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CHINA

LI SHUJIANG and KARL W. LUCKERT. *Mythology and Folklore of the Hui: A Muslim Chinese People*. New York: State University of New York Press, 1994. xii + 459 pages. Map, b/w photographs, bibliography, index. Paper US\$21.95; ISBN 0-7914-1824-3.

The book under review is the first publication in English on the folklore of the Hui, the Chinese Muslims. The authors accept the official Chinese definition of the Hui as an ethnic minority even though it is questionable for several reasons. First, the language of the Hui usually does not differ from the language spoken by their Han Chinese neighbors. Second, anthropologically speaking the group includes Han Chinese as well as Iranians, Turks, possibly also Manchus and Mongols, and in South China even Arab and Malay elements (CHIEBOKSAROV 1965, 87). What all these people share is not an ethnic origin but a religion, Islam. Ethnographers group them according to the areas where they live in three (or four) rather distinct large subgroups: the most populous is the one of north and northwest China (Ninxia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, Gansu, Shaanxi, Beijing, and Tianjin), followed by the subgroups of southeast China (Shanghai, Guangzhou) and southwest China (Yunnan and parts of Sichuan). Another very small subgroup is found in two villages of Zai speakers (a language quite different from Chinese) on Hainan, but this group is not represented by any tale in the volume.

The volume assembles translations of 123 tales arranged according to themes such as "The Primeval Ancestors of the Muslims," "Muhammad and his Companions," "The Quest of Culture Heroes and Saviors"—to mention just the themes of the first three chapters. Although reasons may be given to justify such an arrangement, it makes comparison with narrative folklore of other groups difficult, since it disregards more formal aspects such as narrative genres like various types of legends (e.g., Koranic, toponymic, and historic legends) and tales (e.g., fairy tales, novelistic tales, and animal tales). It is further regrettable that the authors do not always supply the usual data, such as the names of the narrator and of the one who recorded the text, or the location where the narrative was recorded. Nor do they supply references to earlier Chinese publications, although many of the stories were published in an earlier anthology compiled by Li Shujiang (1988), one of the authors.

The introduction is generally informative and contains many interesting discourses about Hui mythology and tales. However, one would have wished for a general discussion of the characteristics of Hui folklore and a short history of its collection. In that manner the work of several indigenous and Russian scholars who have studied Hui groups since the end of the nineteenth century could have been put to good use. My own volume (RIFTIN 1977), in particular the introduction that has gone through several printings in Chinese, could have

served as a general survey of Hui tales and as a basis for comparison with tales of the same type from other peoples of the Far East and of Central Asia.

The authors' disregard for Chinese and Western folklore scholarship is the more deplorable because it deprives them of a good opportunity to comment on many peculiar features of their texts. For example, the story of "Adan and Haowa" and the two versions of "Adan and Haierma" (73–82) are not Hui "myths" but Koranic legends, the well-known Koranic stories of Adam and Eve with some interesting alterations. One of them, a version recorded in Heilongjiang Province, attributes seventy-two children (thirty-six pairs of twins) to Eve and not the usual seventy. The number seventy-two appears often in Chinese folklore; we find it repeatedly in Hui stories (seventy-two halls in an underwater palace, seventy-two merits of a hero, seventy-two stars in the sky), and yet there is no comment. The oral transmission of these tales has also resulted in the inclusion of local etiologic details. The Ninxia version of the above story, for example, explains why men's knees and women's buttocks are always cold, and why the menses come regularly (78). Other stories, such as "The Dragon Tablet" (194–98) from Yunnan combine Islamic and Chinese features, in this case a Chinese dragon cult with Islamic ritual prayers for rain (see RIFTIN 1977, 23, and for new material MA 1998, 106–11).

