up that blind bitch.
 When passing by any door, you cannot enter:
 If you mess this up, you commit a grave crime.
 Once you have carefully crossed the Lintel Dam,
 You sneak your way around Oven Gate Village.
 Once you see Vat City, you must pay attention
 So you will not be ambushed by our enemies.
 Once past Black Wind Hole, after ten miles,
 You've arrived right in front of the bride's home.
 You don't need to stare; you don't need to ask:
 The gate of the bride's house is decorated in red.
 Today cannot be compared to any ordinary day,
 Each of you has to be circumspect in your actions.
 Don't look at any good food or any fine drinks;
 You're not allowed to smell the aroma of sheep oil!
 Once you have safely arrived at the gate of the bride,
 You'll be treated as honored guests with fine foods."

Let me tell about the brotherhood of the cats. The old red cat occupied the city of Kangton. Commanding his brothers, the yellow cat, the black cat, the grey cat, the white cat and the spotted cat, he dominated the four neighbors and the eight courtyards. His round eyes resembled lamps and his

whisker hairs were like steel needles; with his tiger head and bear body his strength was unlimited, and his sharp and pointed teeth really inspired fear.

This day the old cat, having eaten its fill, felt quite at ease. He had curled himself up in his mansion in Kangton, and with both his eyes closed, he started, loudly purring, to recite the *Sutra of Great Peace*.¹¹³

Now tell about Cat Two, who was called Tigerstripes. With his yellow pelt and black claws, full waist and strong body he displayed extraordinary courage. Feeling hungry, he was this evening lazily walking on the eaves of the house. Suddenly

Tigerstripes pricked up his ears and fixed his eyes
As he discovered on the ground an activity of mice.
A little rat with pointed beak held a piece of paper,
While muttering some words and also chattering.
Some in red and some in green, one large patrol,
They carried along with them a painted sedan chair.
As soon as Cat Two had seen this, he understood:
A bride-fetching party had come to mouse mansion!

Lightly he dropped on the window sill and entered by the cat door. He quickly ran to the kang and reported, "Elder Brother, congratulations!" He made such a hullabaloo that the old cat stretched his lazy body and berated Tigerstripes for waking him from his sleep, "Why do you have to congratulate me in the middle of the night, in the third watch?"

Tigerstripes offered his apologies and reported, "A moment ago I discovered that a bride-fetching party has arrived at the house of the mice."

"Is that true?"

"I have seen it with my own eyes!"

¹¹³ The purring of cats is often compared to the mumbling sounds of Buddhist monks when reciting the sutras.

“If the mice deliver themselves up to our gate,
 We will once again have a good meal of meat!
 Go and summon all our brothers here together,
 Let them come to Kangton to receive my orders.
 Go to Granary in Grain Room to summon Blackie,
 Go to Stove in Kitchen Room to summon Whitey;
 Go to Chest in East Courtyard to summon Spotty,
 Go to Firewood in West Courtyard to summon Gray.
 All brothers in Four Neighbors and Eight Courtyards,
 Summon them all, without exception, to the last man!”
 In a moment the many brothers of the Cat family
 Had all come together there in the city of Kangton.
 The cat gave his orders, displaying his special skills,
 And immediately set out the battle formation Sack.
 “My dear brothers, you all have received your orders.
 Hide yourselves on four sides, don’t make any move:
 As soon as those mice will have entered the gate,
 We suddenly will strike and show no mercy at all!”

Let’s tell how Sharphead, leading the bride-fetching party, made his way with the aid of the map, and all along the road acted with extreme circumspection. At this moment they had already climbed the seven steps of the foundation and had arrived outside the lintel of the gate. Sharphead ordered them not to make any move, but wait for him to see whether the coast was clear.

Watch Sharphead stretch his forelegs one by one, stretch his neck. With his eyes wildly rolling, he pricked up his ears to listen. “Inside all is safe, so let’s quickly enter the gate. Vat City is not far ahead!” While Sharphead on his side clearly saw Vat City, the cats on their side went mad with joy. On the order of the old cat, the cats all jumped down in the same move. That bride-fetching party, covered in dust after their long journey, met with disaster as soon as they entered that gate!

When the lucky rabbit saw how bad the situation was,
He dropped his phoenix hat and ran off at all speed.
Sharphead was not only smart but also quick-witted:
As soon as he saw "This is wrong!" he turned and fled.
But the other members of the bride-fetching party
Found, running east or fleeing west, no place to hide.
Squealing and squeaking they cried most piteously:
Within three quarters of an hour they lost their lives.

Look at those cats: they fiercely bite, they quickly eat!

Their teeth of steel that are so sharp first take their lives,
And afterwards they pull away their skins completely.
The blood and flesh: they swallow both at the same time,
And what they leave at long last are nothing but bones.

Let's not tell how the people in the bride-fetching party all met with disaster,
Let's narrate how the arrival of the bride was anxiously awaited by the mice.
The friends and relatives had waited from the evening past midnight,
They hadn't had anything to drink or eat as they just sat and waited.
They were so hungry that they heard the rumblings of their stomachs,
But still they did not see any of those who left to fetch the bride return.
They jumped to their feet and called on Ground Squirrel,
And in pairs and couples they went to see Master Molehill,
"We all worked really very hard to help you out this time,
From early in the morning till now it is well after midnight.
We have not even had half a drop of water or a bowl of rice:
Now our bodies have grown so weak our legs are trembling.

We implore you Master Molehill to do us a favor:

Get some of that meat that has been cut in front or behind the knives,
 Add a few drops of cooking oil, and pour out some cups of wine,
 And allow us to eat at least a few bites,
 So we can regain some of our energy!"

Hearing this Master Molehill grew greatly enraged, "The proverb says, 'Do more and drink less!' How can we start eating when the bride-fetching party has not yet returned? A greedy mouth in a lazy body—what kind of style is that? No way! Go back to your tasks!"

Two of these people with an empty stomach became angry, and back in the courtyard they vented their spleen, "On an empty stomach they want us to work— / To work and to work but we still have to live! / Today we have to help in bringing home a bride; / When tomorrow we must help it will be to bury the dead."

They had barely finished speaking when Sharphead arrived,
 He was still scared out of his wits, his body covered in sweat.
 With friends and relatives around him, he greeted Old Mouse;
 Weeping he recounted the disaster of the bride-fetching party.
 "We had barely managed to enter the gate,
 When our enemies descended from heaven!
 Alas, our people who went to fetch the bride
 Collapsed for fear and met with misfortune.
 If I, Sharphead, hadn't been able to run so fast,
 I'd have died and none had been able to bring you the news."

Once Old Mouse heard this, he was both pained and enraged: his rage rose up to heaven, phlegm blocked its throat, his two eyes blankly stared, and his four limbs all stiffened. As his mouth spat out white foam, he collapsed like a wooden pole.

When his friends and relatives saw this critical situation, some of them bent his body and some of them bent his legs. Loudly they called his name again and again, until Old Mouse regained his consciousness.

When the pain subsided, the thought of pain further increased the pain;

When he had wept for pain for a while, it only further added to his rage.

All of a sudden Old Mouse unexpectedly stopped his weeping;

Gnashing his teeth and stamping his feet he spoke as follows,

"If I want to free myself of this overpowering rage,

I cannot go on with this tune, sniveling snot and tears.

Sharphead and Ground Squirrel, you listen to my orders:

Mobilize on my behalf in all four directions my army.

Call on my distant relatives and my close neighbors:

If I don't take revenge, I don't want to go on living.

In Eastern Village invite my elder brother the mole,

Let him lead the soldiers in his house, young and old.

To hunt down a tiger one needs a bunch of brothers;

Going into war one needs an army of fathers and sons.

In Western Farmstead go and call on White Mouse,

And let him raise the white battle flag of his house.

White helmets, white armor, and white battle gowns:

Each in a white battle gown will show his courage!

Go then to South Rapids and invite Ground Squirrel,

Please urge him to leave his hole with his whole family.

Even the greatest hero is no match for many hands;

The strongest foe cannot withstand this many mice!

In North Hill mobilize my brother Yellow Marten,¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ The yellow marten is the yellow-throated marten. The most common word for rodents, *shu* 鼠, is defined in ancient

Teeth of steel, the sharpest claws, and bulging eyes.
 He closely resembles that Huang Zhong¹¹⁵ of the past;
 If he will join the campaign, we definitely will win!”

Look at Old Mouse: in black gown and white belt his steely strength inspires awe, while in his hands he holds his three-foot long black blade. Recounting his thousand feuds and ten-thousand enmities, he proclaims his orders for the mobilization of troops and the departure of the army.

“Our archenemy the cat
 Has abused us too much!
 In the past he abused the five generations of our three ancestors,
 Annihilating our distant relatives, executing our close neighbors.
 Now again he has killed all members of the bride-fetching party,
 Aspiring to exterminate us by destroying all sprouts of our house.
 If we don’t kill our enemy Cat and his brothers,
 We really have no way to survive in this world.
 This time we go on campaign to take revenge,
 So let each of you move forward with courage.
 Those who brazenly disregard my strict orders,
 Won’t be spared by this three-foot long sword.”

The mice soldiers were all filled with growing hatred;
 Encouraging each other they whipped up their energy.
 Vast and grand, greatly imposing, squealing so loudly,
 This great army straightaway rushed to Kangton city.

dictionaries as “a small furry animal, living in holes,” and small predators such as weasels and martens therefore are also classified as *shu*, and many of these have the character *shu* as part of their name.

¹¹⁵ Huang Zhong 黄忠 (d. 220) was one of the generals serving under Liu Bei. As a common word “huang” means yellow.

Now tell how the cats, after breaking their fast,
All had gone back to Kangton to take a rest.
Each and every one recited the *Purring Sutra*,
Satisfied and well-fed they slept and they snored.
Suddenly they heard this clamor for murder,
This awakened those cats, all brothers together.
When they opened their eyes, they were scared,
The whole place was filled by armies of mice!
When enemies meet, there's no need for talk:
So the cats in one move rushed down to attack.
That very place was turned into a battleground:
Officer facing officer, and soldier facing soldier.
Old Mouse gave his orders with true brilliance:
The cats were surrounded from all four sides.
The cats might be strong, but the mice were many:
When cats killed one body, yet another emerged.
Seeking revenge, the mice were a ferocious force,
But vaunting their strength, the cats were all brave.
Squealing and screaming: bloody hairs flew about:
Impossible to determine which side was winning.
The yellow marten, all by himself, took on the old cat;
These two champions together rolled out of the gate.
The yellow marten pursued his attack with each step
And fiercely bit the old cat in the back of his neck.
That old cat rolled over the floor,
Fought himself free, and then fled for his life.
In one jump he ascended the wall and meowed,
Defeated in battle, he was wounded in his mouth.
The yellow marten then attacked Tigerstripes,

But Blackie immediately came to his assistance.
 Three champions: a battle both cunning and mean;
 The marten pursued his attack, risking his life!
 When it became clear the cats were going to lose,
 One suddenly heard a dog, ferociously barking.
 The armies of cats and mice were scared shitless.
 It was the brown dog that could not accept this.
 "Since ancient times it's the cat that eats the mice,
 How can those rats now presume to kill the cats?"
 Because he was filled with this great indignation,
 He rushed forward, without a thought about himself.
 Around his neck was tied a substantial iron chain,
 Behind his body he pulled one door of the gate.
 Rushing forward he needed only to bite once,
 And alas that yellow marten had lost his life!
 Forget about the marten that had lost his life,
 The cats too were so scared they lost their wits.
 The yellow dog only pursued the army of mice,
 He killed one after another most of their leaders.
 Only once the mice in a panic abandoned the battle,
 That yellow dog turned around and went back home.
 When the cat on the wall had seen all this clearly,
 He meowed repeatedly to express his gratitude.
 "It's always said that cats and dogs are enemies,
 But today the situation is quite obvious to all:
 If it had not been for your help, my brother dog,
 We cats alone wouldn't have been able to win."

