

BOOK REVIEWS

NICOLAS STANDAERT, AD DUDINK (eds). *Forgive Us Our Sins. Confession in Late Ming and Early Qing China*, Monumenta Serica Monograph Series LV, Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica, 2006, pp. 268. ISBN-10: 3-8050-0540-1, ISSN 0179-261X

The book is a collection of articles by such famous specialists as Eugenio Menegon, Erik Zürcher, and Liam Matthew Brockey, supplied with some primary texts and translations of texts on the Christian practice of confession that were used by missionaries in China. The main purpose of the book, according to its editors, is to fill the gap of previous studies concerning the adaptation of Christianity in China, namely, the investigation of ritual, which is essential in understanding Chinese culture and religion in general and the accommodation of Christianity in particular. The articles deal with the different perspectives of ritual of confession, aiming to reveal ‘how confession as a foreign ritual became embedded in the Chinese Christian communities’ (p. 7).

The first article by Eugenio Menegon, ‘Deliver us from Evil’, is concerned with two main topics or aspects of ritual that are discussed in two parts accordingly: the prescriptive-normative and practical, presenting a general view of the chronological development of confession in China in the 17th and 18th century ‘from a conception of the sacrament as a tool of moral self-reform in a “Confucian” vein’ (75) towards a more ritualized practice. The analysis of the main descriptions of sacramental confessions introduces the body of prescriptive texts, written for the Chinese by famous missionaries Matteo Ricci, Giulio Aleni, and others. They are divided by the author into four main categories: simple catechetical texts about confession for the vast majority of Christians, elaborate texts for Christian literati, apologetic texts for non-Christians, and manuals for Chinese priests. Menegon reveals how missionaries dealt in practice with such a very different public as the Chinese, trying to adapt themselves to traditional Chinese ways of thinking. He also shows what difficulties of sacramental confession, as followed from this traditional thought, they dealt with in their practice, such as the difficulty of Chinese to unveil one’s sins to another person, that is to confess, and to kneel in confession, which was contrary to the traditional Confucian practice of individual self-examination, or the difference of the visible bodily manifestations of humility, showing the true contrition, or even the traditional segregation of men and women in Chinese society according to ‘outside’ and ‘inside’ (domestic) spheres, which demanded special circumstances for the confession for Chinese women.

All those examples, illustrated by the letters of missionaries and other documents, are very valuable in bringing important details into the understanding of the adaptation of Christianity in China and its problems.

The second part of the article explores the practice of confession as experienced in social and religious life, focusing particularly on three dimensions of the sacramental penance: the ritual as a community-building device, as a response to the psychological and individual needs of the individual, and as a disciplinary tool in the hand of missionaries. Discussing the first dimension of the ritual, Menegon presents a number of examples of various ways and means used to organize the rituals of confession in different areas of China under different circumstances and the regularities and irregularities of the practice due to some difficulties such as the seasonal massive bouts of confession, which were an enormous burden on the missionaries, or the attitude of Chinese women to the sacrament, which demanded the testing of the boundaries of permeability between the inner and outer spheres for those women themselves, as well as for the missionaries in their approach to women.

Analyzing the second dimension of the ritual, the author reveals how confession was fitted into the popular Chinese religious beliefs in the existence of evil forces, thus working as a way of protection from those forces with an effect similar to exorcism and amulets, which were quite popular in Chinese religious life. According to the author, the confessor was compared 'to a good doctor healing the penitent from his or her sins' (p. 58), thus helping to use the ritual of confession 'as a powerful way to heal their body as well as their souls' (p. 66). In the discussion of the third dimension of the ritual, he stresses the use of the sacrament of penance by missionaries as the most direct tool to control the religious and social behaviour of the Christian community and exert the priest's authority in the community.

The final chapter deals with indulgences as an efficacious form of rituality for diminishing the impact of sins in one's life and afterlife. Menegon explains the attractiveness of this system, which became more important from the 18th century, owing to some features of Chinese traditional religion and culture, namely, the importance of filial piety and concerns with deceased ancestors. Thus, the system of indulgences was considered by Chinese Christians very helpful in gaining through their merits and payments the salvation of their baptized ancestors. The author concludes that in consequence this determined the growing neglect of individualized spiritual direction through confession and a rise in penitential rituality concerned with efficaciousness in the form of indulgences.

