

## CHINA

LI FUQING 李福清 [BORIS RIFTIN]. *Guan Gong chuanshuo yu Sanguo yanyi* 關公傳說與三國演義 [Kuan-kung legends and the Romance of the Three Kingdoms]. Taipei: Han Chung Book Co., Ltd, 1997, xii + 366 pages. Color plates, illustrations. Paper NT\$320; ISBN 957-99290-9-2. (In Chinese)

For those who are interested in Chinese folklore and *zhanghui xiaoshuo* 章回小說 (vernacular full-length fiction), this book will be an inspiring and worthwhile read. The author of this book, Boris Riftin, is an internationally-renowned Russian Sinologist. He started his research in the early 1960s on the *Sanguo* 三國 [Three Kingdoms]-lore with particular interest in the legends and worship of Guan Gong 關公. Since then, he has published extensively in both Russian and Chinese and this book is to be remembered as a major contribution to scholarship for its wide-ranging and thought-provoking exploration of the origin, spread, and variation of the Guan Gong legends and for its rich sources and scholarly comments as well. Indeed, a particularly enjoyable feature of this book is its inspiring and convincing analysis of a great variety of primary sources about Guan Gong ranging from folk and religious pictures and portraits to documented myths, legends and folktales. As a folklorist, Riftin attaches great importance to fieldwork. He has made numerous trips to and across China and its neighboring countries to collect primary sources, some of which had existed only in verbal forms and may have otherwise been lost. This book is actually a collection of research papers on Guan Gong and the *Sanguo yanyi* 三國演義 [The Romance of the Three Kingdoms, hereafter *The Romance*]. It contains seven chapters and four appendices, and is about 450,000 Chinese characters in length.

Chapter One, which begins with a critical review of research on Guan Gong conducted by scholars on both sides of the Taiwan straits and from other parts of the world, has its focus on legendary accounts of Guan Gong's supernatural birth, the supernatural origins of his magic sword and red-hair stallion, and his manifestations and places of worship as a deity. In the course of his analysis, Riftin makes frequent references to the Aarne-Thompson motif index in comparison with folktales of this type in circulation among people from other cultural and ethnical backgrounds, which greatly helps his study of Guan Gong legends go beyond the scope of Chinese folktale tradition into a wider world of folklore. The most inspiring aspect of his study to me is that he does not discuss the Guan Gong legends in isolation. Rather, he places his objects of research in a macro-cultural context and examines them in close association with Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist and other Chinese folk religious traditions.

Chapter Two deals with the multiple roles of Guan Gong in Chinese history as a battlefield warrior riding the famous red-haired stallion and striking his magic sword at his enemy, as a Confucian general (*rujian* 儒將) reading the *Chunqiu* 春秋 [Annals of spring and autumn], and as a deified emperor wearing imperial robe and insignia. It also shows him as

a demon-suppressing hero or a god of fortune, as depicted in Ming 明 (1368–1644)–Qing 清 (1616–1911) illustrated editions of *The Romance* and the *Sanguo zhi pinghua* 三國志平話 [Plain narrative version of the history of the Three Kingdoms], in woodblock folk spring festival paintings, on paper effigies used as sacrificial offerings, murals, and statues in temples and monasteries, and on facial masks and make-up on the stage of traditional Chinese operas. There are forty-seven illustrations and photos in this book and they vary from each other in terms of theme, function, structure, and style. The earliest one dates from the Jin 金 (1115–1234)—Yuan 元 (1206–1368) dynasties, and some of them come from as far away as the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Through a minute description of settings, colors, postures, and outfits of Guan Gong pictures, Rifting gives a vivid account of the origin of the Guan Gong worship and its variation and development across time and space. He also discusses in detail religious, particularly Buddhist and Taoist, influence upon Chinese folk beliefs regarding the worship of Guan Gong. Significantly, he provides source information for all the forty-seven illustrations and photos in the book, and spares no effort to compare their regional/national and cultural characteristics.

The focus of this book is then shifted to *The Romance*. As the first of “the Four Masterworks of the Ming Novel,” *The Romance* has attracted much attention from literary critics ever since the Ming dynasty. Rifting’s unique contribution to the study of this novel expresses itself fully in his exploration of the interaction of oral literature upon written literature as shown in the creation of this novel. In Chapter Three, Rifting starts with a comparative survey of traditional Chinese and European literature, finding that there is much in common between them in that both relied heavily on oral traditions (folktales, myths, epics, and legends) in the construction of plots (176). Medieval writers enjoyed much more freedom than their modern and contemporary counterparts in drawing on oral sources for “making” (*zhizuo* 制作) their stories. They gave little thought to the construction of novel plots, as there was always a great mass of ready-made primary materials at hand. What was left for them to do was to find out an appropriate new form or way to present and represent them (177), as is the case with the author of *The Romance*, Luo Guanzhong 羅貫中 (1330?–1400?). With no existing model or style to serve as a guide, Luo turned for inspiration and imitation to two totally different narrative traditions: folk literature (*shuoshu* 說書, storytelling) or semi-folk literature (*pinghua* 平話, plain narrative; and *zaju* 雜劇, variety play) and history (official history, unofficial history, and chronicle) (177). To illustrate his idea about the influence of these two narrative traditions on Luo Guanzhong, Rifting selects from Chapters Eight and Nine of *The Romance* a story about “Wang Yun shrewdly setting a double snare.” He first analyzes this story into fourteen narrative units referred to as *buduan* 步段 (movement). He then identifies primary sources from the above-mentioned traditions Luo used in the plot construction, classifies them according to their sources, and further explores the means employed by the author to organize the otherwise loosely connected episodes into a story. Rifting concludes his study with the following observations (212–13): (1) Luo Guanzhong wrote *The Romance* under the influence of the tradition of historical writings, as evidenced by his chronological narration of events and narrative prose style; (2) he drew on various historical records and transplanted them in *The Romance*; (3) he reorganized episodes selected from historical writings into a coherent unified story by building up cohesive ties between them; (4) he transferred some events involving historical figures to his fictional figures in the novel whenever he felt it to be appropriate and necessary (5) he made revisions and modifications to historical records before transplanting them in his novel if there need be; (6) he changed the courses of action of characters for specific historical events in line with the logic of historical fiction.

The next three chapters are a continuation of his research on *The Romance* with the focus fixed respectively on the principles of portraying characters, the principles of making analogies, and legendary accounts of Zhuge Liang's 諸葛亮 southern expedition. Riftkin's mastery of Chinese folklore, religion, history, and mythology manifests itself again in his discussion of these issues. The reader might feel a little bit disappointed when coming to the end of the book without finding a concluding chapter or a general framework for this study, but if he takes a close look at the contents, he will find a theme that revolves around Guan Gong and *The Romance* and runs through to the last chapter. Here, he will find a thorough list of publications on Guan Gong and *The Romance* of great value in his study of Chinese folklore and Chinese literature.

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