The cat came down from the wall to give his orders,

The army of cats used this chance to counterattack.
Alas, all those mice, those many battalions of troops,
Not only didn't take revenge but also lost their lives.

Now tell that Old Mouse was really quite intelligent:
The crisis created ingenuity and roused his intuition.
When he saw that all its officers had died in this battle,
He played dead, all stretched out there in the courtyard.
When the cats had collected their troops and returned,
Only then did this mouse turn over and get on his feet,
But he had been frightened to his bones, scared in his gall,¹¹⁶
He had to force himself into action to make himself scarce.

A feud increased by hatred, a hatred grown by injustice:
His belly was filled by a hatred he had no way to dispel.
"My sons have all died in a most heart-rending manner,
So how do I alone have the face to survive unscathed?
Let me wager this old life and go and see King Yama
And have this case settled in the court of King Yama!"
Upon this thought he bored his way to the underworld
To seek redress for this wrong in the underworld court.
With great urgency he beat the drum in front of the hall,
Pressuring King Yama to take his seat behind the bench.
Old Mouse cried he had suffered an injustice and a wrong,
And in his accusation mentioned the cat and his brothers.

The rat's trembling voice and his face soaked in hot tears,

¹¹⁶ The gall is considered to be the seat of courage.

Aroused the sympathy of Lord Yama, who immediately
 Issued an order for arresting the souls of those animals,
 To arrest that family of cats, the whole bunch of brothers.
 When the two ghosts had received this order, they left;
 Carrying chains, they came to Kangton to get them all.
 The old cat stepped forward, and he told the two ghosts,
 “When a true hero acts, he alone takes all responsibility.
 You have no reason to arrest them, that bunch of brothers.
 You may take me with you to appear before King Yama,
 And I will argue my case—I’ll defy the rat’s accusations.”

A deepening darkness, one gust of wind:
 In the underworld court he appeared before Lord Yama.
 The hall of King Yama is darkened by gloom;
 While ghost-fires glimmer, black mists are swirling.
 Little ghosts guard the gate with blades in hand;
 Rows of five ghosts on both sides add to the terror.
 An angry King Yama, overcome by his rage, said,
 Intending to interrogate the cat there in his hall,
 “You Old Cat, now kneel down in this high hall;
 You Old Mouse, state the wrongs you suffered!”
 “This hateful cat in league with his brothers
 Relies on his strength to abuse other people:
 He annihilated my five generations of ancestors
 And exterminated distant kin, close neighbors.
 These cats behave recklessly and arbitrarily,
 And we mice have suffered for generations:
 During the day we don’t dare leave the gate,
 During the night we furtively make a living.

It always is but coarse grain and spilled rice,
Only rarely we eat nice dishes or spicy meats.
Day in day out we suffer hunger, starvation;
At every turn we're left without any reserves.
Trembling with fear we go outside our hole,
Bereft of courage we fear to meet our enemy.
To sum up, if by chance we come across our enemy,
Our bones are so much weakened we can't even flee.

When ready to die at times, the execution is slow:
These cats still want to play with you for a while.
They again step on you, turn you with sharp claws;
He frightens you out of your wits, scares your soul.
Dredging the moon from the sea, they throw you up:
Falling down on the ground, your whole body hurts.
Your eyes are all spinning and your head's in a daze,
You can't distinguish north and south, east and west.
When you steel your energy, try and make an escape,
Their sharp claws and steel teeth will finish you off.

Aiya! Dear King Yama,
We never have committed any crime against them,
So why are the cats behaving so cruelly toward us?
As a result, we mice have not a place where to hide,
Please, King Yama, take our side in your judgment!

What is most unbearable, what is most detestable
Is that these cats devoured the bride-fetching party;
They killed each and every battalion of us, the mice,
Idly hoping to annihilate our whole family of mice!

What enrages me even more is that old brown dog:
 The dog and the cat have always been archenemies.
 It was none of his business, so why did he get involved
 And also set out to kill the soldiers in the army of mice?
 Lord Yama, please be so kind as to save us, the mice,
 Take pity on us because of the wrongs we've suffered.
 Severely punish the cat and that bunch of brothers
 And make sure that that dog will keep to his station."

Having heard the account by the rat of his wrongs,
 The roaring rage of King Yama was like the thunder.
 "How brazenly behaved that cat and his brothers!
 Without any distinction wildly killing living beings!"
 He called the two ghosts and repeated his order,
 "Arrest the ghosts of those cats, that whole party!"

The old cat ascended the hall and bowed deeply,
 "King Yama, be so kind as to postpone this order!
 Your Excellency King Yama, please still your rage
 And wait a while before you arrest my brothers.
 Listen to me as I'll describe the behavior of mice
 So you, Lord Yama, can make an informed decision.
 Let's discuss this again: is he indeed a good animal
 Or should the cats annihilate the race of those rats?

Just look at it!

Its ears erect, and a pointed mouth;
 Thievish brows and thievish eyes.
 With sharp teeth and cutting claws

He causes disaster to common men.
During the day he stays in hiding hidden in his hole,
But at night he comes outside in order to harm men.
Clothing boxes and clothing chests,
Wooden implements and furniture;
All kinds of precious articles,
Written documents and scrolls,
Gauze and silk and other textiles,
Clothing made of wool or leather:
One day he has found a hole,
He will chew them to pieces!
Golden rice and white flour,
Rare delicacies and venison
Are swallowed and eaten at will,
Stolen and stealthily taken away.
Before it leaves it defecates and urinates,
And if people inadvertently consume that,
They'll suffer from cholera or diarrhea,
Or even worse, fall ill and lose their life.
His gall is so big it covers heaven,
There is no evil he won't commit.
The granaries and storage rooms
He destroys and ruins arbitrarily.
He walks all over the food grain;
He wrecks and ruins all articles.
In bedrooms and dining parlors
He also dares wreak his havoc.
He chews everything to pieces
And befouls bowls and plates."

When King Yama heard this, he was very much vexed
 And he loudly shouted to the cat that it should shut up,
 “You only enumerate the many mistakes of the mice,
 But never admit any crime that the cats have committed.
 Mice clearly never invaded or crossed you in any way:
 Why did you have to murder the bride-fetching party?
 You robbed who knows how many mice of their lives;
 You also cut off the only surviving sprout of Old Mouse.
 If one harms a life one has to pay it back with one’s life:
 This crime of the cat cannot be condoned in any way.”

Once Old Mouse had heard
 That he had won this case,
 He was dizzy with his success
 And he moved about at will.
 King Yama showed his rage:
 He put the blame on the cat.
 The cat, having lost the case,
 Bowed his head and thought,

“I would rather sacrifice myself to pay back the rat’s life
 Than that I would in any way implicate my dear brothers.
 The crimes of these wily rats have to be clearly reckoned,
 So let me risk my life and address King Yama once more.”
 “The Ten Abominations¹¹⁷ don’t allow the rodents to live,
 Their huge crimes fill the skies: they cannot be pardoned.

¹¹⁷ The most unnatural crimes, such as a parricide and regicide.

When a cat eats a mouse, he does so on behalf of the people.
These rodents clearly cannot be classed as good animals.
By the looks of it, the rats have suffered a grave injustice,
But in truth their own nature is even more cruel and bad.
They mobilized all battalions of the army of the rodents
In order to annihilate us cats in order to exact revenge.
But even the cat's archenemy, even the old brown dog,
Was filled with indignation when he saw this situation.
He was not involved in the conflict but he joined the fray,
Only by doing so he saved us cats, this bunch of brothers.
I beg you King Yama, please display your grace:
Do not demand his life must be repaid by the cat;
Please save our family of cats, this bunch of brothers.
Don't place any blame on the brown dog, my brother;
Take pity on the common people of all-under-heaven!"

When he heard this, King Yama thought to himself,

"This old cat now still continues to protest,
On the one side he's brutal, on the other side he's loyal.
But Old Mouse is really too pitiable:
His features are quite slippery, but he suffered a wrong.
I find it hard to reach a verdict in this tangled case,
So let me start for now by issuing this royal order."
He told his two ghosts to transmit his order,
To transmit this order to the dog, "Now listen clearly:
Considering his diligence in guarding house and yard,
That he fulfilled his duties in a fair and honest manner,
The charge of murder this one time will be dismissed—

We prohibit him from jumping into any idle conflict.”

The cat then kowtowed to King Yama to express its thanks,
 But when he turned around he saw no shadow of Old Mouse.
 He pricked his ears and fixed his eyes, searched all around,
 And noticed that the cloth on King Yama’s table was moving.
 If circumstances had been normal, he would have acted promptly,
 But as King Yama’s rage for the moment had not yet subsided,
 The old cat kept his breath and did not make single sound,
 And listened with attention to the judgment of King Yama.

“You cat, make sure to listen very clearly!

If mice and rats steal food to eat, they do so to survive,
 There is no need at all for you to want their lives on sight.
 Of course these rodents should not damage any clothes,
 But people too are to blame—they don’t take good care.”
 While listening the cat was also paying close attention,
 And noticed that the cloth by now was moving violently.
 Even though by now already one large hole had appeared,
 The cat still sat still, he didn’t dare to make a single move.

He also listened as King Yama went on with his verdict,

“Since ancient time the payment for a murder is a life.
 As you together killed that multitude of rats and mice,
 It will not do to pay for all these killings with one life.
 And that is why I’ll have your brothers all arrested!”
 He called for his two ghosts, “Now listen to this order!”

The cat could not contain himself for another second,
But stepped forward and kowtowed, interrupting him
By saying, "Now allow me to report to you King Yama:
Before you give this order first inspect your table cloth."
Lord Yama had no clue what this request was all about,
But when he bowed his head and looked, it was a fright!
Two holes, like bowls so large, showed in his table cloth
And now Old Mouse was also chewing on the table legs.

Would he accept this from the mouse? Or would he not?
King Yama was this moment overcome by a great rage.
He ordered his two ghosts to grab this rodent creature,
And in the hall he now revised his judgment in this case.
"How brazen is this little mouse! How insolent are his acts!
Here in King Yama's hall he dares act in this wanton way!
Indeed, these rats and mice are not good animals at all,
And I almost made the mistake of sentencing the cats.
Now merit and mistake and good and bad are clear:
These rats deserved to die, they suffered so no wrong!
Let me proclaim this order to the nations of the cats:
It is your duty in each life to catch and kill these mice!
It does not matter where and how you meet those rats—
Devour these mice with hide and hair in just one gulp!
You benefit the common people when you kill the rats:
Let harvests all be bountiful in years of Lasting Peace."

