

The Chinese Dreamscape: 300 BCE–800 CE, by Robert Ford Company. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Asia Center, 2020. xvi, 310 pp. US\$55.00 (cloth), US\$30.00 (paper).

Robert Ford Company's new monograph maps the so-called Chinese dreamscape: what people imagined dreaming was, what they did with and about dreams, and what various roles dreams played in their lives. For Company, the textual record fixes dreams, dream divination, and dream-related practices in time, space, and memory. Dream-related texts connect the "seam where individuals and cultures meet" (30). The dreamscape comprises and reflects collective, historicized connections between individuals, dreams, society, and text. Company argues that those who dreamed, thought about dreams, used them, collected them, and wrote about them were the ones who constructed the dreamscape. The dreamscape overlays history, experience, culture, and life itself. Without an understanding of the Chinese dreamscape, we miss the richness of that past.

Company's textual study allows for complexity in his use of such varied sources as scriptures, classics, biographies, essays, anecdotes of dream divinations, histories, treatises, anthologies, poems, dream interpretation manuals, and manuscripts. Company situates these historical texts on a topographically rich dreamscape, a three-dimensional reception history in which many hands massaged a dream text and made meaning out of it. Indeed, as Company claims, the interpretations of dreams were subject to an ongoing, never ending social process wherein actors preserved, copied, edited, compiled, anthologized, and commented on written records of dreams.

This work promises to be the first of two volumes—this first volume is about dreams and dreaming in China from the end of the Warring States period (475–221 BCE) to the late Tang (618–907 CE). The texts considered by Company span roughly five hundred years, but his book is not a survey and should not be read as one. The organization of the work is driven by Company's questions and his own expertise and positionality within the field of dreams.

Campany consciously and explicitly frames the work in terms of addressing his own assumptions—noting his blind spots and reminding his readers of the dangers of Otherizing—and outsider’s surprise or wonder. Campany is thus refreshingly present in his monograph.

In this volume, Campany explores five paradigms that offer a thematic understanding of what people did with dreams: exorcistic, prospective, visitation, diagnostic, and spillover. These paradigms offer five major access points to the dreamscape. Dreams were exorcised through ritual action, offered one means of understanding the future, provided the dreamers’ spirit the opportunity to visit another realm, helped frame health problems, and allowed dreamers to practice self-cultivation in which the dream advanced the practice.

Campany first sets out to address what dreams were for Chinese writers and readers using extant texts. Here, Campany weaves together dream models based on his reading of daybooks on bamboo strips, of a mid-second century dream rhapsody that is simultaneously a poem about a nightmare and an incantation to expel the nightmare-causing entities, and of medieval stories of dreams dealing with compromised tombs. The model Campany puts forth is that dreams were, at least according to these sources, one mode of contact between what he terms a “spirit-agent” and the dreamer (37). “The focus is not on the dreamer, nor the impact the dream has on him, but on the relationship between the dreamer and the Other who makes contact” (37). Further, Campany argues that this contact is a response to something the dreamer did in waking life. For example, Campany relates the biography of a certain Liu Yin 劉殷 whose filial actions apparently elicited a dream. Liu Yin dreamed he was told to find a grain buried near the western fence of his property. Upon awakening, he dug and found it and discovered its container bore an inscription promising seven years of grain for his filiality. This example, as well as those of negatively valorized acts such as actions of vengeful ghosts who haunted both dreaming and waking life, shared a common structure: a dream was a response evoked by the dreamer’s thoughts, words, or actions. Above, I have offered only a small sampling of Campany’s deep dive

into a range of textual modes and models. To close Chapter Two, Company concludes first that dreaming connected the dreamer with other beings or entities. For the writers of these texts, the self was interrelational and intersubjective; dreams connected the dreamer with the Other. Second, Company reminds the reader that seldom did the dreamer conclude that they themselves were the makers of their own dreams. And finally, none of the texts broached dreaming as a topic of interest in its own right. Thus, “questions about dreaming were inextricably bound up with questions about how best to live” (67).

