*A Book for Burning*

(and reading)

A tale of the academy.

On Jun 22, 2005, at 11:45 AM, UB Mercury wrote:

Dr. Saussy,

I work in faculty services at the University at Buffalo Law Library. One of our professors is hoping to locate an English (or German) translation of Li Zhi's Fen shu (Book to Be Burned). Several of our staff members have attempted to track one down over the last few weeks, with no success. All of the secondary sources we have found (various articles, dissertations, Web sites, etc.) reference only Chinese-language editions of the text, and I have found indications of only Japanese and Korean translations.

The professor discovered your preliminary draft of "In the Workshop of Equivalences" online and suggested that I contact you. Are you aware of any English or German translations (official or unofficial) which may be available, or know of anyone else who may be able to provide more information? Thank you for your time.

Best,

Jennifer Behrens

Mercury Document Delivery Service

University at Buffalo Law Library

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From: **Haun Saussy**   
Date: Jun 22, 2005 10:17 PM  
Subject: Re: Q re: Li Zhi's "Fenshu"  
To: UB Mercury   
  
Dear Ms. Behrens,

Unfortunately, I think that's the state of Li Zhi studies these days. I have been trying to interest students in translating him for years, and they back off and go to some easier writer.

 The main book in a Western language about Li Zhi is Jean-Francois Billeter, \_Li Zhi: philosophe maudit.\_ It includes some translated passages, only not a lot. Professor Tobie Meyer-Fong of Johns Hopkins included some translated essays in her Stanford dissertation about sixteenth-century Chinese feminists, around 1999. Maybe this has come out somewhere as articles or a book.

The piece of mine you mention-- containing a few passages from Li Zhi-- has by now appeared in a book, \_Great Walls of Discourse.\_ There are some footnotes there that might be useful; I think I remember an article by Alfred Forke that had useful information. I have another piece about Matteo Ricci that quotes Li Zhi again, currently in limbo while a colleague takes his sweet time getting his edited book through the press. If it would be useful, I could send that along. And if your colleague has specific passages or questions in mind, I might be able to help.

It's really too bad that this extremely original, interesting and provocative thinker hasn't yet found an intermediary to Western languages.

yours sincerely

Haun Saussy

Professor of Comparative Literature and East Asian Languages

Yale University

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| |  | | --- | | Subject: Fwd: Dr. Saussy re: Li Zhi's "Fenshu" | | From: UB Mercury | | Date: 6/24/05, 11:31 AM |  |  | | --- | | To: "David A. Westbrook" | |

Professor Westbrook,

Here is Dr. Saussy's response to my e-mail. The dissertation that he mentions by Professor Meyer-Fong, which contains some translated essays, is unfortunately not available online through the Digital Dissertations database, but we can request it through interlibrary loan if you would like. Please let me know if you are interested in any of the other materials he references, as well (I was under the impression that you had hoped to find a translation of the entire work, which apparently has not yet been translated into a Western language).

Best,

Jennifer Behrens

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On 6/25/05 11:01 PM, David A. Westbrook wrote:

Dear Prof. Saussy,   
  
Thank you for your thoughtful reply to my library's inquiry into Li Zhi.   
  
I teach international and financial subjects in the law school.   
  
My knowledge of things Chinese is fairly negligible, though long ago, in college, I took a course and wrote on Kang Yu-Wei -- I was (and am) concerned with what might be meant by becoming "modern."

As you might have suspected, I ran into Li Zhi in Pierre Bourdieu's Homo Academicus.  For the last few years I've engaged, if often somewhat obliquely, the bureaucratic character of much intellectual, and of course political, especially legal, life. I've also written a big book on globalization, City of Gold: An Apology for Global Capitalism in a Time of Discontent.  I have been using the word "mandarin," with its overtones of Weber and Kafka, as something of a provocation, but also to suggest that the current organization of thought/politics is not natural, is indeed rather strange, and certainly worth thinking through. And it has come time to confront the problem more directly, and where I live, as it were, in the legal academy.  These days I'm writing a long essay, or perhaps a short book, that engages the bureaucratic nature of that very strange enterprise, legal scholarship.   
  
So it was with a shock of something akin to recognition that I ran into Bourdieu's use of Li Zhi.  Hence the goose chase.  Bourdieu titles the first chapter of his book "A 'Book for Burning'?" and says "Thus we have been tempted to adopt the title, A book for Burning, which Li Zhi, a renegade mandarin, gave to one those self-consuming works of his which revealed the rules of the mandarins' game."  (p. 5)  But that's all.  No note.  Li Zhi does not appear in the index.   
  
I, of course, would like to do something similar for my fellow law professors.   
Again, thanks for your thoughts.  If you would be interested, I would be pleased to send you a copy of the essay when it reaches the "fit for collegial comment" stage.   
  
