

only about thirty-five titles by American poets and novelists on the Vietnam War.

Nonetheless, *Studies on Vietnamese Language and Literature* is a handy reference tool at a time when academics and students alike are starting to look beyond economic reports. Even economists should take note of the fact that Nguyen Dinh Tham has managed to locate sixty-five studies and translations in ten different languages of the *Tale of Kieu*, an early nineteenth-century epic poem by Nguyen Du that continues to entrance Vietnamese, young and old. This bibliography will be quite helpful not only to Vietnam specialists but to comparative linguists, folklorists, and cultural studies analysts as well. Teachers developing courses on Asian literature in translation will also find many valuable leads.

David G. MARR  
Australian National University  
Canberra

### LAOS

DAMRONG TAYANIN. *Being Kammu: My Village, My Life*. Southeast Asia Program Series 14. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program Publications, 1994. 138 pages. Photographs, line drawings, tables, bibliography, glossary. Paper US\$14.00; ISBN 0-87727-130-5.

This is the second book by Damrong Tayanin on aspects of his native Kammu culture, following *Hunting and Fishing in a Kammu Village* (1991). (The Kammu [Khmu] are a highland minority group that inhabits the mountainous area of northwestern Laos and the adjacent territories of Thailand and China.) Born in 1938, the author spent the first thirty-five years of his life in upper Laos, mostly in his native village Rmcùal, Namtha Province. Having gained a regional reputation as a Kammu storyteller, he was recruited by Kristina Lindell for a Thailand-based project of the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies. From 1974 onwards research grants have permitted Damrong to live in Sweden and the USA as a co-researcher in various anthropological projects.

Taking advantage of his double qualification as a native Kammu and an experienced anthropological researcher, Damrong is attempting to preserve as much as he can of the traditional culture of his people in written form. As he himself puts it:

I . . . was born and grew up in a Kammu village and I can therefore give an inside picture of it. It is my intention to describe the village and life there as we ourselves see it, and I try to let the readers understand what we ourselves regard as important. (9-10)

The book is neither professional ethnography nor autobiography. It does not provide a systematic and comprehensive description of Kammu culture, and anthropological terminology is largely absent (notable exceptions are the terms *totem* and *shaman*, whose meaning nevertheless remains somewhat vague). Nor does it attempt to give an ordered account of the author's life. It consists rather of Damrong's reminiscences of his youth in Rmcùal; occasional anecdotal narrative adds color to the otherwise neutral and impersonal description. The book resembles an oral account in style; redundancies are frequent, although here this is not a negative factor, since it serves to stress those features of Kammu culture that are salient in the author's view.

The text is divided into four chapters: "The Village and the House," "Village Economy," "Life inside the Village," and "Life outside the Village." This partition reflects the organizing principle of the book: the categories of personal experience of a former village member, not the conventional categories of ethnographic description. There are, for example, no chapters on social structure or religion, as these are merely aspects of everyday life

and not separate domains of knowledge and action. Thus in chapter 1 the Kammu's lineage-based social organization and asymmetric marriage alliances are shown through the traditionally prescribed interaction of categories of relatives during the construction of a new house. Similarly, the village's tutelary spirits and their cult are discussed since they profoundly affect the rhythms of village life, and interesting aspects of the ancestor cult are revealed by the conventional way of receiving strangers. None of these themes, however, is dealt with exhaustively.

This is also true of chapter 2, which is focused largely on swidden cultivation. Not much detail is provided on agricultural technique; in fact, it is not until the end of chapter 3 that we learn — quite incidentally — that the Kammu “grow both wet rice and dry rice” (97). On the other hand, chapter 2 contains very vivid descriptions (partly anecdotal) of the physical as well as the social aspects of work in the fields, which convey to the reader a unique feeling of what it must be like to be a Kammu swidden farmer.

Chapter 3 devotes much space to the social division of labor, but again the highlights — in my opinion — are the descriptions of two of the author's personal experiences: “My Family Was in Debt” and “The Ancestors Help a Patient.” These tell more about the circumstances of Kammu life than any anthropological monograph possibly could.

The final chapter, “Life outside the Village,” consists entirely of personal recollections. Two stories relate the vicissitudes of prolonged wage work among the lowland Lao, one giving an interesting description of an annual expedition from Rmcul to the Chinese border to trade for salt. These fascinating accounts (plus the one that relates how Damrong came to work for the Scandinavian project) make the reader understand why the author was regarded as an expert storyteller among his people.

I enjoyed this book very much and learned quite a bit from it. Yet it is difficult to form a definitive judgment concerning its value as a scientific source. Certainly the text cannot be held to be a representative view “from the inside” of Kammu culture — the days are past when personal narratives by natives were automatically and somewhat naively regarded as representative pictures of their respective cultures. More than two decades of anthropological research on the use and misuse of autobiographical sources has produced ample evidence that there is no such thing as the “native's point of view.” People everywhere have their own, idiosyncratic views, formed within a certain culturally transmitted cognitive frame. Their accounts do indeed offer a glimpse of the inside of their culture, but it is by no means the “true” picture of the inside.

