

that are intended to simplify access to the material in the volumes turn out to be of quite limited value. One almost needs a thorough knowledge of the contents of the *Encyclopedia* before one can use it fruitfully.

Here I wish to mention two more points. Although the *Encyclopedia* is to be praised for its extensive use of direct field data, there is nothing to indicate how this data was obtained. Thus it is difficult to tell from the statistical information in the appendix whether a greater quantity of responses from a certain region indicates a concentration of certain beliefs or customs there, or simply that a greater number of interviews were conducted in that area without any intention of comparing the resulting data with that from other locales. Indeed, the appendix lists only the number of entries for each location without specifying the topics of the entries. It is therefore impossible to draw any conclusions regarding the relative distribution and prevalence of beliefs and customs in the areas mentioned.

A second point concerns the published sources. Virtually all were published before the mid-1970s, and contain, of course, material that is at least equally dated. This does not disqualify the material, of course, but it does qualify the use of it, and makes one wonder whether no significant data has surfaced during the past twenty years.

Commenting on the benefits of modern technology, Demetrio notes that "this collection should be an on-going project. Thus, our store of folk beliefs and customs must be continually replenished, refined, and perfected as new materials are collected and published all over the Philippines and elsewhere" (Introduction). I heartily support this attitude, especially since computers have made the accumulation and addition of material considerably easier than it was in the past. However, since I believe that a certain rethinking of the volumes' structure would make the information they contain more accessible to a greater number of scholars, I have ventured to mention a few points I feel would help to achieve this goal. The riches offered in the *Encyclopedia* deserve the widest usage possible.

#### REFERENCE CITED

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1970 *Dictionary of Philippine folk beliefs and customs*. Cagayan de Oro City: Xavier University.

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#### THAILAND

TERWIEL, B. J. and Ranoo WICHASIN, translators and editors. *Thai Ahoms and the Stars: Three Ritual Texts to Ward Off Danger*. Studies on Southeast Asia 10. Ithaca, NY: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1992. vi+170 pages. Tables, illustrations, facsimile of manuscripts, glossary, bibliography, index. Paper US\$16.00; ISBN 0-87727-709-5.

For decades, the Cornell University Southeast Asia Program has been making accessible a wide range of primary Asian source materials that might well have remained unknown otherwise—the present work being a good example. Its publications provide invaluable source material not only for area specialists but for the wider research com-

munity as well, particularly scholars carrying out comparative studies through the analysis of indigenous texts on history, politics, local folklore, etc. The Southeast Asia Program publications encompass a wide variety of disciplinary interests and approaches, and their collective worth is simply too great to measure. Even in academic publishing the commercial value of a book occasionally outweighs questions of its scholarly worth; we thus owe a debt of gratitude to the SEAP for continuing to produce publications that are, like the present one, both high in quality and focused in content.

The "Ahoms" mentioned in the book's title may need some introduction. According to the Ahoms' own accounts, a group of Tai speakers arrived in the upper valley of the Brahmaputra River in 1228 A.D. and established there the Ahom Kingdom. ("Tai" here refers to the greater language family of which Thai of Thailand, Lao of Laos, etc., are members; the Shan languages spoken in Burma are also of this family and appear to be quite closely related to Ahom.)

To judge from indigenous histories (called *buranji*) and external evidence, the Ahom Kingdom was engaged in near-continuous warfare, both internal and external, for a period of nearly six hundred years. Various portions of the territory now making up the Indian state of Assam were conquered by Ahom or were wrested from it. Through weight of numbers, the original Tai-speaking leaders became assimilated genetically and linguistically with their Indic Assamese subjects, although a set of earlier Tai beliefs and ritual practices continued to function as a type of "state religion." By the time the Ahom Kingdom fell to the British in 1926, the Tai-Ahom language was known only through documents written in the unique and probably "magical" Ahom script (ultimately based on Old Mon), which could be read only by a small group of religious officiants.

The book under review emphasizes just how little accurate information we have about these written sources and attempts to "undo" some of the earlier preconceptions about Ahom. The editors plausibly contend that most of the earlier work on Ahom, including the edition of key historical documents, the lexicons, and the grammatical sketches, has been seriously flawed by over-reliance on hybrid or even concocted materials and accounts. To set this aright, more source documents need to be published and analyzed. The editors have been fortunate in locating such hard-to-find materials, their search facilitated by a fortuitous set of circumstances including the current political movement in Assam to restore an Ahom sense of identity (4-7), the gathering of interested scholars at the International Conference on Thai Studies (Bangkok, 1984), and the continuing support of the Australian Research Council (vi).

Three such source documents, presented in the original script, then transcribed, translated, and analyzed, form the basis of the present publication. The compilers see the three as so closely related as to be virtually three versions of the same text. The content relates to the ritual practices, mentioned above, that were part of the Ahom "state religion." This particular Ahom textual genre has hitherto been unknown—one reason that the editors selected it for publication.

The source text presents a set of astrological interpretations of heavenly events, as presided over by a chief deity, Lengdon, and the Thaen, or Tai sky spirit(s). The Ahom sky is divided into such constellations as the Boat Tail, the Pig Enclosure, and the (much-dreaded) Elephant Stars. Celestial events are integrated within an intricate decimal/duodecimal numerological system of auspicious and inauspicious timings. These form the sixty-year cycle familiar to those studying Chinese and other Asian calendrical systems. The Ahoms used a version of this system, referred to as *Lakni*, for their official dating, e.g., in the *Buranji* and on coins. For the present text, the compilers have succeeded in determining how this *Lakni* system has interacted with

other associated cycles (89–90).

