

Mark Bender. 2015. Slinking Between Realms: Musk Deer as Prey in Yi Oral Literature *in* Gerald Roche, Keith Dede, Fernanda Pirie, and Benedict Copps (eds) *Asian Highlands Perspectives 37 Centering the Local, A Festschrift for Dr. Charles Kevin Stuart on the Occasion of his Sixtieth Birthday*, 99-121.

SLINKING BETWEEN REALMS: MUSK DEER AS PREY IN YI ORAL LITERATURE*

Mark Bender (The Ohio State University)

- ¹ 地球的人民，啊，
- ² 依靠五谷居住；
- ³ 獐子和麂子，啊，
- ⁴ 在森林之内居住

- ¹ The people of the earth, ah,
- ² Depend on grains to live;
- ³ Water deer and muntjac, ah,
- ⁴ Live within the forests.

From an Azhe narrative poem (Shi 2006:128).

INTRODUCTION

This paper concerns the representation of various species of musk deer in the folk literature and lore of the Yi ethnic group of southwest China. The Yi are one of the largest of China's fifty-five ethnic minority groups, numbering close to seven million. Most Yi live in mountain environments of Yunnan Province, southern Sichuan and western Guizhou provinces, with a few small communities in the western part of the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Prefecture. There are around eighty sub-groups of the Yi, ranging in size from over a million, to only a few thousand. While the dominant group in Southern Sichuan province is the Nuosu (numbering around two million), many sub-groups live within the broken uplands of Yunnan, including the Nisupo, Lipo, Lolopo, and Azhe of the central and southern regions of the province.

The languages of the Yi are categorized into six major groupings with limited or little mutual intelligibility. The traditional written texts, from which I derive some of the material for this paper, are written in a script with at least four major and many minor

variant forms. There is also great variety in the local folk traditions of song, dance, stories, clothing, and customs. Thus, when speaking of the 'Yi' it is necessary to state clearly what cultural area of the Yi regions one is talking about. Indeed, one of the most persistent issues in Yi studies is the problem of *rentong* or 'ethnic commonalities', which is understood as those cultural components that tie the diverse Yi sub-groups together as a state-recognized ethnic minority group. As I have discussed in an article in *Chinoperl Papers*, Wang Jichao, Wu Ga, Bamo Qubumo, and others have suggested that study of oral tradition and folklore, especially as found in traditional creation myths, can serve to better understand those elements of culture and identity that rationalize grouping so many disparate groups under the rubric of 'Yi' (Harrell 2001:7-9; Bender 2007:209-210).

One factor that the Yi increasingly share is the effects of rapid development on the natural environment. Forest, water tables, wildlife, and other natural resources have been increasingly exploited by local and non-local enterprises over the last few decades in various periods of economic and social change. In response, in recent years, a number of Yi researchers have become interested in questions of the environment and traditional culture, as witnessed by the theme of the fourth International Yi Studies Conference held in 2005 in Meigu, Sichuan (Bender 2006). The title, '*Bimo* Practice, Traditional Knowledge, and Ecosystem Sustainability in the Twenty-first Century,' emphasizes the role of knowledge of the environment held by the traditional ritual specialists known as *bimo*. Images of the natural environment are deeply embedded in most of Yi traditional literature, especially in the longer narrative poems transmitted by the *bimo*, which narrate the creation of the cosmos, the earth, and its living beings and their ecological niches. This combination of current ecological concerns and the traditional nature-related elements in the oral and oral-connected literature encourage the use of eco-critical approaches to the Yi material.¹

* A version of this paper was first published in Chinese translation, see Bender 2011. Funding for this paper was supplied by the College of Arts and Sciences at The Ohio State University and a Fulbright award. Special thanks to Bamo Qubumo and Huang Jianming.

¹ 'Ecocriticism' has been described as the "study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty 1996:xix). Richard

While researching how animals, plants, and the natural environment are depicted in Yi traditional folk literature, I discovered that cervids, deer and their relatives, specifically species of musk deer, are widely and prominently represented. These deer seem to figure in the folk literature and lore of Yi everywhere – from the Liangshan Mountains of southern Sichuan, all across Yunnan, to western Guizhou Province. In this paper I will look at images of musk deer in several local traditions of Yi oral and oral-connected literature, rituals, and customs that in various ways help construct relationships between the realms of wild, domestic, and supernatural in the poetic worlds of the texts. Thus, the paper will not only explore how the Yi imagine the musk deer in both poetic and natural worlds, but also suggest how an ecological perspective that engenders local responses to the natural environment as expressed in folklore can contribute to the concept of Yi *rentong*. Before engaging in the discussion of musk deer in Yi folk traditions, I will briefly introduce the natural presence of cervids in environments in the Yi regions.

