

- TING, NAI-TUNG. *A Type Index of Chinese Folktales (in the oral tradition and major works of non-religious classical literature)*. FF Communications Vol. XCIV-3, No. 223. Helsinki: Adademia Scientiarum Fennica, 1978. Paper, 294 pp., 130.—Fmk. ISBN 951-41-0324-6
- CHOI, IN-HAK. *A Type Index of Korean Folktales*. Seoul: Myong Ji University Publishing, 1979. Paper, 353 pp., US \$15.00.

The study of the folktale in the Far East has by and large yielded to the biases of the West, after some initial attempts by solitary genius to have it otherwise. And this is probably for the best. On the one hand, it opens the Orient up to an international community of scholarship and widens the circle of criticism. It also provides a common meeting point for competitive sentiments which run strong from one country to the next and frequently lead to overblown claims to uniqueness. On the other hand, the fact that the raw material of the Oriental folktale often fits clumsily into Western patterns will no doubt prove a significant factor in making contemporary folklorists have another look at tacit presumptions that have so far gone unnoticed.

Nai-Tung Ting's work on the Chinese folktale provides an interesting example in this regard. At a cursory investigation, the work appears to have been done impeccably. It is bearing testimony to the high level of scholarly asceticism that has characterized so many of those who have fallen under the shadow of the Finnish Academy. The indexing system is efficiently laid out and easy to use. It lends itself readily to eventual computerization and will undoubtedly save all the research headaches and frustrations it has been arranged to. For this it merits the highest praise, as also for the actual amount of material that the author has gathered up and sifted through for us. The bibliography runs to well over 700 entries, many of them sizable volumes or collections running to several volumes. It is composed almost entirely of twentieth-century editions up until 1973. Given the breadth and depth of the nation with the world's largest population, and probably also the largest active folk tradition, we have reason to be grateful for efforts such as this. (In a nice flourish of conscientious apologetics, the author even informs us that one particular source had to be skimmed through quickly because the poor quality of the copy hurt his eyes!)

That having been said, it is an unfortunate blemish on the work that a competent English stylist and grammarian was not consulted for the final version of the introduction, and that the editors did not take the trouble to unify punctuation procedures better. Moreover, the listing of Chinese characters appended to the bibliography is cramped and poorly laid out (perhaps with a touch of revenge, one wonders, on the reader who is granted full share in the spoils without having gone through the toils). It would have taken a good linotypist a half day's work to come up with a more readable format. In a volume of such quality, these scratches are only cosmetic, but still a little sad-denning.

More attention should go, however, to what the author has to say in his useful introduction. Comments on the origins, distribution, dissemination, and interpretation of the tales indicate that these are matters given little attention in the composition of the work and the methods of collation. In at least one significant area this affects the final outcome: the exclusion of so-called "religious material." We have every right to pardon the author for being a little unclear on his norms for "major classical literature," but it is less obvious why he should have worked to construct a pure category of the wonder-tale by leaving out the religious. The author's own explanation, that this is done in the name of "international tradition," is hardly satisfactory. If such a feat

is of dubious merit in Europe and the Americas, it ought to be unthinkable in China, where the boundaries of religion and philosophy and superstition are drawn far less rigidly than in the West. What is more, fidelity to international tradition should recognize that religion has long since relinquished any clear hold on self-definition in the community of scholars, and that even confessional theologies have begun to follow the same path. That folktale classifiers should be able to draw them tightly in again seems a little out of place and out of time. Admittedly, not to have excluded the religious would have meant a little more impurity, a little more cross-classifying, and perhaps the insertion of new categories, not to say a rewriting of the criteria for the wonder-tale as such. The distinction between the *märchen* and the wonder-tale is one of the most confusing anyway, and it is hard to believe that Mr. Ting had done more than fumble through it with his general principle: "[Stories] which are based on or designed to illustrate, various religious teachings, such as reincarnation, retribution, discipline and breach of discipline, trials of the faithful or unfaithful by gods, and so on, are religious legends or myths and consequently ignored here" (p. 11).

To follow this up would require actually tracking down the sources in question; the resume of the tales as such only arouses our suspicions. The use of key terms could only show up in the original Chinese; and only by examining the setting in which a tale was told, the dialect and manner of speech used, and the grouping of tales to which it belongs could we begin to confirm the religious nature of the tale: categories that would probably bear little relationship to those used in the West. Needless to say, a single usable library where even the major source material is available is yet to become a reality, in the East or the West. Mr. Ting's work only reminds us of the importance of such things.

