

butions are studies in current Cambodian politics rather than analyses of recent Cambodian developments. Among the exceptions are papers by Ian Harris on Cambodian Buddhism after 1991 and its subsequent politicization since the coup and Milton Osborne's call for a better transnational regulation of the Mekong hydropower plans that threaten the livelihood of people living in the Lower Mekong Basin.

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PASCAL COUDERC / KENNETH SILLANDER (eds.), *Ancestors in Borneo Societies. Death, Transformation, and Social Immortality*. (NIAS Studies in Asian Topics, 50). Copenhagen: NIAS, 2012. 432 pages, photographs, £ 19.99 (pb) / £ 50.00 (hb). ISBN 978-87-7694-092-8 (pb) / ISBN 978-87-7694-091-1

The name of early French anthropologist Robert Hertz, a student of Emile Durkheim, may not be as familiar to *nicht Eingeweihten* (unconsecrated) anthropologists as that of Durkheim, but his eminence as a theorist of death and its rituals in primitive communities seems to have been sufficient to endure without major challenge for a century. One is referred to his 'Contribution à une Étude sur la Représentation Collective de la Mort' (*L'Année sociologique*, 1907), though perhaps even more embedded in the collective anthropological consciousness, thanks to an authoritative English translation, is his theory of the almost universal dichotomy in human cultures between the right hand and the left, symbolizing respectively virtue (or "the sacred") and negative things (or "the profane"), such contrasted values being mirrored even in the structure of the cosmos.

At any rate, after a century a certain restlessness might be expected to have set in among the fraternity, prompting one or more to revisit such a seminal influence in order to either "build on" the master's insights or "reinterpret" them. There was a special issue of *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* in 2007, edited by Eric Venbrux and dedicated to "Hertz's seminal essay and mortuary rites in the Pacific region". And now we are offered the no less high-powered collection edited by Pascal Couderc (of France) and Kenneth Sillander (from Finland), under the informal patronage of doyen of Borneo studies, Bernard Sellato – dedicated to reaching out beyond the relative fixation of the Hertzian theory of death on mortuary rites and the conclusive journeys which begin there (associated in some cases with ancestor worship among surviving kin), towards an interest in ancestors in an ongoing, benevolent or authoritative/ advisory capacity for the living in Borneo societies. The editors call their new conception of the role of the dead, "ancestralship". After a sophisticated 61-page theoretical survey, encompassing the gamut of admittedly inspired ethnography since Hertz (not least Jacob Malinckrodt, *Het Adatrecht van Borneo*. Leiden, Dubbeldeman, 1928; Hans Schärer, *Die Gottesidee der Ngadju Dajak in Süd-Borneo*. Leiden,

E.J.Brill, 1946), readers of more ethnographic than anthropological inclination are treated to eight studies whose titles convey a valid impression of delights in store: (1) Ancestors as sources of authority and potency among the Bentian of East Kalimantan [Sillander]. (2) Recalling the dead, revering the ancestors: multiple forms of ancestorship in Saribas Iban society [Sather]. (3) Separated dead and transformed ancestors: two facets of ancestorship among the Uut Danum of West Kalimantan [Couderc]. (4) Melanau ancestorship as an existential concern [Appleton]. (5) Iban *Petara* as transformed ancestors [Béguet]. (6) Invoking Ne' Rake: ancestral comrades in contemporary Bornean warfare [Oesterheld]. (7) Agency and ambiguity in communication with the ancestors: spirit possession, ancestral transformation, and the conflicts of modernity among the Benuaq [Payne]. (8) Ancestorship without (human) ancestors: ritual hearths and hierarchy in Gerai [Helliwell].

