

Practices and the State in Northern Asia: Views from the Center and Periphery”) is concerned with the changing role of shamanism as an element of Manchu self-definition during the Qing Dynasty.

All of the articles in this book are of interest. My only caveat is that no alternative or minimal definition for the term “shamanism” is maintained. This is perhaps inevitable with a collection of articles such as this. However, the editors state that their purpose is to “deconstruct the archetype” and “loosen the paradigm,” and though the paradigm is indeed loosened, the ultimate effect of the individual case studies is to render the term “shamanism” meaningless. For example, in early Chinese Studies, scholars have debated whether the term *wu* should be translated as “shaman.” This debate depends upon a minimal definition of a “shaman” as someone who uses trance and makes spirit journeys. Within the broad range of definitions used herein, *wu* can certainly be translated as “shaman,” but it does not tell us anything at all about them. There remains the need for a term which refers, at least minimally, to a religious practitioner who uses trance and makes spirit journeys, if only to demonstrate, as this book so clearly implies, that such practices do not have any particular social or ideological implications and must be understood within a wider historical context.

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## CHINA

*Bubonic Plague in Nineteenth-Century China.* By CAROL BENEDICT. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996. xx, 256 pp. \$39.50.

Carol Benedict has written a book on plague in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century China that should interest a broad audience—those interested in the history of medicine, modern world history, and late imperial and modern Chinese history. Benedict’s conclusion offers an apt introduction to the scope and significance of her scholarship. As she demonstrates, “[t]he social history of disease is not only a significant subject in its own right but can also reveal important aspects of Chinese economic, political, social, and cultural life in the last century of Qing rule” (p. 171).

In Benedict’s hands, the story of plague in China becomes a new chapter in the history of state-societal interactions in the late Qing period. The civic activism that dominated public health in China during the second half of the nineteenth century made a transition to a centralized public-health bureaucracy in the early twentieth century. This transition marked a shift in power from the merchant-elites who controlled charitable institutions to the government organizations of state medicine. Reformers in the Chinese government borrowed western models to create a new centralized public-health bureaucracy. At first, they used models of state medicine from Europe to prevent further foreign intervention into China’s internal affairs. Later, however, these models enabled the Chinese state to expand its power over local society. Benedict’s focus on the fight against plague epidemics in China at the turn of the century reveals new dimensions of the social, political, and economic transformations of the late Qing dynasty.

But Benedict does not restrict her analysis to China. By applying a regional systems model to the diffusion of plague in nineteenth-century China, she contributes to the comparative history of disease. Western historians of plague resigned themselves to the “inexplicable randomness” of the spread of plague (p. 97). But this “randomness” had more to do with limitations in their analytic methods than the cleverness of the *Yersinia pestis*. Benedict skillfully employs G. William Skinner’s regional systems model to clarify the previously inexplicable. Specifically, the separate urban and rural patterns of diffusion dominant in European scholarship on plague in fact represent two phases of diffusion within broader regional-city trading systems: the urban pattern occurs when plague first arises in a market-place center; the rural pattern manifests when the disease spreads along trading routes to the urban hinterland. By applying Skinner’s regional systems model to the diffusion of plague for the first time, Benedict shows that although plague spreads in complex and varied ways, its diffusion is neither random nor unpredictable.

Benedict divides her analysis into two parts that cover first the diffusion of and then the responses to plague. Her first three chapters examine the spread of plague from its initial outbreaks in Yunnan during the eighteenth century to its rapid extension along the trade routes of the Southeast Coast macroregion in the late nineteenth century to its transformation into the third pandemic of plague at the turn of the twentieth century. Contrary to conventional opinion, the initial outbreaks of plague in eighteenth-century Yunnan were not due to economic collapse or population decline, but rather to economic growth and expansion along the southwestern frontier. This expansion upset the balance of the natural plague reservoirs endemic in Yunnan. The resulting ecological imbalance forced the Asiatic rat fleas that carry the *Yersinia pestis* to make their deadly jump from the yellow-chested rats of Southern China to humans.

