



# Natural Symbols in South East Asia

Edited by

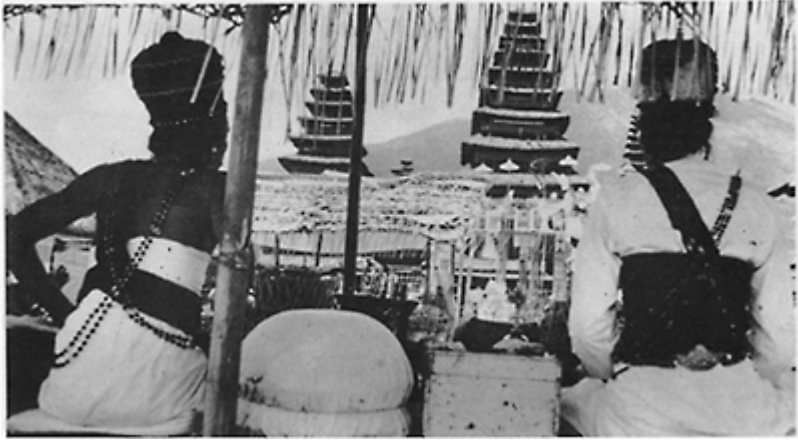
G.B. MILNER



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1. Balinese *Brahmana* priests during the annual temple festival at Basakih. (The pagoda-shaped shrines, *meru*, are representations of the celestial mountain, Mahameru, which is identified locally with the central volcano, in the background.)

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NATURAL SYMBOLS IN SOUTH  
EAST ASIA

*Edited by*

G.B.MILNER

*Professor of Austronesian Studies  
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SCHOOL OF ORIENTAL AND AFRICAN STUDIES  
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## FOREWORD

This book is based on the second of two series of open lectures given in the Centre of South East Asian Studies in the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London during the session 1975–76. The first of these, *Nature and Man in South East Asia*, ran from October to December 1975. The second, *Natural Symbols in South East Asia*, ran from January to March 1976.

The hope that both series would be coherent and independent, and that each would complement the other, was in the main realised and the editors are thus able to present the published versions as companion volumes.

The Department of South East Asia and the Islands at S.O.A.S., which had long had close relations with other departments of the School, notably those of History, Linguistics and Anthropology, was given new opportunities by the formation in the 1960s of a Centre of South East Asian Studies which strengthened existing personal and academic links. More recently the recruitment of scholars from other disciplines—politics, geography and jurisprudence—has greatly increased the resources of the School in the South East Asian region.

The addition of these subjects to the range of our interests has also reminded the linguists and historians that habitat and economy, those uninvited guests, had in the past not always been given adequate consideration. It is true that many of the great orientalists always did show a lively interest in land and sea, in fauna and flora, in soil and weather, in climate and resources, and in the interaction between these prerequisites of man's existence and his cultural achievements. From a scientific point of view however, even the best of them remained, in all but a few cases, enthusiastic amateurs. To say this is not to disparage but simply to recognise that after the 18th century it was no longer possible for the layman to keep abreast of the pace of progress in the natural sciences. Even in oriental studies, the age of the specialist had arrived.

Yet there always was a risk that if interest in the cultures and civilisations of South East Asia was too exclusive, scholars would tend to overlook the natural conditions under which man is born and nurtured, the way he feeds, clothes and houses himself and the safeguards he relies on against the hazards of disease, famine, and other natural disasters. While it goes without saying that cultural achievements are part of his response to the challenges of his environment, it is also true that the solace of art, poetry and religion is only possible after the primary drives for food, shelter and territory are satisfied.

That it should be necessary to make this point at all is a reminder that some famous orientalists had no first-hand knowledge of the East and that many were never exposed to the social and economic pressures that most Asians take for granted. Now, given the

necessity of keeping oriental studies firmly anchored to the often stark realities of peasant life in the tropics, it seems likely that geography and anthropology are well equipped to serve as mediators between society and nature. It is thus appropriate that the first volume should feature four articles by geographers and two by anthropologists.

In the second volume the emphasis switches to the place of nature, organic and inorganic, in symbolic cognition. For it is one of man's distinguishing traits that in addition to his unique development of communication through articulate language, his ability to reason from the particular to the general (and hence his capacity for acquiring and storing knowledge in ways that are not solely determined by genetic factors) seem to depend largely on the genesis and operation of symbols.

Thus the articles of the second volume fall roughly into two categories: those concerned with the structure and functions of inorganic symbols (mainly spatial and directional) used in a social, religious or political context, and those which deal with organic symbols (mainly flora and fauna) used for lyrical, ethical or magical purposes.

\* \* \*

As Centre Chairman I should like to record our debt to members of the Department of Geography, especially to Professor Charles Fisher and to Mr Philip Stott, whose interest and active support made it possible to have access to what was, for most of us, a new perspective on the natural environment of man in South East Asia.

Our thanks are also due to the Centre Secretary Mrs Doris Poppitt, who in addition to her other duties transcribed the recorded versions of the lectures and so greatly assisted the authors in preparing them for publication.

G.B.MILNER

# INTRODUCTION

In the conclusion of his article at the end of this book, Harry Shorto gives cogent reasons why in Burma the south-east should be the most sacred and propitious point of the compass: it is associated with live birth and auspicious death i.e. rebirth and hence, presumably with a circular and cyclical conception of human life which finds in its end its beginning.

The plan of this work must also be regarded as cyclical rather than linear and Shorto's article on the biological coordinates of the compass-points in the Burmese universe takes us back to Mark Hobart's essay on the biosocial azimuths of Bali.

It is perhaps fitting to recall here that when at a meeting of Samoan chiefs and orators the cup-bearer ceremonially hands out the bowl of kava to each one of them in turn, the strict order of precedence is also cyclical: great (but not necessarily the greatest) honour is accorded to the man who receives the first bowl, but equal (or even greater) respect is paid to him who is the last to drink. The originality of the two articles by Mark Hobart and of the contribution by Jeremy Davidson is such however that they are featured at the head of the table of contents.

The title *Natural Symbols* will recall Professor Mary Douglas' major contribution to the subject which appeared in 1970. In that work she stressed the rich symbolic potential of the human body for the representation of social values and of society. Of the contributors to the present book only Davidson takes up her theme, but he focusses his attention on the homologies between aspects of nature and of the sexual organs in the genesis of poetical symbols. Since the tendency to set up a doubtful dichotomy between mind and body, or between man and nature, is characteristically Western, it is instructive to find in Davidson's study of Vietnamese lyrics evidence of an indissoluble association between sexual and aesthetic enjoyment. It may be that some of the most important clues to the enigma presented by the symbol in the processes of cognition will be found in erotic poetry, which is evidently a more acceptable and prestigious genre in South East Asia and the Pacific than it has been in modern Europe.

Hobart's two articles are linked by his recurring suggestions that symbols cannot be depended on to give man a better grasp of his place in nature and society. On the contrary our readiness to respond to arguments presented to us in the shape of models and similes, makes us particularly gullible when the symbols are perverted to set up false, or at least irrelevant, analogies and so used to justify and perpetuate an unequal and perhaps logically indefensible social relationship.

The attention of the reader is especially drawn to Hobart's second article (*Padi, puns and the attribution of responsibility*) where the deliberate employment in Balinese

agricultural ritual of chance phonetic and semantic similarities for magico-religious purposes is discussed. It may be that he has made an important discovery, as the absence of an appropriate term in English (other than 'puns') would *prima facie* seem to indicate.

The warm and humane article by Professor Hla Pe which follows, gives a measure of what we in the west have lost through our relatively recent migrations to ever larger urban conurbations in which we are more and more alienated from the regular and reassuring rhythms of good husbandry. This divorce has given credit to the Western illusion not only that man is heterogeneous from, and superior to, his natural environment but also that as a subject he can arrogate to himself the right to use animals and plants as objects—entirely to serve his own ends. There could hardly be a more compelling appeal for compassion than Hla Pe's remark that as a country lad in Burma, he could scarcely bring himself to eat the companions of his daily round, the animals he loved and who trusted him.