The article, although it is more descriptive than analytical, is very valuable in providing the reader with detailed information not only about the particularities of the job of missionaries in China and their compromising strategies, but also about working

at a time when Christianity was being suppressed in China. It is well documented by additional materials, which are provided in five appendixes and include the comparison of the tables of contents of two lists of the rules for purification written by Aleni (*Dizui zhenggui lue* and *Dizui zhenggui*), the Chinese translations of *Confiteor* and *Act of Contrition*, the English translation of *The Four Essentials of Confession* (used by Franciscans), the examination list from *Dizui zhenggui lue*, and a statistical analysis of the number of confessions and number of communions of Dominican and M.E.P. missions in Fujian and Sichuan between 1730 and 1813. Regrettably, the author did not present any comparison of Christian rituals of confession with Taoist practice of confession, as if such did not exist in imperial China. It seems that he tries to separate Confucianism from Daoism in the same strict manner as Christian missionaries did, although in practice they were not so separated. In discussing the lists of sins made by missionaries and adapted to the Chinese context, the author also avoids any comparisons with the Chinese practice of counting their sins in 'ledgers of merit and demerit', which would help to understand the differences and similarities between Chinese traditional practices and the Christian practice and morality of confession.

This gap, however, is partly filled by the next article of Erik Zürcher 'Buddhist *Chanhui* and Christian Confession in Seventeenth-century China'. The article starts with the attempt to put the Christian practice of confession into the context of the Confucian practice of moral self-cultivation, admitting that 'unlike the Confucian discipline of self-cultivation, which ideally is an autonomous process of moral improvement undertaken for its own sake', the Catholic practice was based on 'the strictly individual act of confession made to the priest, who alone is authorized to confer absolution' (p. 105). However, the importance attached by Christian devotees to the rite of confession as the only effective way to escape divine wrath and damnation after death allows the author to compare it with Buddhist *chanhui* (confession of guilt and remorse), which was concerned with the generation of merit in order to avoid an unhappy rebirth. Zürcher remarks that there was some Buddhist revival among followers in literati circles and an upsurge of lay Buddhism in the late Ming, with regular performances of *chanhui* meetings.

Discussing the practice of *chanhui* liturgies, the author concentrates mainly on Mahayana liturgical texts of Chinese origin, which belong to the so-called *chanfa* ('penitential methods') genre and deal exclusively with non-monastic penitential meetings. He discusses the role of the priest, the concept of merit and sin, and the motivations of those liturgies, which help to show the similarities and differences between *chanhui* and Christian rituals of confession. Zürcher discerns more differences than similarities, pointing out especially the 'communal' nature of merit generated in those liturgies; the 'automatic' working of merit through the mechanism of 'stimulus

and response' (*ganying*); the status and role of the Buddhist priest as 'a messenger reciting the confessional formulas and transferring the merit to other beings' (p. 120), rather than the embodiment of the supernatural and exclusive authority to remit sins; the participation in the liturgy of large groups of superhuman beings, which bring to the liturgy the devotional element; the orientation of the *chanhui* liturgy not only to sin, remorse, and confession, but also to joy and hope; the generic and generalized understanding of sins confessed and lack of emotional involvement in the ritual by the participants; and finally, the realization of the illusoriness of sin itself, which from the Christian perspective would deny the meaning of the very practice of confession.

Those differences help to understand the reasons for the Christian critique of Buddhism in general, and Buddhist rituals of *chanhui* in particular, which is then presented by Zürcher. The analysis of this critique is documented here by the detailed opinions of concrete persons. He also provides a short classification of sins in *Gongguo ge* (Ledgers of merit and demerit) and a Christian confessional manual, showing in which points the Christian list of sins was accommodated to Chinese social reality and traditional Chinese values. Zürcher comes to the conclusion that Christians in their fundamentalist rejection of all traditional religious and mantic practice 'even surpassed the most "purist" Confucian literati' (p. 124). His final conclusion is that Christianity, by providing the purifying and redeeming rituals of confession, could work in that period as a substitute for the Buddhist ceremonies of *chanhui* and rather complement Confucianism on the basis of their shared personal nature of individual self-examination. The conclusion seems to me a little bit unexpected because of the lack of any broad comparative analysis of the Christian and Confucian way of self-examination. Thus, I miss the answer to the question how Christianity, in such a case, could complement the sense of moral dignity, the reliance on the moral self, the optimistic view of human nature as good, and the importance of face and shame that were at the core of Confucian teaching and its practice of self-cultivation and self-examination. In spite of this, the article is very valuable in bringing more light to the understanding of the differences between Chinese Buddhism and Christianity in very practical aspects, thus helping to better understand the latter's hostility towards Buddhism, which is presented in other studies rather superficially.

