

The Shinto line of Fushimi Inari is traced back to the ninth century and has many branch shrines all over Japan—even the Buddhist line of Toyokawa seems to be connected to that line in the end. However, Smyers's work does not stop here; she carries her research on to the roots of Dakini-ten in Hinduism and early Buddhism in India in order to find out just why this deity is linked to the fox.

She applies a similar cultural-historical approach in her quest for the meanings of the jewel in Buddhist, Shinto, and folk traditions. All the major traditions merge in the symbols of the fox and the jewel but leave a vast array of possible interpretations. These different interpretations are used to distinguish the Buddhist monk from the Shinto priest and both from the lay follower or the shaman leader in general, and also to distinguish on the individual level priests, monks, lay followers, and shaman leaders. Anyone may hold his or her own personal view of the deity, which may not conform with the official doctrine of the shrine or temple where that person practices his or her belief. And it definitely is not voiced publicly to avoid disturbing the Japanese ideal of group harmony. However, Smyers was able to elucidate some of these personal opinions on Inari-san in person-to-person interviews.

This leads her to the central question of her study: Why does such a wide variety of beliefs and practices not lead to serious schisms or into a vast amount of separate groups? Why can those with different understandings of Inari still integrate themselves into the one big group of worshippers of Inari-san? Her answers indicate that this is a general problem for scholars of Japanese culture as a whole. So far, when focussing on one group of Japanese society, the centripetal mechanisms—those that keep the group together—have been emphasized. However, any group—including those of Japanese society—is made up of individuals, and individuality is a centrifugal power potentially destroying group cohesion. So far, scholars believed, the Japanese lacked individuality and therefore group cohesion was not endangered. In this study, Smyers shows clearly that the Japanese are just as much individuals as members of Western societies. What distinguishes them from Western individuals is the way they voice their individual opinions, or rather keep silent about them. This is one of the functions of the dichotomy *honno* and *tatema* (*honno* being the term for individual opinions, and *tatema* denoting the shared opinions of a given group). Smyers also discovered another usage of this pair of terms as they come to denote different levels of truth: *tatema* means superficial truth that can be shared with outsiders, while *honno* indicates a deep truth that can only be shared with insiders. Therefore the decision of an informant to start talking *honno* to her—a foreign researcher and an outsider—is a great achievement for any serious scholar of Japanese culture.

The Fox and the Jewel is not only a study of Japanese religion but of Japanese society in general, doing away with the simple prejudice that the Japanese are less individualistic and more group oriented than other people. This book also shows how interdisciplinary work by anthropologists can give a more complete picture of a society than the more highly specialized studies of some Japanologists limiting their view, for example, to literature, sociology, or a single religious tradition of Japan.

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CHINA

BØRDAHL, VIBEKE, Editor. *The Eternal Storyteller: Oral Literature in Modern China*. Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, Studies in Asian Topics, vol. 24. Richmond: Curzon, 1998. xiv + 368 pages. Illustrations, bibliography,

glossary, index. Cloth £40.00; ISBN 0-7007-0982-7.

In August 1996, a unique workshop was held at the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS) in Copenhagen. It was entitled "International Workshop on Oral Literature in Modern China." Both researchers from different parts of the world and professional masters of storytelling from Yangzhou participated in the meetings. Lectures were given on the history, genres, and studies of storytelling in the Yangzhou area. The tellers, who were obviously greatly inspired,¹ entertained with their art in a way that threw light on the deep cultural significance and value of oral storytelling in China.

The book under review is based on this workshop. It is a pleasure to see that the contents of this workshop have resulted in the publication of a gold mine of information presented in both a strict and elucidating way. The volume is dedicated to Chen Wulou and Boris Riftin, who also get special thanks in the Preface. Presentations by these two scientists with selected bibliographies of their publications are given after the main text.

Bibliographies, which are appended to each article, make up an important part of the book. A long list of works on Chinese storytelling in English, French, German, Russian, and Chinese is also given. Chinese characters are not found either in the bibliographies or in the main text, but there is a glossary to compensate for this. The characters certainly make it easier for the reader with some knowledge of Chinese to separate the almost unbelievable profusion of terms used for "storytelling." An index makes it possible to find items of specific interest in the book.

