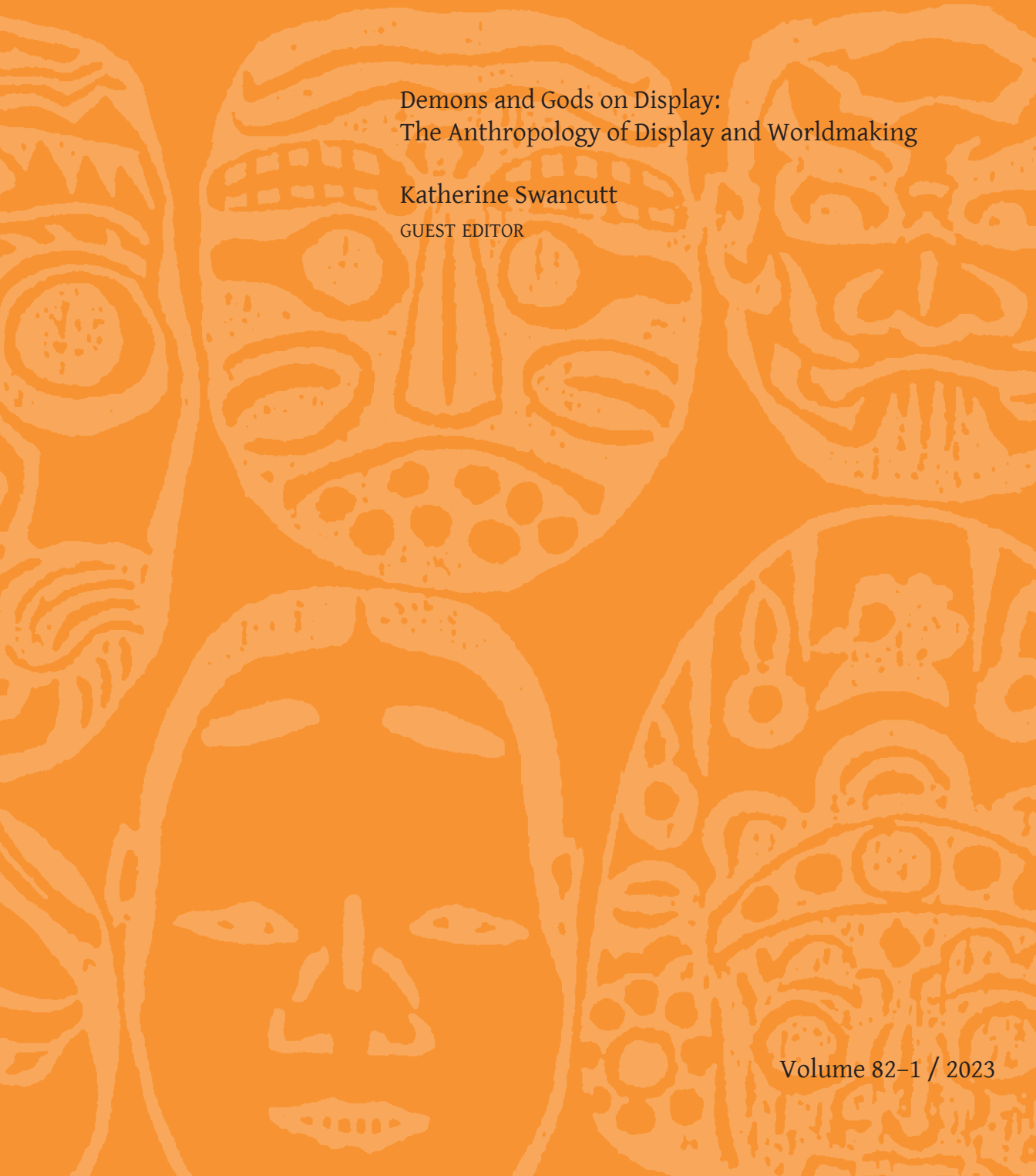
Asian Ethnology



Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking

Katherine Swancutt
GUEST EDITOR

Volume 82–1 / 2023

Asian Ethnology

Asian Ethnology (ISSN 1882–6865) is produced and published by the Anthropological Institute, Nanzan University, Nagoya, Japan, in cooperation with Boston University's Department of Religion. *Asian Ethnology* is an open access journal and all back numbers may be viewed through the journal's website http://asianethnology.org/
Print copies of the journal may be purchased through Amazon.com.

Asian Ethnology publishes formal essays and analyses, research reports, and critical book reviews relating to a wide range of topical categories, including

- narratives, performances, and other forms of cultural representation
- popular religious concepts
- vernacular approaches to health and healing
- local ecological/environmental knowledge
- collective memory and uses of the past
- cultural transformations in diaspora
- transnational flows
- material culture
- museology
- visual culture

Editorial correspondence should be addressed to

Editors, *Asian Ethnology*
18 Yamazato-cho, Showa-ku
Nagoya 466–8673, Japan

TEL: (81) 52–832–3111
email: dorman@nanzan-u.ac.jp

INFORMATION FOR CONTRIBUTORS

Manuscript submissions should be sent as email attachments, in Microsoft Word to the editors. The format should primarly follow the Chicago Manual of Style (17th edition).

For more detailed information, please download the Asian Ethnology Manuscript Submission and Style Guide at https://asianethnology.org/page/submissions

Please be advised that all submissions accepted for publication are subject to editorial modification. Submitted manuscripts should not have been published elsewhere nor currently be under consideration by another journal. Unsolicited book reviews will be considered, though there is no guarantee of publication. In principle, book reviews should not exceed 1,500 words.

Asian Ethnology is indexed in: Arts & Humanities Citation Index; ATLA Religion Database; Bibliography of Asian Studies; Current Contents/Arts & Humanities; International Bibliography of Book Reviews; International Bibliography of Periodical Literature; International Bibliography of the Social Sciences; Religion Index One Periodicals; and Scopus.

Asian Ethnology

Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023

REVIEWS

General

China

Japan

Benjamin Dorman
Nanzan University

Frank J. Korom
Boston University

Editors' Note

The COVID-19 pandemic is finally settling down, and we wish to thank all our readers and contributors for their patience during this time. We also wish to once again extend our heartfelt sympathies to colleagues and families who may have suffered during this period.

We are pleased to present the latest volume of *Asian Ethnology*. Although the journal does not generally publish non-Roman scripts, in consultation with the guest editor, Katherine Swancutt, we have agreed to publish Nuosu script and Chinese characters for her Guest Editor's Introduction and her article included in the volume. She outlines the essential reasons for their inclusion in her notes to the Introduction as well as in her article, respectively. As with all special issues, this one is very much a collective effort, so we thank the guest editor and all the contributors for their efforts. The anonymous evaluators also deserve recognition for their hard work in providing the feedback for the revisions.

We are also introducing a new change on the journal website. Although we have included only the individual articles of an issue on the website for download in the past, we will be making entire future issues available for download in their entirety. Individual articles will still be downloadable as well. The PDF of each issue will be hyperlinked so that readers can jump to specific articles listed in the table of contents. We believe this will make the reading of special issues in particular easier. Back numbers of entire issues dating back to *Asian Ethnology* 79-1 have also been included.

Lastly, we are pleased to announce a new publication titled *Asian Journeys: Conversations with Editors, Fieldworkers, and Scholars*, which is an interactive e-book based on transcripts taken from selected interviews conducted for *Asian Ethnology Podcast* between 2017 and 2021. Direct transcripts of conversations do not necessarily translate the same way in print as oral conversations do. Therefore, these conversations have been edited to conform with grammatical conventions but also maintain the spirit of the speakers' original intentions in the conversation. The materials that

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 1-2

Return to Table of Contents

appear in the e-book are essentially versions that were recorded at the time. This publication is also available for download on the website, on a page next to "Podcast."

Katherine Swancutt
King's College London

Guest Editor's Introduction

Demons and Gods on Display

The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking

Across Asia, display is central to the creative process of worldmaking. This issue introduces "the anthropology of display" as a subfield in its own right that illuminates how people, spirits, gods, demons, ghosts, and their ritual props, offerings, effigies, or emblems manifest their powers and presence. A display is not just the static or unmoving framing of an image that invites contemplation rather than participation; it may unfold as one of the many moving, lively, and performative parts in a public event that generates deeply recursive imaginaries of the cosmos. Bringing the anthropology of religion, magic, exchange, art, and performance into conversation with museum anthropology, this issue shows that display is often used to push at the edges of the social and cosmic order. People and spirits may harness the power of display to steer rituals, ceremonies, and festivals in their preferred directions. Displays of this sort may unleash moral ideals of cultural heritage and plurality, aesthetic deliberations about the future, and new anthropological ways of envisioning the human and otherworldly.

Keywords: anthropology of display—demons—gods—recursivity—spirits—worldmaking

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 3–23

Return to Table of Contents

Display is a multifaceted thing that often leads to powerful acts of worldmaking. While a display is typically envisioned as the static or unmoving framing of an image that invites contemplation rather than participation, it may also unfold as one of the many moving, lively, and performative parts in a public event. Many displays—including those in museums, exhibitions, parades, rituals, ceremonies, festivals, and public protests—generate deeply recursive imaginaries of the cosmos. Perhaps nowhere, though, are displays more likely to transform the world than in the hands of the people, spirits, gods, ghosts, or demons that set out to steer the social and cosmic order in their preferred direction.

Ever since Bronislaw Malinowski's (1922) *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, anthropologists have pinned analyses of major ceremonial events, such as the decorating of canoe prow-boards for the *kula* ceremonial circuit or the amassing of yams for exchange in the Trobriand Islands, on ethnographies that feature elements of display. Similarly, studies of ethnographic representation and the ways in which museums have shaped Euro-American notions of other societies have often revolved around the display of artifacts in glass cabinets or the display of people, cultures, and crafts in live exhibitions and fairs. Display has been a common theme in anthropology, museology, art history, folklore, and communication studies, where it has thrown light on the magical powers of words, people, and things (Tambiah 1968); verbal and communicative competence (Bauman 1984, 2004); the politics of presentation and performance (Davis 1986; Kondo 2018); the making of folklife festivals (Bauman and Sawin 1991; Kurin 1991, 1997; Mathur 2007); the emotional impact of resonance, wonder, and the weird (Greenblatt 1991; Foster 2009); the enchantment of technology (Gell 1992); the accumulation of prestige (Goode 1992; Stoeltje 1992); events that model, mirror, or re-present the world (Handelman 1998); display events in which "actions and objects are invested with meaning and values are put 'on display'" (Abrahams 1981, cited in Bauman 2004, 58); the aesthetics of ritual performance (Hobart and Kapferer 2005); the relationships between concepts and things (Henare, Holbraad, and Wastell 2007); and even the production of montage (Suhr and Willerslev 2013). Yet in these and other works, display has frequently served as an analytical springboard to other themes, rather than being taken as a subject of inquiry in its own right.

Throughout this issue, the contributors introduce "the anthropology of display" as a new way of conceptualizing what display is and does. They use the term "display"

to call attention to how people and spirits manifest their powers and presence in a variety of rituals, ceremonies, festivals, parades, public events, theatrical performances, artworks, and things. Their analyses start from displays that take the form of "spectacles" that may move audiences in emotive, bodily, and sensorial ways (Manning 1992, 293). Each contributor shows ethnographically—and, in the case of Heonik Kwon and Jun Hwan Park, also historically—that people often display demons, gods, ghosts, or spirits as well as their "ritual props," offerings, effigies, or emblems with the purpose of accomplishing a worldmaking act (Kendall 2008, 155). The contributors, then, propose that display may underpin new imaginaries of the cosmos in such diverse settings as a shamanic ceremony or temple festival (Laurel Kendall and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati), a procession of demon puppets (Kari Telle), the parade of a goddess (Teri Silvio), the strange company of gods and flags on an altar (Janet Alison Hoskins), the unfurling of a flag that evokes moral ideals of cultural heritage and plurality (Heonik Kwon and Jun Hwan Park), and the competitions, pageants, and rituals held to repay debts to a sky god (Katherine Swancutt).

The term "display" entered the English lexicon via the Old French *despleier* in the thirteenth century, where it carried connotations of "unfurling" the information printed on a banner. Before that, it can be traced to the Latin *displicare*, which in antiquity meant "to scatter" or "to disperse" but gained the meaning "to unfold" by the Middle Ages. These earlier semantic contours have been formative to the multiple meanings that display has acquired in contemporary usage, where it alternately evokes the sense of being "unfurled," "scattered," "dispersed," "unfolded," "revealed," "exhibited," or "exposed to view" among spectators. As a polysemic term that pivots around making certain things visible while leaving others invisible, display conjures up the staging of an image, thing, being, or event that may captivate, enthrall, awe, and exceed its own bounds.

This raises the question of how any given display might underpin a public event, ritual, or spectacle. Don Handelman distinguishes between rituals and spectacles on the grounds that "spectacles reflect their cultural worlds. The internal logics of spectacles taxonomize and present; those of ritual, taxonomize and transform" (1997, 387–88). He adds that a "spectacle connotes something exhibited to the view, a show, a pageant, a sight, marked by great display, dramatic and thrilling" (ibid., 394). Stephan Feuchtwang takes the related view that a "'spectacle' is not just display. It is also specular, a mirroring by means of the extraordinary—be it of another civilization, or a past that is distant, or for that matter an artistic creation that is meant to disturb and interest" (2011, 74). Spectacles may therefore mirror the "invisible authority" of powerful beings, whether they are people, spirits, gods, demons, or ghosts, in ways that reflect the order of those worlds (ibid., 65). Both Handelman's "internal logics of events" and Feuchtwang's "invisible authority" resonate with many of the analyses set forth in this issue. However, the contributors show that "ritual," "display," and "spectacle" are ultimately elastic concepts that are different in degree but not necessarily different in kind.

Many displays in fact "model," "mirror," or "re-present" the social and cosmic order in Handelman's (1998) sense of the term. Handelman parses public events into three types, starting with "the event-that-presents" or "mirrors" the lived-in world

through displays of "form, fantasy, and power derive[d] directly from [the] social order" (ibid., xxix). Echoing Michel Foucault, he observes that the event that mirrors the social order draws attention to, strengthens, and supports it (ibid., 4, see also 78). In contrast, he proposes that the "event-that-models" the lived-in world reframes (or potentially reshapes) it according to a new vision that "emerges from human creativity as a world unto itself" (ibid., xxvi). But the "event-that-re-presents" goes further by modeling and mirroring the world in ways that "may raise possibilities, questions, perhaps doubts, about the legitimacy or validity of social forms" (ibid., 49, see also 5). Illustrative examples of the event-that-represents can be found in the Smithsonian live exhibitions organized by Richard Kurin (1991, 1997) in the summer of 1985, called "Aditi: A Celebration of Life" and "Mela! An Indian Fair." These exhibitions were filled with display, ritual, and spectacle, which "included daily Ganesha (*puja*) worship; the mud-sculpting of a Durga mother-goddess icon, the construction of a paper-and-bamboo *taziya* (memorial) for the Muslim Muharram festival, and the building and burning of forty-foot-high effigies of the demon king Ravana and his allies" (Kurin 1991, 319). Originally, these (and other) displays at the Smithsonian were meant to reflect the everyday life, artisanry, and social and cosmic orders of India. However, many Indian participants not only modeled the exhibition themes after their own visions of India but also performed them in ways that mirrored the "Smithsonian interest in exemplary practitioners" who display the worldmaking qualities of Smithsonian exhibitions (ibid., 327). The upshot was that many participants used display to steer the social and cosmic orders of the Smithsonian exhibitions—and arguably of India itself—in their preferred direction. Here, many Indian "performers reframed the representation of a performance into a performance itself, regulations notwithstanding" (Karp 1991, 285).

Each contributor to this issue shows that creative displays like this often "push at the edges" of a given ontology (Kendall and Ariati 2020, 284). These spectacles may blur—or even collapse—the ontological distinctions between the display of demons, gods, ghosts, and spirits, on the one hand, and their presences and powers, on the other. Displays of this sort commonly unfold as "public enactments, in their multiplicitous and varied forms, [that] are not only patterned by social forces—they have been part of the very building and challenging of social relations" all along (Davis 1986, 5). Especially creative displays may therefore lead to a worldmaking act that "evokes sociopolitical transformation and [yet] the impossibility of escaping power, history, and culture" (Kondo 2018, 29). The displays discussed by the contributors to this issue tend to go a step further by unsettling the cosmopolitics, cosmic relations, and "logics or organization of design" that are specific to particular events (Handelman 1998, xi; see also Handelman 2004, 4, 12–17).

Before pressing ahead with my discussion of display and worldmaking, though, I need to position it more firmly within the anthropological literature. I start by considering the importance of display in Malinowski's (1922) classic study of the Trobriand Islands and in Alfred Gell's (1992) study of how technologies enchant spectators. Display is a leitmotif in each of these works but is often subsumed under related themes—and notably exchange or magic—that are credited with its worldmaking qualities. Then I turn to the role of display in museums, exhibitions,

and fairs, which have long shaped conceptualizations of the world within and beyond the exhibition space. Here, I point to how display underpins diverse aspects of social life, such as the desire to accumulate goods and status, the dazzling and unsettling qualities of sensory stimulation, the discursive strategies of representation, and the effort to model, mirror, or re-present the world. This brings me to a discussion of the transformative powers, collective imaginaries, and elastic qualities of display (all recurrent themes in this issue) that people, spirits, gods, demons, and other beings may use to steer the social and cosmic orders. Finally, I discuss how the contributors' articles point toward the conceptual value of an anthropology of display and conclude with further reflections upon it.

Toward an anthropology of display

Like many anthropological themes, the power of display has been illustrated both ethnographically and through museum exhibitions. Some ethnographies of display have come to be viewed as anthropological exemplars, because they are "hyper-descriptive in that they described the world in more real terms than the world could do itself, and certainly did this job better than other examples would" (Højer and Bandak 2015, 4). Both the *kula* ceremonial circuit and the Victorian-styled thematic exhibitions at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford, England are anthropological exemplars of display, which, however, are best known for having illuminated other things: competitive exchanges and magical technologies in the case of the *kula*, and a highly contentious mode of ethnographic representation in the case of the Pitt Rivers Museum. My intention in discussing these kinds of exemplars is not to revise the well-known findings of Malinowski or the vast scholarship on the art of anthropology, museum studies, and materiality. I set out to show instead how the heuristic of display brings a variety of worldmaking acts into focus.

As Malinowski remarked in his early twentieth-century landmark study of the Trobriand Islands, the "display" of newly finished canoes produces "a big, aesthetic effect" (1922, 146–47). Display is one of his key logical operators, which is put on equal footing with other concepts in his ethnographic theory, such as gift-giving or the technology of magic. Malinowski notes that "the right to display food" (ibid., 169) commonly underpins the presentation of yams (the archipelago's dietary staple) in storehouses especially devoted to them, while food displays are central to important events, such as the distribution of yams at *sagali* mortuary rites (ibid., 170), the ceremonial preparation of pigs for a feast (ibid., 171), or the *vilamalya* magic performed after a harvest to weaken the islanders' appetites so that they will leave as many yams as possible displayed in their storehouses until they rot (ibid., 169). Accordingly, he suggests that Trobrianders accumulate foods because they are "prompted by the desire of display and enhancement of social prestige through possession of wealth" (ibid., 169). However, this accumulation of food is also offset "by the fundamental human impulse to display, to share, to bestow" (ibid., 175).

Revealingly, display was so important to gifting and exchange in the Trobriands that Malinowski equated "the very fundamental motive of giving" to "the vanity of a display of possession and power" (ibid., 174–75). This point is echoed in *The Sexual*

Lives of Savages, where Malinowski shows that in "*kayasa* (competitive displays)" (1932, 32)—many of which involve food gifting—"there is always a pronouncement of public opinion on the result. So that the most successful or energetic participants also receive an individual share of glory" (ibid., 214). In *Coral Gardens and Their Magic*, the vanity of display underscores the entangled relationship between "the fear of sorcery and the desire for [the] display of wealth" (Malinowski 1965, 243). Here, the desire to display may dangerously provoke "the undercurrent of malice, suspicion and envy which accompanies the display of food and the show of praise and admiration, [and] may lead to bitter personal animosity, which in the Trobriands usually leads to attempts to kill by witchcraft" (ibid., 181). Outcompeting another person with a robust display, then, may attract the risk of personal harm, while failing to please the spirits of the dead with an insufficient display may cause offended spirits to unleash their invisible authority throughout the year ahead. Trobrianders therefore seek to please the dead with opulent displays at key ceremonial events, such as harvesttime when the spirits "return to the village to be present at the dancing and feasting, to enjoy the display of food and valuables, and to partake of the cooked dishes of food which are exposed to them" (ibid., 47–48). During the festive season of Milamala, the spirits also receive food and "a display of valuables, *vaygu'a*, to gladden their eyes" (ibid., 468).

Opulent displays also feature in more recent anthropological classics, such as Gell's study on the technology of enchantment, which evokes Malinowski's discussion of the canoe prow-boards used for the *kula* (1992, 62n2). But here, display is tied to more than personal vanity or the effort to please spirits. Display is shown to be a product of virtuosic skill and the worldmaking powers needed to create a spectacle in the first place. Trobrianders invest painstakingly skilled labor into carving and decorating prow-boards, so that when their canoes reach the shores of *kula* trading partners they will dazzle them into giving away their most famous *kula* shell armbands and necklaces, which are tokens of social status (ibid., 44–46). Virtuosic carving skills enthrall Trobrianders, for whom "the canoe-board is not dazzling as a physical object, but as a display of artistry explicable only in magical terms, something which has been produced by magical means" (ibid., 46). Drawing on George Simmel's discussion of value in *The Philosophy of Money*, Gell suggests that the value of any given thing is scaled against the difficulty in producing or obtaining it, while a virtuosic display of its production is needed to enchant spectators (ibid., 47–48, 58). Yet the technology of enchantment falls short of explaining, for instance, the allure of "the wonder-cabinets of the Renaissance," which contained items that often exceeded "the artistic skill of human makers: technical skill could indeed arouse curiosity, but so could nautilus shells, ostrich eggs, uncannily large (or small) bones, stuffed crocodiles, and fossils" (Greenblatt 1991, 50). Given that spectators may succumb to displays of virtuosic skill, displays of natural wonders, and even displays of the slippage between them (such as the virtuosic skill in obtaining a whole collection of natural wonders), the question arises: how might the worldmaking powers of any kind of display come to be envisioned and propagated?

The dazzle of display

Centuries after cabinets of curiosity became fashionable in Europe, a new way of displaying and vicariously engaging with other societies emerged in late-nineteenth-century museums and expositions, such as the world's fairs (Jenkins 1994, 248). Visitors to early museums and exhibitions encountered displays that were built on the then-current "scientific methods of visualization to understand and exhibit other people—to show them not as they were to themselves but as they were to be pictured or displayed according to museum techniques" (ibid., 267–68). Framed within Euro-American imaginaries, these displays mirrored the sentiments of many of their spectators, who were not often empathetic or even apparently aware of the differences between anthropological displays and theatrical reenactments (ibid., 258–60). These early displays shaped how many spectators have since come to envision exhibited "objects, facts, and images," other societies, the science behind taxonomies, and what they may mean for the spectator's own place in the world (ibid., 248).

There is in fact a whole theater to museums, exhibitions, expositions, and fairs that has encouraged people to approach displays as worldmaking acts. Many spectators have succumbed to this theater, although not all do. Saloni Mathur's study of the November 1885 promotional campaign of Liberty & Co. in London, for example, reveals the racialized landscapes, ideologies, and practices underpinning the display of a "village" of living Indian artisans, which was roundly critiqued by the Indian press for "the barbarous act of displaying human beings" (2007, 41). Despite this debacle, a year later, the Colonial and Indian Exposition of 1886 was staged inside of a recreated Indian palace in London that featured "historical subjects of ethnographic display [who also] refused the terms of their representations" (ibid., 54). Trilokya Nath Mukharji, an upper-caste Bengali who attended this exposition, inverted the spectator's gaze and "transformed the exhibition into a space where 'Europe,' too, could be observed" by standing behind the Europeans who spoke about Indians on display so that he could better hear the points of view of the "*natives of England*" (ibid., 69; emphasis in the original).

Spectators may encounter ironies like this at every level of display, down to the brief labels added to museum items and the fuller descriptions of them communicated through audio tours, films, video screens, and other mediums (Baxandall 1991). Displaying labeled items "makes a collection physically and conceptually manageable" but often downscales the scope of ethnographic representation to "a context in which objects exist devoid of their history" (Jenkins 1994, 268). Here, the onus is left on the spectator "to explore the historically and culturally contingent relationships between the discursive and the nondiscursive"—or the explicit and implicit—qualities of any given display and to imaginatively reconstruct the world(s) from which it has come (ibid., 270). Many spectators, then, end up envisioning exhibits through the lens of a "metonymic displacement" in which one or more labeled items stands for an entire society (ibid., 268–69).

Metonymic displacement is experienced not only through ethnographic forms of display but in museum spaces dedicated to art. The "white cube" rooms that display modern art immerse spectators in a sensorially, materially, and conceptually blank canvas that is meant "to define itself as a zero-degree status of display, the mythic

fundament out of which art objects emerge *ex nihilo*" (Drobnick 2005, 267). Designed to evoke a clinical space, the white cube filters out the unwanted sensory stimulation of, for example, the dazzlingly "enticing window displays" of department stores that historically emerged with museums, exhibitions, and world fairs (Howes 2005, 284). By blocking out the dazzle of the everyday world, the white cube encourages visitors to feel "isolated from social and political cares, protected from history, contingency and accountability" so that they may surrender to metonymic displacement, the enchantment of the white cube's technology, and its logics of design (Drobnick 2005, 267). Subverting the dazzle of someone else's display is, though, no easy task. Doing this requires unsettling long-held stereotypes about the relationships between display and worldmaking, both within and beyond the museum setting.

Unsettling displays

Since the early 2000s especially, many museum staff have set out to decolonize their ethnographic collections by commissioning new displays from artists who represent the societies from which their collections were sourced (Geismar 2015; see also Durrans 1992, 13). Many of these artists have produced displays that are meant to unfold either as provocative, ironic, and subversive commentaries on ethnographic collections or as "a kind of spiritual safeguarding" of them (Geismar 2015, 193). Artistic interventions of this sort have been as diverse as the settings in which they were created. There are museums in which invited artists have "worked as both anthropological interlocutors and anthropological subjects and, through their work, they have also generated new objects for anthropological collections" (ibid., 200). Other museums have encouraged invited artists "to be 'mad scientists' who could create new contexts for objects without any responsibility to communities outside of the institution"—an ambiguous arrangement that has led to the production of displays that alternately critique or support "the power relations and representational imbalances long institutionalized within the European ethnographic museum" (ibid., 200).

But to challenge the dominant mode of display in any museum, it is often necessary to convince museum staff, visitors from the public, and the artists who create new displays to fully unpack their sense of what art and ethnographic representation happen to be. Many artists who set out to question notions of representation in museum spaces end up adhering to "a modernist definition of 'art,' which insists on a primacy of abstracted form, the supremacy of certain institutionalized spaces, and a confident universality . . . [that] negates cultural difference" (ibid., 194). Yet many of these artists also face "the ever-present forms of containment presented by fashions like 'Indo chic,' and the ambivalent space in multicultural society we recognize as the 'ethnic slot'" (Mathur 2007, 169–70). These forms of containment and ambivalence raise the bar significantly for any artists, curators, or visitors who seek to unsettle not just ethnographic and artistic representation but colonial and modern art sensibilities.

Interventions such as these do, however, unfold from time to time. Curator Alisa LaGamma, for example, presented an exhibition titled "Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary" that ran from October 2007 to March 2008 at the

Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (LaGamma 2007). Her exhibit "included a parody on a 'white room' with some once-sacred pieces exhibited as art and valorized in labels by mention of the esteemed collectors who had once owned them" (Laurel Kendall, personal communication, February 11, 2021). As Kendall observes, LaGamma's exhibit subverted the notion of the white cube as "its own visual regime, a sensory cliché signifying 'modern art'" by provocatively displaying African reliquaries within one. This tongue-in-cheek feature of the exhibit invited museum visitors to question whether the ethnographic items on display ever should—or even could—have been reduced to the voyeuristic pleasures of collectors or modern art aesthetes. By encouraging museum visitors to rethink their views of Central Africa and of display itself, LaGamma's exhibit unsettled some of the expectations surrounding ethnographic and artistic representation. Arguably, her exhibit even transformed the cosmopolitical terms through which some visitors engaged with other people's ancestors and things like the reliquaries that had been used to display and contain them.

The transformative powers of display

Transforming the world—or even just certain elements of it—may sound like a tall order, but this is often what people seek to do through display. Apparently simple acts of display, such as using shamanic implements and offerings as ritual props, can unleash a variety of transformative powers. Displays of ritual props, for example, have shaped how illnesses in South Korea—and, since the 1990s, consumer desires, too—are navigated through shamanic ceremonies called *kut* (Kendall 2008, 2009). Offerings for *kut* now mirror the world of conspicuous consumption in which the spirits and clients of Korean shamans must manage their greed. Yet coaxing spirits with the right kinds of offerings is not easy, because "the constant visual display of seemingly boundless and very expensive things to buy have brought with them an uncomfortable awareness of those who have been left behind and of things beyond one's own reach" (Kendall 2008, 162). Many offerings remind shamans and their clients of what the ancestors could not have afforded to enjoy in their own lifetimes, such as imported delicacies like bananas, and even lead to disputes over whether edible ritual props should be comprised exclusively of "foods specified in ritual manuals" (ibid., 159). Debates like these evoke more than just the contradictions that may arise with new forms of consumption and developing a taste for luxury. They point to how Korean shamans, their clients, and spirits have no choice but to "draw dramatic power from these same contradictions" (ibid., 161).

These contradictions intensified in the wake of the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis, when South Korea was compelled to ask the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for support (Kendall 2003, 2009). As South Korea reeled from national dependency on the IMF, some shamans chose to conduct affordable ceremonies with humbler displays of ritual props, which were designed to help clients proactively combat a continuous stream of financial disasters. Notably, Korean shamans found that while they did not have the power to summon or control the IMF, their spirits could predict who it would strike and when, because the IMF was transforming the social and cosmic

order (Kendall 2003, 53–55; Kendall 2009, 146–52). One shaman even reassured her client, who had sought to exact revenge on the person who made her husband lose his job, that her spirits had already confirmed "the IMF will take care of it" (Kendall 2003, 57). Humble displays of ritual props, then, enabled Korean shamans and their spirits to reveal the deeply recursive and contradictory ways in which the IMF was transforming the world and what (if anything) their clients should do to steer their way through it.

A wide range of beings and forces—from shamans to the IMF—may in fact harness the power of display in unprecedented ways. Consider the story of the Balinese mask known as Jero Amerika, who used both demonic and divine forms of display to transform the social and cosmic order. Jero Amerika had been kept as a souvenir wall decoration for years by a Canadian expatriate living in New York and Hong Kong, but frightened him with uncanny moments of rattling, teeth chattering, and flights around the room of his apartment, until he was returned to Bali and received proper recognition as a *sesuhunan*, or "a local god operating through a temple mask" (Kendall and Ariati 2020, 282). Through his world travels and the many different interpretations made of him, Jero Amerika has shown that "mask use always implies a philosophy of personality, but not a single, specific one" (Tonkin 1992, 231). Yet Jero Amerika has taken his transformative powers of display much further in Ubud, a former kingdom of Bali where he resides today as a local temple god, and across the whole island. In temple festivals and in "the local knowledge that circulates through talk, newsprint, and new media," Jero Amerika exhibits an unusually animated and, for some, even "troubling" subjectivity that Kendall and Ariati suggest "pushes at the edges of (what we thought we knew about) a Balinese ontology, [by] behaving in ways that, although plausible within the social life of a Balinese *sesuhunan*, are also deeply eccentric, going beyond the usual expectation of a Balinese mask" (2020, 284).

Much like Jero Amerika, the demons and gods discussed throughout this issue display their own transformative, imaginative, and sometimes deeply eccentric powers. They may, like Korean shamans, expose the appetites, sensibilities, and concerns of the people and spirits who inhabit a world shaped by consumption, recessions, contradictions, and the demands of financial institutions such as the IMF. Or they may, like Jero Amerika, alternately manifest themselves as a ritual prop and a demonic or divine god that instils awe in people, sets ritual events in motion, and pushes at the edges of the social and cosmic order. Many people, in turn, actively seek out these displays "to feel the frisson of a brief encounter" with spirit beings that can steer their collective imaginaries in their own preferred directions (ibid., 292).

Staging collective imaginaries

Certain displays may give rise to collective imaginaries in which the "gods are always both becoming and resisting the projections of human subjectivities" (Silvio 2019, 120). Taiwanese of different generations, genders, and classes, for example, have displayed miniature toys modeled after the deities of Chinese popular religion in city homes, offices, restaurants, and other places since 2007 (ibid., 88). Many young Taiwanese display toy gods in ways that benefit them personally and evoke "the gods' presence

in the human world, if not their existence per se, as an ongoing project of collective imagination" (ibid., 91). Their collective imaginary of the gods is further shaped by the growing popularity of Japanese manga/anime and Taiwanese *ang-a* animation, the latter of which imbues a three-dimensional anthropomorphic figure, such as a toy god, with "specific human qualities (personality, affect, and charisma) through specific types of actions (ritual, iconographic, and communicational practices)" (ibid., 55, see also 92). By re-presenting the personal—and especially the "cute"—qualities of gods in imaginative ways, Taiwanese ensure a reciprocal flow of affect, sympathy, and felicity between themselves and the spirit world (ibid., 104–5, see also 113–15).

However, an altogether different way of staging affect, sympathy, felicity, and the collective imagination underpins the pageantry of the annual Arirang Festival in North Korea, which is meant to resolutely communicate the statement: "Do not hope for any change in me!" (Kwon 2010, 6). This statement, and the Arirang Festival as a whole, are a call to reinvigorate the revolutionary values of North Koreans who obtained national liberation from colonial Manchuria. Staged as a "gigantic mass spectacle involving thousands of highly trained citizen actors (children, students, women, and soldiers) and well-choreographed mass performances," the Arirang Festival dramatizes not only collective paternal love and filial piety for the nation's leader but his "boundless paternal love for all the nation's displaced children" (ibid., 11). The Arirang Festival also echoes the funerary bereavements for Kim Il Sung held in 1994, so that it bridges the "revolutionary traditions" of the past and present (ibid., 19). Here, the affective politics that sustains each citizen's personal connection to Kim Il Sung and the leaders that followed him reinforces a wider collective imagination of how sovereignty is maintained.

Radically different notions of kinship are, then, displayed in Taiwan and North Korea. Unlike the Taiwanese youth whose collective imaginary of toy gods "induces a kind of mirroring effect, cutifying (and in some cases making abject) the viewing subject" (Silvio 2019, 105), the North Korean collective imaginary—as expressed through the Arirang Festival—revolves around militant veneration of the Kim family of leaders. Like ancestor spirits or living parents who bestow benefactions on their descendants, the Kim family is re-presented through collective displays of a partisan state that "calls the pains of hunger 'peevish cries [of children] for food,' unsuited for the soldiers of military-first politics" (Kwon 2010, 22). The Arirang Festival is therefore meant to transform North Koreans into strong, vigorous, and loyal admirers of the Kim family, who have little to no tolerance for cutified subjects and imaginative ways of re-presenting the social and cosmic order. This brings us to the question of how any given display may transform what counts as "self" and "other," or "human" and "otherworldly," in ways that encourage people to rethink the principles that underpin display itself.

The elasticity of display

Earlier I discussed how displays in museums, exhibitions, or fairs—such as LaGamma's exhibition of Central African reliquaries at the Metropolitan Museum of Art—may be used to unsettle ethnographic and artistic representation. I now turn to how displays

may encourage spectators to reconsider such common binary distinctions as self and other, ethnic insider or outsider, sacred and secular, human and spirit, or male and female. Displays of spirits, gods, ghosts, demons, and their ritual props, offerings, effigies, or emblems may bring a certain elasticity to these distinctions, the principles that lie behind them, and even the social and cosmic order. How people engage with displays, then, may shape their ways of perceiving and relating to others.

Rethinking the principles of how one should relate to others is a common feature of many displays in South Asia, where "processions most often affirm or create boundaries, which distinguish insiders from outsiders and provide structures for the display of prestige and hierarchy" (Jacobsen 2008, 7). This is also the case in Japanese *matsuri* festivals, which, however, have a strong propensity for "transformation and change" that makes the social and cosmic order, and the principles underpinning it, notably elastic (Foster and Porcu 2020, 2). Each time Japanese hold the Gion Matsuri festival in Kyoto, for example, they transform ordinary street spaces—including the souvenir shop called Otabi Kyoto—into sacred geographies filled with the presence of spirits (Porcu 2020, 60–65). Otabi Kyoto ordinarily sells tourist items, but during the Gion Matsuri it is rapidly refurbished as a sacred space equipped with festival goods so that "customers feel the intervention of the *kami* [invisible beings] and their protection while they shop" (ibid., 62). Similarly, Michael Dylan Foster shows that the Namahage festival, which is a new year celebration held across Japan, brings people into the company of masked "demons" performed by men who may alternately evoke the jocular (and, for children, frightening) ambience of private rituals held for locals in their hamlets (2020, 121–28), the collective imaginaries of the festival's newly acquired UNESCO intangible cultural heritage status (ibid., 135, see also 128–32), or the kinds of demonic antics that satisfy tourists (ibid., 140–48). Each way of approaching the Namahage festival reveals the elasticity behind the principles for how demons may be displayed to locals and visitors. Participants in Japanese festivals such as Gion Matsuri and the Namahage take deliberately creative approaches to display that "look to the past even as they actively shape the future" (Foster and Porcu 2020, 2).

Some of the more imaginatively staged festivals showcase a surprising degree of elasticity, responsiveness, and fluidity around principles of gender, body, and ethnicity. While women are, for instance, routinely excluded from many public-facing events in the Gion Matsuri festival, their "backstage" roles in it "are seen as fundamental" enough that one member of a local preservation association publicly affirmed "the festival would not be possible without such 'women's power'" (Porcu 2020, 51). Certain women have also repeatedly pushed back against these principles in ways that opened up new, and even eccentric, possibilities for display—as happened when a non-Japanese woman researcher gained permission to accompany a float in the Gion Matsuri festival, albeit in the capacity of a security guard advised to mask her gender by tying up her hair and foregoing make-up (ibid., 51–52). Flexibility and elasticity of this sort are not specific to Gion Matsuri or even Japanese cityscapes. They have become key features of bear hunting rituals among the *matagi* traditional hunters of northeastern Japan, who rely on the *yama no kami*, a female spirit or god that dwells in the mountains and "is sensitive about her own appearance and inherently

jealous of other females" (Schnell 2020, 175). Women are traditionally prohibited from joining these rituals "for fear that the deity might take offense and withhold her favors" of bear hunting success, but this taboo has started to lift in "piecemeal" fashion due to falling numbers of hunters and concerns that the rituals will die out (ibid., 175). On one level, the inclusion of women in *matagi* bear hunting rituals is an act of conservation. Yet, on another level, women's involvement in the hunt is a novel display, which, by virtue of its unorthodoxy, re-presents the status quo even as it opens up new room for transforming it. Displays such as these often shapeshift in ways that reflect the elasticity of their own principles, collective imaginaries, and transformative powers. Let us, then, consider how the contributors to this issue approach the worldmaking qualities of display ethnographically, through accounts of how spirits, gods, demons, and their ritual props, offerings, effigies, or emblems push at the edges of the social and cosmic order.

The articles

Laurel Kendall and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati show in their article "Manifestations of Presence in Korea and Bali: Crossroads, Intersections, Divergences" that Korean shamanic rituals and Balinese temple festivals "display presence" at the boundaries between performance and animation. While Korean shamans, or *mansin*, use their bodies, voices, and facial affect to "evoke a mobile and immediate presence" of the spirits, the Balinese entranced medium, or *pemundut*, wears a mask animated by a local tutelary, or *sesuhunan*, which is responsible for "sending him into trance and propelling his actions." The boundaries between performance and animation remain fuzzy in each display, such that the Korean shaman "is not the *mansin* but she is not not the *mansin*; she is not the god (in a one-on-one sense), but she is not not the god." Comparable ambiguities surround the Balinese *pemundut*, whose own body is heavily cloaked and whose face remains covered by the mask animated by the *sesuhunan*, so that even Kendall and Ariati, "operating on a tip from seemingly well-informed sources," found themselves tracking down the wrong *pemundut* for an interview not long after observing his entranced work firsthand. Korean shamanic rituals and Balinese temple festivals are, then, steered by religious specialists who display their "bodies, costumes, props, offerings, and the like" in ways that "are never absolute." What Kendall and Ariati illuminate are "two distinct ontologies of presence" that are "ultimately very different visual realizations" and yet are fluid enough to push at their own edges, leading Koreans and Balinese to new crossroads, intersections, divergences, and forms of worldmaking.

Similarly, Kari Telle shows in her study "Displaying Demons: Processions at the Crossroads in Multireligious Indonesia" that the demon puppets called *ogoh-ogoh* on the island of Lombok routinely "escape categorization and refuse to be pinned down." *Ogoh-ogoh*, which are crafted by youths and "made for display," bring forces of the invisible and visible realms together when paraded through one of the busiest trafficked crossroads in the town of Cakranegara. The puppets draw together people from across ethnic and religious boundaries in ways that "galvanize a communal ethos that almost transcends status differences," and yet occasionally lead to fights

among the youths who produce them, "especially if their demon is ridiculed or physically attacked." Tellingly, the ambiguity, vitality, and transgressiveness of *ogoh-ogoh* become particularly acute after they have been ritually "filled with an unknown force" that turns them into "a juncture or crossroads traversed by multiple entities." When *ogoh-ogoh* are filled with the power of *taksu*—which amalgamates the force of their artwork, the mantra recited to enliven them, and the sensibilities of spectators—they may dazzle audiences in ways reminiscent of the *kula* canoe prow-boards in the Trobriands. Part of the dazzle of *ogoh-ogoh* is sourced to their "ontological volatility" and penchant for going on display in ways that "unsettle the porous boundaries between 'religion' and 'entertainment.'" Telle thus underscores the cosmopolitics of displaying demons on Lombok, which resemble "a quest for sovereignty" as different council leaders vie to become the main patrons of the *ogoh-ogoh* procession, so that it can mirror their own position, status, and influence. Here, *ogoh-ogoh* produce "fresh collective imaginaries about the demonic" that go beyond modeling or mirroring the world à la Handelman (1998). Enlivened *ogoh-ogoh* dazzle and incite strong passions, first among other "beings of the invisible (*niskala*) realm" and then among humans, both of whom are transformed from spectators into co-participants of the demon parade. It is the *ogoh-ogoh*, then, that steer the annual procession on Lombok in their favor, rendering it a worldmaking event on chiefly demonic terms, rather than an event predominantly shaped by people who would seek to harness demons in the service of what, in human terms, is most politic.

Teri Silvio continues the focus on worldmaking in "The Malevolent Icon Lantern Incident: Early Twenty-First-Century Transformations of the Image of the Goddess Mazu in Taiwan" by proposing that Taiwanese of different generations and political persuasions champion different displays of Mazu, a popular Daoist deity. Whereas the older generation sets out to protect "the hidden core of Chinese folk religion" from being recast in the newer image-forms of today's Taiwan, the younger generation seeks to shift the center of religiosity so that it falls squarely within "the penumbra, where the presentation of the gods is open to change." Many younger Taiwanese portray Mazu as a Japanese pop-influenced and manga-styled character like any other "cute-sexy *moe shojo*." But as Silvio shows through the heated debates that erupted over a parade float made in Mazu's image for the 2017 Lantern Festival in Taiwan's popular Ximen Ding neighborhood, the goddess's display pitted fans of her manga style against those outside of this fandom. In response to this, Wei Tsung-cheng, the artist who had popularized cute-sexy depictions of the goddess through his manga series *Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare*, agreed to repaint the float in a way that would appeal to fans. Perhaps more poignantly, this controversial display of a cute-sexy goddess mobilized wider generational, political, gendered, theological, and aesthetic deliberations about how Taiwan's future should be shaped—especially through its gods. Yet Silvio also shows through her ethnography of the 2021 Taiwanese opera version of Wei's *Apocalypse* that debates about the gods have started to give way to the growing cross-generational appeal of pop-influenced portrayals of Mazu. Blending manga with traditional operatic repertoire (the latter of which has historically been a classic performance art and an offering to the gods), the operatic production of *Apocalypse* folds a pop-influenced display of Mazu into a more

conventional performance genre. Thus, Silvio concludes that creative Taiwanese are bringing new images of popular deities like Mazu—and even display itself—"closer to the hidden spaces of Chinese folk religion."

Janet Alison Hoskins suggests in "Strange Company: Victor Hugo, the Saigon Flag, and Santa Claus on Vietnamese Altars" that Vietnamese popular religion is also expanding in eclectic ways, even as it evokes decolonization, models new religious aspirations, and mirrors multiple forms of loss, disconnections, and a displacement from the past. Hoskins focuses on three images introduced into Vietnamese popular religiosity. One is a mural of Victor Hugo in a temple of Caodaism, an "'Asian fusion' faith" that assembles "the gods of Europe and the gods of Asia." Another is the Saigon flag of the now defunct Republic of South Vietnam, which is treated "as a sort of ancestor" by many in the Vietnamese diaspora who identify as members of "Little Saigon" communities. The third is a Santa Claus doll placed on the altars of Đạo Mẫu shamanistic practitioners who adopt the perspectives of spirits from the imperial Vietnamese past. Each of these images may be displayed in ways that model decolonization on Vietnamese terms and "serve as an anchor for an identity that seems in danger of becoming unmoored." Many images on Vietnamese altars are thus meant to become "models for personalities and attributes that we may all aspire to." This modeling of images is especially visible in the moving displays of Vietnamese rituals, where spirit mediums "use a mirror to see themselves transformed into the possessing spirit." However, as Hoskins shows, museum displays of Vietnamese traditional altars are typically "de-sacralized or de-animated for visitors" and cannot become the lively "canvases of syncretic elements" found on home altars "that encourage personalized modes of spirituality and sometimes also the production of altogether new models." Given this, Hoskins proposes that model figures do more than mirror shared histories of loss and displacement; they offer new ways for Vietnamese to connect with each other and the past through creative assemblages of gods, demons, ancestors, national emblems, meanings, and possibilities.

Heonik Kwon and Jun Hwan Park discuss a related theme in "The American Flag in Kim's Spirit Shrine," namely how the South Korean shaman Kim Kŭm-hwa displayed a small American flag that reflected the culturally plural world of shamanism in which she strove to live. As Kwon and Park show, Kim's small American flag "spoke to the powerful forces of modern politics that sought to displace shamanism from society" in Incheon, the historic port town west of Seoul that was her home. For Kim, the flag was emblematic of her role as a cultural diplomat chosen to perform the shamanic *kut* ceremony at the 1982 World's Fair in Knoxville, Tennessee, during a two-month trip in which she gave another invited shamanic performance at America's preeminent cultural institution, the Smithsonian Museum. The enthusiastic reception that Kim and her spirit-helpers received in America was altogether different from what they had experienced in the two decades prior to her trip, when shamanism and popular religion in South Korea were branded as superstition and subjected to a "militant polemic against idolatry." Kim's trip coincided with the 1980s South Korean resistance movement to military-led rule—a movement that, as Kwon and Park observe, championed "shamanism as a key part of its cultural (or countercultural) activity." South Korea responded to this movement by imparting shamanism with

intangible cultural heritage status, which brought it back into the fold of authentic cultural activities and normalized relations with neighboring countries. This meant that Kim's role as a diplomatic envoy to the United States took place at what became for her "a defining moment," in which her trip to the Knoxville Fair displayed "a world where she could be free from social stigma and be proud to be a performer and guardian of traditional culture." But Kwon and Park propose that there is more to Kim's display of the American flag in her spirit shrine, which is in fact "quite *un-American.*" Drawing upon Kim's memoirs, they show that her small American flag displayed the heritage conservation ethos that underpins UNESCO, modern anthropology, and the advocacy of peace and tolerance in the post-1945 world, rather than any common discourses of American power. One can see this ethos of heritage conservation in the photograph that Kim kept "prominently displayed in her home," which showed her next to the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss during his 1981 visit to South Korea when he attended one of her *kut*. Further echoes of this ethos are found in the display of Kim's own portrait, which arrived at the UNESCO House soon after Lévi-Strauss's visit and now hangs in this self-proclaimed "universal museum" with other items celebrating cultural diversity from around the world. In displaying her small American flag, then, Kim re-presented (and enlivened) her memories of Hwanghae shamanism from her early life, when she contributed to the welfare of her community alongside other popular religious practitioners, free from the domestic military campaigns against her craft and the international complicity behind it that for so long had devalued its "earthly spirituality." Unfurled here was Kim's highly personalized form of worldmaking that mirrored UNESCO's vision of heritage conservation, both within and beyond the walls of its universal museum.

Finally, Katherine Swancutt shows how many Nuosu display their worldmaking ambitions in "The Time of Red Snowfall: Steering Social and Cosmic Renewal in Southwest China." Her comparative study of the annual Fire Festival celebrations in the Liangshan mountains throws light on the two-way displays underpinning this high-stakes festival, which no Nuosu person is guaranteed to survive. Many Nuosu in western Liangshan envision the Fire Festival as a response to a fun-loving wrestling match that took place in myth-historical times between a human hero and the spirit emissary of the sky god. However, the sky god, Ngeti Gunzy (ꉻꄚꇬꊾ), became enraged when the hero accidentally killed his emissary and has retaliated ever since by making the souls of Nuosu people go missing during the Fire Festival until they pay him a sacrificial debt.[1] Unforeseen accidents, illnesses, and even deaths caused by Ngeti Gunzy are common during this dangerous season of social and cosmic renewal. To avert disaster, then, many Nuosu in western Liangshan hold lively competitions and pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy through the ritual for "the descent and exchange of the soul" in the hopes that he will display his satisfaction by sparing lives. Further sacrifices are made in western Liangshan to win over local land spirits, the ancestors, guardian spirits, and spirit helpers of each household, and in some cases even culture heroes, which usher in prosperity for the year ahead. By contrast, Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan approach the Fire Festival as a largely uncelebrated event that often involves deferring their competitions to the autumn sheep shearing festival and disguising their sacrifices to Ngeti Gunzy by calling them "turning back

the enemy." Here, Nuosu explain that their distinct approach to the Fire Festival emerged after a generations-old battle brought eerie "red snowfall," which has since become a metaphor for extreme bloodshed, to their mountains. Red snowfall may also evoke the myth-historical moment when the sky god transformed red snow into human beings, only to nearly wipe them out with a flood after his spirit emissary was killed. Arguably, then, Nuosu across northeastern Liangshan defer and disguise the key elements in their Fire Festival to avoid heralding in another battle, or worse yet, encouraging Ngeti Gunzy to replace them with a new crop of human beings. So, while different local and even personalized worldmaking strategies unfold through the Fire Festival in Liangshan, each is illuminated by an anthropological analysis of display.

Conclusions on the anthropology of display and worldmaking

What the contributors to this issue offer anthropology and the wider field of Asian ethnology is a new way of envisioning display, worldmaking, and the relationships between them. The anthropology of display both encompasses and goes beyond the discipline's longstanding interest in competitive displays of gift-giving, the enchantment of technology, the dazzling and unsettling qualities of sensory stimulation, the discursive strategies of representation, the effort to model, mirror, or re-present the world, and other related themes. It does this by approaching display not only as the static or unmoving framing of an image that invites contemplation rather than participation but as one of the many moving, lively, and performative parts of a public event. Each of the contributors shows that especially powerful spectacles may blur, or even collapse, the ontological distinctions between the display of demons, gods, ghosts, and spirits, on the one hand, and their presences and powers, on the other. People and spirits who harness the transformative powers of display may therefore steer their regimes of visibility, collective imaginaries, logics, and principles of how to relate to the world in new, elastic, and often unprecedented directions.

Here, the conceptual value of the anthropology of display comes fully into focus. Cutting across museum anthropology and the anthropology of religion, magic, exchange, art, and performance, the anthropology of display throws light on how people and spirits push at the edges of the social and cosmic order. It shows that display has the power to generate deeply recursive imaginaries of the cosmos. On another level, it calls attention to how displays unleash moral ideals of cultural heritage and plurality, aesthetic deliberations about the future, and new ways of envisioning the human and otherworldly. Ultimately, then, the anthropology of display reveals how powerful demons, gods, ghosts, spirits, and their ritual props, offerings, effigies, or emblems underpin our analyses of worldmaking.

Acknowledgments

Both this introduction and the special issue as a whole emerged from panels held at the Association for Asian Studies in Asia annual conferences over the course of two years. Our endeavor started with a double-panel session in 2019 called "Popular Religion on the Rise? (I): New Gods, New Demons, New Times" and "Popular Religion

on the Rise? (II): New Landscapes, New Gods, New Cosmologies," which Laurel Kendall and I co-organized in Bangkok, Thailand. We continued with another panel in 2020 devoted to "Demons and Gods on Display: The Pageantry of Popular Religion as Crossroads Encounters," which I organized in Kobe, Japan. I am grateful to all who participated in the panels. Especial thanks go to Janet Alison Hoskins, Laurel Kendall, and Kari Telle for stimulating comments on this introduction, as well as to the anonymous reviewers for their generous remarks. This article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement no. 856543).

Note

1. Many of Swancutt's research partners in Southwest China are Nuosu ethnohistorians who routinely use the Nuosu script in their own publications and strongly promote its use by others to extend its visibility, reach, and longevity. These ethnohistorians seek to position the Nuosu script and culture within the history of wider China and the world at large. They also seek to spread a general awareness of the Nuosu language and to show the similarities and differences between it and Chinese by publishing in both languages. To respect Nuosu efforts to protect their language, Swancutt provides both the Nuosu script and Chinese characters for key terms in this special issue.

Author

Katherine Swancutt is reader in social anthropology and director of the Religious and Ethnic Diversity in China and Asia Research Unit at King's College London. She has conducted anthropological fieldwork across Inner Asia for more than two decades, writing extensively on shamanism and animism in China and Mongolia, and is currently project lead of the European Research Council Synergy Grant "Cosmological Visionaries: Shamans, Scientists, and Climate Change at the Ethnic Borderlands of China and Russia." Author of *Fortune and the Cursed: The Sliding Scale of Time in Mongolian Divination* (Berghahn 2012), she is co-editor of *Animism Beyond the Soul: Ontology, Reflexivity, and the Making of Anthropological Knowledge* (*Social Analysis*, special issue 2016, and Berghahn 2018), and editor of *Crafting Chinese Memories: The Art and Materiality of Storytelling* (Berghahn 2021).

References

Abrahams, Roger. 1981. "Shouting Match at the Border: The Folklore of Display Events." In *And Other Neighborly Names: Social Image and Cultural Process in Texas Folklore*, edited by Richard Bauman and Roger D. Abrahams, 303–21. Austin: University of Texas Press. https://doi.org/10.7560/703520-014

Bauman, Richard. 1984. *Verbal Art as Performance*. Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

———. 2004. *A World of Others' Words: Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Intertextuality*. Oxford: Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470773895

Bauman, Richard, and Patricia Sawin. 1991. "The Politics of Participation in Folklife Festivals." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 288–314. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Baxandall, Michael. 1991. "Exhibiting Intention: Some Preconditions of the Visual Display of Culturally Purposeful Objects." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display,* edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 33–41. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Davis, Susan G. 1986. *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Drobnick, Jim. 2005. "Volatile Effects: Olfactory Dimensions of Art and Architecture." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, edited by David Howes, 265–80. Oxford and New York: Berg.

Durrans, Brian. 1992. "Behind the Scenes: Museums and Selective Criticism." *Anthropology Today* 8 (4): 11–15. https://doi.org/10.2307/2783531

Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2011. "Exhibition and Awe: Regimes of Visibility in the Presentation of an Emperor." *Journal of Material Culture* 16 (1): 64–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183510394942

Foster, Michael Dylan. 2009. *Pandemonium and Parade: Japanese Monsters and the Culture of Yōkai*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520942677-fm

———. 2020. "Eloquent Plasticity: Vernacular Religion, Change, and Namahage." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 9 (1/3): 118–64. https://doi.org/10.1163/22118349-00901004

Foster, Michael Dylan, and Elisabetta Porcu, eds. 2020. "Introduction: Matsuri and Religion in Japan." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 9 (1/3): 1–9. https://doi.org/10.1163/22118349-00901009

Geismar, Haidy. 2015. "The Art of Anthropology: Questioning Contemporary Art in Ethnographic Display." In *The International Handbooks of Museum Studies: Museum Theory*, edited by Andrea Witcomb and Kylie Message, 183–210. Chichester: John Wiley & Sons.

Gell, Alfred. 1992. "The Technology of Enchantment and the Enchantment of Technology." In *Anthropology, Art, and Aesthetics*, edited by Jeremy Coote and Anthony Shelton, 40–67. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Goode, Judith. 1992. "Food." In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*, edited by Richard Bauman, 233–45. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Greenblatt, Stephen. 1991. "Resonance and Wonder." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 42–56. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Handelman, Don. 1997. "Rituals/Spectacles." *International Social Science Journal* 49 (153): 387–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.1997.tb00031.x

———. 1998. *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

———. 2004. "Introduction: Why Ritual in Its Own Right? How So?" *Social Analysis* 48 (2): 1–32. https://doi.org/10.3167/015597704782352582

Henare, Amiria, Martin Holbraad, and Sari Wastell, eds. 2007. *Thinking Through Things: Theorising Artefacts Ethnographically*. London and New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203088791

Hobart, Angela, and Bruce Kapferer, eds. 2005. *Aesthetics in Performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781782382041-fm

Højer, Lars, and Andreas Bandak, eds. 2015. "Introduction: The Power of Example." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21 (S1): 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.12173

Howes, David, ed. 2005. "Hyperesthesia, or, the Sensual Logic of Late Capitalism." In *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*, 281–303. Oxford and New York: Berg. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003230700-25

Jacobsen, Knut A., ed. 2008. *South Asian Religions on Display: Religious Processions in South Asia and in the Diaspora*. London and New York: Routledge.

