

differences and geographical challenges.” Readers of *The Divine Eye* will also appreciate the documentary on Caodaism produced by Janet and Susan Hoskins in 2008 as a companion to the book. While Janet Hoskins has conducted interviews with Caodaists in Canada, France, and Australia, little of these non-US materials are presented in the book. Moreover, since she focuses predominantly on Caodai leaders, the voices of ordinary Caodaists are not heard. *The Divine Eye* portrays Caodaism as a rather elitist project formulated by colonial French-educated intellectuals who aspired for a particular form of Asian modernity. What were—and are—the motivations for ordinary practitioners of Caodaism to participate in the religion? If they were to aspire for a form of modernity, would their understanding of modernity be similar to that of the anticolonial intellectual elites? And how would the “conversion” process to Caodaism by ordinary Caodaists differ from that of intellectual Caodaists, and more interestingly, how would it differ from that of Christian conversion in both colonial and contemporary Vietnam? Despite these shortcomings, *The Divine Eye* is a remarkable contribution to a rather thin scholarship on Vietnamese religious and diasporic studies.

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Animism in Southeast Asia

KAJ ÅRHEM and GUIDO SPRENGER, eds.

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Animism in Southeast Asia is a rich study that reaches well beyond the bounds of regional and disciplinary expertise. Surely, anthropologists of religion in Southeast Asia will have some commentary on the work, but so should scholars who work in the fields of global history, anthropology, sociology, religious studies, politics and society, and any number of subdisciplines. The rich comparative approach between Amerindian—in particular, Amazonian along with Ojibwe—animism and Southeast Asian animism broadens the possibilities of analysis for experts who work in East,

South, and Central Asia, and the Middle East as well as African contexts. It would be useful for courses such as “Introduction to World Religions” and “Asian Religions in a Global Perspective,” and a necessity for courses on the study of Southeast Asian religions. While most individuals understand animism to be the worship of animal spirits, and many would still posit there are particular pejorative connotations to the usage of the term, even when the term is used without such intent, *Animism in Southeast Asia* completely reforms the foundations of the study of animism through a collection of detail-driven case studies and theoretical revelations.

Animism in Southeast Asia is conveniently organized for ease of use. With theoretical discussions by Tim Ingold, Kaj Århem, and Guido Sprenger bookending the work, it is divided into two simple parts by nature of the location of the case studies. In the first part, readers will find case studies from mainland Southeast Asia and the Philippines, while in the second part they will find case studies from insular Southeast Asia. There are absences in the work, as with any single volume attempting to cover the vast diversity of Southeast Asia, a region that boasts a significant variety of large, well-known religious communities (Hindus, Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, and so on) and where the most popular traditions have hundreds of millions of adherents. Furthermore, it is a well-known fact that the politics of Southeast Asian governments often put bounds upon the limits of scholarly inquiry. Cases from the study of animism in Burma and Thailand are conspicuously absent from the current collection. That said, this is a strong collection of essays that provide valuable studies of many understudied communities in Southeast Asia. For example, Signe Howell’s study on the Chewong upland minority of Peninsular Malaysia provides rich stories associated with the solidification and explanation of animistic practices, as well as an innovative rethinking of animistic ontology based upon the Chewong conception of the *ruwai*, which Howell takes to be “analogous to ‘the Fruit’” from Karl Marx’s discourse on *The Holy Family* (p. 69). The *ruwai* in this sense is a critical otherworldly substance that can present itself in various “this-worldly” forms, as it were, ranging from an elephant, to a leaf monkey, or a rambutan fruit.

After Howell’s study of the Chewong, *Animism in Southeast Asia* moves toward an explanation of personhood, particularly among the Rmeet community in upland Laos, in which Sprenger expertly highlights how interethnic relations are transformed and transposed upon interspecies relationships in animist conceptions of the cosmological order in Rmeet religious understanding. This, in turn, is followed by two studies among the Katu of Vietnam and the Central Annamite Cordillera, by Kaj Århem and Nikolas Århem respectively. The particularly innovative theoretical work of Kaj Århem, in this case, draws upon the Katu practices of animism to propose a distinction between symmetric (restricted) exchange and asymmetric (unrestricted) exchange, as they are practiced in animist worlds, and what the implications of this difference might be. As Århem posits:

Symmetric and asymmetric worlds are curved cosmologies, to borrow a natural science metaphor. Elementary social facts such as exchange, reciprocity, and notions of intersubjectivity take fundamentally different shapes in the two worlds. So also, the idea of predation and its human form,

hunting—with great implications for notions of existential security, illness and curing, and human-animal relations: in a symmetric world, hunting and the consumption of game food carry the threat of counter-predation, a possibility which is ruled out—perhaps inconceivable—in an asymmetric world. However, in both worlds, the conceptualization of the human-animal relationship is diagnostic of their particular forms of animism. (p. 111)

In a volume of detailed theoretical explorations, Århem's suggestions about the problem of the hunter in an animist community, calls readers to entirely rethink what they thought they knew about animism. Drawing upon the example of hunting practices, the distinction between the symmetric and asymmetric types of animism becomes clear. It is also through substantial comparative work in the Amazon that Århem is able to take the position that there are different forms of shamanism in Southeast Asia and Latin America, a position that he clarifies later in the volume.