CERVIDS IN THE YI REGIONS

Southern Sichuan and northern Yunnan provinces are located in what has been described as a biodiversity hotspot on the eastern margins of the Tibetan Plateau (Conservation International 2007; Coggins 2003:34-5). Southwest China was once rich in species of larger mammals, among which were several species of Asian deer. A number of deer are found in China, including varieties of sika, roe deer (*Capreolus capreolus* or *pao* in Chinese), water deer (also called *he lu* or 'river deer' in Chinese), muntjac, and red deer (wapiti) that once had ranges throughout much of the country, but which are today

Kerridge, as quoted in Garrard (2004:4) has further noted that, "Most of all ecocriticism seeks to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of their coherence and usefulness as responses to environmental crisis." See Bender (2008) for a more extensive discussion of ecocriticism and the representation of animals and plants in the *Nuosu Book of Origins (Hnewo teyy)*. The terms 'oral literature' and 'oral-connected literature' refer, respectively, to the oral tradition and to written texts with a clear or assumed relation to an oral performance tradition (see Foley 2003).

either extinct in many of their former ranges or confined to nature reserves in Southeast, Southwest, and Northeast China (Coggins 2003). Other deer, such as the Tibetan white-lipped deer, sambar deer (*Cervus unicolor*, *shui lu*, 'water deer,' in Chinese), the hog deer of the South or Southwest, and more eastern-ranging Pere-David's deer (saved from extinction by transplanted herds to England in the nineteenth century) had more restricted ranges.

The compound term *qy le* in the Northern Yi dialect suggests a folk taxonomy of musk deer.² The term refers to what could be at least two species of muntjac (*Muntiacus*) or *qyx* and the water deer (*Hydropotes inermis*) or *le* (Geist 1998:44-8; 26-8). In the Yi areas, a common Chinese translation of *qy le* is *jizi zhangzi*, which is a compound term of the names for the muntjac (*jizi*) and water deer (*zhangzi*). However, care must be taken in using these Chinese terms, as in some local dialects, they are interchangeable or used with some modification to refer to musk deer or other cervids. An example is the use of the term *shanzhang* 'mountain water deer' for both Reeve's muntjac and another the so-called 'tufted deer' (*Elaphodus*) in the mountains of Fujian province (Coggins 2003:286-87). The small tufted deer, a 'derived' or more modern species of muntjac, does range in areas above 3,000 meters in Sichuan and, along with the hog deer (*Axis procinus*), may at times be lumped in with the lower-dwelling species of muntjac and the water deer (Geist 1998:46-7).

Both muntjac and water deer are relatively 'primitive' deer, with fangs. The Reeves (*reevesi*), or Chinese muntjac, is considered to be the most ancient of the several muntjac species in China and Southeast Asia. Muntjacs vary in morphology, but tend to have short antlers, sometimes with pronounced antler pedicles, which, as we will see, sometimes figure in the folklore. The water deer is considered to be morphologically regressed, as neither gender has antlers. Rather, male water deer have long canine tusks that measure up to fifty-two millimeters in males. The average male water deer stands about fifty-two centimeters at the shoulder, with the female somewhat smaller. The color is predominantly grayish-brown, with a somewhat lighter rump. Water deer hair may measure as long as forty millimeters in its

² See Harrison (2007:35-42) for a discussion of folk taxonomies and native knowledge of the environment.

winter coat, which, along with its short tail, suggest adaptation to colder climates than small deer in Southeast Asia (Geist 1998:27). Muntjac range in size from slightly smaller to somewhat larger than water deer. Both deer also have glands located in the pre-orbital eye sockets. The water deer also features glands between the toes, and a unique pair of inguinal glands on the lower belly which produce much sought after musk (Geist 1998:27). When mating, both deer make a variety of calls (buzzes and whines, among them) that Yi hunters have learned to emulate. Like water deer, muntjacs subsist on easily digestible plant life (shoots of grasses, fruits and seeds, soft types of bark, etc.) and occasionally bird's eggs or small creatures. Although it is presently illegal to hunt both deer, in recent times hunters would trail them with dogs, and sometimes employed nets or snares to capture them.