Jenkins, David. 1994. "Object Lessons and Ethnographic Displays: Museum Exhibitions and the Making of American Anthropology." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 36 (2): 242–70. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500019046

Karp, Ivan. 1991. "Festivals." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 279–87. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kendall, Laurel. 2003. "Gods, Markets, and the IMF in the Korean Spirit World." In *Transparency and Conspiracy: Ethnographies of Suspicion in the New World Order*, edited by Harry G. West and Todd Sanders, 38–64. Durham and London: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822384854-001

———. 2008. "Of Hungry Ghosts and Other Matters of Consumption in the Republic of Korea: The Commodity Becomes a Ritual Prop." *American Ethnologist* 35 (1): 154–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2008.00011.x

———. 2009. *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.21313/hawaii/9780824833435.001.0001

Kendall, Laurel, and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati. 2020. "Scary Mask/Local Protector: The Curious History of Jero Amerika." *Anthropology and Humanism* 45 (2): 279–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12296

Kondo, Dorinne. 2018. *Worldmaking: Race, Performance, and the Work of Creativity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002420-fm

Kurin, Richard. 1991. "Cultural Conservation through Representation: Festival of India Folklife Exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution." In *Exhibiting Cultures: The Poetics and Politics of Museum Display*, edited by Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 315–43. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

———. 1997. "The Festival of India." In *Reflections of a Culture Broker: A View from the Smithsonian*, by Richard Kurin, 141–68. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Kwon, Heonik. 2010. "North Korea's Politics of Longing." *Critical Asian Studies* 42 (1): 3–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/14672710903537456

LaGamma, Alisa, ed. 2007. *Eternal Ancestors: The Art of the Central African Reliquary*. Metropolitan Museum of Art Publications. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1922. *Argonauts of the Western Pacific: An Account of Native Enterprise and Adventure in the Archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

———. 1932. *The Sexual Lives of Savages in North-Western Melanesia: An Ethnographic Account of Courtship, Marriage, and Family Life among the Natives of the Trobriand Islands, British New Guinea*. London: George Routledge & Sons.

———. 1965. *Coral Gardens and their Magic. Vol. I: Soil Tilling and Agricultural Rites in the Trobriand Islands*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Manning, Frank E. 1992. "Spectacle." In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*, edited by Richard Bauman, 291–99. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Mathur, Saloni. 2007. *India by Design: Colonial History and Cultural Display*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

Porcu, Elisabetta. 2020. "Gion Matsuri in Kyoto: A Multilayered Religious Phenomenon." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 9 (1/3): 37–77. https://doi.org/10.1163/22118349-00901006

Schnell, Scott. 2020. "Kuma Matsuri: Bear Hunters as Intermediaries between Humans and Nature." *Journal of Religion in Japan* 9 (1/3): 165–94. https://doi.org/10.1163/22118349-00901001

Silvio, Teri. 2019. *Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824880989-fm

Stoeltje, Beverly J. 1992. "Festival." In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*, edited by Richard Bauman, 261–71. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Suhr, Christian, and Rane Willerslev, eds. 2013. *Transcultural Montage*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857459657-fm

Tambiah, Stanley J. 1968. "The Magical Power of Words." *Man* 3 (2): 175–208. https://doi.org/10.2307/2798500

Tonkin, Elizabeth. 1992. "Mask." In *Folklore, Cultural Performances, and Popular Entertainments: A Communications-Centered Handbook*, edited by Richard Bauman, 225–32. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Laurel Kendall
American Museum of Natural History (AMNH)

Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati
School for International Training (SIT) Study Abroad—Indonesia

Manifestations of Presence in Korea and Bali

Crossroads, Intersections, Divergences

Korean shaman rituals (*kut*) and Balinese temple festivals (*odalan*) display presence: gods, ancestors, and restless ghosts in Korea; oscillations between demonic and divine in Bali. Both rituals require an artful construction of space, music, costumes, and, in Bali, masks to convey an emotionally resonant sense of encounter. Our discussion begins at the point of intersection between these two traditions, the crossroads from which we follow their divergence, contrasting the work of a shaman (*mansin*) in Korea with the combination of an entranced medium (*pemundut*) and a mask empowered by a local tutelary (*sesuhunan*) in Bali as ultimately very different visual realizations of presence, or "display" in the context of this volume's discussion. We consider how the powerful entities that Korean *kut* and Balinese *odalan* engage are ontologically realized through different deployments of bodies and objects in ritual space. The idea of crossroads, intersections, and divergences permits a deeper understanding of resonance and contrast than might be subsumed by the broad headings of "possession rituals" or "ritual theater."

Keywords: Bali—Korea—shaman—spirit medium—mask—ontology

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 25–43

Return to Table of Contents

Korean[1] shaman rituals (*kut*) and Balinese temple festivals (*odalan*) are richly constructed displays of presence, an "unfurling" in Katherine Swancutt's (2023) terms of gods, ancestors, and restless ghosts in the Korean case, and in Bali of forces that oscillate between demonic and divine in an active contestation with practitioners of black magic. Both ritual processes assume lavish displays, artful constructions of space, music, and material properties such as costumes, props, and, in Bali, masks. All of these elements, realized through no small human effort, create a sense of time and space "at odds with the normal" (Taussig 2009, 8), wherein performers and spectators—to their different degrees of engagement—encounter entities and processes otherwise unseen but now compellingly realized in visual forms (or not, in the case of poor performance and failed ritual). In both Korea and Bali, efficacy occurs through skilled performance—by an inspired shaman (*mansin*) in Korea, and in Bali through the conjoining of a mask and its empowering invisible energies to make a local tutelary god or *sesuhunan* and an entranced medium who bears the *sesuhunan* embodied in the mask he carries on his head.[2] In the Korean example, greedy gods and restless ancestors are feasted, entertained, and mollified, their goodwill restored such that the sponsor's fortunes are transformed.[3] In the Balinese temple festival, the *sesuhunan* draws out and neutralizes demonic forces for the collective benefit of the community. Both systems assume the impermanence of their resolutions; in Bali, demonic and divine are in perpetual oscillation, like changing seasons, and in Korea, the appetites of gods and ancestors are stated, but only for a while.[4]

If these rituals—the *kut* in Korea or the *odalan* in Bali—are successful, a sense of transformation is accomplished through an unbinding of tension and anxiety. Success is also measured retrospectively through local readings of what happens next in the world of mundane fortune, through whatever befalls the participants soon enough after the ritual to be read as consequential. Both the *kut* and the *odalan* are high-stakes rituals; they can fail both performatively and in their consequences. In their own logics, well-articulated performance and auspicious consequence are not unrelated. Both the Korean *kut* and the Balinese *odalan* are highly theatrical ritual forms, visual spectacles that in both places have a double life as performance art. In South Korea, *mansin* and their non-*mansin* apprentices give heritage performances of *kut* on secular stages; some *mansin* hold the official government designation as "heritage-bearer" (*poyuja*), exemplary performers of rituals that have been designated as Important Intangible Cultural Properties (*Chungyo Muhyŏng Munhwajae*). In Bali, performances

of temple dances and dramas for tourists have been a daily occurrence for decades, often involving the same performers and sometimes using the same masks as are mustered for an *odalan* in a temple (Picard 1996). Secular versions of both *kut* and the climactic demon-transforming dramas that are part of the *odalan*, and our focus here, are performed on theater stages and at arts festivals all over the world.

None of this is surprising; there are parallels in many other places. What we have said thus far about the performance of Balinese *odalan* and Korean *kut* could be subsumed under the broad heading of "possession rituals" or "ritual theater" as described in many places beyond Bali and South Korea. Most of us have been there before (e.g., Laderman and Roseman 1996). In our discussion here, however, we take convergence as the point of intersection, the crossroads where South Korean *kut* meets the Balinese *odalan* and from which these two distinctive roads then veer off in their own directions. The idea is one of crossroads, intersections, and divergences, the invitation to see our material together and apart, to think about the different premises through which presence comes to be realized in theatrical display. The crossroads metaphor enables an understanding of the resonances and contrasts between a *kut* in Korea and an *odalan* in Bali, how things that fall comfortably under the same heading—such as "ritual drama"—may in fact be very different both ontologically and in each ontology's visual realization. To use Stephan Feuchtwang's (2011) term, we will be exploring two different "regimes of visibility," one realized in a shaman's body, and the other in an empowered mask.

Bali: The *odalan*, the mask, the medium

In Bali, Indonesia, it is estimated that almost 90 percent of the population follows the Balinese form of Hinduism, but religious beliefs and practices have developed various local characteristics that include a focus on worship of the ancestors and so-called "animist" beliefs that distinguish Balinese Hinduism from Hinduism as practiced on the Indian subcontinent. Balinese recognize five categories of ritual, known collectively as the *Panca Yadnya*: *Dewa Yadnya* to venerate deities, *Manusa Yadnya* to mark the life cycle, *Resi Yadnya* to initiate priests, *Bhuta Yadnya* to appease demonic spirits, and *Pitra Yadnya* to purify the souls of the recently deceased. All Balinese rituals are inextricably linked to performing arts, most notably to music and dance. There is no religious ceremony in Bali without its attendant art forms, and nearly all forms of Balinese artistic expression—dance, music, carving, and even the subjects of much secular painting—have ultimate sources in and often an explicit link to religious action. Even a performance art as "secular" as the flirtation dance called *Joged Bumbung* will never be performed without a prior blessing of the stage and the ornate headdress of the dancers, and the dance itself adds an auspicious note to the conclusion of ceremonies like the three-month blessing of a child, when the father or grandfather briefly takes the male role in the dance while carrying the child. Secular performances for tourists begin, like any other performance, with the sacred elements of incense, offerings, and prayers, raising the possibility of a mustering of invisible forces, as evidenced on those rare occasions when a performer falls into deep trance in front of an audience of tourists.

The *odalan* that concern us here are *Dewa Yadnya*, rituals performed for deities, temple festivals that are most often timed according to the 210-day Balinese sacred year (*Pawukon*).[5] *Odalan* are the melting point where the *sekala* and *niskala*—visible and invisible beings—interact with each other. Each village in Bali has at least three temples, and each of these three temples is a site of religious focus and custodial responsibility for a temple community.[6] The temple community is responsible for organizing the *odalan*.[7] The setting for an *odalan* is artistically constructed; the shrines in the temples are decorated with colorful traditional umbrellas, banners with images of deities, and elaborate offerings made from fruits, flowers, and meats. People go to the *odalan* in their best traditional costumes to pray and also to socialize. Temples are very lively during the festival. The men of the temple community play the gong ensembles of the gamelan orchestra or work in the community kitchen of the temple, while the women are busy with preparing offerings of plaited palm leaves, flowers, and foodstuffs, placing them at appropriate points in the temple, or taking part in processions, as when women perform the stately *Pendet* dance to welcome the deities on their return from a lustration of water from the temple's holy spring or river.

An *odalan* lasts over several days and includes many different types of performance, all sacred (*wali*) but some more sacred than others (figure 1).[8] Sacredness is also calibrated in relation to the spaces in which different activities take place over the duration of the festival. A Balinese temple is divided into three ascending courtyards that are sites for different degrees of sacred activity. The outer courtyard (*jaba sisi*) has an atmosphere something like a county fair in the United States and is the place for dances, shadow plays, and other performances aimed at pleasing the temple goers, "entertainments to be watched" (*balih-balihan*) and open to all. The middle courtyard (*jaba tengah*) is where final preparations are made for the many offerings that are

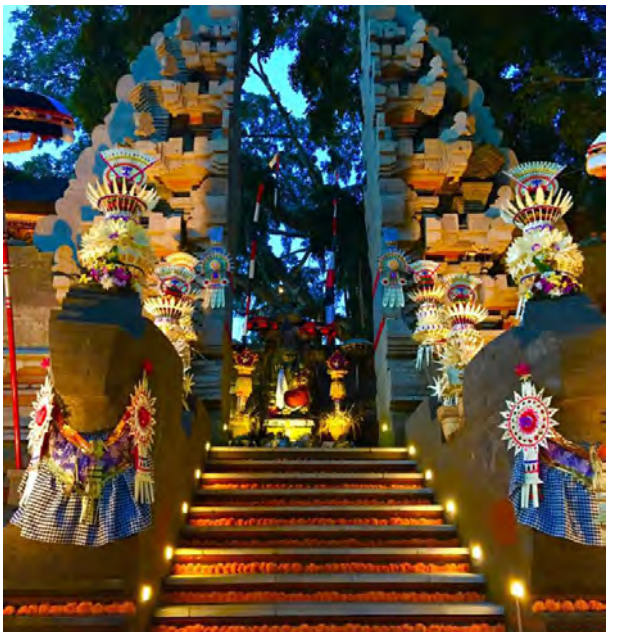


Figure 1. Main Gate (Candi Bentar) of the Pura Dalem Ubud decorated for an *odalan*, 2017. Photograph by Laurel Kendall.

Figure 2. Rangda appears at the odalan, Pura Dalem Ubud, 2017. Photograph by Wayan Ariati.

brought to the temple for blessing by all the community members and where the musical ensembles perform, such that the middle courtyard is often alive with the resonant and exciting sounds of the Balinese gamelan orchestra. Performances here accomplish important ritual work and can only be watched by those who are wearing temple attire. The inner courtyard (*jeroan*) holds the most sacred shrines, sites for solemn worship of the deities that is accomplished by offering flowers with hands outstretched in prayer-like fashion and completed with a blessing of holy water. This is also the space where the most sacred dances are performed and where the masks/local tutelaries reside.[9]

The divine and demonic are most intensely present in the performance of masks that embody the *sesuhunan*, masks borne on the heads and shoulders of their designated human mediums as they descend from the inner courtyard into the crowded central courtyard during an *odalan*. The appearance of fanged Rangda in the Calon Arang play is a riveting moment—Rangda with bulging eyes, lolling tongue, and wild hair; Rangda the queen of the *léyak*, women who gather in cemeteries and work black magic on their neighbors (figure 2). Rangda's appearance here and Rangda's encounters with the lion-like Barong Ket may be the single most dangerous and consequential element of the *odalan*, abundantly described, filmed, and photographed by anthropologists and performance scholars.[10] Rangda feints and parries with the lion-like Barong, she is attacked by *keris*-bearing trancers, but her own force field causes them to stab their *keris* blades at their own chests and collapse into deep trance, eventually revived with holy water (*tirta*) poured through the Barong's beard. In the Calon Arang play, an aggrieved widow practicing black arts in a cemetery gains

sufficient power to transform herself into terrifying Rangda, leading her demonic *léyak* followers in sowing pestilence throughout the land. Patih Agung, the King's Minister who has been commissioned to kill Rangda, makes an inconclusive attack. Rangda's appearance in the inner courtyard culminates with her sprinting down from the temple and running toward the cemetery, transformed now into a protective but still scarily powerful tutelary who challenges and neutralizes practitioners of black magic in her path (Geertz 1994, 81). She will return to the nearly empty temple for a final placation of demonic forces. Through the actions of the masks, the entranced medium, and the supportive work of the other performers and musicians, this powerful visual manifestation of presence does the ritual work that transforms what was demonic into what becomes, for a time, divine, a protective tutelary presence. As theater scholar John Emigh observes, the dramatic structure gives the expectation of a fixed narrative, which, in the Calon Arang play, includes anticipated comic interludes and other business. The expectation of a fixed performance is reinforced by tourist performances, but the powers brought forth by the mustering of demonic and divine forces can disrupt the anticipated frame of a ritual drama. The Barong might not drive back Rangda, or Rangda might leave the temple before the Barong even appears; what matters is that the energies embodied in the masks be danced (Emigh 1984, 30–33).

Rangda in the Calon Arang play and Rangda's engagement with the Barong Ket may be the most iconic expression of ritual transformation through the visual medium of masks in the context of an *odalan*, but other masks have been deployed to similar work. *Topeng Sidhakarya*, a culminating masked ceremonial performance enacting a white-haired old man, also occurs in the middle courtyard (figure 3). "Sidhakarya" means "accomplished ritual," and the performance of the dance puts a final auspicious seal on all that has transpired in the temple space. The uncanny appearance of this old man's mask with bulging eyes, wild hair, and protruding buck teeth is both comical and slightly frightening, factors that may account for why this mask is prone to trigger trance states among members of some village congregations. While the performer who takes on the mask of Sidhakarya usually meditates in anticipation of his performance, he is not usually taken over by deep trance in the manner of the medium who becomes Rangda. As theater scholar John Emigh describes it, the *Topeng* masked play of which Sidhakarya is a part is performed in the idiom of a visitation from another world, but in most instances, it is

Figure 3. Performance of Topeng Sidhakarya, Ubud, 2017. Photograph by Laurel Kendall.

understood more as sacred entertainment for the divine spectators than as a full incarnation in the manner of Rangda and the Barong (Emigh 1996, 115–16). Unlike the medium under the temple mask, *Topeng* performers are, in most instances, skilled and highly trained performers, and even some talented non-Balinese have been welcomed as students of *Topeng*. And yet, a full generalization does not hold. In at least one community known to us, the Sidhakarya mask is known to have uncanny power, the wearer to have been in some sense "chosen" by the *sesuhunan*.

In what may be even more of a departure from type, a temple in the residential complex of the former rulers of Ubud has incorporated a new mask into the array of spiritual images that have become an active part of current belief and practice: Ratu Gede Gombrang, "The Great Lord Gombrang" or simply Jero Amerika, a mask returned from abroad after demonstrating its uncanny power. The mask is of old woman Celuluk, a comic role, but Jero Amerika has switched genders and gained a sacred gravitas equivalent to a Rangda, appearing at the *odalan* to do the protective work expected of a *sesuhunan*, sprinting out of the temple and running through the town and its surround to challenge practitioners of black magic. Jero Amerika speaks Old Javanese (*Bahasa Kawi*) as the Rangdas do rather than in the bawdy colloquialisms of the old woman, and appears, as the Rangdas do, in an enclosing cloak. Like Rangda's medium, the body of Jero Amerika's medium is wrapped with a special fabric (*cepuk*) from Nusa Penida Island used for rituals, and with the black-and-white cloth (*kamen poleng*) that is also wrapped around sacred figures. In other words, Jero Amerika is a *sesuhunan*, described by one of our conversation partners as a "sacred figure supported and held high by the community," a mask so powerful that it can protect the community members from all manner of calamities (Kendall and Ariati 2020).

The mask, more than a bit of theatrical artifice, is the agentive presence that channels otherwise invisible energies, and it is the ritual work of the *odalan* to transform the realization of these energies from demonic to divine. An efficacious mask must be enlivened (*idup*), charismatic, exalted (*berwibawa*/*wibawa*), and, above all, charged with a magical and potentially dangerous power (*tenget*) analogous to an electrical current. Such a mask is carved by someone who has a deep store of personal power, or *sakti*, which he has cultivated through meditation and esoteric practice. The carver's work is a ritual act as much as an expression of good craftsmanship. Offerings rest at his side while he works in a state of near-meditative concentration, chanting appropriate mantras at different stages of the process (Eiseman 1990, 207; Wiener 1995, 55–56). Once the mask is complete, a Brahmin priest ritually purifies (*melaspas*, *melaspasin*) the mask and then ensouls (*pasupati*) it, installing five sacred elements (*panca dathu*)[11] inside the mask that act as conductors for the forces or energies that will empower it. The final enlivening (*ngeréh*) takes place in a cemetery in deep midnight, where, in an atmosphere of rising tension, the activation of the mask is confirmed in a burst of light, usually experienced as a waking vision.[12]

Thus far we have been speaking of masks and the realization of powerful entities through masks. The entranced medium who bears the mask/*sesuhunan* during an *odalan* is, with the carver and the priest, a man who has cultivated a deep personal store of *sakti*. He is someone who has been chosen for this work by forces in the unseen world, the *niskala*, who have revealed their intentions for the medium of a

particular *sesuhunan* during a temple ceremony by such means as a medium's voice or a priest's waking dream. Like *mansin* in Korea, and like shamans and spirit mediums in many traditions, those who are chosen in this way cannot reject their spiritual obligation; to do so would risk calamity. The medium who bears the mask/*sesuhunan* does not need to be trained to this role in order to perform in a temple festival the way that masked performers for *Topeng* are trained, but to do this dangerous work it is essential that he be a man of considerable *sakti*. Stories are told of mediums with insufficient *sakti* who succumb to the stab thrusts of the *keris* blades aimed at Rangda. Some mediums gain renown as vehicles for extraordinary manifestations of presence. When the late Bapak Rarem from Peliatan was chosen to be the medium for Jero Amerika, he was already an old man, but when he took on the mask of Jero Amerika, he became filled with the *sesuhunan*'s power and energy. Spectators remembered how, by the end of the performance, Jero Amerika would run as though flying, "patrolling" Ubud and the neighboring villages to make sure that their inhabitants were protected from evildoers both seen and unseen. But even with a nod to Bapak Rarem as a man of extraordinary *sakti*, a man of power who was capable of bearing such a powerful mask, these activities were locally read as a measure of the mask Jero Amerika's empowerment by a noteworthy *sesuhunan*, which propelled the aged medium in his remarkable performance.

Kut: Gods, costumes, and shaman bodies

In Korea we encounter a different relationship of body, image, and inspirational energy from what we have seen in Bali. "Korean shamanism" (*musok*, *mugyo*) is often described as Korea's most indigenous and ancient religion, but whatever its roots, shamanship is an adaptive practice that draws, sponge-like, on the social surround. Korean shaman practice is infused with Confucian and Buddhist notions of cosmology, causality, morality, and the afterlife, as well as notions of gods, ancestors, and ghosts that are recognizable throughout East Asia, albeit they express themselves in recognizably Korean ways and address the immediate concerns of living Koreans. As a shaman, the *mansin*[13] is chosen by the gods and empowered to engage with them, to learn their will and call on their power to secure auspicious outcomes and banish impure and inauspicious forces. In contemporary Korea, auspicious outcomes are often a matter of business success. Korean shamanship involves inspiration but also the mastery of skill, most particularly the artful articulation of words, song, performance business, and, most particularly, the inspired speech of compelling divinations (*kongsu*). *Kut* are the primary and most visually realized occasions for these transactions. *Mansin* do divinations and perform a range of smaller rituals, from exorcisms to inducements of the birth spirit into an infertile womb, but *kut* is their most elaborate, significant, and expensive ritual vehicle. During *kut*, *mansin* mark the presence of a succession of gods by garbing themselves in a series of costumes approximating antique dress and conveying appropriate voice and body affect for each manifesting god. The country *kut* that form the basis of this discussion did not match the artful decorations and entertainments produced through the collective efforts of a Balinese community for a temple festival. Even so, all *kut*, even the most

Figure 4. *Kut* for the dead performed in the courtyard as a spatial compromise, 2003. Photograph by Laurel Kendall.

humble, include careful arrangements of offerings, fruits, cakes, and candy, which combine with the costumes of the *mansin*, candlelight, and incense to create a colorful scenescape different from that of the everyday. In contemporary urban *kut*, the offerings have become more ostentatious (although not necessarily more beautiful) and the costumes more spectacular. Rather than the household preparations of the remembered past, the *mansin* usually take charge of catered offerings, and the lavishness and waste sometimes involved in making a good show has provoked critical social commentary.

Into the 1970s, most *kut* were performed in and around traditional Korean houses, structures facing small courtyards enclosed by walls and gated. This is where Laurel Kendall encountered *kut* during her first fieldwork and where Korean and Japanese ethnologists had described them (Kendall 1985). The gods were invoked outside the house gate and then inside on the narrow wooden veranda. Gods from high mountains were greeted beside an outdoor platform where tall earthen jars of condiments were stored beside the house. Most of the action of the *kut* would take place under the main roof beam on the open veranda, the residence of Sŏngju, the House Lord, while family members and spectators crowded the doorways of the adjoining rooms or bundled next to the *mansin* team who accompanied their colleague with drum and cymbals. The birth spirit (Samsin Halmŏni) appeared in the inner room. As the *kut* wound toward conclusion, the action moved down again to the courtyard, where the House Site Official (T'ŏju Taegam) libated the perimeters of his domain, and eventually the action went out the gate as wandering ghosts and other unclean forces were purged from the house and carried away. If family dead were to be sent to paradise (*chinogi*/*chinogwi kut*), this too would happen outside the gate, as a *mansin* manifesting a lachrymose ancestral presence would move directionally away from the house while navigating the roads out of hell and into paradise. In more cramped residential circumstances or when, as in recent years, an urban population holds their *kut* in the *mansin*'s own shrine or in rented commercial facilities, compromises are made (figure 4). Thus while the environmental theater

(following Schechner 1985) of a Balinese temple constructs ritual space and ritual performances within that space as a layered and hierarchically restricted access to sacredness, the environmental theater of a *kut* casts a visible encounter between the living household and its gods and ancestors within the metaphoric structure of the physical house itself, the common space that living family, house tutelary gods, and ancestors share day to day, its boundaries secured through the ritual and unclean entities cast away, at least for a time.[14] In the past, *kut* were also held on behalf of villages, although rarely by the 1970s, and sometimes collectively on behalf of lineages. On these occasions boundaries of entrance and exit were marked in ways analogous to *kut* held in private homes, and the community in question became like a household for the common intentions of the ritual. In the twenty-first century, South Korea is an almost completely urbanized society, and most *kut* are held in the rented rooms of commercial *kuttang*, establishments that rent out space for this purpose, but the palimpsest of interior space, courtyard, and space outside the walls may be discerned in the ways these *kut* are staged.

In *kut*, the *mansin* manifests several gods in a single performance, wearing their costumes, enacting their characteristic gestures, and speaking their words. She[15] garbs herself in clothing appropriate to each god, usually layers of clothing for a predetermined sequence of gods that are peeled off to mark transitions from the highest-ranked god to each in a series of subordinate deities. She dances to the cadence of drum and symbols, and when inspiration strikes her, begins to jump and spin on the balls of her feet, pounding her arms to a rising crescendo of percussive sound. A flick of her arm, then silence. She speaks in the persona of each god, assuming the characteristic gestures of an imperious king or general, a venal lower official, a flighty maiden, a weeping ancestor (figure 5). Sometimes she twists her face into a particular

Figure 5. Mischievous dead sister-in-law appears; client (behind) is amused, 1977. Photograph by Laurel Kendall.

Figure 6. Petulant birth grandmother (*mansin* in white costume) berates client for neglect, 1977. Photograph by Laurel Kendall.

affect, a "mask" in the sense of a Grotowskian actor (see Grotowski 1968, figs. 9–12). In character, she/the god examines the lavish piles of offering food and scowls with contempt at the client who is rubbing her hands in urgent supplication (figure 6). In the god's voice, she assesses the client's situation, singing out the disappointments and dangers that are causing the client to sponsor a *kut*, sometimes evoking tears and sometimes inducing laughter. In the persona of a complaining, greedy, or lusty god, she/he berates the client for past neglect in a manner not only intimidating but often humorous. The client bobs a series of contrite bows––"I didn't realize, I didn't know any better"––and the client may enter into the spirit of contestation, "How can I feast you if you don't make me rich? Make me rich, next time I'll take you out for grilled ribs!"[16] When the god is won over, the atmosphere shifts, and the god sings his own praises with lavish promises of succor and good fortune. And then the costume is pulled off revealing another costume underneath, the drum beats pick up again, the *mansin* spins, the music stops, another demanding god is present, and the process is repeated, from castigation to reconciliation with possible surprises of revelation and stage business—the lecherous Official who tweaks the client's breast, wags a phallic dried fish at her, and leers; the flighty young Princess or virgin ghost who briefly gyrates to a disco beat from the drummer, the Child God who runs around the offering tray snatching sweets and saying things that only a child can say: "I don't like you!" When all of the gods in one sequence have been played and all of the costume layers have been peeled off, the *mansin* spins back to herself, an exhausted self, and another *mansin* layers up for the next sequence of gods, the next round of encounters.

This is not a possession ritual. The gods do not move the *mansin*'s lips and body. They do send her inspiration (*myŏnggi*, literally "bright energy")—as dreams, visions, bodily sensations, and sometimes raw intuition such that she views the situation through the eyes of the god she is manifesting and speaks and acts accordingly. Inspiration, as an expression of the gods' favor, is something the *mansin* must cultivate through rigorous acts of devotion. A *mansin* offers daily devotions to the gods who

sit in the paintings in her shrine. She further cultivates her powers by making pilgrimages to sacred mountains, places charged with the presence of divinity; after making offerings and praying zealously, she channels this divine energy back to her shrine through the medium of her own body. When a god "plays well" (*chal norda*) with the *mansin*, the *mansin*'s words are uncannily resonant, the performance is lively, and the spectators respond with laughter, tears, and their own playful banter.[17] When the gods who appear in a *kut* play well with the *mansin*, when the collectivity of gods favors the *mansin*, it is assumed that her *kut* will be efficacious. This is the braided source of an individual *mansin*'s renown: a *mansin* whose *kut* are lively and engaging and a *mansin* whose *kut* are efficacious because the gods have played well and are satisfied, such that they now favor the client's household with good fortune. *Mansin* have been known to characterize themselves as the gods' *kisaeng*, their female entertainers. When inspiration eludes the *mansin* she needs to ad lib; she must get it right, accurately interpret and enact the gods' intentions, or both she and her client will suffer. When the gods do not play well, the *mansin*'s reputation slides, sometimes to ruin. In all of this, the *mansin* is a shaman, one who actively engages the spirits/gods in ways that have social consequence. She is a doer, the one who performs the display; she is not a puppet animated by a god, a characterization often applied to spirit mediums.[18] *Mansin* who are able to orchestrate a fine and consequential mustering of gods and ancestors on their clients' behalf become "great shamans" (*kŭn mansin*).

Discussion

Where do the branching roads lead us? As anticipated in Swancutt's introduction to these articles, Korean *kut* and Balinese *odalan* are spectacular displays that mirror into presence things otherwise unseen (Swancutt 2023, following Feuchtwang 2011). But the two processes of unfurling, unfolding, exhibiting, and revealing are orchestrations in different keys driven by different ontologies in relation to spirit, matter, and bodies. Of course, ours is a selective comparison, not "Bali" and "Korea" but rather two different regimes of display as enabled by temple masks and their mediums in Bali and *mansin* in Korea. Had we chosen, instead, to focus on the work of the traditional Balinese healer, the *balian*, the presentation of facial affect would be significant, and that would be another discussion entirely. Our comparison is justified in that we have brought together two forms of ritual performance that are highly theatricalized, involving embodied performance, musical competence, and a ritually signifying surround. *Kut* and *odalan* are sufficiently resonant as ritual theaters to permit the sort of discussion that might cause us to illuminate the contours of two distinctive visual regimes of ritual practice and signification.

In Korea, we find shamans whose own bodies, voices, and facial affect evoke a mobile and immediate presence, as close as a playful pinch of the breast, a spit of wine on the face, a caress from a weeping ancestor. It is the *mansin* who makes that presence work, both through her cultivation of the divine favor that brings her inspiration and in her own ability to deploy that same inspiration as emotionally resonant performance. These acts of spectacular doing constitute shamanship; a

shaman actively engages the spirits (see Shirokogoroff 1935; Hamayon 2000; and for Korea, Kendall 2021a; Walraven 2009). A *mansin* does the gods' will but is not their animated, entranced puppet, a condition most *mansin* would probably consider easier than what the gods expect of them. In Bali, by contrast, the invisible forces of a *sesuhunan* as a powerful and empowering presence animate the mask. In the *odalan*, the mobility of the medium testifies to the presence of the *sesuhunan* in the mask, but in the first instance, it is the *sesuhunan*/mask that animates the medium, sending him into trance and propelling his actions. While a *kut* is, in some sense, about the *mansin*, a visible test of her abilities and the efficacy of the particular gods she serves, what happens in the appearance of Rangda and Rangda-like entities at an *odalan* is primarily about the power of presence embodied in a particular named mask/*sesuhunan*, the conjunction of invisible energies (*niskala*) and the carved wooden mask (*tapel*).

Consider how things otherwise unseen become visible in the two distinctive ritual forms of *kut* and *odalan*. The *kut* takes place in and about known and mundane space, not hidden, not veiled. The *mansin* is never not there.[19] She transforms herself in full view, first as her colleagues help her to layer on the gods' costumes, then as she spins herself to the drumming, from which she emerges to speak with their authority. In the manner of good theater, she is not the *mansin* but she is not not the *mansin*; she is not the god (in a one-on-one sense), but she is not not the god as a signifying, prognosticating, commanding presence who needs to be engaged with music, feasting, and banter.

In Bali, the transformation is complete even before the energized mask and entranced medium become a visible presence in the ritual.[20] Rangda emerges from the sacred-most pinnacle of the temple, where the medium meditated and entered the altered state that inspired him to take on the mask. In the arc of the ritual, the spectators never experience the medium's own face. It is the *sesuhunan*/mask that spectators anticipate, while the medium all but disappears under its head-encasing burden and enveloped in his thick cloak. This distinction between the different visual regimes that accompany a Balinese temple mask and a Korean shaman was clarified for Kendall when, after watching an impressive appearance by Jero Amerika at an *odalan*, she spent the better part of a day tracking the medium who had succeeded the renowned Bapak Rarem. Although Kendall was operating on a tip from seemingly well-informed sources, it was the wrong medium. Such a mistake would be virtually impossible after a *kut*. Teri Silvio's (2019) distinction between "performance" and "animation" is useful here, with performance as a primary descriptor for the dancing, miming, and speaking through which the *mansin* gives presence to gods/spirits in Korean *kut*. Like other shamans elsewhere, the *mansin* is a doer whose own marked presence is an inextricable part of the visual realization of the ritual (although some of her ritual props might briefly, and less consequentially, become animated; Kendall 2021b). Animation characterizes the activities of an empowered mask and its medium in Balinese temple festivals, with emphasis on the mobility of an otherwise immobile material subject, the mask/energizing tutelary.[21] Technically, the medium animates the mask, as masks and puppets are animated by those who operate them; ontologically and experientially, the mask/*sesuhunan* animates the medium.

As Silvio (2019) notes, such distinctions are never absolute; mobile materiality in the form of bodies, costumes, props, offerings, and the like is never absent from *kut*, and it is virtually impossible to talk about a Balinese *odalan* without using the word "performance." Even so, "performance" and "animation" distil two distinct ontologies of presence, two different regimes of visible display for gods appearing via *mansin* and *sesuhunan* appearing via masks. These distinctions might not have been so clearly revealed had we not begun at a point of intersection and followed both branching paths.

An afterword about words

One of our reviewers suggested that we had riddled an earlier draft of this article with an excess of native terms and done so to the point of distraction. We set about, then, to pare them down; this proved to be a useful exercise that in the end sharpens and reinforces what we have to say. We bore down to a limited number of native terms that it was impossible to discard. *Kut* and *odalan* are both "ritual theater," but their usefulness in this discussion comes from their mutual distinction, and we have preserved the Korean and Balinese terms. Likewise, *mansin* are "shamans" by the broad definition accepted by scholars today—masters of the spirits—as we have explained in the text, but they do their work in distinctive ways that would not, say, meet the expectations of a Euro-American neo-shaman. It thus seems useful to keep their Korean identity present. "Medium," however, seemed sufficient for the role of the Balinese *pemundut*, the medium as a vehicle for the empowering mask/*sesuhunan*. *Sesuhunan*, however, offers its own challenges. While *sesuhunan* could be glossed as a "tutelary god," the English term washes away the particular combination of animating energies and empowered mask that make a presence in the Balinese *odalan* and the recognition that a *sesuhunan* as a presence oscillates between demonic and divine. The recognition that we need the Korean gloss *mansin* for the shaman and Balinese *sesuhunan* for the enlivened presence in the mask affirms the counterpoints of our discussion.

AUTHORS

Anthropologist Laurel Kendall is curator of Asian Ethnographic Collections at the American Museum of Natural History and an adjunct senior research fellow at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute, Columbia University. The author and editor of many books and articles about popular religion in South Korea, Vietnam, and Bali, Kendall is best known for her work on the Korean shaman tradition, beginning with *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life* (University of Hawai'i Press 1985), and an update in *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion* (University of Hawai'i Press 2015). Her more recent *Mediums, Markets, and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings and Masks in Asian Places* (University of California Press 2021) is a comparative study. Kendall is a former president of the Association for Asian Studies (2016–17).

Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati is director of the School for International Training (SIT), Indonesia. Trained as a scholar of religion, she is the author of *The Journey of the Goddess Durga: India, Java & Bali* (International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan 2016) as well as many articles on religion and gender. She is an associate of the American Museum of Natural History.

NOTES

1. "Korea" is used in generalizations about the *mansin* tradition, which includes transplanted regional practices from what is now North Korea (DPRK), although most of the observations in this article are from the practices of *mansin* in and around Seoul. The ethnographic present is that of late-twentieth- and early twenty-first-century South Korea (ROK).

2. Mediums of powerful temple masks are all male. *Topeng* mask dance includes women who may, in this capacity, perform during temple rituals in ways pleasing to a divine audience, but the performers of this genre are not considered to be embodying a *sesuhunan*.

3. For more detailed information on *mansin* and *kut* than can be provided here, see Bruno (2002), Choi (1989, 1991), and Kendall (1985, 2009); for *odalan* and related see Ariati (2016), Bandem and deBoer (1995), Belo (1960), Geertz (1994), and Hobart (2003).

4. For an extended discussion of the agency of masks and images in four Asian settings see Kendall (2021b).

5. While most *odalan* are timed according to the *Pawukon* calendar, occurring once every 210 days, some Balinese follow a cycle based on a Balinese lunar calendar, timing their *odalan* to fall on *purnama* (the full moon) of a certain month in a 360–365-day cycle, or more rarely during *tilem* (the new moon).

6. These are the Pura Puseh, sacred to the god Wisnu and his consort Dewi Sri or Laksmi, who represent water and rice and are the sustainers of human life; the Pura Desa, or "Temple of the Village," sacred to Brahma, who in Bali is the god of fire and the household hearth as well as creator of the universe, and to his consort Dewi Saraswati, the goddess of speech, learning, and the arts; and the Pura Dalem, sacred to the god Siwa and his consort Dewi Durga, who preside over the postmortem rituals of cremation that dissolve life back into its origins and ensure that deceased family members enter the realm of protective ancestors. Those three divine beings—Wisnu, Brahma, and Siwa—keep this universe in balance through their three functions of creation (*utpatti*, Brahma), preservation (*sthiti*, Wisnu), and dissolution (*pralina*, Siwa). They are called collectively *kahyangan tiga* (the three village temples).

7. This cluster of community members is responsible to the *Desa Adat*, the village as a customary body whose members share belief and practice in the Balinese form of Hinduism. At the same time, they are also likely to be members of the same *Desa Dinas*, the village as an Indonesian administrative unit. This includes all of those who reside within the same village, whatever their religion may be. Because of the separation of the *Desa Adat* and *Desa Dinas*, non-Hindus of the *Desa Dinas* are not required to take part in Hindu ceremonies. However, it is common for the members of the village to help each other or respect each other's social and religious obligations, and it is not uncommon for non-Hindu members of a village to participate in the elaborate preparations for events like weddings and cremations. Since the *odalan* is very entertaining, many non-Hindus

will visit the temple festival to see the semi-sacred entertainments performed in the outer courtyard (*jaba sisi*) of the temple. In this *jaba sisi*, both Hindu and non-Hindu members of the village can buy and sell food items, toys, or other material goods; however, in contemporary Bali they will not sell any food preparations containing beef.

8. The provincial government in Bali, concerned that the tourist industry would have a deleterious effect on sacred dances, classified performances into three categories: sacred (*wali*), semi-sacred (*bebali*), and entertainments (*balih-balihan*). Some Bali scholars consider this schema artificial; for example, performer/scholar I Madé Bandem asserts that all phenomena in Bali are either very *wali*, *wali*, or less *wali* (quoted in Herbst 1997, 129).

9. It is a strict rule in Bali that women are not allowed to enter any temple or other sacred place during their menstrual period, because blood is considered attractive to negative forces and can thus put women and the community in danger. This prohibition is often misunderstood by Western visitors to Bali as being a way to "keep women down." However, this is not the view of Balinese women, who often speak of menopause as a time in their lives that frees them to become closer to the deities and less directly involved in the difficulties and challenges of the reproductive cycle of life.

10. See Ariati (2016, 196–97, 205), Bandem and deBoer (1995, 102–26), Bateson and Mead (1952), Belo (1960), Emigh (1984, 30–34; 1996), Geertz (1994, 65–81), Hobart (2003, 123–205; 2005), and many others.

11. The term is Sanskrit, meaning five (*panca*) elements (*dhatu*). These are gold, silver, bronze, iron, and diamond or ruby. As in the five-element scheme of the Sinosphere, the enlivening elements exist in relation to each other and as equivalents for other things such as directions and colors, but these are two distinct systems, and their components are not the same.

12. See Belo (1960, 98), Hobart (2003, 147), Eiseman (1990, 208), Slattum and Schraub (2003, 26–27), and Stephen (2001, 146–47).

13. *Mudang*, a broad and somewhat derogatory term, broadly describes those who serve the spirits, feasting and entertaining them to secure their goodwill by performing *kut* (Yim 1970). The most shaman-like *mudang*, those who operate on the basis of inspiration rather than through hereditary mastery of song, dance, and ritual business, are the *mansin* of what is now North Korea and the Seoul area. However, through media exposure to photogenic *mansin* and the expectations such images have engendered, along with decline of hereditary *mudang* as a rejected outcast status, the *mansin* style of shamanship, the costumes, and the shrine fittings are widely replicated throughout South Korea today.

14. "Environmental theater" as developed in the work of performance studies scholar and theater director Richard Schechner (1985) builds on anthropologist Victor Turner's work on ritual process (1968, 1969). Turner encouraged students of ritual to study the social field where ritual activity takes place. What situations prompt the holding of a ritual? How are the precipitating problems addressed inside the ritual itself? How does the flow of ritual action cause participants to engage symbolically and emotionally in transforming their situation? In Turner's writing, movement through time, space, and a sequence of symbolically and emotionally potent ritual engagements worked a transformative effect from a condition of affliction to healing. Schechner's "environmental theater" is not restricted to a theatrical stage or even to a single space but rather moves through and in relation to a space, as in Turner's descriptions of Ndembu

ritual. The setting of a Balinese temple and the domestic space that became background to a *kut* could similarly be considered "environmental theater."

15. Most but not all Korean *mansin* are female. Male *mansin* are a marked category (*paksu mansin*, *paksu mudang*), and traditionally these male *paksu* would dress in Korean women's clothing before layering on the gods' costumes for a *kut*. Kendall has encountered some *paksu* who no longer do this and whose gendered presentation of self is more masculine than older stereotypes of *paksu mansin*. Balinese *pemundut* are male.

16. Pork also figures in religious vows made in Bali. When prayers are answered, the supplicant offers *babi guling*, roast suckling pig, in return. This vow is called *mesesangi*.

17. Space does not permit a detailed exposition of the dynamics of a *kut*, which has been described in greater detail elsewhere (Kendall 1985, chap. 1; 2009, chaps. 2, 3). See Bruno (2002) for a detailed analysis of speech slippages between shaman and god, and Yim (1970) for an early recognition of the absence of trance. The *mansin*'s relation to her paintings is described in Kendall, Yang, and Yoon (2015) and Kendall (2021b). For mountain pilgrimages see Kendall (1985, 127–31) and Kendall (2009, 184–88).

18. As per Silvio's (2019) discussion of "performance" and "animation" as two contrasting modalities.

19. The only exception to this is in the *kut* for the dead, where the Death Messenger costumes-up out of sight and aggressively approaches the house gate, face twisted in a threatening leer. Women gather to protect the threshold, a play of interior space to be defended against dangers that come to the household from outside.

20. Mediums who perform in the *odalan* and those close to them describe a sense of partial consciousness, like a waking dream state. Our reference here is to how the presence of the *sesuhunan* is visually experienced by other participants in the *odalan*.

21. We use "animation" in the basic sense whereby an agent causes an otherwise immobile material form to move; we appreciate that Silvio has also cast her ethnographic gaze on new domains such as media animation (Silvio 2019).

References

Ariati, Ni Wayan Pasek. 2016. *The Journey of the Goddess Durga: India, Java, and Bali*. New Delhi: International Academy of Indian Culture and Aditya Prakashan.

Bandem, I. Madé, and Frederik E. deBoer. 1995. *Balinese Dance in Transition: Kaja and Kelod*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bateson, Gregory, and Margaret Mead, dirs. 1952. *Trance and Dance in Bali.* Film. Institute for Intercultural Studies. http://www.interculturalstudies.org/resources.html#films

Belo, Jane. 1960. *Trance in Bali*. New York: Columbia University Press. https://doi.org/10.7312/belo94442

Bruno, Antonetta L. 2002. *The Gate of Words: Language in the Rituals of Korean Shamans*. CNWS Publications 117. Leiden: Research School of Asian, African, and Amerindian Studies (CNWS), Leiden University.

Choi, Chungmoo. 1989. "The Artistry and Ritual Aesthetics of Urban Korean Shamans." *Journal of Ritual Studies* 3 (2): 235–49.

———. 1991. "Nami, Ch'ae, and Oksun: Superstar Shamans in Korea." In *Shamans of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Ruth-Inge Heinze, 51–62. New York: Irvington.

Eiseman, Fred B., Jr. 1990. *Bali: Sekala & Niskala; Essays on Religion, Ritual, and Art*. Vol 2: *Essays in Society, Tradition, and Craft*. Singapore: Periplus Editions.

Emigh, John. 1984. "Dealing with the Demonic: Strategies for Containment in Hindu Iconography and Performance." *Asian Theatre Journal* 1 (1): 21–39. https://doi.org/10.2307/1124364

———. 1996. *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2011. "Exhibition and Awe: Regimes of Visibility in the Presentation of an Emperor." *Journal of Material Culture* 16 (1): 64–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183510394942

Geertz, Hildred. 1994. *Images of Power: Balinese Paintings Made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824845506-fm

Grotowski, Jerzy. 1968. *Towards a Poor Theatre.* New York: Simon and Schuster. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203819814

Hamayon, Roberte. 2000. *La chasse à l'âme: Esquisse d'une théorie du chamanisme Sibérien*. Paris: Société d'Ethnologie.

Herbst, Edward. 1997. *Voices in Bali: Energies and Perceptions in Vocal Music and Dance Theater*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

Hobart, Angela. 2003. *Healing Performances of Bali: Between Darkness and Light*. New York: Berghahn Books.

———. 2005. "Transformation and Aesthetics in Balinese Masked Performances: Rangda and Barong." In *Aesthetics in Performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*, edited by Angela Hobart and Bruce Kapferer, 161–82. New York: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv287shgn.12

Kendall, Laurel. 1985. *Shamans, Housewives, and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824844837-fm

———. 2009. *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824860899-fm

———. 2021a. "Gods and Things: Is 'Animism' an Operable Concept in Korea?" *Religions* 12 (4): 283–97. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12040283

———. 2021b. *Mediums and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings, and Masks in Asian Places*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520970717-fm

Kendall, Laurel, and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati. 2020. "Scary Mask/Local Protector: The Curious History of Jero Amerika." *Anthropology and Humanism* 45 (2): 279–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12296

Kendall, Laurel, Jongsung Yang, and Yul Soo Yoon. 2015. *God Pictures in Korean Contexts: The Ownership and Meaning of Shaman Paintings*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824857097-fm

Laderman, Carol, and Marina Roseman, eds. 1996. *The Performance of Healing*. New York and London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315538860

Picard, Michel. 1996. *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*. Singapore: Archipelago Press.

Schechner, Richard. 1985. *Between Theater and Anthropology*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812200928.fm

Shirokogoroff, Sergei M. 1935. *The Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. London: Kegan Paul.

Silvio, Teri. 2019. *Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824880989-fm

Slattum, Judy, and Paul Schraub. 2003. *Balinese Masks: Spirits of an Ancient Drama.* Singapore: Periplus.

Stephen, Michele. 2001. "Barong and Rangda in the Context of Balinese Religion." *Review of Indonesian and Malaysian Affairs* 35 (1): 135–93.

Swancutt, Katherine. 2023. "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 3-23.

Taussig, Michael. 2009. *What Color Is the Sacred?* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226789996.001.0001

Turner, Victor. 1968. *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429486012

———. 1969. *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315134666

Walraven, Boudewijn. 2009. "National Pantheon, Regional Deities, Personal Spirits? *Mushindo*, *Sŏngsu*, and the Nature of Korean Shamanism." *Asian Ethnology* 68 (1): 55–80.

Wiener, Margaret J. 1995. *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Yim, Suk-jay (Yim Sŏk-chae). 1970. "Han'guk musok yŏn'gu sŏsŏl" [Introduction to Korean "Mu-ism"]. *Journal of Asian Women* 9: 73–90.

Kari Telle
Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI), Norway

Displaying Demons

Processions at the Crossroads in Multireligious Indonesia

In the Hindu Balinese imagination, demons (*buta kala*) are ambiguous figures of the crossroads. Across Indonesia, the display of giant demon puppets (*ogoh-ogoh*) has increasingly become part of the lunar Hindu New Year celebrations. Drawing on fieldwork among the Balinese minority on the island of Lombok, I argue that the display of demon puppets permits Hindu Balinese youth to unleash "wild" demonic forces. Building on Kaja M. McGowan's (2008) notion of Balinese "internal aesthetics," I propose that the puppets serve as potential sites or receptacles for the demonic. Just as each demon puppet mobilizes a display of fun and volatility, so it provokes passions and frequently becomes embroiled in conflict. Demon puppets are designed to amuse and dazzle by their outrageous appearance, yet they unsettle the porous boundaries between "religion" and "entertainment." By examining the politics surrounding the annual *ogoh-ogoh* procession in Cakranegara, I show that their display acquires urgency in a multireligious context.

Keywords: processions—aesthetics—display—Balinese Hinduism—religious pluralism—Lombok

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 45–71

Return to Table of Contents

In the Hindu Balinese imagination demons (*buta kala*) are ambiguous figures of the crossroads. Troublesome and often obnoxious, demons are beings in perpetual motion who are associated with spatial and temporal transitions. Hence it is fitting that the *buta kala* are entertained and feasted with lavish sacrifices at the end of the lunar Hindu (*Saka*) year, a critical cosmic juncture that is enlivened by display and pageantry. Across the Indonesian archipelago, the display of giant demon puppets (*ogoh-ogoh*) has increasingly become part of the Hindu New Year celebrations, which culminates with Nyepi, the Day of Silence, the first day of new year and a national holiday. Zooming in on the Muslim majority island of Lombok, I argue in this article that the public display of demon puppets permits Hindu Balinese minority youth to demonstrate their aesthetic prowess in ways that also intimate their capacity to unleash "wild" demonic forces.

The relatively flimsy papier-mâché demons have had a brief yet remarkable career. In just a few decades, strikingly new demons—from gorillas with AK-47 rifles to three-meter-long hairy mosquitos with bulging eyes crawling along the tarmac, Dracula vampires, and blood-dripping Suzuki motorcycles—have popped up across urban and rural Lombok and inserted themselves into the sequence of Hindu New Year celebrations (figure 1). Crucially, the startling range of demon puppets owes its existence to youth, whose passion for conceiving, making, and displaying their aesthetic creations to multireligious audiences has given the demons greater visibility in contemporary public life. Such displays of aesthetic ingenuity both delight and provoke. Nowadays the *ogoh-ogoh* procession in the city of Cakranegara usually includes 120–150 demon puppets, each puppet carried by a group of young men and accompanied by a sizeable entourage of female and male youth amid a vibrant cacophony of drums, cymbals, and gongs. The procession culminates with a sumptuous end of year ritual (*tawur kesanga*), in which the demons are invited to feast on a spread of delicacies before being requested to depart and not disturb people in the new year. Timed for maximum effect, the end of year ritual begins just before sunset (*sandikala*), the in-between transitional time when the demons like to roam about. The ideal place to perform these sacrifices is a large intersection, preferably one that has been ritually empowered by offerings and metal deposits buried deep in the ground.

In this article, I take the *ogoh-ogoh* procession in Cakranegara as the locus for unpacking Balinese feelings and assumptions about the display of demons and for

Figure 1. Giant mosquito-beetle with bulging yellow eyes, 2010. Photograph by Kari Telle

contributing to the anthropology of display as an important subject in its own right.[1] One of the fascinating things about the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets is that they, not unlike the demonic forces they evoke, escape categorization and refuse to be pinned down. Herein lies the source of their attraction and capacity to provoke strong sentiments. Although the diversity of their external appearance is vital to their performative and affective appeal, we should not, I suggest, be too dazzled by their outward forms. Nor should we think of display as merely intended for human audiences. To grasp what display entails in a Balinese life-world and to appreciate the passionate investment in the relatively ephemeral *ogoh-ogoh* puppets or sculptures, it is necessary to consider their "internal aesthetic" (McGowan 2008).

Writing about Balinese shrines, art historian Kaja McGowan observes that Western visual sensibilities have steered the attention toward "outward" monumental images, a tendency that has led scholars "to overlook the more ephemeral sculptures or 'effigies' made from raw ingredients in the landscape, ingredients that hold meaning as sheer potential" (2008, 245). Comprehending "the internal life of shrines," she argues, "requires adjusting to an aesthetic that subsists on disappearing" as "images are always about to be wrapped up, to be contained, or to be swallowed" (2008, 243). Introducing the idea of an "internal aesthetic," McGowan usefully directs attention to the intricate web of raw ingredients and deposit boxes that give "life" (*urip*) to Balinese shrines.[2] Taking McGowan's notion of an internal aesthetics as my cue, I will show that the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets are assembled and animated through material and symbolic processes of activation, before being deactivated, disassembled, and ultimately pulverized by fire. Of course, it is only by bringing the "outward" and "inward" form of these puppets together that we can begin to grasp their significance

and capacity to incite strong passions. But this is easier said than done: pinning down what an *ogoh-ogoh* puppet is, is not easy at all. Yet it helps to trace the process of its fabrication; once the "outer" body has been completed, the puppet can be described as a juncture or crossroads, which brings me to the subject of display.

Judging from the drama that often surrounds the annual procession of demon puppets, I think it is fair to say that many Balinese struggle with how to deal with these intriguing puppets. Part of the problem is that the relatively short-lived *ogoh-ogoh* puppets defy easy categorization. This problem has perhaps been most acute for religious authorities, who have vacillated with regard to whether the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets should be included within public Hindu rituals or not. At the same time, it is precisely their inaccessibility and their potential as being more than matter that imbues the relatively flimsy, often comical *ogoh-ogoh* puppets with their affective power. In a Hindu Balinese life-world, display is firmly bound up with efforts to manage relations with the forces of the "invisible" (*niskala*) realm, both by manifesting their presence in the "visible" (*sekala*) realm, and, equally important, by maintaining a proper distance between these different ontological realms. As a practice of mediation, aesthetic display brings normally hidden forces into the realm of the sensory. Hence, in this context display should not be considered merely as a spectacle intended for human audiences but as a practice for entertaining, engaging, and moving invisible audiences. As McGowan's notion of internal aesthetics implicitly suggests, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets first become visible to beings of the invisible (*niskala*) realm. With this in mind, it is but a short step to argue that display is a fraught endeavor, a high-stakes process that involves both intrinsic and extrinsic risks (Howe 2000; Telle 2016).[3]

In what follows, I will bring some of these productive tensions to the surface, as they speak to Katherine Swancutt's invitation in the introduction to this issue to approach display as an elastic phenomenon that may unsettle conventional

Figure 2. Rangda, the widow-witch, 2015. Photograph by Kari Telle.

Figure 3. Green-faced orangutan with spiky hair, bullets and army boots, 2015. Photograph by Kari Telle.

distinctions between self and other, sacred and secular, human and spirit, male and female, and ethnic insider and outsider, "thus inviting spectators to consider what lies at the crossroads between them" (2023a, 3-23). Honing in on the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets, I will show that they both give shape to the demonic and serve as intersections through which spiritual movement and transformation take place. Being made for display, the giant *ogoh-ogoh* puppets delight and amuse, yet these ephemeral three-dimensional performing objects also incite strong passions and frequently become embroiled in conflict. The *ogoh-ogoh* procession is *the* occasion when the demons show off and flourish for a brief yet intense burst of life—typically some lose a limb, or worse, their head. Fusing youth culture, entertainment, and spiritual concerns, the boisterous *ogoh-ogoh* procession allows Hindu Balinese youth to display their aesthetic prowess in ways that upend or unsettle the distinction between "secular" entertainment and "religious" ritual.

Display at the crossroads

Once per year, the main artery of Lombok's urban center is taken over by demons. In March 2015, more than 150 large papier-mâché demons assembled outside the Mataram Mall around noon before moving in a boisterous procession down Jalan Pejanggik, a broad avenue named after a precolonial Sasak kingdom.[4] As usual, the procession included classic Balinese demons, such as the widow-witch Rangda with her lolling tongue and sagging breasts (figure 2), and Kala Rau depicted as a huge gaping mouth about to swallow the petite moon goddess.[5] Dazzling novel creatures also made their debut appearance, such as the colossal, green-faced gorilla with spiky orange hair sporting an AK-47 rifle and a belt of bullets draped around his fat torso (figure 3). A macabre execution scene depicted two hooded all-black henchmen taking aim at two blindfolded men. By the time all the demons and their human entourage reached the intersection where Pejanggik Street meets Anak Agung Ngurah Karangasem Street, where the procession ended, it was late afternoon and only the most avid spectators remained.

Few, if any, public events in urban Lombok can rival the popularity of the annual *ogoh-ogoh* procession in Cakranegara, an exuberant spectacle organized by Balinese youth from across Cakranegara, Sweta, Ampenan, and Mataram, the provincial capital of West Nusa Tenggara. That the demons are pulling youth from a sprawling urban area together in a shared undertaking, year after year, testifies to a remarkable groundswell of interest in putting demons on display. On Lombok, Balinese Hindus constitute less than 7 percent of the population, being concentrated in urban areas and in the western and central parts of the island. While the puppets are designed to impress and amuse, their oversized limbs and sexual organs easily risk offending moral and religious sensibilities, certainly among the more conservative Sasak Muslims, who constitute more than 90 percent of the island's 3.8 million inhabitants. Awareness of this potential is second nature to Lombok Balinese youth, who have come of age during the "conservative turn" (van Bruinessen 2013) in Indonesian Islam in the new millennium. They have also grown up with stories and memories of the anti-Christian violence in January 2000, when churches, shops, businesses, and homes belonging to Christians, often but by no means exclusively of Sino-Indonesian descent, were looted and burned (Telle 2010, 2011). While the *ogoh-ogoh* procession has a light, playful feel, this public event that draws thousands of spectators from all over the city and beyond tends to be heavily securitized. The heavy presence of uniformed police, Balinese civilian guards (*pecalang*), and snipers on many rooftops heightens the perception that "something" is at stake, adding a sense of excitement to the procession.