MORTAL AND IMMORTAL JUDGES

King Yama does not always serve as the judge in the case of the mouse or rat accusing the cat of murder. Sometimes other gods take his place. One god who replaces King Yama in some places is the local city god who, among his many functions, also serves as the local representative of the underworld bureaucracy in the world of light.¹¹⁸

In the first text presented in this chapter, *The Mouse Lodges and Accusation against the Cat* (*Laoshu tong mao gaozhang* 老鼠同猫告状), a short ballad from Guangdong, the mouse takes his case to the court of Judge Bao 包公, in the tradition of late imperial China the prefect of the metropolitan prefecture of Kaifeng, the capital of the Northern Song dynasty, during the reign of Emperor Renzong (the Humane Ancestor; r. 1023–1063). The character of Judge Bao is based on a certain Bao Zheng 包拯 (999–1062),¹¹⁹ whose actual tenure of the position of metropolitan prefect lasted only a little more than one year, but who in that short period established a lasting reputation for honesty, fearlessness and accessibility. Later legend made him the perfect “pure official” who will not hesitate to punish the high and mighty in righting the wrongs their victims have suffered. Later legend would also claim that Judge Bao sentenced the living during the day and the dead at night, and would provide him with several magic means to identify criminals. The number of cases solved by Judge Bao continued to grow with every century. While in some of these cases Judge Bao is alerted to a crime by the action of one or more animals, this would appear to be the only case in which Judge Bao judges a suit brought by one animal against another.

The ballad, composed with two exceptions in seven-syllable lines, is translated on the basis of the text included in *Complete Collection of Chinese Folksongs: Guangdong* (*Zhongguo geyao jicheng: Guangdong juan* 中国歌谣集成广东卷, 2007), 667–68. It is said to hail from Maoming city (in the southwestern part of the province), where it was performed by Li Shichang 黎世昌 and recorded by Yang Qiangwen 杨强文. The ballad can at least be traced back to the nineteenth century because a very crude woodblock edition of this ballad with only minor variants has been preserved.

¹¹⁸ *Zhongguo quyuan zhi: Sichuan zhuan* 2003, 115.

¹¹⁹ Wilt L. Idema 2011.

In the second text presented in this chapter, *The Rat Accuses the Cat* (*Laoshu gao mao* 老鼠告猫), a ballad from Sichuan, the judge is only described as "a great divine immortal" (*dashenxian* 大神仙) who (at least his statue) houses in a temple on top of an unidentified mountain. This ballad is basically written in ten-syllable lines. The text is identified as a short set-piece in the genre of *jinqianban* 金钱板. This genre has a history that can be traced back to the early nineteenth century. In this genre a single performer performs while standing, accompanying the sung sections of his texts by beating a clapper made of three pieces of bamboo that are roughly thirty centimeters in length. The translation is based on *A Selection of Traditional Set-Pieces in Jinqianban* (*Jinqianban chuantong shumao xuan* 金钱板传统书帽选, 1984), 113–123. This collection had been compiled and edited by Zou Zhongxin 邹忠薪, who was not only active as a performer but also published several texts. When his text includes near the end a section in which the gods themselves are ridiculed as powerless victims of the rodents, one wonders whether Zou may have added this section in the 1950s or later to make the text serviceable in the campaigns against "superstition" of the time. In an adaptation of this text as a play in Xiong Tongfu 熊同福, ed. *Zhuqin Ballads from Eastern Sichuan* (*Chuandong zhuqin* 川东竹琴, 2008), 182–89 such a section is missing, and the text moves immediately from the end of the statement of the cat to the judgment by the great divine immortal.

* * *

THE MOUSE LODGES AN ACCUSATION AGAINST THE CAT

A true piece of news / A real piece of news:
 The mouse and the cat hate each other deeply.
 The old mouse king there in the Eastern Capital
 Had no way to vent his injustice and suffering.
 The father mouse weighed three pounds and more,
 The mother mouse was reckoned at seven pounds.
 The mother mouse at that time was pregnant

And gave birth to a whole bunch of little mice.
 In order to celebrate the day that he was born,
 He left with his sons and daughters from his hole.
 When they passed in front of the house of Sir Cat,
 He ran into his archenemy, his enemy from birth.
 “How detestable is that tabby cat,
 He only wants to swallow us with hide and hair!”
 At that sight the mother mouse wept piteously,
 At that sight the father mouse was in a panic.
 The father mouse now was deeply disturbed
 And he found a master¹²⁰ to write his statement.
 When the statement had been fully written out,
 It was wrapped in a double, nay triple envelope.
 The mouse ran straight to Judge Bao’s office
 And there he quickly submitted that statement.
 The mouse and the cat both came to the court
 To hear how Judge Bao would judge the case.
 The mouse was the first to speak up and said,
 “I am the person who submitted the accusation.
 I accuse the cat of excessively cruel behavior:
 As soon as he sees us mice he’ll bite us to death.”
 The cat did not wait for Judge Bao’s questions,
 But shouted, “Lord Bao, please listen to the facts!
 That mouse chewed a fan of the master to shreds,
 And he also chewed a skirt of the lady to shreds.

120 The “master” here is a litigation master. The traditional judicial system did not know prosecutors and defense lawyers, but in late imperial China there were individuals who (against the law) for a fee provided legal advice and drafted accusations and counter statements. Some of them acquired a considerable reputation as legal experts and were much sought after. Macauley 1998.

He chewed a belt of the second master to shreds
And he destroyed a head scarf of the second lady.
And even if you say that these can all be repaired,
You still will see the traces of all that damage.
He also chewed through all the threads and cords—
Everything spread on the floor in a terrible mess.
And if the owner would discover him doing this,
He definitely would make an effort to catch him.
In the kitchen he'll chew through the ladle's handle
And eat a few pounds of the four baskets of beans.
Squeaking and squealing they'll create a ruckus
Until they are chased and run right up the beams.
From the eastern shed they scamper to the western shed,
Everywhere leaving the stench of pee and shit.
When behind the house bamboo sprouts appear,
They will all be chewed clean by these mice.
And if you plant kidney beans in front of your door,
He will bring sons and daughters to dig them up.
His crimes of destruction run well into millions,
So please, Lord Bao, let us know your decision."
Hearing this, Judge Bao was filled with great rage
And he had that Sir Mouse immediately tied up.
Not only had he Sir Mouse slapped in the face,
But he also had him whipped on his foot soles.¹²¹
That very moment Judge Bao set the cat free again
And told him to give all his efforts to catching mice.
As a reward he gave the cat three pieces of pork;

¹²¹ Tentative translation.

He also rewarded him with tens of pound of fish.
A silver plaque hung down from the tabby cat's neck
That brilliantly shone, even clearer than a lamp.
Escorted by a band of drums and pipes the cat
Returned home in victory to persecute rodents.

THE RAT'S ACCUSATION OF THE CAT

There was a certain
 Great divine immortal
 Whose heart was straight and just,
And among the immortals
 Each and every one
 Addressed him as Most Venerable.
Once upon a day
 This divine immortal
 Left his temple to go for a walk,
And so came across
 A little rat
 That was kneeling at the temple gate.
By the looks of it,
 It was very pitiable
 And it really wounded one's feelings,
How, with its mouth askew
 And its eyes all closed,
 It bitterly wept and kept crying,

"Lord Divine Immortal,

You definitely must

Greatly display your compassion.

On behalf of all

My family members

Please right the wrong we suffered!

My whole family

Lives in a hole in the ground,

Suffering no end of bitter grief;

Only late at night

We will crawl outside

And set out in search of food.

When in the kitchen

We eat some things,

They're all either raw or cold,

But after some thefts

The owner of the house

Came up with a black scheme:

He mixed arsenic

With cooked rice

So you could not see any trace,

And placed these bowls

In front of each

And every one of our holes.

When my old man

Had eaten this rice,

He was affected by the poison,

And when he died,
 He was as stiff as a plank,
 His four legs all stretched out.
When one scheme had worked,
 The owner of the house
 Decided on yet a second scheme,
Because he wanted
 To exterminate the rats,
 Removing the weeds with the roots!
He bought for his house
 A wooden contraption
 With tight and tense iron threads,
And on its iron hook
 He hung some bacon
 Or perhaps a little piece of meat.
He placed this in
 A pitch-black spot
 For the very purpose of seduction,
And when my uncle
 Saw this meat,
 He could only swallow his saliva.
He rushed over
 And spurred on by hunger
 Took a bite and tried to escape,
But slipping while running
 He suddenly heard
 That one sound of 'gotcha!'

When the spring

Broke his waist:

Pee flowed and shit spurted.

No way to wriggle free

As the contraption didn't budge,

For all his efforts he couldn't win.

Both my elder uncle

And my youngest uncle

Lost their lives in that contraption:

When I would later

See such a thing,

I would not even dare go and smell.

The owner of the house

Did even more things

Because his heart was full of cruelty.

He got bamboo tubes

And filled them with rice,

Also to do away with our kind.

If you bored into the tube

In order to eat the rice,

That bamboo tube starts to roll;

When the bamboo slipped,

You would only hear

That noise and that clamor!

Pressed on all sides,

You were pressed fast,

And your neck was tightly pressed;

No way to escape,
 No way to retreat:
 This was going to be your death.

My elder brother
 Lost his life
 In such a kind of bamboo tube:

In my family,
 Old and young,
 Quite a number of people died.

From then on
 My whole family
 Didn't dare show a shadow;

Ravished by hunger
 Each and everyone
 Survived on his own saliva!

While the owner
 Had already made
 Quite some effort towards our extermination,

He also brought home
 —Who could have thought so?—
 A cat, that terrible beast!

Now that damned cat—
 Between him and me
 There existed no enmity or feud

Like as if I
 Had dug up
 The graves of his ancestors!

But he would crouch

In some dark spot

And wait for the likes of us,

And seeing me

He snorted once,

Producing a roaring sound.

Covering me completely

He pressed me down

And then bit me in the head,

And he treated me

As if I were only

A little snack on the side.

When he had dragged me

Below one of the beds

He started leisurely to chew.

Eating one bite,

He snorted once,

Moving me this way and that.

When he had eaten one half,

He left the other half

And did not even eat all of me,

But when the owner

Saw my remains,

He was extraordinarily pleased!

Now if the cat

Had only finished me off,

That wouldn't have mattered,

But below the wall

My whole family

Is now dying from hunger.

My dear mother

Is eighty years old

And has no one to serve her:

My father has died,

My brother is gone—

On whom is she now to rely?

My brother's wife

Has lost her husband,

So who will take care of her?

She has no son,

She has no daughter,

She is left all alone without support.

My youngest sister

Is only eighteen,

And is still quite young in years;

Her mother-in-law

Is living upstairs

But she hasn't yet become the bride.

That little cat

In eating me

Was bereft of all common decency—

Lord Divine Immortal,

Please right these wrongs

On behalf of me and my family!"

When the divine immortal
 Had heard these words,
 His heart was filled with rage,
And at the temple gate
 He repeatedly
 Cursed out the cat in these words,
"You damned plague,
 With your great strength
 You do not keep to your station!
Why did you have
 To kill the mouse
 In such a heart-rending manner?"
He told the rat,
 "There's no need to weep,
 Just wait here inside the temple,
I will have that cat
 Immediately brought
 Here to the gate of the temple!"
Then he turned around
 And with all speed
 Transmitted his command,
Ordering the god of wind
 As well as the god of fire
 To go and arrest the offender,
"I allow you one hour
 To capture that cat
 And bring him in for questioning;

Go as fast as you can,
Return as fast as you can,
You cannot rest for a moment!"

