

BIBLIOGRAPHIE

Brigitte BERTHIER, *La dame-du-bord-de-l'eau* (Nanterre, Société d'ethnologie, 1988) (311 pp.; bibliographies, no index) (ISBN 2-901161-32-4)

Brigitte Berthier has produced a fascinating book on the cult and mythology of the Fujianese goddess Chen Jin[g]gu 陳進/靖姑, also known as the Lady at the Border of the Water (*linshui furen* 臨水夫人). In Part One, she summarizes a rare novel on the mythology of the goddess, the *Linshui pingyao* 臨水平妖, and analyses it in great detail. Her account is informed by fieldwork experiences on Taiwan, which she also describes in more detail in Part Two. The cult has long been a very popular temple cult in northern Fujian, Southeastern Jiangxi and Southern Jiangsu, and still is on Taiwan.

Recently, I have published a short article on eight Fujian temple cults, including that of Linshui furen, from an historical perspective.¹ Unfortunately, I was unable to incorporate Berthier's book, having completed my article in early 1988. In the course of my search for historical sources, I have come across some useful—if unimaginative—articles on the Linshui furen cult by Wei Yingqi 魏應騏 and Rong Zhaozu 容肇祖, all of them dating from 1928, which Berthier has not used.² Apart from some interesting historical sources, Wei mentions a *Precious Scroll of Inviting Mother to Cross the Passes* (*Qing nai guoguan baojuan* 請奶過關寶卷), a scroll with spells connected with her (mythical) son (*Sheren ge zhoujuan* 舍人哥咒卷)³ (integral text and some annotations in Wei [1928] pp. 41–44), and the *Alternative History of the Min Capital* (*Mindu bieji* 閩都別記).⁴ Neither of these works has been used by Berthier. The last of these

¹ "The Genesis and Spread of Temple Cults in Fukien", in E.B.Vermeer ed., *Development and Decline of Fukien Province in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (E.J.Brill, Leiden, 1990) pp. 349–396.

² Wei Yingqi 魏應騏 ed., *Fujian sanshen kao* 福建三神考 (original 1928; *Zhongshan daxue minsu congshu* 中山大學民俗叢書, vol. 28, Taipei, 1969, hereafter Wei [1928]).

³ Zhou Kai 周凱, *Xiamen zhi* 廈門志 (*Taiwan wenxian congkan* 臺灣文獻叢刊 vol. 95) p. 649 remarks that *she* 舍 is a term of address for sons and grandsons. *Sheren* also is an official title.

⁴ *Mindu bieji* (Fujian renmin chubanshe, Fuzhou, 1987); interesting preface by Fu Yiling 傅衣凌. Oldest extant dated edition 1911.

three works is a voluminous and extremely detailed mythological account of the history of the Fuzhou (i.e. the Min Capital) region, with a central role for Linshui furen. A precise comparison with the *Linshui pingyao* is impossible here, because I have not yet been able to obtain a Chinese text of this extremely rare novel. Judging from the synopsis of the *Linshui pingyao* by Berthier, and the remarks in Wei (1928) pp. 15–23 on the *Mindu bieji*, it would seem that there are many similarities in basic structure between the two works, as well as some significant differences.

I agree with Berthier (pp. 20–22) that we can analyse the *Linshui pingyao* as a repository of anecdotes, rather than as a novel (and to my mind the same applies to the *Mindu bieji*). Nevertheless, there is the problem to what extent the *Linshui pingyao* and the *Mindu bieji* represent the folklore of one coherent cultural region and one social group of believers, or form the product of the erudite mind of one literatus author (who may have combined and rewritten folklore from different cultural regions and social groups). Although the *Linshui pingyao* may not seem too coherent from a Western perspective (Berthier, *loc. cit.*), this does not preclude the presence of an aesthetical aim in the mind of its author. As it is now, we know next to nothing of the provenance and distribution of the novel.