Like Hobart and Shorto, the authors of the next two articles, George Condominas and Andrew Turton, share an interest in the relationship between the physical and the social dimensions of space and in the isomorphism which they discern in social units of varying scale. For Condominas *l'espace social* is a function of political relations between unequal partners whose ascribed status is a matter partly of accidents of history, partly of land tenure and mode of production, and partly of exchanges of goods and services. Within these co-ordinates a dynamic relationship develops between social classes ranked also according to ethnic and linguistic origins. When pressures become intolerable, however, even the least privileged of these classes has the ultimate option of withdrawing its allegiance and offering it elsewhere.

Turton examines in detail the organisation of space in the lay-out of a typical Northern Thailand house and the light that the ritual and social customs which punctuate its construction and inauguration throws on the political assumptions which underlie architectural space. The dwelling of an extended family emerges not only as a microcosm of the Kingdom of Thailand, but the power of the head of the household is shown to be politically and symbolically akin to that of the King over the country as a whole.

In his well-documented article which draws on a wide range of primary and secondary sources, Anthony Christie re-examines a question first asked by Lévi-Strauss in the 1950s concerning the existence of moieties and other forms of dual organisation in South East Asia and elsewhere. Noting that the distinguished French anthropologist came to a negative conclusion, Christie agrees with the verdict as far as Indonesia is concerned and adds a great deal of other evidence from his own reading and fieldwork. His unusual ability to examine problems both dia- and synchronically, as well as cross-culturally, adds much weight to his conclusions. To put it in his own words 'Reality...construes the situation as a totality—which can be expressed as two parts, neither of which can exist without the other'. 'The important thing...is that the two parts are twins from a single origin: their opposition is an expression of their unity.'

Finally the reader's attention is drawn to the concluding paragraphs of Shorto's article, in which he puts forward a highly suggestive model for a better interpretation of orientation symbolism in 'Burma'. The binary opposition of human life and death is combined with the quadripartite disposition of the cardinal points to form a dynamic structure (Fig. 4). The result neatly sums up the human condition and is elegant as well as satisfying.

\* \* \*

I now have the pleasant duty of thanking all those who have helped to edit the eight articles which make up this book. In addition to the considerable assistance given to me by the authors with their own articles, which is gratefully acknowledged, thanks are also due to Jeremy Davidson who helped me with another article and to Stuart Simmonds, John Okell, Peter Bee and Kunmanas Chitakasem who did the same. I am also grateful for help and advice from Mrs Valerie Phillips of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Mlle Gabrielle Varro of the Centre de Documentation et de Recherches sur l'Asie du Sud-Est et le Monde Insulindien in Paris, Miss Doris Johnson of S.O.A.S. and Philip Stott. I wish to thank the Publications Committee of S.O.A.S., especially its Chairman Professor J.C. Wright and its Secretary Mr Martin Daly for their help and support. Finally the editor owes a special debt to Miss Joan Oliver and the staff of the S.O.A.S. Support Section, as well as to the cartographer Mr Albert de Souza and the photographer Mr Paul Fox for the production of the present volume.

G.B.MILNER  
Chairman

Centre of South East Asian Studies

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# THE PATH OF THE SOUL: THE LEGITIMACY OF NATURE IN BALINESE CONCEPTIONS OF SPACE<sup>1</sup>

Mark Hobart

Space is highly ordered in Balinese thought and its use is organised according to definite rules. Within this framework, ritual position and movement possess a complex significance. In the closed cycle of life, death and rebirth, for example, the location of ceremonies varies with changes in status and provides a tangible expression of the fate of the human soul. The basic dimensions are defined by reference to terrestrial and empyrean phenomena and are identified with processes in nature which are perceived as changeless: the course of the sun and the downhill flow of water. From this, there emerges a connexion between the interpretation of space and the traditional political order, founded upon a theory of caste. For the main directional axis is associated with ritual purity, which also constitutes the ideological principle underlying the system of ranking. Through the medium of the spatial grid, purity—or innate religious difference which justifies political inequality—is represented as a natural and unquestionable quality. This is strikingly reminiscent of Cohen's view of political systems that: 'the stability and continuity of the régime are made possible through a complex system of symbolism that gives it legitimacy by representing it ultimately as a "natural" part of the celestial order' (A.Cohen 1969:221).

This argument raises two more general issues. One of the approaches to the study of Balinese society has stressed the importance of a conceptual order based on organised dual classification, in which the indigenous dimensions form fundamental pairs of complementary opposites.<sup>2</sup> Such a system may, however, have two aspects. The directions have often been reduced to a series of exclusive binary oppositions; whereas in some contexts it would be more exact, and useful, to adopt instead a model based on a continuum between polar extremes (P.Cohen 1975:620–22). Applied to space in Bali, a formal analysis in terms of dualistic categories tends to be static and incomplete, as it ignores the problems of relative position and mobility.

On a different theme, the increasingly sophisticated studies, which demonstrate the ways societies classify and structure the natural world (Douglas 1957; 1966; 1970; Leach 1964; Lévi-Strauss 1962; 1966; Tambiah 1969), sometimes create the impression that anthropologists adopt a position of cultural relativism which overlooks Lévi-Strauss' point that man may desire 'objective knowledge' of the properties of the universe (Lévi-Strauss 1966; 2–3). This emphasis on the cultural bases of classification is not



incompatible with the view that there is a world 'out there'. In some features, nature possesses an observable order (cf. Lévi-Strauss 1966:9–10), which may be of symbolic significance precisely because it appears to be intrinsic, immutable and independent of society. In Bali, it is interesting that the natural events underlying the spatial system are distinguished by being conceived of as part of a universe largely beyond human control. At one level, the socialisation of nature seems to be reversed, and society is presented as linked to the natural order.

In his survey, principally of the work of Dutch scholars on Balinese religion, Swellengrebel provides a useful discussion on what he terms 'cosmic antipodes' (1960: Chapter 3). In common with certain other societies in the Indonesian archipelago, the Balinese recognise an antithesis between the direction of the interior, *kaja*, and the sea, *kelod*.<sup>3</sup> This forms the primary axis, in which the mountains are identified with the sacred, purity and goodness, whereas the sea is the complete reverse. There is a secondary axis, running from east, *kangin*, to west, *kauh*, which tends to emerge as less important, but reflects a similar dichotomy of qualities. Associated with this classification are a series of further binary oppositions, which include: sacred:profane; gods:demons; male:female; safety:danger; waxing moon:waning moon; day:night; life:death; and even *désa*: *banjar* (the so-called religious and secular village communities respectively). There is another common system, partly related to the one mentioned, but of less immediate relevance. This is the division of the universe into ranked worlds, above and below the island of Bali, comprising: *akasa*, the upper world, *madyapada*, the human world, and *neraka*, the underworld (Swellengrebel 1960:37–46).

Initially, Balinese directions may be considered then as defined by reference to two spatial axes. These differ in character, however, for while the east: west line is fixed, the one linking mountain and sea describes a radius round a roughly central point to produce a circle. Unfortunately, the exact location of *kaja* raises difficulties. According to some authors, it seems to be correlated with the highest volcano, Gunung Agung, rising over 3,000 metres to the eastern end of the central mountain chain (Covarrubias 1937:76; Mead 1960:201), although in the west of the island it is apparently replaced by lesser, but more visible, peaks. In a fascinating study of the geometrical considerations in temple orientations, James has demonstrated the significance of topography, but that particular identification is questionable (James 1973:148–9; Swellengrebel 1960:39). For much of the lowland area, the reference points of *kaja* and *kelod* commonly adopted appear to correspond roughly with upstream and downstream, from the volcanic lakes and springs of the interior to the sea, or with the course of water. This view receives some support from a scrutiny of detailed early maps of the plains where the paths run in a similar direction, rather than radiating out from the mountains. The relevance of this should become evident in due course.

As the lake: sea axis is theoretically radial, it bears little relation to the compass points, and varies from place to place around the coast-line. In the narrow belt to the north of the mountain range, *kaja* lies towards the south, so that the most propitious direction is to the south-east. It is at the lateral extremities of the island that difficulties occur. For the few villages in the remote west, the direction of the lakes and east coincide; but correspondingly, in the eastern tip they stand opposed. From a brief survey of settlements there, *kaja* seems to predominate for many purposes.<sup>4</sup> Thus, by inversion, reduplication or suppression, the system can be made to work.

