

SINGAPORE

Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography, No. 2, 1983. John R. Clammer, editor, *Studies in Chinese Folk Religion in Singapore and Malaysia*. Singapore: National University of Singapore, Department of Sociology, 1983. Price per issue US\$10.00. ISSN 0217-2992.

This is the second issue of *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, a new annual journal published by the Department of Sociology of the National University of Singapore. This new journal is devoted to ethnography and is not an analytical approach to Southeast Asian studies. It is a welcome addition to the field and contains a number of well written and insightful articles.

In his introduction to this volume the editor says that each individual number will be devoted to a specific topic. The first number brought together "Studies of Ethnic Minority Peoples," the present volume, number two, treats "Chinese Folk Religion," and number three is dedicated to "Studies of Malaysian Societies and Cultures."

Under the title, "Studies in Chinese Folk Religion in Singapore and Malaysia," this issue assembles seven articles. Their titles and authors are: Chinese Spirit Mediums in Singapore: An Ethnographic Study (Ju Shi Huey), Chinese Divination (Choong Ket Che), The Sam Poh Neo Neo Keramat: A Study of a Baba Chinese Temple (Cceilia Ng Siew Hua), Ideology, Authority and Conflict in a Chinese Religious Movement in West Malaysia (Raymond L. M. Lee and S. E. Ackerman), Automatic Writing in Singapore (Ruth-Inge Heinze), Postscript: Chinese Religious Studies Today (Harry Perking), and Confucianism as Folk Religion in Singapore: A Note (Leo Juat Beh and John Clammer).

It may be a good idea to start by reading the last two articles first since they treat the general background of Chinese religion. Parking interprets traditional Chinese cosmology and the history of Taoism. Leo Juat Beh and Clammer give a short outline of Confucianism in a modern Singapore community. Both contributions offer information that aids in understanding the five foregoing articles. The other articles describe many examples of syncretism in modern Singapore and Malay communities and offer important suggestions. We tend to understand syncretism as a fixed and determined condition throughout the whole of a society. However, as these articles show, it gradually takes shape in individual experiences and is transformed within a social context. If, therefore, syncretism evolves within a situation of ethnic complexity, one must pay closer attention to multiethnic communities, such as Singapore or Malaysia. Without doubt this issue of *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography* is a great contribution to understand the religious complexity of this area.

The themes for the coming volumes, focused on specific topics, raise great expectations, for journals which carry ethnographic articles often tend to be mere collections of disparate papers. If this journal continues to produce monographs centered on particular themes and continues to provide detailed illustrations of those themes, we all could greatly benefit from a new source of first-hand information about this area.

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