

Book Reviews

The Chinese Dreamscape: 300 BCE–800 CE. By Robert Ford Campany. Harvard-Yenching Institute Monograph Series 122. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020. Pp. xvi + 260. \$55.00/£44.95.

In *The Chinese Dreamscape: 300 BCE–800 CE*, Robert Campany provides a wide-ranging yet detailed and well-tempered exploration of dreams in Chinese written records. Among the many strengths of this publication is its extensive reference to both dream literature in a broad swath of academic research and in the field of Sinology. As a result, Campany's work should prove invaluable to scholars interested in traditional Chinese literature and culture as well as comparative studies as diverse as psychology, theology, and literature.

Campany's project has three major undertakings that thread through the entire book. There is an exploration of the literature of dreaming, expansive discussion of the primary materials that inform the Chinese dreamscape, as he calls it, and an ambitious analytical effort to find order in the massive and even unwieldy cultural breadth and historical scope of the materials and ideas encompassed. Although he explicitly titles and describes the project as covering the late Warring States to the late Tang, in fact, his analysis in critical points reaches back to the divination records of the Shang. The elements of Chinese dreams and divination are inextricably linked in typologies, correlation schemes, interpretation, and interpreters.

Interestingly, Campany begins with a long introductory chapter that focuses on what the book is not, including a section subtitled "Some Roads Not Taken." He makes an important commitment regarding the rich complexity and often contradictory matter of Chinese culture over eleven centuries. That commitment is to avoid as much as possible obfuscating labels that oversimplify the complexity of such things as "Buddhist" perspectives and to avoid disregarding defining intricacies of source material that spans so many centuries and such a broad and diverse geography. The reflections in this section have relevance to far more than the specific focus of this study, and Campany does well in honouring his commitment and attending to intricacies, something much Sinological literature would do well to emulate. Of course, it is the nature of scholarship and certainly a goal of this work to distil and generalize concise meaning from the intricacies of primary material.

This text reveals an inescapable tension between broad analytic themes and detailed commentary on specific primary material. That is what we find in the subsequent chapters, which are somewhat unusual in that they do not follow a chronology of materials about dreams and do not attempt a history of dreaming and dream literature, but are organized around strong themes related to the topic and treat sources not in a developmental time frame but almost as layered, simultaneous sets revealing more and more topical depth.

The first of these topics explored in Chapter Two is classifications and typologies, what he describes as “models” of dreaming. The author’s own synthetic classification covers contacts with and initiated by exogenous beings, similar contact initiated by the dreamer, wandering souls, and manifestations related to daily life including mental and physical imbalances. Here the author covers some important basics, such as the relationship between body and soul and the balance and order concepts foundational to Chinese medicine.

The discussion turns to categorization schemes found in legacy discussions of dreaming themselves, reaching back to the *Zhouli* 周禮 that provides a simple set of six dream types delineated primarily by what condition on the part of the dreamer caused them, conditions such as yearning, happiness, and fear. A much more extensive and detailed taxonomy from Wang Fu’s 王符 (c. 90–165 C.E.) *Discourses of a Recluse* (*Qianfulun* 潛夫論) provides ten categories. In addition to attending to causes, as did the *Zhouli*, Wang Fu adds ways of interpreting dreams. Wang Fu’s categories focus on the connection between dream worlds to the wake world in terms of directness and causation. In a way, Wang Fu’s heuristic text is a broad brush outline of Campany’s book, from types to interpretations.

The categorization study concludes with a Buddhist dream analysis laid out in a late fifth-century translation of a vinaya commentary. This stands apart from the *Zhouli* and Wang Fu discussions, but it is important in itself. There are two major categories, one involving involuntary behaviours of only the dreamer himself and no demerit, ranging from nocturnal emissions to dreams of flying. The second and more important category involves the agency of divine beings, that can be informed by past karmic seeds or future karmic fruit. But there is a caveat. Such messenger dreams can be real or illusory, and they could be contrived by evil actors as well as benevolent ones.

This rich chapter ends with a discussion of dream narratives that avoids taking a stance on the theory or meaning of dreams but purposely remains open to interpretation. Campany calls out three major points. The first is that dreams connect the dreamer to some other being or entity. The second is the question of what internal or external agent or event causes a dream. The final and important

point is that legacy classification schemes and related narratives do not approach dreams as a topic of interest in and of themselves but rather focus on why they matter and what they might mean. Campany argues, from the most general and inclusive perspective, dreams mattered for “therapeutic reasons.” In other words, dreams do matter, in contrast to an earlier discussion by the fifth century B.C.E. Daoist philosopher Liezi 列子, who somewhat playfully argued that dreams did not matter at all.

