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DOWN THERE ON A VISIT: A HISTORIAN IN “THE FIELD”

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Reflections of a historian on doing fieldwork in Chinese villages.

KEYWORDS: Shanxi, villages, ritual, ethnography, antiquarianism

In 1991 I took part in discussions in Taipei chaired by Professor Wang Ch'iu-kuei that developed a Chiang Ching-kuo Foundation grant proposal for a large project called “Chinese Regional Theatre In Its Social and Ritual Contexts” 中國地方戲與儀式之研究. The plan was to have local scholars of village ritual and drama in thirteen provinces investigate and document village rituals that still survived, or that could be to a certain extent reconstructed on the basis of manuscript evidence and the memories of local people. Special emphasis was placed on rituals involving exorcistic drama and dance, often called *nuo* 傩, which we now know were very common, but whose very existence had been unknown to most scholars before the mid-1980s.¹ As I will explain below, when Professor Wang proposed that I study village festivals in Shanxi, I decided to accept, even though I was venturing into areas, both scholarly and geographic, that were completely new to me. I ended by making three trips to southeastern Shanxi, where I met local researchers, searched archives, and visited important temple sites. I found myself working with texts that were new to me, and, more important for the purposes of this essay, interviewing elderly villagers and tramping around temples taking measurements, looking at murals, deciphering inscriptions, and in general doing the sort of thing my anthropologist friends had done.

As my materials accumulated, I felt both elation and unease. The elation came from being the first western-trained historian to work on genuine north Chinese village liturgical manuscripts; the unease came from a growing suspicion that I did not really understand the implications of my attempt to combine fieldwork and more traditional text-based research. I sensed that the two approaches were in some ways antithetical, and that they in any case employed methodologies with very different, and possibly mutually exclusive, constraints. This paper began as an attempt to explore that uncomfortable intellectual situation. But it soon became clear that deeper issues were involved. To set the stage I will give a brief description of the research that led to the writing of *Spectacle and Sacrifice: The*

¹ The results of the project were published in the *Monograph Series of Studies in Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore* (Minsu quyi congshu 民俗曲藝叢書), ed. Wang Ch'iu-kuei 王秋桂, 86 vols. (Taipei: Shi Hezheng Folk Culture Foundation, 1993–2008).

Ritual Foundations of Village Life in North China,² with special attention to the kinds of sources that I used. My attention was attracted to southeastern Shanxi by the publication in 1987 of a liturgical manuscript dated 1574 that had been discovered in Nan Shê Village 南舍村, about seventeen kilometers north of the city of Changzhi 長治.³ Before long other manuscripts were published,⁴ and still more were known to exist. This unique material seemed almost certain to provide unprecedented insight into the ritual life of the villagers in that part of Shanxi, and perhaps elsewhere in north China. I remembered too the advice of my teacher, Wu Xiaoling 吳曉鈴, who had told me that he considered Shanxi one of the most promising areas in which to pursue research on Chinese popular culture. That is why, when Professor Wang's project offered me a chance to go to China to meet with local researchers and carry out investigations of my own, I chose Shanxi.

The liturgical manuscripts, of which a dozen or so had then been discovered, were used by local Masters of Ceremony (*zhuli* 主禮) when they directed the large temple festivals, sometimes sponsored by groups of villages, sometimes by a single village, that were known locally as *sai* 賽. They specified the order of the rituals that made up the *sai*, provided the texts of prayers and invocations, listed the titles of operas that were to be performed, gave the names of the deities that were to be honored, and so on. Other unpublished written sources included a few brief opera scripts that had been reconstructed by old performers (the originals, which numbered in the dozens if not hundreds, all perished in the Cultural Revolution) and a handful of inscriptions. There were of course some published inscription texts as well, and also local histories, though these last were of little use.

Up to this point the materials I had to work with were very familiar in type if not in form or content; I had been working with written texts, and only with written texts, for my entire professional career. But there was another type of material that seemed, at least at first glance, very different, and it was this that made me uneasy. There were interviews with villagers, including ritual specialists, which I recorded and which were later transcribed; draft oral histories of aging ritual specialists that had been prepared by local scholars and then edited for possible publication; a long and extremely detailed handwritten description of one of the great *sai* by an educated resident of the place where it was celebrated, and my interviews with him; and descriptions of various aspects of these rituals written by scholars from elsewhere in Shanxi but obviously based on extensive interviews with local people—though the sources of the information were not always specified, and the data appeared to have undergone extensive editing. And there were my visits to temples where the great festivals had been celebrated, and to the sites of temples that had been destroyed, and their associated villages.