Why have the demons captivated the imagination of Hindu Balinese youth? What is at stake during the *ogoh-ogoh* procession? What does all this tell us about display as a phenomenon that does not just "mirror" or "model" the world (Handelman 1998) but potentially generates fresh collective imaginaries about the demonic and steers the social and cosmic orders in new directions? Before tackling these questions, let me briefly introduce the urban landscape where the demon puppets first emerged on Lombok, namely the city of Cakranegara. As this name indicates, Cakranegara was once the capital of a Balinese state (*negara*). A branch of the Karangasem kingdom began to build the city in the early eighteenth century, after troops from Karangasem in east Bali defeated smaller Sasak kingdoms (Hägerdal 2001; Harnish 2006). Balinese rulers placed much emphasis on temple construction: the Meru temple with nine roofs was constructed around 1720 in the center of the city, just across from the royal palace. The nearby Mayura temple, surrounded by a big lake and gardens, was built around 1740. Examining the city's spatial layout and the grid-system of streets, scholars have noted the impetus to embed cosmology in built form, producing structures that sought to integrate the macro-cosmos (*bhuwana agung*) with the micro-cosmos (*bhuwana alit*) (Funo 2002). Balinese ruled ended in 1894, when they and their Sasak allies were defeated by Dutch troops fighting alongside Sasak aristocrats from east Lombok. At the time, the supreme *raja* was Anak Agung Ngurah Karangasem of Puri Mataram, one of the wealthiest indigenous rulers in the archipelago (Vanvugt 1995). The palace was destroyed and looted, and numerous treasures were brought to Holland or auctioned off, and the aging king and his two sons were exiled to Java. Among the looted treasures was the fourteenth-century

Negara-Kertagama lontar-manuscript that tells the story of the Javanese Majapahit empire, which was eventually repatriated to Indonesia in 1974 and awarded UNESCO World Heritage status.

Although Balinese rule is long gone, the characteristic grid-system of streets and the major temples are tangible reminders of the time when Cakranegara was the "navel" (*puseh*) of the kingdom. What may be less obvious to a casual visitor, yet self-evident to Balinese residents, is how this urban landscape, jam-packed with stores, stalls, motorcycles, and cars, undergoes periodic transformations and is also a pulsating "living" or "spiritual landscape" (Allerton 2009; Telle 2009). My host in Cakranegara, Ratu Oka Netra, a high-ranking elderly Balinese man, explained that the construction of strategically located crossroads required offerings and the burial of thin sheets of precious metals (*pratima*) to anchor and activate these critical junctures. The precious objects in the subterraneous spiritual landscape should not be exposed but remain covered by layers of earth. By far the most cosmologically pregnant "major" (*agung*) intersection in Cakranegara is where Jalan Pejanggik meets Jalan Anak Agung Ngurah Karangasem, named after Lombok's last Hindu Balinese ruler. Like a spinning wheel (*cakra*), this busy crossroads is flanked by a police post, the large traditional market (Pasar Cakra), and an old Hindu temple dedicated to commerce (Pura Melanting). Not surprisingly, this historically significant intersection (*catus pata*) is widely considered to be the ideal place for major rituals that are tied to the lunar cycle, and notably the end of year sacrifice.

Yet it has proved increasingly difficult to use this intersection for ritual purposes, as municipal authorities fear that closing the city's busiest thoroughfares may cause traffic jams and conflict. To this day, many Sasak feel uneasy when Balinese processions take over roads and obstruct traffic for extended periods. Harnish notes that "one elder Sasak friend stated that when Balinese ceremonies are held at an intersection in Cakranegara, it is like they are celebrating their victory over the Sasak and have once again colonized Lombok" (2021, 227). While it is an extremely delicate matter to perform Hindu rituals in busy intersections, municipal authorities have taken considerable interest in the demon procession. Rather than listening to those who would like to banish the demons from "the island of a thousand mosques," as Lombok is commonly known nowadays, both municipal and provincial authorities like to portray the vibrant *ogoh-ogoh* procession as showcasing interethnic and interreligious tolerance and harmony, a local manifestation of Indonesia's national motto "unity in diversity" (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*). This framing has given the demon puppets greater visibility and public fame. But there are certainly those who find that the demons are misrecognized and cheapened by being displayed as cultural products in a "secular" procession (*pawai*) alongside Sasak musicians and dancers. Others find that the hidden force of the flimsy puppets, their demonic power so to speak, is precisely to bring youth from different communities across a sprawling urban area together in a shared undertaking. All the better if Sasak Muslim musicians and performers also dance and drum the demons into being, using display to activate the life-affirming potential of coexistence across ethnic and religious boundaries.[6] Turning now to how the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets are made, I pay close attention to their outward form and provide glimpses into their anatomy and internal aesthetics.

Conceiving demons

In March 2009, a Lombok Balinese friend and I spent many pleasant afternoons walking around the predominantly Balinese neighborhoods in Cakranegara and Mataram looking for puppets in progress. One afternoon we came across some teenagers and kids working on a human-sized figure with claw-like toes and a dagger in his right hand. This was the Demon Man (*Buta Kala Dengan*), whom Ida Bagus Nyoman (aged sixteen) described as "a very angry person who always wants to pick a fight and likes to hit people." This was the first year Nyoman and his friends made a proper *ogoh-ogoh* that would join the procession on March 26, alongside another, bigger demon from the ward. Next to the Demon Man, they had placed a flower offering (*canang*) and a few incense sticks. They explained that they always burned incense and put out a fresh *canang* before beginning the work in order to reduce the risk of accidents. Showing me his bruised fingers, Nyoman said, "I got many cuts from the bamboo we used to make his frame. Actually, almost all of us have been injured, but nothing really serious has happened." What had been difficult was to get permission to make a puppet in the first place. At first, Nyoman's father had refused to let him occupy himself with the lowly demons. Eventually, after other family members intervened, Nyoman was allowed to work on the Demon Man, albeit on the condition that he did not carry him in the procession (figure 4).

These comments about minor mishaps, despite taking precautions, indicate that making an *ogoh-ogoh* is a somewhat risk-filled endeavor. So is the intergenerational domestic drama that likely involves both status concerns and parental worries about safety during the procession, when the puppets are lifted and spun around at a dazzling speed. Being born into the highest Brahmana strata, Ida Bagus Nyoman belongs to the select few who can become a priest (*pedanda*). The father's reluctance to let his son occupy himself with the Demon Man was likely informed by the understanding that

Figure 4. The Demon Man (*Buta Kala Dengan*), Karang Bungkulan, Cakranegara, 2009. Photograph by Kari Telle.

for "learned Balinese," as Angela Hobart notes, the demons "epitomize the cravings of the world, the passions and furies to which the human being may succumb" (2003, 169). Some high-caste Balinese avoid involvement with the *ogoh-ogoh* and will not carry or position themselves below the demons. Others mock such attitudes as hopelessly outmoded. For the most part the process of making and displaying *ogoh-ogoh* seems to galvanize a communal ethos that almost transcends status differences. Nevertheless, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets are surrounded with ambivalence, not least because they infuse youth with a competitive spirit that occasionally spills into fights, especially if their demon is ridiculed or physically attacked.

Making these puppets is a collective endeavor, the most dedicated makers being unmarried youth (*terune*) and young married men from the same ward. When youth agree to make a demon puppet, they exercise their imaginations, the power to bring into being.[7] In Balinese, *ogoh-ogoh* connotes "shaking" or "wagging," which nicely captures the characteristic movement of the puppets in motion. Being made for display, the puppets are constructed from light materials and designed to give a sense of fluid, dynamic movement. Usually one leg is raised and one arm is positioned higher than the other, which helps to balance the structure and creates the impression of being alive as it glides through the air when it is lifted and spun around. Expert makers excel by realizing scenes involving one or more demons hovering over or devouring their victims. The process usually starts one or two months before Nyepi. Typically, youth request in-kind and monetary contributions for buying bamboo, wood, glue, paper, styrofoam, paint, various accessories, pieces of cloth, and T-shirts from people in the neighborhood. Despite growing residential segregation along ethnic and religious lines, giving donations for collective rituals and public events remains an important means of cultivating neighborliness (see also Suprapto 2013, 214–16). Hence Balinese youth can count on their Sasak, Javanese, and Sino-Indonesian neighbors to contribute, with more substantial donations from shops, banks, and businesses.[8] In some Balinese-dominated wards, part of the money is raised through betting on cocks, a practice that is illegal in Indonesia—as it was when the police raided the famous cockfight that the Geertzs observed in Bali, which was held to raise money for an elementary school (Geertz 1973).

Given the intriguing links between cockfighting, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets, and the Balinese New Year celebrations, some comments about these phenomena are in order. Any cockfight, according to Clifford Geertz, "is in the first instance a blood sacrifice offered, with the appropriate chants and oblations, to the demons in order to pacify their ravenous, cannibal hunger" (1973, 420). In fact, Geertz observes that most villages on Bali used to arrange large-scale cockfights one day before Nyepi, with official approval, an exception to the general ban. On Lombok cockfighting is far more controversial, but in some wards the *ogoh-ogoh* are made in the communal hall (*bale banjar*), close to where the semi-secretive fights take place. Passionate gamblers were indeed quick to note that just as the spilled blood satiates the demons in the earth, the blood infuses the *ogoh-ogoh* with vitality. Both the illegality of cockfighting and the fact that such fights are typically accompanied by alcohol taints the *ogoh-ogoh* with transgressiveness—highly fitting for demonic figures, who exhibit raw passions and flaunt good behavior. Being a minority, Balinese on Lombok try to avoid offending

Muslim-majority sensibilities regarding gambling and alcohol consumption, and in most wards such activities are kept apart from the puppets.

The appearance of the Demon Man alongside oversized insects, and the archetypal Balinese witch Rangda in her ferocious form, shows that their visual persona and iconography are extremely varied. Many *ogoh-ogoh* makers emphasized that they enjoyed making these puppets precisely because they could draw on all kinds of sources for inspiration—from horror movie monsters like Dracula to the grisly ISIS execution spectacles on the news. Others insisted that they always make a "real" demon, by which they meant one of the 108 demons named in ancient *lontar* texts, Hindu epics, and *wayang* stories. As Dewa, a married man in his mid-twenties, put it to me in 2010, "This is Kala Celuluk, the king of sorcerers who likes to eat babies alive in order to become even more potent (*sakti*). You have to understand, he is truly a terrible demon, whereas those 'new creations' [*kreasi baru*] are merely designed to amuse." Rather than weighing in on disagreements over real versus faux demons, the point here is that the demonic is a complex yet highly elastic concept. This elasticity is eloquently manifested in their outward appearance, where demons with genealogies stretching back to ancient Hindu figures appear alongside relatively modern horror film celebrities like Dracula and the ill-tempered Demon Man.

The value placed on bringing forth a spectacular outlandish demon is, however, matched by strict observance of the key stages in the fabrication process. Irrespective of the puppet's phenotypical shape and the depth or shallowness of its genealogy, its anatomy and stages of growth are virtually identical. Much as youth revel in the freedom to conceive a demon of their own, they also take a number of precautions. The sense that conceiving an *ogoh-ogoh* is a risky undertaking is, effectively, built into the aesthetic process. Besides making the *ogoh-ogoh* into a distinct entity, what Birgit Meyer (2009) calls a "sensational form," these habituated actions inculcate an

Figure 5. Boy with Demon, Cakranegara, 2009. Photograph by Kari Telle.

affective disposition toward the puppets, what Christopher Pinney (2004) terms a "corpothetics" that mobilize all the senses simultaneously. Some of these conventions are similar to those that apply to other aesthetic objects, such as sacred masks (Hobart 2003; Kendall and Ariati 2020). What is specific to the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets is the expectation that they should be made during the final months of the Saka year and be burned shortly after Nyepi, the Day of Silence. Despite the temptation to keep a particularly well-crafted head for reuse, this is hardly, if ever, done. My interlocutors were well aware that *ogoh-ogoh* can fetch high prices in Bali's art market and are made to order for individual buyers or for display at official functions (Nozlopy 2004). Yet such developments have not taken hold on Lombok, where the *ogoh-ogoh* are relatively short-lived creatures whose creation and destruction remains intimately tied to the annual Hindu ritual cycle.

Examining the internal process of conceiving *ogoh-ogoh* puppets, we hit upon an internal aesthetics that exploits selected raw ingredients in the natural world, "ingredients that hold meaning as sheer potential" (McGowan 2008, 245). To begin, an offering basket accompanied by incense is prepared before the work of crafting the frame begins. Shaped as a tall basket made from palm leaves, the offering basket contains coins, rice, flowers, and eggs and is identical to those used when paying visits to shrines. In this context, the offering conveys to the invisible (*niskala*) forces that the work will begin, requesting their permission and support. It is common to put a small flower offering (*canang sari*) inside the bamboo frame. Though Ida Bagus Nyoman and his friends always put out a small offering every time they worked on the Demon Man, more experienced *ogoh-ogoh* makers do not necessarily bother to do so (figure 5).

When the outer body has been completed, painted, dressed, and decorated, a temple priest (*mangku*) or someone with knowledge of mantra is asked to carry out a purification (*melaspas*) rite. Besides ritually completing the *ogoh-ogoh*, my young interlocutors explained that the *melaspas* rite is intended to prevent those who have worked on the demon puppet from being disturbed or literally inhabited by their own creation. Such disturbances may involve bad dreams, nightmares, illness, or possession (*kerauhan*), which is considered to be problematic if it occurs spontaneously outside a healing or performance context. The aim is to protect those who have made the demon puppet, strengthening their bodily integrity. What I add to this explanation, which pivots around the need to uphold distinctions between humans and spirits, is that this rite makes the *ogoh-ogoh* distinctly "other." The importance of cutting ties and severing connections illustrates that the aesthetic process involves an interplay of beings who are situated across an "ontological divide" (Keane 2008, 120). Rather than binding makers closer to what they have co-created, the objective here is to set them firmly apart. At issue here is a process of severance, whereby the aesthetic object is alienated from its mundane context. Crucially, aesthetic display involves negotiating ontological dynamics as well as efforts to prevent the collapse of vital distinctions.

The *melaspas* rite that completes the *ogoh-ogoh* puppet is usually performed in close conjunction with another rite, one that is no less important but has a rather different purpose (figure 6). Since these rites usually take place within the same

Figure 6. Purification/ enlivening the demon (*melaspas/ pasupati*), Karang Bang Bang, Cakranegara, 2010. Photograph by Kari Telle.

event, they can be tricky to distinguish. Known as *pasupati*, the aim of this rite, which requires knowledge of prayers and mantra, is to acquaint potent beings from the *niskala* realm with the recently completed puppet.[9] This rite also involves prayers for the safety of those who will carry the puppet in the procession the following day. While incense, prayers, and mantra are indispensable communicative vehicles, it is unthinkable to call upon such powerful beings without providing them with the appropriate display of offerings. The core ingredients are raw meat and blood from a black or brown-feathered chicken, which are placed on the ground. No meal is complete without drink, and Balinese demons are fond of fermented rice wine (*tuak*) and liquor, substances that lubricate and form ties of relatedness. If these beings are moved to enter the *ogoh-ogoh*, it becomes "conscious" and "alive" (*urip*), and the body is filled with an unknown force. For this process of animation to happen, timing is important.[10] Hence, the *pasupati* rite is usually carried out at sunset (*sandikala*), the in-between period between day and night when demons like to roam about. Significantly, at this time the piece of white cloth that covers the puppet's eyes during the process of fabrication will be removed, a gesture that signals it may be conscious and enables an intimate exchange of gazes.

This kind of "visual intermingling" (Pinney 2001, 168) with the demonic can be scary, yet is thrilling and suggests that display enables a two-way communication (see Telle 2021, 410–12; and for a related discussion of two-way displays in Southwest China, Swancutt 2023b). From now on, the puppet is treated as a sentient being, who craves food, drink, company, and respect. People speak of the *ogoh-ogoh* as being alive. Henceforth, young and older men will guard the *ogoh-ogoh* throughout the night (*tangi*). To stay vigilant and have a good time, snacks and drink should be plentiful, which accounts for the somewhat disheveled appearance of some of the participants the following day. In this state, some are prone to lose their tempers, which partly accounts for the playful yet tense undercurrents of the procession.

Having caught glimpses of how the puppets are conceived and of their internal anatomy, we see that each *ogoh-ogoh* puppet is a highly unstable nexus of inner and outward material forms. Display in this context is firmly wound up with efforts to capture the interest of invisible (*niskala*) audiences and transform them from spectators into co-participants. Extending McGowan's notion of internal aesthetics, I suggest that the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets first become known or visible to the beings of the invisible realm. Once the *pasupati* rite has been performed, people say that the puppet looks and feels different: the eyes are more fiery and shiny, the body feels more heavy, its appearance is more terrifying, etc. In short, these expressions indicate that the puppet is filled with substance and is a conjunction or crossroads of invisible energies and outward form. These accounts express a common Balinese experience, namely that various kinds of spirits may temporally inhabit human bodies and different kinds of objects (see also Kendall and Ariati 2020; Pedersen 2008; Wiener 2017). The concept of *taksu* was often invoked when people talked about a well-crafted *ogoh-ogoh*, one that would inspire visceral effects, such as goosebumps or a quicker pulse. Notably, *taksu* is also the name of a specific shrine in the house yard at which one can pray for inspiration and protection. In June 2018, Made Yoga, a Balinese stone carver specialized in temple architecture, explained *taksu* as follows:

> We [Balinese] are convinced that works of art possess *taksu*. We pray to the forces of the invisible realm to enter, so that the object becomes filled with power. I would say that *taksu* emerges from the combination of the quality of the art, the efficacy of the mantra, and the sensibility of the onlookers. Of course, an *ogoh-ogoh* is more likely to make you frightened when you are alone in a quiet place or in the forest than during a bustling (*ramai*) parade with many people around. Whether the *ogoh-ogoh* affects you or not is also a subjective perception. It's like a sense of euphoria. Sometimes people even get possessed (*kerauhan*).

This gloss underlines how *taksu* is an emergent property, a perception arising out of the fluid web of human-object-spirit relations.[11] Just as an *ogoh-ogoh* will elicit different responses from different persons, it will be experienced differently by the same person depending on the time (*kala*) and circumstance (*patra*).[12] Far from being a stable entity, these perceptual shifts reflect that the puppet is a juncture or crossroads traversed by multiple entities. Hence, any *ogoh-ogoh* could attract different beings, and there is not necessarily a correspondence between its outward persona and its internal, womb-like potential.

Far from being unique to the *ogoh-ogoh*, the gap between surface and interiority is an enduring puzzle and existential issue. "The capacity of spirit beings not only to change from a well-wishing attitude to destructive anger and back, but also to take many different shapes at a whim," as Hildred Geertz (1994, 32) points out, "has important implications for Balinese conceptions of truth." It implies, for example that "humans may not always know what form a being may take, nor can they know from the form of a prepared vessel what being may have taken his seat in it" (Geertz 1994, 32). In light of this pervasive ontological volatility, it hardly matters whether an *ogoh-ogoh* is shaped as a true demon or as a faux demon, such as the green-faced gorilla with military boots that appeared in 2015 whom Dewa would surely have dismissed as a "new creation that is merely designed to amuse." Indeed, this *ogoh-ogoh* could

potentially be more than dead matter.[13] One conclusion that Hildred Geertz (1994, 32) draws is "that the artist who wants to portray such a being can use his own fantasy at will." This argument may well hold for paintings, yet it is less obvious when dealing with rapidly proliferating demons who want to go on display in ways that unsettle the established, albeit porous, boundaries between entertainment and religion (figure 7).

Demonic politics

It is no exaggeration to say that the *ogoh-ogoh* demons have had phenomenal success in their relatively brief career. Besides proliferating in number and growing in size, the demons have migrated from the urban landscapes of Cakranegara and Mataram, where they made their debut appearance in the early 1990s, into the lush hinterland in West and Central Lombok and along the west coast into North Lombok, gathering small and large Balinese communities into their affective fold. Their swift movement has been powered by youthful enthusiasm, but these demons have also proved troublesome, igniting strong passions along the way. What is notable is how the display of *ogoh-ogoh* puppets, which has gathered steam since the turn of the millennium, has occurred in a period when Balinese and non-Muslim minorities on Lombok often complain of being marginalized in public life and politics. Among the most painful examples of this marginalization is the destruction of shrines and temples in the first decade of the new millennium following the collapse of the authoritarian New Order regime (1966–98). Considering that temples serve as "bridges to the ancestors" (Harnish 2006), the limited political will to enable their reconstruction remains a source of grievance for many Balinese (Telle 2013, 2014, 2016; Widana 2016). While the demon puppets had caught the imaginations of Lombok Balinese youth before these events exposed their precarious situation as a minority, the impetus to demonstrate their aesthetic prowess by putting demons on display has arguably been galvanized by it.

Figure 7. The Bony Demon, 2009. Photograph by Kari Telle.

I am tempted to suggest that the buoyant affirmation of aesthetic prowess and community spirit during a time of uncertainty and pushback springs from a quest for sovereignty. Sovereignty may be too big a word, yet it signals something of the aspirational and defiant energy with which Balinese youth have brought the demons into the public arena through display. However fleetingly, no more than a few hours once per year, the experience of playing with demons generates something like "collective effervescence" (Durkheim 1965). In turn, this has proved irresistible to young Balinese spectators who did not want to miss out on the fun and excitement. Those who mobilized friends and neighbors to make the puppets seem to have had an easy task. The demons, to borrow an Indonesian expression, grew "like mushrooms in the rainy season," in a rhizomatic fashion that took almost everyone by surprise. Although fun and a quest for sovereignty may seem to be worlds apart, the point here is that display unfolds before the eyes of multiple audiences and imagined others, both near and distant, human and nonhuman. In her study of "would-be sovereigns" and the elusive quest for sovereignty in West Papua, Danilyn Rutherford argues that "every bid for power involves a confrontation with audiences of various sorts" (2012, 4). Moreover, "the sense that others are watching can spawn not only anxiety and embarrassment but also pleasure and hope" (2012, 5). Rutherford uses the term "audience" in an extended sense as shorthand for the varied kinds of interlocutors that social actors identify with or react to in life. One merit of this elastic understanding is to underline how the plurality of audiences, in terms of their various scales and unequal powers, both enables and bedevils the political projects that Rutherford examines in *Laughing at Leviathan* (2012). What resonates with the context of Balinese minority youth on Lombok is the audacious will to conjure invisible audiences and to manifest themselves in the company of demons. Having watched the heaving, boisterous procession, it sure seems that the pleasure and thrill that is palpably visible bubbles up from a collective sense of the outrageous audacity of it all. There is much laughter, but the conjuring of demons is serious business. Participants may even experience and see themselves with new eyes—perhaps as a little bigger, part of a larger collective body that is backed by powers that may be called upon in times of crisis.

The conjuring of audiences, both human and those situated beyond an ontological divide, is always risky (Howe 2000), but when this is done by a minority in a situation of simmering ethnoreligious tension, conflicting interests easily come into play (Telle 2016; Harnish 2014; Suprapto 2013). In Indonesia it has become a truism that democratization and the decentralization reforms since 1999 have turned everything into politics. This became all the more true with the introduction in 2005 of direct elections for village heads, mayors, district heads, and governors (Bush 2008). Despite the common complaint that politics is corrupting everything (Bubandt 2014), the competitive electoral climate has also given the demons greater public prominence. Although I have yet to meet a Balinese who did not marvel at the youthful will to realize impressive *ogoh-ogoh* puppets, they have also proved divisive (for a related discussion on the debates surrounding youthful displays of the gods in Taiwan, see Teri Silvio 2023). Even *ogoh-ogoh* aficionados readily admit that the puppets bring out raw feelings, making people hot-tempered and competitive. Occasionally these internal

conflicts have been fought out in the public realm, prompting separate processions and sacrificial rituals, including efforts to lure the demons to the other side.

To illustrate what is at stake in these conflicts over display, the situation that arose in 2009 is quite revealing and illuminates the major tensions that are at play to this day. However, few conflicts come out of the blue, and there had long been tension between the Ogoh-Ogoh Council of Mataram (DOM) and the Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI), a nationwide council tasked with the promotion and standardization of Hinduism in Indonesia (Picard 2011). In the late 1980s, when urban artists began experimenting with making puppets, their efforts were enthusiastically supported both by senior members of the PHDI in Cakranegara and Mataram and by Balinese civil servants involved in the promotion of the performing arts. Local artists and sculptors had been impressed by the giant, colorful puppets they had seen in Denpasar and elsewhere in Bali, where such puppets emerged in the mid-1980s (Nozlopy 2004; Widana 2016).[14] Despite their novelty, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets quickly acquired religious clout by becoming integrated into the sequence of public Hindu New Year rituals. The first time they went on display was in 1992, when residents in six wards in West Cakranegara organized a small procession with six demon puppets to the Taman Mayura temple complex, where they took part in the Tawur Kesanga sacrifice (Kusuma 2003). Year by year, demons from other wards joined the procession and the sacrifice in which offerings are laid out in a mandala shape corresponding to the nine cardinal directions (*nawa sanga*), each direction associated with a Hindu deity, his/her key attributes, and emblematic color. For about a decade this arrangement worked relatively smoothly. But the proliferating demons became challenging to handle, and some found them a nuisance. In 2004, local Hindu authorities (PHDI) announced that they would no longer take responsibility for the *ogoh-ogoh* procession, based on the rationale that the puppets were not essential to the sequence of Hindu rituals culminating with Nyepi but merely a cultural practice popular among youth.

When PHDI pulled back, others stepped in to ride the wave of youthful interest in putting demons on display. The most tangible embodiment of these developments was the formation of the Ogoh-Ogoh Council of Mataram (DOM) in 2005, whose mission was spelled out in a booklet printed on yellow paper.[15] Tapping into the groundswell of interest in *ogoh-ogoh*, DOM's founder aimed to make them more attractive for purposes of display by enhancing their aesthetic quality. Locating the "performing arts" (*seni budaya*) as the foundation of unity in the archipelago, in the past and in the future, the vision statement notes that "regional autonomy" permits each region to express its distinctiveness and to safeguard artistic diversity. Since art is a human need, artists have the obligation to express society's aspirations and anxieties. Thus, the DOM mission statement observes that "at a time when Indonesia has acquired a bad reputation in the eyes of the world, this is the time for Indonesia's artists, particularly those in Mataram, to demonstrate their creativity and ability to enhance the nation's dignity in the most desirable direction" (Kusuma 2005, 2). Besides accommodating the "hopes and anxieties" of *ogoh-ogoh* artists in Mataram, DOM will develop the aesthetic quality of *ogoh-ogoh* and other art forms to ensure their "strategic value in the field of tourism" (2005, 2). The latter aspiration is of

course highly reminiscent of the long history of branding Balinese arts as unique and commercially valuable assets (Picard 1996; Vickers 2011).

What is more interesting is the portrayal of the post-1999 democratic era of regional autonomy as permitting expressive freedom and the articulation of aspirations and anxieties, and the indirect reference to the communal conflicts and Islamist terror attacks on Bali in the early 2000s that hurt Indonesia's reputation as a tolerant Muslim-majority nation with great cultural diversity.[16] A poor reputation adversely effects Lombok, whose economy is heavily dependent on international tourists—a diverse audience whose eyes and appetites increasingly shape local developments. Turning a bleak situation into an opportunity, Artha Kusuma, a Balinese painter, businessman, and aspiring politician, approached Muhammad Ruslan, the mayor of Mataram, to secure his blessing to form the association. During the mayor's reelection campaign for a second period (2005–10), Artha Kusuma served on the veteran Golkar politician's campaign team. Ruslan used the performing arts to promote the provincial capital as a progressive, multiethnic, and multireligious city. In a situation where the demons provoked hostile reactions from some Muslim groups, the mayor's support was important and strategic. But this also pushed the procession toward the public display of interethnic collaboration, a cultural celebration of "unity in diversity."[17] Some Balinese were upset that the demons were becoming associated with party politics, while others felt that their sacred or religious character was sullied by being displayed as mere entertainment.

These issues came to a head in 2009 when the conflict between DOM and PHDI became exposed in public, and critics said that DOM was an acronym for a "special military zone" (Daerah Operasi Militer), likening the local situation to the longstanding armed conflict between the separatist movement in Aceh and the Indonesian armed forces. What catalyzed the situation was the coordination meeting for the procession, which came across as a political campaign event. The meeting opened with Artha Kusuma reading a statement by the mayor, who praised Balinese youth for their creativity but urged them to limit the consumption of alcohol to ensure an orderly procession, before a Muslim Golkar politician, campaigning for a seat in the provincial parliament, gave a speech and donated T-shirts for the procession. The next day, *Lombok Post* featured a piece in which "Mr. Tourism of West Nusa Tenggara" was quoted as saying that, "leading artists can help to birth talented new artists and ensure that the *ogoh-ogoh* become a major 'tourism brand.'" Participants were also given a booklet, *Art, Culture and Politics*, that featured campaign ads for two Golkar politicians. Printed on yellow paper, the color of the Golkar party, the distribution of this booklet was widely seen as inappropriate. Within days, banners rejecting the politization of *ogoh-ogoh* were put up in different areas of Cakranegara. Many were upset by the blunt attempt to harness the demons for political, and possibly financial, gain. In some neighborhoods, DOM banners and booklets were burned. During my two-hour visit to DOM's leader three days later, his phone rang six times, and three visitors came to discuss the tense situation. Suspecting that provocateurs had infiltrated DOM, the leaders now feared that the procession might be disrupted. Rather than relying on Balinese civilian security groups (*pecalang*), they agreed to request more police to secure the procession and end of year sacrifice to be held

in the major intersection (*catus pata*) in Cakranegara. Obtaining permission to hold the sacrifice in this highly auspicious location hinged on political connections and substantial funds. It was also rumored that PHDI in 2008 had requested to use the intersection for the end of year sacrifice but had not been given access and instead was relegated to another intersection.[18]

Strolling through the Banjar Pande Selatan neighborhood in West Cakranegara some days later, I ran into Wayan, a security guard I knew, who was watching teenagers working on the skeleton-like female demon Kala Gregek Tunggek, with wiry fingers and a gaping hole in the back. The previous evening, Wayan had attended a meeting in the "death temple" (*pura dalam*) in Karang Jongkang convened by PHDI in which it was agreed that the demon puppets should only be displayed within their neighborhoods followed by sacrifices in nine locations around the city. As Wayan explained, "PHDI is the highest, most representative body for Hindus. As for DOM, we see it as a guerrilla movement. Under the command of DOM, the procession is just a parade, with Sasak drummers and sexy *joget* dancers. All that is sacred [*sakral*] about the *ogoh-ogoh* is lost." Strikingly, when newspapers reported that PHDI planned smaller parades and would provide financial support for nine sacrifices, they listed various organizations supporting the decision but made no mention of the Ogoh-Ogoh Council of Mataram (DOM), which refused to bow down.

Influential political and religious supporters were mobilized for the second planning meeting for the procession. The seventy representatives from wards making puppets were reassured that the procession would go ahead, being firmly supported by the mayor of Mataram. This time "Mr. Tourism" promised prizes to the three best puppets and to showcase them at an upcoming province-level tourism fair, but he also expressed regret that his support had proved so controversial. A distinguished temple priest who also serves as an educator in Hinduism (*binmas Hindu*) Jero Mangku Wardana gave a wry speech on how the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets mirror the demons. His comments that "big sacrifices nowadays require animals and 'many envelopes,' since the demons lately have become very modern" drew much laughter. By suggesting that money politics infiltrate rituals, he hinted that PHDI officials were not aloof from what they accused DOM leaders of succumbing to. Turning to the upcoming sacrifice, Jero Mangku stressed the cosmological significance of the main intersection in Cakranegara, which was likened to a mountain summit. Linking its historical significance at the center of a Balinese state to the present, the temple priest observed:

> Lately, we have had difficulties convincing municipal authorities to close the intersection. They fear monetary losses. Facing a global monetary crisis, they should realize that it is better to close the intersection, shaped as a swastika, for a few hours once a year. This sacrifice is not merely done to protect the Hindu community. Not at all. Nowadays humanity behaves like sleepwalkers. The sacrifice pays our debts. By giving the demons food and drink they become satiated and less inclined to disturb us. We pray that they will leave us in peace.

Encouraging everyone to take part in the sacrifice in which some forty temple priests would participate, Jero Mangku concluded by reminding youth to remember

to sprinkle the demon puppet with holy water (*tirta peralina*) to remove its inner, vital presence immediately after the procession to avoid dangerous disturbances.

With different factions trying to recruit the demons to their side, *ogoh-ogoh* makers were effectively forced to display their loyalty. Many youth groups were hugely disappointed by the prospect of remaining within the neighborhood but did not want to be pawns in the rivalry between PHDI and the Ogoh-Ogoh Council of Mataram. Some pulled out, but the procession organized by DOM numbered 125 puppets. The large turnout pleased DOM leaders, yet most participants were probably mainly motivated by the desire to go on display. Once the puppets have been enlivened, they want to move about, to see and be seen by myriad others. In the company of a dazzling variety of demons, they flourish into something more. Only by gathering demons from near and far, manifesting their aesthetic prowess in public, could youth hope to unlock the magic, even transformative, powers of display.

Displaying demons

Taking place on the final day of the Saka year, the *ogoh-ogoh* procession is tied to cosmological cycles when the forces of the invisible world and the lives of humans are conjoined through display and sacrifice. The procession, "a celebration of demons" (Kapferer 1983), is a rare moment when Hindu Balinese youth manifest in public, showing off their aesthetic prowess. Located at a pregnant temporal juncture, the procession is steeped in a gay, frivolous atmosphere but also harbors darker intimations of demonic forces on the loose. This tension is built into the organizational logic of the procession, turning it into an alluring "spectacle" that mirrors the "invisible authority" of powerful spirit beings (Feuchtwang 2011, 65). As an interface where demonic forces may reveal themselves, the procession carries transformative potential.

Despite its simple organizational design, the sense that "something" might happen, that display may exceed its own boundaries, animates the *ogoh-ogoh* procession for participants and spectators alike. The procession is directed by one or two speakers, who briefly introduce the demon and his or her human entourage and invite the demon to come forward and spin around, before moving on. While each demon has been ritually enlivened before the procession, it flourishes into a fuller sense of life in the company of unknown demons from different wards and territories. Being lifted and spun around at dizzying speed, accompanied by gongs and frenetic drumbeats, the giant demon puppets seem to bask in the pleasure of display, their potential being realized through a brief, intense spurt of public fame (figure 8).

Typically, the spinning is particularly vigorous in front of the VIP tribune, where the mayor, police and military officers, high-level bureaucrats, and Hindu Balinese leaders are seated. Most demons cooperate, but there is also a deliberate testing of limits, as when an *ogoh-ogoh* puppet refuses to move forward, lingers too long before the VIP tribune, or moves dangerously close to the spectators lining the street and has to be forcefully restrained by police or Balinese guards. The sense that these powerful hidden forces can barely be reined in is a key performative dynamic. During the procession, youth show off their demon and let themselves be drawn into

Figure 8. Going on display, 2010. Photograph by Kari Telle.

its affective force field, taking on some of its wild, unrestrained power. Indeed, the procession exudes a sense of barely controlled order, with the demons threatening to spin out of control, creating chaos. The sense that display threatens to unleash potent forces that are destructive of human and natural orders is further heightened by the heavy presence of police and security personnel, who seem feeble and puny in relation to the giant puppets.

These elements of danger, risk, and uncertainty give the procession its transformative character as a public event where capricious demonic forces may make themselves known. As display draws out malevolent demonic forces, serving as a juncture or meeting place between different realms, the procession unsettles the boundary between entertainment and religion. But by the time the demons reach the intersection where Pejanggik meets Anak Agung Ngurah Karangasem Street and the procession ends, most have lost their spirited, sprightly appearance. Those who have lost a limb or are coming apart seem comical and pathetic, no longer fit to be on public display, much as their exhausted human entourage is now eager to return home. When the day turns to dusk, the puppets are placed at the entrance to their neighborhood and stand guard during Nyepi, the Day of Silence, when Hindus are expected to remain indoors and refrain from unnecessary activities (figure 9). Taking on a protective function, the demon puppets are recruited to ensure that people observe Nyepi and mark out their respective territories. Reaching their final stage, the demon puppets become protective presences, which is also consistent with how, "[A] Balinese ontology recognizes the capacity of things demonic to transform into things divine and for the divine to become demonic" (Kendall and Ariati 2020, 284). Shortly afterward, they are burned.

Conclusion

In sketching the brief career and life-cycle of the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets made by Balinese youth in urban Lombok, my purpose has been to demonstrate how display, as a practice of mediation, brings invisible forces into the realm of the sensory, involving risk and opportunities. Born of crossroads encounters, the demon puppets can be located at the intersection of youth culture, entertainment, and spiritual concerns. Part of their attraction, I have suggested, is precisely that the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets defy easy categorization and unsettle established categories, for instance between "entertainment" and "religion," by being destructive and protective. Both Balinese youth and Hindu religious authorities struggle with what to make of these gloriously hybrid and rapidly proliferating demons, whose rules of fabrication and internal aesthetics are nonetheless reminiscent of how other Balinese sculptures, masks, and objects are ritually activated to attract various spirit beings (McGowan 2008; Telle 2016; Hobart 2005).

Being relatively ephemeral and only once being displayed in public, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets do not accumulate spiritual clout over time, such as named ceremonial daggers (*keris*) (Pedersen 2008) or the eccentric mask Jero Amerika, vividly portrayed by Laurel Kendall and Ariati Ni Wayan Pasek (2020). What these shortlived demon puppets clearly possess, however, is a remarkable capacity to proliferate and to incite strong passions. The *ogoh-ogoh* puppets provide youth with an opportunity to display their aesthetic prowess to multiple audiences. Demanding engagement, the *ogoh-ogoh* puppets not only have expanded notions of the demonic but have also catalyzed heated conflicts over their roles in public life. Such internal conflicts are seen as particularly problematic when they are exposed in public, as they were in 2009 when

Figure 9. Demon placed at the entrance to the neighborhood during Nyepi, Cakranegara, 2009. Photograph by Kari Telle.

the conflict between DOM and PHDI resulted in separate processions and sacrificial rituals. As Gelgel, a Lombok Balinese friend in Cakranegara, wryly observed in 2009, "Before Nyepi we want to get rid of the demons, but now the *kala* arrive, the demons seem to win."

Acknowledgments

I wish to extend my deepest thanks to Katie Swancutt, Laurel Kendall, Kaja McGowan, and the two anonymous reviewers for helpful input on this article. Lene Pedersen, Alanna Cant, Timothy Carroll, and Hilde Nielssen were generous readers of an earlier version of this piece. I am grateful to I. Gede Yudharta for discussions about Balinese performing arts on Lombok.

Author

Kari Telle is a senior researcher at the Chr. Michelsen Institute (CMI) in Norway. Trained in anthropology, journalism, and Southeast Asian studies, Telle's research spans a range of topics in both the anthropology of religion and legal and political anthropology, including ritual performance, animism, state regulation of religion, militias, and hybrid policing. She co-edited the volume *Contemporary Religiosities: Emergent Socialities and the Post-Nation State* (Berghahn 2010). Recent publications include "Faith on Trial: Blasphemy and 'Lawfare' in Indonesia" (*Ethnos* 2018) and the chapter "Anthropologies of Religion" in *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Anthropology* (SAGE 2021).

Notes

1. This article draws on fourteen months of fieldwork between 2005 and 2018 based in Cakranegara and Mataram, West Lombok. Prior to this, I conducted sixteen months of fieldwork in rural Central Lombok, working mainly among Sasak Muslims.

2. McGowan's (2008) primary focus is on the cosmological significance of the deposit boxes (*pedagingan*) placed near the crown of Balinese shrines, whose content includes paired statues and metal sheets.

3. Howe considers "extrinsic risks" to be "risks that accompany the enactment of a ceremony," whereas "intrinsic risks" are "integral to the rite itself, part of its very essence" (2000, 69). In a Hindu Balinese context, rituals set in motion "certain kinds of forces which must then be channelled and controlled by the ritual's managers" (Howe 2000, 75). This perspective can be extended to the process of making and displaying *ogoh-ogoh* puppets.

4. Located at the boundary between Cakranegara and Mataram, the Mataram Mall is situated adjacent to the old Balinese cemetery and the Karang Jongkang death temple (*pura dalem*). Part of the cemetery was demolished to make space for this mall, the first to be built in West Nusa Tenggara Province.

5. For an illuminating discussion of the mythology and masked performances involving Rangda in the context of the Galungan festival and the Calong Arang dance-drama in southern Bali, see

Hobart (2005). As Hobart argues, Rangda should not simply be seen as a malevolent figure but as a totalizing figure who unites destructive, reconstitutive, and protective forces.

6. Cooperation among Balinese and Sasak is a longstanding feature of several festivals and religious events on Lombok (see Gottowik 2019; Harnish 2014; Telle 2016).

7. My understanding of the imagination is informed by Castoriadis (1994) and his effort to dissolve the conceptual break between imagination and reality by theorizing the "radical imaginary."

8. On Bali, some Balinese intellectuals are critical of the high sums of money spent on *ogoh-ogoh*, viewing this as a commercialization of Hindu religion (see Widana 2016). Nozlopy (2005) notes that the practice of requesting donations for making *ogoh-ogoh* may create tensions within the local community. On Lombok, there have been some concerns that funds from politicians and state officials have not been distributed downward but have been "eaten" by them along the way. Such allegations of corruption are quite common.

9. Hobart provides several examples of *pasupati mantra* that are recited to consecrate new Barong Ket masks in Bali (2003, 147 and 248 [appendix]).

10. See Kendall and Yang (2015) for an illuminating discussion of processes of animation with respect to Korean shaman paintings.

11. Davies describes *taksu* as "the spiritual inspiration and energy within a mask, puppet, character, or ceremonial weapon." It is a condition that performers aspire to because it connotes "the artist's being one with his or her musical instrument, mask, puppet or costume" (Davies 2007, 21).

12. For a discussion of the links between time cycles and demons, see Hobart (2003). She notes that demonic spirits (*kala*) are generally understood to be more potent than demons (*buta*), a Balinese term that also means to be blind.

13. Elsewhere (Telle 2009; 2011), I have described how the Balinese responded to the political uncertainties in the early post–New Order era by establishing a Hindu-oriented security force, Dharma Wisesa, headquartered in Cakranegara. According to the leaders, this group has the backing of an invisible "spirit army" (*bale samar*).

14. In both Bali and Lombok these initiatives were supported by the Parisadha Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI), a modernist, reformist organization tasked with unifying and promoting Hinduism in Indonesia. The original organization was established on Bali in 1959.

15. The organization's Indonesian name is Dewan Ogoh-Ogoh Mataram (DOM).

16. For an interesting discussion of Balinese responses to the Islamist bomb attacks in 2002 and 2005 in relation to notions of balance and dependence on tourism, see Hornbacher (2009).

17. See Schlehe (2017) for a comparative discussion of what she calls "festivalization" to assert local culture while simultaneously promoting tourism in post-*reformasi* Indonesia.

18. Critics suspected that one reason PHDI in 2008 organized a big sacrifice in conjunction with Nyepi was linked to the gubernatorial elections, but this is difficult to verify. The discontent with PHDI at this time cannot be separated from the aborted initiative to build a big temple on the slope of the Mount Rinjani volcano and the perceived inability of PHDI to defend and promote Hindu Balinese interests (Telle 2014, 2016).

References

Allerton, Catherine. 2009. "Introduction: Spiritual Landscapes of Southeast Asia." *Anthropological Forum* 19 (3): 235–51. https://doi.org/10.1080/00664670903278387

Bruinessen, Martin van, ed. 2013. *Contemporary Developments in Indonesian Islam: Explaining the Conservative Turn*. Singapore: ISEAS. https://doi.org/10.1355/9789814414579-fm

Bubandt, Nils. 2014. *Democracy, Corruption and the Politics of Spirits in Contemporary Indonesia*. London and New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315773803

Bush, Robin. 2008. "Regional Sharia Regulations in Indonesia: Anomaly or Symptom." In *Expressing Islam: Religious Life and Politics in Indonesia*, edited by Greg Fealy and Sally White, 174–91. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. https://doi.org/10.1355/9789812308528-014

Castoriadis, Cornelius. 1994. "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary." In *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, edited by Gillian Robinson and John F. Rundell, 136–54. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315003528-8

Davies, Stephen. 2007. "Balinese Aesthetics." In "Global Theories of the Arts and Aesthetics," edited by Susan L Feagin. Special issue, *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 65 (1): 21–29. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-594X.2007.00234.x

Durkheim, Emil. 1965. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. New York: Free Press.

Feuchtwang, Stephen. 2011. "Exhibition and Awe: Regimes of Visibility in the Presentation of an Emperor." *Journal of Material Culture* 16 (1): 64–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183510394942

Funo, Shuji. 2002. "The Spatial Formation of Cakranegara." In *The Indonesian Town Revisited*, edited by Peter Nas, 201–29. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, by Clifford Geertz, 412–53. New York: Basic Books.

Geertz, Hildred. 1994. *Images of Power: Balinese Paintings Made for Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824845506-fm

Gottowik, Volker. 2019. "Cooperation and Contestation at a Shared Religious Site: The Lingsar Festival on Lombok, Indonesia." In *Interreligious Dialogue: From Religion to Geopolitics*, edited by Giuseppe Giordan and Andrew P. Lynch, 49–69. Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion 10. Leiden: Brill Press. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004401266_005

Hägerdal, Hans. 2001. *Hindu Rulers, Muslim Subjects: Lombok and Bali in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.

Handelman, Don. 1998. *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

Harnish, David D. 2006. *Bridges to the Ancestors: Music, Myth, and Cultural Politics on an Indonesian Island*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824861674-fm

———. 2014. "Balinese and Sasak Religious Trajectories in Lombok: Interactions, Tensions, and Performing Arts at the Lingsar Temple Festival." In *Between Harmony and Discrimination: Negotiating Religious Identities within Majority-Minority Relationships in Bali and Lombok*, edited by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and David D. Harnish, 61–83. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004271494_004

———. 2021. *Change and Identity in the Music Cultures of Lombok, Indonesia*. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004498242

Hobart, Angela. 2003. *Healing Performances of Bali: Between Darkness and Light.* New York and London: Berghahn Books.

———. 2005. "Transformation and Aesthetics in Balinese Masked Performances: Rangda and Barong." In *Aesthetics and Performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*, edited by Angela Hobart and Bruce Kapferer, 161–82. New York and London: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv287shgn.12

Hornbacher, Annette. 2009. "Global Conflict in Cosmocentric Perspective: A Balinese Approach to Reconciliation." In *Reconciling Indonesia: Grassroots Agency for Peace*, edited by Birgit Bräuchler, 34–53. London and New York: Routledge.

Howe, Leo. 2000. "Risk, Ritual and Performance." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (1): 63–93. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.t01-1-00004

Kapferer, Bruce. 1983. *A Celebration of Demons: Exorcism and the Aesthetics of Healing in Sri Lanka*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Keane, Webb. 2008. "The Evidence of the Senses and the Materiality of Religion." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 14 (1): 110–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2008.00496.x

Kendall, Laurel, and Ariati Ni Wayan Pasek. 2020. "Scary Mask/Local Protector: The Curious History of Jero Amerika." *Anthropology and Humanism* 45 (2): 279–300. https://doi.org/10.1111/anhu.12296

Kendall, Laurel, and Jongsung Yang. 2015. "What Is an Animated Image? Korean Shaman Paintings as Objects of Ambiguity." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 153–85. https://doi.org/10.14318/hau5.2.011

Kusuma, Artha. 2003. *Arti dan Makna Ogoh-Ogoh* [The meaning and significance of *ogoh-ogoh*]. Mataram, Indonesia: Sanggar Pallet.

———. 2005. *Dewan Ogoh-Ogoh Mataram* [The Ogoh-Ogoh Council of Mataram]. Mataram, Indonesia: Sanggar Pallet.

McGowan, Kaja M. 2008. "Raw Ingredients and Deposit Boxes in Balinese Sanctuaries: A Congruence of Obsessions." In *What's the Use of Art?: Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, edited by Jan Mrazek and Morgan Pitelka, 238–71. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865580-011

Meyer, Birgit, ed. 2009. "Introduction: From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations; Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding." In *Aesthetic Formations: Media, Religion, and the Senses*, edited by Birgit Meyer, 1–28. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230623248_1

Nozlopy, Laura. 2004. "*Ogoh-ogoh*: A 'New' Tradition in Transformation." In *Performing Objects: Museums, Material Culture and Performance in Southeast Asia*, edited by Fiona Kerlogue, 153–68. London: Horniman Museum and Gardens.

———. 2005. "Bazar, Big Kites and Other Boy's Things: Distinctions of Gender and Tradition in Balinese Youth Culture." *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 16 (2): 179–97. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1835-9310.2005.tb00033.x

Pedersen, Lene. 2008. "An Ancestral Keris, Balinese Kingship, and a Modern Presidency." In *What's the Use of Art? Asian Visual and Material Culture in Context*, edited by Jan Mrazek

and Morgan Pitelka, 214–37. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865580-010

Picard, Michel. 1996. *Bali: Cultural Tourism and Touristic Culture*. Singapore: Archipelago Press.

———. 2011. "From *Agama Hindu Bali* to *Agama Hindu* and Back: Toward a Relocalisation of the Balinese Religion?" In *The Politics of Religion in Indonesia: Syncretism, Orthodoxy, and Religious Contention in Java and Bali*, edited by Michel Picard and Rémy Madinier, 117–41. London and New York: Routledge.

Pinney, Christopher. 2001. "Piercing the Skin of the Idol." In *Beyond Aesthetics: Art and the Technologies of Enchantment*, edited by Christopher Pinney and Nicholas Thomas, 157–79. Oxford: Berg. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003084808-9

———. 2004. *"Photos of the Gods": The Printed Image and Political Struggle in India*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Rutherford, Danilyn. 2012. *Laughing at Leviathan: Sovereignty and Audience in West Papua*. Chicago: Chicago University Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226731995.001.0001

Schlehe, Judith. 2017. "Contesting Javanese Traditions: The Popularisation of Rituals between Religion and Tourism." *Indonesia and the Malay World 45* (131): 3–23. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13639811.2016.1219494

Silvio, Teri. 2023. "The Malevolent Icon Lantern Incident: Early Twenty-First-Century Transformations of the Image of the Goddess Mazu in Taiwan." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 73-97.

Suprapto. 2013. *Semerbak Dupa di Pulau Seribu Masjid: Kontestasi, Integrasi dan Resolusi Konflik Hindu-Muslim* [Fragrant incense on the island of a thousand mosques: Contestation, integration, and Hindu-Muslim conflict resolution]. Jakarta: Kencana.

Swancutt, Katherine. 2023a. "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 3-23.

———. 2023b. "The Time of Red Snowfall: Steering Social and Cosmic Renewal in Southwest China." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 141-64.

Telle, Kari. 2009. "Spirited Places and Ritual Dynamics among Sasak Muslims on Lombok." *Anthropological Forum* 19 (3): 289–306. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00664670903278411

———. 2010. "Dharma Power: Searching for Security in Post–New Order Indonesia." In *Contemporary Religiosities: Emergent Socialities and the Post-Nation State*, edited by Bruce Kapferer, Kari Telle, and Annelin Eriksen, 141–56. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857455345-009

———. 2011. "Spirited Warriors: Conspiracy and Protection on Lombok." In *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Belief and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, edited by Kirsten W. Endres and Andrea Lauser, 42–61. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857453594-005

———. 2013. "Vigilante Citizenship: Sovereign Practices and the Politics of Insult in Indonesia." *Bijdragen tot de Taal, Land dan Volkenkunde* 196 (3–4): 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-12340029

———. 2014. "Changing Spiritual Landscapes and Religious politics on Lombok." In *Religious Trajectories in Majority/Minority Relationships in Bali and Lombok*, edited by Brigitta Hauser-Schäublin and David D. Harnish, 35–60. Leiden: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004271494_003

———. 2016. "Ritual Power: Risk, Rumours and Religious Pluralism on Lombok." *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 17 (5): 419–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/14442213.2016.1206614

———. 2021. "Anthropologies of Religion." In *The SAGE Handbook of Cultural Anthropology*, edited by Lene Pedersen and Lisa Cliggett, 402–22. London: SAGE Reference. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529756449.n23

Vanvugt, Ewald. 1995. *De Schatten van Lombok* [The Lombok treasure]. Amsterdam: Jan Mets.

Vickers, Adrian. 2011. "Bali Rebuilds Its Tourism Industry." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde* 167 (4): 459–81. https://doi.org/10.1163/22134379-90003580

Widana, I. Gusti Ketut. 2016. *Ogoh-Ogoh: Kapitalisasi Religi di Tataran Materi* [*Ogoh-ogoh*: Religious capitalization at the material level]. Denpasar: Pustaka Bali Post.

Widana, I. Nyoman Murba. 2016. "Resistance toward Cultural Domination in Hindu Balinese Community in Praya Regency Central Lombok." *International Journal of Research in Social Sciences* 6 (10): 345–60.

Wiener, Margaret J. 2017. "Things in (Un)Common: Two Reflections." *Anthropologica* 59 (2): 239–50.

Teri Silvio
Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica

The Malevolent Icon Lantern Incident

Early Twenty-First-Century Transformations of the Image of the Goddess Mazu in Taiwan

During the 2017 Taipei City Lantern Festival, a twenty-foot-tall lantern of Moniang, a character from Taiwanese artist Wei Tsung-cheng's manga series *Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare*, was inaugurated and put on parade. Moniang represents a new image of the goddess Mazu, incarnated as a cute-sexy high school student. This article examines how this display allowed a new image of Mazu to move from the subculture of "male-oriented" manga creators and fans into a broader public sphere. Debates over the lantern reveal a gap in both generational and political leanings in terms of ideas about the relationship between deities and worshippers. The display of Moniang has opened up the possibility for the younger generation's reconceptualization of divinity to challenge some of the traditional images and rituals at the core of Chinese folk religion.

Keywords: Taiwan—Chinese folk religion—Mazu—manga—Wei Tsung-Cheng

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 73–97

Return to Table of Contants

As James Robson notes, "a tension between hiding and revealing thoroughly permeates the different realms of Chinese philosophy, art, literature, and religion" (2016, 180). In the field of Taiwanese folk religion (*minjian zongjiao*), this tension is spatialized, both literally and metaphorically. There is what we might call a sacred core that is characterized by hiddenness. Objects with the most *ling* (efficacious power) are usually at least partially hidden, such as the objects that are sealed into statues for worship (*shenxiang*) to give them life and bring the god into them; the *shenxiang* of the most powerful gods installed in the center of the most interior altar inside temples, farthest away from the worshippers; and the *shenxiang* that ride in covered palanquins during processions around their territory (*raojing*). And then there is a periphery characterized by display, a penumbra where religion bleeds into other social fields. In this sphere of "diffused religion" (Shahar and Weller 1996, 1) or "ambient faith" (Engelke 2012), religious practices, discourses, and especially imagery are not confined to ritual spaces and times but permeate daily life. Thus, in Taiwan, aside from the *shenxiang* on altars in temples and homes, a wide variety of less efficacious images of Daoist and Buddhist deities are seen everywhere—in the art on the facades of temples; on New Year posters; in government-sponsored public art; on signs warning pedestrians not to litter; in movies, television serials, and video games; in shop window displays; on taxicab dashboards; on t-shirts, wallets, stationery goods, credit cards, and on and on.

In this penumbra, where the boundaries between religion and other social fields are permeable, the visual culture of Taiwanese folk religion is constantly changing as it absorbs influences not only from other religions and the fine arts but from commercial culture, democratic politics, and public life generally. While the images from the penumbra very rarely penetrate into the core of hidden power, many scholars have noted the important role that popular culture, including literature, drama, cinema, television, and comic books, plays in giving Taiwanese people their images of gods, and in spreading the worship of particular gods (Shahar and Weller 1996; Shahar 1998; Duara 1988).

Because commercial popular culture plays such an important role in disseminating religious imagery, dramatic and lasting changes in how gods are represented usually take place first through the unnoticed accumulation of individual acts of consumption. It is only in public displays that the emergence of a new type of religious image is made visible to the broader public, acknowledged, and often contested.

Such displays might be seen as bids for legitimacy by one sphere within another, for instance a claim that popular culture has a role to play in religious practice, or that, where government is a secular institution, theological discourse may still inform political debate.

Aside from changes that have been ongoing since the late twentieth century, such as the deterritorialization of deity cults, the corporatization of temple organizations, and the personalization of religious belief (Nadeau and Chang 2003), anthropologists have observed a few new trends in the twenty-first century. First, Taiwanese folk religion has taken an "affective turn" in which hierarchical relationships between deities and worshippers have been reimagined as more egalitarian and based on an intimate, emotional, "heart-to-heart" connection (Lin 2015, 16–18). Second, aesthetics have become more important to worshippers. Young worshippers tend to read temples' public displays, such as their choices of performance troupes to make up their processions, in terms of style, reading these choices as expressions of something like a brand identity, and they form communities of taste based on these expressed identities (Chi 2018a). Third, younger Taiwanese are more likely than older people to acknowledge that gods are dependent on humans to bring them into presence, and that people interact with deities only as they can imagine their appearances and personalities (Silvio 2019, 116–20).

The new images of Daoist and Buddhist deities embody and transmit these ideas. When new types of representations of gods are removed from their original, more private contexts and put on public display, they introduce broader audiences to these emerging concepts of divinity and its relation to humanity (see the articles by Kari Telle, Janet Alison Hoskins, and Heonik Kwon and Jun Hwan Park in this issue for more on the relationships between public forms of display and emerging concepts of divinity). Changes that take place in the penumbra of displayed religious images can always be read as attempts to transform the occulted core—and defended against or supported as such.

The goddess Mazu is one of the most widely worshipped Daoist deities in Taiwan's folk religious pantheon. Legend has it that in the Song dynasty a young woman named Lin Moniang, who lived in Meizhou on the coast of Fujian Province, performed miracles to rescue sailors from drowning, and after she died she was deified as Mazu, goddess of the ocean and protector of seafarers. She is worshipped, like other Taiwanese deities, through carved wooden statues called *shenxiang*. Mazu's *shenxiang* traditionally represent her as a middle-aged woman, with a round face and benevolent expression. She is easily recognizable by her crown with a beaded veil, which often hides her eyes (figure 1).

In the twenty-first century, new styles of representing Mazu have emerged, inspired by Japanese popular culture. In this article, I want to focus on how one particular new image of the goddess Mazu emerged from the subculture of "male-oriented" manga, and then to trace how this image moved into a wider public sphere, into the penumbral space where religion meets national identity politics and commerce, through displays within contexts where these fields intersect.[1] In 2010, the first issue of the manga series *The Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare* (*Ming Zhan Lu*) by Taiwanese artist Wei Tsung-cheng was published.[2] In the manga, Mazu is incarnated

Figure 1. Traditional *shenxiang* of Mazu on a temple altar. Photograph by Charles (Chiao-He) Lee.

in the form of a sixteen-year-old girl named Lin Moniang. In terms of both her visual representation and her characterization, Moniang is a typical *meng shaonü* (*moe shojo* in Japanese).[3] *Meng shaonü* characters are both innocent and eroticized and are a common selling point in manga created mostly by and for male manga/anime fans (*zhainan* in Mandarin, *otaku* in Japanese) (see figure 2).

