

WATSON, C. W. and ROY ELLEN, editors. *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. viii + 222 pages. Map, indices of authors and subjects. Cloth US\$32.00; ISBN 0-8248-1515-7.

The present volume presents a collection of papers on the topic of witchcraft and sorcery in Southeast Asia. The papers were originally presented at the 1989 Canterbury International Symposium on Southeast Asian Studies, a gathering that was organized in order to see whether an understanding could be reached on "the bases for variation and continuity of [sorcery and witchcraft] in the region," to determine whether "there is anything culturally distinctive about such mystical knowledge and its manifestations in the Southeast Asian context," and to assess "what contribution their study might make to our understanding of comparable phenomena globally" (vii). These are ambitious goals, toward which significant, if partial, progress was made. The papers actually cover only a limited area of Southeast Asia: six consider various parts of Indonesia, three deal with Thailand, and one takes up Malaysia. Although one can understand why certain regions were left out, the omission of places like the Philippines is quite curious.

In order to show how witchcraft and sorcery fit into the various societies under discussion, an attempt is made to contextualize these phenomena within the societies' respective worldviews. On this particular point I found myself somewhat frustrated, since none of the studies attempts to demonstrate any overall unity for the Southeast Asian region as a whole. I do not feel that this is an idle criticism, for it involves the old question of what defines Southeast Asia as an area. Can, in other words, one describe a cosmological unity that tells us what Southeast Asia is? What would the significance of this unity be?

Roy Ellen's excellent introduction to the volume goes a long way toward pulling the papers together and raises a number of interesting points. He notes, for example, that in Southeast Asia sorcery is an aspect of the more general practice of court magic, with both involving the manipulation of cosmic forces. The manipulation does not seem to differ very much regardless of whether it is performed for good or for ill, leading Nitibaskara (123) and Slaats and Portier (137) to observe that the usual distinction between black and white magic does not seem to apply in the cases they discuss. Ellen observes that the livelihood these practitioners make for their services may be quite modest; this is true enough, though certain exceptions have recently been reported in the Indonesian press.

One reason that the subject of witchcraft and sorcery in Southeast Asia has been so little studied — especially in comparison with Africa — is that they remain legally invisible in the countries of this region (an issue discussed at length in the introduction and in Slaats and Portier). Although the practice of witchcraft and sorcery flourishes, people who feel victimized by them have little recourse to the law. As far as the legal system is concerned such things do not exist. Things seem to be changing, however: Slaats and Portier point out that the authorities in Indonesia are now taking these practices more seriously (142), as are those in Westernized, educated urban Thailand (29, 31). How witchcraft and sorcery can be prosecuted in a court of law without doing violence to the rules of evidence remains to be seen; in any event, as Watson shows, earlier efforts to control these practices through ridicule have proved less than successful.

Interestingly, belief in witchcraft is far less prevalent in Southeast Asia than is belief in sorcery. This is reflected in the fact that only two papers in the collection (Tannenbaum's and Forth's) deal solely with witchcraft (Durrenberger considers both topics). Their data make it clear that in the three societies under study — the Lisu and the Shan in Thailand and the Nage in eastern Indonesia — the witch is seen as evil. The Nage believe them to be naturally evil, while the Shan and the Lisu see them as people not fully in control of themselves. These peoples, each in its own way, see witches as the inverse of society, as "beyond the logic of social relations" (48). The position of the witch is therefore an ambiguo-

ous one, beyond the control of the community (63). In fact, as Tannenbaum writes, the only way a person "infected" with witchhood can alleviate the problem is by becoming a Buddhist cleric and closely observing the precepts—in other words, by withdrawing from secular community life and engaging in activities that develop spirituality and self-control (68–69).

The remaining papers all deal with sorcery. Society's sorcerers are often members of groups marginal to the main community; even among peoples like the Javanese and Malays, where the sorcerer *can* belong to the community, he or she tends to remain marginal.

In nearly all of the societies discussed (urban Thai, Lisu, Nuauulu, Javanese, Malay, and Gayo), sorcery is linked in some way with interpersonal tensions and anxieties. Ellen (7) observes that sorcerers do not necessarily work with malign intent, and that sorcery is everywhere said (except among the Nuauulu) to be practiced in defense against perceived magical attacks. The Gayo, for example, "returned spirits to their senders [causing] the sender to fall ill" (183).

In every society, with one exception, sorcery is a learned, voluntary skill. The exception is Nuauulu society, where misfortune is generally attributed not to sorcery but to the activities of ancestral spirits; since sorcery is said to be inherited in the male line (61), it too is derived from the powers of the ancestors. All sorcerers were said to use spiritual forces, with only the urban Thais, the Malays, and the Javanese employing supplementary poisons, herbs, and other substances. Sadly, the authors generally do not further identify the spiritual powers involved (nature spirits and ancestral spirits, though often related, tend to be separate categories that occasionally blend).

Space does not permit me to say all I would like about this interesting book or the individual papers. I hope that these studies will stimulate similar investigations in the future, leading perhaps to a general Southeast Asian cosmology.

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JAPAN

BACHNIK, JANE M. and CHARLES J. QUINN, Jr., editors. *Situated Meaning: Inside and Outside in Japanese Self, Society, and Language*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. xviii + 309 pages. Figures, tables, index. Paper US\$16.95; ISBN 0-691-01538-4. Hardcover US\$49.50; ISBN 0-691-06965-4.

Situated Meaning is one of the most significant and impressive collections on Japanese culture to appear recently outside of Japan. Central to this volume is the notion of *uchi* (inside) and *soto* (outside), a major theme in Japanese studies. The book's approach is eloquently summarized by Jane Bachnik in her introduction. Bachnik contends that *uchi* and *soto* are linked, respectively, with self and society, the mutual relation of which is basic to human ontology. Objecting to Cartesian dualism, she proposes *uchi-soto* as a "cline" (continuum) on which the two spheres are defined in relation to each other in constantly shifting social relations. This view is based on the observation that what is *uchi* in one context is *soto* in another, and vice versa. (Another way of regarding this fluidity would be to conceive of *uchi* and *soto* as forming concentric circles with shifting boundaries.)

To clarify this point, Bachnik follows Charles Pierce's notion of indexical (pragmatic) meaning as distinguished from referential (semiotic) meaning. Indexes are contextual; they depend on the context for generating meaning. Similarly, *uchi-soto* is not a fixed social framework but rather a scale or an axis along which relationships may be indexed by degrees