

at the northern tip of Luzon) is worth digging into for the benefit of pre-colonial studies. The same interest can be generated from the mention of ethnic wars, Gaddang versus Ilonggot. And if such studies would be generated, as has been postulated by the book, the entire Cagayan Valley in the precolonial days would then appear to be Gaddang territory. The territory would contain a seaport and would include mountainous areas; a vast territory that would require a relatively advanced social set-up for its upkeep.

The book fulfills what it promised, i.e., it introduces Gaddang literature. To use it as a springboard for further studies is its challenge.

Reuel Molina Aguila
c/o Osaka University of Foreign Studies
Minoo City, Japan

THAILAND

DAVIS, RICHARD. *Muang Metaphysics. A Study of Northern Thai Myth and Ritual*. Studies in Thai Anthropology 1. Bangkok: Pandora, 1984. 324 pages. Maps, figures, plates, references and index. Hardcover. ISBN 974-86226-0-6.

Over the past millennium the Tai spread from the uplands of South China and northern Vietnam westward as far as Assam in India, and southward into the lowlands of mainland Southeast Asia and part way down the Malay peninsula. Widely dispersed and sometimes isolated, the Tai evolved into a family of related but ethnically distinct peoples. Within this family, once Siamese, Shan, Tai Yuan (Northern Thai) and Lao lived in what today is Thailand. All were Tai peoples, yet none were Thai as we know the word today. Who, then are the Thai?

Over the past century a Siamese ruled polity has swallowed up these other Tai and even non-Tai, making—or trying to make—the lot of them into Thai. Legally, “Thai” refers to citizens of Thailand, but culturally “Thai” stresses Siamese ways that made and still rule the realm. While many social scientists have let the state define ethnicity, accepting this nation-building conflation, others such as Moerman and Keyes have addressed the ethnographic and ultimately theoretical problem of disentangling other Tai from the Siamese/Thai amalgam. The book under review, Richard Davis’ *Muang Metaphysics*, represents an important contribution to this latter school. Any scholar who seeks to understand the Tai and their ethnic variations will value Davis’ ethnography for its sensitivity to Northern Thai life and many insightful comparisons to other Tai peoples.

Davis sees himself as recording a vanishing culture. The Northern Thai, or Muang as he prefers to call them, are becoming Thai. He regrets the change and has been instrumental in reviving their traditional Muang script. In his enthusiasm for the Muang way, Davis readily accepts the ‘we are one’ belief necessary to an ethnic revival. While recognizing that Muang culture has “subregional variations,” he deems these “not significant” (26). Yet one wonders if the Muang have become ‘one’ only under recent Siamese pressure to assimilate. As Ronald Renard’s research shows (personal communication) and Davis realizes (37), these Tai traditionally identified themselves as people of one or another specific *muang*, not Muang people as a whole.

Davis’ study focuses on Northern Thai calendric rituals although he incorporates many other aspects of daily life. His initial chapter offers a theoretical discussion of

ritual that justifies the particular distinctions that define his subject. Thus he distinguishes between calendric and crisis rites to dispense with the latter; he notes a Buddhist dimension only to put it aside; and he splits myth from ritual to focus on the latter. Each of these distinctions raises serious theoretical and ethnographic questions, but fortunately Davis himself does not always stay within these perhaps too precise lines. Simply put, his ethnographic good sense often triumphs over specious analytical rigor. Indeed, one might say he has been well taught by his beloved Muang who, especially in rituals, show "an intense concern with the preservation of categorical distinctions" (284) even as their myths show "a high *tolerance* of ambiguity" (288). Although surely unintended, this parallelism between his and their thinking testifies to Davis talents as an ethnographer, or at least it shows a happy match between researcher and researched.

Chapter Two introduces the Northern Thai. After a brief political history, he presents Muang culture as the confluence of archaic Tai, aboriginal Mon-Khmer, and Indic "cultural streams" (33). He then describes their basic social units: *muang* (a ruler's city, town or village and its hinterland), village, and the household with its *huan*, a word meaning both house and its inner sanctum. Here Davis introduces his research site, a riverine village in Nan whose spirit and temple-centered communities overlap with neighboring villages. Finally, he describes Muang social principles: matriliney, male dominance and junior-senior relations. As ethnographic background, the chapter is rich on the symbolism of the *huan* and matriliney, but poor on the political and economic details readers might like to assess the later discussion of ritual.

