

Localities at the Center: Native Place, Space, and Power in Late Imperial Beijing. By Richard Belsky. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2005. Pp. xii + 318. \$45.00/£29.95.

The reclamation of *huiguan* 會館 (native-place lodges) continues with this excellent study of scholar-official lodges in Beijing from their initial establishment in the early Ming period to their dismantling in the 1950s by the communist government. Early nationalist leaders such as Liang Qichao and Sun Yatsen maligned *huiguan* for allegedly promoting native-place ties at the expense of nationalist identity, while communist leaders vilified them as backward and “feudal remnants.” Meanwhile, Max Weber described them as essentially operating as monopolistic guilds that stifled economic development and whose native-place orientation hindered socio-political advancement by precluding the formation of a sense of civic responsibility in China’s cities that would have had the legal autonomy to challenge the authority of the conservative *ancien regime*. In his literature review, Belsky aptly credits the work of Dou Jiliang 竇季良 in the 1940s and Ho Ping-ti 何炳棣 in the 1960s for beginning the academic rehabilitation of native-place lodges. Dou’s pathbreaking work argued that despite the native-place focus of *huiguan*, provincialist ties in any given city naturally were broken down over time as a community spirit was forged nonetheless. Ho Ping-ti focused on the relationship between *huiguan* and economic development and he too found that despite attempts to form monopolies on certain trades, many *huiguan* evolved into organizations that transcended their original intentions by ultimately allowing membership to people from outside the native-place in order to facilitate common economic interests in the city of residence. Thus, Ho concluded, in part, that *huiguan* facilitated urban integration rather than hindered it. Recent scholarship has confirmed and built upon these pioneering studies, as William Rowe and Bryna Goodman have both shown that *huiguan* in Hankou and Shanghai, respectively, contributed to the formation of urban and, in the case of Shanghai, national identities, even as native-place ties remained strong. With *Localities at the Center*, Belsky makes a valuable contribution to this literature by focusing on the roles of scholar-official *huiguan* (as opposed to the largely merchant *huiguan* of Shanghai, Hankou and elsewhere) in China’s capital during the late imperial era. In doing so, Belsky shows that even in the most “imperial” city, native-place organizations operated in a particular urban ecology of *de facto* autonomy that helped integrate influential officials and up-and-coming examination candidates from across the imperium, laying the foundation for an “evolution from a late imperial to a national social-political system” (p. 17).

Following the literature review in the first chapter, the book could roughly be divided into five parts, as Belsky describes the origins and particular characteristics of *huiguan* in Beijing, their functions in and as space, their corporate nature, their roles in state/society and centre/local relations, and their place and perception in the development of modern China. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the origins of *huiguan*, their general characteristics, and the particular attributes of lodges in Beijing, and in doing so he provides rich data for any scholar interested in the formation of regional networks across the country. In general, there were two defining characteristics of the native-place lodge: “(1) it was established and operated by and for native-place compatriots; and (2) it had corporately owned property” (p. 20). Though there were tenuous similarities with *hang* merchant organizations of earlier

eras, the huiguan was a distinct institution that owed its origins to the “fundamental political and administrative transformation” that took place after the Yongle emperor (r. 1402–1424) moved the capital from Nanjing to Beijing and forced thousands to relocate from the provinces to the new centre (p. 33). Belsky relates how scholar-officials established the first verifiable huiguan in the capital, and that subsequently merchants organized their own in imitation, not only in the capital but throughout the empire. He meticulously documents the number and locations of lodges in China and analyzes their patterns finding that there were more than 2,000 outside Beijing by the turn of the twentieth century, and though an exact count is impossible there were certainly more than 500 in the capital alone. Outside Beijing most huiguan could be found in the provinces along the Yangzi River, with a particularly large number in Sichuan province, which had seen a tremendous amount of domestic immigration, not just by merchants, but also by common farmers. In general, it seems that southerners were more likely to establish huiguan, as the number of huiguan founded in and by northerners were far fewer in number. Belsky suggests that southerners were probably more inclined to move about the country; and as they were also more familiar with corporate institutions such as lineage groups, it was more likely that they would form analogous native-place corporations as they sojourned in other cities. While across the country, most huiguan were founded by and for merchants, the majority of Beijing lodges were the exclusive domains of scholar-officials and examination candidates. In fact, providing lodging for poor examination candidates would come to be one of the primary functions of capital lodges.