When Wind and Fire

Heard these words,
They shivered in their hearts,

Because they feared

That in arresting the cat
They might displease the great god.

This scoundrel

Ran quite fast,
And also was quite intelligent,

So they feared that

If they couldn't catch him,
Their crime wouldn't be minor!

The god of wind said,

"Now don't panic,
This isn't much of a problem.

I've come up

With an excellent plan
That definitely will have success.

We'll take along

A dead weather-loach
That gives off quite a stench,

But on smelling

The stench of the fish
That cat will immediately come.

If we have

 This fine plan,

 We will lure the cat into the trap,

And once we have fooled him,

 We will be able

 To enjoy the fruits of our labor."

The god of fire said,

 "Yes, that is great,

 Let's quickly set out on our way,

Because we can only

 Come back here again

 Once we'll have captured the cat."

Because of this cat

 They trekked through

 The provinces of Yunnan and Guizhou;

Then touring Sichuan,

 They left Chengdu

 And so arrived in Baoning.

Descending to Tongnan,

 They trekked through Hechuan

 And eventually arrived in Chongqing;

Following the Yangzi,

 They then also

 Passed through Wanxian and Poulung.

They searched everywhere,

 Sought it in all directions,

 But found nowhere a trace or shadow,

And in desperation

The gods Wind and Fire

Had no single tear left in their eyes.

As a last resort

They only could

Enter the house of some family,

And inside the house

Ask the parrot

Whether he could be of assistance.

The parrot replied,

“That little cat

A moment ago crossed the roof,

And when he jumped down

Gave me such a scare

I was covered in cold sweat all over.

He then here

On this cushion

Curled himself up for a while—

Most likely

He is in the kitchen,

There you will have to take a peek.

This cat

Throughout his life

Has been most afraid of the cold,

That's why he always

Will nourish his spirit

By warming himself in front of the stove.”

When Wind and Fire

Heard these words,

They were very pleased in their hearts,

They said "Many thanks!"

And quickly went off

To go to the door of the kitchen.

The god of fire

Said to the god of wind,

"On no account mess this up!

If we wake up

This little beast,

We will be unable to catch him!"

On arriving at

The door of the stove,

They carefully observed the situation,

And saw the cat

Curled up inside the stove,

Having closed both his eyes.

Clanking and clanging:

That sudden noise

Woke up the cat from its dreams.

Aiya! Its neck

Now was shackled

By an iron chain!

As the little cat

Was pulled forward

He asked while they were walking,

“My dear friends,

What is the reason

You’ve shackled me in chains?

I, this cat,

While on earth

Always have led a decent life!”

The god of wind said,

“We have received

An order of the Divine Immortal!”

The god of fire said,

“The little rat

Has accused you of murder!”

The cat replied,

“That’s a small matter,

For which I will happily answer.

If I devour him

And exterminate his race,

That is a boon to all mankind.

If you don’t believe me,

Just wait a moment

And listen to what I’ll have to say:

Even with half of my mouth

Covered and distorted,

My plea will easily win in this case.”

Wind and Fire

Took the cat with them

Up to the top of the mountain,

And they freed the cat

From its shackles and ropes

Only after entering the temple.

The Divine Immortal

On seeing the cat

Beat his table filled with fury,

And shouted at him,

"You little cat,

You damned despicable creature,

For what reason

Did you kill those mice

In this way beyond any measure?

You not only harmed him,

But you also murdered

His whole family, old and young!

Now here in this temple

You have to quickly

Confess according to the facts:

If one word is wrong,

Only half a word false,

I will not show any mercy at all!"

Now this kitten

Did not panic

And replied, "Allow me to speak!

Lord Divine Immortal,

Please still your rage

And listen carefully to my words.

Have that rat

Brought into the court

For cross-examination in this hall,

And who is right

And who is wrong

Will become clear by itself.”

The Divine Immortal

Nodded his head

To show his agreement for now,

And told the god of fire

To bring the rat

Then and there into the great hall.

When that kitten

Saw the old rat,

He snorted noisily, filled with rage,

And shouted loudly,

“You little rat,

You damned despicable creature!

All your life

Was filled with crime,

But you refuse to accept the guilt,

And now you are dead

You turn around and

Falsely accuse a good man like me.”

When saying this,

He became so furious

That he couldn't suppress his hatred

And loudly snorting

He would have loved

To chew his three souls to death!

That little rat

Was so scared

He was squeaking and ran around,

"Lord Divine Immortal,

Just look at the way

In which he storms and carries on!"

When the Immortal

Saw this situation,

He was even more filled with rage,

"Little kitten,

You can't

Behave in this outrageous manner!

Who commits crimes?

Who has any merits?

Provide me with a detailed account:

Before this court

You are not allowed

To engage in a fistfight together!"

That little kitten

Shook its fur,

And said, "Allow me to speak!

That little rat

Is indeed

A damned despicable creature.

Forming a family

And transmitting its kind

He works with amazing speed.

Each single litter

Is made up of nine

Or at least seven young rodents,

And producing so many

It is impossible for each

To hide his body and shadow.

As they cannot stay,

They devise a way

To divide their family in two,

So they occupy

Each and every house

Throughout all-under-heaven.

Big and small boats

At the riverside

Are filled with their offspring,

And they dig a hole

Below the stove

To make camp, ready for battle.

During the day

They stay in their hole,

All curled up and taking a nap,

But during the night

When people are sleeping

They venture outside the hole.

They enter the kitchen

To steal there the food—

Raw or cold, they don't care!

And while they are eating

They keep on shitting,

A stench that is unbearable!

That rat-shit

They produce

Is truly dirty in the extreme,

And people who

Unwittingly eat it,

Will grow sheep-wool boils.¹²²

Stealing cooking oil

They sit on top of the bottle

As if they are sitting on a bench;

They drop their tail

And stir it a while,

Then lick it as clean as can be.

A whole jug of oil

They are able

To lick empty in this manner,

And the opening

Is covered by

A layer of hair of these rats.

Now people who

Unwittingly eat these,

Will promptly develop an illness,

¹²² Tentative translation.

And in the worst cases

It may even happen

That this will cause their death!

They steal chicken eggs

And steal goose eggs

That they carry around or roll,

And when they break them,

And slip and fall down,

They eat them there on the spot.

Having eaten their fill,

They should hide themselves

And make themselves scarce,

But why do they

Run all over the place

And go on to cause damage?

Entering the study

They chew the books

Of those students to pieces

And have to wreck

The spectacle case

Of the teacher—how pitiable!

Your newest hat

Will be chewed by them

To pieces from brim to top;

Your finest shoes

Will be robbed by them

By their gnawing of the heels.

If you have new clothes,
 They will chew the sleeves
 And they'll chew the collars,
And if young girls
 Have fine headdresses,
 They'll pull them to threads.
They chew on boxes,
 They chew on chests,
 And they chew on the benches;
The roof boarding
 Is so messed up
 It's covered by clouds of dust.
On your cushions
 Some mothers and daughters
 Open the attack and crash the lines;
On top of the curtains
 Some fathers and sons
 Train their skills and drill the troops.
The old grandma
 Hisses at the rats
 And grabbing a stick beats around;
The old grandpa
 Imitates a cat's meow,
 Creating a ruckus till early dawn.
You damned plague,
 You pester people so much
 That each and everyone hates you,

And the next morning

The owner of the house

Keeps on cursing me without end.

Pointing at me, he'll say,

'You damned plague,

What on earth do you think you do?

You damned lazybones,

You don't do a thing,

Not earning your ready-made meals!

Believe it or not,

But this old man

Will make sure you'll suffer hunger!

What I have said,

I will do, just look!

This time I sure am serious like hell!

Each and every day

He inspected the rice bowls

To make sure they were utterly empty,

And I grew so starved

I lacked the strength

Even to move the rice steamer about.

I had no option

But to hang around

When I saw them having their meal,

But the owner

Kicked me then in the back

With the sharp point of his foot.

After three days

Of having no food,

I was truly in desperate straits,

Because I was, alas!

So hungry and starved

That my brain was one dizzy fog.

At my wit's end

I only then

Reached the firm decision that I

Would catch rats

And eat them all,

Not leaving a single one alive!

Now these mice

Are quite small

And can flee and run very fast,

While I, the cat,

Am quite big

And cannot outrun these rodents.

Their holes are small,

So they can enter,

But I cannot enter their holes,

But I've come up

With a fine plan

For capturing mice and rats.

I crouch down

In a pitch-black spot

And there then I sit and wait

Till I see them

Far away from their hole.

Then I snort just only once:

The one mouthful of sputum

That I blow out, robs them

Of both their spirit and soul.

Their four legs fail,

So they cannot run,

And my maw finds an easy prey.

Completely covering him

I manoeuver him so

That I hold his head in my maw

To make it impossible

For him to roll around

And suddenly bite me in my eyes.

Holding him in my maw

I drag him under a couch

And there I start my slow chewing.

With each bite,

I roar loudly,

Proclaiming my hatred repeatedly.

From that moment

The owner of the house

Was indeed quite happy with me:

At each meal

He would give me

A large serving of oil and fish.

And he would say

That when I had eaten

The whole family of those rats,

That even when I

By eating those rats

Had exterminated their kind,

I would have committed no crime!

This then is

The full confession

In honest words, of me, the cat.

Lord Divine Immortal,

You definitely will see

Merit and fault quite clearly!"

When the Immortal

Had heard these words,

He was both happy and angry,

He was happy

Because of the cat,

Angry because of demon rat.

Come to think of it,

These little rats

Had a despicable character.

By the looks of it,

The damage that was done

Was all due to these creatures!

"Why did you come

The year before last

To chew on the top of my crown?

And why did you come

 Last year once again

 To chew on the pupils of my eyes?

During the winter,

 You, little plague,

 Were afraid of the freezing cold

And pulled out my beard

 To fill out your nest,

 Abusing my divine authority!

When people later

 Came to this temple

 To pay their respect to the gods

And saw me

 Without any beard,

 They thought I'd lost my power!"

The god of fire

 Quickly then said,

 "Your Honor, allow me to speak.

When we talk

 About those rats,

 I suffered an even greater grief.

Once upon a day

 Yang Dahan

 Came by to repay his holy vow,

And the gifts

 He put on the table

 Weighed half a pound, no less!

But when he had kowtowed

And struggled up again,

No trace of the meat was left.

When Yang Dahan

Saw the meat was gone,

He was overcome by rage

And loudly shouted,

'Here in this temple

Living ghosts dine on humans!'

When outside the temple

He would out on the street

Meet a man, he would tell this,

And would say,

'That full half a pound of meat

Was swallowed whole by that god of fire!

Which fellow

Would from now on

Still pay his respects to the gods?

If you want to

Honor a bodhisattva,

I curse all your ancestors!'

They ate the meat

But I suffered a scolding,

That really is hurting me deeply—

Lord Divine Immortal,

Judge according to the law

And don't show any mercy!"

When the Immortal

Had heard these words,

He angrily gnashed his teeth,

And shouted loudly,

“You damned rat,

Your crimes are not minor!