Among deer biologists, the gracile water deer, like the muntjac, is classified as a 'slinker,' suggesting the manner in which it maneuvers through its environment, which includes riparian realms featuring dense marsh reeds along river beds (often mentioned in Nuosu creation narratives) and thick shrubbery on mountain slopes. They move somewhat like rabbits and are very good at hiding (Geist 1998:22-8). These slinking traits, along with their color, nimbleness, and grace may attribute to the image in Yi folklore of these deer as magical beings that can appear and disappear in the wink of an eye.³

Many folk beliefs surround musk deer, and the water deer in particular. Many products were once made of its parts. For example, Nuosu children once wore charms made out of the thin, sharp tusks, and used the feet as toys. Men used the leather to make hunting or smoking pouches, in which they stored fire-making tools and tobacco. Last summer in a small Yi craft shop in Xide County, Liangshan, a middle-aged woman had a tanned muntjac skin as a kind of thin mattress on a cot in her shop. When I asked my companion, the contemporary Nuosu poet Aku Wuwu, what muntjac and water deer mean to the Yi, he replied that, "The deer are very kind, sensitive, and auspicious; they have souls and are possibly the creatures Yi hunters

³ In the spring of 2007 I observed two small groups of water deer in the Beijing Zoo. Even in a captive environment they displayed many of the traits in descriptions based on wild behavior.

like to hunt the most. Moreover, the musk of the water deer is regarded as medicine and at times can ward off negative forces – its teeth can be used as weapons against demons and other negative supernatural forces."

Another deer that makes its way into Yi folklore is the sika (*Cervus Nippon*), called *cie* in Northern Yi and *meihua lu* 'plum blossom deer' in Chinese. This deer, which retains fawn-like white spots into adulthood, is distributed widely throughout East Asia. What appear to be references to red deer (*Cervus elaphus*) – known as *ma lu* 'horse deer' in Chinese – occur occasionally in Yunnan Yi texts, though the deer are rare, if not extinct, in most of the province. Very occasionally, other wild ungulates are mentioned in some Yi texts; these creatures seem to be either the mountain-dwelling serow (*Capricornis*) or goral (*Nemohaedus*).

REPRESENTATIONS OF MUSK DEER IN YI TEXTS FROM YUNNAN

Images of musk deer often appear in oral and oral-connected literature of the major sub-groups of the four million Yi in Yunnan province. In a collection of Yi origin poems collected in the late 1950s and later published under the title *Meige*, the section entitled 'Hunting and Raising Livestock' begins with the declaration that hunting dogs, hemp thread, and hunting nets are needed to pursue muntjac. Dogs are transformed from yellow rocks from the mountains around the ancient city of Dali, the capital of an ancient kingdom in the ninth to twelfth centuries. Domesticated hemp is obtained from farmers of the neighboring Lisu people, but nobody can make the string or nets. The sky god Gezi advises the hunters to seek out a woman named Telema, who, in the course of three days, makes the thread and weaves the nets. It is discovered that male muntjac live in the tea mountains, while female muntjac live on the cliffs along the great eastern sea. Finally, Adu, the eldest of the five rather lazy sons of the sky god, who helped create the sky (while their four industrious sisters created the earth), is called to lead the hunting dogs into the mountains. They soon scare up three muntjac which take off across the landscape (Chuxiong 2001b:62):

1 麂子跑出来，
2 阿赌拼命追，
3 从山头到山脚，
4 从河头到河尾，
5 追过一山又一山，
6 追过一林又一林，
7 追到大河边。

1 The muntjac ran off,
2 With Adu in hot pursuit;
3 From mountain top to mountain foot,
4 From the headwaters to the tailwaters,
5 Chasing from mountain to mountain,
6 Chasing from forest to forest.
7 Chasing them to the side of a great river.

After the muntjac run along the twisting bank of the clear, deep water, they escape into a mass of thick vines, where they become entangled. The hunters cannot get to them, so they dig up some rocks from a lakebed and make their way into the tangle, where they beat the muntjacs to death. Once in hand, "The muntjac skins were used for clothing/ And the meat divided for all to eat" (Chuxiong 2001b:64). It is soon discovered, however, that hunting cannot produce enough food So, it is decided that cultivated grains are a more stable food resource, but cows are needed to plow and other domesticated stock are needed for meat, textiles, and leather. As did wild plants and animals in the early phases of the creation, domestic creatures descended from the sky. Red, yellow, and black cows transformed from the dews on the mountains above Dali and were first raised by the woman Telema. Pigs resulted from heavenly dew changing to white and black rocks, which were broken open on earth by the sky god, releasing the first pigs. Then sheep and goats were transformed from the white and black grubs, respectively, that grow inside pine trees. Subsequently, pigs were raised by the Han people, while the sheep and goats were raised by the Yi. And by implication, muntjac and other musk deer were thereafter not the protein staples.

