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Global Soil Proverbs: Cultural Language of the Soil. Edited by Jae E. Yang, M. B. Kirkham, Rattan Lal, and Sigbert Huber. Stuttgart: Schweizerbart Science Publishers, 2018. Pp. xv and 275.

The book under review is a collection of over 600 proverbs on soil, compiled by soil scientists. This review is written by a proverb scholar who makes compost for his garden, so I have some appreciation for both the soil and proverb aspects of this book. It is wonderful to see practical people recognize the value and beauty of proverbs, as well as their application to real world problems. We know that proverbs usually mention the most common animals and objects. This book is about proverbs that touch on something that is universal and basic: soil. The collection consists of proverbs from 30 countries, with each national chapter compiled by soil scientists from that country (though the Irish team included the noted paremiologist Fionnuala Carson Williams). For some of the articles, proverbs from plural languages are included, e.g. India. All of the proverbs are given in their own script, with most transliterated, enabling readers to see rhyme, assonance, alliteration, feature rhyme, meter, etc.

The contributions reflect a wide concept of what is a “proverb”. Some of the proverbs seem to be simple reminders of how to farm various soils, e.g. “Do not plow upland in the fall” (Korea, p. 74) and “No one thrives by tilling sandy soil, and no one is ruined by ploughing clay” (India, p. 42). Other proverbs refer to soil, but do not primarily give agricultural advice about soil. Rather, they are metaphorical, such as “There is no field without hillside” (Spain, p. 179), which reminds people that life has both positive and negative events.

Some Egyptian entries are long, one 10 lines long, but the translation and explanation are not clear, possibly intermingled (p. 14). Some of the Indian examples are prayers related to soil (p. 41). Alan Dundes argued that similar weather proverbs were merely mnemonics being classified as proverbs (at least by a

Western European definition of “proverb”). However, it seems wise to pay attention to the native speakers’ concepts of “proverb” from various languages; if they classify such sayings as “proverbs”, then outsiders should ponder what these writers’ definition of “proverb” encompasses. However, many of the contributions from North America are the least proverbial, many simply quotations about soil, with sources noted, e.g. “Land, then, is not merely soil; it is a fountain of energy flowing through circuit of soils, plants, and animals” (p. 220).

Most of the proverbs are accompanied by helpful explanations, e.g. “A farmer becomes rich if a *shō* (1.8 liters) of soil accumulates in his bed,” is explained as “This proverb implies that farmers who work hard on their farms and fall asleep in bed wearing dirty clothes and muddy shoes become rich” (Japan, p. 64).

Not surprisingly, some proverbs are found in more than one country, e.g. “Soil without dung is like a cow without her calf” (India p. 43, Pakistan p. 87). The book concludes with an index, enabling searches, such as finding out that four countries have proverbs valuing soil as equal to, or above, gold.

As with any collection of proverbs, there are examples to be found of many grammatical constructions: rhetorical questions, imperatives, adynaton, counter proverbs, dialogue proverbs, wellerism proverbs (not surprisingly, one with soil speaking, Turkey, p. 56), etc. It is interesting to compare proverbs from many languages all in one book, comparing the artistic features of their proverbs. For example, rhyme was observed commonly in proverbs from Europe, but not from East Asia.

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