

VAN ESTERIK, PENNY, editor. *Women of Southeast Asia*. Monograph Series on Southeast Asia, Occasional Paper No. 17, revised edition. DeKalb, IL: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, 1996. xiv + 229 pages. Illustrations, figures, tables, appendix, bibliography, index. Paper US\$15.00; ISBN 1-877979-17-1.

This is a new printing of the volume which was first published in 1982 under the same title. A new preface and an addendum to the bibliography are added in order to acknowledge new directions in the study of gender and Southeast Asian women. Apart from the introduction, there are eight essays: three essays on Thailand, two on the Philippines, one on Malaysia, one on Java, and one on Southeast Asia in general. The question whether women in Southeast Asia enjoy high status underlies the analyses in all the papers.

In the essay entitled "Buddhism, Sex-Roles and the Thai Economy," A. Thomas Kirsch investigates how Buddhist values influence individuals' attitudes toward economic activities and the patterning of sex-roles in Thai society. Thai women seem to be freely engaged in economic activities. This is not necessarily because they enjoy high status but rather because women as well as economic endeavors are devalued in the Theravada Buddhist ideology. Thai women are seen as being on a level similar to Chinese immigrants, ethnic minorities. The economic activities they engage in are ones from which Thai men, who hold the political power legitimized by Buddhism, detach themselves.

The essay "Women Meditation Teachers in Thailand," by John Van Esterik discusses two women meditation leaders in Bangkok. While in Thai society, based on the ideology of Theravada Buddhism, women are expected to be more concerned with worldly affairs than with otherworldly goals, these women meditation leaders detach themselves from the former and are engaged in the latter by teaching their interpretation of the Buddhist canon and meditation methods not only to the laity but also to monks. Buddhism as a result of the advent of political ideologies such as communism, democracy, and development, has become less relevant today as a major ideological force in the eyes of some elite groups, but rational interpretations of the Buddhist canon are still seen as significant for coping with modern social situations among those who seek rational explanations. These women meditation teachers have found their sociological niches in modern urban contexts.

Penny Van Esterik, the editor of this volume, introduces three rural Thai women in her essay, "Lay Women in Theravada Buddhism." She points out that there is substantial variation of Thai women's lives although they are all based on Buddhist ideology, which denies monkhood to women and links them with fertility, nurturance, and attachment.

Carol C. Laderman's essay "Putting Malay Women in Their Place," discusses Malay women in Islamic village society on the east coast of the Malay Peninsula. She demonstrates that fear of supernatural and social sanctions and internalization of the stereotype of proper behavior for a Malay woman combine effectively to keep women in their position, which is in the middle of a world continuum, from low status to high.

Valerie L. Hull's essay, "Women in Java's Rural Middle Class: Progress or Regress?" points out that while the expansion of education has contributed to the emergence of a new rural middle class among the Javanese in Indonesia, rural middle-class women have been losing their independence, freedom and self-reliance, because they are still featured as belonging to a lower-class socially and domestically vis à vis men.

M. Christina Blanc Szaton's essay "Women and Men in Iloilo, Philippines: 1903-1970." draws our attention to historical changes of gender relationships in the Philippines. She suggests that notwithstanding the long influence of machismo under the Spanish rule, the national census in 1970 indicates that upper-class women enjoy relative

gender equality in the Philippines. However, women in the Philippines also, Szaton argues, devote most of their energies to the undervalued sectors of private domestic labor and reproduction.

In his essay "Sexual Roles in the Philippines: The Ambiguous Cebuana," Clark D. Neher discusses paradoxical gender relationships in the Philippines. Although in terms of education and professional positions women outnumber men, both men and women are ready to accept machismo and feminismo as their gender ideology. He warns that policy makers must acknowledge the complex sex-role images before invoking any social policies.

In the final essay, "Sexual Status in Southeast Asia: Comparative Perspectives on Women, Agriculture and Political Organization," Robert L. Winzeler draws on MURDOCK's *Ethnographic Atlas* (1967), HRAF, and other comprehensive researches in an attempt to posit Southeast Asian cases in comparative frameworks of analysis. He suggests that intensive and comparative studies within Southeast Asia based on not only ethnographical but also historical and archeological data are significant.

