

of the state-promulgated nationalist discourse. In the final analysis, poetry is worth writing and reading exactly because it is irreducible to any category, mode of writing, or discursive formation other than itself.

Overall, this is an excellent and provocative book. It goes far beyond a single-author study and should be read by all students and scholars of modern Chinese literature and culture. Contextually, it delves into the cultural milieu, literary history, and intellectual genealogy that have shaped Haizi's aesthetic leanings and creative choices. Textually, it offers fine readings of the representative poems of a major poet. The author ought to be congratulated on accomplishing the stated goals with such remarkable clarity and cogency.

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*Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld.* By C. Fred Blake. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011. Pp. ix + 276. \$52.00.

Believing in the possibility of direct communication with ancestors and gods, Chinese routinely burn specially made paper documents, objects, and currency in order to send them to recipients in the other world. This venerable practice has long been noted by foreign observers, and its articulated logic seems straightforward. Even the high gods can be addressed through burned written communications, and both personified supernatural powers and deceased relatives have human-like needs and desires that can be satisfied by the transformation and delivery, through fire, of paper counterparts of this-worldly valuables.

Anyone familiar with contemporary religion in a Chinese community has seen such practices. Scholars, like the practitioners themselves, have usually framed them as pragmatic and sensible, not needing elaborate explanation. General books on Chinese religion may mention examples of such transformations of paper through burning, but do not examine them in detail. Dard Hunter (1883–1966), the American expert on paper, did pioneering work in Chinese communities of China and Southeast Asia for his rare and remarkable 1937 book on *Chinese Ceremonial Paper*,<sup>1</sup> and Hou

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<sup>1</sup> Dard Hunter, *Chinese Ceremonial Paper: A Monograph Relating to the Fabrication of Paper and Tin Foil and the Use of Paper in Chinese Rites and Religious Ceremonies* (Chillicothe, OH: Mountain House Press, 1937). Limited edition.

Ching-Lang's 侯錦郎 1975 French study of Taiwan material brought the subject of back into view.<sup>2</sup> More recently Ellen Johnston Laing and Helen Hui-Ling Liu (2004)<sup>3</sup> and Janet Lee Scott (2007)<sup>4</sup> have looked closely at the paper objects burned on ritual occasions (drawing on fieldwork in Taiwan and Hong Kong, respectively). Each of these studies has been primarily concerned with the physicality, look, and production of these paper objects.

It is the specific act of burning of paper currency for the dead (bills and bullion) that C. Fred Blake (柏樺) has made the subject of the 2011 book here under review. Blake is an established anthropologist on the faculty of the University of Hawai'i who began his career in the Peace Corps in the Marianas and did dissertation research among Hakkas in Hong Kong in the 1970s.<sup>5</sup> *Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld* is his first book in many years and draws on a lifetime of familiarity with Chinese culture. One of its strengths is the many anecdotes drawn from his experiences in overseas Chinese communities and the many parts of China where Blake has lived or travelled (noticeably western Hunan and central Henan, neither of which has been the subject of much ethnography). Blake makes use of past and present practice, variations and regularities, conversations, scholarly works, and newspaper articles. Friends, assistants, and informants are generously acknowledged. He is also attentive to the Chinese terms for the ideas and practices under discussion, and these are given throughout (in standard pronunciation with tone marks, and in characters in a glossary). A dozen black-and-white photographs provide a minimal introduction to the appearance of the kinds of paper money in question.

Blake's goal is, however, neither a systematic ethnography nor a comprehensive of taxonomy of the money itself. Rather, it is an attempt to find the "structure of relevance that transcends the reflections of individual participants" (p. 76), and to understand and theorize Chinese practice by putting it in conversation with "European analytics."

The ideas are developed in nine chapters. Blake begins by describing the "paper money custom" and its place in the writings of past observers and scholars, and then distinguishes different kinds of money (紙錢), recognizing the "protean struc-

<sup>2</sup> Hou Ching-Lang, *Monnaies d'offrande et la notion de trésorerie dans la religion chinoise* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des hautes études chinoises, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Ellen Johnston Laing and Helen Hui-Ling Liu, *Up in Flames: The Ephemeral Art of Pasted-Paper Sculpture in Taiwan* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Janet Lee Scott, *For Gods, Ghosts and Ancestors: The Chinese Tradition of Paper Offerings* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007).

<sup>5</sup> Published as *Ethnic Groups and Social Change in a Chinese Market Town* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1981).

ture” of the “endless in-between, overlapping, and hybrid varieties and purposes” (p. 27). He is cheerful about regional differences, change over time, and difference in context and, indeed, it is underlying structures that interest him most. The third chapter summarizes current understandings about the (murky) origins of this practice. Chapter 4 posits “an unchanging spine of liturgical order” within which the money is burned and proposes semiotic meanings for the paper offerings, but does not (here or elsewhere) give serious consideration to the role of religious specialists (Daoist or Buddhist) and their liturgies. Blake does, however, give due attention to the sight, sound, smell, and taste (“the aesthetics of the senses”) in these rituals. Chapter 5 (“Ideology”) engages ideas about money (in and beyond China), arguing that “the paper money custom was a mode of reproduction etched deeply in a highly developed and successful feudal mode of production . . . with its function to mystify the lifeworld of common folks in the cosmology of the imperial project” (p. 114). The remaining chapters look more closely at “Sacrifice,” concentrating on the physical experiences of making and burning paper money; at the bills themselves; at recent “faddish offerings” and the issues of extravagance; and finally at “value,” where these Chinese practices are situated in the anthropological literature of social economy and fetish.