The question of whether or not dreams mean things guides the remainder of the book. But that question quickly morphs into how dreams mean things. The third and fourth chapters are about interpretation and interpreters. How dreams were interpreted takes us into the realm of physiognomy, semiotics, and Chinese wordplay. In an illuminating analysis, the author reviews the dense commentary record and the diverse and imperfect history of translating *xiang* 象 into English (“figure,” “symbol,” “emblem,” image,” . . .) and concludes with this helpful definition: *xiang* provides “a pathway to an otherwise unavailable counterpart.” In practice the idea of *xiang*, or what we might call its heuristic utility, is to connect to knowable things while acknowledging a plenitude of meaning in the connection that cannot be fully or even largely articulated or grasped. This argument is informed by reference to *Yijing* commentaries and other early explorations, which, in their detailed mapping of *xiang* connections, maintain a persistent sense of their mysteriousness and imply limits to what humans could actually know.

Campany divides books useful for dream interpretations into two basic types. The first, what he calls “Dreambooks,” catalogues lists of identifiable dream indicators or classes and their references. The second consists of narratives of specific, allegedly historic dream events and their outcomes. Among his sources, he provides a very useful analysis of over two thousand bamboo slips from China’s first dynasty that have been collected at Hunan University and include a manual of dream interpretation. He also provides a set of texts from the ninth and tenth centuries collected at the Buddhist centre of Dunhuang. The interpretive mechanisms described in these texts are akin to correlation frameworks that are common in many Chinese cultural realms, from astrological signs to relational matrices like the Five Elements. There is no visible logic to the relations but they are vast in range and firmly established in traditions of divination, calendrics, ritual, fortune telling, physiognomy, and even traditional medicine.

A review of a Buddhist manuscript attributed to an Indian monk who arrived in Chang’an in the eight century adds an interesting element that is linked to Campany’s earlier explanation of the therapeutic side of dream interpretation. What this text adds to the diagnosis of dreams are prescriptions for therapies to

remove blockages revealed by various types of dreams. This medically relevant focus on diagnostics is consistent with the influential role of Indian medicine in early Chinese medicine evidenced in Buddhist canonical literature transported to China as early as the late Han period.

After introducing *Dreambooks*, Campany describes the narratives as an even richer source of understanding than the dream manuals because they put into a storytelling context the actual lives of dreamers and the actual use of the materials and arts of dream interpreters. In introducing this penultimate topic of the book, Campany notes that he is not interested in the actual historicity of the reports. This is very wise, given the nature of Chinese historical narratives and the blurred boundaries between history and fiction. It is also in this final section that scholars of Chinese literature and art will find many hermeneutic and semiotic mechanics that are familiar in their fields.

There is a substantial amount of detail explaining the linkages between the content of dreams and their translation into intelligible meaning for non-dream life. These include hermeneutic strategies like fitting dreamers and dreamed-of characters into ideal types or situations into somewhat standardized storylines. They include many forms of wordplay and semiotic bridging, some unique to China's script, but all familiar as informative devices in narratives, poetry, theatre, and even painting. Connective tissue can be homophony, graphic similarity, rhyme, parallelisms, numerology, graph dissection into component parts, allusion, and established correlations, among others. The last of these, established correlations, are singled out by Campany and designated as "Cosmic Correlations." These are legacy connections that bring together everything from heavenly spheres to astrological signs, to seasonal features, colours, tastes, directions, and to sources of ill health.

The introduction to five famous dream interpreters rounds out this discussion. Campany makes the point that in the vast majority of narratives the interpreter remains unnamed, but five have well-documented lives: Guan Lu 管輅 (c. 210–256), Zhou Xuan 周宣 (d. c. 238), Suo Dan 索紞, Zhao Zhi 趙直, and Yu Wen 庾溫. The aggregate corpus of their stories provides insights that, Campany allows, may not be fully representative but are critically informative of how dream interpretation actually worked. Who were their clients? How did they gain their skills? How did they run their businesses and what was the range of their specialties?

In concluding this section, the author moves from the "how" of dream interpretation to the question of what sorts of ideas, insights, or actions were output through the process. Opening to a broader comparative landscape, he contrasts what he describes as our contemporary, post-Freud and post-Jung focus on the psychology of dreaming to the Chinese understanding of a dream as a

“cosmo-semiotic” event. He does not argue that an individual’s state of mind is not at all relevant. In fact, too much of the prior discussion, especially of Buddhist material, makes clear it is. But the psychological perspective plays a minor role, and the distinction he draws is productive in bringing together many of the materials and thematic threads of the entire book. Linking dreams even more closely to divination, he also makes the point that dream interpretation was first and foremost prospective, indices of future events rather than exposure of some internal state of the dreamer. That leads to a further discussion of the prospective nature of dream interpretation and its relationship to the retrospective nature of narrative records of dreams, including the dynamics by which the quintessentially private experience of a dream is shared and made public by means of a social process and in so doing becomes part of an endlessly expanded canon of dream records.

