

respect Nefsky is in line with present theories on the cultural background of modernization, although she focuses on the regressive rather than the progressive elements. Her book deals with essential issues confronting Japanese women today, but her approach can be criticized for its over-generality, such as its total neglect of the differences between urban and rural Japan. The strong point of the book is that it stimulates the discussion on Japanese women in the context of cultural and religious traditions. The question is whether the same arguments regarding the influence of the Shintoistic world view do not apply equally to Japanese men, many of whom are rejoicing in a life that is mostly work. Whose consciousness then is more traditional, the women's or the men's?

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ROTERMUND, HARTMUT O. *Hōsōgami ou la petite vérole aisément. Matériaux pour l'étude des épidémies dans le Japon des XVIIIe, XIXe siècles* [*Hōsōgami* or smallpox contracted easily]. École Pratique des Hautes Études, Centre d'Études sur les Religions et Traditions Populaires du Japon. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1991. 306 pages. Plates, bibliography, index. Paper FFr. 218.00; ISBN 2-7068-1033-5. (In French)

This book is a good example of why a knowledge of popular religious phenomena is becoming indispensable to both the history of ideas and to what has been called "l'histoire des mentalités."

The study examines smallpox epidemics and the folk-religious reactions to them, focusing upon the second half of the Edo period. The introduction explains—though without the clarity one might have wished for—the necessity of showing, first, how the concept of smallpox fit within the larger epistemological framework, and second, how folk traditions "familiarized" themselves with smallpox (and to a lesser extent measles) and came to see the disease as the result of an external, demonic intervention that people could then manipulate and transform. The book is not a historical analysis of epidemics in Japan *à la* Le Roy Ladurie, nor is it a geography of disease or a history of Japanese medicine. It is concerned solely with how disease was conceived of and how, on the basis of that conception, it was placated through a host of magico-therapeutic practices. The author uses two types of Edo-period sources: medical documents and "folk" materials (including paintings, dances, songs, popular short stories, and poems).

Smallpox and measles ravaged Eurasia for centuries until they were controlled by vaccination during the middle of the eighteenth century in Europe and shortly thereafter in Japan. Japanese epidemics of these diseases, first mentioned in eighth-century sources, were in all probability the result of contacts with China and Korea. They continued more or less regularly until the final epidemic in 1862, causing much suffering and death. They also gave rise to a number of palliative "medical" measures (as varied as they were interesting and ineffective) and excited many reactions within the realm of symbolic behavior. A large part of Rotermund's book attempts to establish the relation between these two orders of reaction as seen in the *Dandokuron* 断毒論 [Treatise on eliminating poisons], a text published in 1810 by the Edo-period doctor HASHIMOTO Hakuju. Hashimoto, bemused by the folk practices he witnessed and sometimes recorded, proposed a new concept of the diseases and their treatment.

Although Hashimoto's work is a prime document showing the paradigm shifts that were occurring in medicine during the late Edo period, Rotermund does not treat it from the standpoint of medical history but from that of religious history, since it provides so much information on the spiritual background of how the Japanese common folk dealt with smallpox.

Smallpox and other infectious diseases were treated in classical and medieval Japan in a manner consistent with how they were conceptualized. Since they were thought to have originated outside of Japan, they were countered with offerings at gates and crossroads, while the stricken were set in purified spaces believed to be immune from the visiting "noxious influences." After Buddhism became a dominant cultural force, help was sought from the members of the Buddhist pantheon thought capable of curing disease, including Kokūzō 虚空蔵, Kannon 観音, Chigo Monju 稚児文殊, and Fudō 不動. Temples dedicated to these deities became the object of cults and pilgrimages; amulets were distributed along with pills and drugs believed to relieve symptoms, alleviate the diseases, or provide protection from them. Shrines to such native or combined divinities as Susano-o no mikoto 素戔鳴尊, Myōshō Daimyōjin, and Sugawara no Michizane 菅原道実 also emerged. The mountain ascetics of Shugendō (the *yama-bushi*), who often specialized in therapeutics of various types, played an immense role in the conceptualization of disease and in the formulation and distribution of all sorts of cures. Rotermund lists an extraordinary panoply of treatments used before and during the Edo period, including straw hats, rhinoceros horn, ox manure, ear wax, and beans (one wishes Rotermund had read Claude Lévi-Strauss's remarkable article on beans in America and Japan).

