

actually learned the technique of dry rice cultivation in Laos itself, apparently from Lao and Kammu neighbors [53]).

Author, translator, and publisher are all to be thanked for ensuring the continued availability of this important work.

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Anthony R. WALKER  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus

#### THAILAND

PREMCHIT, SOMMAI and AMPHAY DORE. *The Lan Na Twelve-Month Traditions*. Chiang Mai: Faculty of Social Sciences, Chiang Mai University, 1992. xx + 339 pages. Maps, figures, photographic plates, bibliography. Soft cover Baht 375.00.

This is a useful, though poorly edited, work on the annual ritual cycle of the Tai Yuan (Khon Muang), or Northern Thai, people, with special reference to the ritual observances within the city of Chiang Mai, and with some comparative materials from the Burmese Shan State, Laos, Sipsong Panna, and Northeast Thailand. Thai specialists will probably want to own a copy of this book, particularly for reference purposes, though they will doubtless regret the absence of an index.

The book begins with a couple of introductory chapters on, respectively, the history and the culture of the Tai Yuan, then delves into the details of the annual ritual cycle in the following twelve chapters, one for each month of the year. Here the reader will find a wealth of historical and ethnographic documentation, but very limited analysis.

Overall the book is a difficult read, precisely because of the lack of an explanatory framework and a very inadequate background to the sociology and worldview of the Yuan people. There is a mass of historical detail, with many paragraphs reading like this:

From 1292, under Mangrai's reign, Mongolian influence increased: Northern Lan Na and Sip Song Panna formed the Cheli; and from 1315 through 1382, the Ba Bai (Lan Na) became a Mongolian tributary. It is believed that during this period and despite the unprecedented development of the Sinhalese Buddhism from 1369, Mahayana had been reactive in Lan Na.

But nowhere is there an adequate treatment of the socioreligious (Buddhist, animist, Brahmanic) and economic (mostly irrigated rice farming) context of the ritual observances that are being described.

It is a pity too that the book was not better edited to eliminate its many errors of grammar and spelling. Nonetheless, we must be grateful for this useful addition (including bibliography and glossary) to the English-language literature on the Tai Yuan.

Anthony R. WALKER  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus

### *BANGLADESH*

ZAMAN, NIAZ. *Princess Kalabati and Other Tales*. Illustrations by Shamarukh Mohiuddin. Dhaka: University Press Limited, 1994. 104 pages. 12 full-page color illustrations. Hardcover TK. 250; ISBN 984-05-1245-5.

Bengal folktales were already being collected and published long before Bengal was divided into Indian West Bengal and independent Bangladesh. The twelve folktales in this volume were selected by Niaz Zaman (associate professor of English at the University of Dhaka) from a larger unpublished collection of folktales in the possession of the Bangla Academy. ZAMAN earlier published a twelve-story collection under the title *Animal Tales of Bangladesh* (1985) — the present volume presents the same tales (with two replaced by new stories more suitable for children), with the express intention of teaching English-speaking children something about the land and culture of Bangladesh.

The language is a simple English, adapted to the Indian standard. It is doubtful, however, whether the book will convey to outsiders a correct picture of present-day Bangladesh. Whereas the great majority of Bangladeshis are now Muslim and in the grip of a strong Islamic fundamentalism, the tales in *Princess Kalabati* tell of Bengal as it was at the time of the medieval Hindu culture, in which Brahmins and Rajputs held power; in which spirits, demons, and fairies were believed to reside in caves, rivers, wells, and trees; and in which animals could speak and often showed more intelligence than human beings.

The author of the book admits that the primary criterion for the selection of the folktales was not their educational value, but their use of animals (or human beings in animal disguise) as the protagonists. If readers of this book expect — and this expectation has been raised by the author herself — that it is especially adapted for the information and enjoyment of children, they are in for a disappointment. The author simply retells her twelve stories, one after the other, as in her first volume. There is no information on or explanation of the folktales, nor any concluding chapter; all the reader is offered is a meager one-page introduction. The author does not even inform us why she selected these particular stories for publication, or who collected them. She does say, though, that not all are from Bangladesh: one is from Assam and another from the Hindu *Panchatantra*. (I can attest that at least one more is also from Assam: "Eri and Suhagi," published in a more complete version by J. BOROOAH [1955].)

But what the author has failed to do, the publisher has attempted to achieve: the margins of each page are attractively decorated with simple drawings of the flora, fauna, and rural life of Bangladesh, and twelve full-page pictures are presented in a style appealing to children.

This volume does not significantly differ from other folktale publications all over India. As far as folklore is concerned, Bangladesh is still a part of India, and of an India in which Hinduism is still the dominant culture and religion. Given the hold of Islam over the thoughts and beliefs of present-day Bangladeshis, it will not be long before all reminders of the old Bengal culture and folklore have faded away.