

processes can be judged with regard to their contribution to survival. This pragmatic materialism provides the reasoning for the low values attached to human happiness, democracy, human rights, liberal freedoms, the arts etc. However, some doubts remain in this reviewer's mind as to whether the interpretation of readers' letters to the Straits Times justifying the caning of Michael Fay as an expression of this ideology is totally correct, since in some of them the point made refers not to the sentence as such but rather that it should not be mitigated merely because the recipient is an American.

It is well known that Singapore is a city state. However, this knowledge tends to obscure the duality of Singapore as the city of that name and the state as a whole, i.e. the Republic of Singapore. This duality would have provided a useful organising principle for the book. As it is, while several contributions deal with very specific issues, down to individual street corner coffee shops, others cover the economic and political development of the country as a whole, as well as a time span of 180 years from Raffles' landing to the present. The separation of contributions focussing on the physical aspects of urban development and planning, including their effects on the societies and communities in specific neighbourhoods, from those dealing with broader economic, political and social aspects of Singapore as a whole would have made good sense and would have provided the reader with a guiding principle. As it is, it is unclear from the preface and the list of contents, what readership the authors had in mind. The lack of co-ordination and editing of the essays confirms the impression that the papers are addressed to very different readers who must pick and choose according to their interests and state of knowledge.

Unfortunately, the reader is left in the dark both with regard to the background and affiliation of the individual authors and the original titles and place of publication (if any) of the contributions that have apparently been translated into German, probably by someone mentioned in passing in the preface. The exception is the paper by Chua Beng Huat, which provides the information that it was originally published (probably in English) in a work edited by Lily Kong and Brenda Yeoh (quoted elsewhere in the book as edited by B.S.A. Yeoh and L. Kong), both of whom also appear as co-authors in the present work.

A German book introducing Singapore to the general reader still remains to be written.

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EVA MARIA KERSHAW, *A Study of Brunei Dusun Religion: Ethnic Priesthood on a Frontier of Islam*. (Borneo Research Council Monograph Series, 4). Phillips ME: Borneo Research Council, 2000. X, 287 pages, US\$ 38.50 (hb.). ISBN 1-929900-01-5

The Dusuns (or Bisayas) of Negara Brunei Darussalam are on the verge of cultural extinction. A non-Islamic people in a predominantly Muslim-Malay sultanate on the north-west coast of Borneo, they are confronted by several almost insuperable problems. First and foremost, they comprise a negligible proportion

of the total population (possibly fewer than five thousand in the Tutong District in 1981); hence they lack political weight in a country with nearly 193,000 inhabitants at that date, rising to more than 330,000 twenty years later. Secondly, they face the aggressive forces of state-backed Islamisation, a process which has gathered momentum since the promulgation of the *Melayu Islam Beraja* ideology in the 1980s. Government money is allocated liberally to Islamic causes, such as mosque construction and missionary work; yet, although one-third of the sultanate's population is not Islamic, little or no government money is ever earmarked for the support of non-Muslim faiths. Thirdly, the economic substructure (rice-farming) underpinning folk religion is being abandoned; as a result, rituals connected with the agriculture cycle become pointless. Fourthly, there is a generation gap. Senior citizens tend to be illiterate and happy with the old ways; younger people – educated, urbanised, subjected to peer pressure from Malay friends – feel a need to distance themselves from their forefathers, whom they have learnt to despise; and as more and more Dusuns adopt Islam, traditionalists find themselves increasingly obliged to adapt to Muslim expectations. Finally, the Dusun language itself is no longer being transmitted, so that it will be reduced in due course to the same status as Cornish.

In 1994 Eva Maria Kershaw published *Dusun Folktales*, a superb 340-page treasury of the group's folklore which she herself had transcribed, classified and annotated during a decade of laborious scholarship. Dusuns might not be as prolific as Scheherazade; nevertheless, eighty-eight pieces are presented here in the original language with parallel English translation. A German-born linguist currently settled in Scotland, Mrs Kershaw has broad experience of South East Asia, having resided in Kelantan and Bangkok as well as in Borneo. A graduate in German and Khmer, she also has specialist knowledge of the thought of Hans Sachs (1494–1576), the Lutheran poet and dramatist.

The Dusun fables were tape-recorded in various settlements in the lower Tutong District, notably Bukit Udal and Bang Diok, where villagers cooperated enthusiastically with the project. Oral literature is important, not just for the entertaining stories, but because of the insight furnished into rural thought, philosophy, and social mores; some notable folk history is also unearthed. Kershaw highlights the 'ingenuity of plot, wisdom and acute powers of observation' found in the material. Several loose genres, ten in all, were identified, such as 'myth and origin tales', 'Yalui stories' (about the village simpleton), and episodes featuring the wily mousedeer. The advent of television in 1975 dealt a severe blow to the story-telling art; and the story-tellers themselves are dying off; so these tales were collected just in time.

Building upon this achievement, Kershaw proceeded to publish (as sole or joint author) several important papers about the Dusuns; another explores in greater detail the significance of the Yalui tales just mentioned, differentiating them from the German *Eulenspiegel* variety (see *Indonesia and the Malay World*, Volume 27, No. 78, 1999, esp. pp. 138–9).

Coming now to the *Study of Brunei Dusun Religion*: this is the *magnum opus*, crowning all the previous endeavours. The monograph begins and ends with masterly contextual chapters (1–2, 11–12). A series of quick-fire sections



(pp. 25–76) brings us to the core of the book: chapter 9, dealing with ‘the belian and her office’ (pp. 77–119) and the long chapter ten, ‘*temarok*: its milieu, meaning, and manifestations’ (pp. 121–89). The *belian* is the ‘Dusun spirit medium’, the *temarok* the ‘defining ritual of Dusun religion’. This is the ‘ethnic priesthood’ of the book’s sub-title. Detailed timetables of sundry rituals are provided as an appendix. There is also an extended general glossary plus another one listing specialist *belian* vocabulary.

The volume makes a significant contribution to knowledge. First, as the bibliography indicates, the Dusuns of Negara Brunei Darussalam have attracted comparatively little attention hitherto. Secondly, the author has engaged in direct participant observation in the field for a prolonged period, supplemented subsequently by at least one return visit; hence her material is thoroughly original. Thirdly, the data are given strong theoretical underpinnings, with Mrs Kershaw able to deploy a wide range of skills, linguistic, anthropological and historical, aided further by the political and musical expertise of her husband, Dr Roger Kershaw, himself a fine scholar of South East Asia. These factors link the book to broader streams of literature and add to its value. Due acknowledgement is given to Dusun informants, particularly the nonagenarian, Narak Buntak, to whom the volume is dedicated. Alas, by the early 1990s the penultimate generation of Dusun speakers and the last generation of Dusun storytellers had probably been reached.

There is nothing objectionable about the production, beyond a few minor misprints in the bibliography and a suspicion that the photographs reproduced in the gallery between pages 120 and 121 might not be as sharply defined as the originals.

In summary, this *Study of Brunei Dusun Religion* is an erudite work of rescue ethnography and the starting point for any future writer interested in the subject. Taken in conjunction with Eva Maria Kershaw’s other publications, an impressive oeuvre is clearly being developed. It is symptomatic that this book, along with *Dusun Folktales*, had to be published in the United States of America rather than in the sultanate: the Bandar Seri Begawan authorities are not much interested in preserving, let alone boosting, a non-Islamic culture.

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