

Mongol. Han's statement is simply a reflection of the common Chinese tendency to measure the cultural level of a people according to whether or not they have a written language.

Han reports that the Monguor "claim that their ancestor was a Mongol general who fought under Genghis Khan." Actually this claim is heard only in Huzhu Monguor Autonomous County, and from some, but by no means all, Monguor. It is implausible that the large number of Monguor who live elsewhere, such as Minhe Hui and Monguor Autonomous County, would claim such a general as an ancestor. Han's description concludes with the usual Chinese-style finale of "colorfully dressed minority peoples"; in fact, few Monguor, with the exception, particularly, of aged females in Huzhu Monguor Autonomous County, wear traditional clothing today.

The information on other ethnics is equally misleading, often just repeating established Chinese clichés. The Mongols, for example, are portrayed as yurt-dwelling grassland wanderers — in fact, probably less than five percent of China's total Mongol population of five million (not three million as reported by Han) live in yurts today. The assertion that "in July . . . the yurts are moved to Hohhot, the capital of Inner Mongolia" for a traditional festival bears no relation to the facts. In Hohhot, a large, heavily polluted industrial city twelve hours by train north of Beijing, the Mongols number less than ten percent of the total population. The nearest yurt-dwellers, other than those trotted out of plastic-covered yurts for the tourists, are in arid regions hundreds of kilometers away.

Han predictably writes that "growing up on horseback, Mongols are skilled riders" (68). My own impression, based on three years of living in Inner Mongolia (1984–87) and extensive travels in the region, is that Mongols in China are predominantly agriculturalists and that most have never been on a horse.

Tibetans fare little better than the Monguor and Mongols.

What, then, is the value of this book? Other than an aid to lull kiddies to sleep, it is a fine example of how the West is willing to use people's interest in "minorities" to enhance the commercial success of a publication. Would that there was a proportional interest in obtaining more factual intelligence about the peoples so used.

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MONGOLIA

HEISSIG, WALTER, editor. *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung, Teil 5. Vorträge des 6. Epensymposiums des Sonderforschungsbereichs 12, Bonn 1988* [Problems in Mongol epic poetry, part 5]. Asiatische Forschungen Band 120. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1992. x + 373 pages. Cloth DM 180.00; ISBN 3-447-03231-6.

The heroic epic of the Eurasian peoples is an ancient tradition, going back to the preliterate stages of each of the emergent pastoral nomadic tribes that arose in the distant reaches of Mongolia. Although written versions of almost all early forms of this art are lacking, the oral epics — and especially the traditions of epic poetry found within them — are ancient enough to rank with the world's oldest.

Analysis of the themes and styles of these epic traditions suggests that the genre had developed into a classic form long before the recording of such texts as the *Secret History of the Mongols* and the Geser epic. The *Fragen der mongolischen Heldendichtung* series treats the Mongol epic in its broadest context and includes comparative studies from the traditions of neighboring peoples and of other pastoral nomads of Central Eurasia.

This volume of the series is somewhat broader in scope than the earlier ones, and is also

more accessible to Western audiences. The greater accessibility results from the presentation of all articles in the text in German (the bulk of them) or English, rather than — as in the past — those languages plus Russian and Mongol. Hopefully this practice will continue in future volumes, and in other publications as well. The contributions being made by scholars from Mongolia in many fields are still relatively unknown.

The broadened scope of the articles in this volume is shown by the twenty-seven separate listings. Of these, fifteen deal solely with Mongol epics, two are concerned with the traditions of Turkic peoples (the Tuvian and Kirgiz), three have to do with the Tibetan *Gesariada*, two with the Tungus-Manchu tradition, and four with comparative topics crossing all the Altaic areas. While a few of these contributions are ground-breaking and of great interest to folklorists and Altaicists alike, most repeat previous themes.

Perhaps the most useful piece in the volume is that of S. G. Kljastornyj on epic subjects in the Old Turkic runic inscriptions. Virtually all the references in this article are to Russian publications, indicating the emphasis that Russian scholars have placed on this genre, a stress dismayingly absent elsewhere, where many folklore texts are still analyzed in linguistic or historical terms. This article provides one more stepping stone in the process of tracing the long evolution of the epic tradition in Central Eurasia.

Most of the rest of the presentations deal with individual topics within oral or written folklore traditions, such as the palace, the fox as abettor, the serpent theme, types of monsters (like the *Mangus* in Mongol epics), and spirits, gods, and demons. All of these are valuable expansions on previous work. Others are weaker, however, and of questionable value in the context of discussion of epic and folkloric themes; Hans-Peter Vietze, for example, suggests new questions to be resolved, but his five-page article on the use of the computer to analyze the *Secret History of the Mongols* is more properly suited to a linguistic setting. Another weakness has to do with the fact that several of the pieces are clearly only session papers of a few pages, such as that of Hamayon, while others, like that of Reichl on "Octavian" and "Kuntuymis," are substantive contributions of many pages. Boris Riftin has a very long (forty pages) and useful paper on the epic of dual combat among the Eastern Mongols. But I wonder if it was necessary to include the eleven pages of Cyrillic text, along with the German translation. This seems to me to underline a problem that exists in all these volumes: the tension between session papers and scholarly, annotated monographs that were certainly not presented in their entirety to a conference audience.

In all, this volume on the folk epics of Central Eurasia is a sound contribution to an admirable body of work, much of which has previously been unavailable to Western audiences. In addition, these studies often apply Western methodology to the epic materials in an organized and concentrated fashion.

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STUART, KEVIN, editor. *The Teller of Seventy Lies & Other Mongolian Folktales*. Illustrated by Danzan. Times Asian Library Series. Singapore, Kuala Lumpur, Hong Kong: Federal Publications, 1993. vi + 98 pages. Paper US\$5.50; ISBN 981-01-2237-3.

More than one thousand Mongolian fairy tales collected among the Mongolian ethnic groups in the People's Republic of China have been published within the last twenty years. Roughly one hundred of these have been translated into Western languages, adding to the available material for comparative research on oral folktales. For that reason the publication of this small booklet is welcome.