Cheers,   
  
David   
  
David A. Westbrook   
Professor of Law   
University at Buffalo Law School

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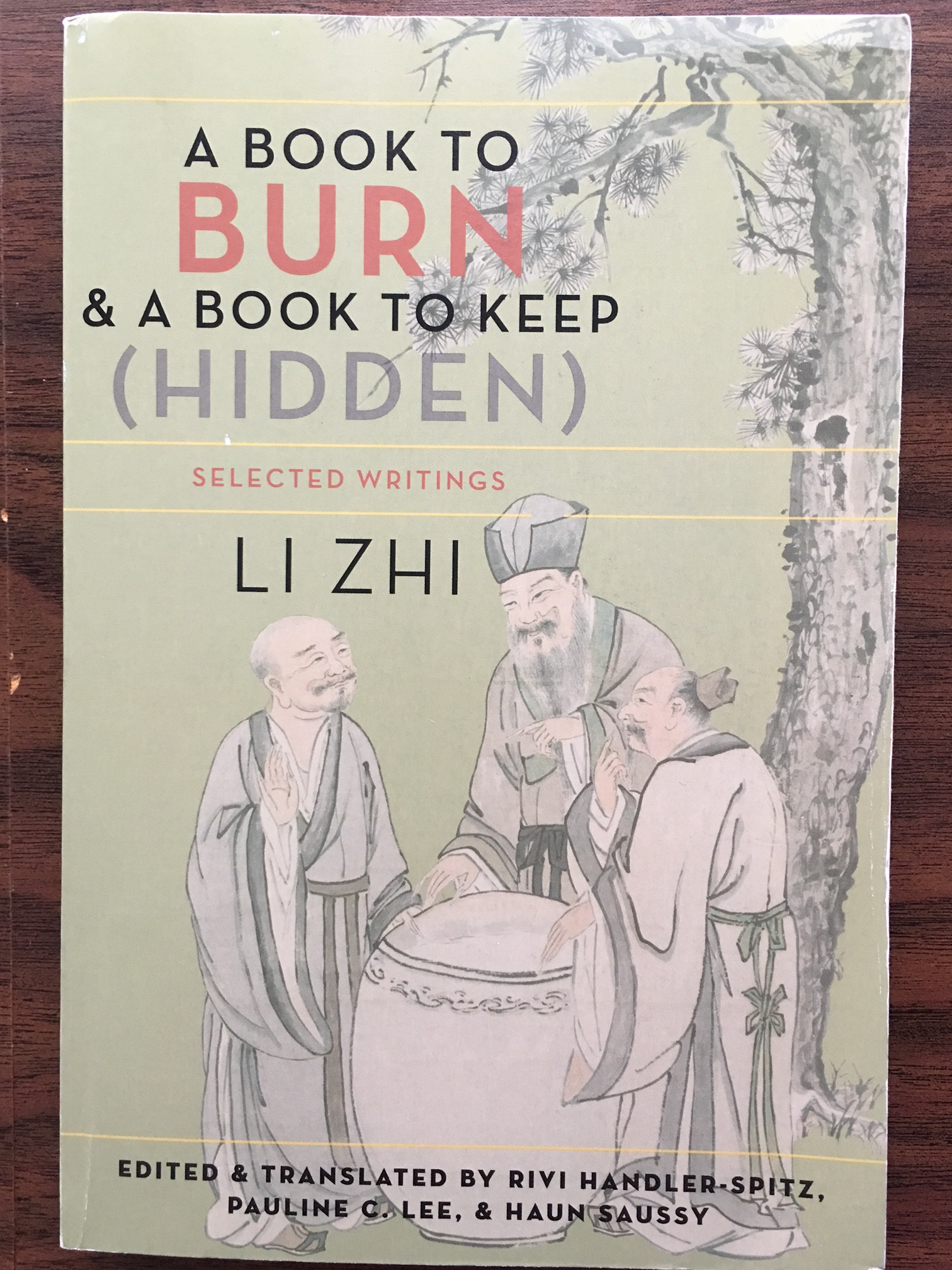
Almost a dozen years later, Haun and I have become friendly if occasional interlocutors, and even read one another's writings, some of them, anyway.

Haun moved from Yale to Chicago, where he is now University Professor. We still haven't managed to meet in person.

I never did finish that essay on the legal academy, though much of the thinking has been folded into other work. It began to seem too inside baseball, and who really cares? And more importantly, life got in the way.

Li Zhi, for his part, died as an old man in 1602, by suicide. He had been imprisoned for heresy. Prior to being interrogated, he called for a razor and a bowl of water.

A few days ago, going through mail that had backed up over the summer, I found this:



from Haun, with an elegant inscription and a gracious acknowledgement.

Columbia University Press 2016. It is brilliant, naturally, and you should buy it.

A thousand thanks to Jennifer Behrens and the library staff for starting this conversation. And thanks, of course, to Haun. Sometimes the university, bureaucratic as it is, really does work, and for that we all, maybe even Li Zhi were he with us, might be grateful.

-- David A. Westbrook

September, 2016