

BOOK REVIEWS

MORIYA TOSHIHIKO. *Nihon Ryōiki no Kenkyū* (Research on Nihon Ryōiki). Tokyo, Miai-sha, 1974, 198 pp.¹

MORIYA, TOSHIHIKO. *Zoku Nihon Ryōiki no Kenkyū* (More Research on Nihon Ryōiki). Tokyo, Miai-sha, 1978, 266 pp.²

These two works (which I shall for convenience designate as I and II, respectively) are primarily composed of journal articles and papers presented by the author over a period of several years; taken together they offer a stimulating approach to the oldest of the extant *setsuwa* (short tale) collections in Japanese literature, *Nihonkoku Gempō Zen'aku Ryōiki* ("A record of miracles concerning the immediate rewarding of virtue and punishment of vice in Japan").³

Generally dated in the early ninth century, *Ryōiki* was compiled by the Buddhist lay monk Kyōkai (also read Keikai)⁴ in order to demonstrate the workings of the Buddhist laws of cause and effect through the explication of miraculous events which were reported to have taken place in Japan. This Kyōkai states very clearly in his preface, and since this collection is clearly a Buddhist one, scholars have generally concentrated on this aspect of its existence.

Moriya, however, came to the work as a specialist in Japanese mythology, and reports in the afterword to the first volume that he and another professor of Japanese literature—whose speciality was folklore—decided to read *Ryōiki* together, and in the course of this reading he was surprised to discover that this Buddhist work actually contains a large number of Shinto myths. Moriya then began digging more deeply into *Ryōiki*, and the results are the essays that make up these two books.

Each volume is identically divided into two sections. The first is labeled "*Nihon Ryōiki no Sekai*" (The world of *Nihon Ryōiki*), and the second, "*Nihon Ryōiki no Hōhō*" (The methods of *Nihon Ryōiki*); in the first section Moriya is concerned with describing the times from which the collection stems, through evidence gleaned from the tales themselves, and in the second he analyzes individual stories from the collection, primarily in terms of their connections with Japanese myth. These second sections are really the heart of Moriya's contributions to *Ryōiki* studies, by far the most stimulating part of his work.

Moriya notes that *Nihon Ryōiki* does not *contain* myths, but that it *utilizes* them as readily available stories; in many of the tales he analyzes the myths are hidden, appearing only with the careful prodding of a specialist's knowledge. The very nature of this speculative approach lays him open to criticism that he has an overly active imagination, finding myth much as many Westerners find Zen—everywhere one looks—but it seems to me that his courage in attempting to bridge the gap between "ancient" (Shinto) Japan and "old" (Buddhist) Japan is commendable even if his ideas must be approached cautiously.

As an example that I personally find extreme, I would point to his discussion of *Ryōiki* II. 31 (Moriya I, 1974: 155–162). The tale in question is about an old couple who have the desire to build a Buddhist pagoda. A child is born to them late in life, and one of her hands is clenched into a fist which will not open. They take this as a physical handicap associated with their advanced ages, but when their daughter is

seven she opens her hand to reveal two pieces of *sari*, the ashes of Buddha. The couple is thus able to realize their dream of building a pagoda, and when it is completed the girl dies. Moriya holds that this tale is a part of the *taketori* (bamboo cutter)⁵ cycle, which usually involves an old woman finding a beautiful girl in a bamboo joint, raising her and becoming wealthy, then finally losing the girl when she returns to the sky whence she came.

It would, of course, be nice to find an example of this venerable story cycle in a work as old as *Ryōiki*, but I cannot help feeling skeptical that this is the one. The only real connection is that the child comes to a couple late in their life, and that that child is a beautiful and physically unusual girl. Moriya says that in the Buddhist *Ryōiki* tale economic happiness is replaced by Buddhist happiness, and perhaps gives us a new way to look at the story, but he does not, in my opinion, make a good case for entering this story in the *taketori* ledger.

On the other hand, he discusses *Ryōiki* II. 33 (Moriya I, 1974: 163–176) in a way which is both stimulating and academically sound. This is a story about a woman eaten by her bridegroom on their wedding night, and Moriya sees it as being related to stories about women who were sacrificed to deities after a one night marriage; his discussion is very concrete, using various examples from Japanese mythology.

