

book with this well-known passage on the virtues and benefits of greater local elite participation in a county administration structured along hereditary lines not so different from those enjoyed by the Ming Kongs. Are we to believe that Gu and other late Ming and early Qing Confucian intellectuals and reformers knew nothing of the Kongs' crimes? I have my doubts, and so wonder why Gu chose to bolster his argument with such dubious evidence.

I also wonder how much of Agnew's analysis would change, if it focused on the ranks of ordinary Kongs. What did they do other than squabble with their kinsmen and abuse tenants and merchants? Despite their professions of reverence for Confucius, ancestor worship, and family ties, the Kongs produced strikingly few Confucian literati, scholars, commentators, and officials of note. Some poets, painters, playwrights, and even authors of Confucian commentary did emerge, but overall the Kongs' presence in the world of learning seems negligible (for instance, one waits until the nineteenth century for the first notable Kong book collector). What then did most Qufu Kongs do with their time and privileges?

To answer such questions, Agnew would need to delve deeper into the Qufu Kong family archives, a privilege he frankly acknowledges is denied him and other researchers by the archives' present gatekeepers. Obligated to rely on printed volumes of archival sources edited by Chinese scholars with a particular story to tell, his analysis in places creaks from an uncritical adoption of these documents' obfuscating categories (such as "lower gentry") and clichés ("evil brokers"). All too rarely are these troublemakers named, making it hard to track down more information on them and their associations. But, this volume leaves me hoping that eventually the archives will reveal much more about the Kong members' other kinship and religious institutions and about their involvements far from Qufu. Meanwhile, Agnew's work should prove both enlightening and refreshing to students of neo-Confucianism as well as the political and social history of late imperial elites. It is warmly recommended.

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AURÉLIE NÉVOT:

*Masters of Psalmody (bimo): Scriptural Shamanism in Southwestern China.*

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Southwest China is home to a diverse range of minority peoples with their own ritual traditions, some of which have native scripts. This book offers profound, hard-won insights into one such semi-oral tradition, that of the Yi-Sani *bimo*, male religious practitioners of the Yi nationality, a Tibeto-Burman-speaking ethnic minority of around eight million people spread throughout southwest China, primarily in Yunnan and Sichuan. The *bimo* religion occupies a liminal space somewhere between the oral and the written: a religion whose chants are based on secret writings voiced by the *bimo* shamans. *Masters of Psalmody* is an anthropology of this shamanic writing, an attempt to answer a prevalent ideology of "structuralist

logocentrism” which finds expression in the policies of the Chinese state, and to thwart the common idea that shamanism would be a religion of orality (p. xiv).

At the book’s foundations lie ethnographic data collected over two decades, primarily from *bimo* informants. Yi writing has been discussed in prior scholarship – but never has the shamanic writing been the subject of a monograph such as this in English, where the author focuses on the writing of the Sani branch with its own distinct logographic scriptural tradition. The author offers a unique perspective, having been trained by a *bimo* in the shamanistic writing, and thus having “partial access” to their secret written language, and, therefore, the “scriptural metaphysics” that make up the heart of this study (p. 2).

The book recounts the transubstantive journey of *bimo* writing, beginning in the first chapter with a discussion of the origin myths and the importance of lineage to the shamanic identity. In chapter 2, the oral nature of the writing is revealed, with a focus on psalmody – the sound passing through writing, leading to the text and texture of the books in chapters 3 and 4, where the books are shown to be “mountains” traversed by the shamans. The ritual books are vessels for shamanic movement. The focus of the fifth chapter is on *bimo* ritual and sacrifice, where the blood of a sacrificial animal enables the transmission of a message to the gods. We are introduced to a specific text, *Achema*, in chapter 6. This bridal chant follows a lyrical narrative more easily understood than the shamanistic chants. The final and most poignant chapter of the book describes the process of democratization of writing, and turns the book as whole into a meditation on what is lost during such a process. Primarily, it seems, we lose the “shamanic voice”: the final question that Névot asks in her conclusion relates to the use of the *bimo* script in a contemporary painting: “does the painter not make us hear the mutism in which this shamanistic writing plunges irremediably?” (p. 245).

