



The Legend of Phu Si (Laos)



Monkey-ear Mushrooms

(Laos)

Once, Queen Sida wanted to have a meal of tiger-ear mushrooms. But in the Northern Lao language this mushroom is called monkey-ear mushrooms. Queen Sida asked the Monkey King, Hanuman, to go search for the mushrooms for her from the mountain of Oudomxay.

“Could you please go and get the mushrooms from Oudomxay Mountain for me?” said Queen Sida.

“Yes, my Lady,” answered Hanuman.

So Hanuman flew to Oudomxay Mountain and gathered some mushrooms for Queen Sida. He returned with a basket full of mushrooms for her.

But Queen Sida looked at the mushrooms and said, “Oh no, this is not the kind of mushroom I would like to have. Please go and bring some others.” She did not want to say that she really wanted monkey-ear mushrooms for she thought that it would offend Hanuman, who is, after all, a monkey.

“Yes, my Lady,” said Hanuman.

He soared to the sky to pick up more mushrooms in Oudomxay Mountain. After awhile he returned with another basket full of mushrooms for Queen Sida. She again examined the mushrooms.

“Oh no, this is still not the kind of mushrooms I would like to have. Please go bring some other kinds.”

“Yes, my Lady,” said Hanuman.

He soared to the sky to pick more mushrooms in Oudomxay Mountain. After awhile he returned with another basket- full of mushrooms for Queen Sida. She again examined the mushrooms.

“Oh no, this is still not the kind of mushrooms I would like to have. How can I tell you what kind of mushroom I would like?”

Hanuman was puzzled. He did not know exactly what kind of mushrooms he should get for Queen Sida. Queen Sida herself could have told Hanuman what kind of mushrooms she would like if they were not monkey-ear mushrooms. Then Hanuman had an idea. “Don’t worry your majesty. I will bring you what you want.”

Hanuman flew off, and soon he was back again. With a great plop... he deposited the entire top of Oudomxay Mountain right in front of the palace.

“There you are, Your Majesty! What you want must be here somewhere. Just pick whatever you like!”

So, Queen Sida sent her servants to pick the mushrooms from the top of the mountain Hanuman had brought. That evening, the queen had the best monkey-ear mushrooms for dinner. She was grateful to Hanuman, for his wit and intelligence and for the most delicious meal in her life.

Even after that, a great mountain has stood right at the door of the royal palace in Luang Phabang. The mountain is called “Phu Sida” for Queen Sida. But sometimes it is just called “Phu Si” for short. It is also said that the top of Oudomxay Mountain is missing... it is flat on the top, for the top is in Luang Phabang.

Supplementary information

- **Hanuman** is the Hindu monkey king who is prominent in the Indian epic Ramayana (Kakawin Ramayana in Indonesia, Hikayat Seri Rama in Malaysia, Pha Lak Pha Lam in Laos, Reamker in Cambodia, and Ramakien in Thailand). Hanuman portrays the role of the loyal aid to the hero Rama.
- In the story, Queen Sida does not want to mention “monkey-ear” to Hanuman because she does not want to offend him. This reflects the character of the Lao people who value politeness and non-confrontation when dealing with others.
- **Luang Phabang** (or Luang Prabang) is a city in north-central Laos. It was formerly the capital of a kingdom of the same name; and the capital of the Kingdom of Laos until 1975. Luang Phabang was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1995.
- **Oudomxay** is another province in northern Laos, to the north-west of Luang Phabang.