

list a few of them here. We are seldom told if a translation represents an entire song or a selection from one; the discussion of the historical background of folksong is woefully inadequate; there is no attempt at comparison with songs of other traditions at all; there is a misrepresentation of the sequence of events in Japanese myth on p. 5; the Romanization of Chinese words is creative, to say the least; and, finally, there is no reference anywhere in the book to the "mountain storm, pine breeze" of the title, leaving one to suspect that it is just another play to attract readers by providing a sufficiently "exotic" title.

The book does have some virtues. I have mentioned the translations; also important is the fact that some attempt is made to discuss the songs as performance pieces. Music is sometimes provided, which is a service to the reader. And the nineteen-page "discography" of recorded performances of folksongs is another such service.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of these virtues, the book does not live up to its potential. Isaku obviously has a real contribution to make, but her effort here falls far short of its goal.

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EGENTER, NOLD. *Bauform als Zeichen und Symbol. Nichtdomestikales Bauen im japanischen Volkskult. Eine bauethnologische Untersuchung, dokumentiert an 100 Dörfern Zentraljapans.* (Constructed form as sign and symbol) 1980, Zürich: Organisationsstelle für Architekturausstellungen, ETH-Hönggerberg. 241 pp., 950 illustrations, bibliography. Paper, sFr. 30.—. ISBN 3-85676-013-1 (In German).

After having read this book I am perplexed and ask myself how I can come to terms with such a publication. It is a catalogue compiled for an exhibition organized by the Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich and held under the title "Göttersitz und Menschenhaus" (Throne of gods and house of men) in November 1980. Contrary to other publications of this sort, it is not just a handbook that explains the exhibited items one by one, it is much more of a treatise concerned with a much neglected aspect of the history of architecture or building. Egenter approaches his topic first of all from a general historical point of view. Yet he aims at more than only at the historical development of forms. He thinks that an analysis that pays close attention to the material and structure that go into the construction of primitive, non-domestic building lead to new insights especially about how a given material and certain building methods may bring forth directly the ideological meaning of the resulting structure.

In order to demonstrate this he investigated certain cultic objects built from reed, bamboo, straw and trees, i.e. all natural materials, and used in celebrations and festivals of the *ujigami*, the village deity, in the area of Ōmihachiman, a city on the shores of Japan's largest lake, Lake Biwa. He collected his material in the years 1972-1976 from a hundred villages which show an astonishing consistency in the fundamental form of these celebrations. At the same time there is a great variety in the methods of building the cultic objects, in their individual forms and also in the larger social or religious systems they symbolize.

Egenter does not limit himself to problems in the history of architecture. He calls his study an exercise in building ethnology and takes almost every opportunity to criticize methods and standpoints of other sciences, especially the history of religions, anthropology of religion, and even archaeology. As a study in ethnology it is primarily one of ergology. I doubt however, whether his theoretical framework as far as ethnological theory is concerned could withstand criticisms from colleagues, since he bases his argument mainly on the theories of W. F. Ogburn and W. E. Mühlmann assuming that similar conditions produce similar results wherever they occur. This argument appears especially in his discussion of the origin, development, and function of a pillar.

The strictly architectural discussions and their results cannot be evaluated here. However, since Egenter uses material related to Japanese folk religion or to village shinto, if we might call it such, his approach has important implications for the study of folk religion. He emphasizes again and again that the material and the forms it is made into have to be thoroughly analyzed before one can apply ideological or theological interpretations to cultic objects. If these material aspects are disregarded, preconceived ideas may make it impossible to grasp what a certain rite and the objects that are used in it really mean. For example, the structures, built in most cases in a combination of one immobile structure and several mobile ones, are burned toward the end of the festival in the precincts of the village shrine. Therefore, these festivals have traditionally been classified simply and conveniently as "fire festivals" (*hi-matsuri* 火祭) and that was the end. But by analyzing the "raw material" of these festivals very closely Egenter can show that the objects around which the action is centered give expression to spacial, social and historical order. They divide and define physical as well as social space, making use of contrastive pairs of categories, like mobility—immobility, emptiness—fullness, sky—earth, and so forth.

These forms and a consideration of their respective variations furthermore reveal facts about the history of a social group or of a certain settlement. Egenter discusses the objects constantly in relation to the social organization of the villages, but he only offers sketchy outlines. He also does not describe the festivals in their entirety, but, except for purposes of a model case, he limits himself to those activities that center around the artificial pillars and trees that are of primary concern to him. We cannot criticize him for this selection, considering that his main point of view is the history of building, but from the point of view e.g. of folk religion this approach has its disadvantages and it might also lead the author into contradictions. Although he repeatedly says that the structures are an expression of order, he states elsewhere that the order of the different levels might possibly have originated in the contrastive binary structure of these objects (p. 138). The facts he accumulates in his book do not prove the truth of this statement nor do they suggest its possibility.

From the viewpoint of folklore or religion or anthropology one constantly wishes for a more detailed and thorough discussion of aspects Egenter mentions more or less in passing. It has, of course, to be granted that the book basically concentrates on architecture, yet it makes an important contribution to the study of Japanese and probably also other folklore, because it reminds us how much things in the strict sense of the word have been left out in the folklorists' endeavor to grasp ideas and beliefs. Here we are taught again that the choice of material and of certain forms of using it are not just left to the inspiration of the moment. There is system behind all this, a system that can teach us much about meanings that are visible only through the characteristics of the material used.

