

It is important to know that in Vietnam at least four kinds of journeys—real, metaphorical, to the past, and to the present—are still closely entangled with one another. The last one, a journey to the present, is the most popular. On this journey, people may visit a number of pagodas and shrines in order to pray for business or financial success, for their ancestors to grant them a boy, or for a girl to become Miss Vietnam. Careful attention to this kind of journey can further deepen our understanding of Vietnam.

In the process of editing this book, two scholars from former enemy nations have come to understand one another. I believe this to be the special significance of this book. Nevertheless, the fact remains that some of the topics taken up in the present volume do not address certain problems that still need to be solved.

One, and perhaps the most serious, problem is the ethnic and religious conflict that is still going on in the central highland where many ethnic minorities live. After the Doi Moi period, many Viet as well as Tay and Nung, who had lived on the Chinese side of the border, immigrated and occupied the lands left fallow by the local population, thus creating serious problems concerning the right to use resources. In addition, some ethnic minorities adopted “Dega Protestantism,” which was the subject of severe governmental restrictions. Because of such pressures, thousands of minority peoples rose up in 2001 and 2004 to request the restoration of their lands, freedom of religion, and the right to local autonomy. American scholars, I believe, cannot ignore this situation because during the time of the war the US military supported and played on the feelings of hatred some of the minorities harbored against the dominant Viet population.

After the end of uprisings in 2001, some of the leaders fled to Cambodia and from there went into exile in the United States. The same thing happened with some of the H’mong people in Laos. In that country, fighting between the Lao Army and H’mong guerrillas, formerly backed up by the US Army, are still going on. Many H’mong soldiers went into exile in the US after 1975, but they cannot easily adapt to American society, and their young men cannot find jobs. Consequently, some of them became soldiers in the US Army. This is still another kind of a long and bitter “journey” of the people of Vietnam.

The present volume does not address these kinds of problems. The “ethnic mosaic” it presents is therefore not dynamic. I believe that in order to present a picture of the ethnic minority peoples, it is not sufficient to simply show them in “traditional” costume in the milieu of a museum.

Knowledge provided by anthropologists has often been used to benefit political or military ends. As a fellow anthropologist I believe that we must reflect on this. At the same time I hope that the knowledge presented in this book goes a long way toward establishing a better understanding between the two nations directly involved in the project and of Vietnam in general. This would then be the final type of journey, the one undertaken by the readers to the body, mind, and spirit of Vietnam.

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CENTRAL ASIA

HARVILAHTI, LAURI in collaboration with Zoja Sergeevna KAZAGAČEVA.
The Holy Mountain. Studies in Upper Altay Oral Poetry. FF
Communications No. 282. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica,
2003. 166 pages. Map, figures, illustrations, bibliography, indices.
Paper, n.p.; ISBN 951-41-0952-X. ISSN 0014-5815.

The work under review is the result of a project entitled “Ethnocultural Identity in Asia (1996–1998),” founded by the Academy of Finland and based on an agreement with the Folklore Department of the Institute of World Literature of the Russian Academy of Sciences. The material was collected during two field trips in 1996 and 1997 to the mountainous regions of the Altay Republic together with well-known folklorists V. M. Gacak, T. M. Sadalova, and M. A. Tolbina from the Altay Academy of Sciences, who each possesses special scientific skills. The aim of this work was to achieve a synthesis to be used as a basis in forming a new overall view of the structure of tradition and modes of performance—the linguistic, stylistic-poetic, and structural devices used to produce mythical and epic cultural tradition.

For this purpose, the chosen region is a very rich field. And it was just the right time, since two of the authors’ three informants, A. Kalkin and T. Čačijakov, passed away in 1997 and 1998. The device “*Rossica non leguntur*”—still doing its job in ethnology, folkloristics, and ethnocultural studies—follows an introductory chapter on the traditions of the steppes and mountains. On the basis of the collected material and former publications the deep roots of the living epic traditions among Turkic and Mongolian peoples are once again pointed out. The very brief “Remarks on the history of research on Altay epics” starts with Radloff, Anochin, and others, and continues with native Altay scholars like V. Kučijak, S. S. Surazakov, Z. S. Kazagačeva, S. M. Katašev, and famous singers of epics like N. U. Ulagašev and two of the authors’ informants—Aleksij G. Kalkin (1925–1998) and Tabar Čačijakov (1923–1997).

