

China



Duan Baolin 段寶林, ed. *Zhongguo Minjian Wenxue Gaiyao*
中國民間文學概要 [Introduction to Chinese Folk Literature].
Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2005. 270 pages.



Duan Baolin, ed. *Zhongguo Minjian Wenyixue* 中國民間文藝學
[The Study of Chinese Folk Literature and Arts].
Beijing: Wenhua Yishu Chubanshe, 2006. 459 pages.

DUAN BAOLIN 段寶林 is among the foremost folklorists of the generation who made their careers after the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. Duan follows in the footsteps of scholars like Zhong Jingwen 鍾敬文, Gu Jiegang 顧頡剛, and Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸, who created modern Chinese folklore studies in the May Fourth Era of the 1920s under the influence of trends in the West and Japan. Hailing from Jiangsu province in the Yangzi River Delta, Duan has conducted fieldwork studies on oral traditions in many areas of the country, including Hebei 河北, Jiangsu 江蘇, Tibet 西藏, Yunnan 雲南, Guangxi 廣西, and Inner Mongolia 內蒙古. Presently an emeritus professor at Beijing (Peking) University, he has taught folklore courses for over four decades. As a central figure in the development and execution of national folklore initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s, Duan has demonstrated a wide and deep knowledge of the vast local and multi-ethnic traditions that comprise Chinese folklore. Among his most influential works is a volume, now in its 3rd edition, dedicated to folklore fieldwork and research in China. Entitled *Zhongguo Minjian Wenxue Gaiyao* [Introduction to Chinese Folk Literature], the first edition was written in the wake of the devastating Cultural Revolution (1966–1976), in an era when basic principles—such as accurate and complete collection methods—had to be reiterated. Succeeding editions have continued to present straightforward and pragmatic strategies and express concern over methods of collecting, archiving, and researching oral and oral-connected literature. The volume covers genres in Western-derived categories such as folkstories (*minjian gushi* 民間故事), folksongs (*minjian geyao* 民間歌謠), epics (*shishi* 史詩), and proverbs (*yanyu* 諺語), as well as the more culturally-specific professional storytelling arts (*quyi* 曲藝) that combine singing, speaking, and music. As such, it and its recent companion volume, *Zhongguo Minjian Wenyi*

ixue, provide excellent starting places for entry into the emerging world of Chinese folklore studies.

The Study of Chinese Folk Arts was authored by Duan, along with a number of other Chinese folklorists (including Yan Yunxiang 閻云翔, Chen Xiaohong 陳曉紅, Jin Wei 靳偉, Wang Shucun 王樹村, Geng Shenglian 耿生廉, Hu Ke 胡克, Tan Meilian 譚美蓮, and Hou Xiaofeng 侯曉楓). The project began as a collection of successful teaching materials compiled since the 1980s. Composed of 14 chapters, the 460 page work includes an introduction and an extensive bibliography. The first four chapters present basic approaches to folklore and the historical background of folklore studies in China. General discussions are couched within a Marxist perspective on the characteristics of folk literature and folk art, different generic categories, artistic and scientific properties, and origins, as found and reiterated in many other folklore-related works published in China. The significance of this collaborative work, however, especially when compared with Duan's *Introduction to Chinese Folk Literature*, is the more detailed theoretical analysis that touches upon complex issues such as relationships between oral literature and written literature, and the marriage between low and high art (“*su*” 俗 and “*ya*” 雅). One of the most interesting features of the folk arts volume is that Duan and his co-authors endeavor not only to expand the field of folklore beyond oral or oral-connected traditions, but also to clarify the boundaries of intangible cultural heritage through the discussion of the historical place and role of folk literature and arts in the tradition of Chinese written literature and great writers. The discussion on the professional *quyi* genres in Chapter 9 is particularly interesting, as this emic category exhibits characteristics of both written and oral literatures. Another merit of this book is found in chapters on other intangible cultural artistic forms, including drama, dance, and music.

Both works provide general, comprehensive, college-level introductions to the field and study of Chinese folk literature and folk arts. Importantly, the books provide evidence of transformations occurring in the scholarly field of Chinese folklore in regards to many issues and perspectives in the book that stem from re-examination and revisions of previous works as well as the incorporation of new theoretical stimuli from within China and from abroad.

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