First, let me give an overview of how images of deities, and the goddess Mazu in particular, have been changing in the twenty-first century, and then introduce Wei Tsung-cheng's manga series and how it is situated within the constellation of new religious images. Then I will move on to look at how Moniang was removed from the manga and recontextualized through public display in two events: first as a giant lantern on a parade float in the 2017 Taipei Lantern Festival, and then played by an actress in a Taiwanese Opera version of *Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare* performed in 2021. Each of these events introduced Moniang to a different audience and was read as making different claims regarding the legitimacy of Japanese pop culture images within the intersecting fields of religion and identity politics.

In turning a goddess into a *meng shaonü* character, Taiwan here follows trends in Japan, where Buddhist and Shinto themes have been common in manga since the beginning of the industry (Thomas 2012), and where Buddhist temples have used manga style to brand themselves, including by representing goddesses as cute-sexy *moe shojo*, for slightly longer than those in Taiwan (Porcu 2014). While there is significant overlap in how this new style of representing deities has been introduced in Japan and Taiwan, Taiwanese folk religion and its social context are also different from Japanese Buddhism and its context. The pressure to construct Taiwanese culture and identity in relation to China makes the question of how folk religion is presented both to Taiwanese people and to the world particularly fraught.

Background: Taiwanese religion and politics in the twenty-first century

The new images of Mazu I discuss here were created by artists born in the late 1970s and 1980s, the first generation to come of age after the end of martial law in 1987 and also to grow up surrounded by Japanese cultural imports including manga and anime. The first decade of the twenty-first century, when they were going to college or starting their careers, saw major changes in Taiwan's politics, economy, and society.

In 2000, after over fifty years of rule by the Chinese Nationalist Party (KMT), Chen Shuibian became the first president elected from the opposition party, the pro-independence Democratic Progressive Party (DPP). One of the factors in Chen's win was his campaign's mobilization of the youth vote. Young campaign workers developed a new strategy, using the aesthetics of Japanese *kawaii* (cute) fancy goods to attract their generation, creating a logo character of the candidate with a large head, a blank face with large eyes, and a baseball cap (Chuang 2011).

During Chen's two terms, Taiwanese government bureaus and businesses began, following global trends, to adopt the discourses and policies of the creative industries and creative economy (Kong et al. 2006). The growth of the creative industries, it was hoped, would both provide a new labor sector to employ youth as Taiwanese manufacturers moved their factories overseas, and give Taiwan a national brand, creating positive images of Taiwanese culture for both international and domestic consumption. It was not only bureaucrats and CEOs who were invested in branding Taiwan. Many young creative workers were also self-motivated to create a new and uniquely Taiwanese visual culture. These "grassroots" nation branders were dedicated to creating works with an authentic Taiwanese feel (Zemanek 2018). For the international market, a main goal was to distinguish Taiwan from the People's Republic of China. For the domestic market, creating new images of Taiwan was more of a strategy to compete with Japanese popular culture, often by taking Japanese genres and aesthetics and localizing them. For both purposes, folk religion—largely gone from the mainland since the Cultural Revolution and distinct from Japanese Buddhism—was one easily available sign of Taiwanese difference (along with Taiwan's Indigenous peoples, night market snacks, and bubble milk tea).[4]

Figure 2. The cover of volume 6 of Wei Tsung-cheng's manga series *The Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare* (*Ming Zhan Lu*). Reproduced with permission from Wei Tsung-cheng.

Ironically, at the same time that folk religion was becoming a prominent signifier in the construction of Taiwanese identity, temple officials perceived folk religion to be in crisis, as young people moved to the cities for higher education

and middle-class jobs, abandoning traditional religious practices. Temple committees started looking to the creative industries to attract urban youth as well as income from tourism.

The first wave: Cutification

The emergence of images of Mazu as sexy-cute was preceded by a wave of images of deities that were purely cute. In the mid-2000s, the Family Mart convenience store chain, which had 2,500 stores around the island, regularly gave away small toys in exchange for proof-of-purchase stickers. Until 2007, these toys had all been figurines of American or Japanese cartoon characters, and the CEO wanted to produce a new line of original toys with local flavor. So that year he hired a Taipei design firm, and the designer created a series of small figurines of the most widely worshipped Daoist and Buddhist deities.

These "Good God Toys" (*hao shen gongzai*) had two of the important characteristics associated with the *kawaii* (cute) style of Japanese logo and mascot characters (called *kyara*) such as Hello Kitty—neoteny (oversized heads in proportion to the body) and a lack of texture and features (they had no noses or mouths). They were also made of vinyl, used in many Japanese toys (figure 3). The Good God Toys were a huge hit. Other designers recognized the trend as a business opportunity, and more and more such goods featuring cute, cartoonish images of deities were produced. Similar cute figurines of deities made of plaster had been produced by a couple of souvenir companies for several years, but they were few and sold mostly at tourist markets near temples. It was not until Family Mart's Good God Toys became a common sight in offices, homes, and shop windows that the media began to report on the "craze" for such images.

As this new type of religious image began to spread through Taiwan's markets, temples began to commission their own versions of the Good God Toys, to sell as souvenirs or give away to worshippers at special events. These toys kept the overall cute aesthetic, while some added more traditional features, for instance, having them made of ceramic, produced by the same artisans who restored the temple facades, or attaching protective charms to them and encouraging people to pass them over the incense burners in front of the *shenxiang* in the temple, just as bags of incense ash often are to give them power.

There was some resistance to the incorporation of the cute toys from older worshippers. They objected to producing images of the gods that would be treated roughly and then thrown away (or left in bathrooms or other unclean places), and some were also made uncomfortable by the incompleteness of the cute toys' faces. But this type of image proved to be so popular with most worshippers, and successful in drawing casual visitors to temples, that these objections were eventually overridden (Chang 2017; Silvio 2019).

When I interviewed collectors of cute deity toys, I encountered a few people (all middle-class men) who saw deity toys as "just toys," and a few others (all women) who believed that they could be treated as similar to *shenxiang*. Most worshippers, however, treated them as something in between, objects that offered blessing and

Figure 3. Mazu toy from the Family Mart's first Good God Figurine series. Photograph by Charles (Chiao-He) Lee.

healing but did not actually contain the deity's spirit. By the end of the 2010s, it had become taken for granted that such cute images of the gods were nearly universally acceptable (making such goods ideal gifts), and that they successfully served to create a sense of "intimacy" (*qinqie gan*) between urban youth alienated from traditional temple culture and the gods (Silvio 2019, chap. 3).

The acceptance of the gods' cutification, the crossover of the Japanese *kawaii* aesthetic in representations of the gods from the market to the temple, was marked through display. Aside from simply displaying the toys and other goods with cute deity images in their souvenir shops, many temples also began to place large balloons or cardboard cutouts of such images at the entrances to temples on holidays (Silvio 2019). Spirit mediums and worshippers began using cute emojis of gods in their communications on Facebook and Line (Lin 2018b; Chi 2018b).

Cute images of Mazu moved into the political arena as the movement to legalize same-sex marriage, and the backlash against it, intensified between 2013 and 2019, when the Marriage Equality Act was finally passed into law. As the strongest opposition to marriage equality was led by Christian groups (with some conservative Buddhist and Daoist associations joining in), the LGBT proponents of the act began to connect gay men and lesbians' right to legally marry to the constitutional right to religious freedom. They argued that Christianity, followed by less than 4 percent of the population, and in particular an evangelical movement funded by North American organizations, should not be dictating the laws in a country where an estimated 70–90 percent of the population identify as followers of Buddhism, Daoism, or folk religion. These religions have no set tenets regarding sexual object choice or behavior. Thus, activists presented Chinese folk religion as both more authentically Taiwanese and more tolerant than Christianity. For instance, in a 2013 public hearing where citizens presented arguments for and against marriage equality legislation, Cheng Chi-wei, the director of Tongzhi Hotline, Taiwan's largest LGBTQ NGO, framed part of his statement like this:

> I am a citizen. I believe in Matsu [Mazu], Buddha, and Pusa [Guanyin], I come from a traditional religious background. My mom always taught us that Matsu and Pusa teach us something—and that is not to do bad things and not to hurt others. They never said you can't be gay. Taiwan is supposed to be a multi-religious environment, not just Catholic or Christian. Please respect other religions. (Cited in Quinn 2015, 108)

By 2014, stickers and posters featuring images of the goddess Mazu with slogans such as "Mazu does not differentiate between straight and gay" (*Mazu bu fen yi tong*) appeared in the annual Pride Parade and other rallies in support of marriage equality (figure 4). That these images of Mazu as an avatar of Taiwanese democratic inclusivity should appear as adorable cartoon characters was overdetermined. These posters and stickers followed what was then already common sense. For people who wished their own image of what Taiwanese identity meant to reach both Taiwanese youth and foreigners, cute was the obvious way to go.

The second wave: Meng Shaonü Mazu

While the first wave of new images of Mazu in the twenty-first century was influenced by the aesthetics and marketing strategies of Japanese *kyara* goods, the second wave came from the more subcultural field of Japanese manga, more specifically the subculture of male-oriented manga and their *otaku* fans. The emergence of this new type of deity image from the subculture of manga into the public nexus of religion, tourism, government, and business was facilitated by movements both within and without the *zhainan* subculture.

Unlike professional product designers, who had produced the majority of cute *kyara*-type images of Buddhist and Daoist deities, full-time professional manga artists are rare in Taiwan. The manga market is dominated by Chinese translations of original Japanese manga, which make up over 90 percent of what is on sale in stores. The vast majority of comics created by local artists in Taiwan use the visual styles, genres, and character types of Japanese manga. Local original comics usually begin as side projects by illustrators, designers, or manga fans and are posted on personal blogs or amateur manga websites. Only those that receive the most positive feedback have a chance at being published professionally.

Figure 4. Sticker handed out by activists at the 2016 Taipei Pride Parade. Design by equalloveofmazu (*Mazu de ai li bu fen yi tong*), reproduced with their permission. Photograph by Huang Yubo.

Within this online subculture of professional and amateur artists sharing their manga, images of Daoist deities as character types from male-oriented manga began to appear around the same time that the popularity of the Good God Toys and other cute deity images passed its peak. One popular series was Salah D's *Hades Items: Apocalypse* (*Yinjian Tiaolie*), first published in 2010, in which General Seven and General Eight (gods in charge of bringing the souls of the dead for judgment) are portrayed as impish youths who dress in fascist-style uniforms and engage in light sado-masochistic play. Their commander, the City God, represented in *shenxiang* as a bearded man, is represented as a mature, sexy woman. This manga is often credited with starting a trend among Taiwanese artists for representing male deities as female. Mazu, though, when she appeared on amateur comics sites, was usually portrayed as a *meng shaonü*.

Throughout the 2010s, the government began offering some forms of direct support for the local comics industry and encouraged the production of manga inspired by local culture. Forms of support included not only grants but the annual Golden Comics Award contest (established in 2010), the funding of an anthology series of comics by local artists about local history and culture (the Creative Comic Collection, begun in 2009), and the establishment of a bookstore/gallery and artist-in-residence program for Taiwanese manga artists housed in a building near the Taipei train station (Taiwan Comic Base, opened in 2019).

It was in this context of increased interest in comics with local content, including religious content, from manga artists, their fans, and the government, that Wei Tsung-cheng's Moniang made her debut and moved into the public sphere.

Wei Tsung-cheng's Moniang

The character Moniang first appeared in Wei Tsung-cheng's manga *The Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare* (hereafter *Apocalypse*). The first volume of *Apocalypse* was published in July 2010, and the most recent, volume 13, in July 2022, with earlier volumes being reprinted. When *Apocalypse* began publishing, Wei was already fairly well known among Taiwanese manga artists and fans. He had started a website for amateur manga artists in 2000 and had moved from briefly selling *tongrenzhi* (amateur comics featuring characters from media franchises, in Japanese, *dojinshi*) to publishing original manga with Future Digi, a company that primarily produces translations of Japanese video games. His previous comics included parodies of political figures and Japanese porn videos, and he had won a couple of awards for them.

In *Apocalypse*, a young, evil Daoist has captured the essence of Mazu's divinity (*shen ge*) and injected it into the body of a comatose young girl, Zhao Xiaoyun, producing Moniang, who has the memories and souls of both the historical Lin Moniang and Xiaoyun inside her. She also has the magical, demon-fighting powers of the goddess. Moniang is taken in by Chen Borong, a disobedient high school boy who is also an expert Daoist martial arts master and a member of the Apocalypse Task Force, a police unit that fights supernatural creatures. Together with the task force, Borong and Moniang work to uncover and foil the villain's plot to unleash the demon dimension into Taiwan. The action takes place in very recognizable sites in northern Taiwan,

and the supporting characters include various Daoist deities and local mythical creatures.[5]

Visually, and in many of its character types and genre conventions, *Apocalypse* falls clearly within what in Taiwan is called the "Japanese system" of manga, but it also draws elements from Hong Kong supernatural *wuxia* (swordfighters) comics. In some ways, *Apocalypse* can be easily classified as a male-oriented manga. Some of the supporting female characters have enormous, button-popping breasts, and almost all of the young female characters wear miniskirts and/or thigh-high stockings. Nevertheless, the series has, to Wei's surprise, attracted quite a few female fans, including *fu nu* (*fujoshi* in Japanese) who "ship" Chen Borong and his cousin.[6] In later volumes, the manga has focused more on the female characters' psychological development.

Moniang is in many ways a typical "magical girl" character (like Sailor Moon), who transforms from a schoolgirl into a fierce warrior. The magical girl is often the heroine of female-oriented manga, but she is also a type of *meng shaonü*, a broad character type characterized by being both innocent and eroticized, which is the selling point for many male-oriented works. Moniang's face looks young, with huge eyes relatively low in the face and a tiny nose and mouth, and her expression is almost always wide-eyed—happy, puzzled, or frightened. She usually wears a school uniform with a short skirt, a blouse with a floppy bow tie, and thigh high stockings. She is sometimes drawn from angles and in poses that emphasize her legs, buttocks, and breasts.

Moniang's Mazu-ness is signified by her long white hair (in Taiwanese manga and puppetry, this often signifies that the character has extraordinary powers), and her signature hairpiece featuring two buns above her ears with decorated covers and a headband with golden spikes, which gestures toward the beaded veil and crown, often with side pieces by the ears, found on Mazu *shenxiang*. She takes on even more traditional elements of Mazu's dress in illustrations at the front or back of some volumes, such as an embroidered shoulder covering, and in her memories as Lin Moniang, she has a silk banner that circles above her head as in many classical

Figure 5. Moniang as the ambassador of Ximen Ding. Photograph by Teri Silvio.

paintings of goddesses and bodhisattvas. When Moniang is separated into her two souls (Zhao Xiaoyun and Mazu), they look the same, distinguished only by some small change in dress.

The first volume of *Apocalypse* sold over eleven thousand copies, making a profit. Although this figure cannot compare with those for popular Japanese manga series, it can be considered quite successful for a locally produced manga. By 2017, nine volumes had been published, and they had sold over eighty thousand copies. The comics were successful enough that issues went into second printings and re-issues. Future Digi began selling tie-in products such as Moniang figurines, and Wei was able to hire several fulltime assistants. Wei was contracted by Japanese manga publisher Comic Catapult to create an international version of *Apocalypse*, and Wei created a new two-volume set that condensed the first three volumes of the original series, restructured and redrawn to make the story easier to follow. In 2017 and 2018 the Japanese version was released as well as a Chinese version published by Future Digi with funding from the Ministry of Culture.

The Malevolent Icon Incident of 2017

Wei Tsung-cheng and Future Digi did not apply for any government grants until after 2017. Nevertheless, they had already benefitted from the increased legitimacy government support granted to the local manga industry. Increasing government support, along with the increasing recognition of the appeal of comics by tourism bureaus and businesses, and the increasing flow of images between the spheres of folk religion and popular culture all made the conditions ripe, by the mid-2010s, for the movement of Moniang out of the subculture of manga/anime fans and into a wider public sphere.

In 2012, Moniang was chosen by the Ximen District Business Association to be the official "ambassador" for the Ximen Ding neighborhood of Taipei, as many key scenes in *Apocalypse* are set there. Banners featuring images of Moniang in various poses have lined the streets of the area ever since (figure 5). Ximen Ding is the site of not only one of the largest chain manga stores in Taipei and many small shops selling manga/anime tie-in products and Japanese character goods but also the historic Red House theater, several cinemas, numerous designer boutiques and cafes, several gay bars and other LGBT-owned businesses, and a weekend craft fair. It is a preferred site for promotional events targeting youth and young professionals, and a common destination for tourists. Thus, the sight of Moniang became part of the background for a wide variety of people passing through the district, although very few of them knew who the character was.

It was not until the 2017 Taipei Lantern Festival, and what became known as the "Malevolent Icon Incident" (*xie shenxiang shijian*), that Moniang was foregrounded by being put on display, and the legitimacy of the new manga-style representation of Mazu was contested. The Yuanxiao Festival or Lantern Festival is the fifteenth day of the first lunar month and marks the end of the New Year holidays. Since the 1990s, both the national and city government tourism bureaus have held large events for the Yuanxiao Festival. Taipei's was, until 2017, held in large, open venues such as

the plazas in front of the Chiang Kai-Shek Memorial Hall. In 2017, however, the city tourism bureau decided to hold nine days of displays and activities in Ximen Ding. Co-sponsors for the festival included Taiwan Railway, Chunghwa Telecom, banks, insurance companies, hotels, and the two major temples in the district.

The theme of the festival was "Westside Story, Taipei Glory." The organizers set up seven display areas and several performance stages along a stretch of the main road through the district, between two MRT (subway) stops. The displays included large lantern installations by local artists, a display of student lantern contest winners, and a variety of different types of light shows, including animations and historical photographs projected onto the facades of Qing-dynasty and Japanese colonial-era buildings. Opening night performances were by local children's theater and acrobatic troupes, as well as Japan's avant-garde dance and music troupe, World Order. As it was the Year of the Rooster/Chicken, most of the lantern displays were poultry-themed, and small rooster-shaped paper lanterns, designed by a Taiwanese artist, were given to visitors to carry.[7]

The organizers had a twenty-foot-tall lantern of Wei's Moniang made for display in the festival and the parade on the night of the Yuanxiao Festival. The lantern does not portray Moniang in mini skirt and thigh-high stockings, as the banners do. Rather, she is shown as Mazu, or perhaps the historical Lin Moniang, standing on blue waves, facing forward, wearing a Song dynasty–style robe, and holding a feather fan in her right hand (figure 6).

The lantern was revealed for the press the day before the festival began, by Wei Tsung-cheng and representatives from the sponsoring organizations. This ritual displayed and legitimated the cooperation of the city government, folk religious institutions, local business associations, and the creative industries in making Moniang an official symbol of both the Ximen District and the city. The vice mayor of Taipei was lifted on a crane to draw white dots on the lantern's eyes. Then the

Figure 6. The Moniang lantern for the 2017 Taipei Lantern Festival (after repainting). Photograph by Wei Tsung-cheng, reproduced with his permission.

chairman of the Tian Hou Temple (Tian Hou, or Empress of Heaven, is another name for Mazu, and this temple features prominently in *Apocalypse*) applied powder to the lantern's cheeks, and Wei applied red paint to its lips (Taipei City Government Tourism Communications Bureau 2017).

The dotting of the eyes is traditionally the final step in the ritual of "inviting the god" (*ru shen*) into a *shenxiang*, investing the statue with vitality and power, and making it a dwelling for the deity's spirit, through which worshippers can communicate with the god. Many of the ritual specialists I interviewed while doing research on the cute deity toys craze thought that dotting the eyes of any anthropomorphic figure could be dangerous, as it might invite "unclean things" to come inhabit it (Silvio 2019, 66–67). The participation of the chairman of the Tian Hou temple may have served to alleviate such fears. I think, however, that the main function of the ritual was to give the lantern a similar status to that of the first wave of new religious images. The vice mayor said in a television interview that the lantern "cartoonized" (*katonghua*) Mazu to make her more attractive to young people. Thus, the lantern was presented as similar to a deity toy, as an object that would be ambiguous in terms of its religious significance, open to interpretation, and therefore acceptable to both worshippers and secular consumers. Hence it was the secular official who performed the most "religious" action of the ritual, while the representative of the folk religious institution performed a part of the ritual with no parallels in traditional religious ceremony, an action that referenced the world of fashion and consumption.

First reactions by the public to the Moniang lantern were mixed at best, and mostly negative. Fans of *Apocalypse* felt that the face of the lantern looked nothing like the original manga character's. They disliked the nose, which was not upturned and cute like the manga version of Lin Moniang, and the "sausage lips," which they found ugly. Young Taiwanese people tend to focus on the gaze of any kind of anthropomorphic figure when making aesthetic judgments about it, and sometimes when judging the efficacy of a *shenxiang*. Fans were most upset by the lantern's eyes, which they said looked "dead." Fans called the lantern the "evil icon" (*xie shenxiang*) and posted their own drawings of the original Lin Moniang character fighting the giant lantern.

The lantern was made by a theater troupe that the city government contracted to create all of the floats for the parade, but several fans assumed that it had been made by traditional religious artisans. These fans attributed the ugliness of the lantern to "the religious world's" lack of familiarity with, or even hostility to, new styles of representing Mazu.

Many sent messages of complaint to Wei Tsung-cheng. Wei then decided to repaint the lantern's face himself. When he was lifted by crane to repaint the face the next day, it was videotaped by both fans and the media, and the "evil icon incident" was trending news on both mainstream and subcultural news networks for a time, reaching many people who did not attend the Lantern Festival in person. Wei claimed that the incident was great publicity for him, and that after it made the news, he got more offers from businesses to cooperate, including from a Japanese cellphone game company.

After this, Wei's Moniang became a reference point within ongoing debates over the legitimacy of manga-style religious images between young manga fans who

were also worshippers and older and more conservative worshippers and cultural activists. Here I want to outline the arguments and counterarguments for and against the legitimacy of the second wave of Japanese pop culture images of Mazu, based on online, press, and media sources from 2017 to 2018. These arguments reveal how manga/anime fans on the one hand and conservative activists on the other see aesthetics, religion, and identity politics as intertwined in different ways.

The Moniang debates

Discussion online quickly moved from the lantern itself to debates over the appropriateness of Moniang as a representation of Mazu. While some conservative worshippers did voice disapproval of the lantern and the manga, the most strenuous objections to the image of Mazu as a *meng shaonü* character did not come from temple committees but rather from political activists who identified with Chinese culture and opposed Taiwanese independence from China. While the critiques of Wei's character took many forms, these activists focused on three interrelated objections: 1) Moniang was too Japanese; 2) Moniang was too sexy; and 3) Wei and the Taipei government were only using Mazu for their own commercial and publicity ends.

Six months after the Lantern Festival, when the General Association of Chinese Culture (GACC) sponsored an exhibit titled "Hello, Miss Lin! Cross-border goddess digital pilgrimage" in Taipei, a group called the Chinese Language Education Foundation (hereafter CLEF) gave a press conference, and a psychology professor at National Taiwan University, Huang Kuang-Kuo, published an editorial critiquing the exhibit. Although the Hello, Miss Lin! exhibit did not include any images from Wei's manga, both brought up the Moniang lantern. Both the CLEF and the GACC, which commissioned the Hello, Miss Lin! exhibit, descend from organizations that were established during Chiang Kai-shek's Chinese Cultural Renaissance in the 1960s, a government campaign that was intended to counter the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution going on across the strait by promoting traditional Chinese culture and values. As Donald J. Hatfield has noted, this movement was instrumental in redefining Taiwanese religious practices as "religion" rather than "superstition" and connecting them to Chinese national identity (2019, 265–66). The GACC is headed by the president, and Tsai Ing-wen (DPP) had recently taken over. The GACC's mission had transformed from promoting Chinese culture to promoting Taiwanese culture (Cheung 2019). The CLEF, however, had not changed its orientation. Thus, the opposition between the two organizations was already determined by their alignments with the opposing parties and the "Green" (pro [eventual] Taiwanese independence) and "Blue" (pro [eventual] reunification with China) camps.

Love or hatred of Japanese manga is one stereotyped marker of leanings toward the Green or Blue camps. This dates back to the transition of Taiwan from the "model colony" of the Japanese empire to the Republic of China under Chiang Kai-shek in 1945. The Chiang regime believed that Taiwanese had internalized Japanese colonial ideology and instituted many cultural programs aimed to re-Sinify the population, including making Mandarin the national language and banning (not very effectively) the import of cultural products from Japan, including manga, throughout the period

of martial law (1947–89). The association of manga fandom with a pro-Taiwan/anti-China stance is evident in the title that the CLEF gave to their press conference, "When Cultural Taiwan Independence Meets Cultural China, Chinese Gods Battle Japanese Ghosts" (Anonymous 2017).

The association of Japanese manga, especially male-oriented manga, with pornography is common, not only in the media outside of Japan but within Japan as well. The CLEF claimed that the lantern "dressed Mazu up as a porn star" and "destroyed the sacredness of religious culture." Huang Kuang-kuo pointed to the fact that *Apocalypse*'s tie-in products included pillows. "In Taiwanese folk religious belief, an icon absolutely cannot be placed in the bedroom," he wrote. "Using the belief of the masses in Mazu to design this kind of 'Lin Moniang hanging cloth' and 'hugging pillow,' if this isn't a desecration of the goddess, then what is?" (Hwang 2017). Finally, these critics argued that Wei and the Taipei government were only using Mazu for their own commercial and publicity ends. Sincere worship, they argued, is not "ordinary creative culture industry consumer behavior."

Fans of *Apocalypse* countered the objection that the lantern was obscene by pointing out that the lantern's body was fully covered and that the perception of obscenity and anti-Japanese sentiment were linked. One wrote, "Hwang Kuang-kuo just hates Japan, ok? It doesn't matter whether it's manga/anime or porn, both were developed in Japan, so of course someone with a Great China ideology would oppose it." One fan in a discussion group asked, "Isn't Hwang a Christian?," harking back to the discourse of the Marriage Equality movement that such strict sexual moralism is actually antithetical to the spirit of Taiwanese folk religion. Fans also defended the original Moniang character design, arguing that when the historical Lin Moniang died and was deified, she was a young woman, so portraying her as such is actually more suitable than the traditional images of Mazu as motherly.

Wei also countered accusations of blasphemy by saying that he threw divination blocks at a Mazu temple every time he drew a new manga in the series, and that the answer had always come back indicating Mazu's approval. Fans told a story that had circulated in their chat groups for a while, that a fan had drawn a pornographic *tongrenzhi* (fan manga) featuring Moniang. This fan had gotten into a traffic accident as he was taking it to the printers—just as he passed a Mazu temple. As YouTuber and novelist WalkTone put it in a YouTube video that was viewed over ninety thousand times, "It's the Empress of Heaven who holds the exclusive copyright here . . . the Empress of Heaven manages her own personal image for herself, ok!" (WalkTone 2017).

In the same video, WalkTone also argued against the idea that participation in the capitalist creative industries and sincere faith are necessarily exclusive. At the end of the same video, titled "My Moniang Was Never That Meng?: Resolving 3 Big Doubts about the Moniang Lantern," his tone turns from satirical to a demonstration of sincerity. As we see videos of Wei Tsung-cheng filming a video and mugging for the camera, screenshots of Wei's manga platform, and newspaper articles on Wei and WalkTone, WalkTone says in the speeded-up voice he uses throughout the video:

> Some Big Brothers might say, "Hah, caught you! The artist who draws Lin Moniang, isn't he a pervert?" Correct, teacher Tsung-cheng is a pervert. Not only that, he's a really dedicated pervert! Every time I see this pervert, I can't help but think of how, a long time ago, there was an 18-year-old who created the first platform in Taiwan for original comics, which launched countless young manga artists. He used every kind of perverse and satirical manga to corrupt the children of the time. Now seventeen years have passed, and one of those little kids who was poisoned by him grew up, and became a little YouTuber called "Fat Otaku Qingliu" [a nickname for WalkTone]. This YouTuber absorbed all kinds of perverse thoughts.

At this point, the tone changes. WalkTone continues, at a slower pace:

> And he continued to promote reading and the spirit of creativity in Taiwan, even making this video, just to tell the world: cultural creativity is not a [tourist] market, it is countless nights, infinite persistence watered with sweat. Respect for the gods does not lie in mere words, it lies in working hard and in persisting, with every stroke of the brush, with every drawing, to make her name radiate over the whole world.

During this speech, we see a series of drone shots of the Moniang float in the Lantern Festival parade. Then there are a series of photographs of Wei worshipping Mazu in a temple and accepting awards, the Lin Moniang banners hanging in Ximen and a monumental bronze Mazu statue, and finally transitioning to a video of boats adorned with both national and temple flags, carrying *shenxiang* of Mazu on pilgrimage across the Taiwan Strait, interspersed with clips of temple festival activities—people lighting incense, dragon dancers, etc. This is followed by a montage of Mazu *shenxiang* and people worshipping (including one white foreigner). Finally, the video ends with two screens with parallel composition: the image of a traditional Mazu *shenxiang* flanked by her demons-turned-assistants, Qian Li Yan and Shun Feng Er, and then Wei's Moniang with his cute versions of the two helpers. The background music here, which grows increasingly loud, is the theme song from the 2016 Disney animated film *Moana*, "How Far I'll Go," played on the violin, drawing a parallel between Lin Moniang/Mazu and a Disney princess from a Pacific island, known for her connection to the divine and her desire to go out into the world.

Many fans were very moved by this part of the video; in fact, the majority of comments on the video claimed that the viewer was moved to tears. Many also echoed WalkTone's characterization of creative labor as a kind of sacrifice, and his desire to globalize knowledge about and belief in Mazu.

While the conservative critics saw a contradiction between the commercialism of the creative industries and religion, for Wei, WalkTone, and their fans, the creative industries belong in the sphere of religion because of the similarities between creative labor and worship—or more precisely, because they see worship as a creative act. As one comment below WalkTone's video put it, "Actually, Mazu's form is created by the mass of worshippers. The times are changing. To let more people know our traditional culture, first change her outward appearance into a style that it's easy for the young generation to accept. Isn't this a way of passing on the culture?"

Conclusion: Moniang moves toward the core?

Debates over the legitimacy of new types of religious images involve much wider conflicts of worldview, which value different kinds of relations among religion, art, politics, and the economy. The display of the Moniang lantern, in a context in which government bureaucracy, the tourism industry, the subculture of male-oriented manga artists and fans, and folk religious leaders and worshippers all had a stake, revealed different views of the nature of Japanese manga characters, particularly *moe shojo* (*meng shaonü*), the nature of Chinese folk deities, and the relationship between the two. These differences articulate a generation gap, which in turn articulates identity politics.

For the older critics of the lantern and Wei's manga, religion is imagined through the lens of politics. For them, the power of deities is a kind of authority, which must be respected through the maintenance of traditions and boundaries. Thus, Moniang cannot be a legitimate religious figure for them. As a character in a male-oriented manga, she is the opposite of authoritative—an object of consumption, vulnerable, passive, and arousing feelings that fall outside the boundaries of what they see as religious.

For the younger fans, religion is imagined through the lens of fandom, as a field of emotion and mood rather than power. Unlike the conservative critics, they see Moniang as a fitting incarnation of Mazu precisely because she is a *moe shojo* character. *Moe* characters (not all of which are young women) are designed to create a "euphoric response" (Galbraith 2009; see also Azuma 2009). This euphoric response to *moe* characters may include the same feelings (affection, desire to protect, perhaps also disgust) as those elicited by *kawaii* characters, but also others, including not only the sexual but also the spiritual (Galbraith 2019, 124–25). Moniang embodies the younger generation's view of deities—a consciously created image that evokes personality through style and elicits an intimate, emotional connection (Silvio 2019, chap. 3).

To put this another way, the older generation privileges the hidden core of Chinese folk religion, that which has changed little over the centuries and which, they believe, should be protected from the fuzzy boundaries of the penumbra of folk religion, where social fields interweave and popular culture can present new images that challenge tradition. The younger generation, however, focuses on the penumbra, where the presentation of the gods is open to change. These views of Mazu are tied to identifications with China, and with Taiwan as a part of China that carries on its pre-twentieth-century traditions versus identification with Taiwan as distinct from China, and a culture that is characterized by constant absorption and localization of international popular culture. If Taiwan's distinctiveness from China lies in the flexibility of its culture and the openness of its folk religion, then how Mazu is represented not only can change, it must.

It remains to be seen whether the second wave of Japanese pop-influenced images of Mazu will be incorporated into the visual culture of Taiwanese temples themselves, as the first wave of *kawaii* images was, but there is some evidence that Moniang is moving closer to the hidden spaces of Chinese folk religion. Moniang was introduced to a new cultural sphere, that of older forms of popular culture or folk art, in January

2021, when a Taiwanese Opera version of *Apocalypse* was performed by the Ming Hwa Yuan troupe. The performance was sponsored by the National Center for the Traditional Arts as part of the Taiwan Traditional Theater Festival and had brief runs at theaters in New Taipei City and Taichung (figure 7).

Taiwanese Opera (*koa-a-hi*) has a close relationship with folk religion, as throughout its history it has been performed as an offering to the gods (and entertainment to attract crowds) at temple festivals. Stories about the origins and exploits of deities are also a common source of *koa-a-hi* narratives, and until the 1970s, many Taiwanese people's sense of what the gods and goddesses look and act like came from *koa-a-hi*.

Koa-a-hi has also become, since the late 1990s, an important symbol of Taiwanese culture. Ming Hwa Yuan is the oldest and largest *koa-a-hi* troupe in Taiwan, founded in 1926, and continuously run by the same family. The troupe frequently represents Taiwan in overseas arts festivals.

Like folk religion, *koa-a-hi* has been losing its audience in the twenty-first century and has been adopting a number of strategies to attract younger people back to the theater. Since the late 2010s, Ming Hwa Yuan has been trying to attract new audiences with crossover shows in which the troupe blends *koa-a-hi* with some other popular genre, for instance adapting a historical novel or adding song and dance numbers in the style of Japan's Takarazuka Revue. In 2018, the troupe was looking for a work popular with young people that it could adapt to the stage, and a friend of some of the actors recommended *Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare*. Chen Chao-hsien, the producer, told me that she chose the manga because it takes place in Ximen Ding, a place local youth know intimately, and because the goddess Mazu is very important to *koa-a-hi* performers—many temples traditionally hire *koa-a-hi* troupes to perform for Mazu's birthday. Ming Hwa Yuan had in fact performed the story of Mazu's deification in 2013. That production was performed in a very traditionalist style, with full use of the traditional musical repertoire and stylized gestures, and with costumes modeled on historical images. The image of Mazu presented in this performance of *Apocalypse* provided a striking contrast.

Figure 7. Program for the Ming Hwa Yuan performance of *Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare* (*Ming Zhan Lu*), 2021. Reproduced with permission from the Ming Hwa Yuan Arts and Cultural Group.

The script was adapted from the international version of *Apocalypse*, and new music was written to add to

the traditional tunes. The show was performed in the *opeila* style, a bricolage style that combines pop music (or here, original music) with the traditional repertoire and features fantastical plots, special effects, and lots of comedy. This style was developed in the post-war decades and was denigrated as chaotic and overly influenced by Japanese and American pop culture by intellectuals in the 1970s–90s, but it has since been rehabilitated and reframed as reflecting Taiwan's multiculturalism and Taiwanese culture's ability to absorb and adapt global trends (Silvio 2009).

The troupe tried to recreate the visual feel of a manga, with a multimedia set that featured animations projected onto the backdrop and costumes inspired by manga/anime cosplayers. When I interviewed members of the troupe a few months after the Taipei shows, they thought they had been relatively successful in drawing in some manga fans without losing their traditional fans, who are mostly middle-aged women, and who lean Green politically. They looked at their Facebook page and online discussions and said that they guessed about 70 percent of the comments about the show by manga fans were positive (they could tell who the manga fans were because they used manga characters as their icons). They also heard from some *koa-a-hi* fans who did go on to read the original manga.

Chen Chao-hsien compared Ming Hwa Yuan's version of *Apocalypse* with the troupe's performance of *Mazu Zhuan* in 2013. In *Mazu Zhuan*, whenever there was a disaster at sea, Mazu went to the rescue. But in *Apocalypse*, Moniang is haunted by the memory that she was not able to save her own father and brother from drowning. With *Apocalypse*, the troupe wanted "to show the humanity behind the gods." Mazu shares Zhao Xiaoyun's vulnerability, which is something the troupe members think the audience identified with. At the performance I saw, Sun Tsui-feng, who has been Ming Hwa Yuan's star performer for decades and played a supporting role in *Apocalypse*, summed up what the troupe thought was the message of the story during the curtain call:

> Through this work, we actually want to communicate a very simple idea: we are often like Moniang. Gods sacrifice themselves and absorb a lot of negative energy, because they want to make the world a better place. Sometimes they lock themselves up, sever all their connections, take on all the responsibility themselves. Does that make the world better? But in this play, luckily, Lin Moniang has Chen Borong, who holds out his hand to her. He gives her love, he gives her concern, he lets her know she is not alone. I hope after seeing this play, we can all go out and become Chen Borongs for other people—this is the real reason that the world can become better.

This may be a more radically egalitarian vision of the interdependence of deities and humans than that held by the fans of the manga, but the interdependence is in itself traditional, as is the idea that deities are most relatable when they are embodied by real people. As Lin Wei-ping has noted, the two main media through which people communicate with Taiwanese folk religion's deities are *shenxiang* and human spirit mediums. She writes, "Humans are fundamentally different from statues; they are dynamic, spontaneous, and sensual. . . . They can form a much closer affective connection with the adherents than statues. However, spirit mediums are also temporary and provisional; they are not as durable and long-lasting as statues" (Lin

Figure 8. The figurine of Moniang with incense burner in Wei Tsung-cheng's studio. Photograph by Teri Silvio.

2015, 10). As goes for the core, the field of religion proper, so goes for the penumbra of popular images.

Aside from being displayed in human form within a genre associated strongly with both Taiwanese religion and national identity, Wei's Moniang was also displayed in an exhibit called "Meeting Buddha and Deities No. 9: Blessing Comic Exhibition" at the Museum of World Religions in New Taipei City in 2020. The museum was established by a Buddhist monk to provide ecumenical religious education in Taiwan. The exhibit included a collection of drawings of *buddhas* and *bodhisattvas* by Japanese manga artists, donated to aid the victims of the 2013 Fukushima tsunami and nuclear power plant disaster, supplemented in Taiwan with a collection of drawings of Buddhist, Daoist, and Christian images provided by local manga artists and illustrators.

Wei Tsung-cheng himself has adopted the character into his religious practice. In his studio, he placed a figurine of Moniang on a shelf, with a small incense burner in front of it (figure 8). He and his editor took the figurine to a local Mazu temple and consulted with the specialists there. They were told not to dot the eyes, but that they could pray to it, which he and his colleagues do. Wei does not treat the figurine exactly as he would a traditional *shenxiang*, however. He said he did not put a Moniang figurine on his home altar, as there is a *shenxiang* of Guanyin there. And when he wants to throw the divination blocks, which he does before he sends any new volume to press, he goes to a temple. Wei said:

> Daoism, it's actually up to you. That is to say, it doesn't have any very strict rituals that you must do or anything. It's like we say, "If your heart is sincere, the gods will be with you (*xin cheng ze ling*)." If you have a concrete image in front of your eyes, it will help you to imagine, but even if you don't have any image in front of you it's still okay, just so long as you are sincere in your mind. . . . I'm sincere, I believe that I'm promoting Mazu culture, so I have confidence.

Wei's discourse here echoes very precisely that of the women who believed that the Family Mart Good God Toys could serve as *shenxiang* for worship. Wei and his coworkers may be outliers here, as were the women who claimed that toys of deities could serve as objects of worship. Yet it is not unthinkable that images of Mazu as an attractive young woman would ultimately move from the sphere of public display—where religion blends with the tourism industry, the creative industries, and government—into the core of traditional aesthetics and ritual. A 2021 news report tells of a new *shenxiang* of Mazu installed in a temple in Nantou County that has a young face, wears glittery blue eyeshadow, and has dyed purple hair styled in a fashionable bob (Song and Gu 2021). The *shenxiang* was made and installed through very traditional means. It was carved and dressed according to a vision of Mazu that the traditional craftsman who made it received in a dream. Before the ritual to invite Mazu's divinity into the statue was performed, he performed a divination ritual to ask Mazu if she approved, and then the newly made *shenxiang* was passed over the incense burner of an older Mazu *shenxiang* at a famous temple in Tainan. Perhaps significantly, this "most fashionable Mazu" does not wear the beaded veil over her eyes. It may be a new imagining of not only the goddess that is moving into the inner recesses of Taiwanese folk religion but of display itself, and the openness to interpretation and emotional connection it allows.

Acknowledgments

I want to thank Wei Tsung-cheng and Chen Chao-hsien, Chen Chao-ting, and Wu Mina of the Ming Hwa Yuan Taiwanese Opera Company who kindly accepted my interviews, and my valiant research assistants, Ellie Huang, Charles (Chiao-He) Lee, and Panchen Lo. Research for this article was partially funded by a grant from the Taiwan Ministry of Science and Technology [MOST 105-2410-H-001-082-MY3].

Author

Teri Silvio is a research fellow at the Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, Taiwan. She is a cultural anthropologist who has done extended ethnographic research on theater, puppetry, toy design, and comics. Silvio's work combines approaches from anthropology, cultural studies, gender and sexuality studies, performance studies, and media studies. Her book, *Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan* (University of Hawai'i Press 2019) develops an anthropological concept of animation as a complement to the concept of performance, and elaborates this concept through Taiwanese examples including televised puppetry, folk religious practice, and manga/anime fandom.

Notes

1. The Japanese manga industry and manga fans divide manga into the rough categories of "male-oriented" and "female-oriented." The term "male-oriented" when used among fans in Taiwan often refers to manga featuring sexualized female characters, but it can also refer to the range of genres primarily created by and for boys and men, e.g., adventure and sports manga. Female-

oriented manga, written primarily by and for girls and women, includes genres such as straight romance and "Boys Love." There are genres that do not fit well into these categories, and fandom crossovers are not uncommon (e.g., when women fans of Boys Love manga read sports manga and imagine the male heroes in romantic relationships with each other).

2. The original English translation for the manga was *Ming Zhan-lu: Final Destiny of the Formosan Gods*. Starting from volume 10, the English title was changed to *The Apocalypse of Darkness Warfare*, although the Chinese title remained the same. For the sake of consistency, I use the new title throughout this article.

3. For clarity, in this article I will use "Moniang" to refer to the manga character, and "Lin Moniang" to refer to the historical figure.

4. Folk religion, especially the worship of Mazu, did experience something of a revival in southern China, especially in Fujian, the location where Lin Moniang was born and from which most of Taiwan's early Chinese settlers migrated (Hatfield 2010; Yang 2004). It should also be noted that Taiwanese folk religion incorporates Buddhist deities in its pantheon, although they are often represented visually in different styles from those common in Japan.

5. For an analysis of the theology expressed in Wei's *Apocalypse*, see Silvio 2018.

6. "Shipping" refers to fans' imagining two characters as lovers who are not lovers in the canon text.

7. I did not attend the 2017 Taipei Lantern Festival in person. My description is based on news reports and blog posts by people who did attend.

References

Anonymous. 2017. "'Mazu Bian A-pian Nv Zhujiao!' Jiaogai Luntan Pi: Cai Zhengfu Duo Ai Riben?" ["Mazu turned into a porn star!" Educational reform symposium critique: How much does the Tsai government love Japan?]. *ETToday News*, August 18, 2017. https://www.ettoday.net/news/20170818/992152.htm#ixzz6tz8nhfUs

Azuma, Hiroki. 2009. *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. Translated by Jonathan E. Abel and Shion Kono. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Chang Hsun. 2017. "Zongjiao yu Wenhua Chuangyi Chanpin: Yi Shenming Gongzai Wei Lie" [Religion and cultural creative products: The case of deity toys]. *Taibei Chengshi Keji Daxue Tongshi Xuebao* 6: 237–50.

Cheung, Han. 2019. "Taiwan in Time: Cultural Counterattack." *Taipei Times*, July 29, 2019. https://www.taipeitimes.com/News/feat/archives/2019/07/28/2003719466

Chi, Wei-Hsian. 2018a. "Taiwan minjian zongjiao yishi shijian zhong de 'pinwei dongyuan': Zhentou, pinwei she qun yu zongjiao zhili" ["Taste mobilization" in the ritual of Taiwanese folk religion: Procession troupes, taste-community and religious government]. *Journal of Social Sciences and Philosophy* 30 (1): 119–61.

———. 2018b. "Taiwan hanren minjian xinyang yu xin meiti: Yi lian shu wei meijie de zongjiao jiangou" [Taiwan Han people's folk religion and new media: Constructing religion through the medium of Facebook]. In *Meijie zongjiao: Yinyue, yingxiang, wu yu xin meiti* [Mediating religion: Music, image, object, and new media], edited by Wei-Ping Lin, 227–66. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press.

Chuang, Yin. 2011. "*Kawaii* in Taiwan Politics." *International Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies* 7 (3): 1–17.

Duara, Prasenjit. 1988. "Superscribing Symbols: The Myth of Guandi, Chinese God of War." *Journal of Asian Studies* 47 (4): 778–95. https://doi.org/10.2307/2057852

Engelke, Matthew. 2012. "Angels in Swindon: Public Religion and Ambient Faith in England." *American Ethnologist* 39 (1): 155–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2011.01355.x

Galbraith, Patrick. 2009. "Moe: Exploring Virtual Potential in Post-Millennial Japan." *Electronic Journal of Contemporary Japanese Studies*. http://www.japanesestudies.org.uk/articles/2009/Galbraith.html

———. 2019. *Otaku and the Struggle for Imagination in Japan*. Durham and London: Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478007012-fm

Hatfield, Donald J. 2010. *Taiwanese Pilgrimage to China: Ritual, Complicity, Community*. New York: Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230102132

———. 2019. "Remediation and Innovation in Taiwanese Religious Sites: Lukang's Glass Temple." *Asian Ethnology* 78 (2): 263–88.

Hoskins, Janet Alison. 2023. "Strange Company: Victor Hugo, the Saigon Flag, and Santa Claus on Vietnamese Altars." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 99-119.

Hwang Kwang-Kuo. 2017. "Zongjiao bixu qiancheng shenming bu ke xiedu" [Religion must be sincere: One must not commit blasphemy against the gods]. *The Merit Times*, October 4, 2017. https://www.merit-times.com.tw/NewsPage.aspx?unid=487701

Kong, Lily, Chris Gibson, Louisa-May Khoo, and Anne-Louise Semple. 2006. "Knowledges of the Creative Economy: Towards a Relational Geography of Diffusion and Adaptation in Asia." *Asia Pacific Viewpoint* 47 (2): 173–94. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8373.2006.00313.x

Kwon, Heonik, and Jun Hwan Park. 2023. "The American Flag in Kim's Spirit Shrine." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1). 121-39.

Lin, Wei-ping. 2015. *Materializing Magical Power: Chinese Popular Religion in Villages and Cities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1dn-n9gs.1

———. 2018a. "Daolun: Meijie zongjiao" [Introduction: Mediating religion]. In *Meijie zongjiao: Yinyue, yingxiang, wu yu xin meiti* [Mediating religion: Music, image, object, and new media], edited by Wei-Ping Lin, 1–32. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press.

———. 2018b. "Kuayue jiexian: LINE yu shuwei shidai de zongjiao" [Crossing boundaries: LINE and religion in the digital age]. In *Meijie zongjiao: Yinyue, yingxiang, wu yu xin meiti* [Mediating religion: Music, image, object, and new media], edited by Wei-Ping Lin, 267–302. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press.

Nadeau, Randall, and Chang Hsun. 2003. "Gods, Ghosts, and Ancestors: Religious Studies and the Question of 'Taiwanese Identity.'" In *Religion in Modern Taiwan*, edited by Philip Clart and Charles B. Jones, 280–99. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824845063-013

Porcu, Elisabetta. 2014. "Pop Religion in Japan: Buddhist Temples, Icons, and Branding." *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* 26 (2): 157–72. https://doi.org/10.3138/jrpc.26.2.157

Quinn, Timothy. 2015. "Taiwan's Multicultural Tongzhi: Popular Representations, Activist Engagements, Markets and Space." Unpublished MA thesis, Department of Anthropology, National Taiwan University.

Robson, James. 2016. "Hidden in Plain View: Concealed Contents, Secluded Statues, and Revealed Religion." In *The Rhetoric of Hiddenness in Traditional Chinese Culture*, edited by Paula M. Varsano, 177–206. New York: State University of New York Press.

Shahar, Meir. 1998. *Crazy Ji: Chinese Religion and Popular Literature*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.1163/9781684170302

Shahar, Meir, and Robert P. Weller, eds. 1996. *Unruly Gods: Divinity and Society in China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865429-fm

Silvio, Teri. 2009. "Tai/ Kuso/ Camp: New Opeila and the Structure of Sensibility." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 10 (3): 341–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/14649370902949358

———. 2018. "Meng Mazu: Minjian zongjiao zai (rixi) Taiwan manhua de zaixian" [Moe Mazu: The representation of folk religion in Taiwanese Japanese system manga]. In *Meijie zongjiao: Yinyue, yingxiang, wu yu xin meiti* [Mediating religion: Music, image, object, and new media], edited by Wei-Ping Lin, 303–32. Taipei: National Taiwan University Press.

———. 2019. *Puppets, Gods, and Brands: Theorizing the Age of Animation from Taiwan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824880989-fm

Song, Jia-Juan, and Shou-Chang Gu. 2021. "Chao shishang! Mazu shenxiang 'ran zi fa, ca yanying' miao fang zhu wei: Tuomeng liang shen dazao" [Super stylish! Mazu statue "dyed purple hair and eyeshadow": Chairman of the temple; Customized according to a dream]. *TVBS News*. https://shorturl.at/nuN01

Taipei City Government Tourism Communications Bureau. 2017. *Taibei dengjie gao 8 gongchi Lin Moniang huache dian jing yishi baoyou huodong ping'an shunli guotai min'an Taibei* [Eye-dotting ceremony for the 8-meter-high Lin Moniang float for the Taipei Lantern Festival, blessing the people with peace]. https://www.tpedoit.gov.taipei/News_Content.aspx?n=603755835E928BED&sms=72544237BBE4C5F6&s=8228FC1C7110AAA6

Telle, Kari. 2023. "Displaying Demons: Processions at the Crossroads in Multireligious Indonesia." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 45-71.

Thomas, Jolyon Baraka. 2012. *Drawing on Tradition: Manga, Anime, and Religion in Contemporary Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824865863-fm

WalkTone. 2017. "Wo de Moniang cai mei zheme meng? Pojie Moniang huadeng 3 da yihuo" ["My Moniang was never that meng?" Resolving 3 doubts about the Moniang Lantern]. YouTube video, 4:01. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXOsbYko-IrM&t=241s

Yang, Mayfair Mei-hui. 2004. "Goddess across the Taiwan Strait: Matrifocal Ritual Space, Nation-State, and Satellite Television Footprints." *Public Culture* 16 (2): 209–38. https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-16-2-209

Zemanek, Adina Simona. 2018. "Nation Branding in Contemporary Taiwan: A Grassroots Perspective." *Culture, Theory and Critique* 59 (2): 119–38. https://doi.org/10.1080/14735784.2018.1431949

Janet Alison Hoskins
University of Southern California

Strange Company

Victor Hugo, the Saigon Flag, and Santa Claus on Vietnamese Altars

Vietnamese popular religion is inclusive and syncretistic and can incorporate a number of external elements into its expanding pantheon. This article explores the image of Victor Hugo in a mural in Caodai temples, the Saigon flag on ancestral altars, and a Santa Claus doll on "Way of the Mother Goddesses" (Đạo Mẫu) home temple altars. Each of these elements is recast onto a Vietnamese religious canvas and given new meaning in its new context, in ways that signal the process of decolonization, a lost country now perceived as an ancestor, and the "American spirit of children" who may offer blessings of prosperity. Just as each image models a religious aspiration, so it also mirrors an experience of loss and disconnection. The home altar is itself the canvas of syncretism, where different historical influences are put on display, and through this display brought into relationships with each other.

Keywords: Caodaism—spirit mediums—Vietnamese religions—flag symbolism—French colonialism

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 99–119

Return to Table of Contents

The visual displays of Vietnamese popular religion are colorful, diverse, and idiosyncratic, and its many temples and shrines include a wide range of spirits, gods, and divine presences. Stuffed snakes coil along the ceiling of altars to the Mother Goddess, while painted tigers with bared teeth lurk in the shadows at the floor. Neon lights are used to enhance the halos of tutelary deities at Taoist shrines, and bright five-colored flags are unfurled along the rooftops to announce a coming festival. Each of these objects serves as a vehicle to make visible spirit entities and forces, from the spirits of the natural landscape to the legacy of imperial rulers.

Although Vietnam is usually perceived as a Buddhist country with a Catholic minority, ancestor worship is the real shared spiritual foundation, and an estimated 45 percent of the Vietnamese people practice folk religion, a mixture of indigenous and external traditions that is inclusive and syncretistic (Hackett et al., 2014). These traditions can incorporate a number of new elements into their expanding and eclectic pantheons. This article explores three such incorporated images—Victor Hugo, the Saigon flag, and Santa Claus—that may appear incongruous in the Vietnamese setting, but which serve to illustrate the elasticity of display (Swancutt 2023) and the creative responsiveness of Vietnamese communities in constructing new meanings for a nineteenth-century author whose works were important in the process of decolonization, a flag now commemorated as a lost family member or ancestor, and the American cult of childhood as perceived by immigrant parents.

Ancestor worship is practiced at home by almost all Vietnamese families, even those who do not have a formal religious affiliation (who make up 29 percent of the population of the Marxist atheist state). About 16 percent of Vietnamese people identify as Buddhist, and 8 percent as Catholic (ibid., 2010; Hoskins and Ninh 2017). The folk religions practiced include Caodaism, the largest formally recognized "indigenous religion," practiced almost exclusively in the former South Vietnam, where it was once followed by one out of four people (Popkin 1979; Werner 1981) and is now followed by about 12 percent of the regional population (Hoskins 2015). They also include the "Way of the Mother Goddesses" (Đạo Mẫu), a spirit possession practice that was recognized in 2016 as an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO and has been allowed to flourish as a series of ritual performances honoring spirits of nature and Vietnam's imperial past (Nguyễn Thị Hiền 2016; Salemink 2015; Fjelstad and Nguyễn 2011). Mother Goddess rituals are shamanistic, and their spirit mediums bear strong similarities to the Korean *mansin* (discussed in Kwon and Park 2023;

Kendall and Ariati 2023), while Caodaism is a new syncretistic religion born in the early twentieth century in the midst of the nationalist struggle for self-determination.

Caodaism is an "Asian fusion" faith that sought to bring the gods of Europe and the gods of Asia together in a conversation to heal the wounds of colonialism and establish a basis for mutual respect and dialogue. Officially called Đại Đạo Tam Kỳ Phổ Độ or "The Great Way of the Third Age of Redemption," Caodaism combines millenarian teachings with the "three great traditions" of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism and elements of Roman Catholicism in its elaborate hierarchy of titles and ranks (which include a pope, female and male cardinals, and bishops). Established in 1926, its earliest members came from the urban educated elite in Saigon, most of them disenfranchised native intellectuals who were frustrated that their study in French-language schools did not qualify them to do more than serve as clerks for colonial offices. In just a few years, Caodaism grew dramatically to become the largest mass movement in the French colony of Cochinchina, with 20–25 percent of the people of South Vietnam converting to this new faith in the period from 1930 to 1975 (Werner 1981).

Caodaism spread out to the countryside and established a large peasant following but was led by civil servants, landowners, businesspeople, and journalists. Its pantheon is made up of all of the spiritual figures who have provided messages in spirit séances to guide the new religion, including messages from the Jade Emperor (also known as "Cao Đài," the highest power), the female Boddhisattva Quan Âm, the Taoist Queen of the Heavens, Lao Tzu, and Vietnamese military heroes like Trần Hưng Đạo. Based on East Asian traditions of spirit writing but also inspired by French Spiritists like Alain Kardec, Caodai theology is an intricate dance between an affirmation of the thousand-year-old tradition of Asian sages and an openness to also listening to figures like Jesus Christ (who announces that he is the son of the Jade Emperor), Sun-Yat Sen (who affirms the rights of Asian peoples to be sovereign in their own countries), and even French figures like Victor Hugo and Jeanne d'Arc. The central emblem of Caodaism is the "divine eye," which is always the left eye, pictured as it appeared in the heavens in a vision seen by the first disciple of this new faith in 1921 (Hoskins 2015, xi, 29–44).

Display is defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary* as "to arrange something or a collection of things so that it can be seen by the public" (*Cambridge Dictionary* n.d.). In the act of displaying something, a connection is established between that thing and the context in which it is being shown. To display something on an altar is to sacralize that thing and then use it to communicate a religious message in relation to the other objects on an altar. To place Victor Hugo beside Sun Yat-Sen and Trạng Trình is to highlight his role in inspiring young Vietnamese nationalists to fight for independence from the French. To place the Saigon flag on an ancestral altar is to venerate the memory of this once-independent state and recognize that it no longer exists. To place Santa Claus beside the child spirits of Cậu Bé and Cậu Bơ is to recognize the placement of Vietnamese children in American commercial spaces, to see their connection to grandfatherly figures, and to acknowledge their aspirations for gifts and material success.

The display of Victor Hugo, the Saigon flag, and Santa Claus on home altars enables each of these figures to become a model for the various personalities and

Figure 1. Victor Hugo mural at the entrance to the Great Temple of Caodaism in Tây Ninh. From left to right: Sun Yat-Sen, Victor Hugo, and Trạng Trình. Photograph by Janet Alison Hoskins.

attributes to which many Vietnamese aspire. This is especially true in the moving displays of Vietnamese rituals, where spirit mediums use a mirror to see themselves transformed into the possessing spirit (Hoskins 2014). However, these figures do not tend to appear in secular contexts like museums, where "traditional altars" are displayed to wider publics, and any images of gods or ancestors would most certainly be de-sacralized or de-animated for visitors. In contrast, Vietnamese home altars are canvases of syncretic elements that encourage personalized modes of spirituality and sometimes also the production of altogether new models. What I show in this article, then, is that Vietnamese put model figures on their home altars to enable a direct experience of mimesis—models that may ultimately hold up a mirror to their experiences of loss and displacement.

Victor Hugo on display

Victor Hugo is pictured in a mural at the entrance to the Great Temple in Tây Ninh (described as the "Vatican in Vietnam") standing beside Sun Yat-Sen and the Vietnamese poet and prophet Trạng Trình,[1] each of them signing in his own way a contract between divinity and humanity (figure 1). Hugo is dressed in the long robes of the Alliance Francaise and holds a plume, Sun-Yat Sen is dressed as a Chinese twentieth-century gentleman and holds an ink block, and Trạng Trình wears an imperial costume and writes with a brush. The words "God, Humanity, Love, and Justice" are written in French, Vietnamese, and Chinese characters on a large placard against a celestial background of white clouds. This famous mural is titled "The Three Saints," and copies of it are found at the entrance to each of the over 1,300 smaller Tây Ninh Caodai temples in Vietnam and the roughly one hundred overseas Tây Ninh

Caodai temples in the United States, Canada, and Australia. Caodaists often say that these three saints show three sources of twentieth-century Vietnamese culture—Chinese politics, French humanism, and Vietnamese literature—but the figure of Victor Hugo has provoked much more controversy and attention than the other two.