Chapter Three, on cosmology, introduces the ritual system. Davis then follows the annual ritual cycle, devoting separate chapters to New Years, rites of planting, ceremonies at the end of Buddhist lent, and rites of harvesting, threshing and storing the grain. The penultimate chapter describes the rites of territory and clanship that recur throughout the ritual cycle, while his concluding chapter offers a theoretically informed overview of Muang myth and ritual. Davis shows how these diverse rituals articulate a common Muang structural order of "asymmetrically opposed concepts" (283) or ranked opposing pairs. Thus, male/female is an opposed pair where the first is superior to the second. In social categories, the other pair is senior/junior; in spatial orientation the pairs are north/south, east/west, and high/low; for the body they are head/feet and right/left; and in the physical environment it is settlement/forest.

Ethnographically each ritual is carefully described and well situated within everyday Muang life. Yet Davis rarely stops here. He brings in their popular textual tradition, even translating lengthy passages; he notes links to more formal Indic texts; and he compares Muang practices to those of other Tai and Southeast Asian peoples. These rich, wide-ranging accounts demonstrate Davis' contention that culture history and social anthropology can complement each other (73). While he draws from both approaches, Davis uses culture history for evidence more than explanation. He remains a social anthropologist, well convinced of the reality of social structure. I am reminded of Victor Turner for whom structure was so real that nearly all else could be anti-structure. If this is sometimes naive, like Turner, Davis shows how fruitful this can be.

Combining approaches suits Davis' eclectic style as a thinker. He refers to Freud as well as Konrad Lorenz, to Eliade as readily as William James. As he quibbles with a theory here and offers an ad hoc one there, one has the sense of reading a working anthropologist's journal where he notes deadends and sets out possibilities for further research and reflection. If this gives the work an unfinished air, it enhances its value to the practicing scholar who will find much to ponder. Were his career not cut short

by an early death and this work published posthumously on his behalf, perhaps he would have tied up some of the loose ends. Still, his intellectual style was refreshingly open and exploratory. Clearly we have lost a talented anthropologist.

We are indebted to the Trustees of The Richard B. Davis Fund for facilitating publication of this fine work. Unfortunately it is marred by numerous typographical errors and garbled or even missing lines. Readers should also be warned that the index is so incomplete as to be a liability.

Richard A. O'Connor
University of the South
Sewanee, Tennessee 37375

WIJEYWARDENE, GEHAN. *Place and Emotion in Northern Thai Ritual Behavior*. Studies in Thai Anthropology 2. Bangkok: Pandora, 1986. 274 pages. Eight plates, bibliography and index. Hardcover. ISBN 974-87356-7-2.

This book is Dr. Wijeyewardene's first major work on the anthropology of the Khon Myang (Khon Muang/Uuan/Northern Thai people) and follows a number of highly informative and theoretically challenging papers which have come from his pen since the late 1960s (cf. Wijeyewardene 1968, 1970, 1977, 1981, 1984). As one might expect, on the basis of Wijeyewardene's earlier, shorter, works, the present volume is replete with fascinating ethnographic detail and thought-provoking analyses. It is also one of the worst-edited and most poorly-published books that the present reviewer has seen in some time! But let us begin with the positive.

The major ethnographic thrust of this book is to describe and analyze the ritual idiom of the Khon Myang as witnessed by Wijeyewardene, mostly in the mid-1970s and specifically within the urban settings of Nan (33-62) and Chiang Mai (78-110; 119-236). Now and again, the author also has recourse to rural materials which he gathered in the mid-1960s, in a village not far from Chiang Mai (147-149). But this book is by no means a traditional ethnography, in which the writer introduces his principal subject matter through background materials concerning other characteristics of the study community or communities. Instead, Wijeyewardene expects a great deal of prior knowledge of his reader: as he moves back and forth from particulars of Northern Thai ethnography to Thailand in general, to Southeast Asia and even as far afield as Sri Lanka. Thus, for example, we go from the religio-philosophical-cum-political disputes of certain present-day, nationally famous, Thai monks (none of them resident in north Thailand) (20-32), to the details of daily life in a Nan city monastery (34-36), to a seventeenth-century European's report on religious life in the Kandyan Kingdom of central Sri Lanka (67-68), to the iconography of ancient Champa (73-75), to the agricultural rituals of the non-Buddhist Tai Dam (Black Tai) people of northern Vietnam (75-76), to the ancient chronicles describing the foundation of Chiang Mai (83-90), back to the ethnographic details of the dedication of a *bod* (building for higher ordination ceremonies) in a Nan monastery (95-108), to a comparison of higher ordination in Thailand and Sri Lanka (110-117), to the sacred geography of Chiang Mai city (124-128), to present-day spirit mediums in Chiang Mai (153-228). (The last-mentioned data are, without doubt, the richest in the whole book.) In the end, all these disparate threads are drawn together, and my purpose here is not to criticize Wijeyewardene's approach, but merely to warn that this is not a book with which to begin one's studies