One of the main parts of this book is devoted to the performers of Altay epics and some texts of their repertoire—*Oči-Bala*, *Maadaj-Kara* and *Kan-Altın*—through interviews with A. Kalkin and his son Elbek.

A. Kalkin was, at the end of twentieth century, “the oldest and most prominent among the last masters of *kaj*,” a type of overtone singing used in the performance of epics, but also by shamans. He descended from a family of well-known epic singers, continued their tradition, and was honored as a national artist. In the interview mentioned, he described his means of memorizing epic texts, his “teachers,” the necessities of performing a text through to the end, and his praise of the *topšuur*, the plucked instrument that he uses to accompany his recital. The second interview with his son Elbek (b. 1953) documents on the one hand the continuity of epic singing, his method of self-study and later his training by his father, the origin of epic songs, and so on. On the other hand, the interview also highlights the changes that have occurred. For example, Elbek, who represents the younger generation, sings not only in his own dialect but also often uses Altaj-Kiži dialect, which forms the basis of current literary language and is therefore universally understood, more so than certain archaic dialects. As far as the handling of the plot and its segments and details are concerned, Elbek’s information corresponds in many ways to the data published by Radloff and others. Furthermore, they—sometimes—document a somewhat different (yet not astonishing) mental approach of Europeans to the whole complex of thoughts and beliefs concerning epic texts and traditions and the attitude of the native peoples themselves to the phenomenon as a whole.

The parallel publishing of the beginning of *Oči Bala* (records made by A. Kalkin from 1996, both in translation and original text) documents the possible modes of singing or reciting epics. The second record is shorter due to deficiencies concerning the form but not the contents, except at the end when the formulaic-like connection of a mythic past and the present time is missing in variant 2. This is, perhaps, due to the singer’s bad health at the time, but shortened passages of this kind may also occur, in my experience, if the singer feels discontented with his audience. In his commentary, the author draws the attention to

the fact that epics are not only meant to be told to human beings, but also are supposed to be directed at, or sung in honor of, supernatural beings—in this case, a mountain goddess, whom the singer addresses by the word *palam*, “my child.” With this small example, he illustrates how segments of the narrative are described by means of various topoi—here, elements of landscape, the home of the hero, his evidently well-established individual community, and the hero himself—thus briefly displaying the character not only of an Altay epic text, but also of texts of Turkic and Mongolian peoples of Central Asia.

He then turns to the specific poetic and stylistic means in epic texts of the Turkic and Mongolian peoples, including alliteration, parallelism, and basic formulaic patterns, and explains with segments of Altay text the special features of the agglutinative Altaic languages that the Altay language belongs to.

Basing on the beginning of *Maadaj-Kara*, the author presents the conception of the world in three layers (upper-, middle- and, underworlds), as it is reflected in the Altay epics and in those of their neighbors. Later, the author compares the introductory part of *Maadaj-Kara* in the versions recorded with the father and three versions with the son (variations indicated in footnotes). He concludes that while the son is an excellent performer of epics, as far as productivity is concerned, he belongs rather to a category of tradition bearers who are in decline.

Tabar Čačijakov, the performer of the third epic *Kan-Altin*, his favorite one, had a difficult time in his life. He gained his greatest inspiration by listening to a singer of epic tales while confined to a labor camp. He then became well-known for performing prose tales and epics unaccompanied. He was an adherent of the Burhanistic religion, which is reflected in the fact that, for instance, in his version of *Kan-Altin* a decisive battle takes place in the middle world, in contrast to the text of A. Kalkin (who came from the tradition of black shamans) that had the battlefield in the underworld, a world to which Čačijakov's heroes could not access.

