



*A review of*  
**The Dragon Daughter  
and Other Lin Lan  
Fairy Tales**

B.C. Kennedy

**F**ew 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 20th century – combine elements from European fairy tales with traditional oral and Chinese narratives. These tales are revolutionary, Jack Zipes suggests in his foreword, not because they adhere to a particular ideology, but rather because a group of writers wanted to produce something 'modern'. The editor Juwen Zhang points out that these tales emerged during the Sinification and Modern Movement in China from the 1920s–'40s when the Chinese adapted many cultural art forms from the West.

The name Lin Lan is a pseudonym created in July 1924 by Li Xiaofeng, a Beijing philosophy student, who published a set of literary stories about a legendary figure in Chinese history using this pen name. He later collaborated with several other editors and writers who shared the name Lin Lan or Lady Lin Lan for collecting and writing the Lin Lan series from the late 1920s to the early 1930s. Published by North New Books in Shanghai, the series was divided into three subgenres: folk legends and tales, folk fairy tales and comic folk tales, with a total of 43 volumes containing nearly one thousand stories. The effort to record oral tales was the principle behind the Lin Lan series, in addition to stimulating the rise of *tanghua* (fairy tales), a concept introduced to China at the turn of the 20th century. While many other authors published in this genre, the Lin Lan series emerged as a unique historical movement and played an essential role in the continuity of collecting and publishing folk and fairy tales from different parts of China. Herein lies the foremost value of the Lin Lan series; that is, their preservation of tales from specific regions during a particular time in Chinese history.

Important social and economic factors that contributed to the emergence of the Lin Lan phenomenon included, for example, the May Fourth Movement (1919), where Chinese elites sought to advance the nation through a 'new culture' imbued with a European 'Brothers Grimm spirit' represented by Western science, technology,

and ideas in contrast to the traditional Confucian values and lifestyle. While this affiliation to the Grimms' tales is acknowledged by Zipes and Zhung in the foreword and introduction of this collection, the dominant motifs and characters of the Lin Lan series ultimately derived from Chinese and not European folklore.

The symbolism of Lin Lan in promoting the fairy tales helped young people growing up from the 1920s to the 1940s gain a sense of their cultural roots through unique Chinese tales that aroused national pride. However, while the Brothers Grimm and the 'Grimms of China' had many similarities, there were also important differences, such as religion. In contrast to the Germanic tales that were infused with Christian religiosity, the Lin Lan stories reflected an inclusive Chinese polytheistic tradition. The other pivotal difference is that the Brothers Grimm published tales that had been passed down through oral tradition, while the Lin Lan tales transmitted literary as well as oral tales. 'The Snake Wife', for example, is a common tale type in Chinese folk and fairy tales as seen in ancient records and the Lin Lan series, and two variants of this tale type, 'The Garden Snake' and 'The Snake Spirit', can be read in this collection. Other cultural differences include the setting of these tales: while European fairy tales are related to hunting in forests, the Lin Lan series depicts agricultural life in China. Likewise, while protagonists in the Western tales are mostly hunters, travelling princes or princesses, Lin Lan weaves tales about peasants, cooking girls or dragon daughters who can build houses. Breaking taboos to obtain treasures in Grimm tales reveals the spirit of the hunting culture, whereas in Lin Lan's tales breaking taboos is often related to losing reassurance and credibility.

This collection of stories is intended to provide a complete and original picture of what the Lin Lan phenomenon signified in early 20th-century China. Although this book contains only about ten percent of the tales categorised as fairy tales in the Lin Lan series, they indicate the richness and diversity of the oral and literary traditions in China. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949), the Lin Lan series disappeared from public and academic life as many fairy tales were labelled as 'superstitious'. The purpose of this collection is to restore the role of Lin Lan in the evolution of fairy tales in China, specifically in the 1920s and 1930s. The collection, divided into four parts, highlights how fairy tales were understood, told, and discussed in China at that time; for example, 'The Hatred and Love of Siblings' shows the commonality among tales from all cultures, whereas the section 'Predestined Love' represents Chinese notions of ghosts/souls as well as ethics and values concerning family. These tales were all selected from the original Lin Lan series and published for the first time in English – except for four from the Wolfram Eberhard collection, which the editor has retranslated. In addition to the 42 tales, the editor has included their bibliographic source as well as tale types, bibliography and biographical notes on important writers and contributors in the Appendices.

Zhang suggests that the Lin Lan series should be appropriately acknowledged as the Brothers Grimm of modern China, and I feel that he puts forward a credible argument. Zhang's 'Introduction' offers a cultural and historical background to these captivating fairy stories, which are a wonderful source of material for anyone interested in this field of research, as the emergence of the Lin Lan fairy tales has rarely been studied or explored outside of China.