You brazenly

Wanted to deceptively

Confuse my sight and hearing;

You brazenly

Committed evil

But accused a good person!”

He instructed Wind,

“Submit that rat

Again to the most severe torture.”

He instructed Fire,

“Escort that rat:

He’s condemned to serve in the army.”

He instructed the cat,

“Rise to your feet

Because I have something to tell you.

As fast as you can

You must leave this temple

And help the people of this world.

As of today

You still will have

To exert yourself in catching rats,

You definitely must

Exterminate those rats,

Remove the weeds with their roots!

For your hard work

In catching cats

You will receive the following reward:

At all three meals

I entitle you

To three weather-loaches, no less."

THE JADE EMPEROR AS JUDGE

The Mouse Accusing the Cat (*Laoshu gao limao*), the second and longest of the following two versions of the court case of the cat against the mouse, was composed in 1978 by Kang Yunxiang 康云祥 (b. 1946) and his elder colleague Fan Rulin 樊如林 (1925–2010), two well-known performers from Linxian in Shanxi province. It is translated on the basis of the text printed in Kang Yunxiang, *Telling and Singing without End: A Selection of Performance Pieces by Kang Yunxiang, Part One* (*Shuoshuo changchang meige wan: Kang Yunxiang quyiy zuopin xuan shang* 说说唱唱没个完康云祥曲艺作品选上, 2009), 23–33. Kang Yunxiang had long experience as an actor in the district local opera troupe; he and Fan Rulin performed together on occasion, and this text is one of their cooperative writing ventures. Most of the text is written in lines of seven-syllable verse, but when it comes to the court case itself most of the text is composed in ten-syllable lines. This part of the text probably is indebted to “the script of a blind folk performer” that is mentioned in the short note at the beginning. From Linxian we have also an anonymous “traditional short piece” (*chuantong xiaoduan* 传统小段) on the underworld court case of the mouse against the cat. This text, *The Mouse Accusing the Cat* (*Laoshu gao limao*) in Wang Hongting 王洪廷, comp., *Village Culture from Linxian* (*Linxian xiangtu wenhua* 临县乡土文化, 2009), 230–32, is throughout composed in ten-syllable lines and limits itself to the confrontation of the mouse and the cat in the court of King Yama. While we cannot be sure that this was the version that Kang and Fan rewrote, it has been translated here to show how far versions of the same tale can differ even within the same district.

In Kang Yunxiang’s rewriting the ballad is expanded by a prequel that narrates the underhanded way in which the mouse achieved the official rank (symbolized by a black gauze cap) of the first place among the animals that serve as the twelve birth-year images. This is based on well-known folktales that tell how the mouse cheated on his good friend the cat by drugging him, and how he became the biggest animal by jumping on top of the ox.¹²³ The sudden rise in status of the mouse then also enables him and his wife to organize the wedding of their son, which is disrupted by the cat when the music of the wedding procession wakes him up from his drug-induced sleep. Because the competition for a position

¹²³ Idema 2019, 31–34.

as birth-year image and for the first place in the ranking of the animals is organized by the Jade Emperor in heaven, the court case of the mouse against the cat is also moved to the celestial Lingxiao 凌霄 Palace. The court of the Jade emperor is of course not filled by terrifying demons like the court of King Yama, but by gods and immortals. Conspicuous among these deities are the many warrior gods, among whom Nezha 哪吒 and Erlang 二郎 take first place. Both gods are best known from the sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the West* (*Xiyou ji*).¹²⁴ In place of Oxhead and Horseface it is here Nezha and Erlang who are dispatched to summon the soul of the cat, which they do most politely. If the mouse who plans to curry the favor of the Jade Emperor perhaps suggests the members of the Gang of Four, it may be meaningful that the Jade Emperor dwelling in his celestial palace is said to live in ignorance of the conditions on earth below.

* * *

Anonymous

THE ACCUSATION OF THE MOUSE AGAINST THE CAT

Ever since Pangu

Opened heaven and earth

And so established Qian and Kun,¹²⁵

So we saw hills and streams,

The ten-thousand creatures,

And the generations of humans.

¹²⁴ Nezha is also a major character in the somewhat later novel *The Creation of the Gods* (*Fengshen yanyi* 封神演义). See Meir Shahar 2015.

¹²⁵ Qian and Kun are the names of two of the Eight Hexagrams. As emblems of respectively Yang and Yin they represent in combination the whole cosmos.

First the Three Rulers,

Then the Five Thearchs:¹²⁶

Who doesn't know about them?

Yao, Shun and Yu,

And Tang of the Shang:

Each of them was enlightened!¹²⁷

But I will not tell

The affairs of the world,

Those struggles for power and status,

Let me tell the tale

Of that small matter

Of the rat's accusation against the cat.

Those little rodents,

Once left in this world,

Caused damage all over the place:

By stealing grain

And chewing on clothes

They caused destruction and damage.

But once the cat

Had been left in this world,

It was loved by each and every one:

It could pierce hills,

It could jump across creeks,

And climb up trees, up to the clouds!

¹²⁶ The Three Rulers and Five Thearchs were the rulers of the world in a mythic past.

¹²⁷ Yao, Shun, and Yu were virtuous rulers in a distant past. Yao ceded the throne to Shun because of his great filial piety, and Shun ceded the throne to Yu after the latter had dealt with the aftermath of the Flood. Yu became the founder of the Xia dynasty (first half of the second millennium BCE) when he was succeeded by his son. Following the collapse of the Xia, Tang became the founder of the Shang dynasty (fifteenth to eleventh century BCE).

If one creature appears,

 There's another to subdue it:

 The cat was there to devour the rats—

Its claws like hooks,

 Its eyes like bells,

 And its whiskers like awls of steel!

When the little cat

 Was dozing off

 While sleeping on top of the table,

It suddenly heard

 Below the table

 An almost inaudible squeaking sound.

When it fixed its stare,

 It observed the mice

 Haunt the room and prowl about:

Leaving their nest,

 Entering their holes,

 They were coming and going in numbers.

Once the little cat

 Had seen this crowd,

 His heart was overcome by rage,

And his bronze-bell eyes

 As large as oil-lamps

 Scared the mice out of their minds.

With a tiger's might

 He made himself large

 By fully stretching his supple waist,

And in one whoosh

He jumped down from the table,
Blocking the entrance of their hole.

Having caught

This little mouse
He carefully chewed him to pieces;

Having grabbed

That little mouse
He swallowed him whole in one go.

That little mouse

Facing a dark storm
Went off to lodge an accusation

And arrived

In the court of darkness
Where he appealed to King Yama.

That little mouse

Stepped forward
And knelt down on all fours;

He held his complaint

High above his head,
While tears were brimming his eyes.

The third associate judge

Accepted the complaint
Which was read by King Yama.

“Little mouse,

Why do you lodge
An accusation against the cat?”

The little mouse stated,

"This is because

Our whole family

Has suffered a grave injustice,

I implore Your Majesty

On behalf of us all

To right the wrong we suffered!

My father was a Rat,

My mother was a Rat,

For generations we've been Rats,

And our family lives

Below Corner of the Wall

At the Lotus Flower Grotto Gate.

Among the twelve

Birth-year animals

We occupy one of the positions,

And there is no one

Of the common people

Who doesn't respect and revere us.

Between that cat and me

There never existed

Any festering feud or old hatred,

So he had no cause

To exterminate

All relatives living at our house.

He devoured my brother,

Leaving my sister-in-law

To a widow's life in her room;

He devoured my sister

Who still quite young

Hadn't yet been united in wedlock.

My little nephew,

Three months old,

Has no one to take care of him;

Eighty years of age,

My dear old mother

Is wounded at heart by this grief.

That little cat

Over there in the world

Commits no end of evil crimes,

May you

King Yama

Crush his bones, smash his body!"

When King Yama

Had heard these words,

He was overcome by a towering rage

And shouted,

"That little cat

Abuses his power to abuse others!

Soul-summoning ghosts,

Quickly come over here,

So I can give my orders to you:

Hasten to

The world of light

And arrest the soul of that cat!"

When these ghosts

Had received their orders,

They didn't dare tarry or linger:

Using a dark storm

They quickly arrived

And greeted the gods of the doors.

When the door gods saw

The summons they showed,

They didn't dare obstruct their way:

Clanging *hualala*

The iron handcuffs

Shackled the soul of that cat!

The soul of the cat

Was taken to

The court of shade in the earth,

And when the cat

Saw King Yama,

It didn't dare raise its voice.

King Yama shouted,

Shouted, "You cat, now listen!

Now today

This little mouse

Has lodged an accusation against you,

And he wants

That justice is done

In the case of him against you."

Once the little cat

Heard that the mouse

Had lodged an accusation against him,

He stared at

That little mouse

With an insuppressible burning rage.

The cat stated,

“King Yama,

Please listen

As I will provide a detailed explanation,

And then decide

In all fairness

Who of us two is right and who wrong.”

That mouse

Immediately

Interrupted the little cat and declared,

“In the world above

That little cat

Entraps and harms the common folk!

Inside the guest rooms,

On top of the chests,

There’s nowhere he doesn’t roam;

Whether it’s food,

Or whether it’s drink,

He is treated like a superior guest;

Having eaten his fill,

Having drunk his fill,

He doesn’t do any serious work.

During the daytime

He closes his eyes

And doesn’t display any energy,

But once it's night,

He definitely wants

To sneak around all over the place,

And once on his way

He makes no sound,

Exactly like a thief on his mission.

During the winter

He hides under a blanket,

Now coming out, and then going in,

And on top that

Some big girl

Will use his body to warm her feet!

That little cat

Has lost all conscience

And is universally hated by people,

And against all reason

He also devoured

All relatives who lived at my house."

When the little cat

Heard these words,

He felt quite annoyed in his heart,

"Little mouse,

You should not utter

Words that are bound to hurt others!

As for eating things

And harming the people,

Your crimes are by far the worst—

Let King Yama

Reach his verdict

Who is right and who is wrong.”

The little mouse

Cunningly defended his actions

And was unwilling to admit defeat,

“Little cat,

You shouldn’t

Concoct an unfounded accusation!

Tell me, which family’s

Mill stone and grinder

May I have devoured?

Which family’s

Stone weights and iron pots

May I have devoured?

Little cat,

You shouldn’t try

To trick me and harm me—

May King Yama

Punish his crime

And annihilate his whole family!”

The little cat

Was so enraged

That his hairs stood all on end;

His head went dizzy,

His eyes saw stars,

Blue veins stood out on his neck.

"The farmers

Sweat blood

To plow and sow and harvest;

In order to have

More grain to eat

They put in strenuous effort.

But when in fall

The straw is piled up

And the grain enters the granary,

You are the first

To taste the harvest

Before the farmer has had a chance.

You steal his grain,

You steal his rice,

And you also stealthily drink the oil,

And wherever you eat,

You leave your shit,

A foul stench that perfumes people!

Then there was

A young daughter-in-law

Who only recently joined the family,

Who after dinner

Didn't properly close

The big vat that's filled with meat:

After eating from it,

You also had to

Cover that meat in shit and pee;

You befouled it with dirt,
 You befouled it with ashes,
 And also transmitted diseases.

The mother-in-law
 Beat her son's wife
 And also roundly cursed her out:

The daughter-in-law
 Suffered such abuse
 That she hung herself and died.

