

vocabulary, it resembles a serious and "heavy" eighteenth-century opus, perhaps Alexander Pope's *Iliad*. Fortunately, the plot and much poetic imagery are conveyed in spite of this needlessly weighty articulation.

In addition to aesthetic concerns, specialists may have reservations about some of the notes, linguists may wince at transcriptions (*karma* alternating with *kharma*, etc.), and philologists may wish there had been better consideration and comparison of the palm-leaf sources (the original text is now apparently lost [102]). Such criticisms are perhaps justified, but do not detract from the essential worth of the book, which is required reading for anyone wishing to understand the cultural roots of the Thai Northeast. A much wider readership with interests in comparative literature will find the book worthwhile reading as well.

REFERENCE CITED:

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1970 *Buddhism and Spirit Cults in Northeast Thailand*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Anthony DILLER  
The Australian National University  
Canberra

SARAWAK

METCALF, PETER. *Where Are You/Spirits: Style and Theme in Berawan Prayer*. Smithsonian Series in Ethnographic Inquiry 13. Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989. xv+345 pages. Maps, figures, tables, appendix of themes, bibliography, index, glossary. Hardcover US\$39.95; ISBN 0-87474-620-5.

This is an excellent piece of work, not only in the field of Bornean ethnography, but more ambitiously in the anthropology of linguistic use, of verbal symbolism, and above all of religious practices. The author of *A Borneo Journey Into Death* (1982), Metcalf has this time produced a technically more sophisticated and theoretically more challenging monograph, based on data he collected during his research (1972-73) among the Berawan who live in the northern part of the Malaysian state of Sarawak.

Seven prayers (*piat*) are presented, both in transcribed Berawan and in English translation, arranged according to the ritual occasions on which they were recited. Each prayer is treated in a separate chapter, except for the first two, which were recited on the same occasion (the ritual of the Prayer of the House) and hence are naturally treated in a single chapter. These chapters also give succinct outlines of current Berawan rituals and religious notions; these will help readers unfamiliar with Bornean ethnography to place the texts within the wider belief system of the people and their ongoing social processes. An introduction and two theoretical chapters precede those that deal with the concrete texts.

The importance of prayers in Berawan religious practices is treated in the Introduction, which also argues for the significance of verbal aspects in ritual performances. The first of the theoretical chapters analyzes the stylistic features of the prayers, and the second isolates their thematic elements. In the conclusion, the author attempts a quantitative analysis of, among other things, the correlation between the styles and the

themes, and the frequencies of particular metrical devices used by individual speakers, together with remarks evaluating their competence.

The author's treatment of the prayer texts shows admirable expertise. The prayers were tape-recorded in the course of actual ritual performances, making it possible to interpret them as part of their respective rituals. This alone is quite an accomplishment, for, as the author notes, most of the oral texts dealt with thus far in ethnographical literature have been collected without a live context. Only in the case of live texts are the references to particular events and persons meaningfully explained, and the indications of intonations and pitches (done meticulously in this book) really significant. Transcribing of the prayers requires more than the ethnographer's necessary command of the language. Perhaps no less important is that he should offer objective standards by which lines and verses can be separated from one another. To put it rather prosaically, he should tell us not only how to spell but also how to punctuate the flow of speech, for punctuation is certainly a part of interpretative schemes. In this the author's analytical explanation, which takes account of both metrical forms and textual meanings, is highly persuasive.

The English translations presented on the pages opposite the original Berawan texts are enjoyable even to those who are "simply curious to see what people in Borneo pray about" (Preface). They are easy to read, in the sense that they do not offer unnaturally variegated glosses to the special prayer words and loan words. The latter are used only for the purpose of constituting rhymes and what the author calls "blind dyads," and as such are meaningless outside the prayers. Their meanings even within the prayers are deduced from the ordinary words that accompany them in the respective dyadic sets. The author's device for dealing with these words is quite simple; just using the same English glosses and then putting subscript numbers to indicate synonyms. Even though (as the author admits) this device was suggested by such an authoritative figure as Dell Hymes, the consistent and reasoned use of it is highly original. As a result, the translations retain the vividness and strength, and even the rhythms, of the spoken prayers. I am convinced of this from my experience among the Iban, another Bornean people, whose prayers have a lot of features similar to Berawan ones. The endnotes to the texts and translations are laborious work, the reading of which must be rewarding to anyone curious to see how the Berawan manipulate their language.

