

The Religion of the Tempasuk Dusuns of North Borneo

BY I. H. N. EVANS

Cambridge: University Press, 1953, pp. 579 and 22 additional plates.

The Na-khi Naga Cult and Related Ceremonies, Parts I and II

BY J. F. ROCK

Rome: Is. M.E.O., 1952 ('Serie Orientale Roma', IV), 2 volumes, pp. 806 and 58 additional plates and explanatory notes.

Le Concile de Lhasa

BY P. DEMIÉVILLE

Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1952 ('Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes chinoises', VII), pp. 399 and 32 additional plates.

With the practically complete cessation of ethnological inquiries conducted in the field under the sponsorship of the French School of the Far East, monographs on South East Asia have become, since the end of the 1939-45 war, somewhat rare. Hence it is a pleasure to welcome the work of Mr. Evans on the religious life of the Dusuns of North Borneo. With its shortcomings and its merits, this book shows what can still be accomplished by the researcher who works alone, at a time when the fashion is team-research. Mr. Evans visited the Tempasuk Sub-District in 1910, as a Cadet of the Chartered Company. From 1912 to 1933, he was curator of the museum of Perak in Malaya, and after a period of retirement in England

between 1933-1938, he returned to Borneo and began to gather up the materials of the present study. Interned by the Japanese during the war, he could not resume his work until he was sixty years old. In his previous books he had given some information on the peoples of Malaya which supplemented the thick and still classic volumes of Skeat and Blagden. The present work, which resumes and sometimes corrects the documentation furnished in his *Studies in Religion, Folklore, and Custom in British North Borneo and the Malay Peninsula*, is divided into three parts: I, General Beliefs; II, Ceremonies, i.e., agrarian rites (one of the parts of the book which will be most interesting to specialists) and communal rites for the

Reviews

village with, among others, some interesting data on head-hunting, which was formerly practiced and which, according to the author, may spring into activity again. This part also includes some individual and domestic ceremonies (for cases of illness, bad dreams, etc.). Many of the rites involve the exposure and the donation of a sacrificial animal to the evil spirits supposed to be gathered outside of the houses. Part III is 'Folktales', and contains sixty-five tales which are closely related to the other two parts of the book. In the appendix are texts in the sacred language used by the Priestesses, with attempts at translation, as well as detailed descriptions of these priestesses' ordination rites, and the details of a fertility rite. The materials of the book are thus rich from a functional point of view. Having lived for the most part by himself and without access to a specialised library, Mr. Evans has not undertaken the comparative analysis of his material. To do so would have increased considerably the size of an already long book; but one cannot help thinking that a discussion of his manuscript with other specialists would have avoided a certain number of repetitions and curtailed some minute descriptions. The author is always careful to tell us what he did not see as well as what he did see, and must be praised for this procedure. We have here, in fact, a truly descriptive work: the reader does not find reference to other works on Borneo in the European languages, besides those of the author. Within these limits, however, the book justifies its publishers' claims: it constitutes one of the most detailed descrip-

tions we have of the religious life of a Borneo people.

Mr. Rock's book, which is also the product of a lone worker, represents essentially an attempt at translation, translation of a rather special kind. The Na-khi, whom Mr. Rock has been studying with praiseworthy tenacity for thirty years, constitute a population who now inhabit the north-west part of Yünnan Province and the south-western corner of Szechuan. They seem to have emigrated long ago from north-east Tibet, where they were living a nomadic existence. Their capital is at Li-Chiang, from which their kings more or less independently controlled their territory until the installation in A.D. 1723 of an administration under the protection of a Chinese magistracy. The Na-khi do not have monasteries, and their religious ceremonies are performed by priest-sorcerers. They do have, however, a voluminous literature, which is in large part religious, although certain texts contain historico-legendary information. For reading these texts a dictionary is of no use, since they are written in pictograms and cannot be translated except by those who know the spoken word which corresponds to the symbol employed in the manuscript. The Na-khi also possess a script of the phonetic type, which is little used today and the rules of which are more and more forgotten. Mr. Rock believes that this script represents the older of the two forms of expression. With the help of those rare priests who can still understand these texts, Mr. Rock examined thousands, and translated hundreds, of manuscripts; the results of