What did I want to do with this heterogeneous mass of material? Clearly it was impossible to use it to describe and explain change over time, a common concern of historians. The manuscripts were unique, and did not form a temporal sequence (most of them were copied after mid-Qing). The information provided by local

² Harvard University Asia Center, 2009.

³ It was first published under the title “*Yingshen saishelie chuan bu sishi qu gongdiao zhu shi*” “迎神賽社禮節傳簿四十曲宮調” 注釋 in *Zhonghua xiqu* 中華戲曲 3 (1987).

⁴ For example, the text entitled *Tang yuexing tu* 唐樂星圖, published in *Zhonghua xiqu* 13 (1998) and elsewhere.

residents was even more limited temporally, for their memories were of events in the 1930s at the earliest. What did seem possible, and what I did in *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, was reconstruct some of those great rituals as completely as possible, and then put them in their local social and cultural contexts. In addition to creating a portrait of the ritual life of some southeastern Shanxi villages in the early twentieth century, I also expected to learn about the attitudes, values, and beliefs of the villagers who sponsored the *sai* by looking closely at the language and symbolism of their rituals and operas. Finally, I thought it was possible that what I discovered in the villages in the Changzhi region would throw light on the symbolic life of other villages in north China. *Describing* as completely as possible a major ritual in a specific village while at the same time providing that ritual with a social and cultural context is akin to what anthropologists do; but since the *sai* were no longer an organic part of village life in my area and could not be witnessed in their original form, I was also doing what historians do—trying to *reconstruct* past realities on the basis of manuscripts and other evidence.

History as practiced in the United States today has deeper affinities with anthropology than any of the other social sciences. This was not the case in the first half of the twentieth century, when the influence of sociologists such as Weber and Durkheim was at its height, but the parts of their work that historians could use have long since been assimilated, and today historians seldom read what sociologists write. What is called cultural history has become more and more popular, and culture is—so they used to say, at any rate—what anthropologists talk about. Probably no social scientist had more influence on the practice of Chinese history in the previous generation than G. William Skinner, and he was an anthropologist (though of a rather special kind). Cultural history is almost invariably local history to one degree or another, and the close study of specific locales is the anthropologist's stock in trade. Anthropology's traditional interest in the rural, the unsophisticated, and the tribal made it seem all the more germane to Chinese historians interested in "the peasantry," in village life, and in the whole rural background of the Communist rise to power.

But the real kinship between history and anthropology has to do, paradoxically enough, with method. I say "paradoxically" because the paradigmatic subjects for anthropologists in the great tradition have been non-literate; they observed behavior and talked to people, but they did not read documents—and historians do little else. But historians and classical anthropologists both believe that "God is in the details"; they both revel in the minute particulars of their subject, understanding that it is important to build up a body of empirical evidence before beginning to generalize. Both are, though this is emphatically not the case with anthropologists working in the post-modern vein, suspicious of any theory that interposes itself between the investigator and the subject. Finally, both are interested ultimately in people as such, individual human beings, no matter what their focus in any given case.

Much of the most interesting history written in the last generation has been very narrowly focused indeed: the well-known work of Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*,⁵ is an attempt to reconstruct the mental world of a sixteenth-century Italian miller on the basis of the transcripts of his interrogation by the Inquisition;

⁵ Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980. The original Italian edition was published in 1976.

Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie's celebrated *Carnival in Romans*⁶ is centrally concerned with the events of a few days in February 1580, in a small town in southwestern France, and is based on two eyewitness accounts; Robert Darnton's much-anthologized article "Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin"⁷ analyzes the significance of a minor (and repulsive) symbolic protest by the apprentices in a French printer's shop in the late 1730s and is based on a manuscript memoir written by one of the participants. This "new cultural history,"⁸ or "microhistory,"⁹ is very much history in the anthropological mode, or, as Darnton puts it, "in the ethnographic grain." It is not surprising that Darnton uses this phrase, since "The Great Cat Massacre" grew out of his experience teaching a seminar on history and anthropology with Clifford Geertz, the most influential cultural anthropologist of our time.¹⁰

There is another type of history practiced nowadays which, while not as microscopic in its focus as the examples just cited, is nevertheless intensely local, concerning itself with subjects such as communal ritual and symbolic resources, and scarcely at all with change over time, much as I do in *Spectacle and Sacrifice*. Edward Muir's *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*¹¹ is such a book. It describes, on the basis of rich contemporary documentation, both written and visual, the great public ceremonies and processions that punctuated the year in Venice and that embodied the myth of the city and legitimated its political institutions. In Muir's book, the focus is not on an individual or a unique event, but rather on rituals that were repeated year after year. This too is the sort of thing that anthropologists have studied, under the rubrics "rites" and "customs." However, no matter how tightly focused microhistories, local histories, and cultural histories may be, they all are built on deep foundations of contextual detail. The research deployed by Ginzburg, Le Roy Ladurie, and Darnton to provide a setting for the specific events that are the occasions of their writings is both broad and deep. They had at their disposal local archival materials and allied resources that to the historian of rural China are shockingly rich. A comparable kind of contextualization, famously labeled "thick description" by Geertz, which is the fruit of long-term residence in a village, characterizes the work of anthropologists. It is precisely this rich contextualization, whether documentary or observational, that my Shanxi research lacked. I had manuscripts that were essentially the scripts of large temple festivals, but nothing like the array of material that historians of early modern Italian or French villages have at their disposal. Local histories, the so-called local gazetteers (*difang zhi* 地方志), are laughably inadequate substitutes, and genuine local archives at the village level scarcely exist. Hence my work was not "microhistory" or "new cultural history" as those genres are defined in contemporary European historiography. Nor could it claim to be anthropology, since it was not based on the "long-term, mainly (though not

⁶ New York: Braziller, 1979. The French edition was published the same year.

⁷ *History Today* 34.8 (August, 1984), pp. 7–15, reprinted in his *Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), pp. 75–106.

⁸ Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

⁹ Edward Muir and Guido Ruggiero, eds., *Microhistory and the Lost Peoples of Europe* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

¹⁰ See p. 3 and the "Acknowledgments" of *The Great Cat Massacre*.

¹¹ Princeton University Press, 1981.

exclusively) qualitative, highly participative, and almost obsessively fine-comb field study in confined contexts” that to Geertz was what anthropologists do.¹² It was my consciousness of these inadequacies that led to the uneasiness I mentioned at the outset.

But if I was not doing “real” local cultural history or “real” anthropology, just what was I doing?

On the historical side it was remarkably reminiscent of the *antiquarianism* that Arnaldo Momigliano has taught us was one of the foundations of modern historiography, and on the anthropological side of *early ethnography*, the principal ancestor of *that* discipline. Momigliano, in his seminal paper “Ancient History and the Antiquarian,”¹³ says of eighteenth-century antiquarians that “they preferred travel to the emendation of texts and altogether subordinated literary texts to coins, statues, vases and inscriptions,” though others “combined literary, archeological and epigraphic evidence.”¹⁴ Such men had become “aware that they could find beauty and emotion of a new kind if they simply looked at their parish church or at the neighbouring castle.”¹⁵

Historians produce those facts which serve to illustrate or explain a certain situation; antiquaries collect all the items that are connected with a certain subject, whether they help to solve a problem or not. The subject-matter contributes to the distinction between historians and antiquaries only in so far as certain subjects (such as . . . religion [and] private life) have traditionally been considered more suitable for systematic *description* than for a chronological account. . . . The antiquarian mentality . . . was not unsuited to the nature of the institutions with which it was mainly dealing. It is easier to *describe* . . . religion [and] customs . . . than it is to explain them genetically.¹⁶

In the nineteenth century, when the distinction between antiquarianism and history was gradually disappearing, there were antiquarians “who transformed their systematic works of erudition into fascinating historical *reconstructions*.”¹⁷ All this—the combination of literary, archeological, and epigraphic evidence; the appreciation of ancient sites; the tendency to collect everything connected with one’s subject; and the concern with description and with historical reconstruction—is strikingly reminiscent of my own work on the *sai* of Shanxi.

