WHY PIKAS HAVE NO TAIL

Gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།

'Od dkar (b. 1983) is a native of Smin thang (Mentang) Township, Gcig sgril (Jiuzhi) County, Mgo log (Guoluo) Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture, Mtsho sngon (Qinghai) Province, China. She is a herder with two daughters (b. 1998; b. 2000) and two sons (b. 2000; b. 2002). I recorded this story from 'Od dkar in the summer of 2016 when I returned to my home in the same area where 'Od dkar is from. She is a great storyteller and heard this story from her mother, 'Jig byed mtsho (b. 1953). She is very willing to share her stories with her children and her relatives' children.

My retelling of "Pikas and Mice" reflects what I heard and remembered from others, as well as the version from 'Od dkar.

Long ago, a family of mice and a childless pika couple lived near a boundless, deep emerald lake. The mice and pikas were kind and friendly to each other. No predators bothered them for a long time so they enjoyed living on the verdant grassland and drinking the very fresh water. Their lives were as though they were living in Paradise.

One day Mother Mouse told her babies to collect wild baby yams for supper, and then she visited the pika couple and invited them for supper to express her concern for them. Mother Mouse was a widow whose husband had died years earlier. Sometimes she was lonely for adult company. During the meal, they all cheerfully enjoyed the food.

Mr. Pika noticed the biggest wild yam was in the pot and felt unhappy because he had not been offered this big yam. However, he concealed his anger and returned home with his wife.

When it was time to move from the summer pasture to the winter camp, Mr. Pika helped the mice move their belongings. They reached their destination at noon and got ready for lunch.

Mother Mouse left to fetch water from a distant river. After she left, Mr. Pika saw the big wild baby yam was still in the pot and immediately thought about how to get it. He then said to the baby mice, "My wife and I have invited a monk to chant scriptures so that our lives will be more secure and happy. We need to give something special to the monk. It's good if we give him your big wild baby yam."

The baby mice said, "We can't do that without Mother's permission."

Mr. Pika was annoyed, rushed to the pot, took the big wild baby yam, and left.

When Mother Mouse returned with a bucket full of water, she found all her children were crying. They said, "Mr. Pika stole our big wild baby yam. We could do nothing to stop him."

Mother Mouse was full of anger, rushed to Mr. Pika's home, and pulled off his tail. From that day on, the pika has had no tail.

Mrs. Pika wanted to take revenge, but she knew she could not defeat the mice because of their many children.

When Mr. Pika asked what they should do, his wife said, "When a nation wants to control another country, it must have many soldiers or it cannot win battles."

Mr. Pika did not understand until his wife said, "You're so stupid! We must have many children!" This explains why there are many pikas today.

Time passed. One day as Mother Mouse strolled along the emerald lake, she noticed a very tall tree. She rested under the tree, felt very comfortable, and slept until dusk when a breeze stroked her cheeks and awakened her.

The next day the mice family moved away from the pika couple and made a new home under the tall tree. They soon realized there was a great eagle's nest in the top of the tree. The eagle often bullied them and defecated on them.

Mother Mouse wisely did not argue with the great eagle. Instead when night came, she told her children to dig around the roots of the tree. Day after day passed and finally, the tree fell into the lake where all the great eagles drowned.

NON-ENGLISH TERMS

'od dkar འོད་དཀར།
gcig sgril གཅིག་སྒྲིལ།
gu ru 'phrin las གུ་རུ་འཕྲིན་ལས།
Guoluo 果洛
Jiuzhi 久治
Mentang 门堂
mgo log མགོ་ལོག
mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྔོན།
Qinghai 青海