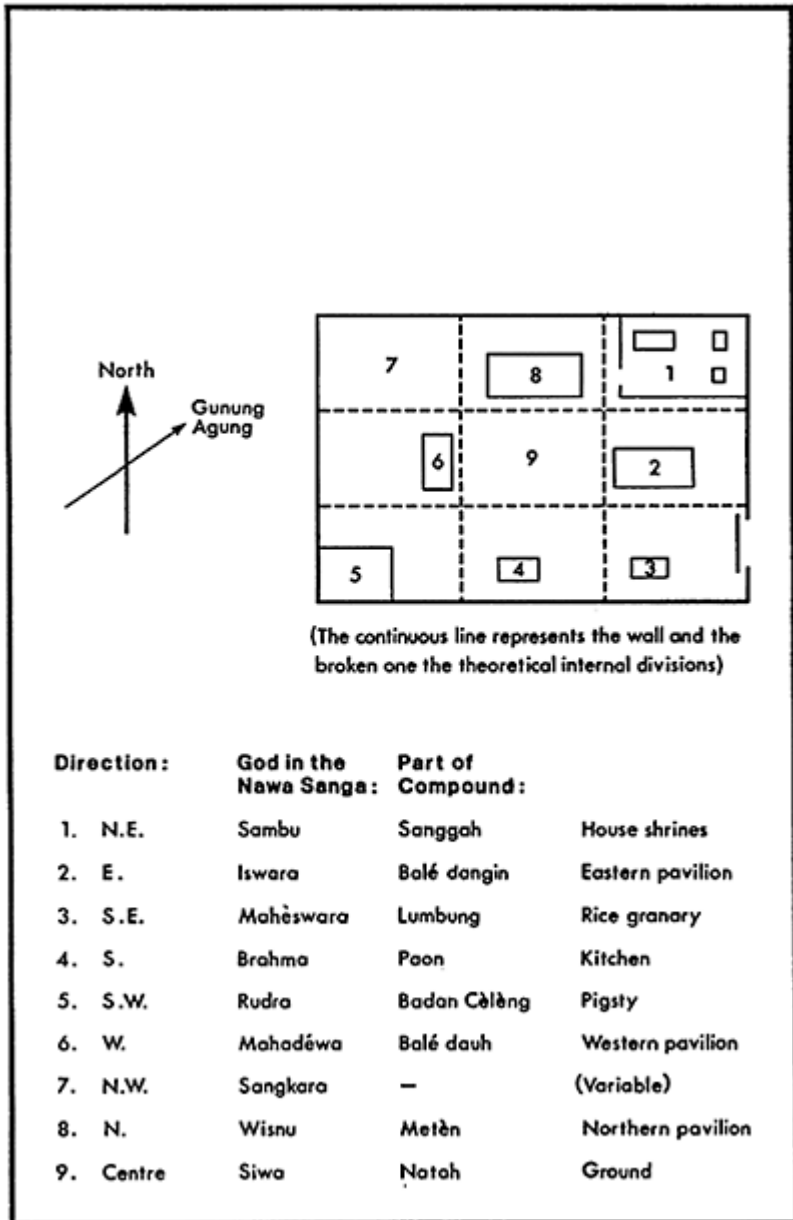
As the majority of the island's population and its historical centre are in the southern lowlands, the line connecting mountains (or lakes) and the sea runs approximately from north to south, so these terms will be used in what follows to prevent unnecessary repetition of unfamiliar words. The result is that the two axes mentioned intersect at a centre, to produce a five-part model, or classificatory scheme, which includes other sets, such as deities, colours, numbers and days (of the Balinese five-day week), known popularly as the *Panca Déwa* (five gods). Hooykaas (C.Hooykaas 1974:2–3) gives an account of the myth in which this complex, referred to as the *Panca Kosika*, is created. This arrangement is related to a more elaborate nine-part system, the *Nawa Sanga*, in which the intermediate directions are ascribed with a prominence similar to that of the cardinal points (Pott 1966:134–5; see also fig. 1).

This ritual grid has wide application. Apart from furnishing the basic frame of reference, in attributing differential value to the directions, it organises the use of space in a wide range of matters, from the proper orientation while sleeping (with the head to the north or east) to the location of temples and shrines (Goris 1960a; 1960b:106). Relative position may be relevant. Norms influence the arrangement of seating at public meetings (Grader 1937:112–14; cf. Hobart 1975:72–3), or the contact between castes (Belo 1970a:93–4; Mead 1960). They also affect religious observances such as the mortuary pollution obligatory for neighbours, *pengapit*, of an afflicted household, so that compounds to the north recognise shorter mourning periods than those to the south. There is an interesting connexion here between ritual purity and the flow of water; for, not only is the prescribed length of pollution on death diminished the higher the caste, but also the terms used for the directions in these circumstances are *luan*, upstream, and *tebèn*, downstream.<sup>5</sup>

This system also underlies the framework in terms of which social space is structured to correspond with, and reduplicate, the putative form of the cosmos (cf. Barnes 1974; Cunningham 1973, for instances from other Indonesian societies). It is to be found, for example, in the ideal form of the village and compound discussed below (Tan 1966), in the ritual setting for the enthronement of a prince (Swellengrebel 1947) or the layout of the shadow-play, *wayang kulit*, and its orientation (for the *mantra*, or invocations, used by the puppeteer in linking the stage to the encompassing order and the directions, see Hooykaas 1973a:76–7). In this scheme, the human body may be seen as a microcosm, *buwana alit*, and its parts identified with the divisions of the natural world (Weck 1937:237–44) and the directions (Wirz 1928:67), rather than as forming a component of the universe, *buwana agung*. On many occasions, the body must be oriented according to the requirements of the spatial rules, so that distinctions of right and left become subordinate. It is possible that this is not unconnected with the problem of the essential motility of human beings.

For the more detailed examination of the use of space, it will be convenient to adopt the arrangement found in the settlement of Tengahpadang (a pseudonym) in the southern Balinese kingdom of Gianyar, where my field-work was carried out. In its general features, it fits well with the accounts in much of the published literature.<sup>6</sup> However, as there is variation in local customs, the possibility of regional differences should not be ignored. The Geertzes, for instance, describe a number of different compounds, but the directions are, unfortunately, not always clear (Geertz & Geertz 1975:50–52).

**Figure 1 Scheme of a simple compound in Tengahpadang (Not to scale)**



The attributes of the spatial grid are evident in the ordered layout of the houseyard and village. Instead of a central building surrounded by land, Balinese compounds normally consist of several pavilions in a roughly square territory, bounded by high walls often in an advanced state of dilapidation. According to Tan (from whose useful discussion the following is partly drawn), this residential area may be divided conceptually into nine smaller squares, each with its appropriate function defined by the directions. The resulting pattern reduplicates the *Nawa Sanga*, in which the interstitial segments can be seen as an elaboration on the major axes.

