



Plum and Bamboo: CHINA'S SUZHOU CHANTEFABLE TRADITION

Mark Bender

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In the cities of the Yangzi River delta region of China, audiences sip tea in story houses while storytellers speak and sing stories accompanied by stringed instruments. The stories unfold week after week, usually revolving around a love intrigue. Plum and Bamboo is a thorough introduction to this enchanting oral narrative tradition that still flourishes in Shanghai and in Suzhou, an ancient city known as the city of gardens. Storytelling in China was once a major art form that rivaled opera and other performance genres. The Suzhou chantefable of today is a rich, local tradition and one of the most viable storytelling traditions in the world, with hundreds of active storytellers in the Yangzi delta region. Drawing on extensive fieldwork and an appreciation of the Chinese art, Mark Bender utilizes a folkloristic approach to provide an overview of the tradition, focusing on the contextualized performance of narrative. In addition to supplying historical and contextual background, the book examines how oral territory is opened and explored in performance. transcript of the Meng Lijun story and interlinear commentary by the storytellers; four appendixes including outlines of traditional stories, some of which are synopsized here for the first time in English; and a romanized transcript of a portion of a performance in Suzhou dialect. A truly important work, a major contribution to a field virtually unstudied in the West and poorly studied in China until very recently. - Susan Blader, associate professor of Chinese at Dartmouth College.

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