

Where are China's witches?  
The scarcity (or not) of accusations of being a witch or magician

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The accusation of being a witch or magician does not necessarily mean that someone really practised witchcraft or magic. In this talk I treat it mainly as a claim intended to separate people from the social networks within which they were relatively secure, usually in order to explain unusual phenomena (such as weather disasters), or even completely instrumentally in order to fight out local conflicts. The talk deals with the curious phenomenon that we have massive information on witchhunts in the West, collected principally by historians, but also in many former colonies, collected mostly by anthropologists and sometimes by historians. This is indeed a substantial field of study, also in German thanks to the rich archives that are still extant. One would expect similar phenomena in China, Korea and Japan, but in the secondary literature research on this topic is almost absent. Over the last few years I have tried to gather more information, also in the primary literature. In my talk I will discuss my findings until now, develop a model that could also be applied to the twentieth century, and suggest why witchhunts as a social phenomenon are relatively rare in traditional China, though by no means absent.