

CHINESE GHOSTS REVISITED

A STUDY OF PARANORMAL BELIEFS AND EXPERIENCES

By Charles Emmons

344 pages, paperback

PUBLISHED BY:

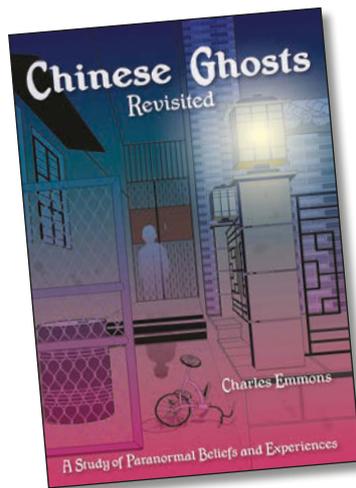
Blacksmith Books, 2017

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In 1982, researcher Charles Emmons pondered the question of whether Hong Kong Chinese experienced paranormal and supernatural phenomena in a manner consistent with the Western psyche. He did not mean via the act of substitution – with Buddha replacing Christ, for example. Rather, he intended to break down the cultural barriers, unlock the universal modes of belief, and decode their functionality in modern Hong Kong society.

The premise of his emerging study was simple: from a sociological and anthropological perspective, what could a study like this reveal about the social function of beliefs in unexplained phenomena, the significance of those beliefs and how they continued to thrive in Cantonese culture and society vis-à-vis Westernised American culture and belief.

The test subjects – all Cantonese speakers and residents of Hong Kong Island – were considered the most Westernised and technologically advanced group in the region as compared to those, for example,



living in the New Territories who would presumably be less modernised and have more traditional belief systems. At the time, Hong Kong had been under British rule for more than 80 years with long-lasting exposure to Western cultural influences at many levels including education and the arts, trade, governance and, most notably, religion in its Christianised form.

Assisted by his Cantonese speaking wife, Dr Emmons' academic approach involved thousands of first-hand interviews, the results of which were dissected and categorised methodically. The data was then collated to break down the beliefs in practice at that time and featured dozens of summarised accounts. The exhaustive collection of weird tales included stories of classic haunting and poltergeist activities, crisis apparitions (normally

seen within 24 hours of death), ghost marriages (which often involved excavation of corpses for the ceremonies), divination, mediumship and communication with spirits and "genies," possession and exorcism, tree spirits and local folk monsters, ESP and PK abilities, the distinctly Chinese phenomenon of "Yin-Yang Eyes" (ability to see both worlds), the financial implications associated with Hong Kong haunted house discounts (buyer beware!), UFOs and much, much more.

The product of his cross-cultural undertaking was to reveal some very intriguing and – when considered in light of East-West comparisons – surprising results. In the years since its release in 1982 under the title *Chinese Ghosts and ESP: A Study of Paranormal Beliefs and Experiences*, new information emerged that further strengthened Dr Emmons' conclusions. It compelled him to update and reappraise some of his findings in light of these discoveries. In this revamped and updated version – now titled *Chinese Ghosts Revisited* – an extra 10,000 words are included, that can be found in italics, enabling the reader to see the new entries at a glance.

From the research, one fascinating trend remained steadfast since the 1982 study: subjects who identify as non-religious in Hong Kong have a lower rate of belief in ghosts when compared to people in the USA who categorise themselves the same. This, according to Dr Emmons, appears to make belief in "ghosts and other

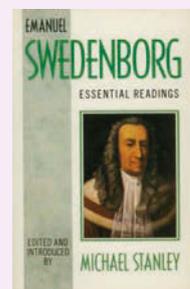
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paranormal phenomena... a functional alternative to standard religion" in the United States. On the other hand, ancestor worship in Asian territories would appear to be its functional counterpart for many non-believing Cantonese.