The sixteenth- and seventeenth-century progenitors of ethnology also were collectors, not of fossils or seashells or coins like the antiquarians, but of exotic man-made

¹² Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 23.

¹³ In his *Studies in Historiography* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1966), pp. 1–39.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 6. Note the emphasis on *literary* texts; Momigliano is here probably referring to classical texts, not the sort of archival and vernacular materials used by Darnton et al. Granted that coins and vases are seldom of use to the student of Chinese popular temples and cults, statues and inscriptions certainly are.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* This too strikes home; I can recall commenting to more than one person on the curious influence that actually seeing the temples where the great *sai* had taken place, or even the sites where they once had stood, had on me.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 3, 25. Emphasis added.

¹⁷ Arnaldo Momigliano, “Historiography on Written Tradition and Historiography on Oral Tradition,” *Studies in Historiography*, p. 220. Emphasis added.

objects—which might have found their way to the same cabinets of curiosities.¹⁸ But as interest developed in the people who had made the pots, spears, and headdresses that were accumulating in private collections and eventually in museums,¹⁹ books describing “the strange rites and Lawes of far distant nations”²⁰ began to be published and eventually expeditions to those “distant nations” were organized.²¹ Some of the expedition leaders even prepared detailed instructions on what should be studied.²² And there was concern that the customs and rites of primitive peoples could not survive extended contact with the West.²³

Wang Ch’iu-kuei’s great project on Chinese village ritual and drama had much in common with those expeditions. It was centrally organized, had strong institutional support, and sent its investigators off into what amounted to the unknown. The feeling that time was running out for the study of the genuine ritual foundations of village life gave a sense of urgency to the planning. Furthermore, most investigators spent only a short time in their villages.²⁴ Finally, Professor Wang supplied all his researchers with detailed instructions on how they should carry out their work.

Antiquarians and ethnographers both were collectors; they were interested in description rather than narrative or analysis; they were attracted by the tangible and the immediate; and they believed in the importance of “being there.” The antiquarian valued artifacts so highly because they were genuine fragments of a past that was otherwise irrevocably lost; the ethnographer’s detailed descriptions were a way of preserving his direct experience of the people he lived among that necessarily came to an end as soon as he left the site of his fieldwork. Among all these similarities there was, however, one great, indeed insurmountable difference: the antiquarian was devoted to the past, the ethnographer to the present.

The rituals I studied are no longer performed, except for the occasional revival staged specifically for videotaping or tourists; they have fallen into history.²⁵ And hence, though I did “fieldwork” under the auspices of a grand ethnographic project, I was really doing antiquarian research, and the final product—*Spectacle and Sacrifice*—is history: history as description, as portraiture.²⁶

¹⁸ Margaret T. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964), p. 122.

¹⁹ Thomas Eriksen and Finn Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), p. 19. For a classic example of this process, see the history of the collection of Augustus Pitt Rivers and its transformation into the Pitt Rivers Museum at Oxford.

²⁰ Hodgen, chapters 4 and 5. The quotation, from Richard Eden’s 1553 translation of Sebastian Muenster’s *Cosmographia* (1544), is found on p. 163.

²¹ An early example is the German Second Kamchatka Expedition of 1733–43. See Han F. Vermeulen, *Before Boas: The Genesis of Ethnography and Ethnology in the German Enlightenment* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), p. 22. For other early expeditions, see Vermeulen, p. 220.

²² Ibid., pp. 164–70; Joseph-Marie de Gérando, *The Observation of Savage Peoples* [1800], trans. F. C. T. Moore (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), pp. 70 ff.

²³ Eriksen and Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology*, p. 23.

²⁴ Obviously there also were differences from the early expeditions: the investigators were natives of the area they were studying, they spoke the local dialects, and they were concerned only with rituals and opera.

²⁵ I refer only to the parts of Shanxi with which I have some familiarity.

²⁶ The other two basic types of history are narrative (telling stories), and analysis (answering questions). Portraiture ignores change over time in favor of complex description.

