

was first coined by the American anthropologist Robert Redfield, and defined most clearly in his *Peasant Society and Culture*.

REFERENCE CITED:

REDFIELD, Robert

1955 *Peasant society and culture: An anthropological approach to civilization*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Namihira Emiko
Kyushu Institute of Design
Fukuoka, Japan

MONGOLIA

HEISSIG, WALTHER. *Gesar-Studien. Untersuchungen zu den Erzählstoffen in den "neuen" Kapiteln des mongolischen Gesar-Zyklus* (Gesar Studies. Research on the narrative topics in the "new" chapters of the Mongolian Gesar cycle). *Abhandlungen der Rheinisch-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Band 69*. Opladen/Germany: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1983. Viii+530 pages. Plates, index. Paperbound DM 124, ISBN 3-531-05083-4. (In German).

Since the early years of this century a number of discoveries have brought to light a series of texts containing chapters of a Mongolian version of the Gesar epic. A printed edition of the epic published in 1956 in Beijing added eight of these newly discovered chapters to the seven chapters that had already been known from a wood-block print edition of 1716. Heissig designates these added chapters as the "new" chapters. They form the subject of his treatise.

Heissig sees himself confronted with a number of problems. First, there is the question of how the "new" chapters relate to the old ones of the 1716 edition. Are they a real continuation or are they completely new and independent creations by one or several authors? Second, what is the relationship of the Mongolian Gesar to the Tibetan Gesar? And third, what is the relationship between the Mongolian Gesar cycle and other Mongolian heroic epics? To find an answer to these problems Heissig employs structural considerations concerning Mongolian epics in general, an internal critique of the extant text and its form(s), and a great amount of circumstantial evidence gathered from cultural and religious history. Both the quantity and quality of his erudition are truly remarkable. One is constantly led to consider the points discussed from a variety of different aspects. Because Heissig always identifies well-grounded conclusions from hypotheses, the reader comes away with a sense of satisfaction, feeling that a competent guide has presented conclusions that go as far as present evidence permits. The style does not fall into a dry, abstract exercise in literary analysis, unappetizing to any but the dedicated specialist. Heissig allows the texts to speak for themselves and succeeds in engaging his readers, despite the length of the book. In his discussion of such central topics as shamanism and folk religion or characteristic figures and personalities, he allows the reader to discover new dimensions to familiar episodes.

Because a full translation of the texts is yet unavailable and because existing summaries lack sufficient detail for any comparative study, Heissig first provides extensive and detailed abstracts of the "new" chapters. He divides them into structural units,

aligning them with parallels in either the old chapters or elsewhere in the "new" chapters. Through this method he clearly delineates the detailed, structural relationships and similarities between the two groups of chapters. The chapters of the 1716 edition are often short renditions of episodes or sequences which are treated with more detail in the "new" chapters. However, Heissig demonstrates that any one account in one group is not just a shortened (or elaborated) version of the same account in the other group. Rather both versions depend on a yet unknown third source. Although there are relationships between the motifs treated in the two groups, Heissig argues that the independent way they are treated shows that they are not modeled on each other. He concludes that the authors of both groups have relied on an independent tradition (which was an oral tradition).

Among all the fifteen extant chapters only the one describing Gesar's battle with the three Śirayīḥol kings is depicted as a real battle in the manner of the Tibetan Gesar. All the other chapters reflect Mongolian epic style, although particular episodes may also occur in the Tibetan Gesar. This means, Heissig explains, that the Mongolian cycle of Gesar Khan is structured for the most part according to the two principal structural types of Mongolian epics, namely, that of bride-winning and that of retrieving something lost, e.g., a wife or a country. Having pointed out this general characteristically Mongolian approach of the singers in the introduction, Heissig then illustrates it by extensive abstracts from the "new" chapters.

In the second part Heissig goes into further detail in treating a great number of narrative models and heroic characters which the Gesar cycle shares with other Mongolian epics. It becomes clear here that the Gesar epic has become thoroughly Mongolian, and that, while remaining faithful to the original in content, the familiar formulas and stereotypes are used at different occasions and even in different stories.

