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2008

# The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China

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## Recommended Citation

Curran, Thomas D. Ph.D., "The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China" (2008).  
*History Faculty Publications*. Paper 25.

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In the fourth story, *The Dragon-Design Bao Sentences the White Weretiger*, the villain takes form as a lovely maiden and seduces a wealthy student on his way to the national examinations. In the end, as pictured on page 129, Dragon-Design Bao along with the Heavenly Master in the other world sentence her to justice.

Three more tales picture hopeful students coming to evil ends. In the story called *Rescriptor Bao Decides the Case of the Weird Black Pot*, the victim is killed by a pair of brothers, potters and thieves, who make a black pot of his body. The pot ultimately tells its sad story and exposes the murderers.

The titles of the remaining stories may further tempt one to read this delightful volume: *The Tale of the Case of Dragon-Design Bao Sentencing the Emperor's Brothers-in-law Cao*; *The Tale of Zhang Wengui*; *The Story of How Shi Guanshou's Wife Liu Dusai on the Night of the Fifteenth, on Superior Prime, Watched the Lanterns*.

University of California, Davis

Benjamin E. Wallacker

Schmalzer, Sigrid: *The People's Peking Man: Popular Science and Human Identity in Twentieth-Century China*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), xix + 346pp., pbk \$26.00. ISBN 978-0-226-73860-4.

This book explores the relationships between science, politics, and culture in twentieth-century China by surveying the history of paleoanthropology with special reference to questions about the origin of mankind that were posed by the discovery in the 1920s of the fossils that came to be known as Peking Man. The author finds that in every phase of this history, especially the socialist period to which most of the text is devoted, Chinese political elites sought to use science to achieve contradictory goals. The result was a dynamic, and at times destructive, interaction between the professional scientific community, a populace that harbored superstitions and folk legends, and a state that saw the dissemination of science as an important tool for remaking the mental fabric of the people.

One contradiction lay in the fact that while the regime characterized the masses as backward, superstitious, and feudal it also believed it important that scientists abandon their laboratories and learn from the people. As the socialist state followed Mao's instructions to bridge the gap between science and the people it ensnared itself in a dilemma: it viewed the dissemination of science as a means to weaken the grip of folk ideologies and prepare the way for the acceptance of scientific socialism, yet at the same time it claimed to value the insights of the masses, and it regarded the cultivation of a vaguely conceptualized "mass science" as a means to counter the elitist tendencies of China's intellectuals. One result was the insertion of class politics into the relationships between science, the state and the people: Chinese scientists saw their fortunes rise or fall as the dynamics of Chinese politics either emphasized or de-emphasized class identity.

Clearly related to this, Schmalzer shows that paleoanthropology offered the state an opportunity to construct a view of human nature that had profound consequences. Following Engels, China's scientists rejected the view that there is such a thing as universal human nature: humankind, they argued, is the product of an evolutionary process by which *homo sapiens* used labor to shape themselves. A logical extension of this position was the glorification of manual labor and the belief that one's nature as a human being is determined by his or her class status. The implications of this are important, for by constructing such an anthropology the state was

preparing for the fragmentation of society into classes each of which bore a discrete identity that was framed by its orientation toward work. Schmalzer does not pursue this as far as she might have done, and one might argue that doing so would take us to a deeper understanding of why the treatment of "class enemies" during the politically heated campaigns of the Maoist years was often so harsh. If what defines humanity is labor, then one who performs no labor may be regarded as something less than human, and the tendency to define humanity in such terms may have helped to impassion the political persecutions of the Maoist years that had as one of their prominent characteristics the de-humanization of one's opponents.

Paleoanthropology also became an arena within which contradictory notions about Chinese identity were negotiated. Chinese scientists and political elites sought to forge a national identity that simultaneously celebrated the paleolithic pedigree of the Chinese people, asserting that Peking Man was ancestral to all of mankind and "emphasizing the shared identity of all people," (p. 103) and attempted to establish the antiquity and uniqueness of the Chinese themselves. Thus, efforts to interpret the fossil record "took on a decidedly nationalist feel" while at the same time "creating tension between broadly inclusive and narrowly nationalist representations of humanity." (p. 97)

There is much else in this book that is worthy of note, including coverage of the means by which the state sought to disseminate science to the people (education, publishing, museums, etc.); the role *yeren* ["wild men," the equivalent of Big Foot in the U.S.] have played in sustaining a popular interest in the strange and mysterious; and the post-Mao period liberation of science from politics. Suffice it to say that while covering a variety of topics that are related to China's fossils the book amply demonstrates that, as Schmalzer puts it, the boundary between science and nonscience in China has been "blurry, contested, and constructed." (p. 297) To students of modern Chinese history this is not a profoundly original finding. It nevertheless comes to us via an insightful and interesting rendition of the story, and the book will be welcomed by the scholarly community.

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Thomas D. Curran

Hardiman, David: *Missionaries and Their Medicine: A Christian Modernity for Tribal India*. (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), xvii+261pp., \$64.95. ISBN 978-0-7190-780206.

Although concerned with Anglican missionary work among the Bhils of Gujarat, this is a book about the social history of medicine, imperialism and colonial modernity rather than a study of church history. It is necessary to highlight the distinctiveness of this intellectual perspective since it might otherwise be overlooked, given the specificity of the topic, the way in which church priorities often shape the way in which church history is presented, and the way in which the author draws heavily on the archive of the Church Missionary Society to gain a critical perspective on the complex relationships between medical missionaries and the tribal people they tried to heal and convert. In other words, Hardiman has succeeded in presenting a unique and important history of colonial modernity through an analysis and understanding of hidden transcripts in the records of conversion, healing and the civilizing practices that shape encounters on the margins of empire.

Given that modernity is often thought of in terms of scientific progress, technological sophistication and the development of institutions built on reason rather than on faith, Har-