



## Folktales of China

*Wolfram Eberhard*

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## Folktales of China Details

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### Mary Catelli says

A collection of tales from China, with notes about when collected and the types and motifs involved

More legends than in many such collections I've seen, partly because the tales often end with the observation that this character or that was made divine for the events of the tale. "The Water Mother", for instance, is the familiar type, like "Why the Sea Is Salt" or "Sweet Porridge" where magic that produces good stuff is let to run wild, but it ends with the observation that the woman became the goddess the Water Mother.

Some of the tales are in fact just bits of folklore, such as about "elves" (all the beings less than gods have had their terms translated to equivalents).

A good number are recognizable types, but only in the deep structure; local color here produces more variation from European tales. "The Mason Wins the Prize" is "The Devil's Three Golden Hairs" but the mason is on a quest to find the three things he was sent to find before marrying, and that's what the question garners him. There are two swan-maidens-like tales, but one is of a woman who came out of a painting and finally went back in. "The Witch's Daughter" flouts Chinese customs to produce a tale "The Girl Helps the Hero Flee."

There's also some definite signs of Communist influence, since they encouraged peasant heroes and heroines. One tale included, only found once in China, was of a peasant outwitting a feudal lord by agreeing to halve the crop -- the lord gets the top or the bottom, and the peasant naturally plants root vegetables or wheat as appropriate. A common European tale, and probably introduced deliberately.

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### k says

It's hard to read a book like this as a piece of literature and not as a window into some kind of historical or cultural truths, and my positive reaction is mostly on its successes as the latter, though unless you have a China itch to scratch I think it won't resonate too deeply. In any case, it's very well organized and annotated, and some of the stories are fun, both epic and ridiculous at the same time.

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