

**21ST CENTURY
CHINESE
LITERATURE**

★ LU YIPING ★ AH LAI ★ MA JINLIAN
★ CHI ZIJIAN ★ SA NA ★ LONG RENQING
★ LIAO YIRONG ★ HONG KE ★ KIM IN-SUN
★ TSERING NORBU ★ BAI XUELIN

THE MUD BOOT WEDDING

AND OTHER ETHNIC MINORITY STORIES



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS



THE MUD BOOT WEDDING



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

一双泥靴的婚礼: 英文 / 施战军 主编

北京: 外文出版社, 2009年 (21世纪中国当代文学书库)

ISBN 978-7-119-05940-2

I. 一 ... II. 施 ... III. 短篇小说—作品集—中国—当代—英文

IV. I247.7

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2009) 第129948号

责任编辑: 邵 东 曾惠杰

英文翻译: 孟凡君 纪 华 高文星 张光前 张晓蓉 廉望舒

王之光 Yvonne Yee 蒙雪琰

英文审定: Lisa E. Buckley Sue Duncan 李振国

装帧设计: 视觉共振

印刷监制: 冯 浩

一双泥靴的婚礼

主 编: 施战军

©2009外文出版社

出版发行:

外文出版社 (中国北京百万庄大街24号)

邮政编码: 100037

网 址: <http://www.flp.com.cn>

电 话: 008610-68320579 (总编室)

008610-68995852 (发行部)

008610-68327750 (版权部)

制 版:

北京维诺传媒文化有限公司

印 刷:

北京外文印刷厂

开 本: 787mm×1092mm 1/16 印 张: 27.5

2009年10月第1版 第1次印刷

(英)

ISBN 978-7-119-05940-2

10800 (平)

10-E-3910P

版权所有 侵权必究 如有印装问题本社负责调换 (电话: 68995852)

Contents

Wang Meng

21st Century Chinese Literature — Points of Departure.....	001
--	-----

Shi Zhanjun

People, Lives and Times	005
-------------------------------	-----

Lu Yiping (Miao)

The Return of Xiabazi	017
-----------------------------	-----

Ah Lai (Tibetan)

The Remote Hot Spring.....	045
----------------------------	-----

Ma Jinlian (Hui)

Girl, Wife, Daughter-in-Law	135
-----------------------------------	-----

Chi Zijian (Han)

Breezes in the Woods	161
----------------------------	-----

Sana (Daur)

Golden Ranges	193
---------------------	-----

Long Renqing (Tibetan)

The Mud Boot Wedding	245
----------------------------	-----

Liao Yirong (Dongxiang)

The Land of Green 265

Hong Ke (Kazakh)

Lake Hanas..... 291

Kim In-Sun (Korean)

Ballad of the Bell Flowers 347

Tsering Norbu (Tibetan)

Killer..... 369

Bai Xuelin (Mongolian)

A Tale from the Huolin River 385

Editor's Recommendations for Further Reading: 432

21st Century Chinese Literature

— Points of Departure

By Wang Meng

The *21st Century Chinese Literature* series aims to introduce contemporary Chinese literature in English, French and other languages to readers all over the world.

Chinese literature's recent path, along the country's trajectory, may not resemble a smooth highway, yet it is still the main channel toward understanding China and the daily lives and inner-world of the Chinese people.

China has been experiencing soaring development, and its links with the rest of the world have been growing closer. Even if you might not know anyone from China, "made in China" still can now be found in most aspects of your life, or as expressed in a Chinese idiom, "Look up, and see it everywhere." News about China appears regularly in newspapers, on TV and the Internet, trying to tell you what is happening in this remote yet near country called China, and what China is thinking and planning. In this way, peoples of the world have developed their general views of China.

Many of those views are often insightful. Chinese writers, like myself, have also been keeping an eye on the world. We often discuss the US, Japan, Russia, South Africa, Italy and other countries, as well as the interesting or ingenious views about China held by peoples of such countries. But we feel much regret to find

Wang Meng is an illustrious writer and China's former Minister of Culture.

sometimes that others' views about China are full of illusions and misunderstandings, more often than not, preconceived, arbitrary and overgeneralized. Thus, my fellow citizens and I have become powerfully aware of how little the world really knows about China, and thus we feel that the world is so near, yet still so remote.