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*A review of*  
**The  
Magic Herb**  
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**A**nthropomorphism is the attribution of human characteristics, emotions, or behaviour to non-human entities, including animals.<sup>1</sup> It is a very common motif in fairy tales, folk stories, and ancient mythology as an attempt to portray the natural world as reflections of ourselves, and to explain the unexpected. While Xenophanes (sixth century B.C.) was the first to use the term 'anthropomorphism' to describe how gods and supernatural beings were like mortals, it was Aesop's fables that gifted animals with human language and understanding and gave them moral lessons to learn. Likewise, the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen also employed anthropomorphism as a useful means to introduce imaginary elements and magical realism to their stories.

Anthropomorphism in children's literature helps create charming, memorable protagonists, but it's also a powerful educational tool that's been used since the earliest people told stories. Dorothy Burroughes' (1883-1963) *The Magic Herb* is an excellent example of this. This gentle tale, written and illustrated by 'one of the finest poster- and printmakers in the early twentieth century', has all her animals act with extraordinary humanity.

Today, Burroughes has been forgotten as a children's author. Born in 1883, she attended the Slade School of Fine Art and the Heatherley School of Fine Art before embarking on a career as a commercial artist in London in the 1920s. She received a commission from the London Underground to create posters to encourage people to visit Regents Park Zoo, and her depiction of Langur monkeys and other animals was a huge success. By 1923 Burroughes was recognised as one of the foremost animal artists in the UK. However, despite her success, Burroughes was not particularly happy drawing and painting animals in cages, and from 1930 to 1952 she wrote and illustrated more than twenty children's books with an unusual focus on animals and animal rights.

Burroughes not only provided delightful stories for children, employing animals anthropomorphically to address diverse situations and problems that humans encounter, but she also had a unique approach to portraying animals: she viewed them as more humane than humans and devised plots that showed how they did not oppress one another but rather resolved most of their dilemmas peacefully, not violently through battles or war.

This elegantly written novella (1945), filled with beautifully executed illustrations, is not a remarkable fantasy. Written early in Burroughes' career as a children's author, it has more of a folktale quality to it, for it is about three brothers with different talents who travel on a dangerous voyage to find medicine for their younger brother who is on the verge of death. In this story the brothers are badgers who care a great deal for one another and are willing to risk their lives for Baby Badger. Folk and fairy tales often deal with a mission in which three brothers fight each other to win a princess or gain power by acquiring a magic potion or item, as seen in, for example, the 'Tale of the Three (Peverell) Brothers' from the Harry Potter series. In 'The Magic Herb', Light-foot, Quick-ears and Bright-eyes have only one hope to save their baby brother – the legendary Magic Herb, which grows in the ruins of an old monastery on top of a mountain on the Magic Isle. Nobody who dared to search for the Magic Herb had ever returned before, but this does not discourage the three brothers, who are willing to rely on their virtues, face the unknown, and do what they know is right, even if it might be impossible. In Burroughes' tale there is no competition between the brothers; rather they co-operate with one another and win the respect of the Saint (St Francis), the Dodo and Unicorn so that they can obtain the magic herb and cure their sick brother.

We are never told the identity of the magic herb, although one of the illustrations depicts St Francis, patron saint of animals and the environment, surrounded by a field of white flowers. For centuries people across the world have been fascinated by herblore and the secrets of herbal remedies, and the author appears to endorse these natural traditions. Many herbs have white flowers; it is

one of the most common herbal blooming colours. By refusing to identify the ‘magic herb’, Burroughes allows the reader to engage in the magical nature of this tale. The inclusion of St Francis and reference to an old monastery in the story recalls the monastic herb gardens of medieval Europe, famed for their production of herbal cures for helping the sick. This allusion feeds into the central theme of *The Magic Herb*. The illustrations that Burroughes drew to accompany this story display her meticulous care in representing animals as models for young readers. Clearly drawing on her previous experiences at Regent Park Zoo, these drawings are empathetic, joyful and often comical.

The editor Jack Zipes includes an afterword on Dorothy Burroughes and her work. He notes that she hardly ever portrayed humans in her books but rather described how discreet and kind animals are able to overcome oppression on their dangerous journeys. Zipes’ mission, he writes, ‘is to unbury dead and neglected authors of fantasy and to create conditions for a better world’. *The Magic Herb*, redesigned and released to carry Burroughes’ legacy to new audiences in beautiful hardcover, comes at a time of ecological challenges and it is now time to revive her works for a contemporary audience.

The anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss commented that animals were ‘bons à penser’ (good to think with), and fairy tales speak through beasts to explore common experiences – fear of sexual intimacy, terror, violence, injustice, and struggles for survival. A tradition of articulate, anthropomorphised creatures of every kind is as old as literature itself: animal fables and beast fairy tales are found in ancient Egypt and Greece and India, and the legendary Aesop of the classics has his storytelling counterparts all over the world, who use crows and ants, lions and monkeys, ravens and donkeys to satirise the follies and vices of human beings and display along the way the effervescent cunning and high spirits of the fairy-tale genre.

Author/illustrator: Dorothy Burroughes. Editor: Jack Zipes.

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1. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/basics/anthropomorphism>.