his years of hard work were largely lost when the boat on which the material had been shipped from Calcutta was sunk by the Japanese in 1944. The author went back into the field after the war and remained there working until 1949. The two volumes which we have before us contain the translation of an impressive quantity of manuscripts intended to be read during ceremonies aiming, roughly, at the expulsion of evil spirits, and the conduct of different funeral ceremonies. The photographs, which are numerous, are of exceptional quality, as might be expected after the author's previous articles and his work on the history and geography of the region. What are the religious ideas which emerge from this compact mass of texts, the reading of which is admittedly difficult, even though the task is lightened by explanatory notes? According to the author, we have to do here with 'a composite religious edifice whose foundation rests primarily on primitive nature-worship and on the ancient pre-buddhistic national religion of Tibet known as the Bün, of which it is in fact only a part but a part which has survived among the Na-khi in a purer form than can now be found in Tibet proper. Na-khi religious literature has been influenced by Burmese Nat-worship, Chinese Taoism, and finally Tibetan Buddhism; its core is however Bün with an admixture of aboriginal tribal shamanism.' One thus gets an idea of the philological and other skills necessary to the thorough examination of the texts given. Despite a sometimes obscure style, Mr. Rock, thanks to his deep knowledge of the daily life of the Na-khi and his personal competence in

botany, has succeeded in bringing some clarification to the understanding of these texts. For a more thorough examination, he naturally lacked the necessary perspectives. Let us hope that other specialists in the ethnology and philology of the regions around the Na-khi will give all the attention that they merit to these texts. While hoping that Mr. Rock will be able to continue his work for a long time, since it is so important for the understanding of the Bon-po religion as it is presently practiced, may we ask him to furnish us as soon as possible with an over-all view of this people, wherein the religious life will be closely tied up to the social, and which he alone is in a position to give us?

With M. Demiéville's book we again find ourselves some thousands of miles to the north-west of Borneo, that is to say, with the Europeo-centrism of our minds, in the heart of Orientalism. One of the great Western masters of the study of Buddhism and of Sinology here brings the equipment of his fine learning to the examination of a conflict which opposed Indian to Chinese Buddhists in the eighth century of our era. Several versions of the controversy in question are already known, notably that in Bu-ston's *History of Buddhism*, translated into English by the Russian scholar Obermiller. The Chinese collection of the 'documents' of the struggle, 'gathered in Tibet itself soon after the event', and brought back from Tun-huang by Paul Pelliot, is reproduced in photographs at the end of the present work. A translation of it takes

Reviews

up the first part of the book; there follows a very full historical commentary, and this first volume ends with the analysis of the Chinese version of the first Bhāvanā-krama of Kamalaśīla, and a translation of the Tibetan version of the third Bhāvanā-krama of the same author, this last by M. E. Lamotte. The work has profited from supplementary data by Mlle. M. Lalou, M. J. Bacot, and M. R. A. Stein.

First, a few words to place very briefly this controversy which took place around A.D. 793. In the history of the texts, the first relations between Tibet and China are marked by two marriages of Chinese princesses to Tibetans; these marriages were in some way the consequence of military activity on the part of Tibet which, during this period, passed rapidly from the condition of a Chinese vassal to that of a power treating on an equal footing with its great neighbour to the East. Indeed, in 763 the Tibetans captured the imperial capital of Ch'ang-an and maintained themselves there for thirteen or fifteen days before being thrown out. Until the middle of the ninth century they remained in northwest China, holding a part of the Chinese Empire. This political background explains what might, at first glance, seem to be only a priestly quarrel over some questions of religious terminology. During the reign of the king Khri-sroñ-Ido-bcan (*ca.* 757-797), a Chinese teacher arrived in Tibet armed with knowledge about 'spiritual concentration', that is, about Yoga practices which the Chinese Buddhists called Dhyana. The Chinese teacher, known under the title of Mahāyanā,