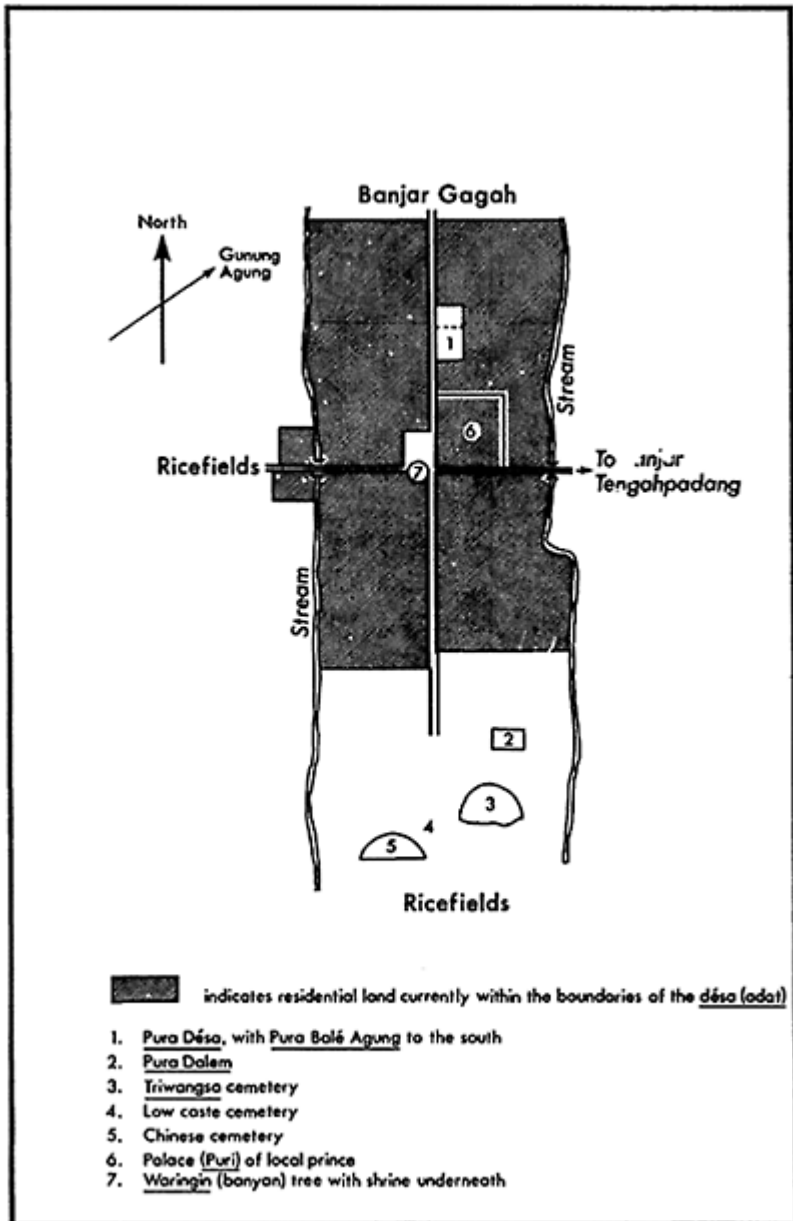
The sections of an idealised, low-caste compound are represented in schematic form in Figure 1, omitting garden land which may lie around the perimeter. A high proportion of residences in Pisangkaja, the main ward studied, approximates this model, including those on which the ethnographic account below is based. The main deviations are in multiple household yards, where the junior branches tend to reiterate the arrangement in part, in most instances, significantly, to the south and west (cf. Geertz & Geertz 1975:50–52). Families which have recently built a new compound often start with the essential structures and ancestor shrines, with the intention of filling the gaps later. Long-established, but poor, households seem generally to attempt to maintain the standard, either by using inexpensive materials or simply by allowing the pavilions to fall into a lamentable condition. The most variation is often in the large yards of wealthy extended families, where buildings proliferate on available garden-land. A striking illustration of this occurred in the *puri*, palace, of the local minor prince. In building a small shop, he was forced to relocate the pigsty in a space on the eastern side of the compound, but still south of the shrines. The complaints to which this led from both the villagers and the senior branch of the royal house provide some indication of the importance attached to correct form.

The structure of the pavilions parallels the tripartite division of the world, discussed above. The raised stereobate corresponds to the underworld and is avoided, except as the site for offerings to demons, *buta*. The open area, enclosed by a variable number of walls (Tan 1966), is used for sleeping and secular activity; while the roof area supported by pillars is reserved for offerings to relatively pure spirits associated with the upper world. The prescriptions for the proper and auspicious measurements of each building are laid down in the manuscript, the *Asta Kosali* (Soebadio 1975). In addition, I was informed that not only the size and form of these, but also the purity of the species of tree used as timber is graded according to caste status.

Similar principles underlie the territorial organisation of the village, although the variation due to topography and historical accident is greater. In Pisangkaja, which both inscriptions and local tradition state to be the original settlement in Tengahpadang, the ideal is followed closely. The ward is divided into four quarters by two paths, running at right-angles to one another in accordance with the main directional axes (Figure 2). The cross-road forms the centre of the village and is a ritually ambiguous place, which is protected by a shrine and a sacred *waringin* tree. This is believed to be haunted at night by villagers possessing *kesaktian*, magical power usually obtained by supplicating the goddess Batari Durga, otherwise known as Batara Sakti, and hence often associated with witchcraft (Belo 1949; Covarrubias 1937:320–58). To the north-east lies a large complex, the *Pura Désa*, which combines a temple for the founding ancestors, *Pura Puseh*, with one for village meetings, *Pura Balé Agung*. Outside the settlement, and *désa* boundary<sup>7</sup> to

### Figure 2 Outline of the Major Sites in Pisangkaja

(For simplicity, only the places mentioned in the text are shown.)



the south stands the *Pura Dalem*, often translated as the temple of death or the underworld, and near it, to the south and west, are the cremation mound and cemeteries. Appropriately, the burial site for the three high castes, *triwangsa*, lies slightly to the north-east of the commoners' graveyard, to the south of which a small group of Chinese tombs faces open ricefields. (Apparently, this satisfies both Balinese ritual and Chinese geomantic requirements simultaneously!) Finally, the palace of the local prince, already mentioned, is located immediately to the north-east of the cross-road. This pattern accords closely with the model given by Tan (1966:471–2).

So far, it has simply been shown that space may be conceived as a series of bounded units, within which the parts are ordered with some sense of direction, so that north and east are purer, or more propitious, than south or west. By combination, the northeast emerges as superior to the south-west. There are a number of shortcomings in the existing arguments as they stand. First, the two axes effectively reduplicate one another; second, the significance of the coordinates remains somewhat vague; finally, in stressing the dual classification of space, there are difficulties in interpreting movement and relative position.

A certain amount of light may be shed on these problems by a closer examination of the ethnography on Bali. In native exegesis, the poles of the sacred directions are identified with points in the external world; and, further, the axes connecting them are associated with the appropriate natural processes. Each of these exhibits a distinct type of motion, which is governed by laws *independent of cultural conceptions*. These are, namely, the rotation of the earth and the force of gravity. It is to particular aspects of these, observed and recognised culturally by the Balinese, that symbolic value is attached. This is not, however, to imply that there is a necessary connexion.

The referents of east and west are fairly obvious, as the places at which the sun rises and sets (cf. Swellengrebel 1960:38). Moreover, on occasions, villagers explicitly equate these with life and death, and the course of the sun with the ageing of man. On the second half of the cycle, informants were less clear, but tentatively related the sun's return to the east by the morning to the equally mysterious means by which the soul moves in death to be reborn. At certain points, there is a formal terminological parallel between the position of the sun in the sky and the stages of human maturation. Afternoon, or *lingsiran*, derives from the high Balinese word *lingsir*, old, used of a senescent person (van Eck 1876). Dusk is designated *sandé kaon* or *sandé kala*. *Kaon* refers, among its other meanings, to evil or misfortune; while *kala* may be either a class of demonic spirit associated with death, or the word for time, manifest in its destructive aspect as the god, Batara Kala. The relatively invariant track of the sun suggests a reason that the east-west axis should be fixed in Balinese thought.

From the introductory discussion, it will be recalled there was evidence to the effect that the poles of the other main axis were the mountain-lakes, or springs, and the sea. In mortuary observance, *kaja* was terminologically correlated with upstream, while downstream was a polluted direction. In Balinese thought, an analogy is drawn between the relative cleanness of river water before it enters the village to be dirtied by washing, excretion



2. A priest (*pemangku*) officiating at the washing of rice by a spring for a temple festival.

and garbage, and the purificatory effects of holy water, *tirtha* and *toya penglukatan* (C.Hooykaas 1973b:10–11). For ritual purposes, water is taken from a source declared to be pure and is converted ceremonially into a holy state. It may then be used in lustration, through which the various forms of impurity, including *kumel* and *sebel* referred to below,<sup>8</sup> are washed away symbolically towards the sea, *kelod* (C.Hooykaas 1973b:6; J.Hooykaas 1961 esp. 16–18; also Belo 1953). This is so general that, as Hooykaas has pointed out, the Balinese may describe this entire system as *agama tirtha*, the religion of holy water, (C.Hooykaas 1973b:11). Significantly, ritual purity, *kesucian*, is linked to the flow of water in the context of caste relations. One of the manifestations of the caste hierarchy is the acceptance of holy water only from the temples of clearly superior groups. Some high castes still refuse to join in receiving *tirtha* from the local *Pura Puseh*, on the grounds that the deities might include ancestors of inferior status. The same may apply to holy water made by a village priest, *pemangku*, of lower caste than the supplicant; for, as one man put it: water does not flow upwards.<sup>9</sup>