Furthermore, Berthier (p. 287) herself indicates that the female medium of Linshui furen on Taiwan, whose activities she uses to interpret the novel, knew rather little about the mythology of her own goddess. She tries to solve this by positing a homology between the lives of the medium and the goddess, which is unconvincing since such a homology exists with most Chinese female shamans all over China (cf. literature quoted in note 7 of this review). I would have liked to see a more extensive ethnographic inquiry into people's knowledge of mythology, since a Dutch researcher doing fieldwork on local religion in Tainan was unable to track down the *Linshui pingyao* for me (even though he asked people at the Linshui furen temple in Tainan for it!).

Such an ethnographic inquiry can be conducted in several ways. One might, for instance, compare the two novels, the *Linshui pingyao* and the *Mindu bieji*, with related local folklore. I have made such a comparison for a crucial part of the tale of Linshui furen, namely the founding of the famous Luoyang Bridge in Quanzhou, which—according to both novels—led to the birth of Linshui furen and her principal adversary, the White Snake. First of all, the versions given in the two novels are different from each other. Furthermore, in the 1920s Chinese ethnographers have recorded many stories about the bridge (from Fujian and Guangdong), but none of them

mentions Linshui furen or her adversary.⁵ Here I do not have the space available for a detailed analysis of the many interesting differences between the two novels and local folklore, but they indicate the need of a more complete discussion of the relevant material than the preliminary analysis by Berthier. This particular example also suggests that the legend of the bridge was not at all connected to Linshui furen in the "popular" mind (represented by local folklore), and that the authors of the two novels simply wanted to incorporate a famous local story concerning the Luoyang Bridge. The same might be true of other components of the two novels. I would be particularly interested to know Berthier's views on a folklore story which mentions (without any further explication) Linshui furen's Guangdong "colleague" Jinhua furen 金華夫人 (see below).⁶

A further comparison of the Linshui furen myth, specifically with folklore and mythology surrounding birth and pregnancy in Fujian and Guangdong, reveals that we are actually dealing with two separate sets of beliefs, i.e. a fairly localized myth of Linshui furen (as a pupil of the exorcist master of Lüshan 閩山, as the tamer of the White Snake etc.), which seems to have been superimposed on a much more wide-spread complex of beliefs surrounding birth and childhood (centering on the belief that every woman is represented by a plant in the Heavenly Flower Gardens, on which red and white buds grow, representing future male and female children). There are excellent ethnographic descriptions of both sets of beliefs, including those by Justus Doolittle, Marjorie Topley and others, which have been ignored by Berthier. Only in the Northern Fujian (Fuzhou) and Taiwan cultural regions, these two sets of beliefs were linked together. However, even though discussing Taiwan, Emily Martin Ahern only mentions the second set, which raises the question to what extent the two sets were combined all over Taiwan, or only in some communities, such as the one visited by Berthier. In the Southern Fujian (Minnan) and Cantonese cultural regions, one only finds the second set. In the Cantonese region (including the Hakka) the female goddess in charge of pregnancy is Jinhua furen, who also has a pantheon very similar to Linshui furen (including 20 female helpers).⁷ I have not been able to find evi-

⁵ Cf. the material given by Wolfram Eberhard, *Typen Chinesischer Volksmärchen* (Helsinki, 1937) pp. 154–156 (nr. 102), but also pp. 129–130 (nr. 85), which suggests that at least part of this myth was known outside Fujian and Guangdong.

⁶ Liu Wanzhang 劉萬章, *Guangzhou minjian gushi* 廣州民間故事 (Zhongshan daxue minsu congshu, vol. 6 [original 1929; Taipei reprint, 1969]) p. 135.