Special chapters are dedicated to the study of the metrical and poetical features of Altay oral poetry and to a summary of its role as an “ethnocultural substrate,” a term referring to archaic features long preserved in a tradition, but also valid for related traditions of the wider area. The aim is “to create a broader ethnocultural theory taking in the manifold processes of textualisation in traditional poetic environments.” This takes into account the consistent poetical system of mythology, shamanic traditions, and epics with its symbolic and ritualistic manifestations. This is a system that “reflects and carries the meanings of the old religions and traditional culture for the Altay ethnic groups.”

Since Altay epic singing cannot be analysed without investigating the musical aspect, chapter 9 gives a detailed “Acoustic analysis of styles of overtone singing,” concluding with hints to other neighboring Turkic and Mongolian traditions, those of the Northern Siberian and Paleo-Asian peoples, and the similarities in non-Asian traditions (such as *jojk*-songs of the Sami people, and Flamenco and others in Europe, Africa, and South America). VAN TONGEREN's recent book (2002) might have been usefully added to the bibliography.

The appendix consists of colored photos by L. Harvilahti illustrating the text and giving a vivid impression of the singers and the background of the fieldwork, a Bibliography, and a welcome General Index and Index of Names.

Although this is a small book, these studies on Upper Altay oral poetry based on the epic texts of three singers (with variants) represent a carefully compiled, comprehensive, and extremely stimulating investigation that is skillfully arranged, even from a didactic point of view. It will be highly welcomed by scholars in the field of oral traditions in general as well as to those concerned with Central Asia and its Altaic peoples and cultures.

REFERENCE CITED

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Erika TAUBE
Leipzig

SOUTHEAST ASIA

Walker, Anthony R. *Merit and the Millennium: Routine and Crisis in the Ritual Lives of the Lahu People*. New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, 2003, xxxii + 907 pages. Maps, figures, numerous b/w plates, glossaries of Lahu words, Chinese characters and words in Thai/Siamese script, bibliography, index of authors, general index with glossary. Hardcover US\$55.00; ISBN 81-7075-0660.

This monumental book is the result of nearly forty years of acquaintance with and research on the Lahu, a swidden agriculturalist Montagnard people inhabiting the northern part of Southeast Asia (Southwest China, northeast Burma, northwest Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam). Its aim is twofold: first, to present and explain the religious ideas and practices of one particular Red Lahu community in North Thailand where the author had worked for four years "in terms of the wider context of the Lahu speaking peoples" of Southeast Asia; second, to demonstrate that "the mountain people in this part of the world, participate, if only on the peripheries, in the drama of surrounding lowland based civilisations. [...] They are certainly not wholly separate, so-called tribal people [...] much of their cultural heritage [...] make[s] very little sense without surrounding civilisations" (738).

Accordingly, the book falls broadly into three sections. Part one (3–108) sets the scene. First, the author's "home" village, Ca Taw in Phrao district, Chiang Mai province, Northwest Thailand is presented briefly, then the focus is broadened. Then he discusses the Lahu between two "high" civilizations, the Han and the Tai, their pseudo-historical migrations in and from their hypothetical homeland in Gansu and Qinghai, to Sichuan and Yunnan in southern China, and finally their actual historical presence there from the seventeenth century onwards. This broad focus beyond the study of a single village and the concomitant historical perspective are the great assets of the book. It is common in Southeast Asian anthropology to find that many hill peoples, including the Lahu, originate from areas other than their current homes. They have spread all over northern Southeast Asia only in the past few centuries, still safeguarding many of their original common cultural traits. And "despite all the doubts that have been raised concerning the sociological and cultural validity of ethnic labels such as 'Lahu' [...] it is only against the broad ethnographic and historical backgrounds that the details of life in even one small Lahu community finally begin to make sense" (48).

As a result of this perspective, the book far transcends the usual limitations of one given community studied personally by the fieldworker, and becomes a treatise of Lahu culture and religion *in general*. The point of departure is always constituted by the author's own data, but these are presented in a broader context as local variations of a Lahu continuum that stretches from Southern China to Northern Southeast Asia. This way, detailed descriptions of ritual phenomena and the minutiae of Lahu ritual life alternate in the book