

*Supernatural in Early Modern Japan* a helpful study of one of the most important works of early modern Japanese literature.

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## KOREA

GRAYSON, JAMES HUNTLEY, *Myths and Legends from Korea: An Annotated Compendium of Ancient and Modern Materials*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, 2001. xvi + 454 pages. Appendices, index. Hardcover US\$114.95; ISBN 0-7007-1241-0.

This impressive collection of Korean folktales and foundation myths is a major addition for studies of Korean folklore and for those who wish to do cross-cultural studies with Korean materials. This volume, compiled and annotated by James Grayson, is quite surely the most authoritative collection of Korean materials translated into English to date and opens up a cornucopia of materials to an English reading audience.

Grayson's work is more than simply a retelling of the various renditions of myths from the Three Kingdoms and Silla periods (1st century BCE–10th century CE). He includes a thorough analysis of each narrative based upon what he refers to as "dramatic structural analysis in which the tale is treated like a drama and examined for the flow of its themes" (2). From this analysis, the narratives are then grouped as similar types based on structure. Grayson states that once the structural type of a narrative based on its narrative format is known, "comparisons can then be made about the purported purpose, or function, of the tale" (5). It is from such a basis that each narrative in this collection is analyzed, categorized, and compared.

The volume examines three categories of materials: "stories of the foundation of the nation, folktales from the ancient period, and folktales from the modern period" (1). Such a collection pattern, according to Grayson, is to, "illustrate the continuity and disjunctures in the structure, theme and function of folktales from early to contemporary times" (1). While the writer's desire to demonstrate what type of narrative has survived from antiquity to the contemporary period is an interesting aspect, it does omit the largest portion of recorded pre-modern Korean history, specifically that of the Koryŏ (918–1392) and Chosŏn (1392–1910) dynasties. It was in these two periods, and particularly in the latter dynasty, that much of what we term as "Korean" culture developed and thus the leapfrog over this millennium is a significant omission.

Of particular importance in the Chosŏn period was the utilization of the Neo-Confucian ideology as a governing tool. The rather eclectic cultural milieu that existed in Koryŏ and earlier times was slowly transformed over the first half of the dynasty to a much more rigid Confucian model. Such a transformation was not without many conflicts in the ways people were accustomed to living and the model they were pushed towards. While discontent with the changes wrought by the strict social system was plentiful, especially among women, the ability to express these complaints in writing was not only difficult, but could be harmful to the well-being of one's family. Hence, oral literary forms such as folktales and shamanic narratives became a seedbed for the growth of narratives that can be deemed as subversive. While Grayson does allude to the difficulties brought about by the emphasis on Neo-Confucianism in Chosŏn (242–43), I do not believe this can replace an actual review of the narratives of this period.

Notwithstanding the above criticism, which, in all fairness, is in part a result of the present reviewer's own research interests, Grayson's work is thorough and his analysis of each

narrative provides keen insight into the social and cultural function of the tale. I believe that such an approach to the narratives will be highly useful to students studying Korean legends for the first time. Grayson's comments provide concrete examples of each narrative's social function and how it reflects various values. In this aspect, the work is at the van of Korean folklore studies.

Researchers will also find this volume useful for cross-cultural studies. By providing cross listings of the Korean narratives with Chinese, Japanese, and even Western narratives, this work will assist those wishing to examine larger thematic concerns in folktales.

I thus believe that this volume is an excellent addition to a growing body of literature on Korean folklore and highly recommend the volume to both students and researchers.

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## CHINA

BENDER, MARK. *Plum and Bamboo: China's Suzhou Chantefable Tradition*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2003. xiii + 259 pages. Photos, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$44.95; ISBN 0-252-02821-x.

The book under review is a study of one of the time-honored and currently most vital genres of professional storytelling in China, *Suzhou tanci* 蘇州彈詞 (Suzhou chantefable). The title "Plum and Bamboo" refers to an opening ballad, *kaipian* 開篇, signaling the romantic contents typical of most narratives in this kind of storytelling (67). *Tanci* is usually performed by a pair of storysingers, often a man and a woman (bamboo and plum), who tell and sing a story in daily installments about two weeks of serial performances in the public storyhouse. *Suzhou tanci*, as indicated by the name, is the locally and dialectally defined subgenre of *tanci* that has its centre in Suzhou and is performed publicly in the Lower Yangtze area where the dialect is readily understood (as a genre for the radio, it reaches even further; compare BENSON 1996).

Mark Bender's broad and intensive studies of Chinese oral performed literature and folklore, whether belonging to the Han majority or to the ethnic minority groups, constitute an important contribution to the field. The present book-length study is the fruit of his research since the 1990s on Suzhou chantefable, and the work is likewise characterized by his deep penetration into the world of Chinese performing artists. With a solid background in Western and Chinese performance theory, his commitment to serious field work among the performers and audiences in China and his wealth of observations on their behavior and interaction give his studies singular value as authentic and original research.

In the preface, Bender defines the aim of his book as follows: "I hope that this work can help with a general appreciation of the Suzhou storytelling arts, especially the *tanci* (chantefable) tradition, and that the study may contribute to discussions of oral-delivered and oral-connected narratives" (xii). As a study in English for a Western readership, it is precisely the invitation to discussion of oral performance that would appeal to the potential readership and lead to understanding, perhaps even appreciation, of an art form that seems deeply rooted in Chinese territory. Just as Beijing opera, *Jingju* 京劇, and Kunshan opera, *Kunqu* 崑曲, have had considerable success with Western audiences in recent decades, both as live performance and as film, the same could happen with the storytelling arts, since they have much to offer in the extra-linguistic domain. Masters of storytelling operate on many levels of communication and are often able to attract both locals and outsiders with a verbal art that is based on mime, sound