

LAGERWEY, John

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MILLER, LUCIEN, Editor. *South of the Clouds: Tales from Yunnan*. Translated by Guo Xu, Lucien Miller, and Xu Kun. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995. xiv + 328 pages. Maps, appendix of traditional Yunnan ethnic minority cultures, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$40.00; ISBN 0-295-97293-9. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-295-97348-X.

Artist Ting Shao Kuang's cover illustration for this beautiful volume already provides the reader with an introduction to its contents. The graphic simplicity of the picture makes one hear the cries of the cicadas and the faint echo of the kettlegongs among the mountains of Yunnan, the area "South of the Clouds."

The book has a general introduction of forty pages by Miller in which the National Minorities are described and the Chinese authorities' strangely vacillating approach to folklore is discussed. In an introduction to folk literature, Xu Kun explains the seven categories into which the stories have been divided to provide samples of the rich store of folktales in the area:

- 1) Stories about creation
- 2) Why people do what they do
- 3) Heroes and heroines of the people
- 4) Animal friends and animal foes
- 5) Wonder and magic
- 6) Wise and foolish folk
- 7) Lovers

Under each heading there are four to six stories from various peoples. The number of tales from the respective minorities varies; the Drung, for instance, have only one, while the Yi have three and the Dai four.

Following the 200 pages of tales is an appendix of 28 pages, where the various minorities and their cultures are presented. As would be expected considering the Chinese authorities' controversial approach to defining minorities, the reader is left in some doubt as to their status. In the discussion in the general introduction it is said that there are twenty-five officially recognized National Minorities in Yunnan. Yet one finds tales and descriptions of twenty-six minorities in the book. The twenty-sixth is the Kucong, a small ethnic group of some 3,000 people that has not received the status of National Minority. Missing entirely is the ethnic group known as the Kammu, whom my coworkers and I have been working with and collecting tales from for over twenty years in several Yunnan villages. Officially they belong to the Dai minority, despite the fact that the Dai speak a Tai language while the Kammu speak a Mon-Khmer language. The description of the Dai in the appendix pertains

to the true Dai only and certainly not to the Kammu. What then are the Kammu? Since they are not recognized as a "National Minority," I suppose we will have to regard them as a "minority minority." But then what do you expect in a situation where one and the same ethnic group may be known under thirty-two different names?

In my work with minorities I have come to doubt almost everything, and am especially suspicious about all population figures. During the last fifteen years I have been told in Chinese materials that the population of the Zhuang is anything from seven million to twenty-three million, so I suppose the figure of 13,400,000 given here is as good as any other.

For a sinologist it is rewarding to find at the end of the book an extensive glossary with clearly printed Chinese characters; the bibliography will be of great help to anyone who has acquired a taste for minority tales while reading the book. The index provides handy reference to everything discussed in the book. The folklorist, however, will be disappointed not to find anything on tale types and motifs. Lists of such features would have been of great help in comparing the tales to their Southeast Asian counterparts. To anyone familiar with Southeast Asian lore it is obvious that it is to Southeast Asia that one should look for other versions of practically all the tales in the book.

Finally I would like to make a small specific comment. In my strict education as a scientist I was taught that one should never review a book where your own works are mentioned. This is a good rule of conduct and yet I intend to break it now, because I wish to give an answer to Professor Miller. It so happens that we are more in agreement than he seems to realize. In the section on textual issues in the general introduction Miller quotes one of our works in which I say that we attempted to make the translations of the tales as close to the recordings as the foreign medium permits (LINDELL, SWAHN, DAMRONG 1979).

We certainly believe that this is the way oral tales collected in the field should be translated the first time they are presented in print, since in such cases the teller and his ability, the situation, and the reactions of the audience are of great interest. We did *not* say, however, that this is the one and only acceptable way of presenting tales to a reader, or for that matter to an audience. A tale is not and should never become a unit frozen into a rigid form. Tales are there to be used and enjoyed, to be transmitted via voice and text, and a good tale is flexible enough to suit any situation. We ourselves make changes when we present tales in situations other than first publication; when I tell one of the tales we have collected to a Swedish audience, I certainly see to it that the listeners understand what I say.

*South of the Clouds* is intended to evoke interest in the lore of the minorities of southwestern China, and the tales are presented in such a way that it stands a good chance of attaining its goal.

#### REFERENCE CITED

LINDELL, Kristina, Jan-Öjvind SWAHN, and DAMRONG Tayanin

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