The next two chapters (4 and 5) establish the spatial features of scholar-official lodges. First, Belsky relates how many of them came to be located in a particular district in Beijing, and in doing so he offers essential corrections to G. William Skinner’s model of social binucleation in Chinese cities. Contrary to previous views, which recognized little, if any, socio-economic differentiation in urban residency patterns, Skinner argued that many Chinese cities contained a scholar-official nucleus and a mercantile nucleus characterized by “occupational homogeneity but personal-wealth heterogeneity” (p. 78). Skinner used Beijing as his model, but as Belsky reveals, while the model was accurate, the district he pointed to (the eastern third of the Inner City) as the scholar-official nucleus was not. Skinner’s model also masks “the considerable transformation of social space that occurred” in the late imperial era (p. 79). Belsky finds that there was no binuclear division during the Ming. If anything, an older idea that the wealthiest, most influential people occupied the centre of the city with decreasing status as one moved further away from the centre seems more apt in describing the residency patterns of the walled Inner and Outer Cities. Most of the wealthiest residents of Ming Beijing, whether officials or merchants, lived in the Inner City, close to the institutional structures of Ming power. But during the early Qing dynasty, the Manchu rulers forced all Han to evacuate the Inner City. Officials then built large compounds predominantly in the relatively open western half of the Outer City, in the Xuannan district. Wealthy merchants relocated to the eastern half, as major markets moved to be closer to the eastern gates leading toward the Grand Canal ports.

The huiguan relocated to the Xuannan district as well, often in imitation of the scholar-official courtyard homes (*siheyuan* 四合院) of the district. In his description of the huiguan as space, Belsky reveals the numerous functions that they served. Large meeting halls were

the primary architectural feature, along with banqueting facilities, courtyards lined with dormitory-style rooms for lodging, ceremonial spaces and altars, and kitchens. More elaborate huiguan, especially those established to serve an entire province, often featured gardens, libraries, and opera stages as well. The overall picture Belsky provides is one of integration. The large concentration of huiguan in one district facilitated interaction between scholar-officials and would be officials from across the empire. Inside the huiguan meanwhile, sojourners were not just experiencing a slice of homelife in the capital, as others have argued. Instead, Belsky reveals that huiguan kitchens likely served fare prepared by Beijing chefs and when entertainments were provided, they were usually Beijing operas. Belsky concludes, “The culture of the Xuannan district was not one of handed-down folkways but one of collective self-invention. It was in some respects a consciously created culture that expressed refinement, learning, proximity to power, and connections with China’s learned and powerful” (p. 118). All of which contributed to the formation of a kind of identification with the idea of a larger “imperium” (a term which Belsky prudently prefers over “nation” in this instance).

Chapters 6 and 7 analyze the corporate nature of huiguan. There is some debate about whether the term corporate should be applied to such organizations in China. In legal parlance, a corporation is treated as a legal individual that limits the liability of individual members. Without such legal assurances in imperial-era Chinese law, huiguan seem not to meet this standard. In an anthropological sense, on the other hand, Belsky argues that because they owned property in common and promoted a group identity, the term seems appropriate. Chapter 6 focuses on the anthropological angle, as Belsky shows how the rituals performed in huiguan helped to facilitate “identification with one’s native region, identification with an empirewide elite, and even with the imperial project itself” (p. 137). Native-place lodges often owned cemeteries where essential burial ceremonies were performed for those who could not afford to ship the remains of deceased relatives back to their hometowns. While this was not so much a necessary service for the wealthy scholar-officials of Beijing huiguan, they often sponsored such cemeteries out of a sense of social duty nonetheless. Scholar-official lodges also performed ceremonies to honour local worthies, usually known for their scholarship or high government ranks. At the same time they also honoured empire-wide gods, such as Wenchang, Guandi, and Kuixing, who were often considered patrons of examination candidates and officials. Huiguan rituals facilitated the “imperial project” as well by promoting cooperation between the Han and Manchu peoples. Belsky’s work in this regard reinforces what Bryna Goodman has shown with the huiguan of Shanghai: that the particularistic ceremonies of huiguan were not incompatible with the formation of identities linked to larger communities outside narrow native-place orientations. What Belsky has additionally revealed, however, is that this integrative function of these corporate entities was in operation in Beijing well before the formation of “national” identities in Shanghai.

