

ENDO, SHOJI. *Folktales of Okinawa*. Translated by Terunobu Tamamori and Jayne A. Hitchcock. Naha, Okinawa/Japan: Bank of the Ryukyus International Foundation, 1995. 200 pages. Tables, chronology, illustrations by Fumio Amuro. Hardcover ¥1,000; ISBN 4-947654-05-8. (In English and Japanese)

The Bank of the Ryukyus International Foundation deserves our thanks for having made the publication of the volume under review possible. We here get 28 tales from Okinawa and the Ryukyu islands in Japanese, followed by translations into English. It is nice to see that the many excellent illustrations have been fairly distributed between the texts in the two languages.

In an appendix about Okinawan folktales we get a short history of the island and a description of how the tales were collected. It is said in this description that during the 20 years of collecting the tales an incredible 55,000 tales were preserved by the 10,000 (!) collaborators involved in the survey. Not only researchers but common readers as well can only hope that more tales, many volumes of them, will be published in the years to come. If they are published, we would like to hear much more about the collection and the work on the tales. One really wonders how it is possible to engage so many people in fieldwork.

On the last pages of the book we are also informed about the type and content of the various tales and the place of collection is mentioned for each tale. (It would have been an advantage for researchers if an index of motifs were also included.) The location of each tale is also given on a map at the beginning of the book. Finally, we find a list of important events in Okinawa's history from 605 to 1992.

The most important part of the volume is certainly the 28 tales of which many are similar to tales from Japan and mainland Asia. Every tale is also followed by a note explaining the origin and the migration. Thus nobody will be astonished to find versions of the great migratory tales.

There is, of course, an animal son—in this case a frog—which does not differ very much from the versions found in other areas. The frog son just spends his time in a pond as a real frog, but when he is 20 years old he suddenly speaks. He asks his mother to go and ask a pretty girl to marry him. The girl agrees, although she is told that the husband to be is not quite human. He is a man at night, but in the morning he changes into a frog again. In the end the wife burns his frog skin, and he then becomes a good looking young man also during the day.

As would be expected, the Skymaiden also comes down to take her bath in another tale, and as usual a young man finds her dress and hides it. They marry and have two children, a son and a daughter. When the maiden finds her dress, she just leaves her family and flies up to the sky. From there on the tale takes a totally unexpected turn. We hear nothing more about the maiden, but her son becomes a central figure in the tale. The tale is also called "The Angel's Son." When the son comes of age, he woos a princess, and she agrees to marry him despite his poverty. When they come to his home, the princess understands that her husband is poor because he does not know what gold is. The worship place at his house is in fact made from gold stones, and the sand on the ground consists of gold nuggets. They are thus unbelievably rich, and the man is generous and becomes so respected that he is made lord first of some castles and at last king of the Ryukyu Kingdom.

The two examples above are sufficient to show that you do not know what to expect from the tales in the volume. What you can be sure about, however, is that all the tales are well worth reading and studying.

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