CENTRAL ASIA

Stuart, Kevin, Keith W. Slater, Wang Xianzhen et al. *Folktales of China's Minhe Mangghuer.* Languages of the World/Text Library 01. München: LINCOM Gmbh, 2005. vii+246 pages. Tables, illustrations, bibliography. Paper €72.90; ISBN 3-89586-254-1.

This is a collection of twenty-three narrative texts in the southeastern variety of Monguor (ISO 693–3: MJG), autonymically *Mangghuer*. This is a Mongolic language variety spoken by approximately twenty-nine thousand people residing largely in Minhe County 民和县

of China's Qinghai Province 青海省; its speakers belong to the Tŭ nationality 土族, and it is sometimes referred to in earlier literature as *San-ch'uan* 三川, a local toponym. The status of Mangghuer as an independent language is a subject of debate. However, all scholars agree that their ancestors, the *Chighaan Monghol* ("White Mongols") were garrisoned with Chinggisid troops on the Chinese frontier in the northeastern part of Amdo Tibet during the thirteenth century, and that the approximately two hundred thousand descendants of these troops today live in three areas: a northern area (Northern or Huzhu Monguor, located in Huzhu County 互助县 in Qinghai and the contiguous Tianzhu County 天祝县 in Gansu Province甘肃省), a southwestern area (Southwestern Monguor or Baonan, located in Tongren County 同仁县 and in Dahejia 大河家 in Gansu Province). It is the southeastern variety that is the subject of this work.

The book's introduction briefly discusses Monguor endonyms and exonyms, and presents population charts and an explanation of the transcription and annotation schemes. The reference section is extensive, but entries are variously formatted and incomplete: citation footnotes in the text in a handful of cases do not appear in the references, and when they do, they are often lacking the original Chinese-language titles.

The twenty-three narratives are presented in the three-line interlinear glossed text format typical of linguistics scholarship; included is a line of transliterated Mangghuer (in a Chinese pinyin-based system), a line of word-by-word translation and grammatical analysis, and a line of English free translation. The texts reflect a normalized form of the language, purged of discourse features such as interactive cues, speech repair, and the other vocalizations (umm…er…well…) characteristic of spoken language. This presentation format makes the text infinitely more readable, as long as the reader keeps in mind that these texts are largely normalized and non-spontaneous. While about two-thirds of the texts are said to be based on direct orthographic transcriptions of tape recordings, the remainder are based on retranslations from field notes in Chinese. Such fieldwork practice is unfortunately still rather common in China, even though the resulting product then reflects the language of the translator, and presents only the gist of the story, rather than presenting the storyteller's language, metaphors, and nuances. Therefore, these materials are best suited to structural and thematic narrative analysis, as well as syntactic and morphological analysis; they are poorly suited to discourse analysis and do not reflect spoken Southeastern Monguor. Details of text provenance (such as locale, date, and other participants) other than the "teller" and the "collector" are not given. Some helpful footnotes briefly cite similar tales in neighboring groups or in other Monguor publications, though no narrative analysis is presented. The tag "dialect variant," while providing welcome extra linguistic information to the reader, is rather misleading, in that it implies erroneously that there is a standard language variety. Southeastern Monguor (Mangghuer) does not have dialects, though it does exhibit minor regional variation in pronunciation and the lexicon. It is of course interesting and sociolinguistically significant that the native-speaker authors believe that one variety is "more standard" than another, and this Mangghuer variety should be made explicit.

The narratives treat a range of largely moralistic themes. Protagonists are often engaged in combating evil, especially in the form of monsters. As with the Central Asian and Siberian *mangus*, among the Southeastern Monguors, the medusa-like monster *mang'huzi~jiutou yaomao* makes an appearance. Monsters, nine-headed or not, are in these tales predominantly female. Animals with anthropomorphic powers are the focus of a number of tales, outwitting other speaking and strategizing animals and humans.

These normalized texts are presented in the following narrative structure: the title is given as an opening utterance; the characters and locale are introduced; and then, in good

structuralist fashion, the plot develops complications and finally a resolution. Often, the last lines of the narrative serve as a moral: in some cases, the moral is given in Chinese (195); at other times, characters code-switch into Chinese (119, 227), especially when they are quoting others. The use of Chinese serves to highlight the utterance as particularly significant to the narrative; it may also point to earlier transmission of the narrative from Chinese speakers.

Several references throughout the narratives show evidence of extensive contact with Chinese, Tibetan, and Mongol Yuan culture: Chinese foot-binding (practiced by young Mangghuer women until the mid-twentieth century), the thousand-*li* horse *qian li ma*), numerous references to Tibetan lamas and Buddhism, as well as the Mongol Yuan dynasty administrator known as *tusi*.

That thirteen authors are listed is indicative of how cooperative this scholarship was: eight listed authors were storytellers, while five processed the materials (as field recordists, transcribers, translators, and grammatical annotators). Many of the narratives in the current work appeared in a previous publication by one of the current co-authors (Wang 1997, which also contains twenty-three narratives).[1] Since Wang 1997 was a limited-distribution local publication, it is good that narratives it contains are reaching a wider audience, but it should have been prominently cited as a source for at least those narratives in the current work "retold" by Wang.

The strength of this collection lies in the narrative themes which emerge, an analysis of which awaits further study. The grammatical analyses also present opportunities for linguistic analysis, when used in conjunction with Slater 2003.

NOTE

1. The following narratives in Wang 1997 are found in this volume: 1–6, 8–12, 14, 16–17, 19–21. Some but not all passages are identical in both works.

REFERENCES CITED

Slater, Keith
    2003 *A Grammar of Mangghuer: A Mongolic language of China's Qinghai-Gansu Sprachbund.* London & New York: RoutledgeCurzon.
Wang Xianzhen, with the editorial assistance of Zhu Yongzheng and Kevin Stuart
    1997 *Mangg huerla bihuang keli* (土族民间故事) *Mangghuer Folktale Reader.* N. P.
    [This book is a grey-market 86 pp. publication without ISBN or publication date. The 1997 date is deduced from the preface, which states the stories were collected in 1996.]

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