All three figures were honored for announcing the coming Caodaism in various ways: Sun Yat-Sen predicted that all Asian peoples would rise up against their European colonial masters, Trạng Trình said the Chinese-dominated Viet people would have their own country, and Hugo predicted the emergence of a new religion, combining the wisdom of East and West, that would be announced in spirit séances. This prediction was posthumously published in 1923, almost thirty years after his death in 1885, in the transcripts of séances held in 1854, when Hugo was living in exile on the island of Jersey (Hugo 1923; Chambers 2008). The séance transcripts were widely read and reviewed in Vietnamese newspapers, fascinated by Hugo's idea that communications with spirits could found a new and more encompassing spirituality, incorporating Asian ideas of vegetarianism and reincarnation to show the fundamental unity of global human faith. Hugo himself was attracted to Asian art and literature, decorated one room in his Paris home with Chinoiserie, and strongly criticized the British burning of the Beijing Summer Palace (Trần 1996; Do 2017).

The first Caodai spirit messages did not include any non-Asian figures. But in 1927, when the main Caodai medium was himself exiled to Cambodia as punishment for "politically charged" activities, the spirit of Victor Hugo appeared using a Vietnamese name and announced that he recognized Trần Quang Vinh, a young participant in the séances, as his spiritual son. Three years later, the Protectorate of Cambodia sent Trần Quang Vinh to Paris to help organize the Exposition Coloniale in Vincennes, and séances revealed that this was a way for God or the Jade Emperor to globalize the faith and lobby for religious freedom in Vietnam.

For a generation of Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Laotian students who studied under French professors, reading the works of Victor Hugo had exposed them to his campaign against the death penalty, his deep sympathy for the oppressed (*Les Misèrables*), and his respect for Asian civilizations. It was Hugo's great enemy Napoléon III (who Hugo famously called "Napoléon le Petit") who conquered French Indochina, only finishing in 1890, after Hugo's death, so they imagined that Hugo would also criticize the French colonial project.

In 1931, the spirit of Victor Hugo announced to his disciples that "France needs to learn some lessons," because "the colonial government is crushed under the iron rule of the Catholic Church" and had started to prosecute the followers of this new religion. Hugo was a "trans-colonial" spiritual figure, since he spoke in French to followers in both Vietnam and Cambodia, and he also emerged as a critic of French colonial policy; the Vietnamese "spiritual sons" of this great French literary figure were the true champions of his prophetic ideas of humanism and emancipation, while French people living in Indochina were criticized for their hypocrisy.

On May 22, 1937, a new Caodai temple was consecrated in Phnom Penh, with a huge portrait of Victor Hugo displayed near the altar, and Trần Quang Vinh announced that they chose to inaugurate the temple "on the 52nd anniversary of the disincarnation of this great Frenchman" (Bernardini 1974; Hoskins 2015, 110). Noting that Hugo was

now recognized as the "spiritual head of the overseas Cao Dai mission," he explicitly traced its lineage back to the spirit séances Hugo conducted on the island of Jersey in 1854. He praised "that fraternity of men, that friendship of races" that had provided the impetus for "a powerful doctrinal synthesis linking the gods of Asia and the gods of Europe" and brought Caodaists "closer to that French soul with which we believe ourselves to have many secret and mysterious affinities" (Gobron 1948, 95).

Caodaists continued to seek support from French colonial figures like Free Masons and scholars of Asian culture and received a more sympathetic treatment from the French government after the 1937 victory of the leftist Popular Front in Paris, but as World War II drew closer these alliances were weakened. In 1940, six of the most important Tây Ninh Caodai leaders were arrested and sent to French prison camps on Madagascar and the Comoros Islands on charges that they had predicted a Japanese victory. In their absence, Trần Quang Vinh took refuge in Cambodia until the temple in Phnom Penh was seized by the French and desecrated. Pushed into the hands of the Japanese, Vinh formed a Caodai militia that worked in the shipyards of Saigon and helped the Japanese to overthrow the French in March 1945. They were promised that a Vietnamese prince who had lived in Japan for decades trying to lead a revolution from a distance would be returned to them, but he never came (Hoskins 2012a, 2015).

When Japan was defeated in August 1945, violence broke out between nationalist and revolutionary forces. The Caodai militia became a defensive force, fighting against the communists and coming to control more territory in southern Vietnam than any other group. When the French tried to return to retake their colony in 1946, they needed indigenous allies and so courted the Caodaists and recruited them to participate in a "peaceful process of decolonization." Vinh negotiated for the return of the exiled Caodai leaders, who accepted the temporary "necessity" of the French presence while the region was pacified and prepared for a transition to a sovereign Vietnam within the framework of a "French Union" modeled on the British Commonwealth (Hoskins 2012b).

The Tây Ninh mural of Victor Hugo, Sun-Yat Sen, and Trạng Trình was finished on August 11, 1948, as Caodaists were turning away from their earlier collaborations with communist revolutionaries to a new collaboration with French forces. A year after it was installed in the Great Temple in Tay Ninh (and later copied in over 1,300 other temples), the Supreme leader Phạm Công Tắc celebrated Victor Hugo's 65th death anniversary on May 22, 1949, by giving a sermon that explained Hugo was a reincarnation of the Vietnamese poet Nguyễn Du (1765–1820)—the most famous of all Vietnamese poets, the author of the national epic *The Tale of Kieu*. By emphasizing the fact that Hugo was preceded by a Vietnamese literary giant, the French writer was "indigenized," and Nguyễn Du himself was made more "cosmopolitan," since his own genius was plotted on a map with French coordinates (Hoskins 2015, 114; Do 2017, 126). This twist came at a political moment when efforts to renew the bonds between the French and the Vietnamese and heal the wounds of colonialism had largely been abandoned, ceding to the post–World War II realization of the inevitability of decolonization.

The ambiguity of this image—Hugo as one of the founding saints of a new faith—has stirred up some controversy about whether Hugo was in fact "worshipped" by

the Vietnamese or deified. First, I want to establish that neither of these is true: his role, like that of Sun Yat-Sen and Trạng Trình, was more that of John the Baptist, who announced the coming of a new religious era. But Hugo's spirit did contribute a number of prayers to the Caodai liturgy, and he was treated as an important spiritual advisor. Second, I want to argue that his legacy needs to be interpreted in relation to the actions of the Vietnamese religious leaders designated as his spiritual sons, who have served as translators, ambassadors, and negotiators with both the French and the Communist regime.

This controversy resonates with anthropological debates about the "deification" of Captain Cook (Sahlins 1987, 1996; Obeyesekere 1992) and Hernando Cortes (Todorov 1987), in which "natives" were said to have attributed supernatural powers to important Europeans. Postcolonial critics have argued that Cook and Cortes were mythologized by westerners but not by colonized subjects. In trying to speak for the oppressed and arm them with scholarly ammunition in their struggles, these writers may have flattened out some of the nuances of non-Western spirituality and the complex exchanges of ideas during the colonial period. While Hugo's position in the Caodai pantheon has no doubt been exaggerated by European commentators (including Graham Greene in his famous novel *The Quiet American*),[2] it remains significant, but less because of Hugo himself (now referred to by a Vietnamese name and absorbed into the spiritual lineage of a Vietnamese poet) than because of his spiritual sons: Vietnamese Caodaists who came to play significant roles in the decolonization process in Indochina. They include the already mentioned Trần Quang Vinh, the young Caodaist missionary sent to Paris in 1931, who was identified in a séance as his spiritual son and eventually became the defense minister of the transitional government of South Vietnam (1947–49), and his own son Trần Quang Cảnh, a Vietnamese American who later became the first overseas Vietnamese member of the Sacerdotal Council, identified as his spiritual grandson (Hoskins 2015, 97–99, 117–19, 247–48, 254; Jammes 2014).

Victor Hugo's writings were important to Caodaists in the 1930s both because they valorized spiritism (since Hugo also participated in spiritist séances) and because they advocated for the oppressed. The French author was placed in a "historically salient cultural model in which a political leader who performs tremendous 'meritorious works' (*công đức*) for the Vietnamese people and nation becomes, after death, a protective tutelary deity whose powers can be drawn upon for assistance by the living" (Malarney 1996, 121). In this sense, he was offered the same status as the one assumed by the spirit of Hồ Chí Minh after his own death in 1969, since Hồ Chí Minh became the focus of a popular religious cult of healing in the twenty-first century (Hoang 2016; Ngo 2019). Hugo's human legacy, and the sense of mission communicated to his disciples and interlocutors, was why he remained important in Caodaism long after his death. He is still considered important by twenty-first-century Caodaists, especially those in the diaspora, because he was appointed the spiritual head of the overseas mission.

Because Hugo's representation in the mural is seen as incongruous by many visitors (although they do not question the presence of Sun Yat-Sen, another non-Vietnamese figure), explanations of why he is there have fueled totally false stories

about other non-Asian figures. While it is true that in the 1930s Caodaists received spirit messages from Jeanne d'Arc (supporting the self-determination of peoples and resisting occupying armies) and a few other French literary and political figures in the 1930s, these did not continue after the beginning of World War II and the accelerating process of decolonization.

In the 1950s, American journalists started to write stories about Caodaism, and supposedly credible entities like *Time Magazine* claimed that Winston Churchill and Charlie Chaplin were also "saints" in the Caodai pantheon (*Time* 1956a, 1956b, 1957). I can only imagine that these stories came from language-based misunderstandings when the journalists interviewed Caodaists, since both Churchill and Chaplin were alive at the time (and lived for many more decades), and only deceased persons can become saints or communicate with the living through séances (Hoskins 2015, 245). Nevertheless, these early and erroneous articles helped create a mythology that exaggerated Caodaism's "outrageous syncretism" (ibid., 4) and has meant that I have been contacted by many other journalists asking where they can find murals or altars with Churchill and Chaplin on them. This is, perhaps, one of the dangers of display: one image displayed that attracts attention can conjure up a series of other similar images that may not even exist.

The Saigon flag on display

A different set of complex political circumstances led to the incorporation of the Saigon flag, representing the now defunct Republic of South Vietnam, into ancestral altars for a large number of people in the Vietnamese diaspora. The diaspora itself can be divided into communities that identify as "Little Saigons," made up overwhelmingly of refugees from the former southern Vietnam and found in the United States, Canada, and Australia, and those that identify as "Little Hanois," made up of northern contract workers and students in the former socialist world of Russia, East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic (Hoskins and Nguyen 2020). Two countries, France and Germany, have mixed populations, with southern refugees being more numerous in France and northern workers more numerous in Germany. The Little Saigons include about three million people, roughly two-thirds of them in the United States, while the other 1.5 million people live in Little Hanois or the mixed countries of France and Germany. There are also Vietnamese communities in Cambodia, China, and Taiwan that are not as clearly demarcated by Cold War polarities.

The veneration of the flag of the former Saigon government has become part of familial worship at ancestral altars in the homes of former refugees in the United States, Canada, and Australia: a small yellow striped Saigon flag (*cờ vàng*) is placed just beside the images of Buddha, the Virgin Mary, or the Caodai emblem of the "left eye of God." This flag symbolically represents the vanished regime as a sort of ancestor: an important part of family history, and a now-deceased but still influential and possibly benevolent spiritual authority. People that I interviewed about this custom described it as "showing respect" or "keeping alive the memory of their homeland," but it does so in a depoliticized context, since the flag is commemorated as heritage.

The red Hanoi flag, in contrast, is never placed on ancestral altars (even by those very loyal to the regime) precisely because its government is still very much alive.

The Saigon flag has been renamed the "Freedom and Heritage Flag" in many Vietnamese American communities, where it is often found flying in front of Buddhist temples, Caodai temples, Vietnamese Catholic Centers, and cultural and historical centers (figure 2). It is also unfurled over cemeteries in the cities of Westminster and Garden Grove (both identified as Little Saigon), where many veterans of the Army of the Republic of South Vietnam are buried, and at monuments to all those who died in the war opposing communist rule. Shopping centers have long served as symbols of ethnic communities in American cities, and accordingly many Vietnamese American activists have asked to have "their flag" fly at supermarkets, restaurants, and mini-malls where many Vietnamese are customers. It has been adopted by cities like Garden Grove, California and Falls Church, Virginia as the "official flag of the Vietnamese community" and recognized as such by the states of California and Ohio.

More recently, many people were surprised to see the Saigon flag flown on January 7, 2021, when pro-Trump protesters stormed the Capitol to try to stop the certification of the election of Joe Biden as president. Writing in the *Washington Post*, the novelist and cultural critic Viet Thanh Nguyen explained, "In America, white nationalists and Vietnamese nationalists share a common condition: a radicalized nostalgia for a lost country and a lost cause" (Nguyen 2021). He continued by providing this historical context:

> For decades, many in the community harbored the belief that they would one day return to Vietnam to topple the communist regime, first through military struggle and then, as the veterans aged, through political struggle. The Vietnamese communist regime took that threat seriously. In the years after its triumph, the regime imprisoned tens of thousands of its former enemies, from generals and judges to enlisted men and priests. Unknown numbers died in the regime's reeducation camps. Hundreds of thousands fled persecution by boat, and many lost their lives

Figure 2. The Saigon flag flying in front of the California Caodai Temple in Garden Grove, California. Photograph by Janet Alison Hoskins.

> at sea. The regime effectively destroyed any possibility of resistance, suppressed the public memory of South Vietnam, destroyed its monuments and silenced most of its opposition. Dissidents still exist today, but they are imprisoned quickly and harshly. (ibid.)

The brandishing of the Saigon flag at the Capitol insurrection, paired often with the Confederate flag, would seem to show a denial of history and a refusal to accept a defeat that happened decades or even a over a century earlier. I argue, however, that the placement of a small flag on a family ancestral altar is quite different from marching with the same flag in Washington, DC. While the political protesters show a "radicalized nostalgia," those who place a miniature flag as a sacred object on their ancestral altars are recognizing that South Vietnam exists no more and are venerating it as a part of their shared history but not their present political reality.

On the one hand, the flying of the Saigon flag at Vietnamese houses of worship, at commercial centers, and (in miniature form) on home altars is a way to create an alternative space in which to collectively commemorate the losing side of a civil war. On the other hand, the fact that this is only possible in exile (and not in Vietnam itself) means that the flag itself is sacralized in a very different way from most national flags. It is in fact illegal to bring the Saigon flag into the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and anyone who tries to unfurl or display it could be immediately arrested and expelled from the country. It is not even possible to display a distant photograph of the Saigon flag in Vietnam, so images of diasporic temples and pagodas are also banned if they include this flag (Hoskins 2017, 2021).

Figure 3. The sanctification of the Saigon flag poster in France. Image downloaded from "70ème anniversaire du Drapeau du Vietnam Libre," Association des Jeunes Vietnamiens de Paris, May 28, 2018. https://www.httn-paris.com/2018/05/70eme-anniversaire-du-drapeau-du-vietnam-libre/

The overseas Vietnamese community that has ceremonialized the worship of the Saigon flag to the highest degree is the refugee community in Paris. In 2008, members of the anticommunist student group AEGVP (Association Générale des Etudiants Vietnamiens de Paris or Tổng Hội Sinh Viên Việt Nam tại Paris) decided to quite consciously reinvent a tradition by sanctifying the Saigon flag (figure 3). The association was founded in 1964 at the Hiền Lương restaurant on the rue de Broca in Paris's fifth arrondissement ("Latin quarter") to support the Saigon government. Several hundred of its members returned to Vietnam in 1972–73 to work to help the current regime, even though their French nationality protected them from the draft. Its

Figure 4. The yellow Saigon flag is flown alongside the Buddhist flag, a Buddhist altar, and the French flag at a protest at the Parvis des Droits de l'Homme (Human Rights Square) in Paris, in front of the Eiffel tower in June 2018. Photograph by Janet Alison Hoskins.

former president in 1972, Trần Văn Bá, returned to Vietnam after the fall of Saigon and was executed for plotting against the government (Nguyen Ngoc Chau 2016).

The yellow striped flag was created by the emperor Thành Thái in 1890, at the same time that he encouraged celebrations of the Hùng Vuong dynasty (the legendary founders of the Vietnamese imperial state). It was adopted by former emperor Bảo Đại in 1948 for a supposedly "sovereign" Vietnamese state within a proposed French Union, and it is this date that was commemorated in the ceremonies held in 2008 and 2018 to celebrate a Vietnam that would be "free, democratic, and sovereign." On June 9, 2018, the seventieth anniversary of this "sanctification" of the flag was celebrated by parading a giant yellow striped flag through the thirteenth arrondissement, Paris's "Asian quarter," starting at a popular Vietnamese market (Tang Frères) and proceeding to a rally to protest the communist government's abuse of human rights. Two weeks later, Buddhist monks in the now-outlawed Unified Buddhist Church led a large demonstration at the Human Rights Square in front of the Eiffel Tower, waving the Buddhist flag, the French flag, and dozens of yellow flags to challenge the legitimacy of the present Vietnamese government and protest new laws on internet censorship and leasing new economic zones to China (figure 4).

There are controversies about whether to interpret the display of the flag of a now-defunct country as a form of ethnic solidarity (like the flag of Armenia displayed in Los Angeles demonstrations about the Armenian genocide), long-distance nationalism (like the Palestinian flag, which is still tied to an aspiring nation), or a history of exclusion and even racialization. Writing about Vietnamese Buddhist communities in the Gulf South, Allison Truitt argues that the display of the Saigon flag at Buddhist temples marks not only the "ethnic" experience of refugee displacement but also that of racialization and marginalization within the host country:

> As a symbol, the flag also exposes how Vietnamese Buddhism cannot be explained by the category of ethnicity but should instead be framed in terms of racialization. The categories of race and ethnicity are used interchangeably to designate Asian Americans, but these categories mark different orders in American political life. By

> designating people's investment in the life of these temples as merely "ethnic," we misrecognize other dynamics at play. These dynamics like hoisting the Freedom and Heritage Flag mark race insofar as this term encodes histories of subjugation, including "legacies of conquest, enslavement, and non-national status that disturb the national peace, whose narrative must thus be silenced within public culture, or hived off from the national story into separate worlds of their own" (Singh 2004, 42–43). Within these temples, people invoke legacies otherwise silenced in public culture, reframing these narratives within a Buddhist idiom and helping residents navigate their historical experiences, present marginalization, and uncertain futures through their spiritual commitments. Displaying the flag is not merely nostalgic but is a ritual activity that alerts us to the fact that while most Americans assume the Cold War ended in 1989, it is not over for many Vietnamese.
>
> (Truitt 2021, 14)

Does flying the flag of a defeated nation mean that Vietnam's long civil war is "over" or that it is "not over"? Calling this flag a "heritage flag" recognizes the fact that it no longer represents a citizenship, but the question of representing the "Vietnamese community" remains a contentious one (Hoskins and Nguyen 2020).

In 2015, at my own campus of the University of Southern California (USC), a Vietnamese American protester climbed up the top of the international studies building and removed the Hanoi flag from where it was flying, replacing it with the Saigon flag. University administrators would not allow it to be replaced, since the logic of displaying flags at that center was that they represented the over one hundred nationalities of the foreign students studying at USC, which have for decades included Vietnamese nationals. With my colleague Viet Thanh Nguyen, we tried to make this protest into a teaching opportunity, and we invited representatives of both the Vietnamese Student Association (made up of Vietnamese Americans who were US nationals) and the Vietnamese International Student Association (made up of Vietnamese nationals) to meet together to discuss this issue. This proved the beginning of a few collaborative social events, mainly built around eating Vietnamese food, which were also efforts at reconciliation between the descendants of those who fought the long civil war. One characteristic of these events was that they would not be promoted with either the Saigon or Hanoi flag.[3]

Santa Claus on display

Images of Santa Claus are found all over commercial shopping centers and public spaces in the season before Christmas, both in Saigon and in California, but it was surprising to me to see one on a Vietnamese altar to the spirit of the youngest prince. The company that surrounds Santa Claus are other toys presented as offerings to the young playful boy spirits: a miniature BMW car, Asian pears, a lemon, an apple, a battery-operated locomotive, a toy horse, a baby god riding a fish, a tiny Christmas tree, and a pack of Marlboro cigarettes. The cigarettes are used by the spirit mediums possessed by the boy spirit, who often perform a pantomime routine of a naughty little boy who sneaks cigarettes from his father and tries to light two or three of them at the same time. The offerings made to this spirit and then distributed by him are

usually candy, small fruits, and the cigarettes—now partially smoked and filled with the breath of the spirit himself.

Followers of Đạo Mẫu, or the "Way of the Mother Goddesses," are not identified with either the decolonial politics of Caodaism or the Cold War conflicts that separate the flags of Hanoi and Saigon. In contrast, Đạo Mẫu is a shamanistic practice in which spirit mediums are possessed by spirits of the imperial past and pray to goddesses of the heavens, earth, and waters. Although the exact sequence of spirits who come down can be different for each ceremony, it always starts with high-ranking generals and mandarins, then goes to ladies of the court, then royal princes and princesses, until the final spirits incarnated, who are playful children. The child spirits dance shaking a rattle, miming tantrums interspersed with pratfalls, and often playfully toss candy or crisp dollar bills out to the audience.

It is a modern version of spirit medium rituals long practiced in rural northern Vietnam that had been condemned as superstitious during the revolutionary struggle. In the early 1990s, a number of Communist party leaders began to promote the idea of reviving cultural activities to foster traditional values, allowing practices once considered "superstition" to become "folk culture." Scholars associated with Ngó Đức Thịnh's Folklore Institute began to document the songs and dances of what was then known as the Four Palaces cult. By highlighting the kinship between these practices and shamanism in other societies, these scholars were able to allow Đạo Mẫu to be reclassified as an indigenous cultural heritage and a "living museum" of Vietnamese culture. In the new market economy of the twenty-first century, these practices also became more attractive, because they were said to promote health, confidence, and entrepreneurial success (Phạm Quynh Phuong 2009; Endres 2011).

In California mediumship communities (*công đồng lên đồng*), serving the spirits is seen as a practice that affirms a transnational Vietnamese identity without "playing the games of the government," since stories of government suppression of the practice are often told. At the same time, members of this community travel back to Vietnam often to buy ritual paraphernalia (costumes, statues, altar decorations) and participate in rituals at particularly potent temples. Their transnational travels implicitly affirm the idea that Vietnamese people are empowered by mythic figures from their past and can use these figures to both understand and model their own behavior. In Clifford Geertz's (1973, 93) famous formulation, the spirits are both "models of" and "models for" human personalities.

The spirit medium does not travel up to heaven to witness the world of these celestial beings like the shaman does. Instead, she invites them into her own body, and this has become a practice where women mediums are the majority, with many male mediums who present as transgendered. She allows them a place within her where they breathe through her breath and shake with the same rhythms as her stomping feet. It is the body, not the sky that is the ground of spirit mediumship.

Mimesis has been discussed by Michael Taussig as the capacity "to copy, imitate, make models, explore difference, yield into and become Other. The wonder of mimesis lies in the copy drawing on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and that power" (Taussig 1993, xiii). For migrants who are far from their homeland, it is a way of

taking spirits indigenous to Vietnam and inviting them into their bodies and their consciousness, so that these spirits come to share their experiences, and to offer their own thoughts about how to interpret them. Much as Laurel Kendall and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati (2023) observe for the Korean *mansin* shaman, the reflection that the spirit medium sees is both her and not her: it uses the landscape of her own features to highlight a different personality, a new set of gestures and facial expressions that interpret her physical form from a new perspective. In the mirror, she sees a moving display of her own identity struggles.

Spirit possession is an experience of fluidity in identity, of being drawn into moving as another being would move and feeling as another being might feel. Recent theorists (Levitt 2007) have argued that second-generation migrants are often working with multiple identities at the same time, a process that promotes flexibility and may have many advantages but which can also prove confusing. The appeal of spirit possession is that it offers an immediate, intense experience of "being Vietnamese," which can serve as an anchor for an identity that seems in danger of becoming unmoored.

For younger migrants born in Vietnam but growing up in California, these spirited encounters are appealing because they involve drama, bodily movement, and altered states of consciousness. For some of their parents, dabbling in this kind of activity is suspect; it can be dangerous and, if mismanaged, can threaten one's wellbeing. They are aware that these practices were condemned as superstitious and backward by the Hanoi government, although for anti-Hanoi refugees this official condemnation can be part of their appeal, since the rituals are associated with struggles for individual freedom. Younger, inexperienced mediums often crave an intense, uncontrolled form of possession trance, which older mediums may see as exaggerated and inappropriate (Fjelstad and Nguyen 2011, 125–28). For the ritual masters, learning to practice spirit possession is learning to control yourself, to enter into each incarnation with skill and deliberation, and to recognize that the spirits are best served with dignity and decorum, not flailing limbs and rolling eyes.

Vietnamese spirit possession ceremonies appear more like lively folkdance sequences than like the violent, spasmodic movements associated with Afro-American diasporic spirit possession ceremonies like Vodou (McCarthy Brown 1991). They emphasize a stage of self-recognition and self-control, since they involve dressing carefully in front of a mirror, providing a moment of self-contemplation and self-recognition as part of the process of becoming a "servant of the gods" (*lam tôi ngài*) (Hoskins 2014). The medium is not simply lost in an involuntary series of movements but comes to see herself moving under the influence of spirits that she considers her masters, teachers, and "lords" (*ngài*). Even the youngest and most impish of the spirits, the "Youngest Prince" Cậu Bé, is seen as a child in heaven and a spiritual master to his youthful devotees on earth.

I first saw Santa Claus on a Đạo Mẫu altar in Garden Grove, California (figure 5), at the home of an older Vietnamese woman who had married an American G.I. and come to the United States in 1974. Her ancestors had migrated from northern Vietnam to Saigon in the 1930s, and she had been initiated into the practice as a young girl. Her granddaughter, in turn, had been pledged to the spirits at the age of twelve as part of

the process of healing her from a serious illness and was now, at thirty-one years old, holding her own ceremonies. I asked the grandmother what it meant to have Santa Claus on her altar, and she told me:

> He is the American spirit of children. They pray to him for gifts, but also to help them to understand their parents and grandparents. In Vietnam, we pray to the Kitchen God at Tết, and he reports about our family to those above. In America, our children pray to Santa Claus, but he also works with Cẫu Bé, the child spirit, to help the generations understand each other.

The Kitchen God (Ông Táo) or Mandarin Táo (Táo Quan) is a kindly older man who lives in the hearth and is seen as the advocate of the Vietnamese family with the gods, and an emissary who travels between heaven and earth. Since he is also depicted as a grandfather (Ông), and he shares Santa Claus's affinity for chimneys, he plays a similar role in the familial piety of Vietnamese New Year (Tết) traditions. The Kitchen God is depicted wearing a long robe and shorts, and he oversees the cleaning of the house in preparation for a prosperous new year on the lunar calendar. He supposedly prepares a report about the family to be taken up to the Jade Emperor in the heavens. Through his intercessions, children are given "*lì-cì*" red envelopes with money in them to wish them good fortune in the new year. The temple owner's explicit association of the Kitchen God with Santa Claus suggests that she sees them as parallel figures, each operating over a specific local area.

While Cậu Bé is a bit of a prankster and a trickster, he is also a sacred intermediary who can help to resolve generational conflict. He wears white pants with a green vest and often dances with a bow and arrow or a hobby horse's reins. He is more approachable than the great generals, mandarins, or ladies of the court, and he is the only spirit in the Đạo Mẫu pantheon who occasionally speaks in English—since

Figure 5. Santa Claus on the Đạo Mẫu altar in Garden Grove, California. Santa Claus appears on the altar dedicated to the two youngest child princes, Cậu Bé and Cậu Bơ. Photograph by Janet Alison Hoskins.

in immigrant families, the children often speak in English, even in answering their parents who speak Vietnamese.

The collaboration of the grandfatherly Kitchen God and the playful child spirit Cậu Bé is a reflection of the situation in many immigrant households, where the parents work multiple jobs, so the children are cared for by grandparents who may not share their language. If Santa Claus sometimes takes on the same position as the Kitchen God, he does so as an indulgent gift-giving spirit who can offer company and consolation to lonely children. His presence on the altar shows a way in which California spirit mediums are incorporating new elements that they see as making their traditional heritage more open to local influences.

Home altars as the canvas of syncretism: Idiosyncratic elements and their contextualization

Syncretism has been characteristic of Vietnamese religious life for centuries, but it has often been depicted negatively, as a bug that corrupts certain religions with folk elements. Rather than being the contamination of "true faiths" with "folk traditions," syncretism should be recognized as the very engine that creates new religions. All religions are the result of a syncretic process that takes an existing formation and transforms it into something new. Vietnamese home altars are always idiosyncratic, since they commemorate specific ancestors, usually grandparents, and place them beside icons of spiritual power. There are rules about what should and should not be placed on an altar, and how other votive objects (candles, incense burners, containers for fruit and flowers) should be arranged. Each particular arrangement makes visible a cosmology, as it is sorted into various levels, associated with levels of spiritual attainment. Santa Claus is placed below the child spirit Cậu Bé, for example, and Victor Hugo is never placed at the same level as images of Buddha, Quan Âm, or the Divine Eye. While the boundaries of what counts as a spiritual guide may be porous, the hierarchy of the highest deities is not open to negotiation. New elements are integrated in at the lower levels, where their power is seen as added to the more encompassing entities at the top.

Altar design is often featured in museum displays to illustrate the complex cosmologies of other peoples. The American Museum of Natural History, for example, featured a Mother Goddess altar in its 2003–04 exhibit on "Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit" (Nguyen and Kendall 2003), and later a similar altar was featured at the Women's Museum of Vietnam, Hanoi, in 2012. While the museum tried to collect objects with a high aesthetic quality of craftsmanship, the basic design was copied from popular practice, and similar altars are found in many people's homes. Since Caodaism and Mother Goddess Worship are considered "indigenous religions," there was concern that these altars should be recognized by their worshippers and would not violate the unwritten grammar of how objects should be arranged.

The Metropolitan Museum in New York displays the ancestral altar of the mother of a ruler of the Benin kingdom, the Art Institute of Chicago has a Nigerian Kalabari Ancestral Altar, and the Fowler Museum of Cultural History had an elaborate display of several different altars in its 1995 exhibit on the "Sacred Arts of Haitian

Vodou." Objects presented for display are often de-sacralized or de-animated first, if they are presented to a wider audience that cannot be expected to exhibit the same ritual protocols of bowing, placing offerings, and speaking respectfully to the objects. Laurel Kendall (2021, 170) and Nguyễn Văn Huy and Phạm Lan Hương (2008) describe the case of the One-Eyed God statue from Họa Village, removed from display at an ancestral lineage house or *đình* after a quarrel, where rumors persisted that it might have been filled with ancestral ashes. Only photographic documentation of the de-animation process allowed it to be exhibited in the museum context of the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology, once it was established that it had been cleansed of materials tying it to a specific family.

People compose their home altars as personalized expressions of filial piety and as belonging to Vietnamese tradition. While the arrangement on an altar is displayed to others, it is usually a select group of descendants and close friends who will be invited into the private space of their home. Display in the much more public, secular space of a museum involves a new set of rules and protocols and is usually accompanied by text assuring its educational value to a much wider audience. The tradition of home altars has created a canvas for people to personalize their spirituality, allowing the incremental process of implicit syncretism to gradually form new configurations. Explicit syncretism, like the spirit messages of the 1920s that brought Caodaism into being, is a more dramatic and disruptive restaging of the gods (Hoskins 2015). The inclusion of Victor Hugo (for his spiritual grandchildren), Santa Claus, and the Saigon flag are idiosyncratic incursions that show the personal histories of the families who honor their ancestors in their homes.

Conclusions: Display and what it represents

The worlds that are made of assembling a particular pantheon of gods, demons, and spiritual advisors are different in each case examined here. Caodaism presents itself as a cosmopolitan syncretism, which is open to illustrious French literary figures as well as Vietnamese and Chinese ones. Victor Hugo takes his place as the reincarnation of a famous Vietnamese poet, so his veneration is located within a transnational recognition of parity of literary accomplishment. In a somewhat similar fashion, Santa Claus comes into a Vietnamese Đạo Mẫu altar because he has a kinship with the beloved Kitchen God and can seem to play a similar role in reconciling the generations in immigrant households. The Saigon flag has often appeared in heavily politicized and divisive contexts, but on a family's ancestral altar it commemorates an experience of displacement and loss that unites the members of a family rather than separating them.

The "strange company" that we see in these various forms of display show how new connections are fused by juxtaposition. Even in the relatively private setting of a home altar or home temple, there must be logic behind the choice of figures shown. Vietnamese spirit mediums' use of a mirror, where they can see themselves transformed into the possessing spirit, allows them to reflect on the differences between their mundane selves and their ritual identities. Each of the spirits who might come to possess them is also depicted as a small statue or figurine on the altars that they worship, so they can model their trance performances on a visual image.

The mirroring or mimesis that is part of each possession experience is associated with taking on the characteristics of a spirit entity, who can then help to transform the daily life of the spirit medium even after the trance is over. It is itself a moving form of display, which shows to the audience many personalities modeled on Vietnamese tradition. One spirit medium even told me explicitly that it was "Vietnam which was dancing inside my body" (Hoskins 2014, 76). Although Caodaists would not put it quite that way, since their form of séance does not include dancing but only the transmission of messages, they also argue that "Victor Hugo can speak to us from above and guide our efforts in the New World" (Hoskins 2015, 124–25). Figures depicted on an altar or a mural become models for personalities and attributes that we may all aspire to, and in the ritual context these possible models can be turned into direct experiences of mimesis.

Just as the American flag on a Korean shaman's shrine can be more about the memory of shamanism in a situation of cultural pluralism (see Kwon and Park 2023), so also the Saigon flag on an ancestral altar in a diasporic community in California can be more about a shared history of suffering than contemporary anticommunism. People can push back at the definitional borders of their own experience and tear open new possibilities of connection and meaning. Each of these spirits models a religious aspiration, which is displayed and activated in a ritual context. But it also holds up a mirror to the experience of loss and displacement. This is what these three examples of innovative displays and incorporations can teach us.

Author

Janet Alison Hoskins is professor of anthropology and religion at the University of Southern California, Los Angeles. Her books include *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism* (2015), *The Play of Time: Kodi Perspectives on History, Calendars and Exchange* (1996 Benda Prize in Southeast Asian Studies, AAS), and *Biographical Objects: How Things Tell the Stories of People's Lives* (1998). She is the contributing editor of four books: *Transpacific Studies: Framing an Emerging Field* (with Viet Thanh Nguyen 2014), *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (1996), *A Space between Oneself and Oneself: Anthropology as a Search for the Subject* (1999), and *Fragments from Forests and Libraries* (2001). She served as president of the Society for the Anthropology of Religion, a section of the American Anthropological Association, from 2011 to 2013, and has written and produced three ethnographic documentaries distributed by der.org, including "The Left Eye of God: Caodaism Travels from Vietnam to California."

Notes

1. Trạng Trình, also known as Nguyễn Bỉnh Khiêm (1491–1585), is a sixteenth-century writer sometimes called the "Nostradamus of Vietnam," who published a series of poems predicting the emergence of an independent Vietnam.

2. A more detailed analysis of Greene's statements about Caodaism and their implications can be found in Hoskins (2015, 2, 8–9, 114–17, 136, 249).

3. This is also the solution proposed by the nuns who run one of the largest Vietnamese Buddhist pagodas in Germany, the Linh Thứ'u Pagoda in Spandau (near Berlin). While the pagoda was initially founded by refugees, it now serves a mixed community that includes more descendants of workers sent to East Germany, so the decision was taken to ban the display of any national flags—including the Saigon flag and the Hanoi flag—to emphasize the pagoda as a place of reconciliation and peace (see Hoskins and Nguyen 2020).

References

Bernardini, Pierre. 1974. "Le Caodaisme au Cambodge." PhD diss., Université dParis VII.

Cambridge Dictionary. N.d. "Display." https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/display

Chambers, John. 2008. *Victor Hugo's Conversations with the Spirit World: A Literary Genius's Hidden Life.* Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.

Do, Tess. 2017. "From Author to Saint: The Appropriations of Victor Hugo and *Les Misérables* in Colonial Vietnam." *Contemporary French Civilization* 42 (1): 113–29. https://doi.org/10.3828/cfc.2017.7

Endres, Kristin. 2011. *Performing the Divine: Mediumship, Markets, and Modernity in Modern Vietnam.* Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies.

Fjelstad, Karen, and Nguyễn Thị Hiền. 2011. *Spirits without Borders: Vietnamese Spirit Mediums in a Transnational Age*. New York: Palgrave.

Geertz, Clifford. 1973. "Religion as a Cultural System." In *The Interpretation of Cultures*, by Clifford Geertz, 87–125. New York: Basic Books.

Gobron, Gabriel. 1948. *Histoire et Philosophie du Caodaisme: Bouddhisme rénové, spiritisme vietnamien, religion nouvelle en Eurasie.* Paris: Dervy.

Hackett, Conrad, Brian Grim, Marcin Stonawski, Vegard Skirbekk, Noble Kuriakose, and Michaela Potančoková. 2014. "Methodology of the Pew Research Global Religious Landscape Study." In *Yearbook of International Religious Demography 2014*, edited by Brian Grim, Johnson Todd, Vegard Skirbekk, and Gina Zurlo, 167–75. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004275065_011

Hoang, Chung Van. 2016. "'Following Uncle Hồ to Save the Nation': Empowerment, Legitimacy and Nationalistic Aspirations in a Vietnamese New Religious Movement." *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 47 (2): 234–54. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022463416000060

Hoskins, Janet Alison. 2012a. *God's Chosen People: Race, Religion and Anti-Colonial Resistance in French Indochina*. The Asia Research Institute Working Paper Series 189. Singapore: National University of Singapore. https://ari.nus.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/wps12_189.pdf

———. 2012b. "A Spirit Medium as Architect: Caodaism's Visual Theology." In *The Spirit of Things: Materiality in the Age of Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia*, edited by Julius Bautista, 43–60. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asian Publications.

———. 2014. "The Spirits You See in the Mirror: Spirit Possession in the Vietnamese American Diaspora." In *The Southeast Asian Diaspora in the United States*, edited by Jonathan Lee, 73–100. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge Scholars Press.

———. 2015. *The Divine Eye and the Diaspora: Vietnamese Syncretism Becomes Transpacific Caodaism*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824854799-toc

———. 2017. "Sacralizing the Diaspora: Cosmopolitan and Originalist Indigenous Religions." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2): 108–40. https://doi.org/10.1525/jvs.2017.12.2.108

———. 2021. "Refugees in the Land of Awes: Vietnamese Arrivals and Departures." In *Refugees and Religion: Ethnographic Studies of Global Trajectories*, edited by Birgit Meyer and Peter Van Der Veer, 87–104. London: Bloomsbury. https://doi org/10.5040/9781350167162

Hoskins, Janet Alison, and Nguyen Thi Hien. 2020. "Vietnamese Transnational Religions: The Cold War Polarities of Temples in Little Hanois and Little Saigons." In *Transnational Religious Spaces: Religious Organizations and Their Interaction in Africa, East Asia, and Beyond*, edited by Philip Clart and Adam Jones, 183–209. Berlin, Germany: De Gruyter Oldenbourg. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110690101

Hoskins, Janet Alison, and Thien-Huong T. Ninh. 2017. "Introduction: Globalizing Vietnamese Religions." *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* 12 (2): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1525/jvs.2017.12.2.1

Hugo, Victor. 1923. *Chez Victor Hugo: Les Tables Tournantes de Jersey; Procès Verbaux des Séances*. Edited by Gustave Simon. Paris: Louis Conard.

Jammes, Jérémy. 2014. *Les Oracles du Cao Đài: Étude d'un mouvement religieux vietnamien et de ses réseaux.* Paris: Les Indes Savantes.

Kendall, Laurel. 2021. *Mediums and Magical Things: Statues, Paintings and Masks in Asian Places.* Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520970717-toc

Kendall, Laurel, and Ni Wayan Pasek Airati. 2023. "Manifestations of Presence in Korea and Bali: Crossroads, Intersections, Divergences." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 25-43

Kwon, Heonik, and Jun Hwan Park. 2023. "The American Flag in Kim's Spirit Shrine." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 121-39

Levitt, Peggy. 2007. *God Needs No Passport: Immigrants and the Changing American Religious Landscape.* New York: The New Press.

Malarney, Shawn K. 1996. "The Emerging Cult of Ho Chi Minh? A Report on Religious Innovation in Contemporary Northern Viet Nam." *Asian Cultural Studies* 24: 121–31.

McCarthy Brown, Karen. 1991. *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Ngo, Tam T. T. 2019. "The Uncle Hồ Religion in Vietnam." In *The Secular in South, East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Kenneth Dean and Peter Van Der Veer, 215–37. New York: Palgrave. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-89369-3_10

Nguyễn, Hiền Thị. 2016. *The Religion of Four Palaces: Mediumship and Therapy in Viet Culture.* Hanoi: Thế Giới Publishing House.

Nguyễn Ngọc Châu. 2016. *Le Temps des Ancêtres: Une famille vietnamienne dans sa traversée du Xxe siècle.* Paris: L'Harmattan.

Nguyễn Văn Huy, and Laurel Kendall. 2003. *Vietnam: Journeys of Body, Mind, and Spirit.* New York: American Museum of Natural History.

Nguyễn Văn Huy, and Phạm Lan Hương. 2008. "One-Eyed God at the Vietnamese Museum of Ethnology: The Story of a Village Conflict." *Asian Ethnology* 67 (2): 201–18.

Nguyen, Viet Thanh. 2021. "There's a Reason the South Vietnamese Flag Flew during the Capital Riot." *Washington Post*, January 14, 2021.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. 1992. *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Phạm Quynh Phuong. 2009. *Hero and Deity: Trần Hưng Đạo and the Resurgence of Popular Religion in Vietnam.* Chiang Mai: Mekong Press.

Popkin, Samuel. 1979. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam*. Berkeley: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520341623-toc

Sahlins, Marshall. 1987. *Islands of History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

———. 1996. *How Natives Think: About Captain Cook, For Example*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Salemink, Oscar. 2015. "Spirit Worship and Possession in Vietnam and Beyond." In *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*, edited by Bryan S. Turner and Oscar Salemink, 231–46. New York and London: Routledge.

Singh, Nikhil Pal. 2004. *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1n9dkwj

Swancutt, Katherine. 2023. "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 3-23

Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315021409

Time Magazine. 1956a. "Pope Takes a Powder." March 5, 1956. https://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,808242,00.html

———. 1956b. "The Beleagered Man." April 4, 1956.

———. 1957. "The Disquieted Americans." February 25, 1957.

Todorov, Tzvetan. 1987. *The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other.* New York: HarperCollins.

Trần Thu Dung. 1996. "Le Caodaisme et Victor Hugo." PhD diss., Université de Paris VII.

Truitt, Allison J. 2021. *Pure Land in the Making: Vietnamese Buddhism in the U.S. Gulf South.* Seattle: University of Washington Press.

Werner, Jayne. 1981. *Peasant Politics and Religious Sectarianism: Peasant and Priest in the Cao Đài in Vietnam.* New Haven, CT: Yale University.

Heonik Kwon
University of Cambridge

Jun Hwan Park
Independent Scholar

The American Flag in Kim's Spirit Shrine

A notable feature of contemporary Hwanghae-do (now a region in North Korea) shamanism in Incheon, west of Seoul, is a body of material symbols of American power that are familiar to Koreans—such as the Stars and Stripes or the portrait of General Douglas MacArthur. Focusing on the small American flag that Kim Kŭm-hwa, a renowned Hwanghae-origin shaman, brought home from her tour of the United States in 1982 during which she performed *kut*, Korea's shamanic rite, at the Knoxville World Fair and the Smithsonian Museum, this article investigates how this object came to join Kim's spirit shrine as an auspicious artifact and what it says about her eminent yet turbulent career experience. It asks what sort of power the American flag displays and how this power is different from what we habitually understand as "American power."

Keywords: shamanism—Korea—spirit portrait—American power—politics of anti-superstition

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 121–139

Return to Table of Contents

Unfurling is an important act in a *kut*, Korea's shamanic ritual. Although the act takes several distinct forms within the rite, most notable would be the divination or fortune-telling session involving *obangki*, the ritual device consisting of five hand-held flags of different colors. In a typical *obangki* divination, the client blind-picks a flag from the bundle held by the shaman and repeats the act once or twice more. The flags are carefully folded together so that their colors are not identifiable to the client, who sees only five identical-looking bamboo sticks that are used as flag poles. Each chosen color signifies a specific cardinal direction and a set of divinatory meanings as related to the conditions of human wellbeing. It also represents certain types of spirits and the specific supernatural power associated with these spirits. For instance, the red flag, associated with the southern orientation, speaks of the power of mountain deities, whereas the yellow flag, which signifies the center, symbolizes the vitality of ancestral spirits. The shaman interprets the combined meanings of two or more flags blind-picked this way. The unfurled colors are supposed to help map the client family's health and business prospects by showing which spirits might respond to the family's specific wishes and how strongly they would do so. Hence it is not surprising that most people who solicit a *kut* usually take part in the five-flag divination with acute interest and concentration. One can even argue that these clients are willing to endure the long and costly ritual in anticipation of those moments in which they can test their luck with the bundle of the red, white, yellow, blue, and green spirit flags. *Obangki* is a compass for the spirit world, reaching out in all directions to all classes of the animate entities within it. Within the act of ritual divination, it is an important means of communication between humans and spirits. And that important communication starts with the unfurling of flags (on the idea of unfurling, see Swancutt 2023).

Within a group of shamans in Incheon, a historic port town west of Seoul, on whom we concentrate in this article, some occasionally introduce to the *obangki* ritual *taeguk'gi* in place of *obangki*'s white flag (and sometimes as an addition to the existing five flags). Featuring symbols of ancient oracles on the pearl-white background, *taeguk'gi* is South Korea's national flag today; before 1945, when the nation was partitioned into two separate polities, it was Korea's national flag. This group of ritual specialists follow a local tradition of shamanism, associated with a region now north of the 38th parallel that divides Korea. The first generation of this group were refugees from the region, called Hwanghae (Yellow Sea), during the 1950–53 war. One notable

feature of the Hwanghae shamanism tradition is known to be a particularly elaborate and vigorous ritual performance involving warrior spirit-helpers. Among those who practice this local cultural form in Incheon today, another distinct feature is that the spirit of an American general plays an active part in the warrior-spirit performance, together with other much more established spirit-personas who originate from old Korean history or from the milieu of ancient Sino-Korean relations. This spirit is that of General Douglas MacArthur, a hero of the Pacific War who, after the war, governed the then America-occupied Japan. During the ensuing crisis of war in East Asia that started in the Korean peninsula, MacArthur was the supreme commander of the United Nations forces to Korea and orchestrated the well-known amphibious military action in September 1950 against the North Korean positions. Being a pivotal episode of the three-year Korean War, the amphibious assault took place in the coastal sea of Incheon, where most of this group of shamans have been primarily based. In the *kut* performed by some of these shamans, it is considered to be an especially auspicious sign if a client picked the *taeguk'gi* flag of the *obangki* in the first round. When this happens, the spirit of the American general is delighted and, taking the flag from the client, gets into a vigorous, joyous dance (that is, through the medium of the ritual-performing shamaness).

We have seen the American general waving and dancing with the Korean flag on several occasions and also have previously written about how this foreigner spirit came to find home in Korea's arguably most authentic, ancient popular religious sphere in the first place (Kwon and Park 2018). We argued that this process of homemaking interacts closely with an opposite process of displacement from home experienced by the first-generation Hwanghae shamans during the Korean War. We concluded that the inception of the American general into their society of spirit-helpers is far from an expression of subservience to a foreign power (as suggested by some nationalist cultural historians of South Korea). In contrast, the spirit of General MacArthur, whose legacies in the Korean War and in South Korea's political history at large are prolifically materialized in the city of Incheon through museums and monuments, is an extension of the spirit of General Im Kyung-ŏp, an eminent seventeenth-century military official and long-established shamanic deity in the Hwanghae region. The keyword in understanding this historical process is displacement (see also Hoskins 2023)—in the double sense of the term involving not only the war-caused physical dislocation from the home-place (the loss of the long-familiar symbolic landscape and related imperative of rebuilding a spirited landscape in an alien place), but also confronting powerful modern political forces of coerced disenchantment that were bent on dislocating traditional religious forms such as shamanism from social space.

We dealt with the first, material aspect of displacement in our earlier work (Kwon and Park 2018), in part with reference to the career of Chung Hak-bong, an eminent actor in Incheon's Hwanghae shamanism group. In the present article, we will explore the second, political dimension of displacement. Useful in this discussion is the life experience of Kim Kŭm-hwa, another towering figure in the displaced Hwanghae shamanism tradition in the post–Korean War South Korea. Madame Kim considered the *obangki* divination ritual an important part of her *kut*, just as Chung

and all other Hwanghae-tradition shamans did. In this article, however, rather than this ritual instrument our focus will be on another flag that she had long kept in her domestic shrine as one of her most cherished objects. This object was a small American flag, proudly displayed at the center of her spirit shrine in Seoul (figure 1). We will investigate how this object came to find a place in Kim's home shrine that is usually exclusively for the shaman's principal tutelary spirits and the gifts offered to them, asking what the American flag meant to her and what role it played within the shrine space and Kim's lived world more broadly. Following these investigations, we will return to the question of displacement and ask how Kim's American flag spoke to the powerful forces of modern politics that sought to displace shamanism from society.

Knoxville, 1982

Incheon has numerous historic relics. Many of them relate to the history of Korea opening its doors to Western and other foreign powers—notably, British, French, German, American, Russian, Japanese, and Chinese—at the end of the nineteenth century. The city is where several eminent American Protestant missionaries first landed in Korea in 1885, and it has several monuments and museums that celebrate the origin of Korea's Protestantism. The city keeps several other memorials that originate from more recent times. One of them is the statue of Douglas MacArthur, erected in 1957 in memory of this hero of the Incheon Landing by United Nations forces in September 1950, a pivotal episode in the Korean War. A short distance from the statue located on a hilltop public space called Freedom Park, visitors find another imposing monument, erected in 1982 to celebrate the centenary of Korea's opening of ties with the United States. We described in our earlier work how the emergence of MacArthur's statue into the postwar cityscape of Incheon developed

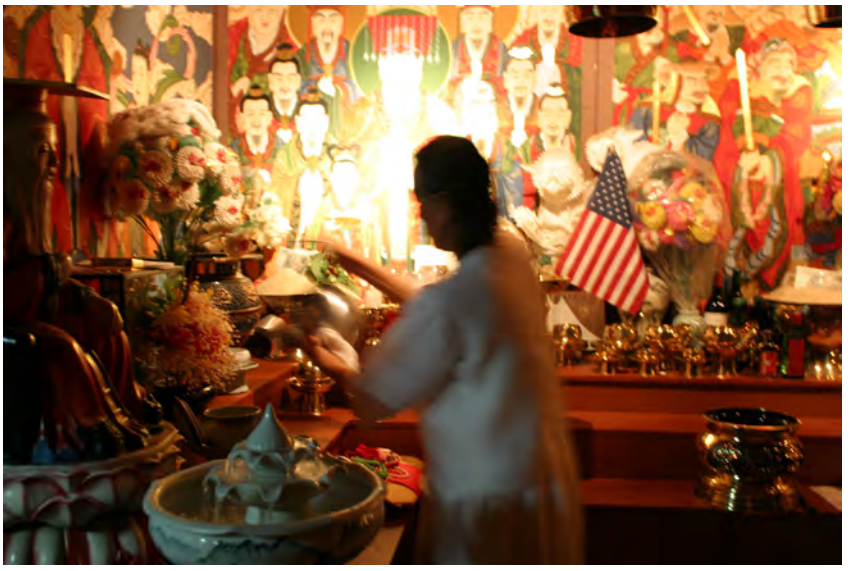


Figure 1. Kim's domestic spirit shrine. Photograph by Jun Hwan Park.

into a significant event in the constitution of Hwanghae shamanism's symbolic vista in its new home in this coastal city. The erection of the Centennial Tower for Korea-American Friendship, and the broader circumstances in which this memorial came into being, was also an event of considerable significance for Hwanghae shamanism. This is especially the case for Kim Kŭm-hwa, a prominent Hwanghae shaman who passed away in 2019. In her memoirs, Kim speaks of 1982 as a decisive turning point in her long career. In the summer of that year, she became one of the first Korean shamans to take *kut* to an international stage.

The occasion was the World Fair held in Knoxville, Tennessee, known more popularly among the townspeople as Jake's Fair, in reference to Jake Butcher, a banker and local notable who played a key role in bringing the international fair to the town. The fair was of great significance for the town's leaders, who hoped the event would provide a springboard for the recovery of the town and the broader Tennessee Valley from the energy crisis and economic recession of the 1970s. For South Korea, this event coincided with the centennial celebration of the ties between Korea and the United States, with a treaty on trade and commerce signed in Incheon (which was then called Jemulpo) on May 22, 1882. The centennial celebration involved a number of other events, including the erection of the centennial Friendship Tower in Incheon's city center, and an equivalent gesture in San Francisco, where emissaries of the Chosun Kingdom (1392–1897) had first landed in 1883, before heading on to the east coast. Participation in the Knoxville event was one of multiple events of considerable significance for South Korea; as for the town's notables, the event's significance was primarily economic, as they wanted to demonstrate their ability to be a major producer of a new energy source that was emerging then: nuclear energy. South Korea's participation in the 1982 World Fair was therefore a meeting of Korea's national interest in forging stronger ties with the United States than in the previous era with the commercial interests of a particular US community. Kim Kŭm-hwa's role in the six-month-long festivity was as a cultural diplomat, introducing the American public to an "authentic traditional culture and art from Korea" (*Daehan nyusŭ* 1982).

Madame Kim recalled her time in Knoxville very fondly—especially how, on one occasion, the six-hundred-strong audience responded to her performative art with more enthusiasm than she had ever encountered before. She was clearly aware of the significance of taking *kut* to a foreign country, and of the fact that this was part of an important cultural diplomatic initiative on the part of South Korea. So were her spirit-helpers, according to her, who responded to her invitation at the fair with exceptional vigor and enthusiasm. She was proud to be chosen for the occasion; however, the experience meant a great deal more to her. After Knoxville, she went to Washington, DC, where she had the opportunity to perform at the country's preeminent cultural institution, the Smithsonian Museum. She recalled her two-month trip to the United States as an exhausting yet rare liberating experience. In her memoir, Kim writes of her complex feelings about the experience, especially concerning how a tradition that is regarded in her home country as a backward custom and a superstition to be expunged from society is disseminated overseas as Korea's proud traditional art and attracted so much attention from foreigners. The trip was a time of freedom for her, she adds—liberation from the social stigma to which she had long been subject. In the

end, her voyage to Knoxville was a deeply contradictory experience for Madame Kim, in that she was specially selected to demonstrate an art form overseas as an authentic and worthy Korean culture, which was condemned back home as a tradition with no place in modernizing and industrializing Korea.

From superstition to culture

Chung Hak-bong, another prominent figure in Hwanghae shamanism who lives in Incheon, reported similar contradictions. In her media interview, Chung contrasted her past experience of social stigma and discrimination as a performer of shamanism to "the changed world today" in which, in her words, "kut activities are even exported to foreign countries" (Hwang 2013, 26–27). The folklore specialist who interviewed her adds (ibid., 27):

> As *musok* [the culture of shamanism] began to be recognized as culture and art since the 1980s, [Chung's] *man'gudaetak kut* [a brand of Hwanghae-do *kut*, meaning "the *kut* that protects ten thousand humans from ten thousand misfortunes"] came to be known and performed inside and outside the country. When the *man'gudaetak kut* was nominated [by the South Korean government] as Hwanghae-do's number one intangible heritage in 2006, Chung Hak-bong became the guardian of this heritage.

Many other reports take note of the transition of Korean shamanism from the category of "superstition" to that of "traditional culture and art." For instance, Laurel Kendall makes a trenchant criticism of the concept of superstition (*misin* in Korean) as applied to shamanism and its many closely associated local traditions and customary domestic practices (2009, 1–33). Kendall's criticism points to several directions. First are South Korea's political campaigns in the 1970s to cleanse what it considered to be the remains of backwardness from social space. In the countryside, the heavy-handed, mass-mobilized political campaign was called the New Village Movement. Her criticism also points to the combatant polemics against superstition or idolatry emanating from some of the then increasingly powerful evangelical sectors, the growth of which was closely intertwined with the country's rapid economic growth during this era. The militant polemic against idolatry (as regards shamanism and other forms of popular religiosity, and by the church as well as by the state) also closely interacted with the era's powerful political character of militancy—against communist North Korea, which was regarded as an idol-worshipping society, referring to the personality cult of Kim Il-sung, the country's founding leader. Interestingly, Kendall throws a critical gaze also at some of the moralizing traditionalist discourse that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s—such as the argument that assigns shamanism to women while placing this allegedly feminized popular religious sphere in contrast to the neo-Confucian tradition that some traditionalists hailed as Korea's true moral tradition.

Of the era's cultural politics against superstition, the explicitly political dimension calls for some further attention. "There is no more shocking event in the history of Korea's folklore studies (in the post–Korean War era) than the New Village Movement (*saemaŭl undong*) of the 1970s," writes Kun-woo Nam, a veteran South Korean scholar in this field (2018, 153). Following the so-called New Life Movement of the late 1960s,

the New Village Movement had a complex background in the rapidly changing domestic and international situations of the time. The initiative was principally a rural economic reform program in the context of sweeping industrialization, which involved a massive migration of the labor force from rural to urban areas. It also had elements of an agricultural revolution, which in this context refers to the introduction of biochemically engineered, high-yielding rice crops as well as the infrastructural intervention in rural spaces in terms of road-building, modernization of the hygienic order, and new housing construction—elements that are widely observed in the construction of economic modernity elsewhere in Asia. The way this drive of rural reform became a concern for scholars of folklore such as Nam, however, relates to the fact that the drive purported to radically transform the mentality and spirituality of rural Korea, not merely its material conditions.