The issue of the problems created by the relationship between animistic spirits and humans is taken up in Jon Henrik Ziegler Remme's study of Ifugao communities in the Philippines. In the end, Remme posits that there are two ontological life forms of animistic spirits or essences: one that humans *can* perceive, and one that humans *cannot* (p. 151). Although the book then moves on to studies in insular Southeast Asia other than the Philippines, after Remme's contribution—with a notable study of Bentian Dayak communities put forward by Kenneth Sillander—the question of human-spirit relations remains as a theme moving forward. However, Sillander shifts the focus of the conversation by emphasizing the sets of taboos and "precepts of *adat*"—often described by scholars as "customary law"—that further shape the contours of these relationships. Monica Janowski then shifts the location and emphasis of the conversation again, by focusing on beliefs about spirits among the Kelabit and Penan of the upper Baram River in Sarawak state, Malaysia, on the island of Borneo. Janowski provides a useful thematic categorization or, rather, typology of the spirits of Sarawak, examining spirits of humans, animals, trees, places, and hard objects to build substantial evidence leading to at least two major theoretical suggestions. The first suggestion highlights the position of grain crops in establishing the relative "separateness" of human society from the natural world, in a sense, while the second questions the long-standing categories of "physical" and "interior"—positing instead a relational understanding of the animist features of Penan and Kelabit cosmology (p. 199).

The final four case studies in *Animism in Southeast Asia* dance across the island world, although they remain mostly in the eastern archipelago. Matthew H. Amster's research on animism and anxiety focuses on the Kelabit of Sarawak. Timo Kaartinen's study of the boundaries of humanity is also concentrated in the eastern archipelago, although it focuses on the animism of the Kei Islands in Eastern Indonesia. Sven Cederroth's study then island-hops to provide a rich, thick description of the cosmological order of the gods and spirits of Wetu Telu communities in the Lombok region of Nusa Tenggara Barat Province, Indonesia. This study is particularly innovative as Cederroth has taken care to record and translate prayers, providing beautifully fluid English-

language versions that could be cited as primary source material in university-level teaching. Similarly, David Hicks's comparative work on the myth cycles of the peoples of Sumbawa, Flores, Kei, the Alor Peninsula, and Timor provides rich, accessible source material for studies on Eastern Indonesia. Furthermore, Hicks highlights a series of motifs that emerge across these narratives: water, life and abundance/plentitude, an instrument of impalement or entrapment, the quest, the social/familial relationship, deception, and visibility/invisibility. The themes help to construct how Hicks thinks about animism from a theoretical perspective, but it is also important to highlight that they demonstrate a particularly useful and important method of comparative narrative analysis, which scholars may well find useful in other contexts.

In the concluding chapter of Århem's substantial contributions to the *Animism in Southeast Asia* volume, the author highlights two forms of shamanism: one Southeast Asian and the other Amazonian, made possible at least in part by Århem's over three decades of expertise on the subject. In the portrayal of these two types of shamanism, Århem points directly to their different forms of spirit possession. In the Southeast Asian form, Århem highlights that the spirit essence is an external presence that enters the shaman/medium as a receiving subject and acts through them. This contrasts with Amazonian shamanism, where the animal spirit physically transforms the shaman into the actual spirit during the ritual. In other words, in Amazonian shamanism "ritual possession" is "ritual transformation by an animal spirit," whereas in Southeast Asia "ritual possession" is just that—possession by an external force. His point is well taken, although it does raise the question of whether Århem is willing to consider Hmong shamanism a Southeast Asian tradition. It is possible that Århem considers Hmong shamanism an East Asian tradition, and therefore under a different field of study. At the same time, because of the substantial Hmong population of Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam, there are many scholars who would consider Hmong shamanism a Southeast Asian tradition. The reason this point is notable is because, unlike other forms of Southeast Asian shamanism that fit Århem's model, in Hmong shamanism the shamans themselves travel into the spirit world to commune with spirits in another realm, and hence the relationship between the shaman and the non-human world takes on a third form that is not comparable to either of Århem's Amazonian or Southeast Asian models.

While there is much more to these distinctions than can be briefly summarized in this space, Århem and Sprenger's work has begun a useful conversation, especially since colleagues in the field of religious studies, history, and Southeast Asian studies might view Århem's theories as provocative findings, pushing toward a comparative understanding of Southeast Asia and Latin America, and a deep analysis of Southeast Asian religious communities.

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