I should mention, though, that certain comparisons with other traditions are made. For instance, discussing the Hui narrative "Adang Brings Fire," Luckert finds there echoes of an ancient shamanic quest, of American Indian stories about the coyote, and even of the Greek myth of Prometheus. But to the reviewer it seems to be much more reasonable to compare this with the tradition of "A-xuan Brings Fire" that circulates among the Shui who live in the same Guizhou Province, and shows a different stage of plot development (the fire is stolen from the sky, the Sky Mother sends the Thunder God to punish the thieves). It may also be compared with a Chinese version from Henan Province about Shang-bo, who has stolen the fire from the sky (see ZHANG 1991, 140–58). This sort of comparison would have enabled the authors to put the Hui tradition into its indispensable cultural milieu and afford them an opportunity to point out its characteristic differences. Other indisputable sources of Hui animal and fairy-tale plots are the Panchatantra, well known in China through translations, and translations of Buddhist sutras. Here the story "The Monkey and the Turtle" can be mentioned. The tale "Luguma Reverts to Hunting," recorded in Xinjiang, is a version of the well-known plot AT 319 A ("The Cannibal Sister") and most likely derives from an Indian source.

Under these circumstances it is surprising, if not unfortunate, that Luckert does not even raise questions about the particular local features of Hui folklore. Instead, the author of the introduction treats Hui folklore as a transformation of hunting folklore with shamanistic features (1). Here he seems to apply to Hui folklore an approach that pertains to American Indian folklore. Indeed, there is no proof that the Hui were hunters, whereas it is well known that they were farmers, artisans, carriers (on trade routes), and retailers. It is true that some characters mentioned in Hui tales are hunters, as Luguma is in the tale mentioned above, but it cannot be ruled out that these plots are borrowed from neighboring populations. The same has to be said about shamans, who, as far as I know, are not found among the Hui but were common among their neighbors, the Uighur and Salar. It is therefore very doubtful, to say the least, that a story like "Luguma Reverts to Hunting" "reflects the typical transition from hunter-gatherer to domesticator ways of thinking" (14) or that a tiger and a hawk helping the main character "are freely roaming hunter gods" (15).

At times one wishes the authors had applied more critical judgment in the selection of narratives. Some of the texts they include can hardly be accepted as belonging to Hui folklore. The story about an expert in gems (180–81), actually the translation of a short story by the writer Niu Su (seventh to eighth centuries), tells of a man of Hu extraction, and other stories

in the same section (183–85) mention Hu characters but not Hui (Hu are barbarians from western regions, such as Sogdians, Persians, etc.). When a Hui is mentioned in a Ming short story (182) it does not necessarily mean that he is a local Hui because Hui is a general name for Muslims. Even more problematic is the inclusion of a tradition about Du Wenxiu, a leader in a nineteenth-century uprising in Yunnan (259–63). Local groups other than Hui participated in that uprising, and as is evident from comments included in the first Chinese edition of this story, the text was collected by a Bai scholar from a Bai narrator (not a Hui!).

Space does not allow me to critically mention other points where I feel the authors did not live up to the expectations readers would have about a book that claims to make a significant folklore tradition of China accessible to a Western public. I wish to mention, however, that the English translation appears to be generally accurate. Yet the translator takes certain rather disturbing liberties. He sometimes omits, for example, toponyms that might appear to be insignificant for a foreigner, though they are in fact quite important in, say, historical traditions and narratives. Or in some cases he changes parts of the original text for no apparent reason: the phrase “He could carry weight as heavy as one thousand eight hundred pounds” is translated rather flatly as “he could do the work of several men” (337), or the simple “Allah named her Haierma” in the Chinese original is rendered as “And no one knew why Allah named her Haierma” (81). There are also numerous mistakes in the transcription of Chinese names.

(Translated from Russian by Boris Parnickel)

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WU ZONGXI, editor. *Suzhou pingtan wenxuan, disan ce* [Selected Writings on Suzhou Pingtan Storytelling, Volume Three]. Suzhou: Suzhou University Press, 1997. 244 pages. (In Chinese)

This work appears in a series of selected essays of various authors on the subject of *Suzhou pingtan*, a local style of Chinese professional narrative that combines instrumental music with speaking and singing roles of the narrator and characters in stories concerning “talented scholars and beautiful ladies.” (See the review by Bender in *Asian Folklore Studies* 56: 188–90.) Wu Zongxi is one of the most prolific and influential commentators on Suzhou storytelling in the post revolutionary period. This collection of his shorter writings spans most of the era of the People’s Republic of China, including essays printed as early as 1952 and as late as 1994. Wu was given duties in the Shanghai cultural bureau while still in his twenties and