There is some indication of the existence of a shadowy third vertical axis, overlapping in part with the previous one, which may be read as diagonal, but nonetheless analytically distinct. This may correspond to the sky and earth, or the ranked worlds, already discussed, of gods, men and inferior beings—animals like snakes and ghosts such as *tonya*, the spirits of men who have suffered bad deaths, by falling into ravines where they remain in perpetuity in separate villages. This dimension appears to be connected to the system of relative status ranking, one expression of which is the formal differentiation of head height (Mead 1960). For instance, in the consecration of a *Brahmana* high priest, the central rite, *napak*, of submission to the teacher consists in the latter placing his foot on the pupil's head (for full details, see Korn 1960:146). In palaces, certain pavilions may be raised so that the prince can stay physically superior to lesser mortals (cf. van der Kaaden 1937). In contrast, where men sit on the same level, this may be an explicit statement of status equality. This inferred distinction is not a part of the *Panca Déwa* system, but the terms used are still interesting. Below, *betèn*, is opposed to above, *(di)duur*, which is related to *luur* and *leluur* (or *leluwur*), the high Balinese words for high and ancestor, respectively. As status and purity tend to be correlated in Bali, it is logical that the lake: sea axis may be seen as oblique.

There are grounds, then, for suggesting that the indigenous spatial grid provides a framework within which a putative relationship of particular natural phenomena to social concepts or values may be formalised and affirmed. Nor is this selection apparently arbitrary in a society which practises irrigated rice agriculture and is dependent upon water and sunshine for the successful harvests of its staple crop. The associated ideas of maturity, purity and rank may further be linked to distinct types of status. The east-west axis is related to the socially recognised stages of human life, to bio-social status or, in one sense, social identity; the lake: sea coordinates to religious purity or ritual status; and the partly separable continuum of high and low, to rank and prestige (C.Geertz 1966a:23–41).

The question remains of the extent to which the proposed model assists in the interpretation of the Balinese use of space. In the compound, some aspects of the ideal pattern become clearer. The north-eastern corner generally consists of an elevated platform for the *sanggah*. This is the site of the shrines to the normally benevolent, purified ancestral spirits, who are expected to guard the welfare and lives of their



subordinate descendants. There is also a customary order in the arrangement of living-quarters in Tengahpadang, even if it is not always observed. Of the pavilions, the northern, or *metèn*, is raised the highest and is the appropriate place for the senior generation who will return shortly, by a circuitous route, to ancestral status and already enjoy a degree of purity (C.Geertz 1966a:15). The heir should reside in the *balé dangin*, to the east and lower than the *metèn*; while any remaining married sons ideally occupy the low *balé dauh* to the west, or other buildings preferably on this side. This would appear to correspond with the superior status of the heir, and his responsibility for the material provision and continuity of the descent line. While this order fits the account given by Covarrubias (1937:92–4), it differs from the example cited by Belo (1970b:357–8), as the anticipated positions of the inheriting son and his mother are reversed. On enquiry, however, I was told that this is a common practice at a certain stage in the developmental cycle, as the *balé dangin* is associated with life, and hence may preserve the health of the ageing.



### 3. Taking the effigy of a temple deity to a pure water source for lustration

In Pisangkaja, the shrines in the amalgamated village temple to the protective ancestors of the *Pura Puseh* are sited to the north and east of those forming the *Pura Balé Agung* (see fig. 2). In contrast, the graveyard lies beyond the village boundary to the south-west, the combined directions of pollution and death. Immediately to the north-east is located the *Pura Dalem*, the temple for the dead who are ‘just purified’ (Goris 1960a:84). Obviously, in some settlements contingent factors may affect this neat layout, but the model still illuminates the features of the preferred arrangement.

The structure of space emerges most fully, however, from the analysis of religious ceremonies, in which relative position and mobility become critical. Briefly, the Balinese generally classify their vast body of rituals into yet another five-part scheme, known as the *panca-yadnya* (or *pañca-yajña*). This comprises: *déwa-yadnya* and *b(h)uta-yadnya*,

offerings to gods and demons; *manusa-yadnya* and *pitra-yadnya*, offerings for the living and for the dead; and finally, the somewhat obscure *resi-yadnya*, offerings said to be for the priests or the pious (Hooykaas 1975:246–259). For the present purposes, the life-cycle and mortuary rites provide a convenient example, in which the function and symbolic significance of the spatial axes is evident. For the various stages of human spiritual development are paralleled by successive shifts of ritual site *in strict accordance* with the values implied by the directional grid. Thus, there is a congruence between the location of ceremonies and the changes in status of the person or soul, elaborated in indigenous philosophy. A detailed investigation not only confirms these statements of belief, but also suggests that there is a coherent pattern in the selection of places used in rites of passage. Within this system, the movement of the body and then the soul in religious performance serves to communicate messages about the changing qualities of men in Balinese society.

Traditional eschatology contains an involved and sometimes contradictory set of theories, perhaps partly as a consequence of differences between the various literary and folk traditions (cf. J.Hooykaas 1956). For example, the high priests of whom I enquired either denied the possibility of reincarnation, or declared its workings unknowable. In popular thought, however, there appear to be discrepant versions of the fate of the soul. On the one hand, through mortuary rites, the impure soul, *pirata*, becomes a partly purified *pitara*,<sup>10</sup> and eventually coalesces into a remote collective ancestral deity; but it may also become an ancestral spirit, to some degree personalised (Boon 1974), responsible for its descendants. On the other hand, the soul is thought to be judged and sentenced according to its deeds to a period in the after-world, from which it returns to be reborn, on occasions almost immediately, into its original agnatic extended family.<sup>11</sup> In Gianyar at least, attention is paid to this last possibility. On the birth of a child, a spirit-medium, *balian tetakson*, is consulted for its welfare may depend on the correct identification of the lineal antecedent. Thus, in common belief, which is the concern here, the path of the soul forms a closed cycle.

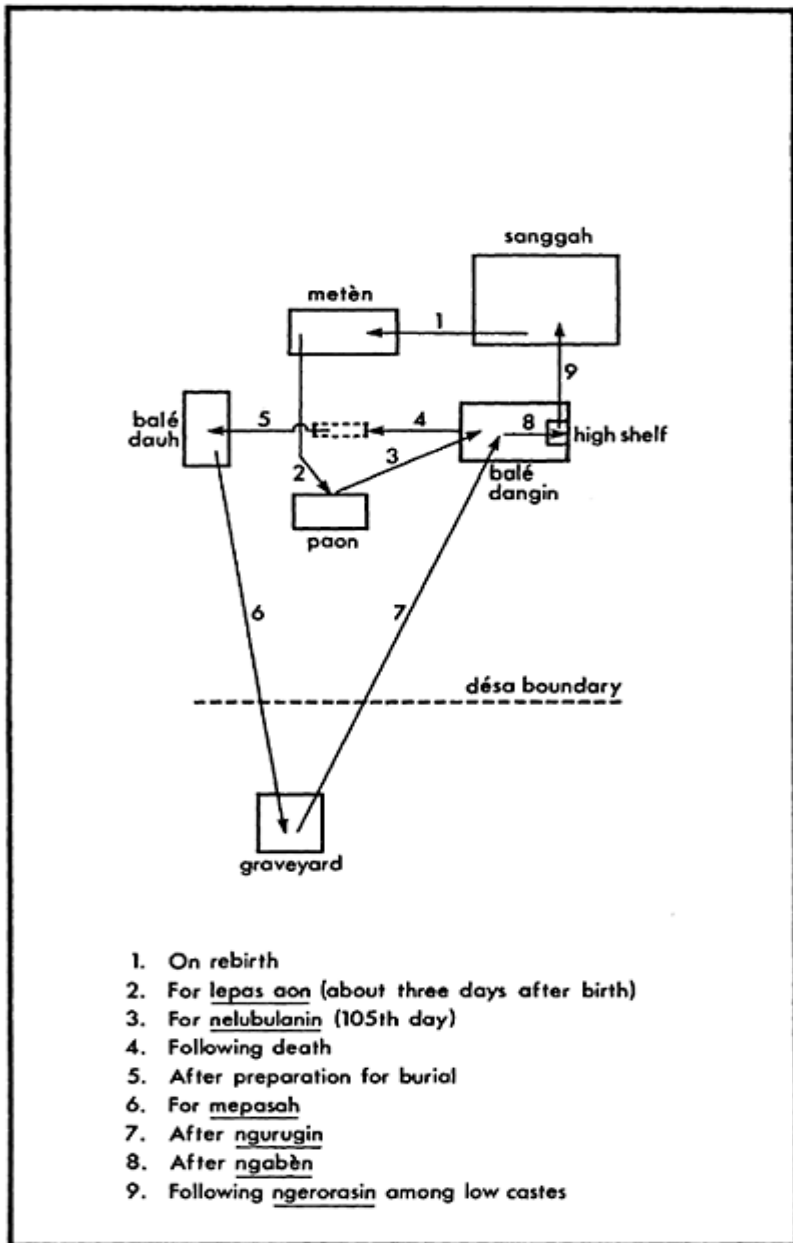
In Tengahpadang, it is widely held that, prior to birth, the embryo's soul is still pure, as it retains vestiges of ancestral qualities. This carries over, in ever-decreasing degrees, into the first months, or even years (up till puberty), of life, but is largely masked by the pollution, *kumel*, of parturition. It is progressively diminished through rites, culminating effectively in the ceremony of *nelubulanin*, performed on the 105th day, upon which the child attains a normal state and may enter temples for the first time. Apart from incidental impurity of various sorts, a more or less constant religious condition is maintained until about the time of female menopause, or grand-parenthood (Mead 1960:198; cf. C.Geertz 1966a:25), when the person is thought slowly to become pure again. This trend is abruptly reversed on death, which marks the onset of intense pollution, *sebel*, gradually alleviated in a long series of ceremonies to convert the shade into an ancestor. At a secular level, a person's social status is increased after marriage by the appearance of successive generations of descendants, only to slump rapidly in death. It is fitting that, at its nadir, the spirit is termed a *petela* (the word may literally mean: earth: van der Tuuk 1897), and finally rises to be a *lelangitan* (*langit*=sky, heaven) or *leluur* (see above) in high Balinese.