It is reported that amid the New Village Movement of 1971–81, more than two-thirds of the hitherto existing communal popular religious sites and built objects were systematically obliterated from rural Korea. This wanton destruction of the cultural heritage was orchestrated by the state hierarchy. However, it also involved zealous local administrative bodies that competed with one another to show their efficacy in this policy domain, as well as mobilized village youth and other grassroots organizations that the state instituted locally as part of the national campaign. A news report from 1973 depicts a situation typical of the time. Entitled "300-Year-Old Rotten Customs Are Blown Away by the Warm Wind of Saemaŭl Undong," the article tells of the heroism of a lone local social activist in a seaside village. The man singlehandedly succeeded in bringing the enlightening spirit of the New Village Movement to the villagers, who had "long lived in terror of superstition, believing that should they anger Yong'wang (Dragon King, master of the maritime world in traditional thought), lightning would strike them from the heaven" (*Kyunghyang sinmun* 1973). In an admirable leap of faith, the article claims, this conservative village, which annually held about twenty community rites on behalf of various guardian spirits, decided to part with its dark past by discontinuing these rites. The village assembly also decided that, in the future, the communal fund that the village had kept for hosting its annual fishing fertility rite should be invested in New Village activities instead. The report notes that when the residents met to discuss these matters, their assembly had an air of solemnity. No one raised objections, and the decision to end the tradition of the fishing rite was endorsed unanimously. It is not difficult to imagine why this was so, taking into consideration the fact that, by 1973, the New Village campaigns were not merely a rural development scheme but had also become a powerful instrument of societal control under the rule of a political dictatorship.

This wave of destruction did not spare urban space, although here it is sometimes difficult to tease out the destructive force of the state's coercive spiritual enlightenment campaigns from the effects of urbanization and urban development. For instance, the veteran folklorist Yang Jong-sung writes of Sasin-dang (the Shrine for Envoys) in Seoul (Yang 2018). Having been one of the four prominent sites of popular pilgrimage and shamanic religiosity in old Seoul, the shrine came to be thoroughly uprooted from the lives of townspeople starting in the early 1970s. In bustling central Seoul, it is not difficult today to find old residents eager to tell

the history of their neighborhood. One story was about the felling of *jangsŭng*, the traditional guardian figures of a community, by a group of local church activists. Another story concerned our interlocuter's grandmother who, having long had a close relationship with a neighborhood fortune-teller, was forced to travel to a far peripheral corner of the city to meet and consult with her. The fortune-teller left the neighborhood in 1970, after running into trouble with some residents who disapproved of her practice and eventually reported her to the police. Kim Kŭm-hwa reported a similar experience. The *kut* was held mostly in the client's home in the past, unlike today, where it can be hosted only in a designated place far away from residential areas. On one occasion, in Seoul's increasingly hostile environment to her trade in the early 1970s, Kim had to halt her *byung-kut* (curative rite) and make a quick dash from her client's home, through the back windows, when the police raided the place after being informed of the event by her client's neighbor. Against this background, one can sometimes hear during a *kut* event today statements such as "Saemaŭl Ghost, I command you to step aside!" declared as part of the calls against misfortune-causing spirit entities.

Kim Kŭm-hwa recalled the era of the Saemaŭl campaign as the most testing time of her long career, as it involved social exclusion and related feelings of indignation on her part against unjust treatment. She makes it clear that Saemaŭl was unlike other similar campaigns she had undergone earlier in her career, for it was based on a bottom-up mass mobilization, not merely the abusive power of the state, which closed in on her from all corners of her everyday life. Her memories involved troubles with state authorities but also with some church groups—such as the incident of a small ritual she held on a hill (not to attract attention by the police) being surrounded by a group of protesters from a local church, reciting aloud the part of Matthew on Satan-chasing. There were other challenging times, however. Notable was her confrontation with another state authority—the revolutionary power in northern Korea during the 1950–53 war. Encounters with this power and the difficulties it caused were shared broadly by nearly all the first-generation Hwanghae-origin shamans in Incheon, also being one of the main reasons for their leaving their homes in northern Korea. Many other townspeople of Incheon, originally from western areas of northern Korea, where Christianity had a strong foothold during the first half of the twentieth century, had a related experience. North Korea waged an aggressive assault against religion and religious communities during the war and the postwar reconstruction era, especially against those communities that challenged its political mandate. In the early postcolonial era, the North Korean revolution initially did have elements of pragmatism, seeking to bring these communities to a united front for state-building. The Soviet power that supported this process also applied a much more conciliatory approach to Christian communities in Korea than it did in the East European or Baltic regions. According to an observer, this was due to the fact that the Soviets realized that the Protestants, despite their relatively small numbers, had a forceful voice in the northern society and tremendous organizational capacity in the space of decolonization (Armstrong 2004). After the Korean War, however, the North Korean revolution began to define religious questions increasingly in a dogmatically Soviet way—ignoring the immense difference between a prerevolutionary Russia, where the

Orthodox Church exerted enormous political influence, and situations in postcolonial Korea, which traditionally is a predominantly secular and religiously pluralist society having no such state-church collusion. The civil war in 1950–53 radicalized the fault line between the revolutionary state and what it regarded as counterrevolutionary religions, in part because of the intervention in the war by a "Protestant" country, the United States, that frustrated North Korea's ambition for national unification. Added to the northern state's association of Korean Protestantism with America's imperial power (and hence, as the enemy of the Korean revolution) was the historical fact that Protestantism was introduced to Korea, at the turn of the twentieth century, primarily by American missionaries.

Kim Kŭm-hwa's memoirs highlight two historical periods as times of great hardship. One was during the Korean War, especially during the early days of the war, when her home region of Hwanghae, like other places of North Korea, was briefly occupied by the South Korean and United Nations forces. By October 1950, North Korea's People's Army was in disarray and in hurried retreat to the north of the 38th Parallel and then on to the country's border with China. This followed its swift and triumphant takeover of nearly the whole of South Korea, from July to September 1950. This change of tide was facilitated by the successful amphibious landing of US and South Korean forces in Incheon harbor in September 1950. Evidence suggests that during this brief and turbulent time, which led to a reversal of the tide following China's intervention in the Korea conflict at the end of October 1950, the retreating northern military and political forces conducted a clean-up action against people whose loyalty to the revolutionary regime and war efforts they doubted. These allegedly subversive elements included people who held religious beliefs or practiced "superstitions." By that time, Kim Kŭm-hwa was an established *mansin* in her village area on the western coast, having been chosen by the village to conduct the important *dong-je*, a community-wide ritual on behalf of the village's guardian spirits. Facing the prospect of being publicly labeled as a believer in superstition, and trying to escape persecution, Kim volunteered to join the local revolutionary Women's League. In another episode, Kim underwent an intense ordeal of interrogation (including sessions of self-criticism) in the hands of the local party cell, after a modest healing rite she held in a neighbor's house had been caught by the party's security network and its webs of neighborhood self-surveillance. Fortunately for her, a long-time client intervened and rescued her from captivity. The woman's son was in a position of considerable authority in the local Workers' Party, and she and her family had benefitted from Kim's curative ritual before.

Political repression against shamanism did not only come from North Korea's revolutionary state authorities, however. Kim's testimony makes it clear that the brief occupation of her northern homeland by the southern police and paramilitary forces during the Korean War, at the end of 1950, was an equally terrifying time, and the intimidation she underwent during this time was in some ways more threatening than any she had experienced earlier in the hands of the northern revolutionary vanguard and youth groups. In her memoirs, she recalls a life-threatening moment during the occupation, in the presence of a South Korean state security officer (whom she calls a CID officer), to whom communism and shamanism were indistinguishable

and belonged in the same pit of abominable superstitions. CID stands for the "criminal investigation department," ununiformed personnel in the British police forces. In the American system, it refers to the United States Army Criminal Investigation Command. In South Korea, during the Korean War, the same acronym was used for the special branch of the military specializing in anticommunist surveillance and counterinsurgency combat activities. The organization carried out sweeping arrests and summary killings against alleged communist suspects during the very early days of the Korean War in areas of South Korea that were at risk of being overrun by the rapidly advancing northern communist army. It is known that about two hundred thousand civilians, who were citizens of South Korea, fell victim to this generalized state terror against society, whose rationale was to prevent these individuals from aiding and collaborating with the enemy. The assault against civilians continued throughout the war, later changing in character to a punitive action, directed against those who were suspected of having collaborated with the northern communist forces during their occupation of the South (Kwon 2020a, 21–42).

Therefore, shamanism was under pressure from the state-driven anti-superstition politics on both sides of the Cold War border. In his report on "The US Military Government's Religion Policy," a historian of religion explores the strong institutional favoritism shown toward Christian leaders and groups by the US Military Government in Korea (1945–48), and again under South Korea's first postcolonial government headed by Rhee Syngman, who the military government helped bring to power (Kang 1993). This favoritism was manifested in a number of ways, including the introduction of a disproportionate number of Christian leaders to key state administrative positions, legislation of the so-called recognized public religions (thus excluding other social religious sectors), and the empowerment of northern-refugee Protestant leaders and youth groups as part of the militancy against communism. It also involved the introduction of the institution of (Christian-only) chaplaincy into the nascent Republic of Korea army, a measure whose significance in the history of Korean Protestantism was later manifested in the aftermath of the Korean war when the number of church attendees began to explode in South Korea. When the country's parliament first opened on May 31, 1948, Rhee asked a parliamentarian and Methodist priest to open the historic event with a prayer. The prayer lasted for about ten minutes, at the end of which all the parliamentarians stood up and collectively joined it. This extraordinary happening was irrespective of the fact that at that time only about 2 percent of the southern Korean population identified themselves as Protestants. The imposition of this affirmative policy, which privileged the church in such a predominantly secular and religiously diverse society as Korea, evolved in the southern half in parallel with the emergence of a broadly Soviet-style, anti-church, and anti-religion politics in the northern half. The North's postwar anti-religion politics eventually crashed on all religions, as they were all considered antisocial and superstitious beliefs; the South's Christianity-privileging politics might be considered pro-religious freedom, but only in a highly selective way, thereby creating its own derivative moral hierarchy of what constitutes the true worldview versus what makes a superstition. In 1947, the Seoul Metropolitan Police (of the US Military Government) declared a "war against superstition" with an astonishingly belligerent message:

> Nowadays superstitious deeds such as mudang's *kut*-plays and *pudakgŏri* [a derogatory reference to shamanic rituals] are prospering, thereby exerting grave evil influences in the domain of social re-education. This situation cannot be ignored. Acknowledging that it is difficult to obliterate long-inherited customs at a single stroke, the Metropolitan Police has chosen fifteen sites in different parts of the city and issued a stern directive that, from now on, all prayer activities must be held only within these designated places. If, despite our directive, we discover any noisy *pudakgŏri* and *kut*-plays are held in private homes or mudang's own houses within the city boundary, these will be punished severely, and we shall thoroughly purge them. (*Seoul Sinmun* 1947)

This demonstrates that popular religions were under considerable political pressure on both sides of partitioned postcolonial Korea. The ensuing Korean War was a life-changing experience for Kim Kŭm-hwa and other Hwanghae-do shamans, not only with the changing waves of violence it involved but also because it meant the loss of the communal basis on which her vocational and existential being as a practitioner of indigenous religious form depended. In her memoirs Madame Kim describes the latter as the most painful and irrevocable consequence of her war-induced dislocation from home. As noted earlier, the advent of MacArthur as a shamanic spirit in the postwar years was, in a crucial way, part of the story of dislocation and the following process of making a home in the new environment. For the purpose of this article, it needs to be remembered that the experience of dislocation in a political sense was far from over with the end of the Korean War in the mid-1950s. On the contrary, an even more radical and more generalized crisis of deracination was to be forced onto Kim and her colleagues in the following decades, especially in the 1970s.

1982

It is against this background of political and social stigmatization reaching its apex in the 1970s that the transition to the 1980s appears to have had particular significance for Kim Kŭm-hwa and other like guardians of what the Seoul Metropolitan Police decree refers to as "long-inherited customs." In his recent review of South Korea's public and academic discourses on shamanism from the late 1960s to the 1980s, Yoshinobu Shinzato (2018), a historian of religion, notes the rise of the concept of cultural heritage as a key aspect of the era's changing policies toward traditional religious forms. He highlights efforts made by the country's prominent folklorists and the growing interest in traditional art and culture among students and intellectuals in the 1970s, who advanced this interest as part of political activism against the era's political dictatorship. Shinzato also makes some critical observations on collusions between some folklore studies groups and the Park regime's cultural politics. His observations concentrate on the fact that the centuries-old popular religious culture was under threat under the authoritarian state's heavy-handed developmentalism, whereas folklore studies concentrated on recording and compiling these cultural relics before they disappeared (assuming this was inevitable).

The New Village Movement was a powerful mass politics, combining a top-down administrative system that penetrated deep into local lives with a bottom-up mass

mobilization. Considering its vertical command structure, it is not surprising that the movement abruptly ran out of steam when the central figure of the authoritarian political system, President Park, who had been in power for nearly two decades after seizing it with the military coup in May 1961, disappeared from the political stage in December 1979 when he was assassinated by his security chief. Even though the preponderance of the power of military elite continued in the subsequent decade, Park's death in 1979 nevertheless opened up an important space in the sphere of South Korean cultural politics. The military leaders of South Korea's so-called Fifth Republic (1981–88) inherited many elements from the Park era but also sought to free themselves from the burdens of his legacies. They also seized power through a coup, but in doing so they sparked off a strong wave of civil resistance, notably in the city of Kwangju, to which the coup leaders responded violently and brutally, using the army and paratrooper units under their command. Two years after the massacre of civilians in Kwangju in May 1980, another defining incident took place, this time in Pusan. Called the Arson of the US Information Center and staged by a handful of college students led by a theology student in Pusan's renowned Presbyterian university, this incident in March 1982 followed an earlier arson attempt at the US Information Center in Kwangju in December 1980. The two incidents together are considered by many observers of modern Korea to signal the beginning of a decisive change in the public perception of American power in South Korea—notably, the growing public awareness that the successive military-led authoritarian regimes in South Korea were not merely Korea's problem (i.e., a political underdevelopment) but were made possible by the complicity of the United States. There was a broad awakening in South Korean society as to the contradictions intrinsic to the presence of American power in the Korean peninsula—between the United States' leadership in the liberal international world and its illiberal foreign policies in relation to its allied states in Asia and elsewhere. In consequence, the 1980s became the time when South Koreans began to question the meaning of American power in their modern history and, accordingly, to soul-search the place of their polity and society within the broader world and beyond the American hegemon.

The military leaders of the Fifth Republic were acutely aware of these changing vistas in South Korea's political society as well as the fact that their power-grabbing was stained in blood. It is under these circumstances that they came to take great interest in the centennial anniversary of the opening of diplomatic ties between Korea and the United States in 1982. There was also an attempt to turn away from the Park era in the cultural sphere: the era that Youngju Ryu calls the Winter Republic, characterized by a depressive (and repressive) political atmosphere, yet vibrant (and resistant) activism in literature and art (Ryu 2015). As a result, the post-Park regime pursued a relatively more liberal policy in cultural production and consumption, encouraging entertainment and sport (the latter eventually led to the hosting of the Asian Games in 1985 and then to that of the Summer Olympics in 1988). At the same time, it sought to counter the growing interest among students and intellectuals in elements of Korea's traditional popular culture by presenting the state as the guardian and promoter of this cultural heritage. The tradition of shamanism especially was fast becoming an important battleground in this milieu. The growing

resistance movement to the military rule took shamanism as a key part of its cultural (or countercultural) activity, increasingly seeing it as an authentic spirituality of the repressed and resisting masses. As the veteran South Korean anthropologist Kim Kwang-ok observed, shamanism (or the idea of shamanism) was rapidly becoming central to the culture of resistance during this era (Kim 1992). The state's culture-policy pundits took careful note of this development and countered with their own politics of authenticity—notably, by bestowing titles of intangible heritage to various regional forms of shamanic rites and their notable practitioners, as well as by introducing these rites into the realm of public art and entertainment performance. All these were happening, however, while the government was cracking down on dissenting politicians as well as a broad swath of student and civic protesters. The Fifth Republic also forcibly reinvigorated the politics of Red Scare—by inventing a series of allegedly seditious groupings including some family-run communist spy ring cases, which were disseminated widely in the news media and through the then newly available color television.

The era's new cultural policy is well illustrated by the festivity of National Wind in May 1981, held in the central Seoul area of Yŏŭido. The timing was deliberate—to mark the anniversary of the Kwangju tragedy, mobilizations for protest were underway in campuses. The week-long festivity was hailed as the largest public feast in Korea's history thus far, "a great youth festival." The event is reported to have attracted around ten million attendees, some of whom were later discovered to be conscript soldiers disguised as students. In content, the national feast combined a "modern pop festival," including youth song contests, with the performance of traditional themes. These included the re-enactment of the *sonoli-kut* (Play-the-ox *kut*) from Yangju county, Kyung-gi Province. *Sonoli-kut* was a popular communal festivity in pre-1945 Korea, having an element of agricultural fertility rite and being structurally similar to a *kut* proper. Although village shamans did participate in the communal procession (and when they did, the feast did have a real ritual, religious character), *sonoli-kut* was also a carnivalesque event (in the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin's sense) or an art of communitas (à la Victor Turner), in which mockeries of the anachronism of existing social structure can generate a feast of laughter and a sense of liminality. The introduction of this local ritual form to the national feast of 1981 followed the nomination of Yangju *sonoli-kut* in 1980 as an intangible national heritage. The heritagization initiative was extended to other regional traditions in the following years. Hwanghae's fishing rite (*baeyŏnsin-kut*) and community *kut* (*daedong-kut*) entered the honored list of intangible cultural heritages in 1985, with Kim Kŭm-hwa being nominated as the guardian of this local cultural tradition.

It was amid this momentum of shamanism (or *musok* as it is referred to in contemporary Korea) changing from "deplorable superstition" to "notable cultural heritage" that Kim Kŭm-hwa made her trip to Knoxville in 1982 as part of the Korean cultural-diplomatic envoy to the United States to celebrate the centenary of the two countries' friendship. After that, she continued to be a prolific actor in South Korea's diplomatic and cultural exchange events, until she passed away in February 2019. These events included a performance in 1995 on the third anniversary of the normalization of diplomatic ties between China and South Korea. After the tragedy

in New York and Washington, DC in September 2001, Kim was invited back to the United States—this time to perform a spirit-consolation rite for the victims of 9/11. Although her visit to Knoxville was part of a greater sociopolitical change that had already been set in motion, Kim did not see it in this way and instead considered the experience to be a defining moment. In Knoxville, she said that she had witnessed a world where she could be free from social stigma and be proud to be a performer and guardian of traditional culture (figure 2).

Conclusion

In her memoirs, Kim movingly tells of her encounter with a few visitors to her Knoxville performance as the most memorable episode of her 1982 trip (Kim 2014). These visitors were members of America's First Nations, who, according to Kim, showed particularly acute interest in what she was doing in the fair. This encounter made her sad as well, as it forced her to realize that earthly spirituality was looked down upon not merely in her homeland but also in the land she was visiting. Moving on from this recollection, Kim later reflects on the entirety of her life trajectory from a village in Hwanghae to a position of considerable fame, as a beholder of an intangible national heritage and, as often mentioned in the media, even as a "national shaman" (*nara mansin*). In this reflection, she no longer shows any bitterness about the political culture of anti-superstition, or any particular enthusiasm about her heritage entitlement and the related politics of cultural conservation and recognition. One gets the impression from her mildly spoken narrative that, in her experience, the transition from one domain of cultural politics to the other is more of a continuation of alienation than necessarily a betterment or decisive progression. Her fondest memories, rather, remain with the time in her birthplace, now in North Korea. The vitality of these memories was not because of her being young then, or due to the

Figure 2. Kim Kŭm-hwa, 1931–2019. Photograph by Jun Hwan Park.

fact that this was the place where she was born and raised. Rather, it is because then and there, she was a shaman with a place to belong to and act in, not one who is perpetually in search of a place where she could meaningfully dwell. She calls this place her Home World—a home for many familiar spirits and a world of many places that are these spirits' homes.

On a closing note, we reflect on what her 1982 trip to America meant to Kim and why it was such a liberating experience to the extent that she had decided to keep the souvenir of this trip at the center of her spirit shrine since. In order to do so, it might be instructive to introduce an episode that took place shortly before her trip to Knoxville and the Smithsonian Museum.

In October 1981, the eminent French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss came to South Korea for a three-week visit. Apart from lectures and other social occasions, this giant of modern anthropology was interested in seeing Korea's iconic traditional cultural sites. These included local Confucian academies of the Chosun era, which Monsieur Lévi-Strauss said left a great impression on him, especially because, being located in the countryside, they were quite different from the academic institutions in his native France that are primarily concentrated in the country's urban centers. Interested also in popular religious sites, Lévi-Strauss watched a *kut* performance at the national shrine house in the north of Seoul's city center, Kuksadang on Inwang-san. The occasion happened to be a family's rite for their ancestors, and, after witnessing the rite, the anthropologist remarked on certain differences that he felt existed between shamanism in Korea and the better-known equivalent tradition in indigenous Siberia and among the Inuit in the far-north of the American continent. He said that indigenous Siberian shamans were known to be able to travel to the land of the dead, being mediators between the living and the dead (as well as between nature and society). In contrast to this, Lévi-Strauss observed that the focus of Korean shamanism seemed, instead, squarely set on relations among the living. He probably meant relations with the dead who are treated as if they were alive. Following this experience, he went on to take part in another *kut*, this time performed by Kim Kŭm-hwa at her client's home in Seoul's old residential quarter. Soon after his visit to Korea, a portrait of a Korean shamaness found its way to one of Paris's most prominent cultural institutions, UNESCO House in the Place de Fontenoy. This painting is proudly displayed in the corridor that connects the international organization's main conference halls as an artifact representing the indigenous culture of Korea. The shamaness in the painting is none but Madame Kim Kŭm-hwa.

The world of freedom Kim encountered in her 1982 trip to America is perhaps best illustrated by this portrait of a Korean shamaness and the constitutive order of the international organization within which it is placed. Of all the international organizations in today's world, UNESCO is probably closest to the discipline of modern sociocultural anthropology in terms of ethos and idealism. The two share a set of ideas and norms that is often glossed as cultural pluralism and the vision for human unity based on the celebration of cultural diversity. Since UNESCO's founding in 1946, in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the organization has advocated for the power of education in helping to actualize this vision of unity through plurality. This vision constitutes, according to the organization's charters, vital groundwork

for the prospective realization of lasting peace—a concept that was initiated by the Enlightenment thinkers of the eighteenth century, notably Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant, and then brought back into the public discourse of interwar Europe, particularly after 1945.

UNESCO's headquarters in Paris, UNESCO House, is not merely a place for intergovernmental meetings for educational, scientific, and cultural policy-making. Completed in 1958, it also purports to be a "universal museum" where diverse art objects and cultural artifacts from all corners of the world are kept and displayed. This is in line with UNESCO's pursuit of "tolerance" (of differences) and celebration of "diversity" (in unity) since its inception after the destruction of World War II. One can marvel at an artifact from the northwest coast of Canada in one of the House's main conference halls. Elsewhere in the building are many other objects, including a statue of Buddha from Nepal ("the birthplace of Lord Buddha, Lumbini"), a fine kimono from Japan, and a painting from Korea. Each of these objects is supposed to best represent the cultural and artistic heritage of the place from which it originates. The artifacts are displayed within the House, together with some of the great modernist works of art—for instance, those of Miro, Picasso, and Le Corbusier. The House itself is of a striking modernist shape of a brutalist orientation, standing out sharply from the surrounding neighborhood, which consists primarily of imposing nineteenth-century buildings. The idea is to preserve the treasures of the world's diverse artistic traditions within an aesthetically modernist space without privileging any particular traditional form. This is in accordance with the organization's purpose of promoting modern scientific knowledge and education while celebrating cultural diversity—an ethos that the founders of the organization believed would be vital to the making of a peaceful and tolerant world in the post-1945 environment (Kwon 2020b).

Her encounter with Lévi-Strauss was an important event for Kim Kŭm-hwa, who kept her photograph taken with this anthropologist prominently displayed in her home. The meeting took place as part of a momentous shift in the moral status of shamanism in South Korea's public understanding of its cultural heritage and identity at the start of the 1980s. We saw this shift through Madame Kim's voyage to Knoxville and elsewhere in the United States as a cultural emissary, to celebrate the centenary of Korean-American friendship. Domestically, the change meant that shamanism was no longer primarily an emblematic legacy of a backward past and a principal focus of the state-driven anti-superstition campaign, becoming instead also a distinct cultural tradition worthy of conversation—a change that Kim recalls as liberating and life-transforming in her memoirs. However, for Kim, the trip to the United States signaled more than relative freedom from persecution and stigmatization at home. For her, the voyage, especially the invitation to one of United States' most eminent cultural institutions, the Smithsonian Museum, was also a powerful encounter with the morality and aesthetics of cultural plurality and with the related recognition of her work as a guardian of Korea's traditional cultural integrity. The magnitude of this experience is made evident in the small American flag that Kim brought home from her 1982 trip—first as a souvenir and then used as an emblem of power—that she kept at the center of her domestic shrine ever since.

We then can conclude that the power of her shrine artifact, the American flag, is not the same as America's power as the latter is commonly understood in contemporary historical and political discourses. Instead, this power is closer to the moral ideal of cultural heritage and plurality as this appears in UNESCO's charters and in the constitutive spirit of modern anthropology, especially that of the discipline's post-1945 development. Much can surely be said as to whether the flag is the right one for eliciting the political ideal of a culturally plural world and if the political entity represented by the American flag can make a rightful and uncontroversial claim for advancing this ideal during the so-called American Century of the second half of the twentieth century. The important point is, rather, that Kim witnessed that such an ideal, no matter how imperfect it might be, existed in the wide world during her first overseas trip and that she subsequently decided to keep a material symbol of that ideal at hand and amid her other spirit objects of dazzling colors. Moreover, she knew also that such an ideal was far from a property of a distant foreign land only. As noted in her recollection of life in her natal village of Hwanghae, a culturally plural world was where she began her career in the first place—a world in which shamanism could coexist with other more powerful cultural-religious traditions (such as Confucianism and Buddhism) and where a young novice shaman like herself could contribute to the wellbeing of the community as meaningfully as any learned village elders or leaders. Seen this way, as was the case with the spirit of MacArthur, we may conclude that what the American flag in Kim's spirit shrine displays is quite *un-American*—as it is principally the memory of Hwanghae shamanism in its original home of Hwanghae.

Acknowledgments

Parts of this article were presented in seminars and panels held at the University of Chicago, Sogang University, Seoul National University, as well as at the 2019 Anthropology of East Asia meeting in Bangkok. Our earlier research on the subject was supported by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council. More recently, our research activity has been made possible by generous support from the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2016-LAB-2250005). We thank them all. We also thank Julie Chu, Donald Baker, Antonnetta Bruno, Hyang Jin Jung, Seong-nae Kim, Clara Han, Bhrigupati Singh, and Katherine Swancutt for sharing with us their interest in the power of magical symbols in modern politics.

Authors

Heonik Kwon is a senior research fellow of social anthropology at Trinity College, University of Cambridge. The author of prizewinning books on the Vietnam War and Asia's postcolonial Cold War, his recent work *After the Korean War: An Intimate History* (2020) received the 2022 James B. Palais prize from the Association for Asian Studies. Jun Hwan Park is an expert on Hwanghae shamanism. He has published widely on the symbolism of luck and money in contemporary Korean shamanism.

References

Armstrong, Charles. 2004. *The North Korean Revolution, 1945–1950*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801468803-toc

"Hanmi sugyo 100 junyŏn" [Centenary of Korean-American friendship]. *Daehan Nyusŭ* [Korean news] 1385, May 20, 1982.

Hoskins, Janet Alison. 2023. "Strange Company: Victor Hugo, the Saigon Flag, and Santa Claus on Vietnamese Altars." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 99-119.

Hwang, Kyung-sun. 2013. "Buknyŭkŭi muhyŭngyusan: Hwanghaedo kŭnmudangŭi kŭnkut iyagi" [Intangible heritage in North Korea: The story of a great *kut* by a great Hwangdae shaman]. *Munhwajae Sarang* [Love of cultural heritage, newsletter of Republic of Korea Cultural Heritage Administration] 99 (February): 26–27.

Kang, Don-ku. 1993. "Migunjŏngŭi jonggyojŏngchaek" [US Military Government's religion policy]. *Jonggyohak Yŏngu* [Journal of religious studies] 12: 15–42.

Kendall, Laurel. 2009. *Shamans, Nostalgias, and the IMF: South Korean Popular Religion in Motion*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824860899-fm

Kim, Kŭm-hwa. 2014. *Mansin Kim Kŭm-hwa* [The shaman Kim Kŭm-hwa]. Seoul: Gungli.

Kim, Kwang-ok. 1992. "Jŏhangmunhwawa musokŭirye" [The culture of resistance and the ritual of shamanism]. *Hankukmunhwainlyuhak* [Korean cultural anthropology] 23: 131–72.

Kwon, Heonik. 2020a. *After the Korean War: An Intimate History*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108768313

———. 2020b. "Lévi-Strauss Memorial Lecture: Anthropology and World Peace." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 10 (2): 279–88. https://doi.org/10.1086/710140

Kwon, Heonik, and Jun Hwan Park. 2018. "American Power in Korean Shamanism." *Journal of Korean Religion* 9 (1): 43–69. https://doi.org/10.1353/jkr.2018.0002

Nam, Kun-woo. 2018. "Hangukŭi saemaŭl undonggwa saenghwalbyŭnhwa" [The New Village Movement and changes in everyday life in South Korea]. *Ilsanggwa Munhwa* [Everyday life and culture] 5: 153.

Ryu, Youngju. 2015. *Writers of the Winter Republic: Literature and Resistance in Park Chung Hee's Korea*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780824856847-fm

"Saemaŭl hunpunge jjotgyŏnan pyesŭp 300nyŏn" [Three-hundred-year-old rotten customs are blown away by the warm wind of the Saemaŭl (movement)]. *Kyunghyang Sinmun* [Kyunghyang daily], February 19, 1973.

Seoul Sinmun [Seoul daily], November 20, 1947. Cited in Don-ku Kang. 1993. "Migunjŏngŭi jonggyojŏngchaek" [The US military government's religion policy]. *Jonggyohak Yŏngu* [Journal of religious studies] 12: 39.

Shinzato, Yoshinobu. 2018. "Hankuk musok damronŭi hyŏngsŏnggwa jŏngaee gwanhan yŏngu: 1960nyŏndaebutŏ 80nyŏndaerŭl jungsimŭro" [The development of discourses on Korean shamanism from the 1960s to the 1980s]. PhD diss., Seoul National University.

Swancutt, Katherine. 2023. "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 3-23.

Yang, Jong-sung. 2018. "Seoul saramdŭlui sarangŭl batatdŏn Sasinsŏnghwangdang" [The imperial envoy shrine that was once loved by the people of Seoul], *Urimunhwasinmun* [Our culture news], October 3. http://www.koya-culture.com/news/article.html?no=114881

Katherine Swancutt
King's College London

The Time of Red Snowfall

Steering Social and Cosmic Renewal in Southwest China

Each year the Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China, celebrate their Fire Festival with vibrant displays that evoke the myth-historical blunder of a hero killing a spirit. To atone for this blunder, they compete in arts and sports before spectators, judges, and the sky god, who receives their displays as ritual blandishments and expresses his satisfaction by sparing lives. These two-way displays typically continue until Nuosu pay their sacrificial debt to the sky god through the ritual for "the descent and exchange of the soul." But many Nuosu approach the Fire Festival differently in the northeastern Liangshan mountains, where they seek to avoid summoning red snowfall, a euphemism that refers to a generations-old war, extreme bloodshed, and perhaps even the origins of humankind. Here, Nuosu call their sacrifices to the sky god "turning back the enemy" and move their competitions to unconventional days that fall outside of the Fire Festival's celebratory window. By steering this season of social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction, Nuosu across Liangshan engage in worldmaking acts that show the conceptual value of the anthropology of display.

Keywords: competition—display—Fire Festival—myth-history—social and cosmic renewal—Southwest China

Asian Ethnology Volume 82, Number 1 · 2023, 141–164

Return to Table of Contents

Perhaps nothing illuminates worldmaking projects more clearly than the spectacle of display. During the annual Fire Festival (*Duzie* ꄮꍑ) of the Nuosu, a Tibeto-Burman group of Southwest China, a weeklong display of state-sponsored competitions is held in many towns and cities that builds up to sacrifices to the sky god, Ngeti Gunzy (ꉻꄧꇬꀕ).[1] Located across the Liangshan mountains of Yunnan and Sichuan provinces, the Nuosu—who are also known by their Chinese ethnonym of Yi—hold Fire Festival competitions in wrestling, singing, instrumental music, dancing, women's beauty, horse racing, traditional clothing, verbal dueling (*kenre* ꇩꎸ), and more in front of live audiences and judge's panels. Cadres and grassroots intellectuals typically organize the celebrations, which in many areas date back to the early 1980s and nowadays tend to culminate in Fire Festival extravaganzas that are multimedia song and dance concerts produced by event organizers from outside of the area (Swancutt 2023). But while the Fire Festival unleashes many lively and fun-loving displays, it is also a highly dangerous season of social and cosmic renewal. As the summer counterpart to the winter New Year (*Kushyr* ꈎꏂ), which is the other major seasonal celebration in the Nuosu ten-month calendar, the Fire Festival unfolds around the annual harvest of bitter buckwheat (*Fagopyrum tataricum*), their dietary staple. According to popular Nuosu lore, Ngeti Gunzy sets out in the weeks leading up to the Fire Festival to imprison each person's soul in his netherworld jail (*shymu ngejjy* ꏂꃅꉻꐚ). He does this in retaliation for the accidental killing of one of his spirit emissaries by a human hero during a wrestling match held in myth-historical times. Ever since this blunder, the sky god has only returned each person's soul in exchange for the payment of an annual debt during the Fire Festival, which typically takes the form of a large sacrificial animal. While some Nuosu say that Ngeti Gunzy may not manage to imprison every human soul, they tend to agree that human (and even livestock) souls are still made absent from their bodies during the Fire Festival. Lost human souls usually roam the nearby mountains or wilderness, but no matter where they go, Nuosu must recover them to avoid illness and eventually death. Anyone whose soul has not been retrieved by the end of the Fire Festival is considered unlikely to survive for long. Many Nuosu, then, unleash a variety of often personalized displays throughout the Fire Festival—from their competitions in arts and sports to the sacrifices they may make to a variety of spirits, including local land spirits (*musi* ꃅꌦ), ancestors, guardian spirits of fate-fortune (*jjylu* ꐚꇐ), spirit helpers (*wasa* ꃰꌺ), certain culture heroes, and Ngeti Gunzy—all of which may be followed

by a smaller ritual that summons home the lost souls of livestock and concludes this season of social and cosmic renewal. In turn, Ngeti Gunzy signals his satisfaction or displeasure with these displays of ritual blandishment by sparing or taking human lives, while other spirits may respond with displays of prosperity or the lack thereof. Each of these displays, which Nuosu may defer or disguise in some parts of Liangshan, unfold as worldmaking acts.

The Fire Festival has grown rapidly each year in the Ninglang Yi Autonomous County of Yunnan, hereafter referred to in Nuosu as Nila (ꆀꆹ), where I have conducted fieldwork since 2007. I attended the Fire Festival in Nila—including in the capacity of a guest judge at the state-sponsored competitions—in the summers of 2015, 2016, and 2019 (Swancutt 2016, 59–60; Swancutt 2023). These official competitions are usually held on makeshift outdoor stages erected in the Old Square and New Square of Nila, just as they are held in other town squares across Liangshan. But many Nuosu in Nila consider that the ambience of the Fire Festival spills over to informal competitions, such as the basketball games played at the edges of the main attractions and youth league soccer games played on the outskirts of town. Local and national television coverage of the Fire Festival brings the official celebrations closer to the country villages surrounding Nila. Many Nuosu children in country villages also hold their own informal play-contests, which are probably one of the "traditional" templates on which the official Fire Festival competitions are based. There is, then, some fluidity to where the Fire Festival celebrations take place, who joins them, and in what capacity. Hundreds of spectators often attend the official competitions in Nila, which attract members of the twelve officially recognized nationalities (Ch. *minzu* 民族) that reside in the county, including the Han ethnic majority of China. People of any nationality may enter these competitions, which are judged by multiethnic panels of grassroots intellectuals from Nila, many of whom are teachers and ethnohistorians based at the local research institution in the county town. Yet the most important judge of all is arguably Ngeti Gunzy, whose omnipresence tends to be especially palpable during the verbal dueling events in which competitors formulate speech riffs on a variety of themes, including the Nuosu afterlife world or heavens (*shymu ngehxa* ꏃꃅꉢꉼ).

Many Nuosu hold their ritual for "the descent and exchange of the soul" (*yyrci hlaba* ꒊꏢꇉꀠ) on the final day of the Fire Festival, when a large livestock animal is sacrificed to Ngeti Gunzy to pay the annual debt owed to him by each household, or, as is the case in southern Liangshan, by the entire community.[2] This debt features in the name of the Fire Festival, which may be literally translated as "passing [a certain time of the year with the use of] fire" (*Duzie* ꄚꍞ), but which includes the term *zie* (ꍞ) that can alternately mean "celebrating a festival" or "paying a debt." The debt also evokes the blood compensation payments that Nuosu have long used to settle disputes with rival clans and lineages (cf. Qubi Shimei and Ma Erzi 2001, 96–103; Hill 2004, 678–82; Swancutt and Jiarimuji 2021, 187, see also 190–201). Once their sacrificial debts have been paid and Nuosu have retrieved their souls, they tend to settle into a celebratory day of cooking and eating their sacrificial meals. As day turns to evening, crowds of children, youths, and some adults congregate in the county town center of Nila to carry long torches made from dried artemisia (*hxike* ꉻꈊ), pine, or other easily obtainable woods that may be purchased from street vendors who also sell

light-up toys, costume headdresses, sweets, and snacks. Notably, this torch bearing is associated with another popular theory behind the origins of the Fire Festival: that torches were once used to drive away destructive crop-eating insects with fire and smoke. Torch processions have become so iconic of the Fire Festival that it is even glossed in Chinese as the "Torch Festival" (Ch. *Huobajie* 火把节).

In contrast to these vibrant displays, Ngeti Gunzy is not ordinarily visible, including to Nuosu priests (*bimo* ꀘꂾ), male shamans (*sunyi* ꌠꑊ), or female shamans (*monyi* ꃀꑊ). He instead tends to be imaginatively envisioned as exhibiting the "invisible authority" that underpins his own "regime of visibility" (Feuchtwang 2011, 65). As an important authority in the Nuosu world, which is filled with numerous spirits and ghosts, Ngeti Gunzy is commonly depicted as being seated upon a throne surrounded by guards and a dog (figure 1). He also appears in popular legends and myth-histories about worldmaking events, accompanied by his wife, spirit emissaries, animal friends, and other beings (Bender 2008, 19, see also 25–26, 29–32; Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, xxxiv, lxvii–lxviii, lxx–lxxiii, 48–58). Each time Ngeti Gunzy takes or spares a human life, he displays his ordinarily invisible authority in visible and tangible ways. Many Nuosu therefore consider their good health throughout the Fire Festival to be a sign of Ngeti Gunzy's pleasure, while illnesses, accidents, or deaths are often a sign of his wrath.

All this gains an extra layer of complexity in northeastern Liangshan, which includes Meigu County of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan, hereafter referred to in Nuosu as Limu Moggu (ꆺꃅꂾꈌ). While the Fire Festival tends to fall on different days across Liangshan due to how local priests interpret the lunar calendar, a pronounced anachronism is sought out in Limu Moggu and across the northeast. Here, Nuosu contend with a problem of cosmic proportions that many trace to an enormous battle that broke out in their area generations ago. No one seems to know who fought in this battle. But many Nuosu across northeastern

Figure 1. Wall panel depicting Ngeti Gunzy seated on a throne in the heavens, flanked by his guards and a dog, in a home located in the Nila county town. The god's name is etched in Nuosu script on the far right, 2016. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Liangshan say that when it ended, their landscape was covered in red snow that was eerie due to its color and its unseasonal arrival during the Fire Festival, which usually falls in the hottest and driest months of July or August.

Red snowfall evokes the kinds of transformation that may steer Nuosu either toward social and cosmic renewal or toward disaster. Myth-historical tales about the potential life-giving and life-taking qualities of red snow are recounted in the Nuosu Book of Origins (*Hnewo Teyy* ꃅꃀꄯꒉ), which traces humankind to red snowfall (cf. Bender 2008, 15–16; Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, lxviii–lxix, 22–23). According to the Book of Origins, the human maiden Pumo Hniyyr (ꁌꂾꅇꒆ) was lured away from her weaving under the household eaves by eagles cavorting in the skies during the days when the world was taking form. These eagles splattered her with three drops of blood that impregnated her and caused her to give birth to the legendary half-human, half-spirit hero, Zhyge Alu (ꍜꈍꀉꇗ). The drops of blood are notable for "foregrounding the later fall of red snow resulting in the snow tribes" that became the forefathers of Nuosu people, animals, and plants (Bender 2008, 15; see also Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, liv, lxxx–lxxxiii). However, the transformation of red snowfall into living beings was neither easy nor automatic. It was preceded by batches of yellow and red snowfall that Ngeti Gunzy "sent to the human world" but was initially "unable to change into living creatures," despite long efforts at "transforming, transforming" them (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 32). Only when fertility (*ge* ꈍ) fell from the sky to earth, rotted for three years, and sent white mist back up to the sky did red snow fall again—this time thrice over—and eventually become the "ancestors" and "progenitors" of today's Nuosu (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 35, see also lxx–lxxi).

Blood and red snow that fell from the sky may have secured the origins of Zhyge Alu, humankind, and other creatures. But these vital red substances also presaged the later destruction of the world at the hands of the sky god, who sent the rains to wipe out the then-current generation of humans, animals, and plants with a massive flood (Bender 2008, 32). Ngeti Gunzy sent this rain in revenge for the myth-historical wrestling match that took place after his spirit emissary Ddiwo Layi (ꄙꃀꆿꑳ) went to earth to harvest crops and grains (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 48–49). While setting about his task on earth, Ddiwo Layi sought to challenge the human hero Ssedi Shuofu (ꌺꄚꎭꃚ) to a wrestling match but did not find him at home. Later, Ssedi Shuofu learned from his mother that a spirit had visited in hopes of wrestling with him. Excited to take up the challenge, Ssedi Shuofu raced out to find Ddiwo Layi in a forest. But when he found no one waiting for him, he smashed up the "piece of wood" in which Ddiwo Layi had hidden, accidentally crushing him there (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 49). Variations on this myth are in routine circulation, and I learned a somewhat different version from the Nuosu anthropologist I call Tuosa, who is from Nila and explained that Ssedi Shuofu had wrestled three times with Ddiwo Layi. Their first wrestling match ended in the spirit defeating the hero, while the second match ended in the hero defeating the spirit. But the third and final wrestling match ended in the hero throwing the spirit down so hard that it cracked its head open against a stone or tree and died. Although Ssedi Shuofu was mighty enough to have killed a spirit, he feared the retribution that would come his way and

so placed Ddiwo Layi inside a hollow piece of wood, which, as the seasons changed, became covered in snow. Eventually the snow melted and carried Ddiwo Layi's body out of the piece of wood, exposing it to the view of Ngeti Gunzy.

Enraged at the death of his emissary, Ngeti Gunzy retaliated by causing an enormous flood, from which only one lone man survived (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 50–52). Through the help of clever animal friends, this man managed to marry Ngeti Gunzy's youngest daughter and propagate humankind into the future through their union (Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, 52–56). But to Nuosu familiar with any version of this tale, the difficulties in rescuing humankind are all too apparent and suggest that care should be taken in all matters related to Ngeti Gunzy, who depending on his mood may seek to generate, transform, destroy, or renew life. Red snowfall is, then, an allegory for both the generations-old battle in northeastern Liangshan and for the dangers of setting large chains of social and cosmic events in motion—from the earliest snowfall that could not transform into living creatures, to the red snowfall that became today's Nuosu, or to the flood that Ngeti Gunzy sent to wipe out humankind. To avoid summoning dangers of this sort again, many Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan now disguise or defer certain elements of display during the Fire Festival season. They reclaim their souls from Ngeti Gunzy in the usual summer months but refer to their household-based sacrifices as "turning back the enemy" (*jji jo* ꏸꐎ),[3] a turn of phrase that highlights the desire to ward off battles at this dangerous time of year. Their competitions also tend to be moved to the autumn sheep shearing season (*chursha* ꍶꎭ), which is a vivacious time of play for children that takes place outside of the Fire Festival's celebratory window, although some may port their competitions to the state-sponsored "Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival" (Ch. *Meiguxian Yizu Jianyangmaojie* 美姑县彝族剪羊毛节) that is held during the summer in Limu Moggu.[4] Crucially, this change of name and date enables Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan to atone for the myth-historical wrestling match without risk of ushering in a disaster that could end the world as they know it.

Given this, I propose that Nuosu across Liangshan use their local logics of display to steer the Fire Festival in their preferred direction. I show how this works by comparing the Fire Festival in Nila, which is part of western Liangshan, to the apparent absence of the festival in Limu Moggu and across northeastern Liangshan. Many Nuosu in these areas "model" and "mirror" their social and cosmic orders during the Fire Festival, but do so in ways that push differently at the edges of their ontologies (cf. Handelman 1981, 331, see also 340, 344; Handelman 1992, 11; Handelman 1998, 5, see also 49). Whereas Nuosu in Nila produce ostentatious displays that invite the sky god to signal his satisfaction with them, Nuosu in Limu Moggu tend to defer any competitions until the autumn sheep shearing and disguise their sacrificial ritual to Ngeti Gunzy with an unconventional name. Across Liangshan, then, the Fire Festival unleashes different and often personalized ways of engaging with, unsettling, and even stepping outside of this season of social and cosmic renewal.

Let me be clear here at the start that my ethnography of the Fire Festival is fuller in Nila than it is in Limu Moggu. This is for a couple of reasons. First, while I have conducted fieldwork regularly in Nila over the course of fifteen years, I have only briefly visited Limu Moggu in 2019. Second, the Fire Festival goes largely uncelebrated

across northeastern Liangshan, to the extent that many Nuosu even characterize it as a place that lacks the Fire Festival altogether. Still, my discussion of Nila and Limu Moggu is enough to show that many Nuosu in these parts of Liangshan use display to accomplish worldmaking acts. My argument here unfolds through several related paths. I start with a brief discussion of how two-way displays may enable people anywhere to evoke—and even mirror—the sentiments they hope to instill in invisible authorities such as Ngeti Gunzy. Then I turn to my ethnography of the Fire Festival competitions and sacrifices that many Nuosu in Nila make to their land spirits, ancestors, guardian spirits, spirit helpers, Ngeti Gunzy, and sometimes even culture heroes like Zhyge Alu. This leads me to a comparative discussion of how Nuosu in Limu Moggu defer their Fire Festival competitions and disguise their sacrifices for it. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that these different approaches to the Fire Festival throw light not only on how people, spirits, and gods collectively revitalize the cosmos but on the value of analyzing their worldmaking acts through the lens of display.

Two-way displays

Communicating with gods and spirits is nearly always a delicate act, which is why many Nuosu go to great lengths to initiate two-way displays in the form of Fire Festival competitions, sacrifices, torch bearing, and other entertainment. Two-way displays open up a social space where people try to win over the spirits in the hopes that they will reciprocate. These displays often mirror the invisible authority of gods and spirits, serve as a form of ritual blandishment to them, and enable a "powerful visual manifestation of [their] presence" (Kendall and Ariati 2023). But what two-way displays ultimately accomplish depends on how they are made in the first place.

A good example of how two-way displays unfold as moving, lively, performative, and deeply communicative engagements with the spirits is found in the Mongolian shaman's mirror, which is composed of two surfaces. Whereas Mongols often "inspect the mirror's outer shiny surface" to gain a window into the spirit world, the spirits "who operate from the realm behind or inside the mirror" gaze out from its rough surface onto human beings (Humphrey 2007, 173). The shaman's mirror, then, "catalyses, as a technology of producing visibility," an especially rich "imagination" of the invisible authority of the spirits (ibid., 174). This is particularly evident in a form of divination in which Buryat Mongol shamans ask their spirit helpers a question, pour vodka (or some other distilled clear liquor) onto the surface of their mirrors, and wait for their spirit helpers to shape the vodka's evaporated residue into a thin film, the image of which is interpreted (Swancutt 2006, 344–45). Divinatory outcomes are based on the premise that Buryat spirits "are the ultimate creators and purveyors of information" and may freely observe everything in the human world, while Buryat people can only imaginatively interpret the images that the spirits display to them on the shaman's mirror (ibid., 338). These two-way displays are shaped by both the power relations between Buryat people and spirits and by the different optics of worldmaking available to them. So, while Buryat people must rely heavily on their imaginations to envision the worldmaking prospects that the spirits show them,

they can harness two-way displays to steer these same prospects in their preferred direction (Swancutt 2012a, 79–80, 84–91).

Similar power relations, optics, and opportunities to steer worldmaking are at play in the two-way displays that Nuosu hold with gods or spirits, even though their cosmology is different to that of the Buryats and other Mongols (cf. Swancutt 2012b; 2020). Many Nuosu in Nila, for example, start their household rituals by lighting a bundle of pine branches (sometimes paired with other plants) using fire from the household hearth. They wave these smoldering branches around the ritual space to purify it before placing them on the ground outdoors in front of the household threshold. The flames and smoke rising from these branches help to alert Ngeti Gunzy, the ancestors, and other spirits to the ritual space where their assistance is needed. When the spirits arrive at the ritual space, they may offer their own communicative displays—one of which is to make a sacrificial animal shake its body as a sign that it is an acceptable ritual offering. Yet the stakes of any two-way display are much higher during the Fire Festival, when the power relations with Ngeti Gunzy are at their most extreme, because he is awaiting his sacrificial payments and every Nuosu person is vulnerable to soul loss. Here, many Nuosu strive to instill favorable sentiments in Ngeti Gunzy through vibrant competitions and sacrifices without, however, knowing when he may suddenly signal his displeasure through the most irreversible of tragedies—a human death.[5] It is only after Ngeti Gunzy has taken the life of a seemingly ill or even healthy person that his dissatisfaction tends to become known. Faced with this uncertainty throughout the Fire Festival season, many Nuosu use savvy forms of display to please Ngeti Gunzy and other spirits.

Displays of competition and death

Two-way displays lie at the heart of both the official Fire Festival events in the town center of Nila and the informal celebrations in its country villages, where many Nuosu children improvise play-contests during the day and light handmade torches or bonfires at night (figure 2). Everything, though, is scaled up in the town center, where there are enough competitors that some events start off with auditions before moving to the main elimination rounds (figure 3). Prizes are given to winners on stage, including diploma-like certificates, trophies, and discreetly presented cash (figure 4), which are handed over by judges who invest many hours in the competitions, where crowds of spectators press up against their shoulders to get a better view (figure 5). Local and sometimes national television crews film the contests and hold interviews with knowledgeable judges. The full week of festivities leads up to a grand finale that features winners of the singing contests, followed by the Fire Festival extravaganza that boasts invited singers and dancers from elsewhere in China. All these events tend to be scheduled before Nuosu pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy on the last day of the Fire Festival.

High above in the heavens, Ngeti Gunzy watches these many festivities unfold. Every effort is made to ensure that the official competitions go smoothly, but they are ultimately beholden to the vagaries of the weather, the often-finicky sound systems, the nerves of the competitors, the personal preferences of the judges, and

Figure 2. Children in a country village of Nila at twilight, who had filled a back basket with torches made from dried branches, possibly including artemisia, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 3. Competitors in the traditional clothing competition on a stage erected in the Old Square of Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 4. Awarding the winner of the verbal dueling competition a diploma, a plastic trophy shaped like a torch, and cash in the Old Square of Nila, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 5. Judging a Fire Festival competition in the Old Square of Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

the ambience of amateur theater that puts pressure on everyone. Still, many Nuosu tend to consider that if the competitions are pleasing to them, then they will likely please Ngeti Gunzy, too. Even mishaps may contribute to the fun of the spectacle, as I learned during the final verbal dueling contest of 2019 in Nila, which took place just as the afternoon was turning to dusk. Keen to photograph the competition, I managed to position myself near to the stage, amid a huddle of spectators taking cover from the rain under a pop-up gazebo. From this vantage point, I had sight of the judges, including my long-term research partner, the Nuosu ethnohistorian I call Misu. Halfway through the competition, one competitor spent an unusually long time on his speech riffs. He paused in forgetfulness, stumbled over words, and slurred his speech. It soon became clear that, before coming on stage, this competitor had spent the day indulging in the Nuosu pastime of decadent drinking with friends. A young spectator at my side became bored and complained that he should wrap up his act, yet the competitor waxed ever more lyrical about the Nuosu heavens as he did. I saw Misu and his fellow judges try to stifle their laughing, while the spectators behind them started giggling, until eventually even the youth by my side jokingly asked if we should all just head out to a bar. But no one took any serious issue with this contestant, whose high-flown riffs about the heavens had somewhat missed their mark.

After the competition had ended, I joined Misu and his wife, who I call Minu, on the walk home along the streets of Nila, which were packed with spectators. They were amused with the drunken speech riffs but expressed mild disappointment at finding all the competitors less accomplished than in previous years. Misu explained that the competition rules in Nila forbid the winners from entering a new Fire Festival event for three years, so that more people may have the chance to win. Since many of the best verbal duelers in Nila had won in recent years, the 2019 line-up was filled mostly with people who had received low scores in the past. I wondered to myself if any problems might have arisen from Ngeti Gunzy having watched the drunken

competitor. However, no one expressed concerns that this competitor might have insulted the heavens; nor did anyone seem to think that Ngeti Gunzy might retaliate for this display of drunken revelry. At worst, the competitor was mildly mocked for his own lack of oratorial skills.

Nevertheless, the difficulty in knowing who might become the next target of Ngeti Gunzy's wrath became clear two days later when I visited the ethnological research institute in Nila. I was absorbed in an interview when Misu suddenly appeared at the office door with a worried expression on his face. He quickly informed his colleagues that he had received a telephone call and had to race out immediately to be with an uncle of his who lived close to his home and appeared to be at death's door. It was just after midday on July 23—three days before everyone in Nila would pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy—and Misu was hurrying before it might be too late. A couple of hours later, I went to hear Misu's son, who I call Yie, perform in the first round of the singing competition, but it was announced over the loudspeakers that Yie had telephoned to tell the judges he could not make it. The judges gave no further explanation and moved to the next candidate. Casting my eyes around the audience and the Old Square where the competition took place, I noticed that Misu's younger daughter, who I call Nravie, had not appeared either, despite her plans to come hear her brother sing. An ominous feeling came over me as I realized that Misu's entire family had gathered at the neighboring home of his uncle in what turned out to be his last hours.

However, on the following day, Nravie competed in the traditional clothing pageant, for which I was a guest judge, while Yie performed in the final singing competition that was part of the Fire Festival grand finale. The judges had allowed him to perform on what appeared to be compassionate grounds and without penalty for having missed the earlier elimination round. I found out that the affairs surrounding Misu's uncle had also been smoothed out, including his funeral, which had been postponed for about a week so that it would not fall on the day of the tiger (the same kind of day on which he had been born).[6] His funeral was set instead for an auspicious date after July 26—the day on which Ngeti Gunzy would receive his sacrifices in Nila and the Fire Festival would conclude. It turned out that Ngeti Gunzy had displayed his wrath only after he had decided that the fate of Misu's uncle was past the point of no return. This made it all but impossible to correlate the death of Misu's uncle with any one specific event during the Fire Festival, including the drunken verbal dueling we had seen just days earlier. All that anyone could do at this point, then, was to keep enjoying—and surviving—the Fire Festival until they could pay Ngeti Gunzy his sacrificial debt in exchange for their own souls.

Sacrificial displays

Early in the morning on the final day of the 2019 Fire Festival, I headed to Misu's household as I had done on two previous occasions to join them in paying their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy. Misu started the day by sacrificing a chicken to the local land spirit as part of an elaborate two-way display. He heated stones in his household hearth, transferred them to a long-handled roasting pan, tossed distilled

white liquor on them to make them steam, and used the steam to purify the hearth room of his home. Throughout this act of fumigation, Misu chanted to his household's guardian spirits and spirit helpers, and poured distilled liquor into the small cups he kept atop of the household altar for them. Like many Nuosu altars, Misu's took the form of a short wooden shelf fixed high up on a wall near to the hearth, on the side of the home devoted to its own residents. When he had finished chanting, Misu headed outdoors with another heated stone and seated himself on a stool to fumigate a yellow-feathered chicken, which Nuosu typically consider to be the luckiest color of chicken to sacrifice during the Fire Festival.[7] Holding the chicken upside down with one hand, he placed its head in a traditional Nuosu lacquerware bowl filled with water, and used a thin stick with his other hand to press its head down against the base of the bowl until it had drowned (figure 6).[8] As Misu explained, he had slaughtered the chicken in the way that he considered best for the Fire Festival, even though this method is unusual. Reminding me that Nuosu often adapt their Fire Festival sacrifices from year to year in hopes of improving their prosperity, he noted that his own approach had already borne fruit. The excrement that the chicken had deposited next to the bowl and the maize kernels that it had choked up as it drowned were both, Misu declared, a sign from the spirits that his household would be "prosperous" (Ch. *facai de* 发财的) in the coming year. Putting the drowned chicken into a basin, he poured hot water on it to loosen its feathers and ease the task of plucking while telling me that the very last Fire Festival ritual, known as "burning the chicken's feathers" (*vazo jjie* ꃘꊒꐦ), would take place when all the guests had gone but the family members were assembled, usually about two days later.

Returning to the hearth, Misu waited as Minu roasted the chicken wings on their electric stove top. As soon as they were cooked, Misu and Nravie ate the chicken wings as quickly as they could to prevents ghosts from entering the home and shoo

Figure 6. Sacrificing a yellow-feathered chicken to the local land spirit on the morning of the final day of the Fire Festival in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 7. Chanting to the culture hero Zhyge Alu as well the household's spirit helpers and guardian spirits with offerings of chicken meat, broth, and boiled bitter buckwheat cakes during the sacrifice to the local land spirit. Kindling lit from the household hearth burns in the household courtyard, sending fire and smoke signals skyward in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

out any that might have managed to enter. Minu then prepared traditional bitter buckwheat cakes for the Fire Festival breakfast, shaping the dough in the form of human genitalia. With an embarrassed laugh, she told me that they looked funny and joked that they also needed to be eaten quickly to keep away unwanted ghosts. But in fact, the idea here was to engage the ancestors, guardian spirits, and spirit helpers of Misu's household in a two-way display that would encourage the propagation of people, livestock, and grains for the year ahead. Three bitter buckwheat cakes were therefore formed into flat and round pieces to represent the women in the home, while two were made like phalluses to represent its men, and all of them were boiled. Then Minu and Misu prepared a fresh mug of tea, a shot glass filled with distilled liquor, and some chicken meat, broth, and bitter buckwheat cakes neatly added to a large lacquerware bowl. Placing this full breakfast for their guardian spirits, other spirit helpers, and ancestors on the household altar, Misu requested that they facilitate his household's prosperity in the coming year as well as the research being done.