In describing the corporate nature of huiguan property, Belsky adds to the legalist understanding of the issue as well. Lodge properties were owned in common, the legal basis of which was upheld by imperial courts, making it practically impossible for holdings to be divested once acquired. In order to sell a property, one had to have the assent of virtually all the common owners. As a result, the state protected huiguan from would-be corrupt directors

who might otherwise try to appropriate huiguan properties for their own gain. Belsky further argues that there was a kind of *de facto* limited liability that had no need for legal explication because China lacked notions of dissolving individual debts. Since individual debts in China were passed on to family members, it was generally unappealing to carry large debts. Huiguan, like families, avoided debt as much as possible, making an explicit law protecting individual members of a huiguan from liability seem unnecessary. Thus, for Belsky even a legalist use of the term corporate is appropriate, although he points out that the particular reliance on state protection and the scholar-official status of many members, indeed, did not offer these capital institutions much incentive to carve out “autonomy” from the imperial state.

The next two chapters then discuss relations with that imperial state. “The lodges were neither forced by the state into acting as instruments of public order nor allowed to operate autonomously in a government-free vacuum” (p. 167). For example, the government required that anyone who wished to conduct government business in the capital had to acquire chopped bonds (*yinjie* 印結) from metropolitan officials from ones home province. These bonds verified the credentials and family backgrounds of petitioners and also provided a rare source of income for metropolitan officials. They also institutionalized the importance of native-place ties, and Belsky shows how chopped bond bureaus worked closely with huiguan administrators, for example in collecting rents for provincial huiguan. While the state did not supervise lodgers directly, it did control their construction, and the state’s ideal of corporate bodies overseeing the behaviour of members held some influence in huiguan as well. While they seemed to lack the kind of juridical authority that lineages and merchant huiguan elsewhere exercised, scholar-official huiguan did have watchmen who were held somewhat accountable for the actions of lodgers. When crimes were committed, though, huiguan directors usually handed offenders over to the metropolitan police for punishment, as organization rules generally could only expel persons who violated huiguan rules, which were mostly designed to discourage residents from engaging in unseemly behaviour (such as cavorting with actors and prostitutes).

Chapter 9 makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of centre-region relations by focusing on the understudied role of the regional ties at the centre in those relations. *Tongxiang* (同鄉) ties “constituted an important node of bidirectional interaction between center and region” (p. 195). On the one hand they facilitated the “articulation of regional interests” in the capital by providing a legitimized form of access to extremely busy officials who might not otherwise have time to meet with local civilians. Not only did high officials make time to meet with prominent people from the same locality, they also produced results for them, as Belsky illustrates with an example of Weng Tonghe’s intervention in a tax dispute from his native Changshu. On the other hand, native-place ties could also be used to facilitate state interests in the regions. During the Taiping Rebellion, the state mobilized members of Anhui huiguan in the capital to help organize local defense back home, most famously in the example of Li Hongzhang’s father Li Wen’an, whose influence in the Luzhou huiguan, Belsky argues, likely led to Li Hongzhang’s initial imperial appointment to a special oversight group sent to Anhui. Li Hongzhang, of course, would then use his Anhui ties, facilitated by the roles he played in the huiguan of the capital, to build considerable influence for himself in the late Qing. Thus, in “either direction, this

interchange effectively introduced a measure of native-place interest into the political operations of the empire” (p. 215).

The role of huiguan in China’s historical trajectory is the subject of the last two chapters. Chapter 10 analyzes their role during the reform movement of the 1890s, and Belsky shows that though the reformers failed to realize most of their objectives, the capital huiguan had played a crucial role in making their efforts possible. In fact, Belsky argues that the “reform movement as we know it could not have taken place anywhere but Beijing because it was so profoundly influenced by the institutionalization of native-place ties unique to that city” (p. 235). The concentration of huiguan in Xuannan led to considerable interaction on the part of examination candidates in residence in 1895, which contributed to the outburst of activity after the terms of the Treaty of Shimonoseki were made public. The huiguan not only collected candidates and officials in a central location, they also provided space for meeting and organizing protests. As a result of this spatial and organizational influence, protestors submitted their petitions along provincial lines. However, as any petition required chopped bonds from a large number of co-provincials in the capital, it became virtually impossible to get the necessary bonds to submit a petition that included citizens from multiple provinces. Thus the famous Songyun petition led by Kang Youwei was rejected, though many other petitions from single provinces were accepted. Even as the reform movement faded, the huiguan would continue to serve as an incubator for political action, serving as the meeting sites for various “study societies” that had considerable influence on capital politics in the late Qing and early Republic.

