

those from the Pingyao area, created a remittance banking system, a vital component of long-distance, countrywide commerce. Pingyao was once filled with some forty impressive temples, as well as other buildings that served its civil administration.

Pingyao's case reminds us, however, of "Chineseness" itself. In ancient times the early Yin Dynasty was also called Shang. The literal meaning of *shang* in Chinese is commerce. In my opinion, commercial activities are essential elements of Chinese urban life, and doing business is indispensable to Chinese identity. So the small but important commercial town of Pingyao is one good example of a Chinese city. We could compare China to the human body. Its capital might be the human heart, and other cities the arteries. All parts of the body have their capillary vessels. In a practical sense, the blood of Chinese society consists of money and goods.

The most striking feature of Pingyao is Qiaojia Dayuan (the Qiao family manor). It is the most outstanding walled compound or estate. Knapp states, "The Qiao family estate is a walled city miniature that echoes well the nest structure of walls-in-walls characteristics of China's walled city" (96). From this we can understand the similarity between the emperor's palaces in the capital and the houses of influential persons in a local city.

As for city gates it is interesting to note that the Chinatowns in various countries formed by Chinese living overseas often have gates which distinguish their areas from other parts of the cities. Even though they do not have walls, their gates suggest that the Chinese living there have built imagined walls in their minds. For non-Han Chinese this is the key concept that helps to understand the Chinese image of socio-topological space. Again I have to stress that the Chinese perception of centrality and identity lies within these unseen walls.

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## SOUTHEAST ASIA

HELLIWELL, CHRISTINE. *"Never Stand Alone": A Study of Borneo Sociality*. Borneo Research Council Monograph No. 5. Phillips, ME: Borneo Research Council, Inc., 2001. xiv + 279 pages. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$35.00; ISBN 1-929900-02-3.

One of the key choices made in anthropological description is the identification of the social units of which the society under consideration is composed. People's lives, after all, are said to be based in these units, and the relationship between them, the social structure of the society, therefore strongly influences those lives. This book is a search for these units among the Gerai of the Ketapang District of Western Kalimantan (Indonesia), a search, therefore, for the locus of Gerai social structure.

The book consists of seven chapters. In the Introduction, the author introduces the theoretical background to her study, questioning the appropriateness of past studies on Borneo to her Gerai data. These studies, themselves part of a discussion on the basis of the structural endurance of society, tended to emphasize the household as the corporate social entity through which individuals gain membership in the larger social whole. Households, which one writer characterized as "sovereign countries" (3) were said to be independent of other such social units and occupy their own apartment in the longhouse or a separate dwelling in the village. Among the cognatic Bornean groups, it was argued, lacking an obvious structure based on exclusive descent groups, houses are a convenient set of socio-physical structures

through which individual lives can be ordered and society structured. Helliwell notes that this proposition is over-simplified and leaves many questions unanswered. One of the problems lies with the notion of social structure itself, based as it is on Western notions of society as based in “discrete, enduring, corporate groups,” groupings that are not either obviously present or even recognized everywhere.

Having posed these questions, the introduction continues with a brief ethnographic and historical sketch of the Gerai and the circumstances of the author’s fieldwork, and then once more returns to the theoretical issues, this time as they relate to the Gerai, where the author certainly had difficulty identifying the discrete, enduring groups of anthropological theory. Yet, Gerai society endures, and what, therefore, is the basis for this? Pointing out that the dwelling-based co-residential household, though important, does not have the enduring corporateness necessary within the theoretical model, she identifies the rice group, the social unit, often co-residential, within which rice is produced—though not always by a single “production unit”—and consumed. This rice group has full authority over its own rice, which it is not obliged to share across group boundaries, an obligation that does exist for other things.