Next, Misu and Yie took this two-way display further by lighting small pieces of kindling from the household hearth and carrying them outdoors into the courtyard, along with a small bowl filled with chicken meat and broth and a lacquerware dish holding a bitter buckwheat cake. These pieces of burning kindling were reminiscent of wooden torches. Positioning himself directly across from the household threshold, Misu chanted to the hero Zhyge Alu as well as to his household's guardian spirits and spirit helpers over these food offerings, while the burning kindling that Yie laid on the ground sent fire and smoke signals—albeit, somewhat subdued by the rain—skyward (figure 7). To complete the chicken sacrifice, Misu splashed oblations of chicken soup to the spirits in each of the cardinal directions and returned indoors

to join Minu and Nravie in quickly eating the last of the roast chicken to keep away ghosts. With this first ritual done, everyone visibly relaxed, and Misu brought down the food he had placed on the altar so that we could enjoy a breakfast of chicken meat, soup, and bitter buckwheat cakes together. As we ate, Misu noticed a grain of maize was still caught in the beak of the sacrificial chicken and declared this to be a rare sign of prosperity. Cleaning the meat from its head so that he could divine the shape and direction in which the chicken's tongue bone pointed, he also confirmed that his household would be very prosperous (cf. Swancutt 2021, 29–31). The divination served as another two-way display, making it clear that the spirits had approved of the chicken sacrifice. Misu then explained that, on the following day, he would visit his home village outside of the Nila town center and stop by a different village on the return journey to pay respects at the household of his uncle who had recently died. His busy schedule meant that he would need to hold the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers that very evening, rather than two days later, and that I would witness it.

But first, we awaited the arrival of the yellow-colored sheep that Misu's household had purchased and would sacrifice to Ngeti Gunzy in exchange for their souls. Although heavy rain had started to fall, the ram was fumigated with smoldering stalks of bamboo from Misu's garden as soon as it arrived, to purify it and send a smoke signal to Ngeti Gunzy. Donning Nuosu capes, but no other finery on account of the rain, Misu and Minu were joined by Yie, who had put on the same traditionally embroidered jacket that he had worn days earlier for the final singing competition of the Fire Festival. As household head, Misu would have been able to chant to Ngeti Gunzy himself during the ritual for the descent and exchange of the soul, but he preferred to invite a priest to help steer this ritual of social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction.

Moments later, the priest arrived by motorcycle wearing ordinary clothes and without any priestly accouterments, as he would only need to facilitate what is ultimately a householder's ritual. One of Misu's neighbors also came to help with the heavy lifting needed to display the sacrificial sheep. Misu, Minu, and Yie then gathered in a seated huddle facing the household threshold, with the main door to their house wide open as is customary during Nuosu rituals, so that nothing would obstruct them from recovering their souls. In one deft movement, the neighbor lifted the sheep, which he balanced in the crux of his arms, and moved it in circular motions above Misu's family (figure 8).[9] The sacrificial animal is held over the right sides of the bodies of men and boys and moved in nine counterclockwise circles, while for women and girls it is held over the left sides of their bodies and moved in seven clockwise circles.[10] After this, the sacrificial animal is rubbed against each of the householder's bodies. Throughout this work of offering the ram to Ngeti Gunzy, the priest chanted and called back the lost souls of Misu's household (figure 9), before racing off to perform the same work at the many other households that had summoned him for the day. Finally, the neighbor and Yie smothered the ram, which is the preferred mode of slaughter at the Fire Festival.[11] Everyone in Misu's household was relieved to have recovered their souls from Ngeti Gunzy.

Figure 8. Circling the sacrificial ram above the householders for the ritual of the descent and exchange of the soul in Nila, 2016. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 9. Nuosu priest chanting to facilitate the ritual of the descent and exchange of the soul in Nila, 2015. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 10. Gallbladder from the sacrificial sheep for the Fire Festival supported by the right edge of the household altar, which holds alcohol offerings and effigies made of plants from previous rituals in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

While butchering the ram, Yie called out excitedly that he had extracted an especially large gallbladder. Nuosu across Liangshan have traditionally used the gallbladders of slaughtered animals to display the amount of prosperity that a fresh kill has brought to the household. The larger the gallbladder, the more ample the prosperity. Once removed, the gallbladder is typically stuck to the household wall just beneath the altar using only the vital fluids on its surface to keep it in place, where it is allowed to remain on display (for months and sometimes years) until it drops of its own accord. Yie and Minu tried sticking the sacrificial ram's gallbladder to the household wall, but it kept falling to the ground due to its size and weight until Misu hit upon the makeshift solution of positioning it just above the altar, allowing it to rest against it for support (figure 10).

Several hours were then devoted to cooking, and everyone was pleased that the sun came out in time for our mutton feast because sunshine is itself a display of social and cosmic renewal on the final day of the Fire Festival. As we relaxed, Misu approached me to share more details about the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers. He told me that this ritual is ideally held by small children in the household, but because his children are now grown, he would conduct it himself. Adding that our colleague Tuosa often overstates the importance of Ngeti Gunzy and the myth-historical death of his spirit emissary, Misu explained that the Fire Festival accomplishes more than paying a debt to the sky god and recovering human souls. It is also a season in which Nuosu seek to make the coming year prosperous, while gathering with relatives and friends to celebrate and chat. To underscore his point, Misu enumerated three distinct outcomes that Nuosu wish for when burning the chicken's feathers. First is the removal of all ghosts, illnesses, hunger, dirty or impure things, and the cold that comes from lack of clothing and impoverishment. Second is the burning and sending away of insects that eat people's grains, crops, and plants. Third is the summoning home of the souls of livestock animals. The whole point of the Fire Festival, Misu

Figure 11. Stoking the fire during the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. A bottle of distilled liquor and a lacquerware goblet filled with an alcohol offering to the spirits is in the background. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

concluded, is to steer everything in a prosperous direction so that the year ahead will be smooth, successful, filled with good weather, abundant in crops and livestock, and free of damaging insects, ghosts, and bad or impure things that are sent away from the home.

Summoning displays

As the time had come for Misu to hold the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers, he collected some fresh sticks of bamboo from his garden and seated himself again in his courtyard to prepare for another two-way display. Splitting the bamboo sticks with a dagger into ten tidy halves, he explained that they would be assembled into two small effigies of animal feeding troughs. Animal feed and salt are ideally added to these troughs during the ritual, but Misu said that he would need to use flour in lieu of the animal feed that he had run out of at home. The ritual would be held some distance away, so that any ghosts or impure things that might be attracted to it would not find their way back to Misu's household. Gathering scraps of wood from his garden to use as kindling, he dried them over the hearth so they would burn quickly, before handing a bag filled with the feathers of the sacrificial chicken to a neighbor's child who came along to help carry it. We headed out with Yie, a friend of his who had just arrived, and several more of the neighborhood's children to a nearby waste ground covered in scrub and rubbish, which Misu declared was suitable for burning the chicken's feathers.

Misu immediately prepared a small fire for the ritual with the dried kindling, pouring distilled liquor over it in a clockwise circle to fumigate the area and send a fiery smoke signal to the heavens. Dropping handfuls of chicken feathers onto the flames, he explained that they are burned so they will not rot and attract the insects that eat the grains, crops, and plants that people grow. He also poured an offering to the spirits into a small lacquerware goblet that he placed near to the fire, which he stoked from time to time (figure 11). With all eyes fixed upon him, Misu declared that adults teach children how to hold this ritual and then proceeded to construct miniature effigies of the feeding troughs for livestock. Sorting eight of the split bamboo sticks into pairs, he pushed them into the ground so that they stood vertically in "x-shaped" formations that resembled the support stands for troughs. Then he balanced a split bamboo stick across each of them to evoke the hollowed-out logs in which livestock feed is placed. But as he had forgotten to bring the feed (or flour to be used in lieu of it) and salt, he instructed Yie to race home and retrieve them. Once the salt—which was all that Yie could find—had been added to the effigies, Misu confirmed that this was sufficient to feed the souls of his household's livestock.

Then Misu started chanting to send away bad things and the insects that harm crops, enjoining Yie to chant with him while reminding everyone that small children usually conduct this ritual, but that they would need to follow their own personalized approach (figure 12).[12] Staring on in wonder, the neighborhood children gathered around us did not join in the chanting but observed the ritual with curiosity. Misu chuckled with slight embarrassment as he explained that he and Yie would now need to imitate the calls that Nuosu make to summon animals to eat at their troughs. He

Figure 12. Chanting during the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

Figure 13. Effigies of livestock feeding troughs, filled with salt, constructed for the ritual of burning the chicken's feathers in Nila, 2019. Photograph by Katherine Swancutt.

pointed out that these vocal displays would be a way of ritually calling back the lost souls of horses, pigs, sheep, goats, chickens, and cattle—the latter of which, he added, Nuosu classify together with yaks, but not water buffalo. Much like people who lose their souls before the onset of the Fire Festival, he said that livestock are bereft of their souls until this ritual is held. But when coaxed home in animal language and with the attractive salt (and, where possible, feed) that is added to the effigies of animal troughs, the souls of livestock understand that they are being summoned to return to their bodies (figure 13). So, for several minutes, Misu and Yie interspersed onomatopoetic imitations of animal calls into their Nuosu-language chanting. To conclude the ritual, Misu chanted some simple words that any Nuosu person can use

to expel “all manner of ghosts” (*nyicy hamo* ꆏꊨꉻꂾ), illnesses, poverty, bad or impure things, and the want of clothing that leads to feeling cold. Taking one last moment to admonish the insects to leave his crops and plants, Misu declared that the ritual of burning the chicken’s feathers would help to ensure the health and propagation of his grains and livestock. As we watched the embers burning the chicken’s feathers die down, I thanked Misu, who insisted that he had only held a very small and minor ritual. By then the evening had set in, and Misu returned home to rest. I therefore headed out, as did Yie and his friend, to watch the carrying of torches, which was the final Fire Festival display of the year in the Nila county town.

Deferring and disguising display

Just three days after the Fire Festival had ended in Nila, I joined Misu, the priest I call Obbu, Tuosa, and one of his anthropology students for a research trip to northeastern Liangshan, where we learned that people approach their festive displays rather differently. We traveled in Tuosa’s jeep for the better part of three hours before reaching our first destination, the city of Xichang, known in Nuosu as Labbu Orro (ꇁꀘꉢꊒ), which is the seat of the Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture in Sichuan. Although we had arranged to meet some local priests on our arrival, they had been summoned away from the city to assist numerous households in the countryside that were paying their sacrificial debts to Ngeti Gunzy. No one was surprised about this, since the exact dates for the Fire Festival vary across Liangshan. But Tuosa decided that it would be a better use of our time to travel to Limu Moggu early the next day so we could meet with some other priests and scholars. However, when we reached Limu Moggu, the priests there explained that many people in the area were also busy paying their sacrificial debts to the sky god. Since the Fire Festival had become an unexpected obstacle to our plans yet again, we jokingly folded a comparative discussion of its festive displays into the small talk in our introductions.

We learned then from the priests in Limu Moggu that the Fire Festival is considered by many in the area to be an understated—or by some accounts even uncelebrated—occasion. As they explained, Nuosu in northeastern Liangshan hold the key sacrifice to Ngeti Gunzy during the Fire Festival season, but do not call it “the descent and exchange of the soul.” They added that it is also customary across northeastern Liangshan to port the Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season. Tracing these differences to the local lore about an ancient battle that summoned forth red snowfall during the Fire Festival, which many now associate with extreme bloodshed, the priests confirmed that no one wants to invite a similar disaster again. Many Nuosu across northeastern Liangshan therefore pay their sacrificial debt to Ngeti Gunzy in summer to recover their souls in a timely manner but refer to their ritual as “turning back the enemy.” It seemed to us that this alternative name would help to disguise the ritual’s associations with the Fire Festival and to ward off the possibility of summoning red snowfall. Similarly, deferring the Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season would incorporate them into a celebratory moment already associated with children’s play—which is itself a kind of disguise.

Everyone's curiosity was piqued by the different local and personalized approaches that Nuosu may take to the Fire Festival. But no one, including the priests from Limu Moggu, was able to guess who had been the enemies of northeastern Liangshan during the ancient battle that led to red snowfall. Some days later I asked Tuosa, Misu, and Obbu if the strategy in Limu Moggu for rescheduling the Fire Festival competitions was meant to prevent a return to the myth-historical moment when Ngeti Gunzy sought to transform red snowfall into human beings, only to fail, and then succeed, before setting out to destroy humankind with a flood when his spirit emissary was killed. They agreed this could be why the Fire Festival appears to go uncelebrated in Limu Moggu but added that no one there seemed to have drawn this connection themselves. We were all left wondering whether the motivation across northeastern Liangshan to defer and disguise the Fire Festival was to ensure that this highly dangerous moment in Nuosu myth-history would not be repeated. After all, if Ngeti Gunzy had once been angry enough to destroy humankind with a flood—and had sent red snowfall to northeastern Liangshan again many generations later—then it was conceivable that he might, in another moment of anger, send red snow to earth as a way of transforming the world. It was even possible that Ngeti Gunzy might repeat the old chapter of myth-history in which he had transformed red snowfall into a new crop of beings that would replace the previous generation of humans, animals, and plants.

Concluding reflections on social and cosmic renewal

Of the many displays that Nuosu may unleash during the Fire Festival, the act of pleasing and pleading with Ngeti Gunzy is arguably the most important. However, what the vibrant competitions, sacrificial offerings, and other forms of ritual blandishment that make up the Fire Festival ultimately accomplish depends on how they unfold. Whereas Nuosu in Nila and across western Liangshan hold opulent two-way displays throughout the Fire Festival, Nuosu in Limu Moggu and across northeastern Liangshan disguise their sacrificial payments to Ngeti Gunzy under a different ritual name and tend to defer the timing of their competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season. Many Nuosu, then, follow their own local and personalized strategies for staging fun-loving competitions, paying their annual debt to Ngeti Gunzy, recovering lost souls, and steering social and cosmic renewal in a prosperous direction. Their different approaches to worldmaking throw light not only on the invisible authority of Ngeti Gunzy but on how the efforts to please him through two-way displays may shape human lives, for better and worse.

Fire Festival displays are meant to be moving, lively, and performative parts of a major season of social and cosmic renewal. Many Nuosu therefore harness these displays to communicate their wishes to invisible authorities, from Ngeti Gunzy to local land spirits, ancestors, guardian spirits, spirit helpers, and sometimes even the culture hero Zhyge Alu. When the Fire Festival is successful, Nuosu find that their wishes are fulfilled through the prosperity displayed to them in the year ahead. Where they are unsuccessful, Nuosu fail to usher in prosperity and may find that Ngeti Gunzy displays his wrath by taking a human life. The reciprocity implied in these two-

way displays underpins the "logic," following Don Handelman (1997, 1998), of the Fire Festival across Liangshan. It is also central to how many Nuosu approach each festive competition, sacrifice, and the fire and smoke signals that they send skyward during rituals. Yet many Nuosu choose to unsettle this logic through two-way displays that enable them to step outside of the social and cosmic order, as happens when the Fire Festival is disguised, deferred, and treated as a largely uncelebrated event in Limu Moggu and northeastern Liangshan. Here—and as the contributors to this issue show for other parts of Asia—display is used to push at the edges of an ontology, unleashing new meanings and possibilities. What the anthropology of display opens up, then, is a new way of envisioning how people and spirits steer rituals, festivals, public events, the cosmopolitics that animate myth-histories, and even the process of worldmaking itself.

Acknowledgments

Thanks go to all those who participated in the panel "Demons and Gods on Display: The Pageantry of Popular Religion as Crossroads Encounters" at the 2020 Association for Asian Studies in Asia annual conference in Kobe, Japan, where I first presented the materials in this article. I would also like to thank Tony Milligan and Elisa Tamburo for their comments on an earlier draft, as well as the anonymous reviewers for their stimulating remarks. This article is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program (grant agreement no. 856543).

Author

Katherine Swancutt is reader in social anthropology and director of the Religious and Ethnic Diversity in China and Asia Research Unit at King's College London. She has conducted anthropological fieldwork across Inner Asia for more than two decades, writing extensively on shamanism and animism in China and Mongolia, and is currently project lead of the European Research Council Synergy Grant "Cosmological Visionaries: Shamans, Scientists, and Climate Change at the Ethnic Borderlands of China and Russia." Author of *Fortune and the Cursed: The Sliding Scale of Time in Mongolian Divination* (Berghahn 2012), she is co-editor of *Animism Beyond the Soul: Ontology, Reflexivity, and the Making of Anthropological Knowledge* (*Social Analysis*, special issue 2016, and Berghahn 2018), and editor of *Crafting Chinese Memories: The Art and Materiality of Storytelling* (Berghahn 2021).

Notes

1. Nuosu terms are transliterated without tonal markers except in the case of certain authors' names that are conventionally spelled with them. Tonal markers in Nuosu are not pronounced and are written as consonants that always appear at the end of a syllable ("t" denotes a high tone, "x" denotes a high-mid tone, "p" denotes a low falling tone, and the mid tone has no marker). The "Fire Festival" (*Duzie* ꅐꊨ), for example, is a compound word composed of a syllable with a high tone followed by a syllable with a mid tone, which appears as "*Dutzie*" when written with

tonal markers. Similarly, the name of the sky god, "Ngeti Gunzy" (ꉻꄮꈬꍝ), is composed of two compound words that move from a mid tone to a high tone, followed by a high-mid tone, and finally a mid tone. It is written as "Ngetit Guxnzy" with tonal markers. All Nuosu terms are also rendered in Nuosu script, while Chinese terms are preceded by "Ch.," transliterated into pinyin, and rendered in Chinese characters.

2. Many Nuosu in the southern region of Liangshan collectively sacrifice an ox to pay their debt to Ngeti Gunzy, rather than holding separate household-based sacrifices for each family.

3. "Turning back the enemy" can alternately mean "turning back the west" (cf. Jiarimuji and Yang Da-chuan 2022, 100), an interpretation that suggests the generations-old battle in northeastern Liangshan may have been fought with the Han ethnic majority of China, other minority nationalities who came from the west, such as Tibetans, or perhaps even Nuosu from Nila or elsewhere in western Liangshan. Notably, "turning back the enemy" is the name of an altogether different ritual in western Liangshan that may be held to cure people of madness or to avenge the death of a person killed in a fight.

4. There are in fact three Nuosu sheep shearing (*yoshacy* ꑳꎭꏸ) seasons, the exact timings of which are dependent on the weather, starting with the spring sheep shearing (*nyisha* ꑊꎭ) that is held before sheep are taken to the mountains or forests to escape the summer heat. This is followed by the autumn sheep shearing (*chursha* ꍒꎭ) that tends to take place when the wool is at its best, because the grass is not yet at its highest and it is still clean of burrs. Winter sheep shearing (*shaga* ꎭꇤ) is usually only done when the wool is thick; otherwise many Nuosu wait until spring to shear their sheep again. However, the Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival is held in summer at the height of the tourist season, so that it may roughly coincide with the official Fire Festival celebrations elsewhere in Liangshan, unfold as a competitive attraction to them, and evoke—or even take the place of—the autumn sheep shearing (Jan Karlach, personal communication, May 14 and 23, 2023, and Yueqi Zuoxi, personal communication, May 15 and 23, 2023). Nuosu in Limu Moggu and northeastern Liangshan, then, may choose to port their Fire Festival competitions to the autumn sheep shearing season, to the Meigu County Yi Sheep Shearing Festival, or to both events. For more on Nuosu sheep shearing and wool production, see Bender (2008, 22).

5. The irreversible tragedy of death is reflected in the poetry of Aku Wuwu, perhaps the most prominent poet in Liangshan. One of Aku Wuwu's most famous poems laments the death of the culture hero Zhyge Alu and the unsuccessful effort to reverse his death by laboriously calling back his soul (Aku Wuwu, Bender, and Jjiepa Ayi 2005).

6. As is common across Asia, Nuosu recognize animal days, months, and years. Care is often taken to ensure there are no conflicts between a Nuosu person's astrology and the day of his or her own funeral, which starts the deceased's journey to the afterlife.

7. This chicken is ideally a young hen that has not yet laid eggs.

8. There are many different views among Nuosu on how to slaughter a chicken for the Fire Festival, which, as a household-based ritual, may be adapted to improve the prosperity of each household.

9. Before the sacrificial animal is circled above the householders during the ritual for the descent and exchange of the soul, a special rope is often woven together with three sticks (one black, one white, and one grey), which may be used to touch each of the householder's heads. I did not observe

the use of this rope woven together with the three sticks at Misu's household in 2015, 2016, or 2019. However, many Nuosu consider that each household approaches the Fire Festival in the way that seems best suited to enhancing prosperity for the coming year. Some Nuosu even slaughter a different kind of animal or make other small adjustments each year when paying their sacrificial debts to Ngeti Gunzy, in hopes of attracting more prosperity than they had done previously.

10. The circling of sacrificial animals over householders follows the same logic of directional movement as the gestures that Nuosu traditionally use to indicate who is part of the in-group or out-group. Men and the living are typically members of the in-group and associated with a counterclockwise gesture using the right hand, whereas women and the dead are usually members of the out-group and associated with a clockwise gesture using the left hand (cf. Bender, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu 2019, lxxviii).

11. Misu explained that the sheep is smothered because its meat is tastier if no blood has been lost. Later, during our travels in Limu Moggu, he added that on a good day like the Fire Festival, it is best not to let blood flow from the sacrificial animal (for more on the sacrificing of sheep, see Bender 2008, 21). Some priests from Limu Moggu agreed with Misu that the chicken sacrificed to the land spirit should be drowned, although they had not heard of using a stick to keep its head submerged under water. No one knew the exact reason why the chicken should be drowned.

12. No specific formulas are used in these chants, which express the householder's wish to send away all bad things, ghosts, and disasters. The souls of lost livestock are also the only spirits that pay attention to these chants. Misu explained that in addition to burning the chicken's feathers, Nuosu may burn wild plants that bear fruits, which are common across Liangshan.

References

Aku Wuwu, Mark Bender, and Jjiepa Ayi. 2005. "Calling Back the Soul of Zhyge Alu." *Mānoa* 17 (1): 123–30. https://doi.org/10.1353/man.2005.0013

Bender, Mark. 2008. "'Tribes of Snow': Animals and Plants in the Nuosu Book of Origins." *Asian Ethnology* 67 (1): 5–42. https://www.jstor.org/stable/25135285

Bender, Mark, Aku Wuwu, and Jjivot Zopqu, trans. 2019. *The Nuosu Book of Origins: A Creation Epic from Southwest China*. Seattle: University of Washington Press. https://doi.org/10.6069/9780295745701.s01

Feuchtwang, Stephan. 2011. "Exhibition and Awe: Regimes of Visibility in the Presentation of an Emperor." *Journal of Material Culture* 16 (1): 64–79. https://doi.org/10.1177/1359183510394942

Handelman, Don. 1981. "The Ritual Clown: Attributes and Affinities." *Anthropos* 76 (3/4) : 321–70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/40460961

———. 1992. "Passages to Play: Paradox and Process." *Play and Culture* 5 (1): 1–19.

———. 1997. "Rituals/Spectacles." *International Social Science Journal* 49 (153): 387–99. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2451.1997.tb00031.x

———. 1998. *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn.

Hill, Anne Maxwell. 2004. "Provocative Behavior: Agency and Feuds in Southwest China." *American Anthropologist* 106 (4): 675–86. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.2004.106.4.675

Humphrey, Caroline. 2007. "Inside and Outside the Mirror: Mongolian Shamans' Mirrors as Instruments of Perspectivism." *Inner Asia* 9 (2): 173–95. https://www.jstor.org/stable/23614990

Jiarimuji [嘉日姆几], and Yang Da-chuan [杨大川]. 2022. "*Yishi zhong de 'Xiufu': Yi xiang guanyu Liangshan Yizu jingshen jibing guan de renleixue yanjiu* 仪式中的'修复': 一项关于凉山彝族精神疾病观的人类学研究" [The "fix" in rituals: An anthropological study on the view of mental illness among the Liangshan Yi]. *Shehuixue Pinglun* 10 (4): 91–109.

Kendall, Laurel, and Ni Wayan Pasek Ariati. 2023. "Manifestations of Presence in Korea and Bali: Crossroads, Intersections, Divergences." In "Demons and Gods on Display: The Anthropology of Display and Worldmaking," edited by Katherine Swancutt. Special issue, *Asian Ethnology* 82 (1): 25–43.

Qubi Shimei, and Ma Erzi. 2001. "Homicide and Homicide Cases in Old Liangshan." In *Perspectives on the Yi of Southwest China*, edited by Stevan Harrell, 94–103. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520219885.003.0007

Swancutt, Katherine. 2006. "Representational vs. Conjectural Divination: Innovating out of Nothing in Mongolia." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 12 (2): 331–53. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2006.00294.x

———. 2012a. *Fortune and the Cursed: The Sliding Scale of Time in Mongolian Divination*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857454836-fm

———. 2012b. "Masked Predation, Hierarchy and the Scaling of Extractive Relations in Inner Asia and Beyond." In *Animism in Rainforest and Tundra: Personhood, Animals, Plants, and Things in Contemporary Amazonia and Siberia*, edited by Marc Brightman, Vanessa Elisa Grotti, and Olga Ulturgasheva, 175–94. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. https://doi.org/10.1515/9780857454690-015

———. 2016. "Religion through the Looking Glass: Fieldwork, Biography, and Authorship in Southwest China and Beyond." *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 7 (1): 51–67. https://doi.org/10.3167/arrs.2016.070104

———. 2020. "Animal Release and the Sacrificial Ethos in Inner Asia." *Inner Asia* 22 (2): 199–216. https://doi.org/10.1163/22105018-12340147

———. 2021. "The Chicken and the Egg: Cracking the Ontology of Divination in Southwest China." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Anthropology* 65 (2): 19–40. https://doi.org/10.3167/sa.2021.650202

———. 2023. "Moved to Distraction: The Ritual Theatre of the Fire Festival in Southwest China." *Religion* 53 (3): 1-25. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2023.2211398

Swancutt, Katherine (苏梦林), and Jiarimuji (嘉日姆几). 2021. "Jailhouse Blues, Storytelling and Becoming the Stuff of Legends in Southwest China." In *Crafting Chinese Memories: The Art and Materiality of Storytelling*, edited by Katherine Swancutt, 181–205. New York and Oxford: Berghahn. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781800732384-010

Reviews

General

Ilyse Morgenstein Fuerst and Brannon M. Wheeler, eds.
Words of Experience: Translating Islam with Carl W. Ernst

Sheffield: Equinox, 2021. 308 pages, 3 figures. Hardcover, $100.00; ebook, $100.00. ISBN 9781781799109 (hardcover), 9781781799116 (ebook).

This edited volume is a Festschrift for the noted American scholar of Islam Carl Ernst, derived from a 2017 conference convened in his honor. In developing a work of this sort there are always challenges of coherence and selecting contributors. In this case, the writers are primarily, but not exclusively, students of Ernst associated with the University of North Carolina and Duke University. Their assignment here was to engage his work in chapters across broad themes, which preface-writer and Ernst's long-term colleague Bruce Lawrence notes, draw on Ernst's contributions across the academic career spectrum of research, teaching, and service. The material therefore encompasses not only Ernst's exemplary scholarship, leadership at his institution, and professional service, but also his public role, since Ernst is both a scholar of Islam and a public intellectual, translating the contested topics of Islam and religion to an increasingly broad, and an increasingly polarized, public.

An underlying cohesive theme of the book is the concept of "translating," often conducted methodologically through establishing parameters of the semantic field of an established term or concept, such as "religion" or "syncretism," and then tracing its transformations through time so as to complicate, situate, and deconstruct essentialist assumptions. While this harkens back to the approach of one of Ernst's Harvard mentors, the late Wilfred Cantwell Smith, it also reflects the trajectory of a rich and varied scholarly career in Islamic studies that emerged alongside the watershed events of Edward Said's postcolonial critique of Orientalism and the Iranian Revolution, and then, post-millennium, was called to respond to the 9/11 attacks and rising Islamophobia, both in the West and India.

The volume's thirteen chapters are somewhat loosely grouped into two parts: those grappling with a more narrow or specific theme derived from Ernst's broad corpus of books and articles, and those that confront broader issues or challenges within the academic study of religion. The chapters therefore primarily engage South Asian Sufism, Sufi studies in other contexts, the academic study of religion, and the field of Islamic studies, along with contemporary issues such as Islamophobia.

As the author of the introduction, Bruce Lawrence, points out, the essays in part 1 are variously inspired by books, essays, or unique insights of Ernst that are then engaged by the authors in stimulating and productive ways. For example, chapter 1, "Is Islam a 'Religion?'" by Brannon Ingram, explores the term "religion" (Arabic, *dīn*) across a range of contemporary Muslim sources and academic usages.

Among the volume's "case study" chapters is one by Michael Muhammad Knight, who situates an articulation of Sufism in a particular local context, that of the African American movement, the Ansar Allah/Nubian Islamic Hebrews of the 1970s and 1980s. The sheer scope and richness of the material highlights the author's observation regarding how African American trends have been thus far largely neglected among studies of Western Sufism, despite both actual impact and their intrinsically fascinating elements for the study of religion.

The chapter by Samah Choudry, focusing on the post-9/11 American Muslim play *Disgraced*, is related to Ernst's more recent publications that critique colonialism and Islamophobia, as well as to more broad themes of public and artistic expression of religion. Those interested in textual analysis as skillfully employed by Ernst from the time of his first study on ecstatic mystical utterances can find this strand developed in Frederick S. Colby's essay on visionary rhetoric in Sufi ascension narratives.

Translation can also encompass the trenchant critique of terms too facilely bandied about such as "influence" and "syncretism," which of course may be politically and culturally loaded, if not pejorative, as noted in the chapter by Joy Laine and James W. Laine, a chapter that picks up on another of Ernst's interests, Sufism and yoga. Coeditor Brannon Wheeler also explores some of the methodological challenges of religious comparison in terms of what "syncretism" can imply, distort, or illuminate in his essay in part 2 of the volume.

Part 2 addresses disparate themes across seven chapters, only a few of which I can touch upon here, for example, the evolving impact of the "public" on both the scholarly career and interests, and through the impact of the internet and social media on academics and the material they study.

Katherine Pratt Ewing, a senior colleague of Ernst, sensitizes us to some of the more recent political currents across scholarship and public discourses around Sufism. This includes the colonial invention of the term "Sufism," more recent "Sufiphobia" among Salafis and Islamists, and instances of governments and rulers promoting Sufism as a strategy to combat radicalism, thus pointing to the challenges of defining and understanding this complex topic.

A further essay focusing on a specifically American manifestation of local Sufism and media outreach is Robert Rozehnal's chapter on the Inayatiyya Order and its recent initiatives over the internet, a subject that Rozehnal treated at length in his monograph *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience* (2019).

Insights into Ernst's leadership in the profession and at his home institution come from Candace Mixon's review of the impact of networking and state funding on academic careers. In addition to these efforts, she highlights Ernst's involvement in expanding academic analysis to incorporate expressions through the arts and material culture. Volume coeditor Ilyse R. Morgenstein Fuerst further reviews the more public-facing contributions made by Ernst in his studies *Following Muhammad* (2003) and *How to Read the Qur'an* (2011). The former could be seen as a response to 9/11 and the latter to an unfortunate 2002 incident in which conservative forces in North Carolina attempted to

repress the assignment of readings from the Qur'an as an exercise for incoming students. From a related angle, Katie Merriman not only addresses Ernst's oeuvre but also his paradigmatic efforts in scholarly collaboration, promoting international exchanges, and institution building.

On the whole, celebrations of influential scholars and their impact over time on students, colleagues, and broader fields of knowledge may be both inspiring and informative. They situate for us a field and its pursuit, and may, in fact, humanize our intellectual endeavors. Perhaps a concluding epigraph could be derived from the title of Ernst's own (2018) collection of articles: "It's not just academic!"

References

Ernst, Carl W. 2003. *Following Muhammad*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

———. 2011. *How to Read the Qur'an: A New Guide with Select Translations*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

———. 2018. *It's Not Just Academic: Essays on Sufism and Islamic Studies*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE.

Rozehnal, Robert. 2019. *Cyber Sufis: Virtual Expressions of the American Muslim Experience*. Oxford: Oneworld.

Marcia Hermansen
Loyola University Chicago

Nayantara Sheoran Appleton and Caroline Bennet, eds.
Methods, Moments, and Ethnographic Spaces in Asia

Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2021. 276 pages. Hardcover, $125.00; ebook $38.00. ISBN 9781786612489 (hardcover), 9781786612496 (ebook).

I did not initially grasp the editorial framing of "Asia as Method." The chapters are, however, a collection of narratives explaining the developed methods inspired by Kuan Hsing Chen's *Asia as Method: Toward Deimperialization* (2010). Thus, insight emerges into how the authors created methods, moments, and ethnographic spaces across Asia, while attending to the task of finding "inter-Asian referencing" to "create multiple reference points within Asia" (xxi).

The book has three sections, titled "Reflexively Re-Reading the Field" (4 chapters), "Thinking Across Space and Time" (3 chapters), and "Notes on Positionality" (4 chapters). I developed appreciation for two things: (1) the reason why the editors chose this topic and its value to several disciplines, particularly an anthropological approach to Asian-related area studies, and (2) how each author uniquely positioned themselves to explain their methodological and epistemological approaches to engaging with "Asia."

One of my students recently lamented about one chapter I shared in a course, in which they explained that the book "reads like a blog piece." However, I perceive this to be one of the book's strengths. While each author has gone to some depth to explain their methodological approaches through disclosing anecdotal vulnerabilities, impasses, and hacks, what emerges is that the ways in which someone conducts fieldwork must become resiliently creative. As such, graduate students can learn from these narratives about how to enter and be in the field, as well as how to conceptualize it beyond somewhat static and outdated frames. They can also learn how to relate—not only to the Other,

but also the Self. Furthermore, what emerges is that in the early twenty-first century "Asia," the "field," the "researcher," and the "researched" exist in far more complex and dynamic flows that require unique methodological patches as needed to deal with whatever issue might arise.

From a geographic perspective, section 1 covers the Western Pamirs, India and Nepal, Cambodia, and Pakistan. Section 2 focuses on Cambodia, India and Papua New Guinea, and Bali. Section 3 focuses on Japan, India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The chapters that have the greatest impression are "Astronauts of the Western Pamirs: Mobility, Power, and Disconnection in High Asia" (chapter 1), "The Bali of Anthropology and the Anthropology of Bali: Research in a Fast-Moving Part of Asia" (chapter 7), and "'We Have Always Been Cosmopolitan': Towards Anthropologies of Contemporary Complexity in Japan" (chapter 8).

While this does not suggest these chapters are superior, it is these from which I recall more immediate detail. Notably, "The Astronauts" is a great starting point. Perched up high on top of the world, "mobility between places in High Asia that are disconnected by complex national boundaries as well as by colonial and Cold War legacies" is discussed (3), through highlighting the ambiguity of space and dominion, and by comparing these "astronauts" with Bronislaw Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. This results in "stretching definitions of modernity, urbanity, and the centre" (3).

The themes of the other chapters are equally engaging and thoughtfully explicated. Chapter 2 focuses on methodological issues around repositioning the individual self and field in relation to subnational and marginal narratives within and adjacent to the Indian state, through examining Maithili language and culture spread across India and Nepal. Chapter 3 explores issues pertaining to Cambodia's Cold War legacy and the very real threats of trying to do fieldwork in a region under authoritarian rule. Chapter 4 focuses on Karachi and the ways in which urban ethnography can be approached while thinking reflexively about how one's positionality and identity are "constantly shifting concepts that are interrogated and challenged during the process of fieldwork and that are related to the social and economic pressures that are driving Asian urbanisms at large" (65).

Chapter 5 returns to Cambodia to explore the idea of "The Child as Method." One of the key arguments focuses on the fact that while

> children as research subjects are considered inherently powerless and therefore require special protections, local assertions of cultural autonomy may reinforce children's status as more empowered, and as bearing more responsibilities, at an earlier age than the strict dividing line of eighteen years would suggest. (87)

Chapter 6 argues for the epistemological power of comparison. It focuses on how and why an inter-Asian, multi-sited cultural comparative method can work and should be considered feasible. It focuses on grassroots women's organizations located in both India and Papua New Guinea (Asia and Oceania), providing insight into "how to undertake a comparative ethnographic study of NGOs" (116).

Chapter 7 provides two approaches to the study of Bali by its co-authors. The chapter aims firstly to "provide a rough sketch of the complex landscape of this new Bali and secondly to outline the way each of us, half a generation apart, have developed methodological approaches" (147) toward "an increasingly complex and interconnected world. . . . Our role then as ethnographers is to trace relations, make sense of the global

connections and flows, and indeed incommensurabilities between levels of scale as we encounter them" (161).

Chapter 8 focuses on the author's attempt at a reflexive examination of "anthropological life in, and now I daresay of, Japan" (171). It probes the anthropological Other and the realizations of how that might not fit with the reality of how the Other lives and how the researcher encountered it. It plays on probing the essentialist narratives that take for granted the less-than-bounded physical and social realities present in contemporary Japan, particularly as they relate to the economy of reinscribing "essential Japan," even with "forced or chosen cosmopolitan" realities that exist (187).

Chapters 9–11 are respectively located in India, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. They explore similar issues to chapters 2 and 4. The common thread is how they are written by women who rely on varying degrees of feminist anthropological framing to explore how identity, legitimacy, authority, and access are perpetually constrained and negotiated. The insights of these chapters build on the notion of becoming more reflexive and probing these moments of awkwardness and tension through the dynamism of the insider/outsider binary. In unique ways they provide insight into the implicit negotiations the researcher must manage, within oneself and explicitly with others, around gaming performativity and the perceived expectations of those they engaged with in the field. Adding to this is the fact that these women are mostly locals and insiders who studied and lived abroad and have typically returned "home" to conduct research. Thus, they had to contend with unintended and unforeseen issues around familial obligations or societal expectations while trying to do fieldwork. This leads to questioning one's loyalty, location, and identity. Chapter 10 provides a slightly more circuitous narrative to the field site through explicating the anxiety and insights gained by understanding the perceived values of context-dependent identities by being perceived as not so much the Other, but, let us say, Another.

Overall, I enjoyed reading this book. It made me think in new ways about new places and topics, all of which I can draw from. It has much value as a teaching resource, beyond anthropology and Asian studies.

Patrick McCartney
Nanzan Anthropological Institute

China

Edward A. Burger, Director.
The Mountain Path

2021. 93 minutes, color. $5.00 USD rental, $15.00 USD purchase. One Mind Productions. https://www.onemindproductions.com/themountainpath/

In the documentary *The Mountain Path*, director Edward A. Burger takes us along on his journey deep into the Zhongnan Mountains in China's Shaanxi province to find modern-day Buddhist hermits. Although the film is framed around his own search for guidance in the Dharma, the hermits take center stage, and he presents their narratives and teachings with minimal commentary. The result is a rich visual ethnography of a form of religious practice that many may have thought lost to China's tumultuous twentieth century or the more general advance of modernity.

Return to Table of Contents

The film opens with a shot of the mountains, highlighting a green landscape shrouded in mist before cutting to a monk working in a garden. This monk, we soon learn, is Burger's teacher, whom he calls *Shīfu*, a term of respect for Buddhist monks and nuns that can also be translated as "Master." The film sets the tone by beginning with one of his lessons: "Buddhist practice must begin with your actions. But the purpose of practice is to transform your mind. Change your consciousness. Change your way of seeing." Burger then tells us the story of how he, a young American, came to study Buddhism with a Chinese mountain hermit over twenty years ago. Narrated to a background of first urban then increasingly rural travel scenes, he talks about how reading Bill Porter's book *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits* (1993) inspired him to travel to China and seek out hermits himself. Once in China, he asked the monks and nuns he encountered whether they knew any hermits, before finally receiving directions to a hermitage in the Zhongnan Mountains where he met his teacher.

Although we learn the most about Burger's teacher, the film introduces us to other hermits on the mountain as well. They encounter one on a trail when they become lost, and he becomes their trail guide, directing them first to two ascetics in the valley who are building their huts. Later, he takes them to visit a Cantonese nun who established herself in a part of the mountains others thought was too bare and difficult, as well as an advanced practitioner whom Burger describes as "a hermit among hermits." Burger also travels to another part of the Zhongnan Mountains to visit an old master living in a remote hermitage with his disciples. In all these cases, scenes from their daily lives are interwoven with their teachings. We watch them source water from streams, add firewood to stoves, tend gardens and gather wild plants for food, cook meals, and meditate. The difficulties of such a life are not glossed over, but the hermits emphasize that living as a hermit in the Zhongnan Mountains is a good way to make progress in their Buddhist practice, helping them to, in *Shīfu*'s words, "cultivate stillness."

The film does a nice job challenging some of the stereotypes viewers may hold about hermits. For one, they are not all male; nuns can be hermits too. Another thing that the film makes clear is that although these individuals are hermits, they are not completely isolated; rather, they remain embedded in communities, be it monastic communities, local lay communities, or the community of fellow hermits. Early in the film, Burger's teacher makes clear that living in the mountains requires a foundation of training in monastic communities, saying

> If you can live in a big monastery and stay in the meditation hall for three, maybe five years, with that foundation there, you can live in the mountains. But you have to know how to practice. If you don't understand the methods of practice, in the mountains you'll go astray. And that's nothing but torture.

He makes the point that staying in the mountains is not a lifelong commitment for most of these hermits but is rather a stage of their practice that may last a period of five to ten years before they, presumably, return to their monastic communities. They also have interactions with local lay practitioners, who visit for teachings or to bring offerings, and they call upon and assist each other.

From a scholarly perspective, it would have been helpful to have a bit more concrete information about the timeframe of the filming. Burger tells us that he has been studying with his teacher for over twenty years, and we see a 2003–04 calendar behind *Shīfu* in one scene, but beyond that the film does not make clear whether all this footage was shot in

the early 2000s or over the intervening twenty years. If the footage is, in fact, all from the early 2000s, that naturally opens the question of if and how the hermit experience has changed since then, especially given the growth of both religion and domestic tourism as China's economy has continued to develop. The lack of Daoist hermits in the film is also noticeable, particularly given the Zhongnan Mountains' reputation as a refuge for both Buddhist and Daoist hermits, although the focus on Buddhists allows a depth that a more comprehensive film might struggle to achieve.

In short, this film provides rare insight into an understudied dimension of Chinese religious life, and it will be appreciated by scholars of Buddhism, religious studies, Chinese religions, and contemporary Chinese society, along with Buddhist practitioners. Although it does not provide a general introduction to Buddhism, it would be well suited to screenings in advanced undergraduate classes on these topics.

References

Porter, Bill. 1993. *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*. Berkeley: Counterpoint

Megan Rogers
Duke Kunshan University

Gonçalo Santos
Chinese Village Life Today: Building Families in an Age of Transition

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2021. 320 pages. Paperback, $30.00. ISBN 9780295747408.

The title of this book is misleadingly bland and uninformative. Even the subtitle reveals little of the riches within. *Chinese Village Life Today: Building Families in an Age of Transition* takes transformations in the life of a single rural Chinese community as a case study to explore issues relating to technocratic modernization and the increasing dominance under global capitalism of technoscience and technocratic expertise in the conduct and governance of family life. It is a complex, multifaceted ethnography, which sets the bar high for new studies of everyday life in twenty-first-century China.

The book has four main strengths. The first is the duration and richness of research on which it is based. Most recent book-length studies of Chinese village life draw on ethnographic research conducted over just a few years. In contrast, this book, which is Gonçalo Santos's first single-authored monograph, is based on an intensive fourteen months of research in villages in the northern Guangdong township of Yellow Flower in 1999–2001, followed by repeated research visits to the same villages in nine of the twelve years between 2005 and 2017. Furthermore, in addition to returning to Yellow Flower, Santos kept in touch with villagers who had left their village homes and visited them in their migrant homes in Guangzhou and other cities in the Pearl River Delta. Consequently, this book draws on longitudinal multi-sited rural-urban research conducted over a two-decade period. The resultant combination of a translocal focus with a wealth of detail about transformations over time is the book's main distinguishing feature.

The second strength relates to language. Santos's prior training and fluency in Cantonese, a sub-variety of which is the main language spoken in Yellow Flower, undoubtedly contributed to the wealth of his fieldwork findings. The inclusion in the

book of a discussion of language and orthography, as well as a glossary of Cantonese and Mandarin words, also adds to the book's riches.

The third strength is how the book weaves together detailed micro-histories of transformations in Chinese village life in the post-Mao reform period with broader macro-level histories. This strength is particularly evident in chapters 3 and 5, which focus on transformations in attitudes and practices surrounding childbirth and toilets, respectively. In these chapters, Santos analyzes how recent transformations in the most basic aspects of everyday village life are entangled in complex ways with much longer histories involving national and global shifts in and contestations over morality and understandings of civilization, technology, and modernity. For example, in chapter 5, he locates villagers' conflicting responses to the introduction of private flush toilets in relation to twentieth-century elite ambivalence and only very gradual reform of an imperial-era system of public hygiene involving public latrines and the collection of human excreta for use as fertilizer. This system was not discarded until the post-Mao period. But then, middle-class urbanites quickly embraced Western-style private flush toilets as emblematic of "civilization" and "modernity." In Yellow Flower, this new standard of "modernity" took hold in the late 1990s, but only with resistance, local adaptations, and variations among villagers. In the 2010s, some villagers continued to use communal latrines, saying that their own private flush toilets wasted water and were expensive to maintain.

A final strength of the book is the author's engagement with critical social theory and the work of other China scholars. Santos pulls in a whole plethora of concepts and conceptualizations, but two overlapping clusters of ideas form his starting point. The first relates to modernity and individualization. Much recent scholarship on China has been influenced by anthropologist Yan Yunxiang's claim that, as in other modern states, social relations in China have been transformed by individualization. Building on his previous critiques, Santos suggests in this book that the individualization paradigm is useful for its attention to everyday practices and individual agency, but it fails to capture the moral conflicts experienced by individuals and communities. In response, Santos turns to theoretical approaches that conceive modernity as a reconfiguration of social norms, involving contention, conflict, and negotiations between actors at both macro and micro levels. He focuses on how macro-level forces of change are mediated by micro-level "intimate choices" made through negotiations between individual members of Yellow Flower's families and kinship networks.

The second cluster of ideas framing this book relates to "technocratic governmentality." Here, Santos builds on Susan Greenhalgh's writing about China's family planning policies. In the 2000s, Greenhalgh broke away from the previously dominant narrative portraying the one-child policy as a key example of an authoritarian state's coercive control over citizens' private lives. From the 1990s, she argued, China's population governance increasingly involved market forces and a variety of nonstate actors. Contributing to this shift toward more indirect governance was the rise of normative discourses emphasizing the need for the cultivation and self-cultivation of population "quality" (*suzhi*). Greenhalgh and her co-author Edwin Winckler characterized these trends in terms of Foucauldian notions of "governmentalization" and "neoliberalization" (see Greenhalgh and Winckler 2005).

Santos is not comfortable with labeling China's state "neoliberal" or "neoliberalizing." Instead, he suggests we think of China as remaining a "civilization-state," bent on

promoting and defending a single Chinese way of life. This model, he suggests, helps to explain the efforts of each of China's leaders in the post-Mao period to make a new contribution to the construction of a "socialist civilization" that highlights science and technology, while retaining core Chinese characteristics.

At the same time, though, Santos retains Greenhalgh's pluralistic model of technocratic governmentality in post-Mao China. Thus, he argues that the civilizing mission to construct a socialist civilization with Chinese characteristics is not enacted by the Communist Party state alone. Instead, it involves a range of state and nonstate actors, including professional experts and institutions, such as hospitals, and communities and individual citizens themselves. Greenhalgh's discussions have mostly focused on how state and elite nonstate actors have discursively framed family planning in terms of science and the cultivation of a quality population. Santos, in contrast, takes a bottom-up approach, which highlights the moral agency of villagers and furthers an understanding of macro-level, civilizing, technocratic frameworks of power as being entangled with conflicts and negotiations at the micro level.

These two clusters of ideas are developed in conjunction with other ideas in each of the book's main chapters to different degrees, in different ways, and in relation to a variety of topics. The whole that emerges from the combination of these many moving parts is rich and thought-provoking. However, the book is less of a tightly knit cloth and more of a loose weave.

Chapters 2–4 are the core of the book. Each of these three chapters relates in some way to the building of families through marriage, childbirth, and parenting. The links among these chapters are clear, as is the link to the book's subtitle, with its focus on "building families," and the introduction, where family planning is first discussed. In each chapter, the focus is on intimate choices and the complex relationships between micro-level contestations and broader forces under modernity. Technology and technocratic governance also emerge as obvious themes, especially in chapter 2, in relation to technocratic family planning and the technologies of birth control, and in chapter 3, in relation to the high-tech medicalization of childbirth. The theme of technology is also carried into chapter 4, where Santos focuses on "technologies of multiple mothering" to refer to the "sociotechnical ensemble" involved in childcare arrangements.

After chapter 4 there is a major break, and chapters 5–6 depart from topics of marriage, childbirth, and parenting to discuss toilets and popular religion, respectively. These chapters are characterized by the same combination of ethnographic detail about micro-level intimate choices with broader macro-level theoretical and historical discussion as the previous ones. But the differences in topic, both between these chapters and previous ones and between chapters 5 and 6, are disconcerting. I suspect that many readers will feel that, despite obviously relating to important aspects of Chinese village life today, these last two chapters do not really fit in this book.

My own feeling is that the disjunctures could have been avoided and the book's discussion of "building families" enriched by referring to feminist theorizing around social reproduction, householding, and community economies. These overlapping bodies of theory reconceptualize or overcome the dichotomy between public production and private social and cultural reproduction. Many scholars have applied them in discussions of shifts in global capitalism around the world. In relation to contemporary China, they have fed into analyses of shifts in care work of the kind discussed in this book's chapter 4 (see Jacka 2018). They also have inspired discussion of the way in which a burgeoning

consumer capitalism in rural China has been accompanied by a resurgence in popular religion and ritual practices, the topic of chapter 6 (see Yang 2020). Given Santos's engagement with feminist debates about technology, it is curious that he does not also discuss this other strand of feminist theorizing, especially given how pertinent it is to the "building of families."

Aside from the awkward disjuncture between some chapters, there is also some unevenness in the quality of individual chapters in this book. To my mind, the weakest is chapter 6 on popular religion. Apart from being only tenuously linked with other parts of the book, this chapter is burdened with a mountain of technical detail, which neither contributes to the analysis nor thickens the description and feel of life in the villages of Yellow Flower.

At the other end of the spectrum, my favorite chapters are 3 and 5. These chapters offer insights into the high-tech medicalization of childbirth and the history of norms and practices around toilets and hygiene. These are fundamental aspects of everyday Chinese village life, but they have received relatively little attention in previous ethnographies. The skillful weaving together of micro- and macro-level historical transformations in these chapters makes for fascinating reading. And the balance between empirical detail and theoretically informed analysis is just right.

References

Greenhalgh, Susan, and Edwin A. Winckler. 2005. *Governing China's Population: From Leninist to Neoliberal Biopolitics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Jacka, Tamara. 2018. "Translocal Family Reproduction and Agrarian Change in China: A New Analytical Framework." *Journal of Peasant Studies* 45 (7): 1341–59.

Yang, Mayfair. 2020. *Re-Enchanting Modernity: Ritual Economy and Society in Wenzhou, China*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Tamara Jacka
Australian National University

Kenneth J. Yin
Dungan Folktales and Legends

New York: Peter Lang, 2021. 424 pages, 2 maps. Hardcover, $109.95; ebook, $109.95. ISBN 9781433187612 (hardcover), 9781433184116 (ebook).

This volume is an English translation of seventy-eight folk narratives assembled and translated into Russian under the title *Dunganskie narodnye skazki I predaniaa* (Dungan folktales and legends) by the revered Russian Sinologist Boris L. Rifkin (1932–2012) (known in Chinese as Li Fuqing), based on versions collected and translated from Dungan sources by Makhmud Akhemeddovich Khasanov and Il'ias Ismailovich Iuusupov (1977). The present volume, edited and translated into English by Kenneth J. Yin, is the first complete rendering of the collection in English. The folktales are associated with a people called the Dungans in Russia and parts of eastern Central Asia.

The Dungans are known as "Sinophone Muslims"—that is, Chinese-speaking Muslims—and also as the Hui, especially in China, where they are officially termed *Huizu* (Hui ethnic group). The Hui number over four million in China and have large communities

in northwest, southwest, and northeastern China, as well as elsewhere in the country. Chinese sources mention what appear to be Dungan/Hui peoples as early as the seventh century. The populations in Central Asia seem to have emigrated from China starting in the century, though the history and ethnic composition are still under debate by scholars, as indicated in the original introduction to this collection.

Of the seventy-eight narratives, seventy-three are attributed to "Dungans" and five to "Hui." The languages of the collected stories herein include stories in the spoken Dungan Gansu dialect (the majority of the stories), the spoken Shaanxi Dungan dialect (which is spoken in the eastern-central areas of Kyrgyzstan), and the Yunnan Hui dialect. Most of the tales were recorded in Cyrillic Dungan, a written medium used outside of China. The linguistic diversity of the project made the transliteration of names into Russian and Chinese Romanizations sometimes problematic, as explained by Yin (xv–xvi). An example of Dungan KNAB romanization, based on Gansu Dungan, is included in a riddle in "A Quick-Witted Boy" with the line "*Youli yige gounjidi dan*" (standard Chinese *pinyin* romanization: *yeyou yige gongjide dan*, or "and one rooster egg" in English) (239).

The book includes a short preface and notes on translation. Chapter 1, which is an introduction to "The Fictional World of the Dungan Tale," is based on the original introduction by Rifkin and Khansanov. The introduction provides background on the origins of the Dungan, migrations and present populations, language, and aspects of the stories, including the imagery of colors, numbers, place names, the theme of filial piety, religious symbolism, instances of words from other languages, and story themes and motifs, among others. It also includes a list of 216 sources (mostly Russian and Chinese) on Dungan folklore research and related subjects, ranging from the late nineteenth century to the 1970s. The bulk of the volume consists of three chapters of tales, titled: "Wonder Tales and Animal Tales," "Novelistic Tales, Folk Anecdotes, and Adventure Stories," and "Legends, Historical Tales, and Narratives." There are also four appendices (including a list of storytellers and information about the original collectors and editors), a glossary, and an index.

Chapter 2, on wonder tales, includes forty stories with supernatural content, many sharing themes and motifs with other folk literatures of northern China and parts of Central Asia. Several tales within this section share similarities. For example, "Zhon Dajie Shoots Pheasants" shares motifs of a young man marrying a daughter of the dragon king who emerges from a red gourd. Bringing good fortune to the honest young pheasant hunter who follows her instructions to the letter, the general pattern is similar to that of "The Red Bottle-Gourd," though in the second story, the sympathetic young man is abused by his mother-in-law. As explained in the notes, the red bottle gourd is a common feature in many Dungan homes and is associated with tales of how good fortune is gained by acting properly and keeping a good relation with the supernatural world. Other tales include transformational beings such as the "Frogling," a story about a frog adopted by an elderly couple who later transforms to a human and marries the emperor's daughter. However, she thoughtlessly throws away her handsome husband's frog skin, bringing disaster to the land. "The Snake Girl" is about a young man doing "business beyond the Great Wall" (141) who naively marries a snake demon in the form of a lovely young woman. And in "The Old Hunter," cunning fox fairies prevail over human adversaries. A favorite of Riftin's was "The White-Rabbit Girl." He considered the tale a "highly transformed" version of the classic "youth obtains divine wife" tale, which is told with emphasis on a young woman protagonist who transforms into a white rabbit and digs

herself out of the courtyard in which she has been cloistered after her fiancée, an old mullah, unexpectedly dies (30).

In chapter 3, among the "novelistic" tales similar to works of traditional vernacular fiction, are two concerning the "Mangy One," in which a "mangy" young man buys a dream of the sun, moon, and two stars from his better-looking workmate, and through a series of interactions with beautiful princesses—the second being a transformed dove from whom he stole her feathered cloak—winds up with two beautiful wives (the sun and moon) and two lovely children (stars) and reigns as emperor. As in the red bottle gourd stories, the young protagonist first fails to heed the advice of his female mentor but then accepts her aid. Other tales in this section include titles such as "The Man Who Was Afraid of His Wife," "The Seven Baldheads," "The Foolish Son-in-Law," and others that highlight foolish behavior and sometimes reveal social anxieties.

Chapter 4 contains legends of a number of Chinese historical characters, such Han Xin of the third century BCE , the Emperor Wendi of the Sui dynasty (581–604 CE), and Huang Tianba, a leader of the Yellow Turbans revolt near the fall of the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). These are all told as vernacular stories, with many incidents that sound much like story kernels of lengthy serial stories from professional storytelling (*shuoshu*) genres and plots of some late Imperial works of vernacular fiction. One outstanding example is "The Story of Xie Rengouy," or Xie Rengui (614–83 CE), which concerns a famous general in the Tang dynasty and is the subject of special study by Riftin. Other narratives are versions of famous Chinese tales such as "Yu Beiya Breaks the Zither" (*Yu Boya sui qin*). Another called "The Stranger" is set in "Hashi," which is the historical city of Kashgar in western Xinjiang. The tales in all three sections reflect the complex cultural mixings that took place among Dungan/Hui communities over many centuries, combining elements as distant as the Middle East and China.

In all, Kenneth J. Yin has presented the English-speaking world with an accessible volume of stories that were collected, translated, and edited by a constellation of cultural workers that included one of Russia's greatest Sinological folklorists. The volume offers a collection of tales that adds more data for comparisons of Asian folk narratives and contributes to a wider understanding of Dungan/Hui folk narrative and lore (Berezkin 2012, 267–68).

References

Berezkin, Rostislav. 2012."Academician Boris L'Vovich Riftin (1932–2012): The Extraordinary Life of a Brilliant Scholar." *CHINOPERL Papers* 31 (1): 259–72.

Rifkin, Boris L., ed. and trans. 1977. *Dunganskie narodnye skazki I predaniaa* [Dungan folktales and legends]. Compiled and translated by Makhmud Akhemeddovich Khasanov and Il'ias Ismailovich Iuusupov. Moscow: Glavnaia Redaktsiia Vostochnoi Litertury Izdatel'stva "Nauka."

Mark Bender
The Ohio State University

Adam Kielman
Sonic Mobilities: Producing Worlds in Southern China

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. 200 pages. Hardcover, $95.00; paperback, $27.50; ebook $26.99. ISBN 9780226817743 (hardcover), 9780226817804 (paperback), 9780226817798 (ebook).