The next article, 'Illuminating the shades of sin' by Liam Matthew Brockey, examines the use of auricular confession by Jesuit missionaries in China during the 17th century, claiming that they relied on confession as the most effective locus of moral suasion due to the lack of more effective means of constraining their Chinese penitents to practice Christian standards of morality. The first part of the essay

provides a narrative chronology of the Jesuits' use of the sacrament of penance in China, starting from its introduction among rural Christians in northern Guangdong Province in the first years of the 17th century to the increase and intensification of the practice in 1640 (due to the dynastic change and waves of violence across China that caused fear of death). The story is drawn from the rare written testimonies of the priests themselves, correspondence of missionaries, annual letters, and administrative documents, which reveal in a unique way some of the difficulties, self-sacrifice, specific duties, and demands of missionary work due to the particular circumstances in China at that time.

In the second part of essay, L.M. Brockey discusses the text by Jose Monteiro, *Vera et Unica Praxis breviter ediscendi, ac expeditissime loquendi Sinicum idioma...* (The True and Only Brief Way for Quickly Learning to Speak the Chinese Language...), which was created for distribution to new recruits to the China mission. The author concentrates on the final section of the text, which consists of imagined dialogues between a Chinese Christian as a penitent and a Jesuit priest concerning questions of morality and sin. He analyses questions about the Ten Commandments and inquiries about the Seven Capital sins, revealing how the Jesuits viewed the sins of Chinese penitents and 'typical' moral state of Chinese Christians, pointing out its similarities with the penitents of Catholic Europe, as well as the unique or 'typically Chinese' sins as indicated and included in the manual. By using such a comparative analysis, the author shows in a very concrete way the differences between Chinese and Christian visions of morality, pointing out some difficulties which Jesuit missionaries dealt with in order to reform Chinese customs. The analysis of Monteiro's text leads the author to the conclusion, that 'China Jesuits considered their penitents to be on similar to rustics in Catholic Europe, with the exception of a few cultural specificities' (p. 148). However, in sharing the intention of their confreres in Europe to 'reform the customs' of their followers, Jesuits in China had to practice their sacrament of penance by two steps: first 'to instill a proper attitude toward religion', and second, 'to rid Chinese Christians of the "scandalous" elements of indigenous behavior', insisting 'upon forms of lay comportment that met the exacting standards of the Society of Jesus' (p. 173).

The article is followed by the translation of Jose Montiero's *A Missionary Confessional Manual* mentioned above, done by L.M. Brockey and Ad Dudink, with some introductory words on its Lisbon manuscript and Chinese version, and published here in three languages: Portuguese, English and Chinese. Such a scrupulous and trilingual presentation of the text allows the reader not only to make more full view of the kind of Christian morality instilled by Jesuits, but also to inquire into the details of translation.

The book is readable not as a collection of separate articles, but as a very collective investigation of the topics from different aspects, although the editors have presented in the introduction the idea of the book only in very brief, general terms. I think that the book could be very valuable to investigators of the history of Christian missions in China, bringing to light their very specific and inadequately studied aspects and details of their teaching and practice.

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SHU-HSIEN LIU. *Essentials of Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, Resources in Asian philosophy and religion, Westport, London: Praeger, 2003, pp. xv+165. ISBN 0-313-27581-5 (HB)

One's expectations may rise quite high when one holds in one's hands a book about a philosophical movement-in-making written by the prominent member of that very movement. To read and investigate this kind of intellectual self-reflection of a scholar who influences and forms an entire system of thought is both an intriguing and an exciting occupation for a reader. This is exactly the case with the book written by Liu Shuxian (Shu-hsien Liu). A current member of the Academia Sinica in Taiwan, Professor Liu devotes himself to the difficult task of telling the story of an intellectual movement that he calls Contemporary Neo-Confucianism (he also uses the terms 'Contemporary New Confucianism' or 'New Confucianism' interchangeably). Liu's book is still one of a very few studies available in Western languages on a topic that receives great attention in the academic and even public circles in mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea. While the world's economic and political reality of today has already convinced a great number of people of the necessity to get more familiar with the Chinese way of living and thinking, contemporary Chinese thinkers whose line of thought and work is in a very close relation to traditional Chinese philosophical systems are still too little known to Western audiences. Thus any attempt to introduce such a broad and diverse philosophical movement with a background rooted in tradition more than 2500 years old is worth compliment and support.