Furthermore, the present text contains things that arouse a certain skepticism. For example, how authentic is Damrong's view that in former times the Kammu lived in darkness and silence since they could not read nor write and had no radios or newspapers (38)? Can the author's critical judgment concerning certain child-nursing practices of Kammu mothers (89) be regarded as “local knowledge”? Who is “we” when Damrong states “As we say,” then proceeds to cite a proverb in what is obviously the *Laotian* language (96)? One also expects that Damrong's accounts were influenced by his two years of wage work in a Luang Prabang shop and by his almost continuous residence in Thailand, Sweden, and the U.S.A. since 1973.

Unfortunately, the book is totally silent about the circumstances of its production (at Cornell University during the author's stay as a resident fellow in the Southeast Asia Program). In which language was the original text recorded, and who translated it into English? What kind of control had the author over the final, published product? (As Damrong notes himself [99], he “can . . . read and write . . . [only] a little English.”)

This is an important and valuable book in that it offers the reader an insider's version of Kammu culture (one of several possible versions, of course!). It shows an alternative — and also theoretically interesting — way of arranging and transmitting ethnographic information, and it conveys knowledge outside the range of a conventional scientific monograph by a foreign researcher. Yet the book cannot (and is probably not meant to) replace such professional monographs. It should be regarded as a supplement of a kind that is unfortunately

lacking for almost all the other minority cultures of Southeast Asia.

#### REFERENCE CITED

DAMRONG, Tayanin, and Kristina LINDELL

1991 *Hunting and fishing in a Kammu village*. Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, Studies on Asian Topics 14. London: Curzon Press.

Roland MISCHUNG  
University of Hamburg  
Hamburg, Germany

#### PHILIPPINES

WEIN, CLEMENS. *Berinareu: The Religious Epic of the Tirurais*. Manila: Divine Word Publications, 1989. 228 pages. Appendices of characters and topographical names, references. Paper, n.p.; ISBN 971-510-040-6.

The religious epic *Berinareu* is known by all Tirurais and is regarded by them as one of their most precious traditions. The text published here is the transcription of a ten-hour performance by a Tiruray singer that was tape-recorded by the author.

The Tirurais, a cultural minority living in the Philippines and numbering about 25,000, live in the southwest of the island of Mindanao. Formerly they were a nomadic people who subsisted on hunting, fishing, and gathering, but nowadays they are sedentary farmers planting mainly upland rice and tubers. Lacking a writing system, they previously transmitted their traditions from generation to generation by word of mouth. Since the introduction of schools, however, illiteracy is gradually being pushed back.

The preeminent supernatural being of the *Berinareu* is Fulu-fulu, whose name means "highest supreme being." This female being transcends all other supernatural beings. Next in rank to Fulu-fulu are the three *lundaan*: Menggerayur, Menemandai, and Fengonien. Menggerayur is the sister of Fulu-fulu; Menemandai is the creator of the world, humankind, and the means of livelihood; Fengonien sometimes appears to be the same as Fulu-fulu. These three supernaturals are sometimes petitioned for help.

Still lower in rank are the *meginaleu*. These are either spirits or powerful nonhumans of an ambivalent character. The good ones aid and subordinate themselves to the four higher supernatural beings. The bad ones test shamans, trying to prevent them and their people from going to the other world. Next in line come human beings: the shamans and the ordinary people. Shamans, endowed with great powers and special religious paraphernalia, mediate between the supernatural beings and the ordinary people. The shamans live on earth with ordinary people, but can go anywhere they want and negotiate as equals with the supernatural beings.

The hero of *Berinareu* is Lengkuos, a powerful shaman who is given the mission of taking his suffering people to the other world, a goal he finally achieves by negotiating with supernatural beings. The story's plot is as follows.

The residence of Lengkuos is crowded with thousands of his Tiruray followers, who inquire from their leader about their final happiness. A kidnapping has occurred: Seangkaien, the future spouse of Lengkuos, was taken. Lengkuos saves her from her abductors, but she becomes aware that Lengkuos is planning to marry Linauan Kadeg, another woman.

Lengkuos goes to the residence of Fulu-fulu to get the golden thread with eight knots, which possesses special powers. The thread has been promised to Seangkaien so that she might help the Tirurais, but Lengkuos attempts to use it as a bride-price for Linauan Kadeg.

When Seangkaien goes to Fulu-fulu for the thread with eight knots she is infuriated to hear that it has been given to Lengkuos. She then decides to kill all of Lengkuos's followers. She succeeds in deceiving Linauan Kadeg and obtains the thread with eight knots, then