Chamu is another creation epic, collected in the 1950s by scholars and students in Kunming. It is associated with the Nisupo sub-group in the Shuangbai region of Chuxiong prefecture. The published version is based on an oral-connected text written in Yi characters. The development of life and humans unfolds in a series of eras in a dynamic of creation and destruction. Humans gradually differentiate themselves from apes and other wild creatures in an evolutionary process that begins with the one-eyed people, followed by the protruding-eyed people, and culminating in the appearance of people with horizontally aligned eyes. In the first of these stages, a daughter of the Dragon King delegates the creation of the one-eyed proto-humans, who gradually come to know the characteristics of their fellow creatures. The passage provides a catalogue of prominent creatures in the mythic landscape, including two species of deer (Chuxiong 2001a:246-47):

- ¹ 独眼睛这代人啊,
- ² 漫漫认识野兽习性:
- ³ 力大不过野猪,
- ⁴ 凶猛不过老虎,
- ⁵ 但小不过麂子,
- ⁶ 善良不过马鹿,

- ¹ This age of the one-eyed people, ah,
- ² Gradually came to know the habits of the wild beasts:
- ³ Nothing was stronger than the wild boars,
- ⁴ Nothing was fiercer than the tigers,
- ⁵ Nothing more timid than the muntjac,
- ⁶ Nothing more gentle than the red deer

Once the age of contemporary humans begins, the epics recount the origins of many technologies and items of material culture, including hemp, cotton, and weaving. Echoing similar passages in *Meige*, one scene depicts sons of the 'White Yi' cutting the forests and planting crops, then families engaged in processing hemp. Soon after, the three sons of the family set hempen snares on the hillsides, but the next day they find that musk deer and pheasants have tripped or

broken them all. The young men then decided to bait the snares with seeds of vegetables, sesame, and hemp. Two days later they return to check the sets, only to find (Chuxiong 2001b:308):

- 1 山顶那一扣，
- 2 没有扣着麂子；
- 3 山腰那一扣，
- 4 没扣着香獐；
- 5 山腰那一扣，
- 6 扣着只大孔雀

- 1 The snare on the mountaintop,
- 2 Didn't hold a muntjac;
- 3 The snare on the mountainside,
- 4 Didn't hold a musky water deer;
- 5 But the snare at the foot of the mountain,
- 6 Held a huge peacock.

They cut open the bird's body and find bolls of cotton inside – thus the origin of the fabric among the local Yi. Aside from indicating that seeds are not good deer bait, the passage illustrates the importance of musk deer as desirable prey – for meat and musk – and the use of hempen set snares as a hunting technique. Coggins (2003:225) has documented the use of snares and set bows for capturing a variety game in southern China, and Yi hunters have told me of using hempen nets and snares in capturing musk deer and other prey. In another respect, musk deer are implicated in a process that bridges the realm of wild and domestic, with a supernatural dimension, as well.

This pattern of the deer hunt repeats itself in ensuing passages entitled 'The Origin of Paper and Writing Brushes.' The passage begins with questions about what was to be used to make paper and writing brushes. The short answer is: tree bark for paper and bamboo and the hair of the scented water deer for the brushes. A father, Xie Awu, leads his three sons to ask the dragons of the four directions for aid in finding the bark and bamboo, but the green (East), white (South), black (North), and red (West) dragons cannot

help. So the young men are dispatched on a hunt into the copses, leading dogs and carrying golden bows, silver crossbows, and a hunting horn. They first flush a pair of leopards and tigers, but their arrows miss. They next drive out a pair of red deer and wild boar, with the same result. Next they pursue a pair of *shanlu* and *yanyang* (seemingly serow and or goral), and still their arrows fly off the mark. Finally, a single water deer (*xiang zhang* 'fragrant water deer') is found, though the sons' arrows all miss. Xie Awu raises his silver crossbow and releases a dart that kills the small deer. Next (Chuxiong 2001a:334-35):

1 歇索三个儿子,
 2 把香獐抬回家里,
 3 歇阿乌剖开香獐,
 4 香獐头没有脑浆,
 5 却有三颗竹子种,
 6 有三颗纸数籽,
 7 挖开香獐心,
 8 香獐心中没有血,
 9 却有三颗竹子种,
 10 有三颗纸数籽.
 11 敲开香獐骨头,
 12 不见骨髓,
 13 却有三颗竹子种,
 14 有三颗纸数籽.

1 The three sons of Xiesuo Mountain,
 2 Carried the musk deer back home,
 3 Xie Awu split open the deer's head,
 4 But there were no brains inside the head,
 5 There were only three bamboo shoots,
 6 And three paper tree seedlings.
 7 [He] ripped open the musk deer's heart,
 8 But there was no blood inside the heart,
 9 There were only three bamboo shoots,
 10 And three paper tree seedlings.
 11 [He] broke apart the musk deer's bones,

¹² But there was no marrow to be seen,

¹³ There were only three bamboo shoots,

¹⁴ And three paper tree seedlings.

