

BOOK REVIEWS

RONGE, VERONIKA. *Das tibetische Handwerkertum vor 1959*. Beiträge zur Südasien-Forschung, Südasien-Institut, Universität Heidelberg, Band 43. Wiesbaden, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1978. viii+181 pp., 2 maps. (With English summary)

Twenty years have passed since Chinese communist troops invaded Tibet, prompted the Dalai Lama and tens of thousands of his followers to flee the "Top of the World", and forced them to adjust to a new world. Tibet's mysteriousness and unusual form of government had attracted the attention of travelers and scholars for quite some time. However, the conditions under which information could be gathered did not preclude onesidedness, misinformation or even misinterpretation at times. E.g., although we had information about the main social groups and their organization, not much attention has been paid hitherto to the craftsmen and their organization. Some authors were convinced that, although several kind of craftsmen existed, their importance was negligible; others said that they were even organized according to profession into "guilds". This *status quaestionis* is the starting point for the author's research. She has gathered her information from Tibetan craftsmen living in exile and from Nepali who had lived and worked in Lhasa or elsewhere in Tibet. From this material she then reconstructed what sort of social and political organizations of craftsmen there were before 1959.

Tibetan society was divided into a number of "states" (*Stände*) rather than classes in the strict sense, and the individual's position depended on religious principles (e.g. karma) as well as on secular (e.g. birth, fortune). So we find several types of craftsmen depending on whether they made their living entirely or only partly by their craft. Farmers and herders were often parttime craftsmen who worked in their free time for an additional income. Then there were the fulltime professionals. With the exception of the roaming craftsmen, who had to search for opportunities to work, these fulltime craftsmen were called on for the execution of public as well as private orders. The degree of prestige and esteem any particular profession enjoyed depended on the above mentioned principles, so that the religiously meritorious crafts of artists were ranked highest, whereas those who indulged in directly or indirectly "sinful activities" like the killing of sentient beings ranked lowest. Yet in spite of such differentiation based on religious factors, a general disrespect for those who were poor or followed a way of living that was considered to be morally questionable introduced further factors to determine the kind of esteem a profession enjoyed. This becomes quite clear, e.g. in the case of smiths. Gold and silversmiths are esteemed and highly appreciated for their skill, but at the same time they are mistrusted, because they are thought to cheat on the material entrusted to them. On the other side, the blacksmith who forges tools to kill with is seen as a sinful man.

This sort of view determines somehow whether a child would follow in his father's profession or not. In an ill famed profession a child is likely to follow his father, because there is hardly any other choice, but in others there are a number of reasons to determine one's actual career. In some cases it may be the wish or order of a man's

overlord, in others, specially in the case of fulltime craftsmen, it is the wish and inclination of the aspirant himself.

Among the fulltime craftsmen, first of all in Lhasa, there existed two kinds of organizations. One, the *bzo khan* ("workshop"), was organized according to profession, and being partly under government control received also government orders. Theoretically speaking, a craftsman in Lhasa was free to join the organization of his craft or to work independently. Yet, if he chose to work as an independent, the *bzo khan* would put pressure on him and levy a certain tax on his private income. Internally, the *bzo khan* was hierarchically structured under the leadership of masters, who wielded internal jurisdiction and also determined the income of the members in the lower ranks. However, these groupings did not provide social security or mutual assistance to their members at time of need. This was taken care of by another organization, the *skyid sdug*. The *skyid sdug* was a kind of voluntary association whose members had certain things in common, like their place of origin, their beliefs or their neighborhood, but they always belonged to several different professions. The *skyid sdug* took especially care also of religious needs and obligations of its members.

The Newar craftsmen from Nepal living in Lhasa had a similar organization like the *skyid sdug*, called *Pala* or *Para*, to protect the Newar interests in this foreign country. The author thinks, that the Tibetans may have appreciated the value of such an organization and imitated it very much the same way as they had learned from the Neware superior craftsmanship.

The political role both of these organizations played at the time of growing resistance and of the final revolt against the Chinese is seen by the author as another special feature of these groups. But why should it be so? Couldn't it be sufficiently explained as a result of the prevailing political circumstances? The reason for this is that a group, although organized for a professional or some social purpose, does not exclude the possibility of its being used as a base of political activities, when the necessity or opportunity for such activities arose. In that sense, to distinguish it from the unpolitical *guthri* of Nepal may be of only a relative value. This is even more so, since one could think that already the creation of the *bzo khan* was not just aimed at a pooling of skill, considering the fact that these groups were administrated by monks on the one hand, and could put pressure on the freelance craftsmen on the other hand with government approval. But this may be difficult to determine with the situation being as it now is and with the material at hand.

