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Peter KNECHT

THAILAND

NATHALANG, SIRAPORN T., Editor. *Thai Folklore: Insights into Thai Culture.* Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2000. xviii + 233 pages. Color plates and b/w photographs. Paper 250 baht. ISBN 974-346-046-2. (Distributed by Chulalongkorn University Book Center, Phyathai Road, Bangkok 10330, Thailand)

Thai Folklore: Insights into Thai Culture, a collection of ten articles, is the first publication of Thai folklore in English to come out of the Thai Studies Center of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Eight of the articles in the collection have been published earlier either in journals or books. Most of the studies concentrate on the subgenres of oral narratives: folktales, myths, Jataka tales, and ghost stories. Three studies examine folksongs, folk beliefs, and puppet theatre.

The editor, Siraporn Nathalang, contributed three articles on folktales and myths. The first article, "Different Family Roles, Different Interpretations of Thai Folktales" (a reprint from the special issue, "Folklore and Folklife of Thailand," *Asian Folklore Studies* 48 [1989]) concentrates on issues related to family roles, family conflicts, and individually-derived meanings of folktales. In her second article, "Thai Folktale Drama on Television: Tradition and Modernity," Nathalang analyzes the effects of modernity and social change through the Thai folktales and folk dramas that have been adapted into various television series. Plot, character, and new stylistic developments occurred in one series as folk drama story writers became more conscious of changing Thai values, and of the presence of a young television audience. For example, monogamy as the current family value became the part of the story line in one drama as opposed to polygamy in the story line of the older dramas. In another drama, the heroine was characterized as capable, with skills of her own instead of being beautiful but helpless as the heroines of the past. In her third article, "Thai Creation Myths: Reflection of Thai Relations and Cultures" (first published in *Thai Culture* 2 [1997]), Nathalang continues with her comparative interest in the study of pre-Buddhism creation myths of various Thai-speaking groups as indicative of the relationship between these groups and their belief systems. She categorizes the myths into three types: the world as created by a pair of creators, human beings as coming out of a giant gourd after the flood, and the first male and female as *devada*s (angels) who could not return to heaven after having eaten the fragrant soil on earth. The advent of Brahmanism and Buddhism in the region saw the syncretism of indigenous beliefs and the new religions. In some versions of the myths, however, Nathalang sees evidence of a rice-growing tradition of the Thai peoples.

William Klausner's three articles, taken from his book *Reflections in the Log Pond* (1972), center on jokes. "Siang Miang: Folk Hero" gives a synopsis of four stories that tells of the wit, guile, and craftiness of the northeastern folktale hero Siang Miang. Klausner sees Siang Miang's behavior as a psychological safety valve for the rural masses, which also served

to chastise and caution elders, superiors, and rulers not to abuse their power. In "Hua Paw Tales" the *hua paw* is another northeastern monk character type. What makes this character type amusing to listeners is the juxtaposition of the human foils with ideal norms of monkhood. Now told as entertainment and as moral narratives to the young, Klausner hypothesizes that these stories might have been intended to instruct those who entered monkhood in the past. In "In-Law Tales" culturally expected behaviors of in-laws and subsequent tensions and conflicts were told in the guise of tales featuring in-laws. The tension between fathers-in-law and sons-in-law is rooted in the northeastern Thai tradition that requires the son-in-law to live with his wife's parents and to render service and appropriate respect. The conflicts between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law stem from the competition for the son's affection, and from the postmarital residence situation in which the daughter-in-law lives in her husband's house because he is the only son.

Suvanna Kriengkraipetch in "Folksong and Socio-Cultural Change in Thai Village Life" sets her discussion of ritual songs and social songs within the context of the ritual and social life of her field village in Suphan Buri, Central Thailand. As a village that depended on rice farming for its livelihood, ritual songs attached to agricultural rites, and beliefs in benevolent and guardian spirits, feature as prominently as the songs sung for entertainment that sometimes integrate cultural and family messages. It was a social occasion when these songs were sung and, according to Kriengkraipetch's analysis of the song texts, they became a means for social control and an outlet for social pressure. Kriengkraipetch's second article, "Thai Folk Beliefs about Animals and Plants and Attitude toward Nature" (first published in *Culture and Environment in Thailand* [1989]), focuses on a different genre of folklore—folk beliefs. Nursery rhymes, lullabies, folksongs, riddles, and sayings become intersecting folklore genres through which Kriengkraipetch explores how attitudes towards nature are expressed.