The family then burned off the hillsides and planted the seedlings and shoots. The final lines of the section remind listeners that this was the origin of paper and brushes, which allowed Yi books to be written and handed down to their descendants. Thus, the water deer is linked in the myth world with the origin of paper and writing brushes – the requirements of literacy are provided by ritual and genealogy.

Yi scholar Shi Youfu, who became a *bimo* in order to better study the ancient Yi writings, recovered a fascinating text from among the Azhe sub-group near Mile, in the Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture in southern Yunnan (Shi 2006:124-26). The text, entitled *Shidi Tianzi* (the name of the main character), includes several references to muntjac and water deer, and dates from the late nineteenth century, though the story it tells is likely older. By way of a folk narrative, the text conveys teachings of what is locally called *bimo jiao* or *bujiao*, a local synthesis of what appear to be Daoist, Buddhist, and native *bimo* beliefs. Its plot and values are also quite similar to the syncretic beliefs of the *Luojiao* local religion of the lower-Yangzi (Bender 2001). As such, the text departs greatly from *bimo* origin texts characteristic of other Yi regions in tone, language, and worldview. In the story, a local ruler (or 'emperor') named Geliwan, of vast wealth and military might, goes one day with a retinue of servants, dogs, and horses, to hunt in the mountains. His beaters scare up a golden muntjac, which hides in the deep bamboo copses. When the emperor enters in pursuit, he finds a white-haired immortal. Thinking he is a kind-hearted person, the emperor asks him if he has seen 'his' muntjac (*jizi*) or water deer (*zhangzi*). The immortal replies that (Shi 2006:126):

¹ 麂住大岩头,

² 獐住大岩上。

³ 我说戈力挽,

⁴ 举首看青天

5 未见你麋子，
6 俯视箐林内，
7 不遇你獐子。

1 Muntjac live on top of the great cliffs,
2 Water deer dwell upon the great cliffs.
3 I say that Geliwan
4 When looking up into the blue skies
5 Will not see your muntjac,
6 When peering down upon the forests and copses
7 Will not find your water deer.

The immortal continues with a rebuke of the ruler's obsession with material wealth, and scolds him for hunting, saying that the wild creatures were, "sent by Heaven." Enraged, the emperor chops the immortal into small pieces. On the way home, the ruler meets a talking snake, and summons his diviners to interpret this omen. They reveal that the ruler has erred in killing the immortal. The emperor quickly returns to the mountains and manages to piece the immortal back together. The re-incorporated immortal reveals that he is the Bu God from the ninth level of the heavens, and in a forgiving tone reveals that he is kind-hearted (*shan*) towards upright humans. He then proceeds to relate the truths of the Bu beliefs to the ruler, and then sets him off on a quest in search of a magical flowering tree, which results in the birth of a son named Shidi Tianzi. The child is cast into the wilds and is, for a time, raised by wild creatures. However, he eventually re-engages with human culture and devotes himself to spiritual self-cultivation, later becoming an embodiment of the Bu precepts. The early stages of this hero's life are in ways comparable to that of the mythic Yi hero, Zhyge Alu, a more martial myth figure popular in many northern Yi areas. In terms of cervid imagery, the role of the golden muntjac and water deer in the initial meeting between the emperor and the immortal is crucial as a force bringing together the realms of the human royals and that of the supernatural from the sky. The emperor, the paramount figure of the human world, enters the realm of the wilds in search of a magic musk deer, which results in the meeting with a sky god – which, as in

another Yi tale treated below, may actually have disguised himself as the deer.

MUSK DEER IN NUOSU LORE

Another Yi tale of a supernatural being in the form of a deer comes from the Nuosu people of Sichuan province, who live mostly in regions across the Upper Yangzi River from the Yunnan Yi. Least acculturated and most conservative of all the Yi subgroups, the Nuosu still have a rich living tradition of oral lore and ritual. Deer – musk deer in particular – appear frequently in Nuosu oral and oral-connected literature, including the 'mythic master-text', the *Book of Origins*, or *Hnewo teyy*, which charts the origins of life on earth. Other origin texts, many recently published in a lavishly illustrated compendium of Nuosu oral literature (Liangshan Yizu 2006), include the *Origins of Ghosts (Nyicy bbopa)*; an origin chant on hunting dogs that focuses on water deer; narrative poems such as the captured bride *Gamo Anyo*, who escapes for a short time into the wilds; many folktales; and the works of many modern Nuosu poets, such as Jidi Majia, Aku Wuwu, and Luowu Laqie (Bamo 2001, 2003, Bender 2005). Musk deer are also mentioned in other origin narratives, such as a poetic origin text which recounts the legendary origins and migrations of the ancient Gu Hou clan-group.