Liu Shuxian's undertaking appears even more difficult and of greater importance having in mind that among the scholars in the field there is still a lack of consensus about the origination, scope, influences, and even representatives of Contemporary Neo-Confucianism. Liu's organic overview of almost a century of the newest history of Chinese thought makes his book a valuable guide for Western scholars and students alike.

As Liu Shuxian makes it clear in the Preface, the current volume is 'a sequel' to his earlier *Understanding Confucian Philosophy: Classical and Sung-Ming* (Westport, 1998) (p. xi). This also becomes obvious from the text itself because of plenty of notes referring to the pages of that previous book. On the one hand, it signals two vital and most probably interdependent features of Chinese intellectual tradition—continuity and creative adjustment of tradition to the present circumstances. That gives a reader a valid and correct feeling that contemporary Chinese thinkers cannot be grasped without at least some knowledge about the previous epochs of Chinese philosophy that nurtured and stimulated them. On the other hand, some of those references are rather lengthy (for example note 15 in Chapter 1 suggests consulting pages 113–257 of the previous work) causing some inconvenience to a reader, since many arguments seem to be left untold in the present work. It becomes questionable whether *Essentials of Contemporary Neo-Confucian Philosophy*, although a 'sequel', can be read as a separate volume as the separate title would suggest.

Liu declares that his 'emphasis is on philosophy' (p. xi), and that is proved in Chapter 1, 'Paradigm Shift in the Transitional Period from the Late Ming to the early Ch'ing', which is the most philosophical in the entire book. The author starts with a terminological consideration on the validity of the very term *Neo-Confucianism*, which has no direct equivalent in Chinese. Liu argues that the usage of the term is justifiable if we were to restrict it to the *lixue* 理学 of Song and Ming dynasties, both of the most influential schools of that time—those of Cheng-Zhu and Lu-Wang—included (p. 2). This definition is a theoretical basis that allows Liu to argue against the inclusion of Qing (Ch'ing) thinkers such as Yan Yuan (Yen Yüan) or Dai Zhen (Tai Chen) into the Neo-Confucian school, as Feng Youlan (Fung Yu-lan) did in his influential and still widely read *History of Chinese Philosophy*. Liu explicitly and convincingly demonstrates that there was what he calls a 'paradigm shift' in the years of late Ming and early Qing dynasties, which resulted in 'radical naturalistic humanism', dropping the transcendent perspective altogether (p. 7). In other words, the mark of the intellectual world of the Qing Dynasty after the paradigm shift was that 'philology came to the fore while philosophy retreated to the rear' (p. 15).

Liu Shuxian's position brings a lot of conceptual clarity and consistency into the research of history of Chinese philosophy done in Western languages. It however remains unclear why Chapter 1 is in a book about Contemporary Neo-Confucians and how is it related to the problems discussed in the rest of the book. As an introductory chapter, it leaves too many unaddressed questions of how this paradigm shift and the altered intellectual climate in the Qing Dynasty in general influenced contemporary Chinese thinkers, or what their attitude towards the Qing legacy is.

Chapter 2 is an actual introduction in which Liu lays the theoretical foundation to approach a number of 20th and 21st century Chinese thinkers as belonging to

more or less a coherent movement. A lot of energy in the research of contemporary Chinese thought goes into disputing whether one or another scholar should or should not be included in the Contemporary New Confucian movement. Liu, in his own words, goes 'one step further' and assigns fifteen scholars to four groups in three generations (p. 24). By doing so Liu once again brings more clarity into the field and sets up a framework in which future discussions on the nature of Contemporary New Confucianism may be held. As Liu reaffirms the determination to concentrate his discussion on philosophy (p. 26) and dedicates individual chapters to the five most philosophical representatives of New Confucianism, the rest of Chapter 2 is devoted mainly to Liang Sou-ming (Liang Shuming) and discussions on the status and understanding of science and philosophy in China in the early 1930s. Liu then goes on to provide a general sketch of what could be regarded as the basic position of New Confucians in metaphysics, epistemology, axiology, cosmology, science, ethics, politics, and other realms of human concerns (p. 37–8).