Thus, Belsky reveals the contradictory role of the huiguan. One of his primary arguments here is that huiguan were vital for the development of new forms of imperium-wide identity that had some influence on the development of something akin to nationalism later on. At the same time, though he does not argue such explicitly, the example of the 1890s reform movement shows the institutional limits of such identity formation. While Belsky clearly illustrates how the huiguan did not hinder the development of an imperium-wide identity, and their proximity in Xuannan even facilitated attempts at trans-provincial cooperation, the state clearly had the upper hand in limiting the effectiveness of this cooperation. The chopped bond requirement did not prevent Kang Youwei from developing the Songyun petition, but it did allow for its rejection and probably discouraged the proliferation of other such drives at that time. While Belsky carefully, and rightfully, avoids blanket statements that would squeeze huiguan into a predetermined pattern of historical development, the emphasis nevertheless is on their integrative functions. More explication about how the particulars of such state-huiguan ties might have simultaneously hindered the reformers’ efforts would have strengthened Belsky’s overall arguments, particularly as in the later parts of the book he tries to show how people in the early twentieth century came to view huiguan as “vestiges of a backward past with little or nothing to offer a modernizing China” (p. 248). The scholar-official huiguan in Beijing survived the elimination of the examination system in 1905 and the fall of the dynasty in 1912, but the institution had a harder time adjusting to the moving of the capital to Nanjing in 1928. Many huiguan began to operate new style schools, but their prestige steadily declined; and Belsky argues that the increasing admission of women and families as residents along with the increasing penetration of the modernizing state into huiguan affairs contributed to this decline. This

explanation is the somewhat less satisfying than the other arguments made in the book, as one gets the sense that there were more concrete reasons for the general change of attitude. Again, more use could have been made of the structural limitations of integration imposed by the Qing and later regimes.

Overall, the study is nuanced and well researched. Belsky's topics encompass some highly theoretical issues, such as space, ritual, and architecture, but fortunately, he spares the reader much of the unnecessary jargon that sometimes mars other histories on such topics. His work is theoretically informed and makes valuable contributions to our understanding of the urban environment, centre-region relations, and the formation of broader identities in China; but he prudently avoids becoming a captive of his theoretical influences. Belsky is quite convincing in arguing that overall, huiguan do not deserve the reputation that they developed in the early twentieth century. It does seem clear that scholar-official huiguan in the capital were progressive institutions that mostly facilitated integration and helped foster a wider identification with the imperium, even if the state clearly had an advantage in limiting their ability to challenge imperial authority.

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Classical Chinese Supernatural Fiction: A Morphological History. By Xiaohuan Zhao. Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005. Pp. xii + 401. \$129.95/£79.95.

This book, as the subtitle clearly states, takes a morphological approach to examine the history of Chinese *zhiguai* 志怪 (records of the strange or records of the anomalies). It begins with the claim that the genre known in the West as “supernatural fiction” “is closest in theme and content to the Chinese term *zhiguai*” (p. 1). It applies the models and methods established by Vladimir Propp (1895–1970), the famous Russian scholar who developed a structural theory of folk tales, to study Chinese *zhiguai* records. In doing so Zhao aims to reach a “clearer interpretation of the textual patterns of classical Chinese supernatural fiction” (p. 2) and to “find out what distinguishes classical Chinese supernatural fiction in terms of form and structure as a unique genre of ‘strange writing’” (p. 5).

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is a general survey of the history of the *zhiguai* genre from the fifth century B.C. to the eighteenth century. Chapter One places both *zhiguai* and *chuanqi* 傳奇 (stories of the marvelous) as the subcategories of *wenyan xiaoshuo* 文言小說 (classical Chinese fiction). It identifies four stages of *zhiguai*'s development in Chinese literary history: the embryonic, the formative, the mature, and the climatic. Each of these four stages is discussed in subsequent chapters. In Chapter One, the author considers myths, legends, fables and parables preserved in the pre-Han and Han works, such as *Shanhaijing* 山海經, *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋, *Fengsu tongyi* 風俗通義, and *Huainanzi* 淮南子, are “underdeveloped and unsophisticated” and are therefore “supernatural fiction in embryo” (p. 29). Chapter Two treats the *zhiguai* of the Six Dynasties as the formative stage of the development of Chinese supernatural fiction. It traces in great detail the various