Bamo Qubumo, of the Ethnic Literature division of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, has introduced a version of an origin narrative (*bbopa*) about the beauty Zyzy Hnira, which features a beautiful femme fatale associated with a white water deer (which in her English translation she calls a 'river deer'). Known as the *Origins of Ghosts (Nyicy bbopa)*, the story, which is typically part of ceremonies held to dispel the ghosts of sickness, also incorporates much about hunting lore (Bamo 2001:453-4). In a beginning not unlike that of the Azhe story of *Shidi Tianzi*, the narrative begins with a hunt and leads to the encounter with a slinking musk deer, which leads to an encounter with a supernatural in human form.

Both muntjac and water deer appear numerous times in origin stories in the Nuosu *Book of Origins*. At one point in the

creation process, red snow falls from the sky, bringing life to earth. Deer, however are not among the various plants and creatures that grow up in the very particular bio-niches described in the poem. Though they are not specifically catalogued in these 'Tribes of Snow' – composed of the folk taxons the 'Tribes of Blood' and 'Tribes without Blood' (animals and plants, respectively) – they do exist within the mythical landscape; and a grey water deer is the only surviving creature during a time of global warming brought on by the creation of too many suns and moons in the sky.

The most prominent reference to musk deer in the *Hnewo teyy* is metonymic. When the mother of Zhyge Alu, the culture-hero who later shoots down the extra suns and moons, seeks out a *bimo* after being splattered with blood falling from dragon-eagles soaring in the sky, she finds the *bimo* priest seated on a special seat-pad. The pad consists of a bottom layer of bamboo matting, a middle layer of sheep wool felt, and a top layer of loose hair of muntjac and water deer. From the *bimo* she receives the information that she has been impregnated with a perverse life force falling from the sky and that she will give birth to an unusual child – which she later abandons in the wilds to be raised by dragons. I was told in Xide County that in real life, a *bimo* sits on a similar mat of bamboo, felt, and loose deer hair when conducting the rites for sending off a deceased parent's soul tablet. Such tablets are hung in the home for a set period of time until they are transported to a mountain cave or crag where they are interred.⁴

⁴ When Yi poet Aku Wuwu and I were translating this passage of the text I had a difficult time imagining this business about loose hair as a seat. After talking with a few Yi hunters, they indicated that muntjac hair is loosened by soaking the raw hide in water until the hair begins to slip from the follicles, when it can be easily pulled or scraped off. Water deer hair can be removed in clumps, especially right after one is killed. Felt cannot be made from musk deer hair, though tanned musk deer hide, with or without hair, can be used for other purposes. These include smoking pouches or hunting bags. Muntjac is the preferred leather, but the thinner water deer hides will also serve.

HUNTING LORE

"Don't kill a thin bear; don't kill a fat deer" is an *luby*, or Nuosu proverb, that reflects a folk attitude towards the conservation of natural resources. The implication is that a bear is not in its prime and not worth killing unless it is fat. And likewise a fat deer is a pregnant one that will produce more deer if left alone. Hunting has been curtailed throughout Southwest China since around 2000, in efforts to save animal species that have come under increased assault due to the effect of market reforms in the Chinese economy. Even so, many middle-aged and older Yi in Liangshan (and Yunnan) know much of hunting lore, and game is still sometimes taken. According to Eqi Luoluo, a 78 year *ndeggu* 'wise man' from Meigu County, traditionally there were taboos against killing certain animals, including eagles, monkeys, snakes, and frogs – all of which are mentioned in the *Book of Origins*. If a snake, for instance, is killed, it must be buried immediately, lest hail fall or the earth tremor. Killing such creatures could result in bad luck, which might last for generations. If a panda were killed, crop failure could result. While killing 'good' birds like lucky magpies is taboo, killing 'bad' birds is also sometimes taboo, such as that harbinger of doom, the crow. If a taboo creature is killed, a *bimo* must be called to sacrifice a white chicken in order to dispel the negative forces. In the case of killing a swan, a sheep must be sacrificed and a goose effigy made from sacred grass. A musk deer or wild pig with a noticeable lump or large cut or tear on its ear cannot be killed, as such an irregularity is the mark of a special creature. Regarded as beneficial ungulates like cows, water deer (*le*) are thought to protect life. It was once common to hang a token made of male water deer fangs around a child's neck or hat, the ends of the teeth sewed into a small square of cloth that held musk and displayed the fangs in a splayed fashion. Such tokens are sometimes part of the ritual accoutrements of *bimo*, which like eagle claws and wild boar tusks, are useful in fighting off malevolent forces (Harrell, Bamo, Ma 2000:54). Also, the skin of the water deer is featured in funeral rites. A small bag made of water deer skin is made so that the soul of the departed can carry parched grain to eat while on the road to the land of the dead.