What follows in the next five chapters are the introductions of the philosophical views of Feng Youlan, Hsiung Shih-li (Xiong Shili), Thomé Fang (Fang Dongmei), T'ang Chün-i (Tang Junyi), and Mou Tsung-san (Mou Zongsan), who receives the most attention. Liu talks extensively about their scholarly careers and philosophical works, introduces their philosophical vocabulary, and gives an account of their attitudes towards the complex political and social reality of 20th century China. Liu is not reluctant to show his personal evaluations, agreements and disagreements with the philosophers concerned, and that undoubtedly is the best account of the position of yet another, more recent representative of the New Confucian movement—Liu Shuxian himself.

Nevertheless, huge parts of descriptive narration rather than critical and comparative analysis make this book seem something more of a collection of intellectual biographies of five profound and bright minds of Chinese philosophy, than an account on the essentials of one discrete movement that unites all of them. Nonetheless, the thorough piece on Mou Zongsan's thought could be an exception in this context.

In the last chapter, Liu tells the story of four members of so far the youngest mature generation of New Confucians and as their most common and outstanding feature presents the 'international dimension' in their thought and activities (p. 142). This declared international dimension allows us to hope that Western scholarship on classical and contemporary Chinese thinkers is going to increase both in scope and in depth. The present book of Liu Shuxian is definitely a gigantic step in this direction.

GUY L. BECK (ed.), *Alternative Krishnas. Regional and Vernacular Variations on a Hindu Deity*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, pp. xvi+217. ISBN 0-7914-6415-6 (HB)

The volume *Alternative Krishnas* is dedicated to the living Vaishnava tradition relating to the god Krishna (Kṛṣṇa) and contains essays of nine American scholars. Definitely its very title catches a reader's attention (intended?). In the introduction Guy L. Beck, the editor, while explaining the term 'alternative Krishnas' states that 'besides alleged normative Krishna, there are several other types of Krishnas that have flourished in different parts of India among ethnic groups and sectarian divisions. As a collection of essays describing "alternative Krishnas", this book is an attempt to supply some more elusive yet compelling missing pieces to the complete jigsaw puzzle of "Krishna"' (p. 2). The effort of the authors is mostly welcome. One should be aware, however, that for those whose religious tradition is under more or less meticulous research, Krishna is one, in the form known to them and worshiped in their own way. Perhaps it would have been more appropriate to simply introduce the expression 'alternate views of Krishna [and his worship]'. Describing and analysing the religious cult in its manifold dimensions, one should remember that it is invented by humans, not the divine, for their own sake. Thus Krishna always maintains his real form (*svarūpa*) among his numerous devotees coming from various strata of society, and they perceive him in the form (*rūpa*) familiar to them and according to their expectations grounded in their own experience of the divine. Mainstream and non-mainstream traditions of Vaishnavism (Krishnaism) are complementary in their existence.

Regional and vernacular variations on Krishna bhakti presented in the volume cover mostly North India (Maharashtra, a region of Braj and Benares, or Uttar Pradesh, and West Bengal) with a short sojourn to South India, more precisely, Tamilnadu. The two opening papers of Glen Alexander Hayes and June McDaniel are dedicated to religious traditions in West Bengal, respectively Vaishnava Sahajiyā and folk Vaishnavism. Hayes discusses alternative views of Krishna and Rādhā of the Sahajiyās, referring to a contemporary (Western) metaphor theory finding it 'quite useful in evaluating the potency of conceptual metaphor in religious texts' (p. 21). Concentrating on extolling the theory as such, he unfortunately does not leave enough space for examining the various texts of the Sahajiyās. Applying the Indian aesthetic theory of *rasa*, only mentioned, could have given an interesting conceptual metaphoric view of the matter as well. McDaniels focuses on the village cult of Krishna statues, opposing it to Gauḍīya Vaishnavism (pp. 34–6), an orthodox tradition of that region. It is rather obvious, though, that a devotee of any origin and affiliation in daily worship does not consider any theoretical reflection except his/her own understanding of the

divine. After all, the worship of images was also introduced by Gauḍīya Vaiṣṇavas, just to mention two followers of Caitanya—Narahari Śarkar, and Vaṁsidās. The cult of village statues (*ṭhākurs*) of Krishna is a part of the widespread mode of praising the deity in a material shape of the solid *mūrti*. Should we agree with the author's final statement: 'this alternative or folk Krishna has humbled himself as a prisoner within matter' (p. 40)?