An exploration of the nature of this rice group and its relations with other such groups as well as with other aspects of society is the prevailing theme of the book. Chapter Two describes the importance of rice in Gerai society, noting that the very idea of eating involves the consumption of rice. Rice is a vital ingredient in ceremonies and offerings to spirits—a form of sociability, since, just as between people, relations between humans and spirits involve the offering and consumption of rice. Rice equals welfare and the more one’s group has, the healthier its members are said to be. Interestingly, in the light of data from elsewhere in Indonesia, Helliwell makes no mention of a belief in a rice-spirit that animates the crop although it is said to share its ancestry with humans (51), the importance of which will become clear later. Given the importance of rice, then, the author notes that a grouping formed around its production and control must be a key aspect of Gerai society.

Chapter Three focuses on the rice group, the way the Gerai organize people’s rights and duties in regard to rice and its production. Rice fields are usually worked by a small number of people, the rice production unit. Within this unit all are equally responsible and have equal rights. Production units are often part of a larger two-to-three-generational kin-based grouping, which can consist of two or three such production units: the rice group. While the production unit provides the seed and has the ultimate responsibility in producing the crop, advice and help may come from the rice group of which it is part. This group may also supply some of the labor for its production and has a share in the rights to its consumption, although primary rights remain with the production unit. This arrangement spreads the risk of crop failure and allows the larger group to efficiently use its available labor force in both crop production and maintaining the family.

The exploration of the rice group is continued in Chapter Four, with a description of how it is constituted and why it should be seen as a basic unit. Rice, it is pointed out, is grown to care for the young. To do so only for one’s self would be an unsatisfying bother. Growing rice and growing children are indeed seen as identical, as both need love and attention (102). A primary value among the Gerai is for people to need each other and to demonstrate this: not to do so marks one as antisocial. In their care for both rice and children this “need” is demonstrated: people need grain from the plant and care in their old age from the young. Given the realities of life and nature, neither is an absolute certainty, and so rice is nurtured and social obligations are created through care and sharing. Children are the future existence of the rice group, although not all can become members. Only one child and its partner are eligible to do so, other children joining either their partners’ group or forming one of their own. The presence in the group of siblings leads to a lessening of mutual need and an

increase in tensions (111). The basis of the rice group, then, lies in the vertical bond between parents and one of their children. Property is passed primarily along this line, although the wealthier may give some to other children as well. More than one production unit, then, may make up a rice group, and these may be spread over different households, both being coordinate with different generations. It is the rice group and its sharing of labor and mutual dependence that allows the Gerai to produce both rice and children at the same time. The inability to do either reflects poorly on the spiritual health of the group. The rice group, however, the author notes, is not a corporate unit. Production units rather than the rice group own property (rice), though the other members of the rice group have some rights in it. The same is true of tools, baskets and the like: they belong to the person(s) that made them.

The next two chapters highlight the relation of the rice group to the larger Gerai society, considering both its place in the *adat* community (Chapter Five) and its relations with its neighbors (Chapter Six). In a world filled with danger and uncertainty, the *adat* is a guide to the proper and peaceful life. Especially important here is the ritual hearth on which each rice group should ideally be focused. This means, however, that each group should have a dwelling, ideally an apartment in a longhouse within the village. This is not always possible, however, and groups that do not can associate with groups that do, the association being based on common ancestry. The ritual hearth is, indeed, the crucial feature of the rice group. Located next to the main post of the apartment with the rice container next to it, it contains ashes from the hearth from which it broke off or, to put it differently, which gave birth to it.

Hearths, therefore, link the living and the ancestors ultimately with a sky deity (149–50), both through the ashes and the adjoining rice which, as we saw earlier, also has human ancestry. The assembly is guarded by spirits that assure peoples' adherence to the *adat*, although it is unclear whether these are ancestral spirits or not. The realization of this association with the ancestors could have clarified many points that the author struggles with. Since the author does not specifically deal with ancestors, I must be slightly hesitant here, but as an ancestor-focused group with the rules for recruitment and association described above, the rice group holds in common the ashes and rice descending through the generations, and therewith the group's life, its most precious "corporate" property. For this reason also groups without a hearth of their own link up with, or even have their hearth-ashes temporarily cared for by groups with which they have an ancestor in common. That the rights of such associated groups are not as strong as those of the primary group is a secondary matter that has nothing to do with the corporateness of either.

