

And then follows what, to this reviewer's mind, is the most telling observation of all:

Even in America people still have the sense that they are still in a camp. The old folks have it the most. In this country, because of the language barrier, because of the different culture, they feel they are locked in and have no way out.

For himself, the youthful informant concludes, "In America, I have to learn how to get out of the camp psychology."

Part 3, "Life in America" (the source of the extracts with which I began this review), is doubtless the most interesting from the specialist's viewpoint. It includes, besides many vivid words by Hmong youth themselves, a perceptive essay, "Caught between Cultures," by the principal coordinator for this volume, Dave Moore, who remarks, among other things, that

the [Hmong] elders do not always understand the inherent contradiction between the American student-life with its demands on a person's time and energy, and the "good Hmong" life-style with its [own special] demands. The result is that the Hmong youth constantly finds himself in situations in which he has to decide whether to respond as a Hmong or as an American. (122)

Insofar as this insightful little book helps young Hmong face this dilemma with patience and sympathy, rather than with haste and anger, it will surely have fulfilled its manifest function. But it is for its latent function—its provision of a vivid glimpse into the lives of the youth of an uprooted Southeast Asian mountain people—that I recommend *A Free People* to the readers of this scholarly journal.

Anthony R. WALKER  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, Ohio

#### THAILAND

GESICK, LORRAINE M. *In the Land of Lady White Blood: Southern Thailand and the Meaning of History*. Studies on Southeast Asia 18. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University, 1995. viii + 98 pages. Maps, illustrations, appendix, bibliography, index. Paper US\$12.00; ISBN 0-87727-717-6.

"This book is an attempt to uncover, through the examination of a group of manuscripts and the communities that preserved them, the historical sensibility of rural southern Thailand from the seventeenth century to the present," says Gesick, who calls this attempt "ethnographic history" (1).

In order to make clear what this "historical sensibility" is, Gesick examines two kinds of texts found among these manuscripts. In chapter 3 she turns her attention to the text of an official decree (*tamra*) by the king of Ayutthaya in 1698 to the Pa Kaeo monks of Bang Kaeo in Phatthalung. According to Gesick, the *tamra* were regarded as receptacles of the king's voice, and thus as something sacred. The *tamra* of 1698 emerges as an extremely complex document, for within it is the 1610 *tamra* of the former king, within which is another text (a letter by Phra Phanarat), within which are *tamra* of even earlier kings, within which are

further texts (original *tamra* and lists)" (28). This complex structure was adopted in order to curb the actions of local officials who were attempting to violate an agreement (expressed in the original *tamra*) between the king of Ayutthaya, the monastery, and the monastery's supporting community that no taxes would be levied on the people and lands granted to the religious institution. By citing earlier *tamra* for support the author sought to increase the text's authority. The monastery and its supporting community preserved the *tamra* to help maintain the position of Buddhism and, as a result, to make merit for themselves.

In chapter 4 Gesick examines the other type of text: narrative histories written in the southern region of Thailand that concern monasteries and their communities. These were composed to supplement the content of the official decree issued by the king of Ayutthaya. The histories contain remembrances and records of the ancestors who kept the *tamra*. The essential points of the histories were as follows. Each community centered on a monastery was exempted from taxes, and was thus independent and autonomous in nature. Each also claimed its own ordination lineage, different from that of other communities, and disputed the orthodoxy of other communities' ordinations. A state of tension consequently existed between these groups, indicating the involvement of southern Thai Buddhism in the twelfth- to fifteenth-century disputes that arose in Southeast Asian Theravāda Buddhism over the purity of the ordination. Gesick does not believe that these disputes were too serious, however. Her analysis of a certain story handed down in the area indicates that each community, while voicing its claims and disputing those of others, recognized itself as part of the larger Buddhist community and saw its own history in terms of that of Buddhism. Consequently, Gesick presumes that the people of southern Thailand basically acknowledged the indispensability of each ordination lineage to southern Thai Buddhism as a whole. Gesick points, in other words, to the existence in southern Thailand of a way of thinking that recognized the possibility of a plurality of histories, or, in other words, of a multivocal historical discourse.