Titling her paper 'Domesticating Krishna ...' Tracy Pintchman refers to a women's ritual tradition in Benares and juxtaposes the puranic and the folk. The female devotional practice is pictured in regard to Krishna's wedding to the plant Tulsi in the elaborated *pūjā* in Kārtik month (October/November). Then we move to Braj, the home country of Krishna. The chapter 'Krishna as Loving Husband of God...' by Guy L. Beck presents the Rādhāvallabha Sampradāya founded by Śrī Harivamśa (16th century), one of the most important Vaiṣṇava sects in Vrindavana, founded by Śrī Harivamśa (16th century). The Sampradāya established the supreme status of Rādhā, which the author discusses by considering different Vaiṣṇava traditions. Rādhā was placed over and above Krishna, definitely her husband. Thus two passionate lovers of the *Gītagovinda* by Jayadeva (12th century) became eternally married wife and husband. The appendix to the chapter is worth mentioning since it contains a translation of two hymns composed in Braj Bhāṣa (a transcription of the original text would have been appreciated). They describe the wedding of Rādhā and Krishna (pp. 86–90) and come from the Sampradāya's hymnal that is still a part of ritual practice. A. Whitney Sanford writes about Balarāma (Daūjī), a faithful companion of his brother Krishna, but rarely worshipped separately. She concentrates on the religious practice of the Daūjī Temple (Uttar Pradesh) where Balarāma is given a central position in the cult. The textual sources for Balarāma and his Holī festival are brought into attention and informatively presented. Christian Lee Novetzke gives an account entitled 'A Family Affair...', or Krishna in Paṇḍharpūr (Maharashtra), taking 'the theme of family values and domestic issues as a defining character of early Marāṭhī devotional literature' (p. 114). He focuses on the *Tīrthāvalī* (*The Garland of Sacred Places*) text of the Vārkarī tradition and worship of Krishna as Viṭṭhal.

The Krishna-lore in the south is represented by an essay of Anne E. Monius, who dedicates it to 'Krishna in the Non-Hindu Literature of Early Medieval South India' (p. 139). The author refers to two Tamil narrative poems, *Cilappatikāram* and *Maṇimēkalai*, the author of the former perhaps belonging to the Jaina tradition and of the latter to the Buddhist one. The passages from them describing Krishna's dance (*kuravai*) and mentioning Balarāma and Piññai (Rādhā) are questioned, but there is no clear answer (pp. 146–7). It should be remembered that both poems are associated with the Hindu tradition as well (*vide* deification of Kaṇṇaki), so why call them,

without any comment, non-Hindu literature? The essay of Jerome H. Bauer discusses the figure of Krishna in Jaina cosmohistory, where he is considered an archetypal Jaina layman on the one hand and an Illustrious Person—*Śalākāpuruṣa* (p. 151)—on the other one. The Jaina Krishna stories called *Harivaṃśa Purāṇas* are found both in the Śvetāmbara and Digambara canons. The author consults some of them to reflect upon the problem of an ‘alternative tradition’, ‘countertradition’, or ‘parallel tradition’ of the Jaina Krishna (p. 165). The last chapter of the volume, by Valerie Ritter, deals with the epic poem *Priyapravās (The Sojourn of the Beloved)* by Hariaudh, a Braj Bhāṣa poet of the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries. The poet remodels the carnal relationship of Rādhā and Krishna into modern social phenomenon voiced in his work.

The whole volume offers a considerable spectrum of various lesser-known forms of Krishna bhakti presented from different research perspectives. It is an informative addition to studies in broadly conceived Vaishnavism and religious traditions as such.

