

## BOOK REVIEWS

### GENERAL

BONNEFOY, YVES, compiler. *Asian Mythologies*. Translated under the direction of Wendy Doniger. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1993. xxiii+376 pages. Illustrations, index. Paper US \$27.00; ISBN 0-226-06456-5.

In 1981 Yves BONNEFOY, professor of comparative poetics at the Collège de France, published his two-volume *Dictionnaire des mythologies et des religions des sociétés traditionnelles et du monde antique*, with entries primarily by Francophone scholars associated with the École Pratique des Hautes Études in Paris. This dictionary was translated under the direction of Wendy Doniger, Mircea Eliade Professor at the Divinity School of Chicago, and published in 1991 in a two-volume hardcover edition entitled *Mythologies*. The English translation is based upon Bonnefoy's original but differs in one important respect: the organization of the entries. In the French edition the entries appeared in alphabetical order, while in the English translation a geographical ordering was adopted. In 1993 a four-volume paperback edition was issued that, in effect, presents the various sections of *Mythologies* as separate volumes: *Roman and European Mythologies*; *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*; *American, African, and Old European Mythologies*; and the volume under review, *Asian Mythologies*. These English editions have made Bonnefoy's work available to a wider circle of readers, and the reordering of the material based on geography has enhanced its utility.

*Asian Mythologies* begins with prefaces by Doniger and Bonnefoy, followed by entries in four parts. Part 1, common also to the three companion volumes, contains introductory articles by Mircea Eliade, Marcel Detienne, André Leroi-Gourhan, and François-René Picon. The remaining three parts consist of geographical or conceptual groupings of the contributions, with part 2 devoted to South Asia, Iran, and Buddhism; part 3 to Southeast Asia; and part 4 to East Asia and Inner Asia. Each individual part is also structured geographically, and in such a way that articles of a more general nature are followed by those on more specialized topics. The entries are by a variety of scholars, from leaders in their fields to those still young when they authored their articles. The part 2 entries on India were written by Charles Malamoud, Jacques Scheuer, Madeleine Biardeau, and Marie-Louise Reiniche; those on Iran by Jean Varenne; and those on Buddhism by Rolf A. Stein. The part 3 articles on mainland Southeast Asia (with its strong Indian influence) are by Solange Thierry; those on insular Southeast Asia by Denys Lombard and Christian Pelras; those on the highlands of Madagascar by Paul Ottino; those on indigenous Indochina by Jacques Dournes; and those on Vietnam by Tu Chuon Le Oc Mach. The part 4 contributions on China are by Maxime Kaltenmark; those on Japan by Hartmut O. Rotermond, François Macé, and Laurence Berthier (now Caillet); those on Korea by Li Ogg; those on Tibet by Per Kvaerne. Turkish and Mongolian issues are discussed by Jean-Paul Roux, Caucasian issues by Georges Charachidzé, Siberian issues by Laurence Delaby, and Finno-Ugrian issues by Jean-Luc Moreau.

The geographical arrangement is on the whole quite successful in providing us with a picture of the mythological and religious world of each area. There are, however, some minor inconsistencies. In part 3, for instance, insular Southeast Asia is sandwiched between the Indian-influenced civilizations of mainland Southeast Asia and those of the indigenous Indochinese. The entry "Gods and Myths of Abkhaz, the Cherkess, and the Ubykh of the Northern Caucasus" would fit better in the section on the Celts, Norse, Slavs, Caucasians, and their neighbors in the *American, African, and Old European Mythologies* volume than in the present volume on Asia.

The present collection is more voluminous than GRIMAL's *Mythologies* (1963), an earlier French compendium on world mythologies, enabling it to present wider coverage and more detailed discussions. Southeast Asia is neglected in the Grimal book, for example, but is given the treatment it deserves in Bonnefoy's volume. Despite the present compendium's greater volume, however, it is not an encyclopedic work like Grimal's, since the selection and presentation of material was left to the discretion of the individual authors. The authors are not generally content with mere description of the myths and rituals, and present some interpretation as well, either their own or that current at the time. The influence of Lévi-Strauss and Dumézil is considerably less than one might expect; Varenne is rather exceptional in citing Dumézil twice in his contributions on Iranian mythology (Amesh Spenta [112] and Mithra [118]). Nevertheless, structuralist thinking in one form or another constitutes the foundation of most of the articles. Biarreau, for instance, describes her stance in treating Hindu mythologies as follows: "We will sacrifice exhaustiveness in favor of intelligibility, positing both a deep unity beneath the diversity and the possibility of grasping this unity through an appropriate method" (34).

