Kenneth J. Yin
Dungan Folktales and Legends

New York: Peter Lang, 2021. 424 pages, 2 maps. Hardcover, $109.95; ebook, $109.95. ISBN 9781433187612 (hardcover), 9781433184116 (ebook).

This volume is an English translation of seventy-eight folk narratives assembled and translated into Russian under the title *Dunganskie narodnye skazki I predaniaa* (Dungan folktales and legends) by the revered Russian Sinologist Boris L. Rifkin (1932–2012) (known in Chinese as Li Fuqing), based on versions collected and translated from Dungan sources by Makhmud Akhemeddovich Khasanov and Il'ias Ismailovich Iuusupov (1977). The present volume, edited and translated into English by Kenneth J. Yin, is the first complete rendering of the collection in English. The folktales are associated with a people called the Dungans in Russia and parts of eastern Central Asia.

The Dungans are known as "Sinophone Muslims"—that is, Chinese-speaking Muslims—and also as the Hui, especially in China, where they are officially termed *Huizu* (Hui ethnic group). The Hui number over four million in China and have large communities

in northwest, southwest, and northeastern China, as well as elsewhere in the country. Chinese sources mention what appear to be Dungan/Hui peoples as early as the seventh century. The populations in Central Asia seem to have emigrated from China starting in the century, though the history and ethnic composition are still under debate by scholars, as indicated in the original introduction to this collection.

Of the seventy-eight narratives, seventy-three are attributed to "Dungans" and five to "Hui." The languages of the collected stories herein include stories in the spoken Dungan Gansu dialect (the majority of the stories), the spoken Shaanxi Dungan dialect (which is spoken in the eastern-central areas of Kyrgyzstan), and the Yunnan Hui dialect. Most of the tales were recorded in Cyrillic Dungan, a written medium used outside of China. The linguistic diversity of the project made the transliteration of names into Russian and Chinese Romanizations sometimes problematic, as explained by Yin (xv–xvi). An example of Dungan KNAB romanization, based on Gansu Dungan, is included in a riddle in "A Quick-Witted Boy" with the line "*Youli yige gounjidi dan*" (standard Chinese *pinyin* romanization: *yeyou yige gongjide dan*, or "and one rooster egg" in English) (239).

The book includes a short preface and notes on translation. Chapter 1, which is an introduction to "The Fictional World of the Dungan Tale," is based on the original introduction by Rifkin and Khansanov. The introduction provides background on the origins of the Dungan, migrations and present populations, language, and aspects of the stories, including the imagery of colors, numbers, place names, the theme of filial piety, religious symbolism, instances of words from other languages, and story themes and motifs, among others. It also includes a list of 216 sources (mostly Russian and Chinese) on Dungan folklore research and related subjects, ranging from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. The bulk of the volume consists of three chapters of tales, titled: "Wonder Tales and Animal Tales," "Novelistic Tales, Folk Anecdotes, and Adventure Stories," and "Legends, Historical Tales, and Narratives." There are also four appendices (including a list of storytellers and information about the original collectors and editors), a glossary, and an index.

Chapter 2, on wonder tales, includes forty stories with supernatural content, many sharing themes and motifs with other folk literatures of northern China and parts of Central Asia. Several tales within this section share similarities. For example, "Zhon Dajie Shoots Pheasants" shares motifs of a young man marrying a daughter of the dragon king who emerges from a red gourd. Bringing good fortune to the honest young pheasant hunter who follows her instructions to the letter, the general pattern is similar to that of "The Red Bottle-Gourd," though in the second story, the sympathetic young man is abused by his mother-in-law. As explained in the notes, the red bottle gourd is a common feature in many Dungan homes and is associated with tales of how good fortune is gained by acting properly and keeping a good relation with the supernatural world. Other tales include transformational beings such as the "Frogling," a story about a frog adopted by an elderly couple who later transforms to a human and marries the emperor's daughter. However, she thoughtlessly throws away her handsome husband's frog skin, bringing disaster to the land. "The Snake Girl" is about a young man doing "business beyond the Great Wall" (141) who naively marries a snake demon in the form of a lovely young woman. And in "The Old Hunter," cunning fox fairies prevail over human adversaries. A favorite of Riftin's was "The White-Rabbit Girl." He considered the tale a "highly transformed" version of the classic "youth obtains divine wife" tale, which is told with emphasis on a young woman protagonist who transforms into a white rabbit and digs

herself out of the courtyard in which she has been cloistered after her fiancée, an old mullah, unexpectedly dies (30).

In chapter 3, among the "novelistic" tales similar to works of traditional vernacular fiction, are two concerning the "Mangy One," in which a "mangy" young man buys a dream of the sun, moon, and two stars from his better-looking workmate, and through a series of interactions with beautiful princesses—the second being a transformed dove from whom he stole her feathered cloak—winds up with two beautiful wives (the sun and moon) and two lovely children (stars) and reigns as emperor. As in the red bottle gourd stories, the young protagonist first fails to heed the advice of his female mentor but then accepts her aid. Other tales in this section include titles such as "The Man Who Was Afraid of His Wife," "The Seven Baldheads," "The Foolish Son-in-Law," and others that highlight foolish behavior and sometimes reveal social anxieties.

Chapter 4 contains legends of a number of Chinese historical characters, such Han Xin of the third century BCE , the Emperor Wendi of the Sui dynasty (581–604 CE), and Huang Tianba, a leader of the Yellow Turbans revolt near the fall of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). These are all told as vernacular stories, with many incidents that sound much like story kernels of lengthy serial stories from professional storytelling (*shuoshu*) genres and plots of some late Imperial works of vernacular fiction. One outstanding example is "The Story of Xie Rengouy," or Xie Rengui (614–83 CE), which concerns a famous general in the Tang dynasty and is the subject of special study by Riftin. Other narratives are versions of famous Chinese tales such as "Yu Beiya Breaks the Zither" (*Yu Boya sui qin*). Another called "The Stranger" is set in "Hashi," which is the historical city of Kashgar in western Xinjiang. The tales in all three sections reflect the complex cultural mixings that took place among Dungan/Hui communities over many centuries, combining elements as distant as the Middle East and China.

In all, Kenneth J. Yin has presented the English-speaking world with an accessible volume of stories that were collected, translated, and edited by a constellation of cultural workers that included one of Russia's greatest Sinological folklorists. The volume offers a collection of tales that adds more data for comparisons of Asian folk narratives and contributes to a wider understanding of Dungan/Hui folk narrative and lore (Berezkin 2012, 267–68).

References

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