⁷ Thus, Justus Doolittle, *Social Life of the Chinese* (London, 1866), vol. I, pp. 113–134,

dence of the second set outside these three cultural regions (or four, if we count Taiwan separately, as I feel we should), even though I have made a special check of the extensive fieldwork on Nainai 奶奶 and Niangniang 娘娘 cults in Northern China, which serve the same basic functions concerning birth and pregnancy in Northern China, as do the Linshui furen and Jinhua furen cults in the South.⁸

This preliminary survey of the geographical distribution of the two sets of beliefs raises some interesting historical questions: a. to what extent are all these beliefs regional in nature; b. how old is the belief in the Heavenly Flower Gardens etc., and when and where was it linked with that in Linshui furen or Jinhua furen; c. how (and to what extent) did the typically Northern Fujian belief in Linshui furen as a protector of women and children spread to Taiwan, which is culturally a part of Southern Fujian. Further-

pp. 264–266, pp. 289–291 already discusses both sets of beliefs and customs, in fascinating detail, for the Fuzhou region. Emily Martin Ahern only refers to the second set on Taiwan, in her “Affines and the Rituals of Kinship”, in Arthur P. Wolf ed., *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society* (Stanford, 1974) pp. 279–307, esp. pp. 286–288, and her *The Cult of the Dead in a Chinese Village* (Stanford, 1973) pp. 237–239. J.J.M. de Groot describes the second group for Amoy in his splendid *Les fêtes annuellement célébrées à Émoui (Amoy)* (San Francisco, 1977 reprint) pp. 396–398, and the *Religious System of China*, vol. VI (Taipei, 1989 reprint) pp. 1332–1339, but makes no mention of the first. Marjorie Topley, “Some Occasional Rites Performed by the Singapore Cantonese”, in the *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Vol. XXIV:III (1951) pp. 120–144 mentions the second set only in her exhaustive and richly illustrated description of the rituals for healing children (Passing through the Gate [*guoguan* 過關], etc.) or for mothers wanting a child (Surrounding the Garden [*wei huayuan* 圍花園]) in the Cantonese cultural region. Jack M. Potter, in his fascinating article on female shamans in the same cultural region, “Cantonese Shamanism”, in Wolf (1974), pp. 207–231, esp. 211–215 and 225–226, also only mentions the second set. Of these works, Berthier only refers to De Groot and Ahern (1973). On *Jinhua furen*, cf. Qu Dajun 屈大均, *Guangdong xinyu* 廣東新語 (early Qing; Beijing, 1985) 6: p. 215 and Rong Zhaozu, “Guangzhou he’nan de jinhua miao 廣州河南的金華廟”, *Minsu* 民俗 (1928) 41–42: pp. 51–53. This summary of ethnographical literature by no means exhausts the available sources.

⁸ The standard work on children, pregnancy and childbirth, foot-binding, etc. in Chinese folklore and religion, ignored by Berthier and most other writers on these matters, is Nagao Tatsuzō 永尾龍造, *Shina minzoku shi* 支那民俗誌 (1942) preface; Zhongguo minsu xuehui 中國民俗學會 and Dongfang wenhua shuju 東方文化書局 reprint, n.d., n.p. [Taiwan]), three vols. This is a truly stupendous compendium of information covering all of China before the Second World War. The first two volumes concern Chinese New Year, the third volume covers children etc. in 857 pages, with a separate and truly exhaustive index of another 52 pages! Linshui furen is treated summarily on pp. 347–352, Jinhua furen on pp. 352–353.

more, the existence of many variant versions (between the two novels, as well as between the novels on the one hand and local folklore on the other), and the fact that the myth of Linshui furen has been superimposed on a more widespread set of beliefs would seem to undermine Berthier's analysis, which depends on the assumption that the two sets of beliefs must form an integral and uniform whole.