In the English summary the author says that she describes also "various craft-techniques and skills" (164). Such descriptions are, however, only very cursory. The author can hardly be blamed for this, the object of the book being social importance and organization of craftsmen rather than their techniques. Something more important is the question, whether these associations could be seen as something akin to the European guild. The author promised that this would be clear after the material had been presented. In the conclusion she declares abruptly that these organizations by no means can be compared with medieval European guilds. It is, however, left to the reader's intuition to find out, what the author takes to be the characteristics of these guilds and why consequently the Tibetan organizations were not even comparable with them. Considering the differences in character between the discussed organizations some further clarification in this respect would be called for.

We wish to commend the author for having brought the attention to the existence and the organizational forms of a Tibetan middleclass. The text is written in German with quotations in the original French or English. The many Tibetan expressions in the text and the spelling of place names that differs greatly from the traditional

spelling may be disturbing for a reader with only little specified knowledge of Tibetan, but a list of expressions and another of names are of good help.

Peter Knecht

SIHKALA, ANNA-LEENA. *The Rite Technique of the Siberian Shaman*. FF Communications vol. XCIII-2, No. 220. Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1978. 385 pp. Price 180.—Fmk.

The title of this book may almost look like an understatement, because the author does not just unfold the rite's technique, but takes up the question of its essence. By doing so she endeavours to cover the immense area of Siberia, immense in the sense of geographical space as well as in that of the material available.

The topic is developed in three parts. After a general introduction the author delineates in the first part the foundation of her method. She discusses the main insights of role theory and hypnosis in order to apply them later to the shaman's role-taking. In the second part she then collects the published material on shamanic séances (quoting some rather lengthy reports by German scholars in the original German), orders it according to her frame of interpretation and adds some general background information about the cultural situation together with her interpretation according to a supposed order of stages in an ideal séance. In the third and last part she draws her conclusions on the basis of a comparison of the introduced material, describing the role and status of the shaman, the types of shamans and their characteristics, and finally, the function and effect of role-taking by the shaman during a séance.

Accepting as a general starting point for the discussion a definition of shamanism that sees its distinctive characteristic in ecstasy, the author then goes on to ask, what this "ecstatic transformation" is, how it comes about, and what kind of belief system may provide its ideological justification. But to be able to answer these questions she has to clear the way in several respects.

First of all she criticizes former theories of shamanism for concentrating too unilaterally on one phenomenon and their taking it then as the decisive feature, be it possession (Findeisen) or the shaman's journey (Eliade). She further points out that attempts at a general theory of shamanism were made mostly outside the Russian-speaking area by "researchers with no thorough insight into the material of some small area behind them but who also occasionally lack all personal contact with the phenomena in question" (19). Such a statement makes one wonder about the manner in which the author would objectively view her own position. She certainly works with material collected by Russian, Hungarian and other researchers who had first hand experience with shamanism, but how much of "personal contact with the phenomena" did she herself have? The present study does not only rely entirely on printed reports, but also the author remarks repeatedly that shamanism and its rites belong to a past tradition and cannot be observed anymore.

In order to avoid a kind of theorizing similar to the one criticized, the author stresses what she calls an "intracultural" approach (cf. Foreword p. 5), i.e. she analyzes each particular form of séance in its own cultural setting. This allows her to point out the culturally bound idiosyncrasies of séances and to identify certain types of ecstatic role-taking. Yet, finally she comes up with some kind of a general theory by which the séance is explained as a situation of communication, the technique of which is based

on ecstatic role-taking. This sort of conclusion and the author's research situation hardly differs essentially from what she criticizes, although it is less onesided. This may then be the reason why she tries to remedy the situation by a critical discussion of her material. She expounds the principles on which to base a critical treatment of the material, but still, some of the data are of such a general kind, that it is difficult to see how they could not help lending themselves to a rather imaginative "reconstruction" of a séance situation. However we have to acknowledge the efforts of the author to treat her material critically and not lose the characteristics of a particular situation for the sake of a smooth and comprehensive theory.

In connection with this situation the author clarifies her position in still another respect. The term "shamanism" itself has to be restricted in its use to what she calls "the real, 'classical' shamanism of Central Asia, Northern Siberia and other arctic regions" (14-15). This means that "shamanic features", which may be found elsewhere in the world, have to be excluded from the discussion of shamanism as an institution, otherwise the term will be stressed to such an extent as to be in danger of having its content blurred too much. That is certainly true, but considering the history of anthropological research in general and of shamanism in particular one may also be entitled to have diverging ideas about what may be the "real" form of a particular phenomenon.