*Burning Money* thus uses ethnographic information to try to deepen our theoretical understanding of this seemingly paradoxical practice. Some of the sensitive observations of practice are very nice. I particularly enjoyed the thoughtful descriptions in Chapter 6 on the folding of paper bullion (元寶) by women, which he treats as both social practice and “mindful-body work,” and likens to a variety of other kinds of “wrapping” (e.g. of dumplings). Blake does not, however, place paper money within the frameworks of grave goods (conveyed to the dead through burial), of food offerings (placed on an altar for gods and ancestors both), or burned paper communications for the gods (often prepared and sent by religious specialists). Nor does he tell us how much ordinary currency paper money actually cost.

Instead, Blake offers several levels of interpretation of what he sees as the relevant dimensions of this practice. Throughout, he is interested in and respectful of the interpretations of his informants, but to these he adds his own, attempting to situate paper money within scholarly understandings of Chinese culture in particular and theory in general. On his website, he provides a big picture: “I have long been interested in how historical structures of domination (especially the modern system) are reproduced in, and thus distort, the everyday lives of ordinary people. My academic work focuses on the interpersonal microcosms where (to paraphrase Marx) people make, unmake, and remake their worlds under historical conditions that they do not themselves choose.” And in *Burning Money* Blake describes his “particular cultural focus . . . [as] the historical formations of China and how the social order is

reproduced in the common customs and how it also constrains and exacts tolls on the interpersonal lives of participants” (p. 277).

Ruminations on theory are not sequestered in parts of this book but embedded in the description and analysis on every page. I am a historian with a strong interest in Chinese religion, not an anthropologist, and I confess to difficulty becoming engaged in the issues presented so seriously here. Beyond the warmth of the ethnography, I found Blake’s writing ornately wordy and mostly empty, and the relentless attempts to inflate sensitive observations into compelling theory were unpersuasive to me. Whether other readers will find his speculations stimulating or convincing will depend on the reader. Be your own judge.

The most quoted theorists are Marx, Baudrillard, Hegel, Merleau-Ponty, Mauss, Rappaport, Graeber, and Hill Gates (the China specialist whose work is most energetically engaged); the terms most frequently discussed are capital, commodity, dialectics, exchange value, ideology, labour, mystification, ritual, sacrifice, and value. The post-structuralist ideas of recent decades are strikingly absent. The following passages will give, I believe, a fair indication of the style of the prose and of the argument.

On ritual burning: “Each material form takes its turn in contributing its sensory property to the flow of life: the candles bring forth a flickering glow that makes the cosmos luminous; incense provides a smoldering fragrance that permeates the cosmos with desire for the numinous, the presence of spirits; food provides flavorful sustenance, which by comestion (i.e., eating, and the devouring action of fire) and metabolism produces caloric heat and sustains life; paper money shifts the active mode of sentience from tongue to hands, from the touch of food (taste) to the touch of paper (tactility), in making and circulating things of value” (p. 86).

On making paper bullion: “In the practice of handling and folding, the *longue durée* of the historical gives way to the intersubjective moment of the phenomenological: the ‘empty’ space created by folding the paper into a *bǎo* changes the good or commodity of exchange value into a vessel of sensual, material (combustible), and ultimately invisible, pure, eidetic, original, or spiritual value” (p. 137).

Or (the last paragraph of the book): “Mystification is tied to a ritual mode of production/reproduction, which is concerned with the authenticity of the artifice, a preoccupation of social economies. Through historical processes of industrial-based rationalization, mystification is sublated as reification and tied to an ideological mode of producing/reproducing state-based capitalisms. With the mutation of state-based capitalisms into international corporate-based global capital, reification is simulated through semiosis. To the extent we want to view this in the totality of historical dialectics, we would have to say that thus far capitalist civilization has moved the human spirit toward an alienation of historic profundity. Our task is to understand

how our notions of value are shaped by these modes of production/reproduction” (p. 214).

In any case, we can all be glad that Fred Blake has given the subject of burning paper money the serious attention it deserves.

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*Visionary Journeys: Travel Writings from Early Medieval and Nineteenth-Century China.* By Xiaofei Tian. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011. Pp. xii + 381. \$39.95/£29.95.

In her new book Xiaofei Tian engages with a wide spectrum of aspects and effects of physical, intellectual, and emotional displacement, and patterns of encountering the foreign and the unknown in travelogues. As indicated in the title the book consists of two main parts: the first deals with the period of Northern and Southern Dynasties (317–589), the second with the late Qing dynasty. In terms of the introduction of foreign vocabulary into virtually all aspects of daily life in China, the considerable numbers of foreigners entering the country and living among the Chinese populace, and the quantity of foreign language works being translated into Chinese and received by readers in China, these two periods certainly share interesting features. And there is no doubt that due to the mobility of people, objects, and ideas leading to cultural challenges and exchanges, the Chinese environment witnessed major cultural changes during these two periods when significant foreign cultural aspects were appropriated. The author aims at linking the two parts through her understanding of early medieval travel literature and nineteenth-century travellers’ accounts of Europe and America not just as simple travelogues but as representations of encounters with a world previously unknown to the Chinese that lead to new modes of expanding horizons and absorption of foreign influences. This is to say that, according to Tian, modes of seeing the world established in early medieval times resurfaced in the nineteenth century and are therefore at the very centre of intercultural encounters and exchanges during the late Manchu period.

Tian’s investigation starts by exploring “the mind in its interaction with the physical world” (p. 21) and the perception of landscape by early medieval literati. Language and codes, belief and value systems that govern this interaction are put at the centre of her observations. Key elements such as the focused mind as a prerequisite for accessing landscape, metaphors of the dream, landscape as an em-