widely known throughout central India. (The essay is reprinted from J. Flueckiger's book *Gender and Genre in the Folklore of Middle India,* 1996.) In one place (Chhattisgarh) the epic serves as one of the regional identification marks with emphasis on the female character's role (Candaini); in another province (Uttar Pradesh) the epic serves as a caste identification mark, with emphasis on the martial role of Canaini's male partner Loriki.

The other paper about Indian culture, by W S. Sax, does not deal with epic as such but describes (on a rather primary level) the worship in a remote Himalayan valley of certain epic heroes as divinities. The curiosity consists in that the worshiped epic heroes are the villains of the *Mahābhārata* epic and not its positive characters. The author does not offer analyses of the phenomenon. The phenomenon belongs more to the field of the phenomenology of religion than to studies on the epic. By the way, from the author's description it seems that these *Mahābhārata* characters are worshiped because they are feared; the worship is meant to appease them. As is well known, such fear-motivated worship is widespread and not unique to India. (Such worship is especially prevalent in South India; see WHITEHEAD 1988).

Two more papers will interest the readers of *Asian Folklore Studies.* Susan Slyomovics and D. F. Reynolds deal with the performance and wider social aspects of the same Egyptian oral epic, which both of them have studied in the field. Although nominally in Africa, Egypt, as is well known, is culturally part of the Mediterranean and Asia. Both authors offer valuable insights into the mechanisms of social use of the epic in regard to the exploits and battles of the Saudian tribe of Banū Hilāl. Their contributions are valuable to the study of the performance aspect of oral literature.

The other ten papers in the volume, except for one about the relation of nineteenth-century South Slavic literatures to the oral literatures of that area, discuss their points in relation to European works, especially Homeric works or those written or authored in ancient and medieval times.

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1988 *The village gods of South India.* New Delhi: Asian Educational Services. (1921 reprint)

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YEN PING-CHIU. *Proverbs, Songs, Epic Narratives, Folktales of East Asia: Selected Texts, Parallel Analysis and Comparative Approach.* New York: University Press of America, Inc., 1997.

The material for this book was mainly taken from China, Japan, Korea, and Mongolia. The first part discusses proverbs (in a very broad sense) from only this area, and demonstrates how the author's choice of subject was based on external and inner conditions. The author also divides the proverbs into two categories. One category is used for older proverbs that in most cases use analogies from different livelihoods (e.g., nomadism, hunting, fishing, and agriculture) with the aim of expressing a message. The other category mainly deals with "ethical well-being" and derives its origin from the teaching of Confucius and later philosophers, such as Laotzu. The influence of this second category of proverbs can be found also outside China.

After a detailed introduction to the musical tradition of the countries mentioned above,

the second chapter principally deals with songs. Yen applies an "ethnopoetic analysis," by which she means that poetry and songs may be interpreted "as nature images used by ethnic groups to express indigenous concerns and poetic feelings achieved by observing visual objects in the natural world" and assumes that a set of four "nature images" with their "associated sentiments" occurs within the whole area. Yen then goes into particulars about the song traditions in the countries in question using concepts from Albert B. Lord's and Milman Parry's "oral formulaic theory," especially as they have been used by C. H. Wang.

In the third chapter Yen treats a "story- or thematic-pattern" that is called "The Hero Returning in Disguise" and in the West can be found in the *Odyssey,* in Serbo-Croatian epic songs like "Marko and Nina," and in the Turk epic about Bamsi Beyrek. Later on she reproduces summaries of versions of one Tibetan, one Japanese, and one Chinese epic, from which it might be concluded that they can be reduced to the same recurrent series of (extremely simplified) motifs, as in the Western epics just mentioned: "Union—Absence—Devastation—Return—Disguise—Recognition—Reunion." Then Yen more closely analyzes a series of motifs and ethnopoetic composition in the epics in question.