In Chapter Six the idea of sociability is highlighted. While there are rules as to who may or may not enter the apartments, outsiders being restricted to the outer gallery while the inner apartments are restricted to those defined as "us," including the rice, people, and the ancestors, the longhouse apartments are not rigidly-bounded physical units. Rather, they are described as permeable, allowing for an easy flow of conversation and a sharing of goods. Sociability comes to the fore as a process between people and between groups, and is the glue that holds Gerai society together.

In the conclusions the theoretical issues underlying the book are reprised in the light of the data presented. The idea of bounded groups as the basis for Gerai social structure is once again rejected, the emphasis being placed instead on the variability of the rice groups involved, which the Gerai nevertheless all characterize as *rumah* (houses), whether or not they have a ritual hearth. While the author properly points out the visual orientation of many anthropologists, leading them to focus on objects, she herself does not quite escape this same tendency, which also underlies our concept of social structure, namely as a thing. A more productive approach, I think, would be to realize, with Piaget, that structure is processual and that structures only exist in the continual act of structuring. The process of the Gerai's sociability

is a major factor here, leading to the cohesion of their society, whichever anthropological model is used.

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## INDIA

BLACKBURN, STUART. *Moral Fictions: Tamil Folktales from Oral Tradition*. Folklore Fellows Communications 278. Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2001. 338 pages. Maps, appendices, glossary, illustrations, bibliography, index. Hardcover, €33; Paper €29. ISBN 951-41-0898-1; ISSN 0014-5815.

Stuart Blackburn has published a selection of one hundred Tamil folktales, which he recorded during 1995–1996 in different regions of Tamil Nadu. Fortunately the period in folklore studies when pieces of folklore were supposed to explain themselves is over. Sources are usually published together with commentaries and theoretical insights of researchers. In this manner, Blackburn's book is not only a rich and entertaining anthology of oral narratives, but it is also a monograph, whose main thesis is formulated in the title: the author sees the tales as moral fictions.

Oral and written literature of India has played a significant role in folklore studies since the time of Theodor Benfey and his research on the transmission of the tales of Pancatantra in different cultures. There are only a few books, however, that present Indian tales from oral performances. It would be fair to compare *Moral Fictions* with two other recent books, *Mondays on the Dark Night of the Moon* by Kirin NARAYAN and *A Flowering Tree* by A. K. RAMANUJAN. The first of them is a narrative ethnography from the Kangra district in North India, Himachal Pradesh. It introduces twenty-one womens' tales together with rich contextual data and examples of oral literary criticism—a term introduced by Alan Dundes to denote the tradition-bearers' commentaries and their interpretations of folklore. Due to Ramanujan's untimely death, his collection of seventy-seven Kannada tales has less contextual information and commentaries than originally planned.

*Moral Fictions* includes more tales than the above-mentioned books; regarding the balance between material and researcher's interpretations, it represents the middle ground that lies between Narayan and Ramanujan. Blackburn provides more information about the performers, local culture, and performance contexts than *A Flowering Tree*. He has also included discussions between the storytellers and the audience, a valuable key to understanding the reception of the tales by local people. Like Ramanujan, Blackburn mainly focuses on the textual side of these stories, yet he differs from Narayan who draws vivid portraits of the storyteller in her everyday settings. True, as Blackburn has published tales from forty-one people, it would be unreasonable to expect that he should have presented abundant reflections of these meetings and added the biographies of his tellers. We learn several illuminating details, such as the fact that the age of his informants ranges between ten to seventy; some of them have not attended school at all but others hold M.Sc., M.A., or Ph.D. degrees.

Most of the tales have been published according to the tale-telling sessions. Any reader who is familiar with European folktales would recognize the Tamil versions of famous tale-types such as "The Dragon-Slayer" (AT 300), "The Kind and the Unkind Girls" (AT 480), "Cinderella" (AT 510A), and others. Blackburn's classification of his tales according to the Aarne-Thompson system is a remarkable achievement because many of them appear in