In contrast, readers of Professor In-Hak Choi's work will have a difficult time, I fear, bringing themselves to confidence in the reliability of its scholarship. There is no introduction and no explanation of goals or methods. He does not so much as even mention, as I had to find out otherwise, that this is in fact a translation of the major portion of his doctoral research originally done at a Japanese university and published in Japanese in 1976.<sup>1</sup> I say "translation," but the resemblances to the English language are purely incidental. Not a page, nay not a paragraph, and hardly a sentence goes by without a major blunder. Out of deference to the "past eighteen years" that he tells us in a brief preface he had spent gathering and studying the folktales, I took the trouble to read the theoretical chapters of the original Japanese. Leaving aside the rather general historical remarks on the study of the folktale in the West, his comments on the tradition in Korea were enlightening, and I reckon it a loss that this was not included in the English edition. In particular, the sorts of problems unique to collecting and classifying the Korean tale make a rather interesting story on their own, even though they tend to be rather disorganized and scattered throughout his account of classifying methods (largely Western, with some Japanese influence). Instead, what we have is a scant few dozen bibliographical sources, arranged in the standard manner with an occasional curious category alteration, and a final cross-referencing with four other indices. We can only hope that something more will be done with this work, perhaps to bring it up to the standards of the FFC where it should find its rightful place and better justify its price.

As far as the actual content of the tales goes, it must be said that the summaries Choi provides of his 766 entries give us, on the whole, a much clearer indication of the actual motifs and composition, while Ting covers more than twice as many tales with better documentation. (Both authors make very liberal use of the category of *schwänke* rather than commit to the label of "unclassified" that large portion of material that

falls outside the moulds. In this respect, they both seem to be following the lead of Eberhard's classic work on the Chinese folktale.) If it is hard to page through Choi's accounts without feeling the urge to take a child up on one's lap and spin a yarn from all the details provided, it is no less difficult to read Ting's summaries without wanting to get one's hands on the original material and see what the stories look like in their complete form. By way of illustration, we may compare their treatment of comparable tales (both types 103 in Eberhard). Ting gives thirteen sources for the following entry entitled *The Monk and the Bird*:

"A man goes to the mountains and (a) hears boys sing (b) watches two boys, old men, or ladies play chess. When he returns to the spot where he has left his tool (bucket, axe, etc.) or horse, he notices that his tool has decayed or that his horse has died. When he reaches home, he finds out that many years, or even generations, have passed" (p. 85).

Choi lists only two sources and describes his tale of *Three School Friends* this way:

- I. Once there were three school friends. One boy wanted to have power, the second one wanted magic and the last one wanted to occupy a great plain all for his own.
- II. A long time passed after they parted. The boy who had always been fair became a district officer and the boy who was gentle became a mountain hermit.
- III. One day the district officer visited the friend who was then a mountain hermit. There, he received a kind hostage. When he visited the greedy friend who had wanted a great plain, that friend was turned to a green-blue snake and put in the cage.
- IV. The district officer stayed with the mountain hermit for three days and went back to home, but the village had changed greatly, in the village, three hundreds years had passed" (*sic*, p. 118).

In matters of the folktale, fevers still boil quickly when it comes to interpretation. It is still a living form in most of the world, although I find it difficult to concur with those who would claim that research has not had considerable impact on its development, even to the point of effecting a certain paralysis of its former vitality. But the folktale has not been killed off for having become a branch of study, and in fact scholars of the folktale have done much to protect it from being devoured by that avaricious commercial beast that Richard Dorson has neatly dubbed "fakelore." At the same time, the study of the folktale must be prepared to let living oral traditions challenge its self-understanding to a loosening of the reins so that more reliable means of using the amassed material with intuitive good sense—the same intuitive good sense with which tales were memorized, altered, and transmitted long before the invention of "the folktale" as an academic class of facts—can be fostered. The building up of schools of interpretation is, after all, folklore of another sort. It needs a solid academic base to keep from merely reconfirming the biases of categories introduced from the outside; and that academic base in turn needs to be applied and put to use, lest it get locked away irretrievably in expensive tomes that are simply shelved and unread.

#### NOTE

1. Choi In-hak, *Kankoku Mukashi-banashi no Kenkyū*, Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1976. 崔仁鶴『韓国昔話の研究。その理論とタイプインデックス』, 東京, 弘文堂.

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