One problem is touched upon in several of the essays: "Is the storyteller eternal or not?" It is pointed out that today the telling sessions are usually visited mainly by elderly people, and that the younger generations seem to have lost interest in professional storytelling. But have young people ever been particularly fond of this kind of entertainment? Not one of the stories I know is for children, and the elaborate, artificial ways of telling the stories may make it difficult for a young audience to appreciate them. It is probably impossible to answer my question, but judging from the pictures in the book of telling sessions in ancient times, the audiences of long ago also consisted mainly of mature people. The real problem is probably if there will be any tellers or not in the future and not if there will be an audience—there will surely be sufficiently many elderly persons who get fed up with TV and film in China as in the West. The question is if it will be possible to earn a decent living by storytelling, and if it will be possible to find young apprentices who are willing to submit themselves to the strict discipline required in order to learn the art of a master teller.

Each essay in the book deserves a review, and it is a pity that only two can be briefly discussed: Wilt L. Idema's study of the Nūshu texts and Helga Wërle-Burger's of the interaction between storytelling, operas, and films.

In the essay by Idema, it is surprising to learn that the Nūshu script probably began to be used as late as last century, and it is equally astonishing to find that it was used right up to the 1980s. The contents of the texts clearly show that the women who wrote them down, read them, or listened to them accepted the morals of traditional China. The women of the stories may complain about their conditions, but they hardly ever take action to change their fate. If they do, as Zhu Yingtai did, they are bound to fail. The morals of bygone times are thus accepted or simply taken for granted. The tales, therefore, do not propagate any feminist ideas, or at least not feminist ideas that exist in the West. Yet, is there perhaps not one idea that may have been regarded as "feminist" in China not very long ago? It seems as if some of the faithful ladies expected their husbands to be equally faithful. To require that the husband should be faithful and live in a monogamous marriage, that, to be sure, *was* feminism in pre-modern China. In the old days, a wife who expected that of her husband would be considered

selfish and niggardly as well, since she certainly knew that a mandarin felt duty bound to have four wives—in other words, “help, and if need be, support four families.” Let us not forget that men also had, and have, their burdens. If a Chinese official had four wives, it did not mean that he was a lecher but showed that he was a responsible man who both considered the progeny for his own family and prosperity for the families of his wives. This ought to be considered while reading Idema’s essay.

In her essay, Werle-Burger not only explains the interaction among media storytelling, operas, and films but also, in a thought evoking section, speaks of the ultimate origin of all performing arts. All kinds of performances have their roots in the rites of the shaman, she says, and those go back to prehistoric times. To anyone who has seen a shaman in Southeast Asia dance a sword dance, not as a war dance but as a rite to expel evil spirits from, for instance, a new house, it is not difficult to see that there might be a connection between storytelling and shamanic rites. The idea that all kinds of theater performances are still considered to be rites is equally easy to accept when one learns that performances are given at the temple wall opposite the altar so that the god or gods may see the play. According to a lecture given at Lund University by Wolfram Eberhard, all plays everywhere in China were performed in places where gods could see them. A link to shamanism could perhaps explain not only the origin of performing arts but also why the language of the professional tellers is so contrived, not to say ritualized, as Børdahl has clarified in her book *The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling* (NIAS Monograph Series, No. 73, Richmond: Curzon Press, 1996).

It was, of course, the presence of the five storytellers that made the workshop such a unique occasion. Who would have expected to hear professional Chinese tellers in Copenhagen, when only about a decade ago one feared that they would never be heard again anywhere? From the truly excellent series of photographs of the performances taken by Jette Ross, the reader is able to perceive the enthusiasm with which the tellers delivered their tales. One almost gets a bit suspicious: Are they really able to be all that inspired during an ordinary session at home?

That storytelling is something worthy of consideration today is shown by the fact that it is used also as propaganda. One of the tellers told a story in which Chen Yi is the hero.² While telling this story, the teller was wearing ordinary Western-style dress and not the long old-fashioned gown. Yet, in his telling, he was more of a classical teller than a modern propagandist.

The performances were storytelling at its very best, and it is good to know that one can take part in them over and over again because they were videotaped by Sven Nielsen of the Danish Folklore Archives. The archives are accessible to researchers.

Over the years the leader of the workshop and editor of this book, Vibeke Børdahl, has done so much to document the art of storytelling in Yangzhou and to make it known all over the world that one feels that it may be time for the university there to bestow an Honorary Doctor’s Degree on her or perhaps for the town to elect her Honorary Citizen. She surely deserves it.

NOTES

1. The reviewer attended the workshop as a listener and was herself inspired by the enthusiasm of the tellers.

2. To me, who met Chen Yi many times when I was working at the Royal Swedish Embassy in Beijing, it felt rather strange to find him as the hero of a tale.

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