Literature can draw us closer to communicate views and imagination about the world and life, and share each other's joys and sorrows beyond language barriers, different cultures and backgrounds or long distances. It can make you feel that people living afar are like your next-door neighbors, as you perceive and share the secret interiors of their lives and dreams. To illustrate this point, I shall borrow a poetic line from the current Indian ambassador to China, Mrs. Nirupama Rao:

*"...making sense of each other,
even as realization glimmers
that, we are little morsels
tossed by the history of these parts."*

It elucidates the point of departure of this series. Readers from all over the world, who are used to learning about China through foreign newspapers, TV and the Internet, may now open up these books to see China through the heartfelt thoughts and writings of Chinese people themselves. The many authors of these new short stories, living in this rapidly developing and changing, yet ancient nation, have strived to describe all that is happening in and around themselves, to give genuine dynamic expression to the intricate recent experiences of the Chinese people. Through the power of their words you will be able to catch glimpses of the

real, complex and living China, as well as other possibilities for all humanity, including yourself.

The Foreign Languages Press has long devoted itself to enhancing mutual understanding between China and the rest of the world. China followers in every country probably still remember *Panda Books*, mainly published in the late 20th century. Those books collected a wide range of contemporary Chinese literary works. The *Panda Books* series helped many Chinese writers become known to the world. *21st Century Chinese Literature* can be regarded as the continuation of *Panda Books*, though its selection and editing methods vary greatly from the old series. All the volumes of new short stories were edited by Chinese scholars, with in-depth understanding and research in contemporary Chinese literature, whose judgment and views are highly respected among Chinese writers and readers. They accomplished this editing work independently, conducive to this new series better reflecting the highly diversified spiritual quests and artistic creativity of contemporary Chinese literature.

Thus, the other vital impact of this series is to provide international sinologists and Chinese literary researchers with the view from inside, from within the Chinese literary circles widely recognized among Chinese writers and readers. These points of view are likely to differ from the general views held by other countries toward contemporary Chinese literature. It is this very difference that engenders the great potential for new knowledge and discovery.

Modern Chinese writers have been deeply influenced by literature from all over the world. We have been deeply convinced by Goethe's concept of "World Literature." We are committed to

the invaluable dream of a "Tower of Babel" promoting mutual understanding among all the peoples of the world. I believe the *21st Century Chinese Literature* series will provide our own enduring great bricks in this skyward "Tower."

Introduction

People, Lives and Times

Shi Zhanjun

Professor Shi Zhanjun, a Ph.D. in literature, was born in 1966, in Tongyu, Jilin Province, his mother from the Mongolian ethnic group. After July 1988 Prof. Shi taught first at the Chinese Department of Jilin Normal University and then at the College of Liberal Arts of Shandong University. In 2001, he went to the Republic of Korea as an exchange professor at Dongseo University. Since September 2007, he has been studying contemporary Chinese literature at the Post-doctoral Research Center of Peking University. Prof. Shi is now an executive director of Chinese Fiction Society and vice-chair and secretary-general of the Shandong Association of Contemporary Literature. He is the chief editor of the four-part, 18-volume literary series *New Spark Writer* and one of the chief editors of *China New Age Literary Research Data*, totaling 18 parts, 24 volumes. His studies won the Theoretical Criticism Prize of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles and Outstanding Achievement Award of the China Association of Contemporary Literature. At the end of 2007, Prof. Shi was voted "Young Critic of the Year" at the Forum for Young Chinese Writers and Critics co-sponsored by the literary magazines *People's Literature* and *Southern Cultural Forum*. In the same year, he won the support of the New Century Talent Program launched by China's Ministry of Education.