During the day
 You hide yourself
 Inside that cozy nest of yours,

But at night
 You all leave your hole
 To cause damage for the people.

Let's not talk
 Of your stealing of grain
 And ruining rice and vegetables,

But why do you have
 To chew gauze skirts
 To pieces in the girls' chambers?

When you've eaten your fill,
 When you've drunk your fill,
 And idle have nothing else to do,

You sharpen your teeth
 By chewing through boxes
 And also chewing on door posts.

The best houses

Are visited by you

Until they are filled with holes,

This means that you

Hate them so much

You'll chew your teeth to shreds.

It's only because

The common people

Have no other way to handle you,

That they cherish me,

This little cat,

Hoping I'll give it my best effort.

My owner

Raises me

Until I am all full-grown,

And then tells me

To exterminate mice

As a repayment for his good care.

You proudly claim

That the common people

Treat you with honor and respect,

But why is it then

That during daytime you

Don't dare be spotted by people?

But why is it then

That on crossing the street

You are cursed and beaten by all?

If I am so bad,
 Then why am I
 Liked and beloved by all people?
May you, King Yama,
 Reach a decision
 In this case on the basis of reason,
And whoever broke the law,
 Annihilate that person
 And the relatives who live in his house!"
When King Yama
 Had heard to the end
 This long exposition by the cat,
He turned his head
 But didn't see
 Where the mouse might have gone.
When he bowed his head
 And carefully looked
 Below the table at which he was seated,
That little mouse
 Was busily chewing
 On the side of the cloth around the table.
In this brand new
 Cloth for his table
 It had chewed some holes,
And in this pure
 Great hall
 His foul stench rose to heaven.

King Yama's

Hall-stirring gavel

Came down with a bang,

"You, this damned

Little mouse,

Are without law or heaven!

Even in my office

You have the temerity

To wreak destruction at will,

So in the world of men

You must even be

More reckless and shameless.

You little cat,

You come forward,

So I may formally appoint you:

I appoint you as

The Catcher of Mice,

To that office with all its rights.

During the day

You'll recite your sutras

And rest on top of the table,

While at night

You will sleep

With a beauty under one blanket.

You little mouse,

You come forward,

To hear my punishment for you:

You will sink into

The eighteenth layer of hell,
Never again to ascend the streets.”

King Yama's verdict

Was fair and impartial
And was praised by the people:

It left us with

Cats devouring mice
From generation to generation.

Kang Yunxiang

THE MOUSE ACCUSING THE CAT

This work was composed in 1978 by the author in cooperation with Fan Rulin. Using the script of a blind folk performer as its basis, it was completed by expanding the contents and revising it, with the aim of moralizing society so people will be trustworthy and honest.

Now I have tuned the strings of my instrument
I'll tell you the tale of the mouse accusing the cat.
Heaven fears it will be covered by black clouds,
Those black clouds fear that a storm will rise up.
A storyteller fears that his audience will be small,
An opera singer fears that few will come to watch.
Things fear to get broken / people fear to grow old,
And ice cones fear most to be fried on the stove.

Sheep fear the wolf / Wolves fear the leopard,
And the mouse lives in fear of a little black cat.

But once long ago the old mouse and the cat
Lived in harmony and were the best of friends.
They talked together / They laughed together,
And at night they also often slept together.
Then one day
The Jade Emperor issued an imperial edict
And summoned Golden Star Great White.¹²⁸
"I order you to go to the mortal world below.
Summon the flying birds and running beasts
And tell them to come all to Lingxiao Palace.
I want to select the twelve birth-year images
I want to see for myself / And know for myself
And then determine their rank on my own."

With this order Great White left Lingxiao,
Riding five-colored clouds through the sky.
Standing on his cloud he looked downward
Where smoke issued from each hearth.¹²⁹
The rooster crowed, / The chicken cackled,
And magpies jumped about in their trees.
The fathers sang, / the mothers laughed:
Each family in this world was quite busy.

¹²⁸ Great White is the deified planet Venus. As the evening star, Venus is associated with the West and with the element metal (gold).

¹²⁹ Smoke rising from cooking fires designates a peaceful society.

The Golden Star Great White then spoke,
 “Flying birds and running beasts, all listen.
 The Jade Emperor in his Lingxiao Palace
 Will select the twelve birth-year images.
 He’ll watch for himself, / know for himself,
 And personally declare the ranking order.
 You all have to arrive early and on time—
 If you are late, there’s no second chance.”

The birds and the beast were all informed,
 And they excitedly ran off to tell all others.
 Some of them flew, / Some of them hopped,
 The squealing and crying created a ruckus.
 The flower-red rooster ran through the yard,
 And noticed a mouse that was stealing a date.
 Seeing this, the rooster was quite annoyed,
 And, though vexed, he feigned friendliness.
 “Your capabilities are truly not that small,
 All of the birds and beasts now know.
 You must go to heaven for the competition:
 I am sure you’ll be picked as number one!”

Hearing this, the mouse pursed his lips and smiled
 And addressed elder brother the rooster as follows,
 “Last night I dreamed a cannon was fired,
 And today you bring me this happy news.

When I will wear that black gauze cap,¹³⁰
I will take you to heaven to hop around.
I'll be riding a horse, / be carried in a chair:
Just look what kind of status I will enjoy!"
Hearing this, the rooster stealthily smiled,
"Who would want to be your acquaintance?"
Stretching its tail / and turning his head
The mouse then left to find the black cat.

The mouse had intended to inform the cat:
The more he thought, the less wise it seemed.
"If that black cat will also be there in the sky,
His martial arts will be much better than mine.
Not only will I stand out, / but the cat will do so:
I must fear that I'll come home with nothing.
The best will be to play a little trick on him,
I'll ask him to drink some wine to celebrate.
I will put some sleeping powder in his wine,
And get him so drunk that he'll not wake up."
Having made up his mind, he smiled slyly,
"This method will truly work without fail."

Back home he showed a smile on his face
And said to that black cat, "Dear brother,
You have found a fitting partner for my son,
As match-maker you labored day in, day out.
Holes in your pants, / Holes in your jacket:

¹³⁰ A gauze cap signals that the wearer has received an official appointment.

You have fully worn out all your energy.
 The two of us are truly the best of friends,
 I never will be able to forget your service.
 When I went into the city earlier today,
 I bought some alcohol that's really great.
 I've fried some sliced pork with greens
 And invite you, brother, to have a drink."

The cat said,
 "I will take none, / I will take none,
 You know how little drink I can hold.
 If I drink a drop, I'll collapse in a stupor
 And then miss tomorrow's competition!"

The mouse filled one glass with wine
 And again addressed the cat, "Brother,
 In arranging this marriage for my son,
 You've exhausted yourself in this task.
 That's why I've invited you over today,
 So you have to drink at least one or two.
 We two are good friends and relatives,
 So it won't do if you don't drink two.
 If you go to heaven with a few drinks,
 I am sure you will gain the first place."

When the cat was confronted with this,
 He kept on pondering the situation:
 If he would drink a glass of alcohol,
 He was afraid he might miss the event;
 If he would not drink even one glass,

He would disappoint his friend mouse.
After much deliberation he decided
That it would be okay if he drank one.
Having decided so, he accepted a glass
Which he then gulped down in one go.

When the cat had drunk this one glass,
The medicine immediately took effect.
His head became heavy, / his feet light,
His eyes turned dark and he fell asleep.
Stretched out on the floor, motionless:
Only now that old mouse felt elated!
The mouse was so happy he laughed,
"This time I've bamboozled the cat!"
Now running, / Now hopping,
He registered his name at Lingxiao.

Heaven's drum boomed / Golden bells sounded:
The Jade Emperor entered Lingxiao Palace Hall.
Nezha and Erlang both held swords in their hands,
Celestial troops and officers were truly numerous.
The two generals Heng and Ha looked ferocious,
The four Heavenly Kings were standing akimbo.
The twenty-four lunar lodge gods had arrived too,
And then there were Harmony and Immortality.

His Majesty the Jade Emperor looked down
And inspected each and every one personally.
Flying birds and running beasts all had come,

But the only one he did not see was the cat.
 So he immediately questioned the old mouse,
 “Why has that black cat not yet arrived here?”
 The mouse knelt down and came up with a lie,
 “I truly have not the slightest idea about that,
 But some people say that he is quite arrogant
 And has no respect for any black gauze cap.
 When he heard that he was ordered to report,
 He went back home and lay down to sleep.”
 Hearing this, the Jade Emperor was enraged,
 “Those who did not arrive are taken down!”
 He personally looked / and personally checked:
 The twelve birth-year images were lined up.
 The ox was the biggest, / the mouse the smallest:
 Once he heard this, the mouse was enraged!
 Since birth this mouse had a large ambition:
 He came up with a vile and villainous scheme.
 He started to holler, / He started to scream,
 And cried, “Your Majesty, please listen to me!
 Do not belittle me because my body is small,
 My martial arts are quite extensive indeed.
 My mind is agile, / My hands are crafty,
 I cannot only jump but I also can run.
 I cannot only chew, / But I also can bite:
 I am able to protect this empire of yours.
 Here in heaven are no end of immortals,
 So let’s have an examination once again.
 Who is the biggest / And who the smallest—
 Let’s ask those immortals who is the best!”

The Jade Emperor said,
"No need to scream! / No need to scream!
Let's all go out and have a second trial.
The twelve birth-year images left the Palace,
They lined up side by side and had a race.
The old mouse squeaked only one time
And then jumped on the back of the ox!
The immortals all said, "This is superb!
This mouse truly has a trick on his sleeve.
This mouse is really not a small animal,
By the looks of it, he has major abilities."
The mouse hurried forward, knelt down,
And asked the Jade Emperor for his title.
His Majesty the Jade Emperor agreed,
And since then the mouse is number one.

Once the mouse wore the black gauze cap,
He was so elated he had no eye for bump or fall.
When he returned home in this glory,
His whole family wore a broad smile.
His wedded wife / addressed him,
"Now let's quickly call for the match-maker!
Our son now is not a little boy anymore,
It's time for him to bring home the bride.
We should make use of this fine moment
To celebrate a lucky wedding ceremony."

The mouse, so happy his eyes popped out,
 Immediately told all males in his family,
 "Put on new clothes, / Put on a new hat,
 Quickly prepare for the wedding event!
 Rinse the rice / And bake the cakes,
 Fill the dumplings and knead the flour.
 Slice the bean curd and have it fried,
 Burn the apricot alcohol to the north,
 And quickly cook the vegetable dishes.
 Our relatives and friends are not few,
 They must all drink enough to get drunk!"
 The young groom / Was quite dashing!
 Baring his teeth, his face was all smiles.
 Dressed in all colors he took his seat,¹³¹
 So elated that his tail turned in curves.
 A pair of lanterns shone before his face;
 The band struck up, the shawn was blown.
 The bride he married was truly beautiful:
 A nice pointed mouth and very small feet.
 Stitched pants / And a stitched jacket,
 Her shoes were skillfully embroidered:
 The Eight Immortals Crossing the Sea ran about,

131 The text specifies that the groom takes his seat in the sedan chair to be taken to the house of the bride to fetch her and bring her home. Later we learn that the bride and groom both fall from the sedan chair when it is overturned by the cat. This configuration may well be influenced by modern practice as nowadays bride and groom may be driven together in a limousine. Traditionally, however, the bride would ride the sedan chair by herself; if the groom accompanied the bride-fetching party, he probably would ride on horseback, both going and returning. The bride would wear a heavy veil, and the groom would only see the face of his bride in the bridal room after she had joined his family and he was finally allowed to lift her veil.