I visited sites that are important to my subject, as did Gibbon and countless other historians of everything from medieval French agriculture to the American Civil War, and I interviewed villagers, but about their memories of events that took place fifty years ago, not their conceptions of kinship or their words for plants. Herodotus and Thucydides did the same thing at the beginning of the Western historiographical tradition: “Thucydides accepted the presupposition of Herodotus that history is made of predominantly oral traditions.”²⁷ (Note however that, as Momigliano says, Thucydides and his successors concentrated on recent political and military events; “erudite research on religion, art, customs. . . and so on was excluded.”²⁸) So visiting an old site and talking to the people who live there about past events is a venerable historiographical technique.

My “fieldwork” was not ethnography, because I did not observe the rituals I was studying. And the oral histories, the descriptions of the *sai* of their youth written by educated villagers, and the articles by local or provincial scholars, who very much resemble the antiquarians of rural France and Italy—all this material, which was central to my research, was not produced by real ethnographic research either, but by something closer to antiquarianism.

On reflection, it appears that the word “fieldwork,” which was central to the conception of the Chinese Regional Theatre project, is fundamentally ambiguous. It can refer to the activities of both the antiquarian and the ethnographer. I believe this was in fact the source of much of my original perplexity, since I never really thought about what the term meant, though it was used constantly in discussions about the Project.

The reports in the *Monograph Series of Studies in Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore*²⁹ describe rituals that *are* still being performed, though it is by no means clear in every instance whether they are performed regularly, or just for the cameras of visiting scholars.³⁰ Hence they really *are* the result of ethnographic research, though of a rather hit-and-run variety in many cases. As I have said, the investigators seldom lived for extended periods in the village they were studying, instead coming for short stays to observe the performance of famous local rituals. Nor do they make clear in all cases who their informants were, and whether their information came from villagers or from printed sources. But it appears that some of the rituals documented in the *Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore Monographs* had been revived after a long hiatus while in other cases the disruption of tradition had been minimal. This is an important point, for the greater the disruption of tradition and the greater the effort that had to be expended to reconstruct a ritual, the more we are in the realm of antiquarianism as opposed to genuine ethnography. Moreover, even in those cases where the rituals have been spontaneously revived by the villagers, the question remains how closely they resemble their pre-revolutionary prototypes.

²⁷ Momigliano, “Historiography on Written Tradition,” p. 214.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 216.

²⁹ See note 1.

³⁰ As appears to have been the case with the *Shangu shenpu* 扇鼓神譜 ritual of Renzhuang Village in southwestern Shanxi, described in Huang Zhusan 黃竹三 and Wang Fucai 王福才, *Shanxi sheng Quwo xian Renzhuang cun Shangu shenpu diaocha baogao* 山西省曲沃縣任莊村《扇鼓神譜》調查報告 (Taipei: Minsu quyì congshu, 1994). For an introduction to the *Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore Monographs*, see *Ethnography in China Today: A Critical Assessment of Methods and Results*, ed. Daniel L. Overmyer (Taipei: Yuan-Liou Publishing Co., Ltd., 2002).

These reflections on the nature of my own research and that of the fieldworkers in the Regional Theatre project are of more than parochial interest. First of all, the studies gathered in the *Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore Monographs* are a resource of major importance, and we need to have a clear sense of their nature and limitations. Second, all those who study local cults and rituals in China today have to confront the issue of the degree to which the traditions they are studying have been disrupted, and in those cases where the disruption has been severe, to decide whether they are historian-antiquarians whose aim it is to reconstruct past practices, or anthropologist-ethnographers, content to record what is done today.

Whether we are working in antiquarian or ethnographic mode, however, our research is intrinsically limited; its intense focus on the local and the particular ensures this. Hence the question constantly arises as to how representative our findings are. Are my reconstructions in *Spectacle and Sacrifice*, in the end, relevant only to southeastern Shanxi, or can they be taken as representative of a wider region? Anthropologists of course have always faced this problem: are they just studying one village, or mankind? They have tended to solve the problem through the development of abstract schemata, while historians have muddled along with less ambitious “middle range” generalizations. For the foreseeable future, I think there will be considerable difficulty in generalizing from the evidence that I have collected, or that can be found in the volumes of the *Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore Monographs* series. The reason for this is quite simple: traditional Chinese village ritual practices were extremely heterogeneous. Villages literally within shouting distance of each other could have radically different ways of sacrificing to their deities, or of driving away evil influences.³¹ Since there was no ecclesiastical authority to enforce ritual conformity, and since officials had little interest in the customary practices of villagers as long as they did not threaten public order or prove to be too great a financial drain and hence an obstacle to the collection of taxes, it was natural for a state of what I have called ritual autarky to develop in the countryside. In such a situation, the most appropriate research methodology is the study of small regions or even single villages. Generalization is sure to come in due course, but it will require an immense amount of data, precisely because there is, or was, so much local variation.