The key to the scriptural metaphysics of the Yi-Sani *bimo*, and the central metaphor running throughout this work, is that for the *bimo* writing = blood: “This concept is that of *se*, a graphic sign which at the same time means ‘writing’ and ‘blood’” (p. x). It is metaphorical because the *bimo* actually write in black ink, not blood, although Névot rejects the “Eurocentric” language of metaphor in favour of Geoffrey Lloyd’s notion of “semantic stretch” (p. 6). Essentially, textual transmission among the *bimo* was traditionally linked to blood ties via patrilineal transmission, with the graphic sign for “writing” being identical to the sign for “blood”, but with the exact graphs used differing between *bimo* lineages (p. 5).

This is a work that relies heavily upon transcription (utilizing the author’s own notation system instead of IPA), which by necessity puts us one step removed from the object of discussion: native writing. Unfortunately the reliance on transcription means we are presented with sentences like this: “The Master of psalmody explicitly states that through its blood, *se*, and its breath, *sè*, this *mo* [sacrificial animal] takes the message contained in the psalmody that it has to communicate to the spirits, *se*” (p. 162). The reader is always placed at arm’s length from the object of description, for the phonemes are discussed without the Yi-Sani script itself. This leads to a certain confusion: are these phonemes multi-graphical, or homographical? The book seems to suggest both, depending upon the situation: “The semantic ambiguities of the homographs” (p. 144) vs the “multidimensional, multi-graphical” phoneme “*se*” (p. 164). A clearer approach (typographical difficulties notwithstanding) might have been to show some of these graphs embedded within the main discussion. Only in chapter 7 does the reader get to see actual written representations of “blood” and “writing” (p. 209), in a reproduction of a page from the author’s own field notes, as an example of non-patrilineal scriptural heterogeneity.

A philological analysis of these different written forms may have proved fruitful, for while clearly different graphs, they appear to share similar features.

This study juxtaposes the master–disciple lineage of transmission with the scriptural unification project of the Chinese state, ending on the melancholy note of the shamanistic tradition of *bimo* lineage in the Stone Forest County having been consigned to the past (p. 244). This is because the effort of the Chinese state to unify the script is, perhaps ironically, a process that entails the separation of blood from writing: the imposition of logocentrism onto what was traditionally a non-linear, divine writing. This separation is, in the author’s estimation, an attempt by the Chinese state to uproot local shamanistic power. While this may certainly be true, it is also, as the author notes, the continuation of a process that actually began before Communist Party rule, with the missionary Paul Vial (1855–1917), who taught *bimo* writing at a school to any who would learn it (thus breaking the tradition of patrilineal transmission) in the early twentieth century (p. 210). Perhaps this is also a necessary process, if we accept that the “gradual democratisation of writing is an essential aspect of the passage to modernity” (Marty Lyons, *Ordinary Writings, Personal Narratives: Writing Practices in 19th and Early 20th-century Europe* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007), p. 27).

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BIRGIT KELLNER (ed.):

*Buddhism and the Dynamics of Transculturality, New Approaches.*

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*Buddhism and the Dynamics of Transculturality* discusses Buddhism’s involvement in cultural exchange and transfer. It focuses on cultural mobility, the domestication of ideas and practices in new environments, and the consequent production of Buddhist histories. Within this framework, the volume presents a variety of perspectives on what has been termed “transculturality”. This is used as an orienting concept, leaving ample space for discussion and multiple interpretations, as explained in the well-written introduction. All of the contributors make full use of the freedom they have been given, bringing intriguing new facts and theories to the subject. The end result is an interesting array of papers exploring Buddhist practice, discourse, and visual and material culture across a wide range of geographical and temporal contexts.

The first chapter, by Ingo Strauch, addresses the role of trade contacts in the dissemination of Buddhism in the rarely studied Socotra archipelago (modern-day Yemen). This fascinating, beautifully illustrated study is based on a recently discovered cave hoard of drawings and inscriptions in a variety of languages and scripts dating from the second to the fourth or fifth century CE. Alongside brief devotional texts, drawings of *stūpas*, possible markers of worship generating merit, testify to the importance of Buddhism in the archipelago. Due to a lack of local economic support, however, permanent Buddhist settlements were not established there.