Having shown how deeply the Mongolian Gesar is embedded in Mongolian epic tradition, Heissig then discusses both the question of outside literary influence on the cycle and the influence exerted by this cycle on other Mongolian epics. While he grants the possibility that early traders coming from the West to Central Asia may have carried certain motifs with them into Mongolia, Heissig thinks that there are ideas and conceptions basic to heroic poetry as such, whatever its provenance. There is then no need to search for currents of cross-cultural transmission for explaining such motifs, for example, the flight of the hero's warriors in the face of the terrifying prospect of battle with a powerful enemy, which appears both in *Beowulf* and in the Gesar. Heissig further argues that the actual form of the present chapters of the Gesar indicate that it is a prose rendition of another verse story, only partially forgotten. This accounts for the fact that some parts of the "new" chapters appear as verse embedded in prose narrative. It is also possible to see the influence of Mongolian didactic and gnomic poetry in places where typical behavior or good and bad character traits are described. Although Heissig acknowledges similarities outside the Mongolian tradition with motifs in Chinese novels, he considers it unlikely that there is a direct influence, for some of the most characteristic features of the Chinese materials, such as their formulaic endings, are not present in the Mongolian tradition.

On the possibility of the Mongolian Gesar epic influencing other Mongolian epics, Heissig argues that in the bride-winning epics some basic elements from the Gesar have been adopted. This is demonstrated in the fact that these elements were retained in their specific Gesar form without adaptation. To enable himself to adjudicate questions of transfer from the Gesar in particular cases, Heissig presents two criteria. First, does the complete sequence of action in a Gesar chapter appear in the other epic, although the hero Gesar does not? If so, then it can be accepted that

the 1716 edition was known and was the source. Second, one cannot assume direct influence just because a particular motif from the Gesar is present in another epic, unless this motif is used in the same context as in the Gesar cycle. These two criteria should prove to be very useful in deciding questions of direct influence. They will highlight the difficulty of apodictically demonstrating such influence. Indeed the hallmark of Heissig's book is this sort of critical and prudent assessment of evidence.

Following as it does the publications by Heissig and his collaborators of collections of Mongolian epics, this book helps bring into focus a number of issues. Heissig frequently refers to the above published materials, showing their interrelations. Since the full references are given only the first time they occur, it is time consuming for one who encounters a particular source somewhere in the middle of the book to identify the reference. The use of such abbreviations is, no doubt, a time-honored practice, but it would perhaps have been more helpful to the reader to gather reference material in a separate bibliography. A Mongolist can easily understand references from even the most abbreviated citations, but the book is certain to be of interest to scholars of epic literature and folklore, who would appreciate a more accessible bibliography.

The book is extremely valuable, especially if one is willing to spend the time needed to familiarize oneself with its thinking. Heissig has given us a thoughtful and well-balanced guide to an important area of Asian epic tradition.

Peter Knecht

INDIA

BAILEY, GREG. *The Mythology of Brahmā*. Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983. 256 pages, bibliography, index. Rs 100.

This book is important for scholarship on India for two reasons: First, even though only one important temple to Brahmā remains in worship today (at Pushkar near Ajmer), Bailey gathers evidence from Vedic, Hindu, and Buddhist sources to show that from c. 400 BCE to 400 CE Brahmā was an important cultic figure with many temples of his own in north India, some of them important pilgrimage centers. Second, Bailey provides an analytical handle for grasping the role of Brahmā in Hindu myth through his description of Brahmā's origins in the "apotheosization of the *brahmā* priest" in the *śrauta* sacrifice, the priest who served as "the general overseer of the whole series of rituals that make up the complete sacrifice" (6). In the myths of the later epics and Purāṇas, Brahmā plays roles defined by this Vedic ritualism as modified by the *bhakti* and *yoga* of "Hinduism." He is, for example, matter (*prakṛti*) as it moves from undifferentiated "chaos" (*pradhāna*) into an ordered and individuated form (*ahaṃkāra*); he is the order (*dharma*) that further organizes that individuated matter into the cosmos we inhabit and within the cosmos he is the begetter of beings who are born and die, imitating his own career as the single ancestor of all beings (*pitāmaha*, the grandfather).

Brahmā's roles articulate a world view that affirms *pravṛtti*—actions intended to recycle the created matter of the cosmos in an orderly manner in order to sustain the cosmos and those within it. In contrast to Viṣṇu and Śiva, Brahmā has no concern with transcendent freedom (*mokṣa*) nor with *nirvṛtti*—actions of renunciants that are intended not to procreate. Brahmā, like most householders, is thus reborn repeatedly—as the cosmic egg (*brahmāṇḍa*), as the *dharma* that orders the cosmos into a hierarchical and interdependent structure, and as the progenitor of the gods and demons