People, Lives and Times

Let's look at the borders on the map of China, starting in the west and moving slowly on to the south, north and east, and then to the regions of sparse population, high mountains and broad deserts. These areas are mostly inhabited by China's ethnic minority peoples, where the economy and science and technology are less developed, but where the pristine beauty of nature and sanctity still persist. These areas may harbor a greater diversity of cultures and literature than inland China. As a developing country, China is moving toward overall modernization. The ancient culture and the old urban and rural structures of China's majority Han people are being drastically remolded by the new economic age, particularly in the 21st century. Although the minority peoples have inevitably been influenced by the general trend of the time, their unique customs and landscape, and the surviving connection between their epic ballads and reality have become an increasingly important subject of Chinese culture and literature.

Recent landmark literary works that have attracted much attention in China, including the controversial best-sellers

Wolf Totem by Jiang Rong and *Tibetan Mastiff* by Yang Zhijun, the esthetic novels *Empty Mountain* by Ah Lai and *On the Right Bank of the Argun River* by Chi Zijian, share a renewed perspective on China's minorities. Two major subjects have drawn the focus of 21st century writers and literary critics, namely, stories of migrant workers, disclosing the progress and consequences of modernization; and esthetic depictions of the ecology in the border areas and the life of minority peoples, providing reflections on modernization and definitions of people's mindsets. In terms of these two dimensions, our general view and habitual impressions may not be basically mistaken, but viewed against such diverse and vibrant creative writing, may be shown to be somewhat incomplete or even arbitrary.

Genuine literature always makes a humane observation of and reflects deeply on the difficult circumstances of others; with minority peoples too, it should not be always admiring or intrusive, but should have empathy for the lives of all individuals.

The writer Lu Yiping from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region describes the misfortune of Xiabazi, a man from the Tajik ethnic group in *The Return of Xiabazi*:

"Xiabazi knows that the Tahman Grassland, where the Tajik people have lived for generations, is suffering from the over-grazing of too many herds, which float across the area like white clouds. To keep from starving, the sheep have learned to dig up grass roots from the ground with their muzzles and hooves.

....

"The cow-dung smoke rising from the roof of each *langaili* house, together with the smells of roast *nang* and stewed mutton, mixed with the sweet aroma of the grass in the Tahman Grassland,

giving Xiabazi a feeling of warmth. Xiabazi has reveled in the Grassland's charms many times before, so much so that he lived the place with every ounce of his being. Knowing that the beautiful Tahman Grassland couldn't afford to support so many people, he accepted Township Chief Xiren's urging and agreed to leave and move to Markit Plain, a strange area at the edge of the broad desert."

Xiabazi is derided as a fool by a seemingly clever man. What a thought-provoking irony! The real fools are those who are considered to have seen the world but sacrifice their common long-term interest for a price.

Comparisons with mainstream inland Chinese culture are expressed naturally and objectively. Quantities of critiques on the value of minority literature have repeatedly intensified the comparison habit among readers and gradually consolidated their concept of border area and ethnic minority literature.

Actually, the habit of making cultural and esthetic comparisons between the literature of Chinese minority peoples and the Han has misled urban readers. As a result, the average urban reader is interested more in descriptions of virgin landscapes and unusual customs of ethnic minorities in the border areas, than in detailed observations of their lives. Mysteries and legends that seem exotic to inland culture are more appealing than daily life.

Therefore, the importance of writers such as Kim In-Sun and Ma Jinlian is worth mentioning. They do not divorce ethnic literature from daily life, but write about the ordinary. Turning the emphasis away from descriptions of natural scenery and ethnic customs, these writers focus on the normal themes of literature – people, lives and the passage of time.

The young Hui writer Ma Jinlian lives in Xiji County, Guyuan

Prefecture, in Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, a region known for its arid climate and harsh life. It is the normal literary practice for writers to experience the trials of life here and express sympathy and concern. The representation of ethnic elements is often achieved by means of religious matters or representative characters. *Girl, Wife, Daughter-in-Law* is personal, involved and up-close; it is far from pure observation, still less is it conceptual. Rather than the usual imagination catering to the need for novelty, the story gives us faithfulness to and love for life. The tale recounts the experience of Snowflake from the time she marries to when she gives birth. With her good-natured husband working away in the city most of the time, she has to live with her smart mother-in-law and her calculating sister-in-law. Daily life proceeds in a peaceful and orderly way. Snowflake has a placid, positive nature. Her attitude toward all her toil and the family she married into is one of simple contentment refreshing the notoriously thirsty land.

