

Book Review

Mills, D.E.; A Collection of Tales from *Uji*. A Study and Translation of *Uji Shûi Monogatari*. University of Cambridge Oriental Publications No. 15. Cambridge 1970, xii + 459 pp.

As it is suggested in the subtitle of this book, the author discusses in the first part history and literary problems of tale literature and specially of *Uji shûi monogatari*. What follows is a translation of the 197 stories of the "Collection of Tales from *Uji*".

It is not the purpose of this review to discuss the literary arguments brought up in this book. However, the *setsuwa*-literature being closely connected with the religious and everyday life of the time, is a valuable source of information for the student of Japanese culture. *Setсуwa* are considered to be a kind of narrative similar to the folk-tale type although they cannot be classified as folk tales. About two-thirds of all stories are Buddhist tales, the rest being stories of the life of courtiers as well as of common people, often taking up customs and manners of old times in a somewhat nostalgic way.

First the author gives a general historical outline starting with the oldest collection of Buddhist tales, the *Nihon ryôiki*. Following the three main streams of Buddhist tales, secular tales and mixed tales, he discusses briefly the content and literary characteristics of the more important collections. The reason for this is that "not only the vast range but also the true nature of tale literature is all but unknown to foreign students of Japan" (p. 4). And this is probably true not only in the field of literature.

Bypassing the more detailed literary parts of the book I would like to point to the more general aspects of tale literature brought up by the author. Although there are certain groupings of stories it is rather difficult, if not impossible, to draw distinct lines between them because the stories are heterogeneous in themselves. Nevertheless there is a basically common attitude in that all the compilers understand their work as recording old legends and traditions. In this, oral tradition is certainly playing an important role, but since there are numerous striking parallels among the collections, it cannot be a tradition at random, carried on by an anonymous group. There seem to have been "specialists in the telling of tales" (p. 33).

With their simple doctrines these stories appealed to any audience, be it high or low. That is what makes them valuable for the study of the time, but the author is right to point out that as historical documents they should be treated quite carefully. But just because they also show the ordinary tastes of high ranking people at the court, these stories are a refreshing counterpart to the others of high literary value which depict a rather unreal and refined world, the privilege of a few courtiers. Through his highly readable translation of these frequently humorous and human stories, the author made it possible for everybody to have a good look at a side of Japanese culture which is not very much known, often because of the complicated language in which these tales are written. *Uji shûi monogatari* still preserves a lot of Buddhist tales and provides therefore a good introduction to this world of saints and wonders. But it becomes clear that the point made in these stories is not religious but secular, giving the superstitious attitude of people or a humorous situation.

On the basis of literary proofs the author comes to the conclusion that *Uji shûi monogatari* is not just a supplement to *Konjaku monogatari* but another

text of the *Uji dainagon monogatari*. And as such it is not written at one time and by only one author but is the result of a process of interpolation.

Interspersed in the translation are reproductions of block prints from an edition published 1959 in Kyoto. The text is provided with a great number of footnotes explaining the historical background or connections of persons and places mentioned. I would especially like to mention that the author tries to render, and I think successfully, even the puns of the Japanese original with an English equivalent and not just a literal translation. In these cases he adds an explication of the Japanese play of words in the footnote. On the other side it would have been very helpful for the purpose of references with Japanese texts to add a list of names and special Buddhist expressions in Japanese and Chinese symbols.

The appendix brings a number of tables showing the history of tale literature in general and also the divisions in *Uji shūi monogatari* and its correspondences with the most important other collections. A bibliography of Japanese and foreign works on the subject is followed by an index for names and important concepts. This comes in quite handy in the case where there is no footnote at a particular place, because the name in question was already mentioned several times in earlier tales. But if someone does not read through the whole book, he might be glad to be referred to an earlier explanation.

Finally the author is to be thanked for having made available this scientific and at the same time human guide to a side of Japan which merits to be known much better.

Peter Knecht

Toth, Marian Davies; Tales from Thailand illustrated by Supee Pasutanavin. Tuttle Tokyo 1971, 183 pp.

The reader will soon be fascinated by the vivid narrative and the fairy tale atmosphere of the stories presented in this volume. Everything in this book seems to fit the idea of an exotic and mysterious country of the orient. The tales are children's stories and presented in that way. Therefore, the reality of life might well have been somehow different from what we hear in these tales, but notwithstanding they give a good account of the ideals and the aspirations of the people of Thailand.

The first part of the book renders 18 tales arranged in four groups: How-it-Came-to-Be Stories, Stories of Thai People, Animal and Bird Stories, Religious Stories. The atmosphere of the stories is reflected in the illustrations by Supee Pasutanavin, a Thai artist. The second part gives a short explanation of history and some aspects of daily life which appear in the foregoing tales. The eminent role of kings as the capable leaders of their people is shown, but also the way how the tales also reflect important traits of Thai culture. There could be mentioned the "courage and a confident approach to the problems of living" (p. 154), the beliefs and the gentle and loyal character of the Thai people. In these tales it becomes also quite evident that although the great majority of the people profess Buddhism as its religion, elements of Hinduism and animism are extant at the same time. A short glossary at the end of the volume lists a translation and a short explanation of Thai expressions occurring in the text.

The present volume preserves the atmosphere of children's stories in a very pleasant way. It is therefore no critical collection of tales but a charming one, showing the author's esteem and deep sympathy for Thailand and her people, among whom she has spent some years as a teacher.

Peter Knecht