Some of the authors present a rather balanced picture of the mythology and religion of the area assigned to them. This is the case with Solange Thierry (mainland Southeast Asia), Denys Lombard and Christian Pelras (insular Southeast Asia), Maxime Kaltenmark (China), Per Kvaerne (Tibet), and Jean-Paul Roux (Turkey and Mongolia). The approaches adopted by the respective authors differ, however, with Lombard and Pelras concentrating on recent studies by various scholars, Kaltenmark running mainly on the rails laid by Marcel Granet, and Roux presenting a useful summary of his own voluminous research results. Certain of the authors show a greater leaning toward religion than mythology, such as Laurence Delaby, who discusses such subjects as shamanism and conceptions of the soul in Siberia. Rotermond stresses *yama-bushi* mountain ascetics, *tengu* demons, and other favorite themes of his in Japanese popular religion.

The present volume includes articles on groups little studied outside of France, such as the Madagascans (Paul Ottino) and Proto-Indochinese tribes (Jacques Dournes), providing information on their religion and mythology otherwise difficult to obtain in English. Certain of the articles are filled with stimulating suggestions for further research, such as Rolf Stein's "The Guardian of the Gate" and François Macé's "Japanese Conceptions of the Afterlife." All in all this volume testifies to the high standard of French scholarship in the areas of mythology and religion.

A few minor lapses and inaccuracies have found their way into this valuable work. In the list of contributors (xviii), the initials P.O. (Paul Ottino) are missing for the article on Madagascar; Ottino is (or was?) "directeur d'études cumulant à l'École Pratique des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Professeur au Centre Universitaire de la Réunion (Madagascar)," according to the original French edition (vol. 1, xx). Kvaerne's articles on Tibet are revised versions that cite works (Stein 1972, Karmay 1987, and Heffler 1977) not used in the original French, but these works are not

mentioned in the bibliographies accompanying the present articles. On page 361 (“Finno-Ugrian Myths and Rituals”) mention is made of “shamanic customs,” but as this is “costume chamanique” in French the English should be “shamanic costumes.” Such shortcomings, however, do not seriously detract from the overall high quality of this volume. *Asian Mythologies* will remain a standard reference work in this field of study for decades to come.

## REFERENCES CITED

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Taryō ŌBAYASHI

Tokyo Woman's Christian University

Tokyo

EVANS, GRANT, editor. *Asia's Cultural Mosaic: An Anthropological Introduction*. Singapore: Prentice Hall, Simon & Schuster (Asia), 1993. xi+436 pages. Illustrations, figures, bibliography, glossary, index. Paper US\$19.50; ISBN 0-13-052812-9.

Every now and then a textbook crosses one's desk that is so good that the reviewer wonders if he can possibly do it justice. *Asia's Cultural Mosaic: An Anthropological Introduction* is such a book. Designed as a core text for undergraduate courses on Asia, the collection is an up-to-date, even-quality, well-organized, open-ended, and scholarly propaedeutic to Asia, anthropology, and ethics. It is a tribute to the academic standards, expertise, and approach to fieldwork of editor Grant Evans and his twelve contributors that the promise implicit in their book's title has been fulfilled; indeed, their successful endeavor could just as well have been entitled *Anthropology's Cultural Mosaic: An Asian Introduction*.

This very accessible but demanding book will appeal to a readership beyond that it was originally designed for. The text is inviting, challenging, and interactive. It does not represent a body of top-down knowledge to be loaded into blank minds but rather an anthropological perspective, a way of seeing, an intersubjectivity. The reader is involved in the knowledge-making process through constant bifurcations of “stark moral choices” and inescapable questionings of assumptions.

Each chapter follows a familiar anthropological trope, e.g., the hominid fossil record, language, kinship, economies, dominance, gender roles, cosmology, the field, the future. The chapters contain numerous references for interested readers to pursue, and feature a multitude of well-placed and well-chosen photographs to break the text and stimulate interest.

The patrilineal ancestors of the anthropological discourse community are met as they arise in context: Darwin, Dubois, Dart, Durkheim, Tylor, Weber, Frazer, Boas, Malinowski, Sapir, Radcliffe-Brown, Evans-Pritchard, Firth, Kroeber, Lévi-Strauss, Whorf, Leach, Geertz, Said, and Margaret Mead. The reader is also introduced to