The fourth chapter, "Folktales Analyzed through Story-Patterns of 'The Hero Returning with Cure(s)': A Search for Latent Meanings," deals with a "uniform story-pattern" as did the third chapter. Finally, in the last part of the book, Yen cites *Structural Anthropology* by Lévi-Strauss: "There are. . . very few structural laws.... [The tales and myths] can be reduced to a small number of simple types if we can abstract... a few elementary functions"; and she tries in the same way to reduce "a number of tales to types and patterns of essential story elements." It is certainly true that, if you reduce folktales to summaries that go into two or three printed lines in a book, the thesis about the few patterns is acceptable, but it means that you rough-hew the contents of the individual texts or tale types (in the classical meaning, i.e., types in the catalogues of Aarne and Thompson) to totally meaningless sequences. They imply in Yen's analyses that completely unrelated and unconnected motifs are included in the same detail of a pattern. This can be illustrated by the following two motifs that are both shortened to the word "Travel" in the pattern: "Two poor peasants, the one living by lies and deceit, the other following truth and honesty, disputed about their ways of life and agreed to ask three people whom they met to settle the dispute"; and "A king had seven daughters of whom the seventh believed in God and offended the king. The king expelled her from his palace and sent her to a jungle." When you bring such summaries together it is as if you compare apple pips with pear pips without taking into consideration that they have been surrounded by peel and pulp. In this case, the first tale belongs to tale type AT 613, "Truth and Falsehood," whereas the second one is a somewhat fragmentary version of tale type AT 432, "The Prince as Bird." These two types have not one single motif in common.

To this Yen adds the assertion that "The consistent sequence of the essential elements in tales of diverse cultural regions and ethnic backgrounds points to a religious phenomenon manifested in two basic forms: 1) shamanic initiation and professional debut; 2) professional shamanistic practices." These are ideas that I must reject as utterly unreasonable hypotheses that imitate Mircea Eliade and that are completely unrealistic. To insert shamanistic technique et cetera as "essential story elements" in the tales dealt with in this book (175–219) is, with one exception, to put it politely, groundless. Just the pattern element "Travel" gets this commentary: "My caption word 'Travel'... means the shaman as a healer pursuing an ecstatic journey can penetrate the underworld and rise to the sky."

On page 203 the author mentions the elements "Mutilation of Eyes/Hand" and "Restoration of Lost Eyes/Hand" following Eliade:

> Eliade speaks of dismemberment as a manifestation of a shamanic initiation rite. But

> when the dismemberment or mutilation of physical parts is absent from all the above tales of geographically and ethnically diverse regions, what could be a valid interpretation answerable to the two uniquely missing elements in nine tales and story-patterns? My interpretation is: The absence of the elements Mutilation and Restoration means that the Hero or Heroine has already undergone an initiation rite (not narrated in the individual pieces presented) — there is no need to stress and present the initiatory aspect(s) of the shaman profession in these tales. The contents of these tales represent the shaman or shamaness performing skills in his or her professional career.

Is Yen not aware of the fact that her valiant effort to make use of the interpretation model of Eliade brings her far away from all probability? Interpreting the Manchu tale (193) that explicitly deals with a shamaness in such a way may be acceptable, but in no other text in the book does something or somebody shaman-like appear. Folktale study of this kind reminds me of the "mythosophic" analyses of 150 years ago, that considerably deteriorated the credibility of folkloristics among other scholars.

One more example of these strange parallels. On page 209 Yen deals with the motif in which the hero in the tales of type AT 613 (as also in the type AT 461, "Three Hairs from the Devil's Beard," not at all related to AT 613) learns how to create a spring in an arid area. This Yen compares with the technique of dowsing and connects it with the fact that "shamanic practices arose when digging wells" in the areas where the three tales, containing this motif, were collected (namely, Limousin [!], South China, and Korea) because in these areas "water is scarce." Any book about dowsing could have told the author that the method is also known in countries where there is a lot of water.

It is a very welcome trend that scholars have begun to write comparative studies of folktales in East Asia and also to compare them with tales from other areas, both East and West. Here an immense field of research opens up. It is important, however, that scholars not let their imagination run riot, but rely on theorists who are proper folklorists.

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JAPAN

BRAZELL, KAREN, Editor. *Traditional Japanese Theater: An Anthology of Plays.* New York, Columbia University Press, 1998. xiv + 562 pages. Illustrations, glossary, bibliography. Hardcover US$57.00/£39.95; ISBN 0-231-10872-9.

Recent books in English on traditional Japanese theater—noh, kyōgen, kabuki, and puppet drama—have provided interested readers with more detailed and specific information than ever before on the history of its development, aspects of performance and, of course, translations of plays. *Traditional Japanese Theater,* as the title suggests, attempts to bring together all of these in one convenient volume that may best be described as a teaching anthology. It contains translations of twenty-nine plays (in whole or in part) by seventeen translators, and five separate essays. The book is ideal for the informed general reader and as a general textbook for undergraduate courses on Japanese theater. Even academic nonspecialists will find here much of value.

The anthology is divided into three parts, each of which begins with an explanatory