The last major discussion reflects a concept introduced in the beginning of the book, *Umwelt*, defined as the ecological niche as the animal itself perceives it, a bounded ontological space whose boundaries are not readily breached. The chapter entitled “Visitations” discusses dreams as a channel between such spaces, or worlds, between the living of different species and between the living and the dead. Four features are implicated in visitations, an encounter with a being from a “different world,” no coding that requires interpretation, a real non-dream encounter, and real-world consequences. The matter of visitations is available to us in narratives, e.g., a story of a fisherman saving an ant whose own life was later saved by a combination of an ant brigade chewing through ropes binding him and a black-robed personage who abetted his escape from false accusations. Visitations includes communication with dead relatives, long-distance communication and travel to sustain friendships and visit relatives, identification of the locus of serious disease in the body, and even the sharing of dreams with others. Some narratives reveal risks in these dream-fuelled, boundary-crossing communications and travels, the risks of undertaking passage into an *Umwelt* that the dreamer does not know or understand. This final chapter convincingly fulfils Company’s initial promise to put the Chinese dreamscape into a comparative context, with frequent and informative references to dreams and visitations themes by important Western philosophers and analysts.

One area that arguably merits more attention than the author accords is the role of dreams in the long tradition of what might be called trans-generational kinship or lineage communication. Sometimes related to divination and sometimes not, dreams are a channel, along with scapulimancy, burnt offerings of food or money, ritual music and calendric sound experiments, to communicate with deceased ancestors either to serve their needs or to serve one’s own. This discussion could range beyond the visitation theme as Company develops it. There is mention of Shang dream interpretation of this type, and in a section entitled “Dream

Affordances,” Campany relates dreams that afford contact with deceased ancestors. In many places he explores the relationship between dreams and divination. And he cites scholars who have characterized divination as a buffer that mediates between the world we know of in everyday life and worlds we can only imagine, primarily worlds of the dead.

In that vein, I hesitate to raise an issue about something not in a scholarly article that in my opinion the author could have included. Having said that, practices under the broad generic rubric of “ancestor worship” are such a defining characteristic of mainstream Chinese culture, not to mention so deeply ingrained in dream records and adjacent cultural production, that we would have benefitted from the author’s insights into this particular facet or utility of the Chinese dreamscape had he provided a focused and coherent discussion.

I found myself an impatient reader through the nearly forty pages of preface and introductory materials, which begin with childhood memories of studying a book on dream symbols and ends with a list of six bullets explaining why he wrote a book about dreams. This extensive and somewhat self-conscious intellectual autobiography, the how, why, and when this project was conceived and undertaken, runs a risk of eclipsing the study itself, which the reader is understandably eager to delve into. This is not to say that the introduction does not contain materials of value or relevance. Campany’s very extensive discussion of dream scholarship includes but is not limited to defining the scope of his interests and the competing approaches to dreams from perspectives of psychologists, neurologists, anthropologists, literature theorists, theologians, and cultural historians. He includes a useful and provocative taxonomy of five major dream classes. The multiple reports on how his analytic approach developed, and what it is and what it is not, are somewhat redundant with what is amply demonstrated in the body of the book itself. It is ultimately a question of balance and being mindful of what the title of the book promises and what the reader seeks to learn.

It is more than obvious that this is not a topic that has occupied the author for just the duration of the project itself, but the book is an attempt to distil important meaning from decades of research and thinking about dreams. This gives the book something of a monumental quality that sets the stage for a very brief final chapter, entitled “The Maps and the Butterfly,” and described by the author as a “fragmentary epilogue.” It is, in fact, a lyrical reflection on the entire project and the ultimate significance of dreaming in the Chinese tradition. And it introduces what a reader with even a passing knowledge of China would await in a study of Chinese dreams, Zhuangzi’s 莊子 widely known butterfly dream. But perhaps more important in this epilogue is Campany’s discussion of a peculiarly orderly wall

inscription at a remote postal station near Dunhuang, the very edge of the imperial territory. The inscription provides a calendared chart of ordinances that dictate proper activities and behaviours. Campany's explicit point is that remote border marked the limit of the known and enforceable imperial order, and the chart was a nugatory effort to project that order beyond its realistic reach. He links that to an attempt to map the Chinese dreamscape; such an attempt is similarly limited. What he does not say, but richly implies, is that the domain of dreaming in China, its interpretation and its narratives, provided a counterpoint to, if not escape from, the officially promoted and officially reported, albeit highly idealized, perfect social order governing daily life in pre-imperial and imperial China.

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The Objectionable Li Zhi: Fiction, Criticism, and Dissent in Late Ming China.

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Studies of Li Zhi's 李贄 (1527–1602) works, life, and times abound, to the extent that it has become a mini academic industry. This is not a bad thing; after all, Li Zhi lived in the late Ming period, which has fascinated later scholars because it was a time when much of Chinese elite and popular culture burgeoned in different ways, often eliciting passionate disagreement among its contemporaries on how the legacies of the past should be interpreted and developed. *The Objectionable Li Zhi* brings together eleven essays by today's scholars who address topics that many of them have explored in their earlier studies and offers a worthy companion to the editors' earlier volume of selected translations of Li Zhi's writings.¹ The titles of the essays clearly show their authors' perceptive admiration for Li Zhi, but they do not necessarily agree on how they see their subject. It is to the credit of the editors that they are comfortable with the diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations of Li Zhi's actions, thought, and practices presented in the essays.

¹ Rivi Handler-Spitz, Pauline C. Lee, and Haun Saussy, trans. *A Book to Burn and A Book to Keep (Hidden): Selected Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).