To be followed from behind by Zhang Guolao.¹³²
 There were chickens and ducks and sparrows.
 Fishes between lotus leaves came to the surface,
 Phoenixes stretching their wings rose in the sky.
 The four sedan chair carriers carried her quickly.
 When she was about to arrive at her new home,
 Fire crackers went off in a string of explosions.
 The loud noise of the beaten gongs and drums
 Woke up the black cat still sleeping on the *kang*.
 ,
 Ever since the cat had fallen fast asleep,
 He had not been aware of anything at all.
 But when he woke up and had rubbed his eyes,
 All he saw of the mouse were only a few hairs.
 "Too bad, this damned mouse has deviously
 Made sure I got drunk, and then sneaked off.
 His vile and villainous schemes are too many:
 He made me miss the competition in heaven."
 As he thought about it, he grew even angrier,
 And he searched for the mouse left and right.
 When he climbed a tree and looked around,
 He espied some mice carrying a sedan chair.
 Once the cat noticed this, he had a good laugh,
 "Wait until I come to offer my congratulations!"
 He stretched his legs / And stretched his body,
 And in one swoosh jumped in front of them.

¹³² The scene of the Eight Immortals (including Zhang Guolao 张果老) crossing the Eastern Ocean in one boat is a common theme in popular painting and embroidery. The story is recounted in the sixteenth-century novel *Journey to the East* (*Dongyouji* 东游记). For a French translation of this novel, see Wu Yuantai 1993.

As soon as the mouse saw the cat had come,
 He was so scared that he peed in his pants.
 He feigned all was well and showed a smile,
 Saying, "Dear brother cat, please make way.
 Wait till we've taken the bride to our place,
 And then I will personally pour you a glass."
 On hearing this, the cat exploded for rage,
 And cursed the mouse as a no-good crook,
 "For the sake of your own black gauze hat
 Your tricked me with vile and evil schemes.
 I've no need for your jumping up and down,
 This time I'm going to swallow you whole!"

The mouse, all fear, knelt down and wept,
 Beating his head on the ground till it bled.
 "As we now are celebrating this wedding,
 Please be so kind, Sir, as to do us this favor.
 Consider that these children still are young,
 So absolutely don't dare swallow them.
 If today you are willing to pardon me,
 I later will offer you some great treasure."
 Hearing this, the cat only grew angrier,
 "I know the kind of sweet talker you are!
 I will not accept any treasure from you:
 None of those here will be able to escape.
 No matter how old, / no matter how young,
 I will swallow you all, sparing not one!"

When the mouse saw how things developed,
He roused himself facing death and shouted,
"The two of us have always been best friends,
But because of one trifle you now are angry.
You rely on your strength and martial arts
To abuse me because I'm so tiny and small.
But make sure you that don't misjudge me:
Let's see whether you dare touch one of my hairs!"
Following that he jumped three feet up in the air,
"Let's have it! Let's fight it out, just you and me!"
Hearing this, the cat could not but laugh out loud,
"Fine! Let me look of what bones you are made!"
He opened his maw, / He curled up his tail,
And jumped forward with claws stretched out.
When the mouse saw things didn't bode well,
He feared he'd end as one worn wad of cotton.
On all four claws he ran around and around,
But he could not see either a bump or a fall.
So he shitted himself / and wetted himself,
And then he jumped into the maw of the cat.
Having caught the mouse, the cat didn't tarry,
But loudly chewing swallowed him, both bones and flesh!
He smashed the lanterns, he overturned the chair
So both groom and bride fell down on the street.
Now he pushed them, / Then he shoved them,
Stamping them into one puddle of black blood.
First the old ones / Then the young ones—
He swallowed both the hosts and guests alike.

When that old mouse
 Had lost his life,
 He turned into a ghostly soul
And shouted loudly,
 “You old black cat,
 You really were way too cruel!

I was taken in
 By your moral discourse
 And constant recital of sutras—
But how could you
 Show a different face,
 An iron mien bereft of mercy?
To eat my flesh
 And drink my blood
 Would have been cruel enough,
Why did you have
 To finish off
 My whole family, our whole house?
My dear old mother
 Has been left behind:
 Who will take care of her now?
By eating my son
 You have cut off
 The chance I might have grandsons.

Now I today
 While at home
 Was hoping to celebrate a wedding,

You have eaten

The ushers and hosts

As well as all relatives and friends.

My only son

Brought home a bride,

And hadn't yet consummated the marriage,

So you should not have

Swallowed the couple

Both together while very much alive.

While still on earth

I very much wanted

To fight it out with you in earnest,

But who could know

That you, black cat,

Had such an unlimited strength?

Only after

Two or three rounds

My bones had weakened a lot,

So all of a sudden

I had you clench

My neck between your jaws.

In deepest darkness,

Deeply depressed,

Inside a black cavernous hole:

I don't know how

I had entered into

That stinking stomach of yours.

No chance anymore

To enjoy my glory

And rise step by step to higher rank,

No chance anymore

To wear my black gauze

And so display my power and might.

The more I think,

The more I ponder,

The more my feelings grow sadder:

Tears, drop upon drop,

Kerplonk, kerplonk

Drip down on the front of my gown.”

When the old mouse had wept quite a while,

He suddenly came up with a great thought,

“Since ancient times

Dragons rely on the ocean, tigers on woods;

Officials rely on the people, people on them.

His Majesty the Jade Emperor up in heaven

Doesn't know a thing about life here below.

Let me use sweet words to curry his favor—

Let me bamboozle that blind Jade Emperor!

In case the Jade Emperor believes my words,

He'll take revenge to right this wrong for me.”

After some thought he had reached a decision,

He took out his brush and wrote a complaint.

(prose) Now tell that the rat wanted to take revenge, but that he did not have any ground. While he was morosely pondering the matter, he suddenly came up with a plan, “I'll have to borrow the dragon

mouth of the king of the Tang and come up with some nonsense. That's my decision, so let's put down some lines.

(sing:)

Lifting my brush

I write to Lingxiao,

To the True Lord the Jade Emperor:

I this old mouse

Was killed by the cat

In a really most grievous manner!

All day long

I stay in my hole,

Accepting my lot, enjoying my fate;

I don't look outside,

I don't show my face,

Idly passing my winters and falls.

But in the times

When Gaisuwen

Rose in rebellion east of the Liao,

The Tang princes

Escorted the Emperor,

Leading their infantry and cavalry.

The two armies met:

They were defeated

And fled back to their encampment:

Lacking food,

Lacking fodder,

They were locked up in that town.

At that moment

The Tang princes

Issued an urgent order to me,

Commanding me

To transport the grain

Of the whole world to their camp.

I this old mouse

On receiving this order

Risked my life, and, courting death,

In one might

I stole no less

Than ten thousand pounds of grain.

Provided with hay,

Provided with grain,

And provided with additional troops,

The Tang princes,

Escorting the Emperor,

Now continued the eastern campaign.

Observing this

The Tang Emperor

Was very pleased in his royal mind:

In his golden hall

He rewarded me

By his own mouth with a true title:

He appointed me as

Earth-Piercing Dragon,

A most awe-imposing title indeed!

Through every region

And every district

I was allowed to sneak my way.

And because I

By stealing grain and hay

Had merit in protecting the Emperor,

I got three cups

Of each bushel

Of grain throughout the wide world.¹³³

But what merit

Has the black cat

Ever earned in protecting the state?

So for what reason

Do all those people

So much like him and love him?

When people eat,

He gets something

From everything that they eat;

When they go to sleep,

He worms his way

Into some hole below the blanket.

During the day

He goes from door to door,

Not devoting himself to his duties,

¹³³ Comparable accounts of how mice saved Emperor Tang Taizong (r. 627–649) and his army from starvation during their campaign on the Korean peninsula against the Korean dictator Gaisuwen 盖苏文 (Yŏn Kaesomun) are also found in some other adaptations of the court case of the mouse against the cat. Cf. Idema 2019, 93.

But then at night

He by all means

Sets out to search for us rodents.

He relies on

His superior strength

And his skill in the martial arts—

Still he should not

Have swallowed all

The many members of my family.

My one family

Counted ten members,

And then the relatives and friends:

Each of them

Lost his life

Between the jaws of that monster.

He has not only

In his treatment of me

Been far too vicious and cruel,

In his curses

Of Your Majesty

He is even more outrageous:

He claims that you,

Your Majesty,

Are foggy-headed and dumb,

Listen to slander,

Believe evil words,

Can't separate loyal and false;

He further claims

That your favor towards me

Shows you're blind in both eyes,

And that your court

Is completely filled with

Pasty-faced traitorous lackeys!

Your Majesty,

You decide fairly

Because you're like a clear mirror,

Please be so kind

As to right the wrong

That I, small mouse, have suffered."

When he had finished writing this accusation,

He set out to go to heaven and submit his plea.

Now he was hopping, / Now he was running,

And in a while he had reached the South Gate.¹³⁴

He beat the drum / He sounded the bell,

Knelt down on the ground and cried out,

"A wrong! I was wronged!"

The Jade Emperor was just about to retire,

When he suddenly heard the drum and bell.

Hastily he returned to his precious palace,

Not knowing what kind of case this could be,

And when he arrived in the Lingxiao Palace hall,

Celestial troops and officers stood on both sides.

The Jade Emperor had to look down to see clearly

¹³⁴ The entrance to heaven is its South Gate.

What kind of evil sprite had come to his court:

A sharp mouth / And little eyes,

As well as a few long hairs for a beard.

Unlike a bird / And unlike an insect,

And his whole body covered in dark grey!

(prose) When the Jade Emperor had had a good look, he felt quite annoyed. "This is a mouse! Why did you come here? What wrong did you suffer that you had to beat the drum and sound the bell? Explain yourself clearly. If you want to tell me some glaring lie, you have to be very careful." The mouse was so scared that his soul left him because this gave him quite a headache. If he told the truth, he would most likely lose the case, so he still had to come up with some nonsense.

(sing:)

"Your Majesty the Jade Emperor,

Before I this mouse

Have even uttered one word,

My heart is already filled with sadness

And tear upon tear

Flows down dripping

In an unending stream from my eyes.

I've suffered a wrong,

Suffered an injustice

That is as deep as the deepest ocean:

That vicious cat,

That criminal cat

Committed a crime without equal.

It would be impossible

For me, this tiny mouse,

To expose his misdeeds by speaking,

So please Your Majesty,

Be so kind as to read

The statement I have here in writing."

The Jade Emperor

Accepted and read

The statement the mouse had prepared:

Every word

And every sentence

Were written as clear as clear could be.

Having read this,

He mistook the statement

For being a true account of the matter,

But in his heart

He still could not stop

Himself from harboring some doubt.

"In the past

I always thought

That the cat was a loyal vassal indeed,

Who had thought

That he in secret

Had conceived this intention to rebel?

To swallow a mouse

Without any reason

Is already a crime that's not minor,

But why did he have

To curse even me

As a stupid king without the Way?"