Pranee Wongthet in "The Jataka Stories and Laopuan Worldview" (reprinted from *Asian Folklore Studies* 48 [1989]) uses the Buddha's birth story as the focal point of her analysis of the Laopuan worldview and of their expression of Laopuan ethnicity. As an ethnic group in Thailand and as former prisoners of war and their descendants, the Laopuan present versions of Jataka stories that serve as links to their past, their expression of the group's cultural continuity, and their spiritual strength. They are taken to be truthful accounts, historically meaningful and sacred.

Paritta Chalempow Koanantakool in "Relevance of the Textual and Contextual Analyses in Understanding Folk Performance in Modern Society: A Case of Southern Thai Shadow Puppet Theatre" (also reprinted from *Asian Folklore Studies* 48 [1989]) focuses on a well-known folk performance of southern Thailand—the puppet theatre. She discusses how each artist manipulated the text of the story, the dialogue, and the visuals to fit a specific performance context and audience as well as current events, social and political. Her thorough analysis clearly points to the relationship between text and context, where the dynamism of a successful folk performance lies.

Ka F. Wong in "Nang Nag: The Cult and Myth of a Popular Ghost in Thailand" succinctly analyzes the bewitching hold of the ghost story of Nang Nag who died during labor and lovingly awaited her husband's return. The ghost story was performed as a folk drama—recently made into a movie—and gave rise to a popular cult with its own shrine in a Buddhist temple. Wong sees Nang Nag as a tragic figure, symbolizing the outcast, the dead who wished to be reunited with the living, and the "otherness" that was feared, considered as dangerous, and destructive. To Wong, Nang Nag's tenacity in crossing the boundary between life and death represented a challenge to prejudice and accounts for the popularity of the story.

In addition to Phya Anuman Rajadhon's *Essays on Thai Folklore* (Social Science Association Press of Thailand, 1968) and the 1989 special issue of *Asian Folklore Studies,*

"Folklore and Folklife in Thailand," this collection of research on Thai folklore in English is is to be applauded. The articles vary in length, strength, and scope of study. More rigorous studies of Thai folklore and the nonverbal genres of folklife covering more cultural groups, particularly groups that have been neglected, need to be produced to shed more light on the wide range and richness of the folk tradition in Thailand.

Wanni W ANDERSON
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island

INDIA

TIEKEN, HERMAN. *Kāvya in South India: Old Tamil Caṅkam Poetry.* Gonda Indological Studies, Volume X. Groningen, The Netherlands: Egbert Forsten Publishing, 2001. 270 pages. Appendices, index of places, bibliography. Paper Dfl 120; ISBN 90-6980-1345.

The Sanskrit word "*kāvya*" applied to *Caṅkam* poetry in the title of the book immediately reveals the author's intention. With the help of his excellent knowledge of Sanskrit, Prakrit, and Tamil, he wants to demonstrate that old Tamil *Caṅkam* poetry is indebted to Sanskrit literature and not an autonomous creation, as usually assumed. In order to uphold this claim he shifts the date of *Caṅkam* poetry to the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth century, while Tamil and Western experts date it between the first and the seventh centuries. Since he admits that the poetic convention of the five *tiṇais* (landscapes) of *Caṅkam* poetry has no Sanskrit counterpart, he has to play down its importance and show that the heroes of the love poems are not well-matched couples and that there are no truly happy unions. According to him, the village in the poems is a dull place inhabited by poor and foolish people. His personal opinion that "the best in ancient Tamil love poetry is sadness" might be accepted, but this does not mean that the heroes are not well-matched. In real life we desire unperturbed happiness, but in literature we enjoy dramatic events. The great lovers of world literature like Romeo and Juliet, Tristan and Isolde, or Leyla and Mecnun would not have become famous if they had lived happily ever after. Compared to their tragedies, the *Caṅkam* lovers' longing and temporary separation are negligible woes. The husband's infidelity in the poems also does not prove that the couple was not well-matched when they married, nor that the woman was foolish in marrying such a man. Since society permitted the husband to have concubines, she had no other choice than to forgive him over and over again after a little sulking.

As proof of the villagers' poverty, Tieken cites the fact that the husband had to travel to acquire wealth, leaving his wife. However, there is no sign that she went begging during his absence, and the acquired wealth was meant to raise his prestige. Other evidence of the villagers' poverty is that they have to work (e.g., they have to cook for themselves), rather than rely on servants, though servants also are mentioned in the poems. In *Kuṟuntokai* 167 the wife smiles when her husband tells her he likes the dish she prepared with great difficulty, since in her native home she never cooked. This poem is certainly no example of true poverty, but seems to depict a happily married couple.

In order to support his new chronology, Tieken has to solve the problem of the archaic language in the poems normally held to be the oldest of the *Caṅkam* corpus. He proposes that orally composing bards in these works are only personae. The poets who actually wrote the poems and simultaneously compiled the anthologies did so in accordance with the ninth-