We should appreciate the contribution which this volume has made to rethinking the wide-spread impressionistic view that women in Southeast Asia enjoy high status. The volume as a whole succeeds in suggesting that gender relationships are diverse even within Southeast Asia and that while women in Southeast Asia tend to occupy a higher position than women in other areas, they are characterized as inferior to men. Some cases indicate that Western influence through colonialization and modernization has made women in Southeast Asia lose their privilege and high status.

The volume is rather unique and exceptional as a collection of papers on women and gender in that half of the authors are men. This may be related to the orientation of not only the volume but also the contributors. Although at the time of the first printing of the volume in 1982 many works on gender theories were available, no paper in this volume, except for Laderman's brief reference to ORTNER's paper (1974), refers to those works. While feminist anthropologists (usually women motivated by criticism of gender injustice in their own society) have been eager to elaborate general theories on gender, this volume and its contributors are concerned with area studies and the application of gender theories to policy making and developmental programs. The contributors' profiles are not incorporated, but we can infer this orientation from their works in the bibliography and the addendum. The contributors study the ethnic majorities of respective nation-states, the Thai in Thailand, the Malay in Malaysia, the Javanese in Indonesia, or draw on a local people in order to discuss the nation in general (e.g., two papers on the Philippines). These featured topics reflect or channel the orientation of the volume.

In conclusion I would like to put forward a few brief criticisms. Although the volume is entitled "Women in Southeast Asia," the distribution of the areas that it covers is apparently imbalanced and what is meant by the category "Southeast Asia" is not sufficiently discussed. While some contributors vaguely posit Southeast Asia in relation to India and East Asia, especially China, its relations to Oceania remain outside the contributors' scope. These deficiencies are critical since the volume, while not provocative theoretically, aims at enriching area studies. The volume also lacks coherence. It is partly because each essay seems to have been written without due attention to the other essays. Since they are interrelated in terms of topics, essays engaged in discussion with each other would have made the volume more coherent. Three photographs of women appear in the middle of the volume totally without context and with uninformative captions. The incorporation of them in this way decreases the coherence of the volume. Furthermore the addendum to the bibliography also contributes to the lack of coherence. According to the editor, it was added to the new printing in order to acknowledge new directions in the concerned study. However, criteria for selecting items

seem to be inconsistent. The addendum, for example, includes my article published in Japanese in *Minken*. Personally I feel very happy finding my article there, but as a reviewer I doubt whether it should have been included in the limited space available.

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INDIA

HENRY, EDWARD O. *Chant the Names of God: Music and Culture in Bhojpuri-Speaking India*. San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1988. xviii + 318 pages. B/w photographs, bibliography, appendices (transliteration of songs, musical notations), index. Paper, n.p.; ISBN 0-916304-79-5.

In a large part of the Indian State of Bihar and in the eastern regions of Uttar Pradesh, the local language is Bhojpuri. It is related to Hindi from which it is—according to the author of the book under consideration—“as different as Spanish is from French.” During several visits between 1968 and 1978 Edward O. Henry recorded music in the Bhojpuri-speaking area and did “research of folk music and related culture.” The outcome is a collection of 110 songs which have been transcribed, translated, and interpreted in their respective cultural contexts.

According to Henry, “general ethnographic information of wide scope is fundamental to this kind of study.” And provided the researcher has this general information, the study of song lyrics leads to a more thorough understanding of the other culture “because people sing things they don’t say.”

This concept—to combine a general anthropological study with the study of folk music and interpret the one through the other—seems to have worked well in certain parts of the book, and best, I feel, in the chapter on “Women’s songs of the wedding.” Several marriage rituals are described in detail. In the wedding songs much of the “un-said” comes to the surface: the feelings of the young bride, particularly her embarrassment to be at the center of public attention; her brother’s feeling of loss when his sister is carried away by a stranger; the antagonism between the two families and the ambivalence of affinal relationships, which become most evident when the author describes the ritualized groom-worship and the contemporaneously sung groom-abuse. A number of the song examples in the book belong to the group of so-called *galis*, songs that often contain obscene insults and which are sung by the women when men from outside the family are present.

Lively representations, e.g., of a *sagun* singing session, give the reader the feeling of participating and watching the women. During the wedding procedures, the women conduct a series of rituals, and for many of them the wedding songs do contribute meanings. The songs