In terms of political jurisdictions, Indonesian Kalimantan is represented by Chapters 1, 3, 6, 7 and 8; Sarawak by Chapters 2, 4 and 5. Sabah and Brunei are missing. This has scant methodological relevance; however, of some concern is that a significant group such as the Kayan are not represented, in spite of the access that Jérôme Rousseau could have provided (cf *Kayan Religion. Ritual life and religious reform in Central Borneo*. Leiden, KITLV Press, 1998). Is the internally generated new religion of Bungan not of greater interest than the Islam to which most Melanau have converted? It does slightly seem as if the selection of ethnic groups was determined not by ancestorship sub-themes but by the availability of research, and individuals willing or eager to contribute it. Fortunately it has proved possible to find, for instance, a case which significantly illustrates the sub-theme of ancestors appearing in animal guise: see Payne's chapter (7). Yet there is an example (p 11) of a discrete study being forced into that mould, where Eva Maria Kershaw (*A Study of Brunei Dusun Religion. Ethnic priesthood on a frontier of Islam*. Phillips, ME, Borneo Research Council, 2000) is misrepresented as inferring that the crocodiles who once appeared to Dusuns in human guise were or are ancestors! More serious is a misquotation of Schärer, after he is revealed (p 17) to have begun to transcend the Hertzian scheme, in seeing not only totemic ancestor worship among the Ngaju but also "ancestorship", endowed with a symbolic importance in representing collective identity. Consistently, it has just been admitted that Schärer "did not provide many details about the concrete manifestations of Ngaju ancestor worship". However, by way of exception to such paucity, the editors then write in parenthesis that Schärer did supply some detail in *Der Totenkult der Ngadju Dajak in Süd-Borneo*. The Hague, Martinus Nijhoff, 1966: 223. This reference seems bizarre, for on that page begins a deeply moving folktale about a woman who dies in childbirth in a field-hut, together with the child, followed by their transformation into ghosts (though at first in bodily form) who proceed to haunt their close kin, with a small element of advice-giving but no tangible connection with ancestor worship.

One does not want to appear pedantic. These anomalies only catch the eye because of the generally outstanding professionalism of the Introduction. But it may also be apposite to remark that institutions of “ancestorship” are not found in the whole of Borneo society, in spite of the eclectic forms of the phenomenon which the book presents. Appleton’s chapter (4) on the Muslim Melanau does not seem to present Bornean “ancestorship” even in one of the forms foreshadowed by the editors, but deals with modern, Malay-style, syncretic use of medicine-men (*bomoh*) and the Sarawak medical services in face of a malignant breast cancer, followed, after the death, by graveyard rites in a Muslim cemetery. Appleton indeed keeps her distance from the old Melanau religion by saying that it is only still found in isolated pockets upstream; using Islamic labels for it such as “animism” or “free-thinking”; and apparently not aspiring to add to the work of the late H. Stephen Morris (*The Oya Melanau*. Sarawak, Malaysian Historical Society, 1997) on that antiquarian subject. Of course it is a good principle to include, in such a collection, glimpses of the changing face of ancestors amid social upheaval. Yet Oesterheld’s chapter (6) on Iban warfare against the transmigrating, Muslim Madurese, which involved ancestral comradeship and the emergence of a *panglima burong* (Bird General) to lead an unprecedented pan-Iban alliance and symbolise a new identity predicated on an imagined shared genealogy, seems to fit the principle more authentically.

Roger Kershaw

EVA MARIA KERSHAW / ROGER KERSHAW (eds.), *Writing an Identity. Content and Conceptions of a Brunei-Dusun ‘Constitution’ of 1981*. (Borneo Research Council Monograph Series, 12). VI, 246 pages, US\$ 40.00. ISBN 1-929900-12-0

The Dusuns are a non-Muslim minority group within the sultanate of Negara Brunei Darussalam situated on the north-west coast of Borneo. They numbered around ten thousand persons at the time of the 1971 census. But, as the state-sponsored Islamisation wave proceeds, they form an increasingly endangered species: anybody who converts to Islam is automatically re-classified as a “Malay”. An *ethnie* which will never graduate to „nation“ status, their 1981 “Constitution” (*Adat Resam Puak Dusun Negeri Brunei*) may be characterised as an “inward-looking document” or as an “exercise in maintaining ethnic boundaries” (pp. 7–8). Produced in the run-up to national independence (achieved at the end of 1983), it is fairly short, taking up only pages 33–67 here.

The editors, a wife-and-husband team with complementary talents as ethnographer and political scientist/historian respectively, provide an introduction (pp. 1–32) and commentary (pp. 68–146), followed by extensive ethnographic appendices on birth, marriage and death (pp. 150 onwards). The “references”