Dire consequences were believed to follow from particular astrological/*Lakni* configurations, and elaborate rituals are prescribed by the text to ward them off. Beware, King, “if the ruler does not die, then the queen and the king’s mother will die” (83). Preventive measures involved sacrifices, offerings, royal herbal baths, and a semiotically saturated apparatus of manipulated images and models. The text is also “self-vindicating” in that it points to certain configurations that “caused” tragic historical events in the period of about 1675–1712. An entertaining sidelight is the tendency of the text to dwell on the heavy fees and payments due the text’s keepers, the ritual officiants.

The source text(s) appear(s) to have been codified in the eighteenth century, but ritual material from earlier centuries has undoubtedly been incorporated. The three copies of the text(s) which appear in this publication comprise two palm-leaf manuscripts of 20–30 pages (leaf-sides) and of indeterminate age, and one paper copy. The compilers note (10) that internal evidence points to transmission by different competing priestly factions.

The book is in five chapters, with addenda, or seven main sections, of which three present various versions of the text. These include clear facsimile reproductions of the original documents, Ahom-script transcripts (produced by a specially designed Ahom computer font), a romanized transliteration, and, finally, a competent English translation. Two additional versions—a Tai-cognate version and a translation into Central Thai—provide a bonus for those who can read Central Thai script. In rare cases the Thai and English translations are slightly at odds, as when the English opts for proper names while the Thai uses a more “etymologizing” approach that imparts particular interpretations (e.g., Barphukon Lan Bhima [59, 78 n. 6]—a historical personage referred to by local scholars as the “arch-villain of Ahom history”—is identified in English as above in Indic form but given a meaningful epithet in Thai).

The remaining four sections consist of analysis and apparatus: a useful introduction, covering the current state of Ahom studies as well as more technical linguistic issues and transcription conventions; two interpretive chapters, covering content, historical background, and astronomical implications; and a complete glossary of all Ahom forms occurring in the documents. A useful index concludes the volume.

Linguists owe the editors a special debt of gratitude for the carefully constructed glossary, as well as for the “Tai cognates” version of the text. Many Ahom forms recorded in the texts have not appeared in earlier sources, and will thus be of great value in linguistic research. The glossary will also make it possible to use contextual interpretation for confirming (or occasionally taking issue with) the editors’ identifications of specific Tai cognates.

Special mention should be made of chapter 5, entitled “Astronomy in the Texts: Is There Any Coherence?”, by invited authority J. C. Eade (another recent SEAP author). Combining his study of the Tai “style of thinking” about celestial organization (117) with a computer-run calendrical analysis, Eade is able to offer a number of technical insights. He speculates, for example, that one of the troublesome “stars” appearing in the Ahom texts may be none other than Rahu, familiar in Asian calendrical lore as a sun-and-moon-devouring demon, but calculated with precision by local astrologers as an invisible node that proceeds through the zodiac in such a way as to predict eclipses.

From the above it will be clear that this book, although narrowly focused and even in a sense “arcane,” deserves to find an interested readership in a number of fields. Folklore specialists, historians, linguists, and researchers in ethnoscience, ritual, and

Asian religion will all find much of value here.

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WIJEYWARDENE, GEHAN and E. C. CHAPMAN, editors. *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought. In Memory of Richard B. Davis.* Canberra: The Richard Davis Fund and the Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1992. 342 pages. Map, figures, line drawings, references, index. ISBN 0-7315-1408-4.

*Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*, a collection of essays on various aspects of Thai culture, was published in memory of the American anthropologist B. Davis, who died in 1981 at the early age of 38. I was acquainted with Davis when he was a Peace Corps volunteer in Thailand during the late 1960s, and helped him publish his first book, *A Northern Thai Reader* (1970), which has since become a standard work in the field of northern Thai studies. His next book, *Muang Metaphysics: A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual*, published posthumously in 1984, also demonstrates his outstanding scholarship regarding the northern Thai people (cf. *Asian Folklore Studies* 47: 175-77).

The phrase "patterns and illusions" in the title of the present volume alludes to a theme that was of central interest to Davis in his anthropological work. As the editors point out, however, the papers in this collection were not necessarily written with Davis's views in mind. They are grouped into two main sections, the first dealing with the topics of change and development in modern Thailand, and the second with modes of thought.

The first section consists of four papers. The first of these, "Population Movements and Environmental Changes in the Hills of Northern Thailand," by Peter and Sally Kunstader, considers two contrasting ecological adaptations practiced by the hill dwellers of Thailand: the swidden cultivation of the sedentary Lua' and the migratory system of the Hmong and other recent arrivals. The authors then analyze the economic and cultural changes that have accompanied population growth, modernization, and the increased commercialization of land use. (This article was of particular interest to me, as one who has been involved in the effort to help the mountain people—the Aka in particular—preserve their ethnic identities.) The second essay, Paul Cohen's "Irrigation and the Northern Thai State in the Nineteenth Century," examines the relationship between rice paddy agriculture and the political system in nineteenth-century northern Thailand. Cohen concludes that internal characteristics of the local social system caused an increase in demand for surplus rice, a demand answered by the intensified cultivation of royal lands where irrigation was controlled by the state. In "Survivors and Accumulators: Changing Patterns of *pa miang*," Christine Mougne shows how the traditional fermented-tea industry in the northern Thai hills has been affected by changes in taste among the lowland Thais, and how the tea producers have adapted to the new conditions. "Meetings as Ritual: Thai Officials, Western Consultants and Development Planning," by Peter Hinton, discusses the ritualistic nature