This cycle of status changes is reflected with some precision in the performance of rites of passage. In what follows, the implications of the directions, should, by now, be



4. The preparatory cleansing of the corpse with holy water (from head to foot)

**Figure 3 The Movement between Sites in Rites of Passage**





### 5. The swathed body shortly before being carried due west from the temporary platform

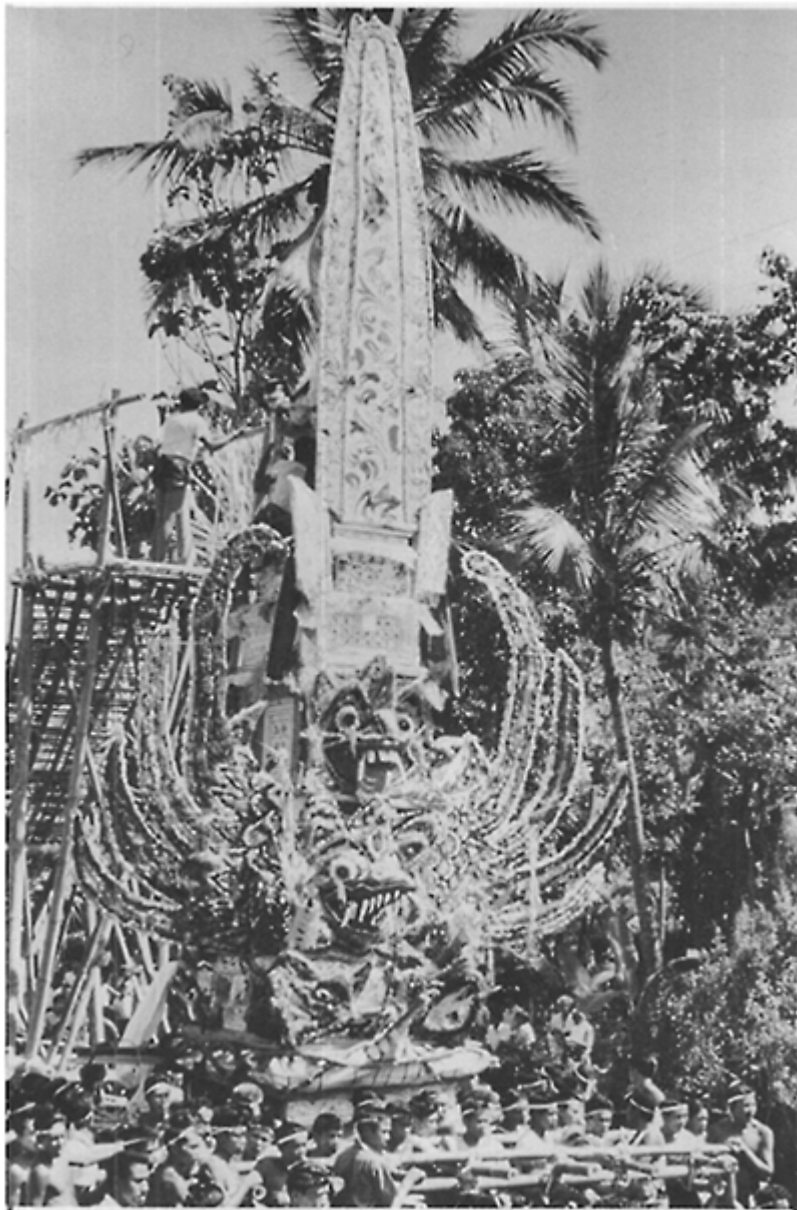
clear, so I shall not repeat them unnecessarily. The proper place for birth, the rebirth of an ancestral spirit, and its attendant ceremony of *pekumel* is in the *metèn*, even if this is not always practicable. As the descent group deities are worshipped from the *sanggah*, this implies a movement of the soul downwards and to the west, as divine essence is incarnated in humble and perishable human form (for an outline of these stages: Figure 3). The site for the subsequent rituals—*lepas aon*, held on the fall of the umbilical cord; *ngerorasin*, the twelfth-day naming ceremony; and *kambuhan* on the forty-second day, which terminates the mother's impurity—is moved due south and down again, as the pollution of birth sets in. From the 105th day onwards, the location is shifted yet again to the *balé dangin*. This coincides with the child's release from *kumel*. Only at this stage may a village priest, *pemangku*, officiate, for previous ritual is the duty of the less pure birth-specialist, *balian manakan*. The remaining ceremonies in life occur here, to ensure individual welfare and the reproduction of the group, through birthdays, *oton*, tooth-filing, *mesangih* and marriage, *mesakapan*. The more subtle distinctions of status are expressed in the secular use of living space mentioned.

Death should also take place in the *balé dangin*. As has been noted, this apparent deviation is perhaps explicable as an attempt to prevent death. If it fails, mortuary rites begin as soon as possible afterwards, when the cadaver is promptly carried due west to the centre of the compound, where it is washed and prepared for burial on a waist-high temporary platform. All the ingredients used in lustration are passed over the body from east to west and thrown on the ground there. By this point, a reversal has occurred, for in ceremonies during life the body is normally oriented towards the east; whereas in death the head of the recumbent corpse is propped to face west. Next, the body is carried further towards the west, where it is honoured for the last time before its final rejection from society. This consists of *mepamit*, a prayer requesting permission to leave the dead (held once more as the cortège enters the graveyard), and *nyumbah*, paying homage by

stooping to pass under the litter, which may be performed only by genealogical juniors (but normally including the wife), with the exception of great-grandchildren, *kumpi*, who rank as equals (Geertz 1966a:20–22). The corpse is then often laid in the *balé dauh*, while the mourners prepare for the journey south-west to the cemetery, where burial takes place to the south of the cremation mound. In fact, there may be two stages: an immediate burial, *mepasah*, when a bamboo tube is left to connect the corpse's face to the air, until one of the rare propitious dates for the further rites, *ngurugin*, when the tube is removed and the remains sealed in. This is the period of greatest degradation, as is indicated by south for the pollution, west for the state of death and underground for the humiliating lack of respect for the shunned relics. It is worth noting that high castes and even commoner families of substance are loth to bury their dead, while for priests interment is strictly proscribed. In each case, the appropriate, if costly, alternative is direct cremation (for early accounts of mortuary customs, see Crucq 1928; Wirz 1928).

