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KING, GAIL OMAN. Translator. *The Story of Hua Guan Suo*. Arizona
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Tempe: Arizona State University, 1989. ix+279 pages. Biblio-
graphy, facsimile of Chinese text. Paper US\$8.00; ISBN 0-939252-
20-1.

A recent discovery of a Ming tomb near Shanghai in China has turned up fourteen
books of popular literature. *The Story of Hua Guan Suo* is a translation of one of
those. The translation (29-228) of the adventure tale is preceded by an introduction
(1-26) and followed by a reproduction of the original text with its illustrations (235-
279). The English translation preserves the flavor of the prosimetric original well,
even down to the "folksy" lingo. If the English actually reads better, that is, more
polished than the Chinese, it is because there is no longer in modern English that sharp
a distinction between the elite and literary, and the popular, vernacular style as there
was and still is in Chinese.

For Chinese literary historians, this is a rare find, because it provides the first
solid example of the genre called *Cihua*—a kind of mixed sing-song verse and prose
narrative used in public, theatrical performance and/or, with the birth of the popular

press in the Ming dynasty, read alone or among friends in the privacy of homes. Confined as Victorian ladies often were to a life at home, the Ming lady whose tomb yielded the find apparently enjoyed her "parlor novels" so much in her lifetime that it was decided that she should carry some of them with her to the next world. This act helped to preserve this "penny novel," otherwise a highly perishable commodity.

The prosimetric format has been adopted by this folk genre. A mix of alternating prose and poetry, each covering roughly the same material, this format originated in Buddhist texts such as the *Lotus Sūtra*, where there is a juxtaposition of an earlier, oral version of the teaching in verse, and a later, probably written expansion of the same in prose. What was an accidental mix was mistaken as a new and integral form. Popular preachers and storytellers in the Tang period then intentionally adopted this prosimetric format. Their manuscripts, sometimes with illustrations, have survived in Dunhuang. The *Story* here is a late heir to that tradition. The verse part allows it to claim a certain measure of literary achievement, and can also be adapted fairly easily to music and song. The more juicy part comes naturally in the longer prose narratives. Folklorists might, however, be more interested in the story line than the literary form itself.

The story line is about Hua Guan Suo's search for his father, Guan Yu, better known to the Western reader as the Chinese God of War, a famous general of the Three Kingdoms period who had been definitively divinized by the time of the Ming dynasty. Guan Suo was the third son of Guan Yu. When he was a child, he was separated from his mother during a festival celebrated on the lake. Subsequently he was brought up in the family of Suo. Then, as an adept, he was tutored by a Taoist master, Hua. These all happened before he discovered his real patrimony as the son of Guan Yu, who was then busy defending the rightful heir to the Han throne in the north. The young warrior, taking all three surnames of Hua, Guan, and Suo, sets out to find his real father. En route he subdues bandits, acquires rare weaponry and a superior mount, and fights and wins a warrior maiden as his bride. He also kills monsters, as most heroes would. He ends up with three wives—again as all respectable Chinese men of rank should. At long last he finds his father, proves his worth as a fighter, and is reunited with Guan Yu. Later he avenges his father's death, then continues fighting for his lord Liu, the rightful heir. He dies a hero's death in battle, having been caught off guard during his mourning. Except for this one time, Hua Guan Suo had won all the battles he fought, through a combination of bare strength and a measure of trickery (an acceptable moral standard in these warrior romances).

Although the hero's quest to establish his patrimony is recognized by the translator as a common theme in folklore (10), that in itself is just the bare skeleton of the story and provides the moral justification for filling in the bulk of the book with thrilling tales of combat. The latter is what actually "sells" the book. Compared with other feudal tales of patrimony lost and gained (like *Ivanhoe*), Hua Guan Suo's tale is more a loose series of battles than a well-told quest. The episodes were probably told originally in instalments by storytellers. Thus, except for the (first) wife, the horse, and his weapon, items any King Arthur should somehow get his hands on, the many other battles often serve no higher purpose than help to sell the whole as a serial. One more or one less brawl en route makes little difference. There is no growth of the hero's character in the process. He was never the wiser or the more vain for it. Personal growth might not be China's idea of a hero's identity; Hua Guan Suo's task was to prove himself a warrior worthy of being Guan Yu's seed (10-11). But a Joseph Campbell would be disappointed, for although this hero on his quest finds his fair damsel and slays the heinous monsters, such mythic and psychic archetypes are now just foils

for his valor. The fair maiden is a lady warrior fit for a warrior's bride—no hint of a gentle anima to his overbearing animus—and the monster is just another bandit in nonhuman form.

Likewise, much of the folk beliefs of folklore are barely visible in this secular tale. This is also a story of warriors told, not by one who saw the real tragedy of wars like the Greek bards, but by a literatus who made a living by selling such escapist tales of harmless violence. Contrary to appearance, the tale is rather bloodless. The hero usually fights the various bandit leaders one against one. He wins. The leader is converted. His band of hundreds, who act more like spectators than like real men-in-arms, join Hua Guan Suo's army en masse. A great feast always follows; a common meal, Chinese style, seals the new brotherhood of fighters. The Viking also killed and then dined heartily, but at least there would be more gore. (The ones who usually get killed in the story here are the monsters; there is no place in the human company for them to be converted to Hua's cause.) The tale does tell of physical action, male camaraderie, and a more open romance between man and woman, everything denied the men and women living in an uptight Neo-Confucian society. But ironically, though the tale is not true to life, life sometimes does imitate even bad fiction. Young minds have been seduced from their stuffy studios to go looking for some Taoist master from whom to learn *hung-fu*, and among the brotherhood of the Chinese martial arts, the ethos of loyalty has been patterned around such heroic tales, and oaths of sworn brotherhood are still made before Guan Yu.

So folklorists coming across this book might have to make an adjustment to see how myths were routinely historicized in China. The history of this fictional hero is itself the history of Chinese politics (16–18): namely, that the Ming rulers' attempt to pacify the Yunan area where rebels associated themselves with a vague figure called Guan Suo apparently had the government turning his cult into a cult of a loyal subject, which led to his being made a legendary "third" son of Guan Yu, then being canonized as the God of War defending the state. Hua Guan Suo then ended up pacifying the same southwest area "back then" with Zhuge Liang, a compatriot of Guan Yu, in a tale not set in "once upon a time" but squarely in time. Created by history for political ends, Hua Guan Suo enjoyed a summer of popularity as a fictional hero and then also faded from history—until this recent find helps recall him, quite literally, from the grave.

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ZHAO ZONGFU 趙宗福. *Huaer tonglun* 花兒通論 [On *huaer*]. Xining 西寧: Qinghai Renmin Chubanshe 青海人民出版社, 1989.

ZHOU JUANGU and ZHANG GENGYOU 周娟姑, 張更有. *Qinghai chuantong minjian gegu jingxuan* 青海傳統民間歌曲精選 [Selections of traditional Qinghai folk songs]. Xining: Qinghai Renmin Chubanshe, 1988.

On Huaer and *Selections of Traditional Qinghai Folk Songs* are two recently published books that those interested in Asian folklore will find valuable. The first is probably the best study to date on a widely distributed type of folk song that may be translated