With each thought,
 Each reflection,
 He found this more insupportable
 And he ordered his troops
 To arrest the black cat
 For sentencing as well as execution.

(prose) When the Jade emperor had read the accusation submitted by the mouse, he was filled with rage, and shouted, "Nezha and Erlang! The cat has committed a serious crime by devouring the whole family of the mouse. You are hereby ordered to set out with all possible speed and arrest that cat so he may be interrogated by the court."

(sing:)
 Nezha and Erlang thereupon rose up in the sky,
 Riding on two five-colored heavenly clouds.
 Traveling on these clouds they arrived quickly,
 In a moment they had come to Cat Village.
 They arrived in the village and found the cat,
 Which was lying down and reciting a sutra.
 Now even though a cat may resemble a tiger,
 He still was scared seeing celestial warriors.
 These stepped forward / And made a bow,
 Addressing the cat in these words, "Listen!
 Right now your presence is called for in Heaven,
 So the Jade Emperor has dispatched us two gods.
 An order of the Jade Emperor must be obeyed,
 So let's set out on this trip together right now."
 When the cat had entered heaven's South Gate,
 He was constantly pondering in his own mind,

"This must be the mouse who carries a grudge
And has falsely accused me in heaven's court.
When in the right, one always should be brave,
Before the Jade Emperor I'll set things straight."
So when he arrived in the Lingxiao Palace hall,
His face showed no fear, his heart was unfazed.

(prose) As soon as the Jade Emperor saw the cat, he shouted, "You damned cat! You have to make a mess of things! You were ordered to guard the gates in the human realm—who allowed you to devour the whole family of the mouse? And you also have to curse me as a stupid king without the Way? The best for you is to confess the truth!" Hearing this, the cat laughed out loudly.

"Your Majesty the Jade Emperor, please listen to my statement!

(sing:)

You Jade Emperor

Are advanced in years

And dwell at ease in the Lingxiao Palace,

There are many things

In the human realm

Of which you don't understand a thing!

That old mouse

Has devious schemes

And doesn't behave in a proper manner.

Now he's a thief,

Then he's a robber,

Harming the people in numerous ways.

During the day

He stays in his hole,

Where he keeps on digging and hacking,

But then at night,

When lanterns are out,

He comes out of his hole to run about.

Now he is here,

Then he is there:

They are chewing, they are gnawing,

Overturning

So much that a man

Cannot get any good sleep all night.

One hidden trap,

One visible trap,

A two-faced three-sided sword:

With vile schemes

And evil tricks

His only aim is to create trouble.

I this cat am

Honest and straight,

I always behave in a proper way,

And treat neighbors,

Both left and right,

With the respect that is their due.

Now if he claims

That I cursed you

As a stupid king without the Way,

That purely is

A blatant lie

Made up to bring about my death.

Once in the past

He and I were

Together reasonably good friends,

And we had agreed

To ascend to heaven

For the birth-year image competition,

But that evil mouse

Without any conscience

Went off to Lingxiao by himself.

From that moment

There was no friendship

Between the two of us anymore.

Because of his

Devious schemes

And his display of wily cunning

He got to wear

A black gauze cap—

But then forgot his lowly position.

Cheating his ruler,

Cheating his underlings,

He turns everything into a mess,

And the good things

He has damaged

Are more than a man can count.

If he eats some grain,

One may consider

That is done to fill his empty belly,

But there is no need

For him to damage

All he sees by gnawing and chewing.

He damages boxes,

He damages chests,

He damages suitcases of leather;

He damages shoes,

He damages caps,

He damages pants and jackets.

He damages books,

He damages letters,

He damages drafts of essays,

Causing such damage

To students of books

That they cannot sit for exams.

All around

They dig their holes,

Creating a risk and a danger:

On days of rain

Water pours in

And houses may even collapse.

His whole body

Is covered with lice,

Is covered with jumping fleas,

And so they spread

Rat-epidemics,

Which cause many people to die.

Come to speak

Of this terrible pest,

And each and everyone is annoyed,

So when I eat them,

I am applauded

By all the people of the world.

Your Majesty,

Please don't believe

The lies that he has concocted,

But pay a visit

To the human realm

And ask who is good, who wrong."

After the cat had given this long speech,

The Jade Emperor summoned Great White,

"Descend once again to the mortal world

And find out who the people say is best.

Make a detailed inquiry from door to door,

And following such a search we'll know."

The Golden Star Great White left Lingxiao

And riding a cloud he drifted thru the sky.

His Majesty the Jade Emperor retired

And the cat was for the time put in prison.

The mouse happily showed a broad grin;

All over the place he danced in the palace.

Now he was roaring, /Then he was shouting,

And he sang a song to a Plum Blossom tune,

"I this mouse show a smile on my face,

Now I am hopping, then I am jumping.

In court I won my case against the cat,
The mountain peach now is in bloom.
There is this one prunus blossom,
I am so happy my tail is curling, trala, trala.
Oh la la the lotus flower, o what a sight the prunus is blooming, trala, trala!"
His hands were dancing / His feet stepping,
When he saw something he started to chew.
He dug a ditch through tables and benches,
All over the place he dug his deep cellars.
Forget about the blind doings of the mouse,
Let's talk about Golden Star Great White.
He asked here, / Then asked there,
And all said that the cat was really good,
"He sleeps late / And rises early,
And the good things he does are not few."

The Jade Emperor

While waiting
Grew more and more impatient,
When he heard
From inside a box
Suddenly a sound that emerged.
He opened the box
By lifting the lid,
And then carefully had a look:
It turned out
That the mouse
Was doing his thing there inside.

He chewed on the helmet,
 He chewed on the armor,
 He chewed a gauze cap to shreds;
The shoes worn by
 The Jade Emperor
 Had been chewed into two pieces.
The cloth that hung
 From the court table
 Had all been damaged by chewing,
And even some
 Of the writingless books¹³⁵
 Of heaven had been chewed to shreds.
Chewing with teeth,
 Scratching with claws,
 Happily curling his tail all around,
He was about
 To steal the jade seal
 Of the palace of heaven, no less!
When the Jade Emperor
 Saw this situation,
 He was extremely offended indeed,
And shouted, "You,
 Little gray mouse,
 Have quite some daring and gall,

¹³⁵ The highest wisdom cannot be expressed in words. So when the holy monk Xuanzang in *Journey to the West* arrives in the Western Paradise, he at first receives from the Buddha sutras that contain not a single character.

Your false accusation

 Against the black cat

 Is already no minor crime at all,

But you even dare

 Here in the palace

 Create a mess, wreak destruction!

With your evil schemes

 And your vile tricks

 You've damaged not a few people,

And you brazenly

 Steal the jade seal

 And chew heaven's books to pieces!"

He immediately summoned celestial troops

And told them to lock the mouse in chains.

His feet and his hands were all shackled:

No escape from punishment and torture!

His tail was cut off, his brain was bashed,

He was not spared the ten-thousand cuts.

Then the Jade Emperor addressed the cat,

“Devouring mice is the proper thing to do.

When you go back down, sleep but little,

But catch those mice and finish them off.

First eat their feet, / Then eat their brains,

Eat them completely, with hide and hair!”

Then he called his celestial troops again,

“Make ready to escort the cat back home.

Get some flowers / And get firecrackers,

And prepare a band of drums and shawns.

Three musical bands, five sedan chairs,¹³⁶
And see the cat home to pleasant tunes."

¹³⁶ Sedan chair carriers would quickly grow tired, so to ensure a speedy travel one might have several teams of carriers that could take turns.

10

DISNEY'S FRIENDS IN WENZHOU

The conflict between the mouse and the cat continues to inspire new adaptations to this very day. The Wenzhou drum ballad written in the early years of this century and published in the January 2007 issue of the journal *Quyì* 曲艺 (*Minor Arts*, p. 7) that is translated below is still called *The Mouse Lodges an Accusation* (*Laoshu gaozhuang*), but manages to tell its story without any role for King Yama.¹³⁷ The text is written mostly in verse but interspersed with short interjections in prose. The mice claim connections with Walt Disney, but once they have managed to have the cat locked up, they abuse their newly won liberties, and the cat eventually is set free and urged to do its job. On the Web (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jkYlnx-l-E>) one can easily find recordings of a glitzy performance of this item sung by a ten-year-old diva.

* * *

THE MOUSE LODGES AN ACCUSATION (A WENZHOU DRUM-BALLAD)

Ruan Shichi, Hu Guangze, and Hu Ping

One member of our troupe is Stubborn Li Xiaoqiang,
 In whatever he does his brain shows no thinking at all.
 He doesn't distinguish between straight talk and irony:
 When he drags a puppy along he will think it's a lamb.
 Then one day a mouse lodged an accusation with him;
 His eyes awash in tears, he searched out Li Xiaoqiang.

(Speak:) Whom did that mouse accuse of what when it had searched out Li Xiaoqiang?

“Dear Xiaoqing, throughout your life you have loved and protected us animals,

¹³⁷ Ruan Shichi a.o. 2007.

My teachers and fellow students greatly praise you.
But while we mice are oh so cute and lovely,
You of all people are keeping a cat! Dear Sir,
This black cat of yours is really too detestable:
Sporting fangs and claws he commits violence.
He exclusively targets the members of my family—
Many of my brothers have become its victims!
So I implore you, Sir, to chase that cat away,
And I will entertain you with dances, sing a song.
Xiaoqiang, the bosses of Disney all love us dearly—
How can you bear to stand by and watch as we suffer such a disaster?

(Speak:) Wu—wu—wu--"

As the mouse kept on kowtowing it kept on weeping,
And he wept until Xiaoqiang was at a loss what to do.
The mouse used that opportunity to offer a suggestion:

(Speak:) "Kill that cat!"

(Speak:) "That's impossible!"

(Speak:) "Then lock up that cat!"

So Li Xiaoqing locked the cat up in an iron cage!

(Speak:) "Meow, meow, meow, please set me free, please set me free!"

"Black cat, don't make such a ruckus, don't blow!
Today it is you who'll suffer while we are in luck!

(Speak:) Haha! Haha! Bye-bye!"

Having successfully lodged his accusation, the mouse went home,
Where he immediately broadcasted this piece of excellent news.
He summoned his family and then convened an expanded meeting:
Clenching their teeth, sharpening their claws they joined the battle.
The great army of mice set out on its expedition,
Invading the house of Xiaoqiang in search of food:
This one brazenly devoured his chocolate,
That one carried off a box of sweet cakes.
Alas, Xiaoqiang's fine new patent leather bag
Was made into an amusement park by the mice.
One of those mice was the most detestable of all:
He scattered his shit and its pee right in the middle.
He blamed Xiaoqiang for not killing the cat
And he bit Xiaoqiang in the tip of his nose:

(Speak:) "I will kill you! Kill you!"

(Speak:) "Hatchee!"

And Xiaoqiang woke up from his dream with a start,
Only now aware of the great evil committed by mice.
"The black cat actually was an excellent body guard,
But I was the one who locked him up in an iron cage.
I didn't distinguish good and bad, didn't use my brain,
And so I ended up being bitten in the nose by that little mouse!
From now on I will study analysis and use my brain,
And never again will I be that befuddled and muddleheaded Li Xiaoqiang!"

I've sung to the end *The Mouse Lodges an Accusation*—
Please consider for yourself the moral it contains.

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