I would be inclined to agree with the author's view on the importance of linguistic aspects of rituals, discussed in the Introduction. The recitation of prayers is a quintessential part of Berawan rituals, and, in terms of their content, they are commentaries on the rituals. As the author writes, the prayers "provide in a compact way direct expression of ideas about ontology and cosmology . . . about augury, sacrifice, the living and the dead" (p. 7). The theoretical stance implied here is markedly different, it seems to me, from the one the author took in his previous book on Berawan death rituals, in which he unequivocally emphasized the performative aspects of rituals. Perhaps this is a matter of balance, and by putting the two books together we may get a whole picture of Berawan rituals and religious ideas.

An additional merit of the present book lies in the fact that local social relations can be learned through the texts and the author's background explanations. The comments on individual speakers' social positions are useful when one considers the individuality of the prayers, and the analysis of the final (seventh) prayer, set in the Bungan cult, a "new" religion widespread in north-central Borneo, is intriguing when one thinks of the changes going on in this area. A more fashion-oriented anthropologist might

have written a book entitled *The Power and Politics of Berawan Prayer*. Personally, though, I prefer this author's approach.

Motomitsu UCHIBORI  
Hitotsubashi University  
Tokyo/Kodaira

#### CENTRAL ASIA

HEISSIG, WALTHER and KLAUS SAGASTER, editors. *Gedanke und Wirkung. Festschrift für Nikolaus Poppe zum 90. Geburtstag* [Idea and effect. Festschrift on the occasion of Nikolaus Poppe's 90th birthday]. Asiatische Forschungen, Band 108. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1989. xvi+372 pages. Illustrations. Cloth DM 228.—; ISBN 3-447-02893-9.

This volume is a collection of thirty-one papers properly dedicated to the late Professor Nicholas Poppe for his ninetieth birthday. Nicholas Poppe was the finest and most prolific scholar in Altaic and Mongolian studies, to whom many generations of scholars in that field have been deeply indebted.

The volume includes a valuable bibliography of Poppe's publications issued between 1977 and 1985, which is an appendix to the bibliography published in honor of his eightieth birthday ("Nicholas Poppe: A Bibliography of Publications from 1924 to 1977." Compiled by Arista Maria Cirtautas. *Parerga* Vol. 4, Institute for Comparative and Foreign Area Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, 1977).

The editors of this volume are two well-known German scholars from the University of Bonn, Walther Heissig and Klaus Sagaster. They have also contributed to the volume the articles "Schamanenlegenden und ihr historischer Hintergrund" (W. Heissig) and "Das Zaubersiegel des Činggis Khan" (K. Sagaster and F. A. Bischoff). In his article Heissig presents four legends about the origin of east Mongolian shamans and discusses them in the context of their historical background. His footnotes are a very useful bibliographic resource for students interested in Mongolian shamanism. In their well-researched and informative article, Sagaster and Bischoff trace the motif and analyze the symbolism of Činggis Khan's seal in Sagang Sečen's story and in other chronicles that are listed alphabetically and according to the language in which they are recorded.

The authors of other articles are all distinguished scholars in Altaic and Mongolian studies from Europe, Japan, Mongolia, and the United States. It is impossible to discuss individual articles adequately and critically in such a short review. Therefore, I shall comment on their common and general features only. Most of the articles consist of competent discussions of philological and linguistic issues that would be of interest only to specialists in the field. Some of the articles especially worthy of mention are "On Subjective Mood and Objective Mood in the Monguor Language" (by Chingeltai), "Die Kopula im Chaladsch" (by G. Doerfer), "The ḥP'ags-pa Letters e and é Represent One and the Same Mongolian Vowel" (by S. Hattori), "Aus dem animistisch-schamanistischen Wortschatz der Altajer" (by K. H. Menges), "How to Play Poker in Altaic" (by R. A. Miller), "Turkic Yer 'Ground, Place, Earth'—Chuvash Śer—Hungarian Szer" (by D. Sinor), and "Anmerkungen zu einigen sprachlichen Eigenheiten des Südostmongolischen im 17. Jahrhundert" (by M. Weiers).

Several articles focus on political and cultural history and provide a valuable variety of contributions to the volume. "Hanlar Ulaki (The Succession of Kings):