Rotermund surveys a great deal of Edo-period material in his presentation of the epidemiology of smallpox as it was understood at the time, and attempts to categorize these documents on the basis of their field of application and finality. He outlines the various dietetic and behavioral taboos that people were to observe when an epidemic started, taboos ranging from the olfactory domain to that of sex (did people of the time make clear distinctions between smallpox and syphilis?). He then describes the appearance of a personified, demonized, and subsequently deified smallpox-causing being called the *hōsōgami* 疱瘡神, and attempts to outline the history of the changes that the figure underwent over the period of a century. The author correctly situates the *hōsōgami* within the *hayari-gami* 流行神 (a category of highly ambiguous entities that were the objects of various Edo-period cults), and analyzes the history of these entities on the basis of a wealth of materials ranging from poems to woodblock prints to short stories. He then shows how these specific cult objects disappeared in the Meiji period, leaving only faint traces in customs such as *sasayu* 笹湯 and lion dances.

The most interesting part of this study is the analysis of the prints known as *aka'e* 赤絵 (red paintings, so called because of the long-standing belief regarding the apotropaic virtue of the color red for smallpox). Rotermund convincingly explains the various emblems, cultic objects, and symbols found in these paintings in light of the folk conceptions about the disease. He then turns his attention to a number of prints and texts apparently intended for children, showing how they functioned in their semiotic field. The emphasis, it seems, was upon praying to the deified form of the smallpox demon in the hope that one might get an alleviated form of the disease: the materials all emphasize plays on the term *karu* 軽 (light, easy) through the use of place names like Karuizawa 軽井沢 and oratory techniques like *karuguchi* 軽口.

It is sad that this complex study is marred by a number of defects, some relating to methodology and others to method. First, I was a bit surprised not to see included in the bibliography the work of Shinga Takeshi on the history of beliefs concerning

epidemic-causing deities. On the methodological side, I had hoped for greater clarity on two points. First, Rotermund does not adequately situate the conceptualization of smallpox within the larger context of concepts of the body, and is thereby unable to indicate the epistemological boundaries within which people—from doctors to *yamabushi* to ordinary folk—might have conceived of disease and thus come to accept as valid what we regard today as extraordinary or incredible treatments. Second, he should have further elucidated matters concerning the *hayari-gami* and their transformation from evil to compassionate beings. This is an old tradition one finds in medieval poetry (which had a strong incantatory character), and which is also expressed in the historical transformation of Kitano, probably the greatest of all Japanese wrathful spirits. Perhaps Rotermund will, in future works, provide further explanation on this point based on comparative studies of the principal *hayari-gami* of the Edo period.

On the level of method, my main criticism is simple: the book is hopelessly disorganized, with the discussion jumping without respite from one topic to another and from one historical period to another. The only part of the book free of this confusion is the discussion of prints and texts. A careful reshuffling of themes and ideas is all that would have been required to present this book as what it actually is beneath all the disorder: one of the better studies on folk traditions concerning epidemics.

#### REFERENCE CITED

HASHIMOTO Hakuju

- 1810 *Kokuji dandoku-ron* 國字斷毒論. Volume 7 of *Nihon shomin seikatsu shiryō shūsei* 日本庶民生活資料集成, 30 vols. Tokyo: San'ichi Shobō.  
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#### CHINA

CAN XUE. *Old Floating Cloud: Two Novellas*. Foreword by Charlotte Innes. Translated by Ronald R. Janssen and Jian Zhang. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991. xx+269 pages. Cloth US \$41.95; ISBN 0-8101-0974-3. Paper US\$16.95; ISBN 0-8101-0988-3.

Contemporary Chinese writer Can Xue continues to entertain and perplex readers in this intriguing pair of novellas published in English translation. This new offering builds nicely upon the author's earlier short-story collection, *Dialogues in Paradise*, but the attempt to stretch similar storytelling techniques and strategies over these more lengthy narratives may weary some readers. Encountering scenes and characters in these pages that repeatedly highlight gore and horror is often uncomfortably similar to stumbling barefoot upon fleshy protrusions—weblike, spidery, and ambiguous—strewn maliciously in our path on the bottom of a dark ocean floor. Such sensations are strangely ill-fitting with anything even remotely human. But presumably that is the very idea: drastic metaphors are required to picture what life is like in today's China for massive numbers of people.

Both novellas, *Yellow Mud Street* and *Old Floating Cloud*, function as folklorish parables, and readers sensitive to Chinese literary connections will sense in the author's devices and formulae a harkening back to the great storytelling traditions of the Tang