Detailed discussion of any of the chapters in these books would require much more space than is allotted to the average book review, so I will limit myself to the two examples above. I should say that in many cases Moriya's arguments are so persuasive that I will never be able to consider the stories in question in any other than his terms, and frequently found myself thinking, "I wish I'd thought of that!" in the course of reading the books.

No matter how one reacts to the individual discussions in these books, it must be repeated that the method itself is stimulating and should be appreciated by anyone interested in the interaction between Buddhist and Shinto elements in Japanese culture and literature. These are important books which should be widely read.

NOTES

1. 守屋俊彦, 「日本靈異記の研究」, 東京, 三弥井社.
2. 守屋俊彦, 「続日本靈異記の研究」, 東京, 三弥井社.
3. 日本国現報善悪靈異記. An English translation was made by Kyoko Motomochi Nakamura, under the title *Miraculous Tales from the Japanese Buddhist Tradition* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973).
4. 景戒
5. 竹取

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WALLS, JAN and YVONNE, transl. *West Lake, A Collection of Folktales*. Hong Kong, Joint Publishing Company, 1980

This volume opens a crack in the door to modern Chinese oral tradition, a room which has been closed to folklorists not dealing mainly with China. *West Lake* is a collection of thirty-four tales from the Hangzhou area which often feature Xi Hu, or the West Lake of the title. The tales were collected, the translators tell us, in 1959,

but not published in China until 1978. Unfortunately, the volume will be of limited use to folklorists because we have no way of knowing to what extent the stories have been edited, or rewritten, and there is no information available as to the narrators themselves. The translators do not say if there was any preface or introduction to the Chinese edition from which they worked, but they do say, "We are told that they have been selected, sorted out and edited many times," so one might surmise the presence of some sort of introductory material in the Chinese text. Inclusion of this in the present volume would have been as much a service to the folklorist as is the motif index appended to the work.

The tales included in this volume tend towards what could be called the "mythic legend" or stories in which the principal actors are often supernatural and which have as their primary function the explanation of natural phenomena such as lakes, falls, mountains and the like. They are always interesting stories, and one senses the presence of a thriving oral tradition in the area from which they were collected. There is in particular much of interest to those who are concerned mainly with the folklore of Japan. For example, the tale "Rising Sun Terrace" (pp. 19-29) describes the imprisonment and release of the sun from the bottom of West Lake; as such it is significant in any consideration of the Japanese story of the confinement of the Sun Goddess in the Heavenly Grotto, for both might be said to depict the "murder" of the sun by a raging storm deity.

Indeed, the mythological character of many of the stories in this volume is, in my opinion, the most valuable aspect of the book. Some two-thirds of the stories contain motifs from Thompson's "A" (mythological) or "B" (animals) classifications, a fact which clearly demonstrates the nature of the tales. On the other hand, only six stories contain the more "märchen-like" motifs found in the "D" (magic) classification, and fewer draw from "H" (tests), so it should be stressed that the range of the tales is limited. This is surely not a weakness, however, for here we get a glimpse at an oral tradition scarcely present in Eberhard's *Folktales of China* (Chicago, 1965).

The translators have supplied a brief introduction which is somewhat disappointing as it does little beyond summarize material already available to the reader in the stories themselves. They call our attention to class conflicts present in many of the tales (poor, honest people who must overcome corrupt landlords and officials), but I, for one, will always wonder to what extent such elements have been either exaggerated or added by the collectors. This element of class conflict is surely an important part of Chinese literature as a whole, and some effort to discuss it in its larger tradition would have been appreciated. There are no notes to the tales at all, and no efforts to compare the tales in this volume to similar stories found elsewhere.

If the above sounds slightly critical I should stress that the tales themselves are a source of great interest and pleasure, and that this volume should broaden our appreciation of Chinese oral literature. The translations read smoothly and easily, and the inclusion of a list of place names with their Chinese characters at the end of the book is a real service to readers, especially those of us who still struggle with the Pinyin romanization.

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