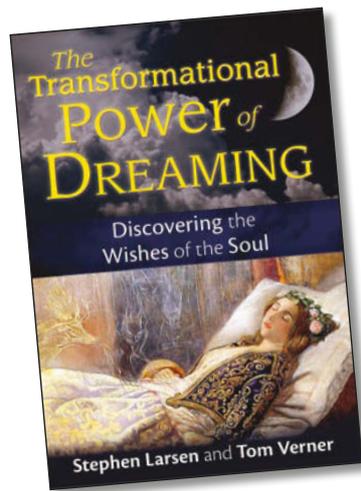
Interestingly, there also appears to be a direct correlation between a belief in ghosts and related supernatural phenomena and an individual's education: the predominantly non-believing participants in the Cantonese study tended to be more science-focused and tech-savvy while those with distinct traditional outlooks generally related more to the superstition of otherworldly matters and preserving the traditions of their ancestors who acted as subjects of worship.

Some statistical data might, at first, appear to be contradictory – especially when considering the belief systems of a mixed, Christianised Hong Kong society. However, in spite of singular differences, the author untangles the contradictions by creating a socio-spiritual model to explain these complexities through historical superstitions and folkloric traditions. Presenting the main subjects as separate chapters – there are many overlapping themes (e.g. belief in ghosts, ancestor worship, clairvoyance and poltergeist activity) – Emmons skilfully balances the data and carefully cross-analyses factor distortions to ensure spurious correlations are nullified.

Chinese Ghosts Revisited holds the unique position of being the only reference work comparing the supernatural and paranormal experiences of Chinese and Westerners while also providing evidence of the universal nature of these experiences. Far from being a boring scientific study, this fascinating book provides an encyclopaedic listing of many eerie, unusual and often overlooked phenomena – many of which can only be found in detail here.

It is an exceptional work and a great companion to Jonathan Chamberlain's excellent *Chinese Gods: An Introduction to Chinese Folk Religion*. *Chinese Ghosts Revisited* should be considered compulsory reading for any serious student of the paranormal, the spiritually-inclined with an interest in supernatural studies, sociologists researching the beliefs of Cantonese Chinese and, especially, those who love a good ghost story before going to bed!

– Bruce Stringer



THE TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER OF DREAMING DISCOVERING THE WISHES OF THE SOUL

By Stephen Larsen & Tom Verner

360 pages, paperback

PUBLISHED BY:
Inner Traditions, 2017

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Most people recognise that our dreams provide a useful way to process the day's events and uncover new perspectives. We often take dreams for granted, and even ridicule them as we watch television shows based on a 'dream sequence'. We talk about a perfect 'dream' world, or talk about our future fantasies as 'dreams coming true'. Despite our addiction to modern smartphones and social media, we continue to dream and most of us find our dreams mysterious and other-worldly.

In *The Transformational Power of Dreaming*, authors Stephen Larsen and Tom Verner examine dream traditions from around the world, beginning with the oldest records from ancient Egypt, Indian, Greece and Australia, and also shamanic traditions. The authors investigate the psychology of dreaming, the neuroscience behind the dreaming brain, the Jungian perspective, and the intersections of yoga and modern dream research.

The authors are more than qualified to write this delightful book. Stephen Larson, PhD is a professor emeritus of psychology at SUNY Ulster and author of *Joseph Campbell: A Fire*

in the Mind. Tom Verner, a practising psychotherapist, was a professor of psychology for 35 years.

They cover the profound role dreams played in the survival of exploited and persecuted cultures, such as Native Americans, African slaves, the Jewish people, and share inspirational stories from exceptional dreamers such as Hildegard von Bingen, Joan of Arc and Harriet Tubman.

This book offers information on working and aligning with dreams to create a clearer and happier waking life. Dreams and myth are connected in the timeless world of the archetypal imagination. The authors offer ample evidence on how dreams often reveal the wishes of the soul. With this understanding, the ancient ones incubated, seeded or encouraged a dream over a certain problem to receive higher wisdom and insights. We can still use these techniques and the practice of dream incubation to help solve problems and gain answers.

If we incorporate into our life some of the techniques shared in this book, we may find ourselves replenished physically and spiritually by a good night's dream-filled sleep. We are much more than physical beings, and yet we spend most, if not all, our lives living a machine-like existence. Dreams come to a troubled and forgetful mind to re-mind us that we are so much more than a machine.

Dreams are precious gems to embrace and contemplate. With the wisdom and insights offered in *The Transformational Power of Dreaming*, we are all capable of stepping into the realms of dreamwork. I fully and happily recommend this book for any student of spirituality, psychology and archetypes. Dreams are messages, but they are also so much more.

– Lesley Crossingham

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