While musk deer can be killed and eaten, there are many beliefs surrounding hunting and processing the kill. Since all game is the property of the Mountain God, special rites must be made in preparation for entering the mountains. Although these practices vary somewhat, hunting is a ritual event throughout the Yi regions. In Meigu the tools of the hunter had to be purified. This was done by placing a hot stone in water, and the hunter's body, his dogs, leashes, guns, etc. were cleansed with steam. In Xide County, located to the northwest of Meigu, I was told by Jjivo Zoqu that on the day of a hunt, a hunter rises at the second crow of the cock. The dogs are then fed nutritious food like eggs (instead of the usual scraps) – food that is better than what the hunters eat. Once the goats have been pastured, the hunter (or hunters if several men go) then sets out, and will continue into the mountains unless an untoward signal appears – such as the unexpected meeting of a woman (who might be out early getting water) on the way. Once the hunter enters the wilds, beyond the fields and into the mountains, he conducts a ritual for the Mountain God, chanting the words, "Allow me to come to the mountains; protect me while in the mountains; let me be successful." Once in the mountains, the dogs are put on a scent and allowed to chase the deer across the hills. It is said that water deer, regarded as very crafty, tend to run in large circles (not unlike whitetail deer in the US) which may indicate the deer's sense of territoriality. The chase continues until the deer tires and is cornered in thick brush or rocks (or sometimes even on a tree limb over-hanging a cliff). A good dog will yelp and circle the prey until the hunter or hunters arrive. However, should it happen that the dogs kill the game, they will typically not eat it. Moreover, if it is discovered that an ear of the dead prey has been torn by the dogs, then the hunters will not dress or eat the creature, fearing bad luck (which seems to echo beliefs about deformed animal ears in Meigu).

Ideally, the hunter comes upon the cornered deer and then shoots it with a musket ball (sometimes homemade) or, in the past, an arrow. In Xide County, older hunters told me that a killing shot anywhere in the body is acceptable – except in the heart, as it might damage the animal's soul. If a bullet strikes the heart, the hunter must undergo a cleansing ritual conducted by a *bimo*. (*Bimo* do not

hunt, though they do kill domestic stock during rituals.) After the deer dies, the hunter must say a prayer beseeching forgiveness for taking its life. At this time a freshly cut anchoring 'hook' made of a small branch cut to shape is inserted in the lower part of each leg in order to show respect to the prey and to keep its soul under control so it will not warn other animals. With the animal on its back, the hooks are inserted in a special order. Looking down on the upturned carcass, the order in Xide is reported to be: 1) left front leg, 2) right back leg, 3) right front leg, 4) left back leg. Cuts are then made above the hoofs in order to skin the deer, following the order of the hook insertion. This is also the order used in skinning goats. After this the deer is cut up. One piece of meat is then given to the dogs. Then each hunter gets a share, and anyone met on the way home (at least those who realize game has been taken) is given a share.

The ritual process, skinning cuts, and meat distribution seem to vary from place to place and even clan to clan. In Meigu I was told that once the prey is down, the hunter must cover the prey with grass and scream, "The animal has run off!" pretending that the hunt was unsuccessful in order to trick the Mountain God, who owns all creatures of the forest. After a while, the animal is butchered and some of the meat is cooked on site; the tongue is offered to the Mountain God to avoid punishment for taking the game. While I heard no mention of the use of the wooden soul-anchoring hooks, the order of the skinning cuts for descendants of the ancient Qonie clan-group is the same as that reported in Xide. However, I was told by Eqi Luoluo that for descendants of the Gguho clan the cuts are: 1) right front leg, 2) left back leg, 3) left front leg, 4) and right back leg. If the wrong order of cuts is made, the meat cannot be eaten. Thus, as in other spheres of Nuosu life, customs regarding hunting and deer must be strictly followed.

In a Nisupo village in the Eshan area of central Yunnan, I was told that the Mountain God controls the wild animals, and thus must be worshipped before a hunt. As in Liangshan, hunters must avoid women on the road to the hunting area. If they speak with a woman, or she handles the hunting tools, the hunt is cancelled. If a hunt is successful, the ear of a musk deer or boar must be placed on top of the Mountain God shrine as evidence of a kill. Everyone gets a piece

of the game in small villages. However, in big villages, only those met on the road need be given a portion. Also, the main hunter receives an extra piece of meat – usually a leg. As in Liangshan, each hunting dog also receives a portion. When skinning, the cuts are made as follows: 1) around the neck, 2) right front leg, 3) left front leg, 4) left back leg, 5) left right leg, 6) down the middle from neck to anus. Based on this and other accounts, it seems that there are certain continuities between musk deer hunting customs in Yunnan and Sichuan.

