

JUDITH SCHLEHE, *Die Meereskönigin des Südens, Ratu Kidul. Geisterpolitik im javanischen Alltag*. Berlin: Dietrich Reimer 1998. 306 pages, 30 illustrations, € 39.00. ISBN 3-496-02657-X

Many Indonesian societies, and the Javanese in particular, are known for their belief in the existence of spirits and ghosts. This belief, however, is not a matter of the transcendental world alone, but has practical significance for the day-to-day life of many Javanese. One of the most prominent characters of the Javanese pantheon of spirits and ghosts is the Queen of the Southern Seas, Kanjeng Ratu Kidul (also known as Nyai Rara Kidul) who occupies a well defined place in the genealogy of the rulers of the house of Mataram in Central Java. Moreover, each of these rulers and their successor dynasties in Yogyakarta and Surakarta is believed to entertain a more than just spiritual relationship with Ratu Kidul, who resides according to common belief in the Southern Seas (the Indian Ocean). Therefore the most important place for interaction and worship is the western part of the beach of Parangtritis, known as Parangkusumo, some 20 km south of the *keraton*, the Sultan's palace, of Ngyogyakarta Hadiningrat. More sites of worship are scattered along the southern shores of Java and Bali from Pelabuhanratu in West Java to Sanur in south-eastern Bali.

Judith Schlehe, director of the Institute for Cultural Anthropology, University of Freiburg, has taken up the case of Ratu Kidul to examine the relevance and significance of the spiritual beliefs of the Javanese for their daily life cycle. The present book, result of field research conducted mainly during the period 1989 to 1991 and complemented with research from later visits to Java during the 1990s is the revised version of Schlehe's habilitation thesis (*Habilitationschrift*). Her main goal is "to reconstruct the significance of the queen of the seas on the individual subjective level as well as on that of society, where the various traditions of knowledge are connected to power structures. Popular spirituality and belief in spirits are examined from the perspective of their relationship to social conditions, practical interests and official government policies." (p. 21, all quotes translated from the German original) Another equally important topic is the way in which the images of spirits influence the perceptions of gender and the lives of women in Java. An important objective of her research is "to show the local strategies of dealing with external influences of modernity. ..., the permanent change of meaning, the dynamics and the creativity in the usage of an old symbol." (p. 20) Schlehe does not intend to produce a theoretically comprehensive explanation of the phenomenon – she actually abandoned this plan in the course of her research because the multitude of relations and references did not allow for a coherent synthesis – but to present the emic perspective, the culturally specific and unique aspects of the Javanese belief in spirits and the day-to-day relevance, taking Ratu Kidul as but one, albeit influential, example.

Schlehe proceeds systematically by first discussing the historical background of Java (ch. 1) and then presenting and interpreting both the literary

evidence from written sources (ch. 2 and 3) and that of oral tradition (ch. 4). Next she shows the relation of Ratu Kidul to other mythical characters such as her only son Raden Ronggo, the snake lady, Nyi Blorong, and one of the *wali* ("apostle" of Islam in Java), Sunan Kalijaga (ch. 5). The next chapters deal with the sacred sites, the rituals and ceremonies (ch. 6) and the spiritual specialists, both male and female, who perform these activities (ch. 7). The following chapter discusses the representations of Ratu Kidul in the ancient and modern arts (painting, dance, theatre) and the mass media (ch. 8). The two concluding chapters offer two different perspectives about the material presented so far. In ch. 9 the authoress presents a set of Western scientific approaches, including political explanations, gender, psychological interpretations, ecological explanations and religious references and relations. In the final chapter (ch. 10) Schlehe introduces the perspective of the Javanese themselves, quoting at length the personal accounts of two Javanese, a man and a woman, about their experiences and interpretations of Ratu Kidul in order to show the role and the significance of the Queen of the Southern Seas in their individual lives.

It would go beyond the range of a review to discuss all the aspects and details of this study. Judith Schlehe presents Ratu Kidul as a figure that can be used in various contexts and interpreted in many ways and directions. Its function can thus be both stabilising or revolutionary. The authoress convincingly shows the complexity of the Javanese concepts, reflecting the multitude of influences over time and the flexibility of their usage by the Javanese themselves. Since the subject matter always involves the researcher not only as a scholar but also as a person, it is very interesting to see how Schlehe positions herself vis-à-vis her topic and her resource persons, both believers and non-believers. This is a book rich in details and insights, contributing to our knowledge and, more importantly, to our understanding of the Javanese world view and daily practice.

The book is complemented with several lists of offerings (*sesaji*) for various ceremonies, the summaries of some *ketoprak* plays, a glossary, and an extensive list of references. An index, however, is missing.

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GRAHAM SAUNDERS, *A History of Brunei*. Second Edition. London/New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002. XX, 231 pages, 4 maps, illustrations, £ 55.00 (hb.). ISBN 0-7007-1698-X

It must be revealed that the reviewer has addressed this work previously (*Asian Affairs*, October 1998), and has taken an interest in the second edition because he anticipated meeting improvements in the light of a number of serious errors discovered in the first, published by Oxford University Press (Kuala Lumpur) in 1994. Obviously the author has revisited his text, because the new publisher speaks not only of an edition "updated to the present" but adds tantalisingly: