

The Journal of Asian Studies

<http://journals.cambridge.org/JAS>

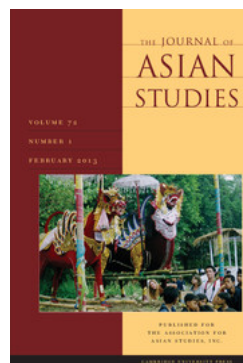
Additional services for *The Journal of Asian Studies*:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



***Struggle and Symbiosis: The Canonization of the Poet Haizi and Cultural Discourses in Contemporary China.* By Rui Kunze. Bochum/Freiburg: Projekt Verlag, 2012. 340 pp. €23.90 (paper).**

Heather Inwood

The Journal of Asian Studies / Volume 72 / Issue 01 / February 2013, pp 176 - 177
DOI: 10.1017/S0021911812001908, Published online: 18 March 2013

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0021911812001908

How to cite this article:

Heather Inwood (2013). The Journal of Asian Studies, 72, pp 176-177 doi:10.1017/S0021911812001908

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

“show don’t tell” approach is her insightful choice to highlight the role of calculation and methods of calculation, rather than to emphasize geometry as previous accounts have done. It is arguably in the field of calculation that the encounter with Western learning led to the most interesting interactions, of which Jami gives several examples.

To conclude, Jami has produced a work of scholarly haute couture that is probably an almost definitive account of this first phase of the circulation of Western learning in China. The book is also highly recommended to those with a more general interest in the late Ming and early Qing periods, and to those interested in the transmission of scientific knowledge and its intercultural manifestations. Jami has done an exemplary job in making the book optimally accessible to a wide readership, and the amount of mathematical background needed to appreciate the arguments is kept to a minimum.

PETER ENGELFRIET
Independent Researcher
 engelfriet@kpnplanet.nl

Struggle and Symbiosis: The Canonization of the Poet Haizi and Cultural Discourses in Contemporary China. By RUI KUNZE. Bochum/Freiburg: Projekt Verlag, 2012. 340 pp. €23.90 (paper).
 doi:10.1017/S0021911812001908

Haizi (born Zha Haisheng, 1964–89) is one of China’s most celebrated and best-loved contemporary poets. His canonization was accelerated by his suicide in March 1989 at the age of twenty-five. *Struggle and Symbiosis*, the first English-language book to focus exclusively on writings by and about Haizi, puts the mythology surrounding his death to one side in order to explore the discourses that imbue his poetry and guide his posthumous rise in fame. The detailed textual analysis, slightly inconsistent application of theory, and lengthy overviews of the relevant secondary literature identify Kunze’s monograph as a published doctoral dissertation, but it is an exemplary piece of research in many ways.

Struggle and Symbiosis fits into a growing body of research that challenges the dichotomy between “official” (state-sponsored) and “unofficial” (non-state-sponsored) worlds of Chinese poetry. The popular image of Haizi as a hero of poetry, Kunze contends, is not the product of any single canonizing force. His is, rather, a reputation born from a confluence of factors that include his inclusion in high-school textbooks and in anthologies by fellow poets, the proliferation of university-based events dedicated to his memory, and, significantly, the contents of the poet’s own creative and autobiographical writings. In death, Haizi’s canonization should be understood as a “politically meaningful” process (p. 67) that responds to China’s changing political and cultural circumstances. His continued visibility as a poetic symbol of resistance against the tides of materialism in Chinese society is closely tied to the growth of cultural nationalism, a trend that Kunze sees as beginning in the early 1980s, rather than in the wake of June 4, 1989, as others have suggested.

After a thorough overview of collections, criticisms, and translations of Haizi’s works in chapter 1, Kunze notes in chapter 2 that Haizi’s affinity for the poet Qu Yuan supports his self-image as a poet-hero. She further understands Haizi’s heroic disposition in light of discussions about literary modernism, the need for China to advance its own “great” writers onto a global stage, and the root-seeking literature of the 1980s that—as was the case with Qu Yuan’s legacy—often conflated the individual with the national self (p. 120). In

chapter 3, Kunze argues that the discourse of *minjian* (folklore) so prevalent within Haizi's writings is a "politically ambivalent space of alternative" (p. 126) that encompasses a diversion from orthodox historiography, a version of civil society promising greater social inclusion, as well as a folk-like "other" shaped by Haizi into a vessel for his anxieties during an era of rapid urbanization. The thematic concerns (wheat fields, animals, water, the earth) that brand Haizi as a people's poet rooted in his rural upbringing also help him erect his own "literary monument," a form of ideological mobilization that parallels the Chinese Communist Party's employment of folk culture in shoring up popular support.

Haizi's lofty tendencies come into sharper focus in chapter 4. Here, Kunze asserts that his goal of creating epic poetry (*shishi*) reveals his "inflated self-understanding" (p. 193) as a poet. Yet, as most biographies of Haizi are also quick to point out, the epic proportions of Haizi's ambitions were let down by his failure to complete the monumental poem he dreamed of, a work that could serve as an "asset of Chinese cultural heritage" (p. 229). The final chapter turns toward Haizi's propensity for what Kunze calls a "literary discourse of divinity" (p. 231). Perhaps disturbingly for readers who see in Haizi's poetry a whimsically spiritual alternative to the utilitarianism of Party-approved literature, Kunze suggests that Haizi's Christian-inflected language of truth, suffering, and salvation is not so different from Mao Zedong's style of writing or from his self-image as a poet-hero. Haizi's struggles against a materialist world resonate with Mao's rhetorical battle for the Communist cause, in both instances expressed in poetry through the recurring motif of death—in Haizi's case, often portending the death of the poet himself.

Despite Kunze's efforts to leave it out of the picture, Haizi's suicide inevitably haunts much of *Struggle and Symbiosis*. Given how many writers throughout history have perished before their time, readers may well wonder what it is that makes Haizi worthy of continued scholarly attention. In an epilogue, Kunze concedes that Haizi was a "talented poet" who, had he lived beyond March 1989, might well have found that "life should be cherished" (p. 301). Regardless of this personal judgment, it could be argued that even while questioning the factors behind Haizi's canonization, Kunze's book steers attention away from other writers who did live beyond 1989 and continue to use poetry as a medium for exploring life in all its complexity. Critics may be onto something when they suggest that a preoccupation with Haizi serves as a proxy for the collective grief that followed events in Tiananmen Square three months later. Kunze, for her part, is more concerned with the meanings to be discovered within the life works of one who has come to represent so much to so many, and the sedimentary values and desires that shape a single poetic voice. This book should be strongly commended for grappling with the aesthetic and ideological tensions between struggle and symbiosis that are ubiquitous in contemporary Chinese cultural life.

HEATHER INWOOD
The Ohio State University
 inwood.4@osu.edu

China: A Religious State. By JOHN LAGERWEY. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010. viii, 237 pp. \$40.00 (cloth); \$20.00 (paper).
 doi:10.1017/S002191181200191X

The title of John Lagerwey's book accurately summarizes his central idea: "The religious dimension of Chinese society and the Chinese state being inseparable from each