In the third chapter, Company takes up the question of whether dreams had meaning. Not all texts in this time period claimed dreams had meaning—Company introduces examples including some Buddhist sutras that emphasize dreams were delusions—however, the default stance was that dreams did have meaning and portended something about the future. In fact, the recording of dreams constituted important societal work. As far as how the meaning of dreams was ascertained, Company asserts that the dreamscape splits into two modes: meaning lay on the surface of the dream and was direct, or meaning was the result of an indirect communication and required deciphering by individuals. Exploring the second mode, Company takes up the work of dream ciphers—the dreamer, a family member or acquaintance, or a specialist. Anecdotes reveal the social situations in which dreams were discussed and interpreted, offering a glimpse of the social performance of dream divination. Company introduces types of dreambooks and their function, categorization format, and notable rhetorical features. Some include interpretations based on the day on which the dream occurred. Others simply list the symbol and the corresponding interpretation: auspicious or inauspicious. Others give more details. Company notes that none of the dreambooks provides rationale for assigning specific meanings to the content of the dreams; they are simplistic and void of context. Company argues that dreambooks provided a feeling of control and fortitude against the anxieties and uncertainties of life. Company includes an interlude of a Buddhist text with a dream-based self-diagnosis system aimed at helping practitioners on the path toward Buddhahood. The text includes diagnoses and explanations for why

a practitioner had a particular karmic obstruction or blockage, as well as recommended actions to help remove those obstructions or blockages.

In the fourth chapter, Campany turns to stories of dream divination that come from the early medieval period, using the narratives to map the range of ways in which dreams were represented, imagined, and treated as a form of social memory. Campany recounts many fascinating dream narratives that specify the dream, the context, and the interpretation. Judging from the anecdotes, most dream interpreters relied upon wordplay—homophonic resonances, graphic correspondences, or instances of what Campany terms “translations” in which dream interpreters used a complex version of wordplay to render a dreamed scene into a word which was then rhymed or graphed or both, depending on the interpreter’s predilections—to arrive at the dream interpretation. Some dream interpretations followed cosmic correlations in which elements from a dream were transposed into celestial equivalences or into hexagrams from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing* 易經). Based on the dream texts Campany analyzes, personal context seems not to have been central in dream interpretation and indeed was even considered distracting; however, Campany emphasizes that there was much not written that may have been important in dream interpretation. Campany closes the chapter with a handful of named dream interpreters from Chinese history, imagining the erased and inaccessible moments of dream divination in which diviner and dreamer would presumably have met and read each other’s facial signals. Thus, dreams, according to the texts, were not presumed to be expressions of individual preoccupations or wishes, but rather acted as signifiers of the potential direction of events and so were prospective in nature.

In the final chapter, Campany explores what he terms the “visitation paradigm” in which he argues that a dream represents a direct, real encounter with another being. Here, Campany views dreams as events and experiences that changed the dreamer and left traces in the waking world. Dreams offered a means of connecting interpersonal spaces. One example is of a husband and wife who were separated by great physical distance and separately dreamed

of intercourse with one another. When the husband returned home, his wife was pregnant and, at least according to the textual record, they presumed this was due to their oneiric coupling. Other scholars have delved into the gendered aspects of women's agency in such narratives; at least in this example of Campany's, it seems there is room for further analysis.¹ Campany continues, writing that dreams could convey information, allow for relationships to be discovered or sustained, permit travel across great distances, cure illnesses, and allow for shared dreams.

Campany's book is valuable for Sinologists of early and middle China, scholars of dreams, scholars of religion, and anyone interested in exploring how best to live. Dreams must be understood in order to understand life for people in early and middle-period China. Theoretically inclined undergraduates will also enjoy Campany's questions that integrate the past into the present and vice versa. Campany invites us on a philosophical journey and offers a welcome opportunity to reflect on dreams and dreaming, reception history, historical memory, and our own relationship with dreams and dreaming. In the epilogue, Campany reminds us of the dreams that are untold, forgotten, or dreamed by other species, marking the limitations of his dreamscape-mapping study. Campany invites us to reflect on an oft-quoted passage from the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 in which Zhuang Zhou dreamed he was a butterfly and upon awakening wondered if he was Zhou who dreamed he was a butterfly or if he in fact was a butterfly dreaming he was Zhou. It is tempting to see the plethora of rich and varied dream texts as a means of definitively mapping and thus ordering dreaming, but Campany asks us to hold onto the tension of the opposites and to remember the butterfly that flies just out of reach. The dreamscape Campany maps for us, he notes, is ceaselessly changing and unfurling underneath us. He creatively invites us to position ourselves within the texts and ideas of late classical and early medieval China and to

¹ For example, see Chen Hsiu-fen, "Between Passion and Repression: Medical Views of Demon Dreams, Demonic Fetuses, and Female Sexual Madness in Late Imperial China," *Late Imperial China* 32, 1 (2011): 51–82. See also Cheng Hsiao-wen, *Divine, Demonic, and Disordered: Women without Men in Song Dynasty China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021).

note the topographical features and fissures within the dreamscape. Ultimately, by addressing the possible range of answers to his philosophical questions about dreams, dreaming, and life in early and medieval China, Campany's work allows us a glimpse of the elusive butterfly.

Brigid E. Vance
Lawrence University

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