This situation should not dishearten us; on the contrary, we should accept it cheerfully, because it tends to subvert the assumption that, to paraphrase Maurice Freedman, “a Chinese popular religion exists.”³² To use the term “Chinese popular religion,” convenient though it may be, is to imply that there is, or was, a single system of beliefs and practices which most ordinary Chinese believed and practiced. This simply is not true. There are, or were, deities that were known to virtually all

³¹ The major rituals of two neighboring villages in Zhejiang are so different as to each have their own volumes in the *Chinese Ritual, Theatre and Folklore Monographs*, both by Xu Hongtu 徐宏圖: *Zhejiang sheng Pan'an xian Shenze cun de lianhuo yishi* 浙江省磐安縣深澤村的煉火儀式 (The ritual of refining fire of Shenze Village, Pan'an County, Zhejiang Province) and *Zhejiang sheng Pan'an xian Yangtuo cun de Xifangle* 浙江省磐安縣仰頭村的西方樂 (The happiness in the west ritual of Yangtuo Village, Pan'an County, Zhejiang Province). For “within shouting distance of each other,” see p. 5 of the latter volume.

³² For the original of this celebrated statement by Freedman, the most influential anthropologist of Chinese kinship and ritual of the preceding generation, see his “On the Sociological Study of Chinese Religion,” p. 20, in *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur Wolf (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1974), p. 20.

Chinese—Guanyin, Guandi; types of practices that were very widespread—processions, pilgrimages; and the forms of temples and altars were everywhere much the same. Yet as soon as one looks closely at local practices, whether of sacrifice, exorcism, or seasonal celebrations, differences far outweigh similarities. And what else would one expect in a country where the population was measured in the hundreds of millions, where there was no established church, and where the organized religions that did exist were unsympathetic to the sectarian mentalities that in the West produced creeds, catechisms, heresies, and excommunications?

Willem Grootaers' inventories of the temples and shrines in northeastern Shanxi and northwestern Hebei, which were made in the 1940s, show that a single temple could house "cult units" from various religious traditions. He also points out what is common knowledge to most students of China's rituals and temples, that Buddhist clergy, Daoist clergy, and spirit mediums could perform in the same ceremonies.³³ In a word, the map that most of us carry around in our head of the continent called "religion," which is divided into nations with names like "Christianity," "Buddhism," and "Islam," which in turn are subdivided into provinces with names such as "Catholicism" and "Lutheranism," "Pure Land" and "Chan," "Sunni" and "Shi'a," and so on, is completely inapplicable to China, where at the level of the village and town there were no religious "-isms," with clear doctrinal boundaries and ecclesiastical authorities to patrol them.

This is why the strong local focus of the salvage antiquarianism, or salvage ethnography, to adapt a phrase I learned from David Holm, that I and other members of the Ritual Theatre project engaged in, was not a defect but a strength. In the realm of traditional Chinese cults and ceremonials, the local is all there is. The great concern, the overriding anxiety, is that soon the local informants who knew the old ceremonies at first hand will all be gone, that in those regions where traditional rituals and operas have not been revived the temples, the manuscripts, and the artifacts will disappear. That is why we must keep going down there on our visits. After much more interviewing, observation of performances, visiting of temples, copying of inscriptions, and collection of manuscripts, in every region, but especially in north China (in which I include Szechwan), so woefully understudied, we may be able to move on to broad generalizations about local cults and village rituals. However, that time has not yet come; for the moment we must be ethnographers, or antiquarians—and that is sufficient.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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³³ The most recent of Grootaers' publications is *The Sanctuaries in a North-China City. A complete survey of the cultic buildings in the city of Hsüan-hua (Chahar)* (Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes études Chinoises, 1995).