In her last three chapters Benedict turns to a wide range of medical, religious, social, and political responses to the plague epidemics of the late Qing. She places the Chinese origins of the third pandemic of plague within the broader context of international politics of health. She does this by contrasting the activist Chinese elite involvement in public health in Canton during the 1894 epidemic with the clash between the civic activism of Chinese elites and the intrusive state medicine of the British colonial administration in Hong Kong during the same year. Benedict shows that during the New Policies period (1901–11), increasing Chinese government responses to the plague played a central role in establishing Chinese state medicine and public health institutions. By the Manchurian epidemic (1910–11) fifteen years later, Chinese reformers integrated Western concepts of aggressive state medicine in their attempts to modernize the Chinese nation-state.

At least three new directions can be taken following Benedict’s lead. They relate to the regional systems model, traditional Chinese epidemiology, and her final conclusion. First, while plague may be the ideal disease for the regional systems model, it would be valuable to see whether this model can be as powerful an analytic tool to explain the diffusion of less acutely infectious diseases, such as tuberculosis, and diseases more susceptible to human behavior, such as venereal diseases. In addition, her summary of Chinese medical thought, although cogent and clear, does not analyze synchronic variability or diachronic changes; she did not intend, however, to give a sociointellectual history of Chinese medical epidemiology. Finally, the shift from civic activism to state medicine Benedict demonstrates appears to parallel a change in intellectual framework from a configurationist multicausal model to a contagionist microbial explanation of plague. This significant paradigm shift may well have helped

underpin the sociopolitical transition in power from the civic sector to the state police. An interesting story remains to be told about how Chinese public-health reformers, like their Pasteurian French contemporaries, used the new identity of the causative agent to expand their power over local society. With her historical analysis of bubonic plague in China, Benedict has established a foundation that scholars from several disciplines would do well to build on.

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*The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling.* By VIBEKE BØRDAHL. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series, No. 73. Surrey, Great Britain: Curzon Press, 1996. xxx, 497 pp. \$65.00.

The written legacy of traditional Chinese oral literature, from the songs collected by the Han Dynasty Bureau of Music to the vernacular stories of Ming times, has received substantial scholarly attention. Rare is the attempt, however, to discover more about the living art of storytelling and oral literature in China through a living look at living tradition. Such an inquiry demands that priority be given to field study with extensive observation and recording of performances. Vibeke Børdahl has done just that in this pioneering, yet comprehensive and informative treatment of one fascinating local oral tradition. Her book explores contemporary Yangzhou storytelling and provides selected transcriptions of a small corpus of oral texts performed in the Yangzhou dialect that she recorded in the years 1986–92.

Børdahl centers her investigation on various versions of episodes about Wu Song in the *Shuihu* (Water Margin) story tradition. Focusing most closely on the famous tale “Wu Song Fights the Tiger,” she examines the telling of the story by several storytellers who represent different storytelling schools. The core of her study is contained in part 1, which begins with a useful discussion of the history of storytelling in China, followed by chapters that examine the recorded story performances with regard to their phonology, grammar, style, and narration. Børdahl concludes her treatment with a discussion of the oral nature of the texts in the light of their counterpart written tradition. Part 2 contains transcriptions of the performances she studied.

The chapters of part 1 leave no facet of Yangzhou storytelling unexplored. After reviewing the art of Chinese storytelling in historical times, chapter 1 presents a detailed overview of the local Yangzhou tradition. Børdahl discusses the history of the various storytelling schools since 1850, then outlines details of training, venue, repertoire, and performance technique and how these have changed over time. Chapter 2 includes background biographies of the storytellers who performed for this study in a profile of the author’s primary sources, field technique, and transcription principles.

In chapter 3, the author outlines the phonology of the Yangzhou dialect and how that phonology is manipulated by the storytellers to color their product. Børdahl describes how the Yangzhou performers alter their pronunciation in specific ways, producing styles they call “square mouth,” “round mouth,” “public talk” and “private talk,” that are designed to give textured variety to the tone and tint of their stories. The skill to produce these different accents is an important part of the storyteller’s technique. Unfortunately, the author’s choice to transcribe the texts included in part