

MONGOLIA / CHINA

HEISSIG, WALTHER. *Tsakhār-Märchen. Nach Aufzeichnungen aus dem Jahre 1938/39* [Chahar Märchen. Recordings from the year 1938/39]. Asiatische Forschungen, Band 87. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1985. Vii+250 pages. Four plates, 31 pages of facsimile, index of names. Paper DM 104.—, ISSN 0571-320X.

With this volume Professor Heissig gives us another fruit of his long standing effort to introduce the manyfold riches of Mongolian oral tradition also to the non-Mongolist. This time he opens a well marked route into the world of the Mongolian *Märchen*, where we meet with by now familiar epic themes, albeit they appear in a somewhat altered and at times attenuated form.

This book is dedicated to the memory of the late Danish Altaic scholar Kaare Grønbech (1901-1957). It was Grønbech who had collected the stories which make the subject matter of this book while he was part of the Centralasian Expedition of the Danish Geographic Society 1938-1939. He had collected altogether twenty-six stories from the same narrator Lhisurun, a young Mongol of about eighteen years. Heissig has selected thirteen of them for discussion in the present volume. Twelve are introduced through rather extensive résumés while another one, *Gal möndör qaγan* (King Firehail), is only referred to in the discussion, its text having been published in full earlier (See Heissig 1979: 44-77).

Heissig includes only those narratives from Grønbech's collection which he considers to be "*Märchen*, epics, heroic *Märchen*, or retellings of an epic, or bards' songs (bensen üliġer)" (3). It will be noticed in the enumeration of genres quoted that Heissig does not restrict his selection to just *Märchen in sensu stricto* but rather considers those kinds of narratives which he takes to exhibit features characteristic of a *Märchen*. This may cause some surprise to those readers who take the title in the strict sense and turn to the book as a collection of Mongolian *Märchen*. One has to understand the term, however, not so much as a category but rather as a collective term for narratives showing to a greater or lesser degree features of the *Märchen*. Under these circumstances one might have expected that Heissig would explain to some degree the criteria guiding his choice. To be sure, these criteria somehow emerge indirectly through the discussion, and seem to be close to those spelled out by Lutz Röhrich (Röhrich 1964: 9-27). In fact, a look into Röhrich's monograph proved to be very helpful in understanding Heissig's discussion. A reader of non-Mongolist background looking for a characterization of the genres mentioned might be disappointed in not finding them in this book. For this he should consult Heissig's *History of Mongolian Literature* (Heissig 1972).

In spite of the foregoing criticism it is only fair to say that Heissig in the first place opts for a cumulative approach to the narratives rather than to discuss their genres in detail. He takes them as various instances of Mongolian oral tradition and points out that they are of eminent interest by the manner in which they reveal the artistry of Mongolian narrators and the essential features of their tradition. In this endeavor Heissig is admirably successful.

As a document of Mongolian oral tradition the collection's unique importance and interest emerge from two factors. First, it offers precious material for the knowledge of traditions in an area for which material hitherto known was rather scarce, i.e., the Chahar region in the eastern part of Inner Mongolia where the interaction with Chinese culture can be expected to be intense. Second, and possibly more important, it is a

body of narratives recorded entirely from one single narrator. This fact gives Heissig the chance, on the one hand, to unravel the sources nourishing the narrator's imagination and, on the other hand, to lay open the uninhibited liberty the narrator takes in order to arrange and rearrange preexisting episodes and motifs into his stories. In analysing these features Heissig succeeds in revealing the truly surprising skillfulness of the young narrator.

In order to give the specialist some idea of how a full story reads, one of them is reproduced in full as facsimile in Mongolian script, another in Mongolian text but in transcription. The bulk of the book, however, is made up of detailed résumés of twelve stories. In spite of this abbreviated form the stories are by no means mere skeletons. Their narrative flux and something of their peculiar charm can still be appreciated thanks to Heissig's own narrative talent. Compared with these texts his annotations, then, are relatively short and yet they are packed with information. One cannot but be impressed by the degree of his erudition which enables him to lay open farreaching connections with other traditions, be they Mongolian or not. As a result, the reader comes away from this book with a vivid impression of how deeply and in what intricate ways the narrator is involved in his culture's tradition and in what skillful manner he employs the material at his disposition.