Sonic Mobilities joins and contributes to a growing body of works that explore transnational musical flows, both contemporary and historical, in coastal China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong, such as Andrew Jones's *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (2001) and *Circuit Listening: Chinese Popular Music in the Global 1960s* (2020). Through an engaging examination of the lives, performances, and recordings of two bands based in Guangzhou, the book "theorizes musics on the move by examining the actual and vicarious mobilities inherent in cosmopolitan musical worlds" (14). In doing so, it highlights how such mobilities provide a balance between "local place-based identities," which "continue to be salient anchors in contemporary subjectivities" (12), and the "unmooring of music from place, nation, identity, and emplaced subjectivities" (13). The examples that emerge show how cosmopolitan musicians from different places in southern China fuse together genres and dialects from different places and groups of people to create new meanings and provide musical expressions for evolving identities. By looking at the different contexts through which the various meanings of the musics are produced, including the dialects in which songs are sung and the sonic infrastructures through which the songs are circulated, the book illustrates how these musicians perform poetic evocations of their hometowns while grappling with broader social issues related to China's rapid urban migration and other factors.

The book's author, Adam Kielman, brings a wealth of experience to this subject. As an ethnomusicologist, jazz saxophonist, recording engineer, and co-founder of the Guangzhou-based band San Duojiao that "blended musical traditions of the Bulang, Wa, Hani, Dai, and Lahu minorities with reggae, dub, jazz, and electronic music," Kielman has unique access to the people he writes about "as a fellow musician, recording engineer, and business partner" (20). Throughout the book, Kielman offers vivid evocations of places where "musicking" (cf. Small 1998) occurs, ranging from recording studios to small and large venues. Clearly positioning himself as a participant in the community of musicians, sound engineers, audiences, and businesses he describes, Kielman provides the reader with a unique vantage point into this world, allowing us access to many of the issues affecting its key players in the book's ethnographic present (*c.* 2014).

The book's introduction looks at broader issues of musical cosmopolitanism and ways that real and imagined mobilities allow people to rethink perceived connections between music and place. Set mainly in Guangzhou, a city with a rich history of witnessing mobilities in China's global interactions as it evolved "from a worldly metropolis in the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE) to the exclusive international port in the Qing Dynasty (1644–1912 CE) to a relatively liberal and open city at the heart of China's reforms beginning in the 1980s" (19), the book examines two bands that, according to Kielman, form part of "a broader cohort of musicians who have coalesced in China's third largest city over the past decade and who participate in a flourishing scene of independent music in southern China that has galvanized in recent years as an important counterpart to both the mainstream Chinese popular music industry and to well-received independent rock and folk scenes centered in Beijing" (3).

The first band, Wanju Chuanzhang ("Toy Captain"), "performs a self-described 'island mix' of poppy, Latin-infused music sung in Min subdialect spoken on Nan'ao Dao, a small island off the southeast coast of China" (3). Its members came to Guangzhou from rural Guangdong Province, Guizhou Province, and Nan'ao Dao. The second band, Mabang (frequently translated as "caravan"), is comprised of members from Guangdong, Guangxi, and Yunnan Provinces, who play "a blend of folk, rock, and reggae peppered with elements from folk musics of southern China and *caidiao* opera from Guangxi Province" (ibid.). Their songs, performed in a subdialect of Mandarin from the outskirts of Liuzhou, Guangxi Province, are "about local life in Guangxi, depicting country fairs, rural life, and song and dance" (ibid.). According to Kielman, Mabang's music "evokes China's southwest, borderlands, cosmopolitanisms, movement, masculinity, and depictions of ancient China" (28). The band's official bio suggests that it combines elements of southern Chinese folksongs, regional opera from Guangxi province in China's southwest, and "rock, reggae, ska, and other elements" to produce "a unique Southern branch world music" (33).

Chapter 2 builds on Kielman's unique access as a recording engineer and musician, along with a growing tradition of ethnographies of the recording studio, to look at the creative processes behind the recording, mixing, and production of Mabang's debut album and the evolving ways in which the band was promoted over time by its record company. Kielman's goal here is "to listen through the recording studio's control room to the interplay between structure and agency that permeates discussions around and enactments of musical genre in the popular music field in contemporary southern China and attend to the ways that such negotiations mediate broader constellations of cosmopolitanism, mobilities, space, and place" (25–26). In tracing the evolution of the band's identity, we see a fascinating shift from the band's earlier self-description as "folk" (*minyao*) (27) to the record label's later genre-framing as "Southern branch world music" (*Nanpai shijie yinyue*) (31). Kielman's technical knowledge as a recording engineer shines through in his ethnographically and technically detailed description of how Mabang's music was produced in the studio, with attention paid to the setup of the physical space, the hardware used, the positioning of microphones for the drums, the decisions involved in how the bass and vocals were recorded, and so on. Looking at the processes through which these myriad decisions were negotiated, the chapter shows how, rather than seeing record executives dominate the production and marketing of "world music" through a top-down approach, we instead see ways in which the conversations and disagreements between band members and record executives regarding marketing and musical/vocal aesthetics sometimes generated "new configurations of musical cosmopolitanism" (48).

Chapter 3 turns to the other band, Wanju Chuanzhang, looking at how their brand of "ocean folk" music (*haiyang minyao*) acts as "a form of cosmopolitan engagement with global island cultures wherein musical elements, timbres, rhythms, and stylistic conventions from reggae, salsa, flamenco, and other musics are resignified in creative ways that consciously attend to issues of mobility, space, and place" (52). Kielman argues that "Wanju Chuanzhang situates their music as expressive of both Nan'ao Island in particular and of a deterritorialized 'island and beach culture' in general" (55). He then does a careful musical and lyrical analysis of three of their songs—"Beach Party," "Mister Curlyhair," and "A Secret in the Bottom of the Incense Burner"—looking at how they negotiate themes ranging from romanticized portraits of beach life to darker critiques of "the personal and familial repercussion(s) of a neoliberalizing economy where migrant workers move far from home in search of economic opportunity" (60). Kielman concludes

the chapter by examining how the group's "ocean folk" music draws on and resignifies what they refer to as "Latin music" (*lading yinyue*), which, in their usage, connotes "a broad and porous assemblage that encompasses various Afro-Caribbean-derived popular musics traditionally associated with the English term *latin music* as well as Jamaican reggae and flamenco-pop fusions such as the Gypsy Kings" (66).

Chapter 4 looks at the cultural politics involved in several Guangzhou-based bands singing in dialects and languages that their audiences may or may not understand. Beginning with a description of a night's performances at a particular music venue, we see various examples of "the intersecting aesthetic and political dimensions of the use of *fangyan*—alternatively translated as dialects, local languages, or topolects" (69). Mabang performs songs in the southwestern subdialect of Mandarin (Guiliuhua) spoken in the singer's hometown Liuzhou, in Guangxi Province; Wanju Chuanzhang performs songs in the southern Min subdialect that is spoken on Nan'ao Island; a third band, San Duojiao, in which Kielman performs, sings songs in the Yunnan dialect of Mandarin as well as several minority languages from the region. Examining the use of such diverse languages, dialects, and topolects within China's contemporary politics of language, Kielman notes how such performances are often viewed as challenges to national linguistic hegemony, before ultimately concluding that "the use of dialects by these bands serves to express the local not as a particular place but as a nostalgic feeling of home connecting multiple locations and experiences in southern China through the cosmopolitan hub of Guangzhou" (79). The bands offer various opportunities for audiences to engage with the lyrics, whether through translated liner notes accompanying their recordings and booklets handed out during performances, or the use of "simple, repetitive language in a calculated linguistic tactic to make the dialect, and the local, comprehensible to a wider audience" (85). Audiences, in turn, choose how they want to engage with the lyrics, either attempting to decode them or just enjoying the texture of their musicality.

Chapters 5 and 6 look at the musical lives of the members of the two bands at the heart of the book—Mabang and Wanju Chuanzhang. Kielman's choice to include these two collections of band member biographies is an interesting approach that highlights the diversity of backgrounds and experiences that come together in these contemporary musical entities, while at the same time joining earlier Chinese popular music biographies that have tended to focus on individual artists, such as those detailed in Helen Rees's *Lives in Chinese Music* (2009) and Andrew F. Jones's *Like a Knife* (1992) and *Circuit Listening* (2020). As Kielman notes, "Examining musical lives in contemporary China means unraveling intersections of personal histories, national histories, cosmopolitan formations, and musical creativity," and those intersections highlight "the role of individual agency and expressive culture in broader cultural shifts and . . . the lived and subjective dimensions of cosmopolitanisms and mobilities that are self-reflexively grappled with in part through listening to and producing music" (92–93). Of particular note in the life stories that Kielman uncovers is the ways in which band members' listening to a variety of musics acted as "a form of vicarious mobility, where the auditory experience was intertwined with imagined travel" and led to actual movements, newly permitted following Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening Up," so that "vicarious mobility and actual mobility are woven together through their musical lives" (135). At the same time, Kielman is cognizant of the "stark contrasts in class backgrounds . . . that influenced the paths members traveled to becoming musicians in Guangzhou," showing how the

diverse experiences and backgrounds of these musicians "bring attention to the ways that geographic mobility intersects with class mobility" (132).

Chapter 7 looks at how different forms of media—socialist-era wired radio, cutout discs (*dakou die*, i.e., surplus CDs and other types of media) in the 1980s and 1990s, and so on—have affected ways in which music is consumed and heard. Kielman uses the term "sonic infrastructures" to capture the way in which "music changes alongside the mediums through which it travels" (140), referring to

> the technical infrastructures that transmit mediated sounds, from copper wires to compact discs to online platforms; the political systems that contextualize and promote certain sounds; the informal social relationships that bring musicians and listeners together in new places; the corporate relationships that seek to influence what is heard, where, when, and by whom; and even the high-speed railroads that transport musicians on tour (141).

Furthermore, he notes that these elements are nested within the economic, political, and cultural developments that China has experienced over the past fifty years. Having traced how these earlier forms of media influenced spatial forms of listening, Kielman then turns to an extended discussion of the sonic infrastructures involved in the distribution and promotion of these two bands' music by Xingwaixing Records. Detailing the record company's sublabel for independent bands Liuzhen Yinyue and the company's social networking site YYQ.com, Kielman argues that these infrastructures "build on and further enable actual and vicarious mobilities that connect smaller cities and rural areas to major urban centers" (157). In addition, he posits that there is a parallel between the translocal qualities of the musics themselves and the sonic infrastructures that transmit and support them. He writes, "In the case of each of the bands, the music itself articulates new modes of spatial belonging that are mirrored by the sonic infrastructures through which the music reaches listeners, modes that may broadly be termed *translocal*, implying a capacity to belong to multiple places and a mode of existence between places" (155).

As the author points out in the book's epilogue, this study, with its focus on southern, cosmopolitan, and transnational musics, adds to and extends previous literature on popular music in contemporary China, which has largely focused on rock music from Beijing and northern China, albeit with some exceptions, and "hegemony/resistance models and approaches from cultural studies in understanding music's relationship to state power" (164). Given the book's combination of ethnographic depth and theoretical breadth, it would make a welcome addition to undergraduate courses on Chinese popular music, world music, and those that examine the transnational flow of culture productions more broadly.

References

Jones, Andrew F. 1992. *Like a Knife: Ideology and Genre in Contemporary Chinese Popular Music*. Ithaca, NY: East Asia Program, Cornell University.

———. 2001. *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

———. 2020. *Circuit Listening: Chinese Popular Music in the Global 1960s*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Rees, Helen, ed. 2009. *Lives in Chinese Music*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Small, Christopher. 1998. *Musicking: The Meanings of Performing and Listening*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Levi S. Gibbs
Dartmouth College

Japan

Janine Anderson Sawada
Faith in Mount Fuji: The Rise of Independent Religion in Early Modern Japan

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 294 pages. Hardcover, $68.00; paperback, $28.00. ISBN 9780824887889 (hardcover), 9780824890469 (paperback).

Janine Anderson Sawada's monograph provides intriguing insights into the relation between popular religions, mountain asceticism, and new religions in the early modern period at Japan's most famous mountain. Mount Fuji was an object of worship and the destination of many pilgrimages by commoners from the nearby metropolis Edo (today's Tokyo) and villages throughout the country in Japan's early modern Edo period (1603–1867). These associations of worshippers are commonly referred to as Fuji confraternities, or *Fujikō* in Japanese. In her book, Anderson Sawada discusses the origins and early development of these groups, their material and ritual culture, and their unique religious views that included a frugal work ethic and novel ideas about women's spiritual roles at Fuji.

The religious culture of Mount Fuji has experienced significant attention in the past by scholars such as H. Byron Earhart (2011), who provided likely the most comprehensive historical overview of Mount Fuji's religious and cultural significance in his monograph *Mount Fuji: Icon of Japan*; Miyazaki Fumiko (2005), who has studied women's unique role in the Fuji movement; and Royall Tyler (1993), who also translated some of the primary sources referenced in Anderson Sawada's book. Anderson Sawada, whose previous research was on vernacular religious and intellectual movements in the transitional period from the Japanese early modern to modern periods, brings new and interesting trains of thought to the study of Mount Fuji. Her monograph combines a deep dive into the topic of Fuji confraternities based on primary sources with an understandable and entertaining writing style. This makes it perfect for both readers experienced in the fields of mountain asceticism and popular religions and readers new to the subject.

The book can be divided into two parts that discuss the *Fujikō* movement during different stages of its development under two of its most influential figures. The first part, consisting of chapters 1 and 2, discusses the late medieval origins of the confraternities surrounding the mountain ascetic Kakugyō Tōbutsu, who is often seen as the Fuji movement's founder. Chapter 1 discusses the general religious landscape in which the Fuji movement developed. Chapter 2 highlights one important aspect of the Fuji movement's material and ritual culture, paper talismans called *ominuki*, which facilitated the early growth of the confraternities through their usage in healing rituals.

The second part discusses the *Fujikō* in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries, when Jikigyō Miroku systematized and expanded their spiritual and sociopolitical views into a cohesive religious system. Chapter 3 introduces Jikigyō's

concept of a Fuji deity, whom he saw as a creator deity. Chapter 4 discusses the relation between religious views of frugality in the Fuji movement and the prayer rituals associated with the talisman economy. While the Fuji movement seemed to criticize the established modes of this economy in early modern Japan, as Anderson Sawada points out, in reality they are only criticizing the fact that people rely on other deities for salvation, instead of the creator deity of Mount Fuji, who would bring more direct benefits. This chapter was especially interesting in dispelling the misconception that religion and economy are two separate entities. As others have also pointed out, understanding the close relation between these two entities is essential in understanding Japanese religion (Reader and Tanabe 1998, 256). Lastly, chapter 5 discusses the reform efforts that arose in the Fuji movement, which tried to advise the Shogunate on the proper way to govern the country. Anderson Sawada argues that Jikigyō Miroku's suicide in 1733 was the culmination of these cries for reform. She therefore argues that his version of Fuji devotionalism also includes a sociopolitical aspect.

Interspersed throughout these chapters, Anderson Sawada discusses a wide range of different topics that include popular religions, mountain asceticism, and new religions. From my own academic background in the study of Japanese new religions, I thought that the parallels Anderson Sawada highlights between the early modern Fuji confraternities and new religions, which are usually thought to have emerged during the nineteenth century, were very important for the study of Japanese new religions. There has been a trend in this field to question the dichotomy between new and established religions, and Anderson Sawada's book provides an important case study in this discussion.

Including a plethora of approaches, such as material and ritual culture, and fields in one study would be an easy way to overwhelm the reader. However, Anderson Sawada manages to combine these viewpoints into one comprehensive picture of the early *Fujikō* movement. She has also shown in her previous monograph *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (Anderson Sawada 2004) that she is capable of effectively combining multiple themes in her research. Being able to utilize an interdisciplinary approach to research is an important skill that is especially valued in early twenty-first-century academia, and Anderson Sawada's book is a welcome example of how to do it.

That said, while her book works well as a guided tour on first reading, the inclusion of multiple themes and approaches can make the work difficult for later reference. The book sometimes lacks a clear sense of structure, jumping from one topic to the next. A good example of this is the section "Healing Practices in the Early Fuji Community" (69–76) in chapter 2. This section connects well with the previous section on talismans and showcases their usage in healing rituals but then turns into a general overview of the establishment of early Fuji communities midway through without any indication of this fact in the section's title or structure. The index somewhat remedies this structural flaw, and its usage while reading is therefore advisable.

Nonetheless, I can only warmly recommend Anderson Sawada's book to anyone interested in the religious culture of Mount Fuji or any of the book's broader themes, such as material culture, mountain asceticism, or new religions.

References

Anderson Sawada, Janine. 2004. *Practical Pursuits: Religion, Politics, and Personal Cultivation in Nineteenth-Century Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Earhart, H. Byron. 2011. *Mount Fuji: Icon of Japan*. Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press.

Miyazaki Fumiko. 2005. "Female Pilgrims and Mt. Fuji: Changing Perspectives on the Exclusion of Women." *Monumenta Nipponica* 60 (3): 339–91.

Reader, Ian, and George J. Tanabe. 1998. *Practically Religious: Worldly Benefits and the Common Religion of Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.

Tyler, Royall. 1993. "'The Book of the Great Practice': The Life of the Mt. Fuji Ascetic Kakugyō Tōbutsu Kū." *Asian Folklore Studies* 52 (2): 251–331.

Jan Frederik Hausmann
Kyushu University

Garrett L. Washington
Church Space and the Capital in Prewar Japan

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2022. 354 pages. Hardcover, $72.00; paperback, $30.00. ISBN: 9780824888862 (hardcover), 978082489178 (paperback).

Despite only 2 percent of the population identifying as Christian, the religion is pictured prominently in the soft culture of manga and in many of Japan's largest institutions, including its health care system, higher education, and government. *Church Space and the Capital in Prewar Japan* explains just how this came to be by focusing on four key Protestant churches in Tokyo over a half century from the 1870s to the 1920s. Garret L. Washington depicts four church communities that took advantage of the new capital of Tokyo and governmental changes instituted by the Meiji reformation to construct churches in key urban spaces attractive to Japan's political and academic elites. This began first with the Reinanzaka church in 1879, followed by the Bancho and Hongo churches of 1886, and finishing with the Fujimicho church in 1887. In a span of just over a decade, some of Japan's most prestigious Protestant names, including Ebina Danjo (1856–1937), Yokoi Tokio (1857–1927), Kozaki Hiromichi (1858–1938), and Uemura Masahisa (1857–1925), made their way from higher learning at the Doshisha in Kyoto to Tokyo's Tsukiji and Kojimachi wards. Their life stories intertwine with those of these church congregations in seven chapters, an introduction, and an epilogue.

Chapter 1 sets the stage for why the proximity of Tokyo was important to the promulgation of Christianity, only five years after it was banned. Instead of placing churches in the countryside, easily accessible urban spaces were chosen to attract students, bureaucrats, and businessmen. Chapter 2 explains how these pastors built their churches in Western and Japanese architectural styles, with large worship halls with moveable walls and chairs to cater to larger crowds. In these spaces, chapter 3 analyzes forty-five sermons in five themes such as "eyes ahead" (toward a Christian future), "brotherhood," "equality in theory," "gender equality in practice," and "Eastern morality" that shaped the discourse of these congregations. Sermons proved harder to be regulated than written text, making them ideal for these pastors to influence society. They did so in myriad ways, shows chapter 4, as Uemura critiqued Japan's occupation of Taiwan and Korea as being contradictory to the Christian idea of brotherhood (145),

while Ebina felt the country had a moral imperative to push its *bushido* spirit onto the rest of Asia (152).

Chapters 5–7 shift discussion from the pastors of these churches to their communities. The *enzetsukai* were public lectures hosted by experts from diverse fields of medicine, literature, psychology, science, and even Buddhist and Shinto philosophy. If physical attendance was difficult, those interested could learn about various issues in church journals that boasted wide readership. Other than famous speeches, church groups such as the *fujinkai* (elder women's society) and the *seinenkai* (youth organization) became important avenues the lay utilized for social action. At a time when it was illegal for women to participate in political assembly (185), these churches pushed the limits of equality between the sexes. Reinanzaka's elder women's society, for instance, was vocal in its opposition to prostitution and concubinage and fought for underprivileged urban children (191), and the youth society engaged in fundraising after disasters like the flooding of the Arakawa River in 1910 (197). The wide participation in these churches' activities shows that "belonging at church was not the same as belonging to the church" (203). In the end, parishioners and participants at these churches would go on to become some of Japan's most famous lawyers, judges, teachers, and nurses, who would help reform the country's education, public health, and criminal justice systems.

By the mid-1920s, the illustrious era of Protestantism came to an end with the Great Kanto Earthquake of 1923 that displaced 1.38 million Japanese and destroyed three of these four churches. By the time these edifices were rebuilt, wars in Asia were in full swing, punishing criticism toward the war effort with imprisonment or death. Public lectures and participation in church events were also severely scaled back. Rather than jeopardize losing the acceptance they fought hard to gain, these Christian congregations and the pastors that led them fell in line with the war effort until its end in 1945.

Overall, Washington's work makes an important contribution to Christianity in Japan by detailing the life work of some of its most notorious pastors and the mark they left on Japan. I must admit, even as a graduate of the Doshisha theology department myself, I knew few of the many names cited in this work. Thus, readers unfamiliar with the Meiji period of Japan or the history of Christianity in this east Asian country may find the lists of names and places daunting. Regardless, there are many rewards to be discovered as Washington brings the reader back a century to understand why Protestant Christianity continues to claim a larger influence in the present. There continues to be a veritable absence of Christian history written in English in this critical period of Japanese development, and for this reason alone the reader, whether academic or not, will not be disappointed. Unfortunately, it is probably such lack of research and readership that has contributed to the book's relatively costly price tag. Nevertheless, if one shops directly at the publisher's website they can find a much more reasonable cost in paperback, hopefully encouraging a wider circulation this book no doubt deserves.

Alec R. LeMay
Bunkyo University

North Korea

Sonia Ryang
Language and Truth in North Korea

Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2021. 238 pages. Hardcover, $80.00; paperback: $28.00. ISBN 9780824886288 (hardcover), 9780824888725 (paperback).

Sonia Ryang has authored an impressive corpus of books in the field of Korean studies, East Asian studies, and anthropology. Several of Ryang's books, such as *Writing Selves in Diaspora: Ethnography of Autobiographics of Korean Women in Japan* (2008), *Love in Modern Japan: Its Estrangement from Self, Sex, and Society* (2006), and *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity* (1997) have been helpful in courses on ethnography, diaspora, and Korean identities. In this, her most recent book, *Language and Truth in North Korea*, Ryang applies her unique perspective of having been educated in the North Korean–run schools in Japan. Ryang is one of the few anthropologists who work on North Korea and the Korean diaspora. She brings anthropological skills and methods to bear in this new book, which provides insights into truth and self in Kim Il Sung's North Korea. Ryang demonstrates a new approach to understanding truth and self in North Korea through a close reading of four textual domains—all of which, though heterogeneous, have contributed to consolidating a regime of truth in North Korea. The first textual domain is North Korea's literary purge (1950s–1960s), the second is the state-led linguistic reforms (1960s–1980s), the third constitutes stories from a People's Chronicle that testified to encounters with Kim Il Sung, and the fourth consists of the multivolume memoir of the leader himself.

The four core chapters of the book examine this vast and varied set of textual documents. What Ryang argues is that these texts don't just say something, they do something. In North Korea, they have "contributed to consolidating this regime of truth, making things that did not exist exist and creating a set of assumptions and shared understandings that are taken to be true" (22). These texts are written by various authors from various walks of life, and they testify to a North Korea that is held together by a regime of truth—more on this later—that may not exist in the real world, yet which gains power through belief.

Ryang explores how language builds power, truth, and self in North Korea. This is a complex and worthy examination. Through her careful analysis, her book brings into greater focus the heartbreak brought about by the loss of Kim Il Sung for the people of North Korea—particularly as it related to power, truth, and self. The heartbreak was due to the nation losing what they were instructed to believe was the most powerful relationship that formed the bedrock of life itself. Here we see a blending of the core themes in Sonia Ryang's work across many of her books: identity, self, language, truth, and love. In many ways, this is an essential book.

"Purge," chapter 1, examines the landscape of vanquished words and expressions—in this way Ryang uncovers a North Korea where the words of Kim Il Sung were one of many sources of authority—at times even less significant than Marx, Lenin, or Stalin. The end of the Korean War was a time of nationwide political consolidation; those who questioned Kim Il Sung were eliminated. "Purge" takes the debates that existed in the literary establishment at that time as its backdrop—the kind of language critics used

Return to Table of Contents

during that time in conforming to state-proclaimed truths. Here Ryang finds something unexpected: "the language of those who purged was not so far removed from that of those who were purged," and further that what was purged in the end was also, ultimately, literary criticism itself (23).

Chapter 2, "Words," looks at how North Korean vocabulary was standardized through authoritative publications during the years 1963–86. These texts demonstrate how linguistic authorities in North Korea corrected, unified, and enforced a lexicon guided by the Party. The aim of these publications was to produce a properly speaking citizen subject. Here, Ryang finds that these texts had the unexpected effect of removing emotion from language used to refer to the Great Leader, turning it into a "performative tool of linguistic correctness" (ibid.).

In chapter 3, "The Chronicle," we are introduced to a fascinating body of testimonies produced in North Korean society by people from all walks of life—these are the stories from the People's Chronicle. By dipping into several of these personal testimonies, Ryang brings to life the linguistic constructs and expressions used to depict Kim Il Sung and ordinary people's encounters with him. These encounters are depicted as profoundly touching, humane, and loving. She explains that these stories are personally emotional first and only secondarily ideological or political. The presentation of these testimonies demonstrates that convincingly. They read like religious conversion testimonies and are moving and touching. What Ryang takes from her analysis of these, however, is compelling. She writes, "the affect between the Great Leader and the people is relevant in the formation of the truth, authenticity, and self in North Korea" (24). The language used in these testimonies is simple but "intensely intimate" and "drawn from outside the vocabulary set that the state had clearly intended to be reserved for the purpose of revering the Great Leader" (ibid). This chapter captures the emotional connection felt by the people of North Korea toward Kim Il Sung. Ryang describes this as a "native truth," which creates a kind of affective relationship between the people and the leader.

Reaching the final core chapter, "The Memoirs," we find that these memoirs, said to be written by Kim Il Sung himself, depart from the formulaic language of truth. In Ryang's words, the memoir volumes "transgress almost all of the norms" examined in previous chapters of her book. Thus, the language of the memoirs is highly unusual. For the people, unification and standardization is the expectation, but for Kim Il Sung, linguistic reforms do not apply; classical idioms of Chinese origin appear, though Kim had ordered them gone decades before. Further, the memoirs pull back the curtain on Kim Il Sung, showing him as truly human: vulnerable, hesitant, worried, and sad. What Ryang identifies at this stage is that these memoirs, coexisting with other kinds of writing in North Korea, demonstrate that there are many discursive forms from which "strands of truth that branch out are then braided into the authentic existence of North Koreans" (25).

The four core chapters of the book are lucid and insightful. I can see myself assigning chapters in an upper-year course on Korean studies. However, the volume could have benefited from a more carefully crafted introduction and conclusion. Much of the writing in the introduction was opaque and confusing. This is regrettable, since I suspect readers may stop there and miss out on the valuable insights uncovered in the core chapters. The style of writing between the introduction/conclusion and these core chapters is quite distinct—the four chapters deal with empirical cases that are elaborated, whereas the introduction and conclusion deal with truth and power. While Ryang wrangles hundreds of texts masterfully in this book, unpacking countless valuable insights, the introduction

and conclusion are obscure and cryptic. Not only this, there is a misrepresentation of some literature in the field of Korean studies. As such, the introduction inspired concern about the carefulness with which the author would approach the material. For example, in her critique of the existing literature on North Korea, Ryang misrepresents my first book, claiming that I argue the inverse of what I actually argued, noting: "Alternatively, when defector recollections are assessed . . . people are aware of how deceptive the state is, that they want to leave, and that they resist the regime through the use of double-talk, in the sense that they say one thing but what they really mean is another (e.g., Fahy 2015)" (5–6). For the sake of my informants—and readers who may not yet have encountered my first book—it is important I clarify this error made by Ryang. *Marching through Suffering: Loss and Survival in North Korea* (Fahy 2015) found, among other things, that North Koreans who lived through the famine were often reluctant to leave their country. An entire chapter of the book, "The Life of Words," demonstrates that informants did not "resist the regime" through double-talk, as Ryang calls it. Rather, people used imaginative, sometimes hilarious, expressions to express their private sentiments about the difficulty of life; they used imaginative language in order to strategize about ways to survive (ibid., 84–107). Resisting the regime was unthinkable. This misunderstanding of a rather simple aspect in my own book leads me to wonder about how carefully Ryang consulted the primary texts in her study.

References

Ryang, Sonia. 1997. *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity*. Boulder: Westview Press.

———. 2006. *Love in Modern Japan: Its Estrangement from Self, Sex, and Society*. London: Routledge.

———. 2008. *Writing Selves in Diaspora: Ethnography of Autobiographics of Korean Women in Japan and the United States*. Lanham: Lexington Books.

Sandra Fahy
Carleton University

South Asia

Anugyan Nag and Spandan Bhattacharya, eds.
Tollygunge to Tollywood: The Bengali Film Industry Reimagined

Hyderabad and Delhi: Orient Blackswan, 2021. 228 pages. Paperback, INR760.00. ISBN 9789354420344.

Tollygunge to Tollywood: The Bengali Film Industry Reimagined, as explained in the introduction, attempts to address the evolution of the Bengali film industry in the post-liberalization period known as "Tollywood." The clear and precise explication of the larger changes taking place within the Bengali film industry and how it underwent a radical transformation emerging from the former "Tollygunge" to "Tollywood" is certainly the strength of this book. The book's content is primarily collated from press, industry reports, and conversations with industry insiders, including producers, directors, distributors, and exhibitors. This content is then methodically analyzed to

Return to Table of Contents

look into the Bengali film industry's evolution as an entertainment and culture industry. The convergence of media together with the role played by the industrial landscape of the Bengali film industry, including corporatization of film production, as well as the emergence of celebrity culture, innovative marketing, and promotional strategies, played a crucial role in its reshaping.

The structure of the book is clear, starting with the transition of the Bengali film industry in the 1970s and then situating it in the larger context of the post-resurgence in the 2000s. Each chapter covers multiple aspects of this transition, unfolding various layers operating within and outside the film industry that ultimately resulted in the establishment of Tollywood. Nag and Bhattacharya begin their analysis by demonstrating the "crisis narrative" of Bengali cinema and how the industry—which had been struggling since the death of actor-superstar Uttam Kumar—was commercially revived by "masala" ("spicy" commercial elements) films or "formula" films, which comprised elements borrowed from Hindi cinema aesthetics. The Bengali film industry was at an all-time low when Anjan Chowdhury released his film *Shatru* ("Adversary") in 1984. A standout example of formula films, *Shatru* borrowed elements from Bombay films, overturning the industry's *bhadralok* (the educated Bengali middle class) orientation to generate an entirely new audience base connected to the more subaltern groups. The authors highlight the whole process of this reemergence, extending from individual filmmakers to the evolution of Shree Venkatesh Films (SVF), founded in 1995 by Shrikant Mehta and Mahendra Soni, which gradually established itself as one of the most powerful corporatized production houses of Tollywood, and how Tollywood began to change gradually as the system of production and exhibition of films transformed.

Nag and Bhattacharya's approach provides a blueprint for how other film historians could use this highly specific historical and cinematic source to engage in broader arguments about cinematic studies in other regional film industries in India. The authors deftly examine the relation between the culturally, socially, and politically evolving Calcutta of the mid-1900s and the television industry's rising popularity, discussing its impact on the Tollygunge film industry. While the distinction between art/parallel and mainstream/commercial cinema is often debated, Nag and Bhattacharya critically discuss how this binary unfolded differently in the post-liberalization period. The period from the 1980s to 1990s witnessed intense public discourse about the differences between the Bengali *bhadralok* class and mainstream commercial cinema. This discourse became further complicated during the post-liberalization period, when the dividing lines between rural and urban locales were gradually blurring in Bengal and elsewhere in India. Tracing further, the book discusses how Bengali cinema saw a resurgence with the advent of multiplex theater in the 2000s, which not only changed the appearance of film viewing but also created a space for films that were experimental and catered to a niche audience. Rituparno Ghosh's *Chokher Bali* in 2003 was the first Bengali film that was screened at the Inox multiplex, which met with critical reviews and a positive box office reception.

Nag and Bhattacharya lay out a persuasive argument about how the film industry went through further changes following newer groups of producers and directors, and new types of film production, distribution, and exhibition. The rise of new stardom was now conceived and circulated through TV, radio, and the print media, and later, through new media boosted by the internet and the cyber world. Satellite TV boosted the Bengali film industry in the mid-1990s after *Zee Bangla* was launched. Privately owned Bengali-

language satellite TV channels, including *ETV Bangla*, *Akash Bangla*, *Tara Muzic*, *Sangeet Bangla*, *Str Jalsha*, *Sony Aath*, and *Ruposhi Bangla*, were broadcasting into Bengali homes; among these, almost all incorporated film-based content in their TV programming in West Bengal. This was followed by the entry of FM broadcasting in Kolkata. Unlike public service providers, stations like *Amar FM*, *Friends FM*, *Big FM*, *Red FM*, and so on did not merely air *Rabindra Sangeet* (songs composed by Rabindranath Tagore) but also provided a new range of programs, including contemporary hit music from the Bengali film and entertainment industry. Furthermore, digital media such as the launch of film websites, fan club webpages, individual websites, Facebook pages, Twitter handles, and Instagram accounts of actors resulted in wide presence in the public discourse; more recently, the rise of OTT (over-the-top) and application-based digital platforms for content production and dissemination played a significant role. Gradually, the press discourse and discussions related to the post-1980s "crisis narrative" began to shift toward a more celebratory discourse regarding the overall improvement of the Bengali film industry. Thus, what this book does is delve into how the media—both old media (TV, radio, and press) and new media (internet and online platforms)—allied with the Tollywood fraternity and symbolically formed a nexus that overlapped and converged to aid Bengali cinema's resurgence.

The book's analytical thrust provides a refreshing outlook into the widely studied industrial changes and dynamics that enable the construction of Tollywood in the public sphere and in media discourses and paves the way for further future research—for example, an even more systematic study of political and social implications of this cinematic transformation, or bringing the analysis to include more recent work on the Bengali film industry alongside the geo-televisual aesthetic in the age of new media.

Nilakshi Goswami
Girijananda Chowdhury University

Leela Fernandes
Governing Water in India: Inequality, Reform, and the State

Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2022. Xiii+282 pages. Paperback, $32.00. ISBN 9780295750439.

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, "decentralization" and "privatization" have been the central principles guiding water reform in many countries of the Global South. The question of how these agendas turned out in practice in India has been under-researched. Has the private sector managed to displace the state in water governance since the onset of reforms? How decentralized has water governance become? Leela Fernandes's book *Governing Water in India* answers some of these questions. The book points out that, judged by the yardsticks of increased private participation and the extent of decentralization, the Indian water reform efforts were a spectacular failure. Private capital has hardly made any direct inroads in water management in India. According to the World Bank's own estimate, by the end of the first decade of reforms, the water sector accounted for only 5 percent of total private investment in infrastructure (73). Meanwhile, the process of decentralization, quite contrary to its purported aims, has led to state centralization and an exacerbation of inequalities in access to water. At best, the reforms have served to redistribute institutional power within India's water bureaucracy, offering greater control over the resource to some state institutions such as the water

utilities of large cities at the expense of less endowed urban and rural entities. These changes, the book contends, must be understood as a process of interaction between the historical legacies of water bureaucracies and the imperatives created by the dominant model of economic growth in post-liberalization India. In this sense, the relationship between the state and private capital remains important for the governance of water, albeit only indirectly.

Tamil Nadu's water bureaucracy provides the case for the book, and the arguments are elaborated over five empirically rich chapters that bring out in a compelling fashion the complex and contradictory impulses generated by the process of water reform. In doing this, the work makes a very important contribution to the scholarship on global water reforms by broadening its empirical focus to include both urban and rural uses of water and the study of the post-liberalization Indian state more generally.

The move toward enacting institutional reforms began under the aegis of the World Bank in the 1980s, a time when water governance in the country was a fragmented institutional field. The postcolonial developmental state did not have the levers for absolute centralization of water at an all-India level, and centralization had instead taken place at the level of state governments. The Public Works Department (PWD) was the main repository of centralized state authority on water, itself a legacy of the institutional advocacy of the colonial-era irrigation bureaucracy. The unraveling of the reform process reconfigured the relationships of control at both the central and state levels. If anything, far from a withdrawal of the state, there was increased activity. As Fernandes rightly points out, the emergence of the first national water policy in India itself can be traced to the onset of such reforms in the 1980s (82). By making infrastructure financing conditional on reforming local water governance, the central government also emerged in the subsequent decades as an important driver of the reform process. Indeed, the reform rhetoric of "decentralization" has only gone hand in hand with the increased reliance of local bodies on intergovernmental financing (85). In Fernandes's own words, "the Bank's model of reform has itself produced key nodal points that facilitate the state's centralization of water resources" (81).

State centralization continues at the subnational level too and is chiefly driven by the imperatives of India's new economic policies to promote investment in new industries, and the resultant pressures of urbanization. This has resulted in greater competition between different Indian states for water resources on the one hand, as well as between different uses of water on the other. This is amply brought out through the examination of the role of Tamil Nadu's water bureaucracy in three instances of water sharing with neighboring states of Karnataka (Cauvery dispute), Andhra Pradesh (the Krishna project), and Kerala (the Mullaperiyar Dam) (chapter 3), while the urbanization of water governance is analyzed through the working of the Chennai metro water and sewerage board (chapter 4), which now regulates water resources beyond the territorial limits of the city into the peri-urban areas. Through these cases, Fernandes highlights how both reforms and the regulatory gaps they have entailed at different levels create space for state centralization, while also promoting the emergence of institutions such as water markets and water mafias, as in the case of Chennai. The key message from the book is that, when it comes to water, state centralization happens at multiple spatial scales, and therein lies the key to understanding the complex and contradictory processes of contemporary water governance in India.

Fernandes's work also brings out the limits to bureaucratic agency in water governance, moving beyond commonly held assumptions that Indian water bureaucrats are essentially corrupt and inefficient. For instance, the Water Resources Organization of the Tamil Nadu PWD has had a clear diagnosis of how unplanned urban development was affecting water resources at least since the 1990s but has often found itself helpless in the face of an economic model that privileges lucrative urban development (151–52). Similarly, the book also draws attention to the crucial dimension of how the bureaucracies (both the PWD and the Chennai metro water) have themselves been victims of retrenchments and staff reductions over the reform period (175), creating thereby a space for the greater involvement of the private sector.

In thus providing a convincing analysis of water governance that seamlessly traverses the urban-rural divide in a historically sensitive way, Fernandes's book provides the right balance of complexity and coherence that an undertaking of this magnitude requires. If the work had addressed how concerns around water pollution, water quality, and wastewater management are implicated in these processes, the work would have been richer, and its contemporary relevance greater. This book would be extremely useful for a wide range of social scientists and humanities scholars interested in water, and to political scientists, and sociologists interested in understanding the post-liberalization Indian state. Beyond academics, policy analysts and advocacy groups would gain fresh ways of thinking about the governance of water from reading the book.

Viswanathan Venkataraman
King's College London

Aniket De
The Boundary of Laughter: Popular Performances across Borders in South Asia
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021. 272 pages. Hardcover, £60.00. ISBN 9780190131494.

The *Boundary of Laughter* offers a rich, interdisciplinary study of a folk theater genre called Gambhira. In pre-partitioned Malda, North Bengal, Gambhira was performed in accordance with a ritual calendar, in rural shrines and fields, in the form of a dialogue between Shiva and the peasants. The actors addressed their complaints to the god, bargaining for a better life, and in the process brought up broader social issues. With British colonial censorship, the influence of anticolonial Swadeshi ideas, and the formation of new nation-states, the fate of Gambhira took rapid turns. Aniket De guides readers through the changing history of ideas around Gambhira and its politics of cultural representation from pre-partitioned Bengal until the present day. The diverse time periods and themes are connected through a theoretical *fil rouge*: the notion of a "shared space" as distinct from "territory."

Territory is space controlled by government authorities, institutions of surveillance, and infrastructures of the nation-state, like the barbed-wire lines and checkposts at the India-Bangladesh border. Building upon geographers like Doreen Massey, De understands space as fluid and constantly reshaped. He suggests that Gambhira is a shared space that persists with resilience despite the rigidization of international borders. The space of Gambhira is shared between Hindu and Muslim audiences, with performers and participants spanning across the spatio-temporal Radcliffe Line. Gambhira is inherently open to change, incorporating many innovations; yet it remains shared among a peasant

Return to Table of Contents

class connected by experiences, daily struggles, and common ethics. De is able to analyze this space without romanticizing it. He is not trying to hide tensions to make us believe in a flattened, neutral space of interfaith harmony. He is recovering a story that got lost under the weight of the hegemonic narrative of communalism and nationalist understandings of heritage.

This book argues that Hindu-Muslim communalism and rigid binaries between Indian and Bangladeshi nation-states cannot do justice to the reality of Gambhira, which remains an irreverently shared space across South Asian borders. The story of Gambhira and its performers urges us to avoid seeing all cultural histories and social relations through the lens of nation-states. Gambhira performers, who are simultaneously actors, composers, and cultural mediators, have shaped a popular political space on their own terms, autonomous from, if not transgressing, elite discourses and urban centers of power.

In chapter 1, "Chronicles of a Toiling God," De explains that the ethics and aesthetics of Gambhira are based on *dardām*, bargaining: a common ground for all peasant communities. Based on the political economy of labor and labor migration in the region of Malda, an interethnic class solidarity is staged through bargaining with Shiva, which reflects the farmers' need to bargain with landlords and moneylenders. The politics and poetics of bargaining, together with a shared spatial imagination—riverine movement upstream and downstream, to access resources of a shared production environment—constitute the common denominator that enables Gambhira to reconcile differences.

Previously imagined by educated elites as a space of the *choṭalok*, the disrespectable and unsophisticated low classes, in the Swadeshi period nationalist intellectuals recovered Gambhira as a form of political theater to spread anticolonial ideas to the masses (chapter 2). Showing dexterity in connecting his specific case study to the larger history of folklore in Bengal, Aniket De presents the ways Gambhira was documented, promoted, or disregarded, following the intellectual agenda of a gentlemanly elite of *bhadralok* scholars and political leaders. While most scholarship on these topics is centered on Calcutta, where *bhadralok* folklorists idealized the Bengali countryside in their search for cultural authenticity, De gives attention to the intellectuals of the *mofussil*, conversant with modern Western education but also with local dialects and regional traditions. These figures include Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1887–1949), whose work had a profound impact on the conventions of the performance and on its public reception, and a plethora of composers of Gambhira songs and plays, whose works often remain unpublished.

With a spotlight on performers like Govinda Seth and their songs, chapter 3 shows how Gambhira came to be feared by colonial authorities as a social weapon. Over the 1920s and 1930s, Gambhira performers developed a popular political space that transcended religious differences at a time of crystallization of Hindu-Muslim identity politics. As numerous interlocutors explained, Gambhira is not about religion and has little to do with being Muslim or worshiping Shiva: it is about pointing out wrongs and setting them on the right course (134).

The last chapters, "Divided States, Shared Songs" and "Economies of Expression," follow the transformations of Gambhira and the fate of its performers from the Partition of India (1947) until the present. The most striking change was introduced by the famous Gambhira master Muhammad Sufi, who recast Gambhira as a dialogue between two Muslim peasants, a grandpa (*nānā*) and his grandson (*nāti*), both donning a *luṅgi* and a conical hat, like agricultural laborers.

As one interlocutor observed, the relationship with one's grandparents is lighthearted and playful; while respected as an elder, one can crack jokes with them. De reads this innovation as a remarkable act of translation, replicating social implications, spheres of authority, and, most importantly, the space for bargaining (*dardām*). While most Indian scholars dismissed the form of Gambhira that developed in East Pakistan as a Muslim or secular counterpart of an authentically Hindu or Buddhist tradition, De suggests that the reconfiguration of Gambhira after Partition, presenting a peasant elder in place of Shiva, is an act of care: a matter of being sensitive toward one's neighbors, making both Hindu and Muslim communities feel welcomed and included. For a nation that has been infamously unsafe for its religious minorities, this is no little accomplishment.

While Gambhira remains a shared social space, "created by social interrelations [that] could not simply be overwritten by national territory" (152), its representation and sponsorship in the two new nation-states followed different trajectories. In Bangladesh, Gambhira became a national tradition, broadcast on television and enjoying state patronage. This brought a more cooperative relationship with the state, at the expense of older patterns of bluntly attacking structures of power. In India, Gambhira remained a local tradition of Malda, far from the aesthetic regime of staged folklore catering to urban audiences. The key moment of this divergence was 1971, when Bangladesh emerged as an independent nation after the Liberation War, and the affective border between East and West Bengal had left all porousness behind.

The last chapter shows how the business of folklore in India and Bangladesh unfolded in accordance with the intellectual and financial interests of a number of parties invested in the commodification of Gambhira: nation-state institutions for the preservation and study of folklore (e.g., Bangla Academy in Dhaka); private corporations; NGOs, constituting an unregulated parallel state in contemporary Bangladesh; and the work of Bengali folklore scholars.

Bangladeshi folklorists represented Gambhira as a secular and progressive theater form, free from the obscurantist clutches of (Hindu) religion. NGOs recruited Gambhira artists for their social awareness campaigns, imposing their own topics, scripts, and, at times, even costumes. This patronage has created new hierarchies between performers, producing fractures within existing troupes. In Chapai, where De has conducted most of his fieldwork on the Bangladeshi side of the border, the author found that NGOs and state-salaried folklorists have glorified the tradition while neglecting its performers, treating them as contract laborers and appropriating their songs as merchandise (198). Indian folklore scholars, instead, put emphasis on the antiquity of the tradition and on the Hindu-Buddhist heritage of Bengal. With their works written in Bengali and widely distributed through affordable local publications, Bengali folklorists' discourses had a tremendous impact in shaping local understandings of Gambhira.

The epilogue opens with an oral commentary by Gambhira performers on a tragic piece of news: a singer hung himself in Jalpaiguri (North Bengal), terrorized about the news of a potential all-India NRC (National Register of Citizens) operation. The NRC operation in Assam, with its list of legitimate citizens released in August 2019, has been a horror for Bengali citizens, particularly for the poor, nonliterate, and landless. In the midst of new fears of statelessness, the anxieties raised by the nonsecular Citizenship Amendment Act, and the Hinduization of Indian politics, the author reiterates that Gambhira has shaped a shared space to articulate an alternative notion of belongingness

across communal and national lines, even at a time when legislation and political leaders have hardened those lines.

This book fills a tremendous gap. While literature on Partition is vast, and there is an abundance of studies on refugees, the state, and the cultural history of Bengal, these bodies of scholarly literature add little to our understanding of how borders are interpreted and negotiated by borderland people, or how postcolonial borders have reshaped cultural traditions from below, changing the landscape of verbal arts and performance genres. The impact of Partition-induced migration and national boundaries on regional musical schools, tunes, performances, and artists' lives is still underexplored (see Nakatani 2011; Ayyagari 2012; NDTV 2017; Basu 2019; Bhoumik 2022; The Travelling Archive 2023). *The Boundary of Laughter* is remarkable for its foregrounding of people's understandings of a cross-border tradition and their ways of mobilizing a shared heritage.

Furthermore, Aniket De gives attention to a little-studied region split by postcolonial borders (Malda, northern Bengal). He does so by conducting fieldwork on both sides of the national border, spending time and traveling with contemporary performers, attending numerous performances, but also digging out unwritten biographies and unpublished notebooks of past performers. Something to be appreciated throughout the book is the awareness about the researcher's positionality in the field. Time and again, the author's voice appears to express self-reflection and to question his own bias and his motives, showing a commendable sincerity and respect toward the cultural owners of the tradition he studied.

The book is animated by a constellation of original verses, jokes, and rhymes collected from the manuscripts and stages of Gambhira artists, carefully selected, beautifully translated, and transliterated from their Bengali original. In addition to colorful fieldwork notes and ethnographic anecdotes, the author also delights us with some unique photographic documentation. A refreshingly mixed methodology, combining the toolboxes of the historian and the ethnographer, makes Gambhira come to life not only through a literary analysis of performance texts but also through accounts of composers and their homes, backstage chats, and visits to archeological sites, where performers provide their own interpretations on such icons of national patrimony.

The appetite for the sounds, voices, and sensory dimensions of the Gambhira performative arena is stimulated by the author's prose, to the extent that readers may wonder why fieldwork recordings and audiovisual samples were not part of the publication project. This might be a question for the publishers, often recalcitrant to enrich texts with multimedia components, rather than for the author.

The question of whether the recent welfare scheme for folk artists implemented by the Trinamool government in West Bengal has affected Gambhira performers remains to be addressed (see Department of Information & Cultural Affairs 2019). In 2019 there were 2,300 enlisted and certified "folk artists" in Malda, as beneficiaries of the governmental scheme "Lokprasār Prakalpa." How many of them are Gambhira artists? What do they gain from their "folk artist identity card" in terms of status, legal protection, and economic security? What is the impact and the compromise in their freedom to laugh at structures of power? This discussion is not something critically missing from the already overwhelming amount of detail and depth of information presented in the book but rather a personal curiosity, awaiting follow-up papers on the topics that the book could not include.

In general, this book is an interesting read for scholars of Bengali cultural history, folklore and performance traditions, South Asian borderlands, and Partition scholars. Clear and concise language; vivid depictions of places, people, and performance settings; and amazing ethnographic vignettes make this book accessible also for students of South Asian studies.

With its focus on popular theater, Aniket De offers a stimulating approach to Hindu-Muslim collaboration and everyday solidarity. While many have discussed the shared space of devotion in Bengali religious syncretism and cross-sectarian faith (e.g., Stewart 1995, 2001; Jalais 2010) and the shared Dalit-Muslim space of an agriculturist class solidarity in the form of organized party politics (e.g., Sen 2018), the irreverent space of Gambhira emerges through the entertaining, as much as political, power of laughter.

References

Ayyagari, Shalini. 2012. "Spaces Betwixt and Between: Musical Borderlands and the Manganiyar Musicians of Rajasthan." *Asian Music* 43 (1): 3–33.

Basu, Priyanka. 2019. "An 'Authentic' Performance? The Cultural Politics of 'Folk' in Bengal and Bangladesh." *South Asian History and Culture* 10 (3): 239–94.

Bhoumik, Moushumi. 2022. "Songs of Crossings: Searching for Ways of Listening to Arnold Bake's 1934 Recordings of Sailors from Bengal." In *Centering Borders in Latin America and South Asian Contexts*, edited by Debaroti Chakraborty, Debra A. Castillo, and Kavita Panjabi, 153–77. London: Routledge.

Department of Information & Cultural Affairs, Government of West Bengal. 2019. "Lokprasār Prakalpa." *West Bengal State Portal*. https://wb.gov.in/government-schemes-details-lokprasar.aspx

Jalais, Annu. 2010. *Forest of Tigers: People, Politics and Environment in the Sunderbans*. London: Routledge.

Nakatani, Tetsuya. 2011. "Partition Refugees on Borders: Assimilation in West Bengal." In *Minorities and the State: Changing Social and Political Landscape of Bengal*, edited by Abhijit Dasgupta, Masahiko Togawa, Abul Barkat, 66–87. New Delhi and Tokyo: Sage.

NDTV. 2017. *Partition Notes: Memory in Music*. Documentary film. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oU2cUMQ7xO4

Sen, Dwaipayan. 2018. *The Decline of the Caste Question: Jogendranath Mandal and the Defeat of Dalit Politics in Bengal*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Stewart, Tony. 1995. "Satya Pir: Muslim Holy Man and Hindu God." In *Religions of India in Practice*, edited by Donald S. Lopez, 578–97. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

———. 2001. "In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Hindu Muslim Encounter through Translation Theory." *History of Religions* 40 (3): 260–87.

The Travelling Archive. 2023. https://www.thetravellingarchive.org/home/

Carola Lorea
University of Tübingen

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen, Sheedi Yaqoob Qambrani, Aliya Iqbal Naqvi, and Hasan Ali Khan
Africans in Pakistan

Trenton: Africa World Press, 2022. Xxiv+191 pages, 60 photographs. Paperback, $24.95. ISBN 9781569027967.

The descendants of Africans living in South Asia provide an instructive counterpoint to the many castes and tribes that make up the region's traditional social structure. Most often termed "Shidis," members of this diasporic community subsist on the economic and societal margins as what might be termed "perpetual foreigners," despite their Indian or Pakistani citizenship. The author of *Africans in Pakistan* hopes to right the historical record and acquaint readers with a misunderstood minority he has come to admire deeply.

Jürgen Wasim Frembgen is an anthropologist who specializes in the indigenous folk Islam of Pakistan. His engagement with Sufism, both scholarly and personal, has permitted fruitful interactions with the Afro-Pakistanis of coastal Sindh and Balochistan. Most of the estimated three-hundred-thousand-strong community lives in this southern part of the country, where Sufism, widely practiced across the social spectrum, is the predominant form of Islam. Frembgen has invited three co-authors to contribute their perspectives to his in-depth study: the Shīdī activist and political leader Yaqoob Qambrani, and historians Aliya Iqbal Naqvi and Hasan Ali Khan.

The author's objectives in writing his monograph, stated at the outset (xii) and reiterated on its final page, are not only to educate scholars about Afro-Pakistanis but, more crucially, to muster recognition and respect for them while "foster[ing] their cultural self-esteem" (169). This two-pronged approach, combining ethnographic enquiry with concern for social justice, can at times confuse the reader. In any case, Frembgen takes us along on his initial impromptu meeting with group members at the *ʿurs* (death commemoration) of Pakistan's best-known Sufi saint, the thirteenth-century Laʿl Shahbaz Qalandar. Here in Sehwan, on a sweltering July day in 2010, the ethnographer encounters a company of dark-skinned pilgrims and listens to them play their footed drum, the *muggarmān*. In its bass voice and complex rhythms he seems to hear the voice of an African past (xvii–xix). Intrigued, he determines to learn more about this ethnic minority.

The book's opening chapter familiarizes us with the widespread prejudice African-descended Pakistanis face, tying these negative perceptions to historical views of the "dark-skinned Other" on the subcontinent and, for comparative purposes, in Europe and the Middle East. Chapter 2 addresses the several ethnic categories of Afro-Pakistanis, most of which have resulted from intermarriage with Baloch and Sindhi tribes, and pinpoints where these populations are concentrated (primarily in Karachi). A dizzying array of ethnonyms evolved to define the subgroups, but most of the names and labels have been turned against the unfortunate Africans in order to disparage them. The second chapter also introduces some measures that the Shīdīs and related communities have taken to try and raise their status, including linking their lineages to African ancestor saints and to individuals mentioned in the Qur'an.

The historical record is analyzed, using both standard and ethnohistorical approaches, in chapter 3. The author draws upon archaeology and conventional accounts but is more interested in what some might consider dubious sources like legends and oral

Return to Table of Contents

traditions. He proffers a stirring defense of memory and orality for retrieving the saga of subcontinental Africans, reminding us that history is never truly objective, and the written word is not less susceptible to "fictive reconstruction [or] . . . nationalist claims" than are recollections passed down through successive generations (64–65). Following a consideration of early contacts in the region, he passes the torch to his historian co-authors for an account of the late-ninth-century Zanj Rebellion and its overflow of East African rebels from Basra to Makran (45–47). Frembgen then continues his narrative, tackling the primary driver of migration from Africa—the slave trade—and addressing the role of African servitude in South Asia's military, seafaring, and domestic economies. Sindh's counterpart to the famed Deccani slave-turned-Prime Minister Malik Ambar (1548–1626) was Hosh Muhammad Shīdī, who became an Afro-Pakistani hero when he was martyred defending Talpur rule against the 1843 British annexation. Here, too, the emic view is favored, for folk memory holds that Hosh Muhammad's battlefield plea for support from a Baloch contingent was rebuffed because of his dark skin. The valiant Africans' self-sacrifice in the face of colonial usurpers is a source of validation for his people.

Attention shifts to the socioeconomic and religious life of this beleaguered community in chapters 4 and 5. Whether engaged in manual and semi-skilled labor in Karachi or working as share-croppers in rural areas, the African-descended Pakistanis are almost universally poor, with low literacy rates and no real power. The better educated among them have founded social welfare organizations to tend to the needs of their less fortunate brethren, and a few members of the group have been elected to political office in recent years (87–90). However, in contrast to their bleak economic situation, the Shīdīs and other Afro-Pakistanis have a vibrant religious life that reflects their mixed heritage and migration journeys. They identify most strongly with Bava Ghor, an African saint entombed, along with his brother and sister, in Gujarat (India). The triad figures in trance-dance, and healing and possession rituals at Karachi's celebrated Mangho Pir festival, where a pod of crocodiles, led by the formidable Mor Sahib, is said to have originated from the lice shaken out of a holy man's cloak. The annual festival is described in an extensively illustrated section written by Frembgen and Yaqoob Qambrani (108–24). A short sixth chapter rounds out the book with a consideration of everyday life for the Afro-Pakistanis, including pastimes, secular manifestations of music and dance, and sports activities.

Frembgen has been visiting Pakistan since 1981; his fieldwork for this monograph alone involved eighteen research trips over the course of more than a decade. A keen and compassionate observer, he draws our attention to the little slights that wound even more deeply than statements made with outright racist intent. In his survey of the rather meager scholarship available on South Asians of African descent, he notes that more work has been done in India (with only about thirty-five thousand community members) than in Pakistan. Hence, his findings really are groundbreaking and should be of interest to scholars, students, and the general public. The book would be a useful source for university departments devoted to Africa and its diaspora, as well for courses in slavery studies and those addressing sacred sites contested by members of different faiths (as is Mangho Pir). Admittedly, there are certain lacunae in the author's analysis. He confesses that as a male outsider he did not have access to women's networks (xxiii). A female observer might have been able to question Shidi women about the apparent prevalence of genital mutilation, for instance. It is a relic of their African past mentioned

in a United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs publication (*IRIN News* 2011). Further quibbles are the absence of a glossary and index, and the print quality of the many photographs. I am certain that better photo editing and higher quality paper would have greatly improved some of the rather murky and sometimes nearly illegible images (fig. 55, for example). All in all, however, I highly recommend the book, and I learned a great deal from it.

References

IRIN News. 2011. "Pakistan: Low Awareness of Hidden FGM Practices." December 29, 2011. https://news.trust.org/item/20111229203000-us8xl/

Tryna Lyons
Independent Scholar

ARTICLES

REVIEWS

cover design by Claudio Bado
original woodcut by Takumi Ito

Asian Ethnology Volume 82–1 / 2023 ISSN 1882–6865