The virtue of understanding in daily life and the passage of time is vividly expressed in *Ballad of the Bell Flowers* by Kim In-Sun, a writer from the Korean ethnic group. Love and enmity among the older generation are gradually dissolved by the understanding of the younger generation and communication between the two generations. The personality of each character is displayed in dialogue. A feeling of gratitude prevails at the wedding of the younger generation.

This does not mean that ethnic characteristics are neglected. They are not used as stage property, but are revealed naturally in the details of daily life, such as the custom of sweeping clean the *kang* (earthen bed) and taking a bath before giving birth; the absent imam who was supposed to give a name to the new baby in *Girl, Wife, Daughter-in-Law*; and the ethnic ballad, festive costumes and food

in *Ballad of the Bell Flowers*. Quietly, without any jarring effect, they exude the pure flavor of ethnic life.

The Remote Hot Spring by the Tibetan writer Ah Lai is an awe-inspiring story, neither embellished by exaggerated ethnic mystery, nor avoiding the modern conflict between the pursuit of material gain and human virtues. The author combines clear self-knowledge, personal experience and understanding of the place he is writing about with his heartfelt emotions, exhibiting the skill and ease of a mature writer. The Tibetan mindset and thinking pattern are naturally reflected in the story, leaving no trace of artificial ornament. At the same time, the story rediscovers the rationality of the Tibetan people through a combined force of history, reality and culture and conveys the magnanimity of the Tibetans to readers. The fast changing scenes are woven through with temptations and depression. However, the story is still dominated by the vigorous dignity and acute cultural perception of the author. It has the same ethos as his previous multi-part novel *Empty Mountain*, which has attracted much attention over the past few years. Only those striving toward creating an everlasting classic can have such incisive, far-sighted vision and discover such an unfailing creative source.

Tsering Norbu's *Killer* and Long Renqing's *The Mud Boot Wedding* were both written by Tibetans, but are dramatically different in narrative style.

"Vanguard Literature" that prevailed in mid- and late-1980s China often used Tibet as background and experimented with new narrative structure and language style based on mysterious imagination. Pioneers of this literary genre included the Han writer Ma Yuan and native Tibetan Tashi Dawa. The masterpieces of the genre they created gained a solid footing in contemporary Chinese

literature. "Vanguard Literature" has waned in central China, but a large group of Tibetan writers of "Vanguard Literature" is actively reflecting the inner world through their narratives. At present, Tsering Norbu is the most representative writer of Tibetan "Vanguard Literature." *Killer* has a simple plot of seeking vengeance for previous wrongs. It is not an unexplored area by any means but it is given freshness, psychological suspense and unpredictable twists by the author's treatment. *Killer* poses the question of how to eliminate inner sin and implies rather than spells out the answer.

The Mud Boot Wedding is told from the perspective of a little boy, full of curiosity and longing for adult experiences. In a sense, the story has the nature of "Vanguard Literature." Through a child's feelings it awakens our sensitivity to all living things, using a narrative technique and the unspoiled imaginative power of a child, whilst bringing in Tibetan folk songs, tales and customs that merge subtly into the story. In contrast to the incisive depictions in Tsering Norbu's story, *The Mud Boot Wedding* adopts a child's perspective and reflects a warm and somewhat lonely feeling through his various playful activities. The warm yet lonely feeling is perhaps what we call nostalgia.

The Land of Green, written by Liao Yirong of the Dongxiang ethnic group, is an adult fairy tale about a beautiful woman torn between two men. The courting, slang expressions and observation of physical attraction reveal the love of beauty. The protagonist Yishiha's love for the heroine Jiayina ends in sadness, but without grudges or hatred. The green grass, beautiful sunshine, lovely dreams and generous blessings convey the same warm yet lonely feeling of nostalgia as the previous story.

When "ethnic culture" comes to face with "developed civilization," the unchanging dependence upon nature and the