The search for hidden or submerged meanings in mythology is always exciting, but one sometimes wonders whose structures we are discovering, ours or theirs, those of an elite author or of the larger community of believers? An example of the risk inherent in such a search is provided by Berthier's attempt to understand the connotations of certain key characters by splitting them up in their component parts (Berthier, pp. 21–22 [theoretical justification], pp. 81–84 [also p. 95 note 21], p. 114, p. 127, p. 217, p. 234, p. 236, p. 240, p. 267). When studying early (pre-Tang) Chinese religion, the etymology of characters and words can be very revealing, but I fail to see how it contributes to our understanding of beliefs during subsequent periods. The Chinese have themselves traditionally used this procedure in different forms of divination, prognostication and punning. A simple example is *shibazi* 十八子, referring to the messianic family-name Li 李. In other words, they used the method to transmit hidden messages, *not* to hide meanings. If we analyse the character *yao* 妖 as consisting of *nǚ* 女 (woman) and *yao* 夭 (premature death) (as done by Berthier, pp. 83–84), the Chinese way of understanding would not be to search for a deeper meaning, but rather for a concrete message about some future event.

Although a synopsis of the novel *Linshui pingyao* is provided (pp. 49–69), Berthier's argument is still sometimes hard to follow, since the book contains no index of any sort, that would enable the reader to refer back to the first occurrence of the Chinese characters of a name or term (which are not necessarily given when the name or term are first mentioned), or to where a certain mythological element has been discussed before in more detail. The footnotes contain some cross-references, but these provide no support for the reader who wants to consult the book as a reference work. Sometimes transcriptions are incorrect (e.g. *dou* where it should be *du* 都), titles are translated inconsistently (Berthier, p. 16, p. 18, p. 25, p. 67), and some bibliographical references are confusing (since they refer to different works by the same author with the same abbreviated reference).

It is curious that the novels *Linshui pingyao* and *Mindū bieji* link Linshui furen closely with the well-known Lüshan exorcist

tradition—considering its founding father to be her master and protector. In this respect, it is a pity that Berthier does not refer to the works by Liu Zhiwan 劉志萬 (Ryû Shiman) and Ôfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾. They contain large amounts of original source-material and scholarly discussions on Linshui furen, the Lüshan tradition, and on “collecting frights (*shoujing* 收驚)”.⁹ This latter custom is closely connected to the Linshui furen cult (Berthier, pp. 237–240). If some scholars have reservations against these two works, I hope they will publish them for the benefit of non-experts such as this reviewer.

Although Berthier provides us with many illuminating insights concerning beliefs surrounding pregnancy and childbirth, as they are transformed into myth and ritual, more use should have been made of the very rich results of fieldwork available in English on South Chinese folklore and religion. Apart from the example given above of the considerable disparity in regional coverage between the belief in the Heavenly Flower Gardens and in Linshui furen, one might think of the widespread beliefs and magical practices surrounding hair and nails, or also the Southern Chinese belief in bones without flesh as representing the male life-force—beliefs that play an important role in the Linshui furen mythology.¹⁰ Reference to the larger anthropological context in which the mythology of the *Linshui pingyao* should be interpreted, by us and—more importantly—by the local people themselves, would have greatly enhanced the value of Berthier's book.

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⁹ Liu Zhiwan (Ryû Shiman), *Chûgoku dôkyô no matsuri to shinkô* 中國道教の祭りと信仰, ge 下 (Tôkyô, 1984) (or its earlier and less exhaustive Chinese version). Ôfuchi Ninji, *Chûgokujin no shûkyô girei* 中國人の宗教儀禮 (Tôkyô, 1983).

¹⁰ On hair and nails in Chinese culture, cf. Jiang Shaoyuan 江紹原, *Faxuzhao: guanyu tamen de fengsu* 髮鬚爪關於它們的風俗 (1928; Shanghai, 1987 reprint). Also, cf. the famous article by Edmund R. Leach, “Magical Hair”, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 88 (1958) pp. 147–164. On flesh and bones, cf. Ahern (1973), Maurice Freedman, *Chinese Lineage and Society: Fukien and Kwangtung* (London, 1966) pp. 118–154 and James L. Watson, “Of Flesh and Bones: The Management of Death Pollution in Cantonese Society”, in: Maurice Bloch and Jonathan Parry eds., *Death and the Regeneration of Life* (Cambridge, 1982) pp. 155–186 (he also makes some interesting remarks on the importance of women's hair, pp. 172–173).