■ Foreword

JACK ZIPES

Juwen Zhang's *The Dragon Daughter and Other Lin Lan Fairy Tales* is a stunning, revolutionary book. It is stunning because, to my knowledge, few folklorists and literary critics in the world are aware that the Lin Lan tales ever existed. These stories, highly popular in China in the early twentieth century, combined elements from European fairy tales with traditional oral Chinese narratives. They are revolutionary not because they adhered to a particular ideology, but because a small group of writers wanted to produce something "modern" and joined together to create intriguing stories often more mysterious and Kafkaesque than Kafka's tales.

As Zhang points out, the development of the Lin Lan, Lady Lin Lan, tales emerged during the Sinification and modernist movement in China from 1920 to 1940, when the Chinese adapted many cultural art forms from the West to awaken self-awareness of and self-confidence in their own traditions and rituals. A group of writers at the Shanghai publishing house North New Books published 43 volumes with close to one thousand tales gathered from informants all over China. In this regard, the editors of the Lin Lan tales were similar to the Brothers Grimm, and certainly they were familiar with the Grimms' tales, but the dominant motifs and characters in their stories derived from Chinese folklore. The publication of the series lasted until the late 1930s, influencing children and adults for more than twenty years.

The significance of the Lin Lan tales cannot be understated. In fact, these unusual narratives cannot be simply catalogued as fairy tales, but represent a range of genres: Chinese legends, comic tales, ghost stories, fables, and folk tales called *tonghua* that reflect polytheistic traditions. The combination of these tales with elements of Western folk and fairy tales make the Lin Lan tales all the more alluring, for it is clear that many if not most of the tales can be explained only if one studies the Chinese and European roots and sources of the narrative.

Clearly, the Lin Lan tales are enigmatic, magical, and fabulous. They are beyond definition and abide by their own laws. One thing is clear, however: the Lin Lan tales have not lost their appeal, for the more our own world becomes unfathomable, the more these hybrid tales resonate with conditions we currently face.

Zhang has provided only a tiny selection of the hundreds of Lin Lan tales, and thanks to his endeavors, we now have a better understanding of how and why oddly modern fairy tales have developed throughout the world. Whether oral or written, metaphorical tales in all countries enable us to gain distance from our lives even as they speak to our needs and desires. What is fascinating about this collection is that cultural differences make no difference whatsoever when storytellers from different countries weld them into universal mysteries.

The Dragon Daughter

and Other

Lin Lan Fairy Tales