CONCLUSION

From this brief look into a few examples of musk deer in Yi lore the following points are worth noting. The behavioral mode of locomotion through thick cover, described by zoologists as 'slinking' may be a factor in the transformation narratives such as the golden muntjac turning into an immortal and the grey water deer becoming a beautiful woman. Other attributes – timid, gentle, lovely, and gracile – especially of water deer, may also contribute to the magical mystique surrounding these creatures in Yi lore. The dual magical qualities of musk – at once auspicious, inviting good fortune, while also repellant of malevolent forces – might also be enhanced by perceptions of the deer having para-normal attributes. The hair and teeth of the water deer are significant in myth and ritual, and in the act of hunting the deer is a material and spiritual bridge between the realms of the uncultivated, unsettled wilds, the domestic and domesticated human realm, and the supernatural. Given the obvious differences and similarities between musk deer in folk literature, belief, and hunting lore, attention to the role of musk deer and possibly other citizens of the local environments – including wild animals such as tigers, eagles, plants like the rhododendron, pine, and cypress, and supernatural dragons – can add dimension to the problem of *rentong*, or 'ethnic commonalities' regarding the Yi. This question of *rentong* is at the heart of what allows such diverse cultures as are represented by the Yi sub-groups to be logically grouped as one ethnic group. Thus, in small ways, such studies on

deer tusks or dragon claws situated within the ecological niches of the story world and actual landscapes of the Yi regions may contribute to a new understanding of the puzzle of pan-Yi ethnic identity and other complex amalgamations of sub-ethnicities such as the Miao, and other ethnic groups with complex compositions.

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NON-ENGLISH TERMS

Note: Yi words written in the official romanization of the Liangshan Standard Yi Syllabary are presented in the main text and footnotes without the often confusing tone marks (p,t,x). The romanized version of the words with tone marks is presented in parentheses in this list. Nuosu words without a roman tone mark (such as “*le*”) are level tones, which are unmarked. Words in other Yi dialects are represented by the same romanization system (Pinyin) used to write the sounds of Standard Chinese.

Adu 阿赌

Aku Wuwu (Apkup Vytvy) 阿库乌雾

Aku Wuwu 阿库乌雾,

Azhe 阿哲

Azhe 阿哲

Bamo Qubumo 巴莫曲布嫫

bimo (bimox) 毕摩

bimo jiao 毕摩教

Bu 布

bujiao 布教

Chuxiong 楚雄

cie 鹿

Eqi Luoluo ??

Eshan 峨山

Gamo Anyo (*Gamop Atnyop*) 甘嫫阿妞

Ga 吴呷

Geliwan 戈力挽

Gezi 格滋

Gguho

he lu 河鹿

Hnewo teyy (Hnewo tepyy) 勒俄特依

Honghe Hani and Yi Autonomous Prefecture 红河哈尼族与彝族自治州

Huang Jianming 黄建明

Jidi Majia 吉狄马加,

jizi zhangzi 麂子獐子

jizi 麂子

Jjivo Zoqu (Jjivot Zopqu)

le 獐

Lipo 里颇

Lolopo 罗罗泼

lu byx 谚语

Luojiao 罗教

Luowu Laqie 罗乌拉且

ma lu 马鹿

Meige 梅葛

Meigu 美姑

meihua lu 梅花鹿

Mile 弥勒

ndeggu (ndep ggup) Nisupo 尼苏泼

Nuosu 诺苏

Nyicy bbopa (Nyitcy bbopat) 鬼的来源

pao 豹

Pinyin 拼音

Qonie (Qotnie)

qy (qyx) 麂子

qy le (qyx le) 麂子獐子

rentong 认同

shanlu 山鹿

Shi Youfu 师有福

Shidi Tianzi 施滴添自

Shuangbai County 双柏县

shui lu 水鹿

Telema 特勒么

vo nre sse ci nyi (vo nre sse ci nyix) 雪族十二子

Wang Jichao 王继超

xiang zhang 香獐

Xide 喜德

Xie Awu 歇阿乌

yanyang 岩羊

Yi 彝

Yunnan 云南

zhangzi 獐子

Zhyge Alu (Zhyxge Axlu) 支格阿鲁

Zyzy Hnira (Zytzyr Hninrat) 孜孜尼扎