taught in Tibet a far-going quietism, 'extending even to the renunciation of pious works', and found many followers. But another party, gathering around the Indian teacher Sāntaraksita, then in Tibet, arose in opposition. The king of the country seemed to incline toward the theses of this latter, but the adversaries of Sāntaraksita threatened to assassinate him with all his supporters, and the king called Kamalaśīla himself from India in order that he might dispute, in the royal presence, the theses of the party of Chinese inspiration. After various interventions from one side and the other, the Chinese faction admitted itself beaten. The propagation of its doctrine was forbidden, a decree which brought about several suicides. Legend adds that, at the instance of the defeated teacher, four ruffians came to break the loins of the winner.

We shall leave to others more competent than ourselves, in more specialised reviews, the pleasure of rejoicing in detail over this feast of scholarly abundance. Here we would like simply to emphasise that M. Demiéville's book, which is essentially the work of a philologist, is rich in ethnological information. Outside the subject of the origins of Buddhism in Tibet and of the role played by China in its origin, here are, by way of example, some of the subjects which are touched upon as the analysis of the documents is pursued: the working of precious metals in ancient Tibet, the function of left and right in Tibet and in China, the imposition of a barbarous hairdress and customs on Chinese, the penitential acts of Tibetan and of Japanese warriors, hierarchical insignia in Tibet and China.

Coats of mail and the wearing of the braid receive particular attention. When M. Demiéville says somewhere that his interpretations are 'too often only conjectures', it must be added that few scholars can 'conjecture' with so much surety and so deep a knowledge of the texts.

Here then we have three books which are very different from each other but which are all three of capital importance for the anthropologist and the historian of religions. Their very variety itself emphasises the problem of the training of the anthropologist who is interested in these areas. Now, such a student has an immense advantage over his Americanist colleague: he can find at his disposal a mass of historical documents which is much greater than anything the Americanist has to make use of. And yet the paradoxical fact is that the anthropologists of South East Asia, with the exception of the Schmidt-Koppers school, have made very scanty use of the rich harvest of facts put at their disposal by several generations of philologists. There are, however, some exceptions: we might mention, among others, the powerful syntheses of Mr. Wolfram Eberhard on local cultures and their role in the formation of Chinese unity, and the remarkable analyses of Indian religions by Paul Mus. But these works date from the last war and even earlier. The political difficulties which since 1945 have hindered work in the field have given a bountiful gift of time to researchers, for the most part obliged to remain in their libraries, time which might have been given over to a

thorough theoretical examination of the philological and other documents gathered before the war. That this examination has not taken place seems to stem from two principal causes: (1) Rare are the anthropologists, particularly in the English-speaking countries, who are also Orientalists. The organisation of university instruction in these countries would seem to forbid simultaneous training in the two disciplines. (2) The underwriting of anthropological studies is still tied closely to the commercial interests of the countries the researchers come from. Any anthropologist will tell you that it is much easier these days to be given a mission in Africa than in countries which no longer benefit from the cultural interest accorded to the old-time colonial areas. The anthropologist seems to be, like the missionary, obliged to follow in the footsteps of the military. The result of this state of affairs is, in any case, plain. The sociology of Buddhism remains entirely to be written, and we do not believe that we go too far wrong in declaring that there does not exist a single modern analysis of the cultural formation of the group of South East Asian peoples. There are to be sure history books, and some of them are excellent; and the two gaps which we point out do not, perhaps, raise problems of burning immediacy. But reading the three books reviewed underlines the fact that in one of the world's regions where the documentation available to the anthropologist is among the richest, the latter still has considerable difficulty in achieving a mastery of it.