

## Book Review

Marion Eggert, *Rede vom Traum. Traumauffassungen der Literatenschicht im späten kaiserlichen China*, Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1993.

The German title *Rede vom Traum* may be translated into English as *Discourse on Dreams*. As the author tells us, this title is inspired by the Chinese phrase *shuo meng* (說夢) or *meng shuo* (夢說). In Chinese, *shuo meng* may refer to all kinds of texts somehow concerned with dreaming or dreams: dream reports, theoretical reflections on dreams, remarks on particular literary texts. Eggert is not only interested in texts explicitly concerned with dreams, but she is in fact interested in *statements (Aussagen)* expressing a particular understanding of dreams and perhaps in coining a particular pattern of understanding dreams, no matter what the explicit topic of the respective texts that include the statements may be. What we should not look for in this study, therefore, is a detailed analysis of particular dream theories in China, nor should we look for any other in-depth analysis of particular Chinese texts on dreams. We should expect instead, as the title tells us, the analysis of a discourse. Eggert introduces her topic as an attempt to provide a synopsis (*Zusammenschau*) of everything that could be said on dreams--by the articulate elite of Chinese society, the *literati*--within a particular segment of time. The selected time segment is the late empire from the 17th to the 19th century.

A reader familiar with recent and not so recent developments in continental European thought will perhaps recognize, apart from the Chinese *shuo meng*, still another source of inspiration behind Eggert's project. I mean the project of discourse analysis as practiced by the early Foucault whose method is outlined in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, published

1969 in French and 1973 in a German translation. Foucault calls the basic units of discourse analysis *énoncés*, usually translated into English as *statements* and into German as *Aussagen*. Eggert does not mention Foucault in her study, and I do not mean this to be a shortcoming. The study does not make use of Foucault's strategies in a technical sense; the inspiration may be an indirect one. However, it is helpful to keep this overall context of questioning in mind when reading the study. It may help to appreciate even more the wealth of material presented in this book and the strategy of presenting it in such a way that a certain map of the discourse on dreams in China becomes visible through the material and without too many generalizations required.

In the first of the book's three major parts, material categorized as dream anecdotes is discussed. Based upon statements from classical sources, the author isolates three paradigms of dream theory implicitly articulated by these anecdotes. A dream is either conceived as (1) a message from within the dreamer's soul, echoing his or her memories, wishes and desires, (2) as a means of attaining contact with the world of the spirits and to find out what may happen in the future, or (3) as an experience of the dreamer's soul without any message from within or from a world beyond being the focus of the dream. With hardly any dream anecdote from the Ming and Ching dynasties documenting the first paradigm, the vast majority of texts stand for the second one and a few for an understanding of dreams as being primarily an experience of the soul.

The second part of the book is dedicated to theoretical statements on dreaming in a more explicit sense. At the beginning, we find again an analysis of material from classical sources. In these early theoretical reflections, a psychological, a physiological, a divinatory and a relativistic perspective can be distinguished. According to Eggert, one of the most significant aspects of the discourse on dreaming in China has to be seen in the fact that later on a fifth theoretical perspective developed, the understanding of dream-

ing as an aesthetic phenomenon. The general tendency of theoretical statements on dream is to deemphasize the divinatory perspective and to emphasize the psychological and later on the aesthetic perspective. A group of statements of particular interest in a philosophical context are those making use of dream as a metaphor for discussing ontological and epistemological questions. A well documented chapter with a concluding section on *Dream and Text* is dedicated to these statements.

The third and final part of the book presents statements on dreaming from Chinese fiction. A survey on patterns of the literary usage of the dream motif in China is followed by an analysis of the *Mudanting* (牡丹亭) as a representative *dream episode*, of the *Xiyoubu* (西遊補) as a representative *dream novel* and of the *Hongloumeng* (紅樓夢) as an encyclopedia of dreams. The rise of Chinese fiction is seen as related to a view of dreaming as providing a critical perspective on reality as it is. As documented by the *Xiyoubu*, dreaming is seen as a perspective that may allow us to gain knowledge, to transcend illusions and even to achieve enlightenment. The later development of Chinese fiction, or at least the process of its reception, was a process of cutting off the critical relation of dreams from reality. The world of dreams became a region of flight, unrelated to reality and without any consequences for and within the state of affairs of the *real* world.

A discourse in Foucault's sense is defined by an object and by the practices, primarily statements, that make the particular object emerge and may produce a constant process of its transformation. Eggert's study shows us how dreaming emerged as an object in China, how different groups of statements on dreaming appeared, accumulated, began to interact and to collide. The book is an example of discourse analysis in Foucault's sense, minus the jargon.

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