In chapter 5 Gesick, relying primarily on an examination of the story of Lady White Blood, points out that history (i.e., the action of one's ancestors) in rural southern Thailand was narrated in connection with specific places and landscapes. She then notes that the story of Lady White Blood, found throughout the area, exists in a range of variants so wide and individualistic as to suggest an original state of plurality rather than the structuralist model of an ur-story that gradually evolved into a variety of forms. Here I wish to point out that all the stories of Lady White Blood found in southern Thailand are closely related to Buddhism.

In both the second and the last chapter Gesick describes the process through which the older discourse of a multivocal history that permeated the manuscripts was subsequently ignored and lost around the turn of the century, when King Chulalongkorn and Prince Damrong promoted the notion of a uniform, rational, and scientific "national history" (the historical discourse of the Western nation-state). Gesick then examines the later fate of the manuscripts, describing how, when they were first taken to Bangkok earlier in this century, they were forced into the framework of Thai national history. The interest in local culture and regional history first seen among Thai historians in the 1960s surged in the 1980s, but most Thai historians still consider it natural to base Thai historical scholarship on the Western model and thus do not examine the actual history of the old manuscripts. It has therefore been left to Gesick to take up this task.

As one who has been studying Thai Theravāda Buddhism for a number of years, I wish to add a few personal observations, mainly in connection with Buddhism. First, I find Gesick's work to be very important, for it provides clues for studying the history of Theravāda Buddhism in southern Thailand. Second, I would like to suggest that a multivocal historical discourse has something in common with the concept and worldview of the *maṇḍala* in esoteric Buddhism, for both display a similar capacity to embrace variety and diversity. The

question of whether other areas of Thailand had a similar pluralistic discourse is one that begs further research. Finally, I would imagine that the monasteries and associated communities that kept the manuscripts were centers of pilgrimage. James PRUESS points out that in the Ayutthaya period taxes were not levied on the members of communities who supported monastic pilgrimage centers (1974, 65–66). The communities analyzed by Gesick show a very similar character, I believe.

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MORIBE Hajime  
Nanzan University  
Nagoya

INDIA

RAHEJA, GLORIA GOODWIN and ANN GRODZINS GOLD. *Listen to the Heron's Words: Reimagining Gender and Kinship in North India*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994. xxxvii + 234 pages. Illustrations, appendix, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$45.00; ISBN 0-520-08370-9. Paper US\$17.00; ISBN 0-520-08371-7.

*Listen to the Heron's Words* not only offers elegant ethnographic descriptions and comprehensive analyses of women's speech genres in North India but also illustrates how South Asian oral tradition transcends cultural authority and transforms into a medium of resistance. Motivated by a feminist desire to counter colonial and ethnographic representations of female submissiveness and passivity in the face of male dominance, the authors uncover subversive and critical messages in North Indian women's performances. Drawing on research conducted in rural Rajasthan (Gold) and Uttar Pradesh (Raheja), the authors stress the agency of North Indian women while addressing questions of representation, gender, sexuality, and kinship. In their endeavor, Raheja and Gold draw on a wide variety of women's expressive genres: songs sung at marriage and birth ceremonies, dancing songs, ritual stories, and informal personal narratives. The poetic forms that Raheja and Gold translate show how women compose poignant responses to North Indian gender and kinship ideology through explicit references to female sexuality valorized in lewd humor and the blurring of social roles in lyrical performances of multiply positioned voices.

The book opens with a theoretical introduction by Raheja, in which she situates an analysis of women's speech genres within broader issues concerning the relationships between language, gender, and power. She locates the account within current anthropological attempts to rethink the idea of culture, elucidating a conception of culture as competing discourses that attend to the experiences of positioned subjects. In this chapter she also makes a provocative attempt to align herself and Gold (who seek out the "hidden transcripts" implicit in women's speech and song) with the subaltern historian, who attempts to recover the voices of those whose agency has been denied.

Gold's first chapter provides an examination of Rajasthani women's wedding and birth songs, proposing that the lyrics offer an alternative perspective on women's sexuality and