Ritual now centres on the reintegration of the soul into society. With formal burial and the cleansing of the compound, offerings may be given to the impure spirit on the bed of the *balé dangin*. For low castes in Tengahpadang, the complete return of the soul is only possible after cremation, *ngabèn*. The body is disinterred, in whole or part (depending on descent group rules, as does the direction of the head in burial). It is then carried north towards the cremation mound and raised onto a prepared funeral pyre. Afterwards, the ashes are committed either to a river or the sea, in a final disposal of the mortal remains to the south. From this moment, offerings to the spirit are made from a high shelf in the east of the *balé dangin*. Among commoners, the cycle is considered closed by the ceremony of *ngerorasin*, held twelve days later (hence the identical term to the earlier life-cycle rite, which is, however, quite distinct). The soul is then thought to be sufficiently purified to be worshipped from the *sanggah* (for the ideal stages, see Goris 1960a: 84). The equivalent high caste rites are properly more complicated and provide an opportunity for some to engage in the conspicuous display of wealth and support. For instance, members of princely families may be carried on elaborate biers, suitably borne on the shoulders of the client populace. Following cremation (*pelebon* in high Balinese), there are a series of possible additions of increasing scale—successively *ngasti*, *meligiya* and *ngeluwer* (rarely, if ever, performed)—for the further purification of the soul, which reaffirm the superiority to low castes.

Although this is of necessity a brief account, the ethnographic evidence tends to support the argument that there are distinct values associated with each direction and suggests a possible means of interpreting some aspects of ritual orientation. Movement of ceremonial site marks changes in status and at the same time constitutes a series of signs, generally clustered to correspond with the link between status attributes, through which this may be expressed or communicated. It seems reasonable from this



6.A minor prince's bier, emphasising his elevation above the low caste bearers

to suppose that the tri-axial system provides a basic framework for the conception, evaluation and use of space in Balinese thought, which may be applicable to other realms of ritual activity.<sup>12</sup>

Up to this point, the discussion has been concerned largely with the internal logic and expression of religious ideas, rather than with the analysis of the covariation of social elements (A.Cohen 1969:216–8). There is another side to the issue, however, which refers to the relationship between spatial conceptions and Balinese social structure; although, in the absence of detailed historical data, the results must remain partly speculative.<sup>13</sup> The problem arises from the fact that one of the main directional axes is associated with ritual purity, which also happens to be a value important to beliefs about rank in Bali.

In what sense the Balinese may be said to have a caste system is a definitional question (see the debate in de Reuck & Knight 1967), which cannot be dealt with here. Various different views have been advanced;<sup>14</sup> but relatively little attention has been devoted, however, in the published literature to the ideology of relations between the constituent title, or descent, groups which are classified with some dispute into the ranked categories of *Brahmana*, (*Ksatriya*, *Wèsyā* and *Sudra*, or commoners (cf. Geertz & Geertz 1975). For instance, marriage and sexual relations between members of different castes (except sometimes unions between commoners) are subject to formal regulations which prohibit hypogamy, *nyerod bangsa*, traditionally punishable by death (Lekkerkerker 1926:70). Similarly, food offered to ancestors or descent group deities might be given away to lower castes, but not the reverse. Breach of these rules constitutes an offence which results in the permanent pollution of the higher ranking caste member and demotion to the level of the party responsible. In another interesting example, the Balinese language contains vocabularies of respect, the proper level, or at the least the key terms, being obligatory in communication between castes. Infringement requires the payment of purificatory offerings, *perascita*, to neutralise the pollution so caused. Underlying these institutions is the fundamental principle that castes are graded by differences in innate purity, so that contact between them must be regulated accordingly.

These ideas of religious grading also underpin the distribution of political power in the traditional system. The classification of castes into four *wangsa*, or *warna*, is linked to an ideal division of labour which is almost identical, in some versions, to the Indian theory of *varna* (Dumont 1970:67–9). In others, the duty, *darma*, of the *Wèsyā* resembles that of the *Satriya*, perhaps because a number of princes are commonly assigned to the former category (not always with their approval). Here, Bali seems to fit closely with Dumont's view of the character of the caste system in India; for the overarching principle of hierarchy is based not on distinctions of wealth or power, but on religious values (Dumont 1970:65–79). In theory, religious authority is also absolutely separated from secular and encompasses it (Dumont 1967:32–4; 1970:65–79) for Bali, see Lekkerkerker 1926; Korn 1932:140–48). As priests, *Brahmana* rank clearly above *Satriya* who possessed a theoretical monopoly over political office, which was justified by the theory of caste purity. Ultimately, however, this legitimacy rests on the cultural belief, in reality false, that some men are *actually* purer than others.





### 7. A high caste cremation, indicated by the use of a carved wooden bull as the receptacle

Granted the currency of beliefs of this sort, they may be made to seem factual through elaboration in myth and symbolism, and Geertz (C.Geertz 1966b) has suggested how this may be achieved in religion. The difficulty remains that certain social institutions are founded upon premises which may either be untestable in principle, as Cooper has argued for the Azande (Cooper 1975:244–6) or are demonstrably misrepresentative (Bloch 1975*a* and in press). To the extent that beliefs justifying economic or political inequality are open to question or negation, this may pose a threat to the acceptance of the established system. It also raises the question of how these assumptions are validated and protected from doubt or denial.

One possible solution is to represent such principles as part of the perceived natural order, and hence place them beyond question. It appears that this, in fact, happens in Bali. For, through the axial system a relationship is postulated between a set of social values and natural phenomena. This is strengthened further by imputing an identity of process. Thus, the cyclical motion of the sun is linked to human life and the irreversible flow of water to ritual purity. The effect is to make purity seem not as a social belief of dubious validity, but in some ways similar to, or as will emerge even identified with, a natural entity.

This conjunction is reinforced by an attribute of formalisation, through which disparate elements are presented as possessing a putative unity. It will be recalled that the two principal axes form equal parts of a more elaborate construct, the *Panca Déwa* system. However, even a cursory examination shows there to be a fundamental difference between them which is obscured through the equation. Whereas the east-west axis links a natural process to a biological (and cultural) one; the other relates a natural process to purity, *which is in no sense a natural condition*. One axis proposes an arbitrary, even if evocative, connexion between two events in nature; the other makes a similar association

between dissimilar qualities. By this obfuscation, purity and pollution are presented as realities of the same order as life and



8. The dispensation of holy water (*tirtha*) during a temple ceremony

death, with a legitimacy conferred by appearing as natural. In the generation of complex conceptual schemes, such as the *Panca Déwa* and *Nawa Sanga*, emphasis is shifted from the heterogeneous components to the form itself, which has the appearance of being an integrated and consistent system. By concentrating attention on the order inherent in the manufactured model and by investing it with special significance, the discrepancies are hidden. Through this formalisation, a synthesis is produced which is effectively beyond dispute and controversy. There may be a parallel here with Bloch's arguments about the implications of formalisation in language (1974; and 1975*b*).

The discussion above suggests that, in certain circumstances, water may be more or less identified with ritual purity in Balinese thought. The ethnography lends some support to this view. First, water is the most general and perhaps the most important agent of ritual purification (C.Hooykaas 1973*b*; J.Hooykaas 1961) and, to the best of my knowledge, is required in all ceremonies for the removal of pollution. It may range in sort from ordinary collected rainwater, *yèh ening*, to the different forms of *tirtha*, prepared with special additives and formulae (Belo 1953:23–6). This is generally conceived of as flowing downwards from the relatively pure to the impure and is exemplified in the holy water known as *banyun cokor*, water of (i.e. used to wash) the feet (of the gods), drunk by the congregation during temple festivals. The quality of *tirtha* also varies, as was noted earlier, according to the purity of the deity invoked, and even of the ritual officiant. There is a further connexion between water and caste. For, in some contexts, the differences between humans are represented as substantive, although, in contrast to India (David 1973), these may be expressed in terms of water rather than blood.<sup>15</sup> It will be remembered that sexual relations with a woman of higher caste are forbidden. The correct relationship of sexual, or marital, partners is of a man with a woman who is his junior by age, genealogical position or caste. In miscaste liaisons, the woman is thought to be polluted by the male's sexual emission. Now, in traditional Balinese theories of physiology, *semen is regarded as water* (Weck 1937:45). Just as water flowing uphill is unnatural, so is semen ascending from a lower to a higher caste.

