


A detailed introduction of Erika Taube is hardly necessary since her name has grown to be inseparable from the development of Mongolian and Tuwa studies of the last decades of the twentieth century. She published numerous articles and books on folklore, folk religion, belief systems of various Mongolian ethnic groups, and Tuwas living in Western Mongolia. Many of her studies, which are based on fieldwork results, are especially valuable. Within her oeuvre she has helped save the heritage of these folk groups for generations to come.

Apart from her academic career, Erika Taube has kept the popularization of scientific insights in mind, and has occasionally published articles and translations for the wider public. In order to make the texts (tales and, in her previous publications, songs) more comprehensible, she used a transcription for Mongolian terminology easily understood
by German readers. In *Völksmärchen der Mongolen* she translated folk tales from various Mongolian dialects, from Khalkha, Buryat, Kalmyk, and Monguor, and also from Russian and Chinese. The majority of the tales are well-known among researchers and Mongolian readers, but there are some unique and less known ones (e.g., the Monguor tales).

In this book she follows the traditional genre typology of Mongolian tales, based on their content:

1. Aetiological tales
2. Animal tales
3. Magic tales
4. Heroic tales
5. Tales on everyday life
6. Comic tales, riddle tales

She gathered in a separate category tales about foolish monsters, which are traditionally ranged with comic tales. She added brief, but pithy explanations to each tale, short masterpieces containing identification numbers in the Aarne-Thompson catalogue and in the Catalogue of Mongolian tales compiled by László LÖRINČZ (1979), the source of the tale and also remarks on the story, the motifs, and the parallels.

The comprehensive scholarly postscript includes a detailed history of collecting folk tales by early European travellers (e.g., B. Bergman) and later researchers (e.g., A. Pozdneev, G. J. Ramsfedt, and N. Poppe) emphasizing the significant contribution of Germans in discovering the Mongolian tales. The name Gábor Bálint (1844—1913), a Hungarian traveller and researcher, could be added to the list of learned collectors of nineteenth-century Mongolian dialects. Bálint visited the Kalmyks (a Mongolian-speaking group living in the lower Volga region) in 1871–1872 and collected large amounts of folklore material, including fifteen folktales. His unpublished manuscripts are kept in the Oriental Collection of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (NAGY 1959). Concerning research activity of the twentieth century, one more leading scholar could be mentioned, namely B. Ja. Vladimirov, who carried out fieldwork in Western-Mongolia and also recorded tales from various Oirad ethnic groups using academic transcription, thus preserving the original dialect in this way (Vladimirov 1926). Taube also surveyed the rich material collected and published by Mongolian researchers (B. Rintchen, P. Khorloo, D. Tserensodnom, and Kh. Sampildendev) mainly in the second half of the twentieth century. The author declares that she had no access to the presumably numerous text collections published in Inner Mongolia. The collecting and publishing activities of Inner Mongolian researchers have picked up since the 1980s and there have certainly appeared many texts in separate books and also in literary journals from various areas of China (Inner Mongolia, Xinjiang, Qinghai, and Gansu) where Mongols live.

Erika Taube’s volume of translations does not only serve the aim of introducing an important part of Mongolian culture, the folk tales, to the international (and, first of all, German) public, but with its elaborate postscript and analysis it is a noteworthy contribution to the academic research of Mongolian folklore as well.

REFERENCES CITED

LÖRINČZ, László


NAGY, L. Julius

Weinshtein, Sew'jan I.  

It is probably no exaggeration to say that Sew'jan I. Weinshtein is an Altmeister, i.e., seasoned expert, if not even the expert on Tuvinian culture. Among modern ethnologists he is also one of the few who have extensively published on a wide range of aspects of the culture studied: history, archeology, sociology, economy, art, and religion (shamanism). The basis of this work and of this familiarity with Tuva, her people and her land comes from almost ten years of continuous living in the country after the found employment as a young scholar at the Museum of Kyzyl. Ever since this first encounter with the country in 1950, and also after his return to Moscow, he has traveled extensively and visited every corner of the country. He has conducted numerous scientific expeditions up into the late 1990s. Most of his numerous publications, the fruit of this extended and intensive research, are, however, quite difficult to access for readers not familiar with the Russian language or the complexity of the problems discussed.

Geheimnisvolles Tuwa is, as the title suggests, a work of quite different character. What Caroline Humphrey once wrote of Weinshtein's earlier work, Nomads of South Siberia, can be applied also to this one, albeit in a very different sense. This book too is “unique in this field,” i.e., among the usual ethnographic reports, however its uniqueness does not lie in “the systematic coverage of its subject” (Humphrey 1980, 1) and a thorough scientific analysis; it is unique because of its very personal touch. It is not a systematic ethnography but a story of the author’s various encounters with Tuva and the Tuvinians, the story of his research plans and this experiences in pursuing these plans, but most of all it is the story of his meetings and conversations with the people of Tuva. The thoughts and feelings of the author himself are as much part of this story as the responses and reactions of the people he encounters. He introduces this work and conversation partners by name, which has the pleasing effect of rendering this book a narrative in which people are alive and not just the hidden and amalgamated stratum of a technical report under the name of ethnography.

Although it is not “a diary in the strict sense,” to borrow from the title of Malinowski’s famous diary, the author constructs this narrative based on the notes of his field diaries of many years. The reader is therefore allowed to follow the author on these sometimes adventurous tours and meet the people he meets. In the process the readers almost inadvertently learns a great deal about Tuvinian culture without being burdened with the heavy technical jargon and discussions.

Nevertheless, references to technical questions and to problems of interest for scholars are not lacking, but rather than being pursued for their own sake, they appear as one aspect of the author’s narrative. For that reason these references seem to be made rather casually, yet this does not reduce their importance. For example, when Weinshtein reports that the nomads keep fields for growing barley and millet, or that they engage in fishing,