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KATRIN FISCHER. *Yakṣagāna. Eine Einführung in eine südindische Theatertradition Mit Übersetzung und Text von „Abhimanyu Kāḷaga“*, Drama und Theater in Südasiens 3, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2004, pp. xi+202. ISSN 1431-4975, ISBN 3-447-05103-5 (Paperback)

Yakṣagāna, a theatre tradition from the state of Karnataka in southern India, attracted scholars’ attention relatively late, the first monographs being published by K. V. Karnath (1975) and Martha Ashton Bush and Bruce Christie (1977). The volume presented is a new contribution to studies concerning this particular theatre form and Indian theatrical tradition as such. Katrin Fischer, a young German scholar, experienced the world of the Yakṣagāna when she did her fieldwork in Karnataka as a researcher within the theatre. Her book is published as a consecutive volume (3) of the series dedicated to *Drama and Theatre of South Asia* and edited by Professor Heidrun Brueckner from Wuerzburg University in Germany. The work is divided into two main parts. While the first one is dedicated to a general picture of the phenomenon of the Yakṣagāna, the second contains a study of a Yakṣagāna text (*Abhimanyu Kāḷaga*).

The concise introduction (pp. 3–5) is followed by Chapter II (pp. 5–54), presenting numerous aspects of the theatre of Yakṣagāna. The author starts with a brief history of the theatre, which can be traced back to the 15th century, though the first Yakṣagāna

text known to us, *Virāṭa Parva*, which was composed in 1564 (the language of this theatre is mainly Kannada, but some Sanskrit, Malayalam and Tuḷu can be also found). Then various constituents of the stage presentation (only men are allowed to perform) are discussed: musical elements (orchestra, musical notations, songs, melodious recitations, dances), acting (gestures, face expressions, stage movement), costume and make up (the term *Schminkmaske* is used), and the context and structure of the performance. Two Yakṣagāna characters catch our attention, Bhāgavata and Hanumanāyaka (pp. 31–4). In them we can recognise familiar and significant figures from Classical Sanskrit theatre, Sūtradhāra and Vidūṣaka. Other important facts concerning Yakṣagāna tradition are also mentioned: aesthetics, religious and non-religious ambiance, patronage, spectators, and present-day position. Fischer concludes the first part of her book with a discussion about the formal classification of the Yakṣagāna—folk or classical? She refers to the opinions of scholars who place this theatre form either in the folk or classical tradition (pp. 49–53). We remain without any unquestionable proposal or definite answer, however. It is undoubtedly a very complicated matter in the case of Yakṣagāna, as well as many other Indian theatre forms. Should we follow the suggestion Kapila Vatsyayan made in her book (*Traditional Indian Theatre: Multiple Streams*, 1980) to call such theatrical phenomena ‘traditional’ since they refer to both classical and folk traditions and are somehow ‘in between’? Yakṣagāna is definitely placed in between these two traditions with its own blend of various elements developed over the course of time.

The second part of Fischer’s book (pp. 54–157) is dedicated to the text *Abhimanyu Kāḷaga* (*The Battle of Abhimanyu*), which was written by Dēvidāsa in the 17th century and is performed by Yakṣagāna troupes. The texts used for presentation are called *prasaṅgas*. The author brings forward numerous issues regarding Yakṣagāna textual tradition and in particular the *prasaṅga* mentioned above. She gives a synopsis of the play/text, considers its metrical structure and poetic frame, and discusses its form and subject matter. After some methodological remarks in regard to the rendering process, a German translation of the *Abhimanyu Kāḷaga* is presented with numerous annotations (pp. 100–34). Then a transcription of the original text follows (pp. 135–57). Chapter VII contains some chosen stanzas from Dēvidāsa’s text and an earlier work by Kumāra Vyāsa, *Karṇāṭa Bhārata Kathāmañjari*, (written in the 15th century) to contrast both poets and their compositions (pp. 159–79). The final chapter (VIII) provides a glossary of the most important terms of the Yakṣagāna tradition; finally a bibliography and three indices are included.

Katrin Fischer’s book is a very welcome addition to studies in Yakṣagāna theatre. Since it is dedicated to the visual tradition, at least a few illustrations or photos would

have been appreciated. That the author published the text of the play (its original and its translation into German) and provided an elaborated presentation is worth praising. A Western reader has a rare, if not the first and only, occasion to become acquainted with the Yakṣagāna textual tradition.

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