As far as séance and technique of ecstasy are concerned, shamanic tradition is basically uniform. The author is therefore able to establish a possible sequence of seven stages as the basic model of a séance, each stage comprising several units or "actemes" in itself. Here it becomes quite clear that phenomena like possession or flight of the soul are but one stage or a certain mode of meeting with the spirit. However, the meeting with the spirit is exactly the decisive element which determines the tenor of a séance and the intensity of ecstasy. The author identifies two basic modes by which to meet the spirits, in one the shaman meets his spirits in this world, in the other he meets them in the other world. From here emerges then a third form, which combines both modes in the course of a single séance. But in all these situations the shaman is the mediator between the spirit world and the audience. The manner by which the spirit roles are made manifest through the shaman's behaviour depends therefore on the relationship the shaman maintains with his audience throughout the séance and also on the importance of the shaman's social position.

This sort of analysis, especially in reference to the socio-economic situation of a particular people, permits the author to isolate four types of shamans. One of them is the clan shaman. This type of shaman is considered to have appeared among peoples where the clan as a property holding unit was strong and meaningful. The shaman is the direct descendent of the clan ancestor and he is therefore responsible for the wellbeing of the clan. But then she goes on to say that with the onset of large-scale reindeer breeding the clan structure was in jeopardy and disintegrated. Still, "signs of clan shamanism" and "matters of belief in these cases in fact remained unchanged longest" (307). That kind of statement is by no means unusual in anthropological literature, but is it really so plausible as it may look? If a certain system of ideas, in this case clan shamanism, depends so much on socio-economic structures, why does it not change more significantly after the underlying system has "already disintegrated"? Is the almost proverbial *inertia* of beliefs in itself a sufficient explanation for it, and if it is, does the socio-economic system have a formative influence only in the case where a new system is to emerge the first time but not or only in reduced degree in later stages of that system's history? If this is so, how do we determine, where and when a certain system emerged to its "real and classical" form?

In spite of such problems the author provides us with an interesting insight into and an understanding of the shaman's fundamental rite as it stands. The hints, however, she makes at historical connections may well be open for further discussion.

A few final remarks about the text itself. In spite of the excellent printing the text is unfortunately interspersed with quite a number of misprints or omissions that sometimes hamper understanding. Nevertheless I wish to draw attention to a few other points I consider to be serious. The author tells us, that "almost all the information on institutionalized ecstatic behaviour among primitive peoples refers to sacral connections" (34), and introduces the example of the Samburu. This makes it look as if the Samburu saw ecstatic experience as something which had sacral connections. However, Lewis, from whose report the example is taken, states explicitly that the Samburu's ecstatic behaviour is of a "non-mystical, secular" kind¹. Is this nothing but a mistake in sentence construction or is it a misreading of Lewis's text?

Elsewhere, explaining the forms of communication with the spirits the author speaks of the shaman's journey. Although she talks explicitly about "reasons for journeys to the other world", she concludes this paragraph by saying: "The issue is thus the meeting of supranormal beings . . . in the normal world" (323). Shouldn't it rather be "in the supranormal world"?

In a text like this, written by somebody whose mothertongue is not English, one may be prepared to encounter sometimes unusual words or phrasings. One such unusual word is "written cultures" (12). I guess that cultures with a writing system are meant. However, there are in any language some basic rules one should adhere to if one uses the language. One of these rules I consider to be the order of the letters in the alphabet. This is of special importance where this order of letters is used to express order on another level than that of the alphabet itself, e.g. in a sequence of actions as the author does (76). In an English text a sequence of letters like U-V-X-Z-Y with no W at all invites confusion. Something similar could be said about the bibliography, where V and W are lumped together.

Peter Knecht

HANS-PETER LAQUEUR. *Zur kulturgeschichtlichen Stellung des türkischen Ringkampfes einst und jetzt*. Europäische Hochschulschriften. Reihe XXXV Sport und Kultur, Band 2. Frankfurt a. M., Peter Lang 1979; 146 pages.

This publication was accepted by the University of Munich as a doctoral thesis. In his preface the author makes it clear that he wants to elucidate the position of the sport of wrestling in the cultural and social structure of the Ottoman Empire, especially the little known phenomenon of the cloister-like community life of the wrestlers.

The content is presented in eight chapters; 1) occasions for arranging wrestling contests; 2) wrestling in the program of festivals; 3) culture relics found in the present Turkish wrestling; 4) wrestling as a specific Turkish sport; 5) the organization of wrestling in the Ottoman Empire; 6) the countries of origin of the wrestlers; 7) the social position of the wrestlers in the Ottoman Empire.

Anthropologists will welcome this carefully done study of a sport since it points

1. Lewis, I. M. *Ecstatic Religion*. Harmondsworth 1971, p. 40.