I strongly recommend that scholars concerned with folklore and with Japanese

culture read this book carefully and consider the proposals it has to make. Although the special and technical terms may make understanding for the un-initiated difficult at times, the many informative sketches of situations in space, of forms, structure and movements of the objects, and the large number of excellent photographs introduce us into a fascinating world of developing and then deteriorating forms. Although I have reservations in regard to some of the author's assumptions and conclusions, I recommend this work for serious consideration because I think the book deserves it and the study of folk traditions needs it.

Peter Knecht

HEISSIG, WALTHER, ed. *Die mongolischen Epen. Bezüge, Sinndeutung und Überlieferung (Ein Symposium)*. Asiatische Forschungen, Band 68. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1979. 216 pp., Paper, DM 88,—. ISBN 3-447-02066-0, ISSN 0571-320X.

For a number of years the "Seminar for languages and culture of Central Asia" at the University of Bonn / Germany has been producing a corpus of translations of Mongolian epics within the framework of its Special Research Area 12 "Central Asia," Project I. The untiring driving force behind this effort is Professor Walther Heissig. We have had the pleasure of introducing several volumes of this collection, which is designed to make these epics available not just to the professional mongolist, but also to others interested in the subject, i.e. the study and comparison of epic poetry, yet for whom the original texts remain books with seven seals.

In order to reflect on the work already done and to consider its future course, a panel of scholars was invited to participate in a symposium that was held at the University of Bonn in fall 1978. Seventeen contributions to this symposium are published in the present volume. The range of contributors as well as that of the topics reflects the wide international acclaim the study of Mongolian epic poetry has found. Most of the contributions are in German, some in English and two in Russian (with German translation).

While all the topics have to do with Mongolian epics, be it directly or indirectly, the first eight contributions take up problems of the epics themselves, such as the analysis of formulae and individual subjects (Heissig) or of motifs (Poppe) for better insights into the structure of these epics. Others take up the characteristics of performance (Bawden), technique of description (Riftin), relation with and transformation of mythology (Neklyudov, Lörincz), epic motifs as found in religious texts (Kaschewsky) or in biographies of modern national heroes (Veit). The rest explore the traditions of peoples in surrounding areas and their contributions to the world of Mongolian epics or the influences they themselves have or may have undergone from there. Kirghiz epics appear to reduce the heroes to ordinary human beings and the *Manas* cycle is used to political ends (Hatto). Turc epics of Central Asia show similar aspects and are a treasure cave for ethnographic studies (Laude-Cirtautas). A reflection on the term "good" in old Turcic, Mongolian and Tibetan reveals a high degree of technicality in this term that creates problems in free translations and should therefore be given closer attention (Sagaster). A description (Macdonald-Tsering) and interpretation (Tsering) of six beautifully reproduced Tibetan *thañ-kas* of Gesar with some considerations of the historicity of *gLiñ Gesar* round out the circle of a world of epics

and their heroes around the Mongolian center. What is then left are the potentially rich, yet only very fragmentary traditions of Manchuria (Stary) and of populations to the west of China, like Lolo and Miao (Eberhard). China itself has produced no epic, possibly due to a political structure that is markedly different from that of the epic world and to an early knowledge of writing that may have killed off an even earlier epic tradition (Eberhard). The last contribution reports on efforts being made to establish an index of motifs in Chinese novels in order to be able to check possible connections on the level of motifs with Mongolian epics (Banck).

If this symposium was meant to explore new questions in relation to Mongolian epics (Veit), then it was certainly successful. In spite of the shortness of all and the unfinished nature of some of the contributions, most of them are truly stimulating, open fresh outlooks and provoke new approaches. Some of the problems and questions raised have been brought closer to solution by later publications, but still the volume gives a valuable account of the problems encountered in the area of epic studies at that particular time.

Peter Knecht

SARMELA, MATTI. *Paikalliskulttuurin Rakennemuutos*. Raportti Pohjois-Thaimaan riisikylistä (Structural change in local culture. De-localization and cultural imperialism in rural North Thailand). Transactions of the Finnish Anthropological Society No. 6. Helsinki: The Finnish Anthropological Society, 1979. Paper, 380 pp. ISSN 0356-0481, ISBN 951-95433-6-8 (Finnish, with large English summary).

This book is an attempt to describe the changes taking place in the northern Thailand province of Lampang primarily through reliance on the author's field interviews. The following points can be noted as being characteristic of his methodology: (1) He understands the traditional village culture in terms of "local culture," and the urban culture in terms of "superculture"; and (2), he regards the ecosystem as central core of the culture of the area, and thinks that changes in this ecosystem influence the entire culture.

The most important aspects of his point of view can be summarized as follows. The "local ecosystem" (that is, the overall economic, social and cultural structure of the area as adapted to its geographical and historical environment), which has been the core of the "local culture," is gradually being replaced by a "global ecosystem" (a centralized and primarily urban production and social system, operating within the context of an international economy), which is the core of a "superculture." The village will then disappear from the world, its place being taken by a rural landscape that is all but dead, composed of a western style "house and surrounding land production structure" and scattered settlements. He of course sees this process as being more advanced in the towns than in the villages.

Let me then offer some of my impressions of this book. First, I have my doubts that the reality of the area can be fully explained by the schema noted above. This is primarily because it goes against all common sense to think that the traditional culture of Thai villages and towns can ever be fully Westernized. For this reason, it seems to me that we would be better off thinking of cultural changes in terms of the content (as opposed to structure) of the culture, or in terms of the idea of "adaptation."