The discussion unfolds in three parts resulting at the same time in a loose grouping of the narratives as well. Heissig is able to show that the narrator was familiar with certain Chinese literary conventions, but even more important, that he is at ease with stylistic features of the bards' songs, the *bensen üliger*, to such an extent that he can make his own liberal use of them. He demonstrates this by showing how the narrator falls from prose into rhymed sequences, and uses decorative poems (*čimeg qolboča*) and formulaic means such as the "rules for warriors" (*Soldatenregeln*). In the second part a considerably detailed comparison with Mongolian epics leads Heissig to conclude convincingly that the *Märchen*, as they are part of the living oral tradition, represent the outcome of a process which began with the rhymed epics and, while passing through intermediate forms mixing alliteration and prose, descended finally to the present state. This is to say that the details of an epic may have been forgotten, but certain of its rhymed parts in particular are remembered and used as formulae even today. In the third and last part he discusses stories which tell of the adventures of a group of brothers. Heissig points out that some of the stories' episodes derive from sources as the *Rāmāyaṇa* or the Mongolian Gesar epic, but that they are adapted in a characteristic manner following the predilections of the narrator. Incidentally, in this group of narratives the *Märchen*-like character is most clearly visible.

Notwithstanding its unpretentious presentation this study gives a lot of food for further thought and points to lines worth investigating. What seems to be a highly technical discussion of characteristic features of Mongolian oral tradition succeeds through the hands of Professor Heissig in gradually drawing a picture of a young man who in the stories crafted according to his personal skills makes personages and episodes come alive which themselves participate in the long and rich tradition of his people. After this we only hope that the narratives could one day be published in their full translation.

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Peter Knecht

THAILAND

YOUNG, LINDA WAI LING. *Shan Chrestomathy. An Introduction to Tai Mau Language and Literature*. Monograph Series No. 28. Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, 1985. Viii+316 pages. Map, glossaries. Paper US\$14.75, ISBN 0-8191-4808-3; Hardcover US\$ 28.50, ISBN 0-8191-4808-3.

Tai Mau (Chinese Shan) is one of the less accessible of the Southwestern Tai languages. In this modest work, Linda Young provides students of Tai dialects a corpus of eleven texts in the form of five folktales, three myths and three short expressive pieces, one of which is a lullaby. The texts were collected in Chiangmai, Thailand in 1976. Each text is transcribed phonemically, with an interlinear word-by-word translation into English, which, in turn, is followed by a continuous free translation. Introductory notes include a phonological sketch, grammar notes, and a description of the new (1940) Tai Mau writing system. The last third of the book is devoted to glossaries, one of which is the 1000 comparative word list developed by William J. Gedney and utilized by Jimmy Harris and others subsequently.

Those who have attempted to translate the literatures of the minority Tai languages can appreciate the difficulties encountered by Young. Untrained in Shan (but knowing Standard Thai), unable to translate *in situ* or with the assistance of a dictionary of the language, her work was mainly one of field translation. Her principal informant, a Tai Mau speaker from Nam Kham, a border town in the Lashio Shan State of Burma, "not only supplied all eight texts as well as the two tables, but, much to my delight and with a zeal which was a perennial source of mystery to me, proceeded to privately write out each text entirely in phonemic script before we embarked on a morpheme-by-morpheme translation."

In the Foreword, James A. Matisoff cautions that "this work is primarily a contribution to cultural anthropology, and only incidentally to linguistics." Linda Young herself also points out differences between some of her citations and those of William Gedney, who went over her data and noted internal inconsistencies and the possibility of notational errors as well. While her grasp of the central meaning of the texts is sufficiently good, one is troubled by the many details of the language that she is unable to deal with or has treated in an almost casual manner. For instance, she displays the glottal stop as a consonant phoneme in a chart on page 11, but in a footnote on the same page declares that it is subphonemic. Later, on page 30, the Tai Mau letter for the glottal stop appears in the list of consonants drawn up neatly by her principal informant but is transcribed by her as (a)—a vowel. On page 32 she attempts to show how the same symbol is used to designate a short glottalized—a? with the illustration s?abaay (wrong) instead of sa?baay (correct). One could go on to point out numerous mis-translation of individual glosses and confusion in matters of syntax as well.

Although she introduces her material as "oral literature," it is evident that she has worked with at least eight written texts transcribed by her main assistant and not from live recordings of truly oral performances. One Mr. Pi apparently "sang" a