It may be worth touching for a moment on the wider problem, in symbolism, of the place of nature. Anthropological theories of religion have tended to stress the ways in which it is socialised. So, it often seems to be regarded as unordered matter upon which structure is imposed exclusively by society. Some of the data from Bali suggest otherwise. Nature may provide convenient objects by which to represent social values, or society itself (Douglas, 1970), but its symbolic significance may stem also from the fact that certain aspects are in no way dependent on society. Water, after all, does not flow downhill because some collective representation states that it must. Particular schemes of classification permit the recognition, or encourage the elaboration in thought, of these features. In some instances, the relevance of the external world in symbolism may reside in observable properties, which for most purposes are intrinsic. In so far as these are seen as "objective" or "natural", they may furnish social values with a semblance of naturalness.

In conclusion, it has been suggested that it may be helpful to view Balinese notions of space, not as series of binary oppositions, but as continua between polar extremes, in which ritual movement parallels changes in social status. The association of natural phenomena with social values, through the medium of spatial axes, is one means of imbuing a dubious principle with verisimilitude, by presenting it as part of an unchanging

order. This obfuscation is reinforced by formalising the arbitrary associations into more abstract, and ostensibly coherent, systems. In traditional Balinese society, the distribution of political power is portrayed, inaccurately, as stemming from position in the caste hierarchy. This rests in turn upon an unsubstantiated theory of the innate differences between men, the assumptions underlying which are themselves obscured.

#### NOTES

1. The fieldwork, on which this article is based, was conducted in Bali between November 1970 and August 1972. I am grateful to the Leverhulme Trust Fund, the London-Cornell Project and to the Horniman Anthropological Scholarship Fund for financial support, and to the Lembaga Ilmu Pengetahuan Indonesia for their sponsorship. My thanks are due to M.R.Kaplan, Professor A.C.Mayer, Professor G.B.Milner, Dr M.C.Ricklefs, Miss B.E.Ward and Dr J.L.Watson for their helpful comments on the original draft, and to Dr C. Hooykaas for being so kind as to check my interpretation of the Balinese material and terminology.
2. This was found, for instance, in the publications of such distinguished scholars as Goris, Grader and Korn. Some of the wider methodological considerations have been discussed in Needham (1960; 1973), and specific criticisms of the work on Bali by Geertz (C.Geertz 1961). A fuller evaluation occurs in an interesting thesis by Howe (1976).
3. The spelling of Balinese follows the official Indonesian system introduced in 1972. Pronunciation is straightforward apart from (c), which is (ch) in 'child'. In addition, it is convenient to distinguish (è) and (é), as in French, from (e) the central vowel. The Balinese language possesses a number of speech levels (Kersten 1970:13-25; for Java, cf. Poedjosedarmo 1968), but where possible here ordinary, or low, Balinese has been used.
4. The problems are reflected in temple orientation. Thus, in Culik and Kubu in the extreme east, the main temples face Gunung Agung lying to the due west. Within these, however, difficulties arise over the position of the *padmasana* which commonly appears to be sited in the corner indicated by the most propitious combination of directions (Covarrubias 1937:268), but as these are directly opposed here, there is an apparent confusion. In Culik, for example in the Pura Pandé the *padmasana* lies on the east side, but in the nearby Pura Banjar Datah it is to the west.
5. For each caste category (see below), the appropriate periods in Tengahpadang were given as:

Brahmana	9 days
Satriya (Dalem)	11 "
Wèsyā	15 "
Sudra	42 "

Of the two types of consecrated *Brahmana* (see C.Hooykaas 1973*b* and 1973*c*), the *Siwa* priest follows the standard nine days, but the *Buddha* priest only five. Among low castes, both the courtyard of death and its neighbour downstream are polluted for forty-two days, in contrast to upstream where it is thirty days. If high caste compounds are affected by lower in this manner, they just observe the time laid down for their own caste which is shorter.

6. Apart from the works already cited, there are references in Belo 1953; Covarrubias 1937; J.Hooykaas 1961.
7. There is some disagreement over the precise character and significance of the *désa* (*adat*), roughly the local religious community (but see C.Geertz 1959; 1961; 1967).
8. Several different categories of pollution appear to be recognized; not just *sebel* (Geertz & Geertz 1975:10–11).
9. Colloquially: *yèh jeg sing menèk*. Some of the more philosophically inclined villagers pointed out that the sea is ambivalent. While it is the direction towards which pollution flows, by virtue of this, it can be argued to be capable of absorbing all the impurities of the world.
10. On the relation between these terms, see Goris (1960a:377, n.11).
11. There is an equally complicated set of beliefs concerning the effects of *d(h)arma*, duty defined either according to caste position or general moral obligation, and *karma(pala)*, the consequences of previous actions.
12. Howe (1976) has reanalysed the ceremonies accompanying the birth of twins of opposite sex in Bali, *manak salah*, using this interpretation with suggestive results.
13. Reliable sources on pre-colonial Balinese history are thin. More recently, although the island has been incorporated into the Republic of Indonesia, political institutions and social values at the village level have remained in many ways remarkably distinct, despite sporadic disturbance (H.Geertz 1959). To some extent, this may be due to the persisting importance of village assemblies in local government. In these small-scale systems, ideological continuity and distinctiveness are maintained in part through forms of public oratory, which serve not so much as a means of cultural brokerage (C.Geertz 1960) but rather to reinterpret in traditional terms the formal relations with the “encapsulating” state (Bailey 1969).
14. Some of the more important contributions include, in chronological order: Lekkerkerker 1926; Korn 1932; C.Geertz 1963; 1966a; 1967; Boon 1973.
15. It is interesting, whether general or not, that the villagers disputed the view that blood was linked to caste. Instead, on more than one occasion, informants pointed out expressly that it did not vary in appearance when spilt. This suggests an alternative possible mode of representing, or explaining, social relations, in terms which deny differences.

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# IMAGES OF ECSTASY: A VIETNAMESE RESPONSE TO NATURE

Jeremy H.C.S.Davidson

lời nói không mất tiền mua  
lựa lời mà nói cho vừa lòng nhau

‘The words one says do not cost anything to listen to, hence weigh them carefully so that they are pleasing to one another’.

Vietnamese culture admits of a highly developed system of symbolism. Nature, seen as an allegory of human life, provides an immense fund of natural symbols to represent every aspect of man’s existence; consequently, the meanings of some members of this rich variety of natural symbols may differ dependent upon whether they are generally accepted in the conventional world or are current at the less rigidly controlled levels of society.

A core of common knowledge attributes human traits and abstractions to certain creatures: the bat symbolises happiness; the crane fidelity and longevity; the earthworm native intelligence; the eel small-eyed meanness and cruelty; the house-lizard regret, especially for stupidity; and

con cóc là cậu ông Trời  
‘the toad is the uncle of (the ruler of) Heaven’.

(Ngọc 1934: vol.2).

Among human activities, sex is one of the most powerful, insistent, rapturous and necessary, and the expression of human sexuality with all its varied procedures, in particular the suggestiveness of the erotic, is also channelled through parallels in nature and is represented by natural symbols. In Vietnam, trees and plants provide a good illustration of the fulfilment of this rôle, while a valuable source for their use in this way is popular literature.



The predominant medium of expression in the Vietnamese literary tradition was, and is, poetry. Prose-writing there developed under French colonialism which introduced the new and essentially European literary forms, techniques and conventions characteristic of prose and, as yet, Vietnamese prose has not undergone that transmutation indispensable to the creation of a truly individual and recognisably national form of literature. Maturity in prose-writing impends; maturity in poetry already exists and continues to reveal new facets of itself to the present day. Traditionally, Vietnamese poetry is ‘sung’ (*ngâm*), and conventional modes with regional variants were developed to exploit the nuances of sound, tone resonance and contour inherent in each syllable, although tone was subordinated to the musical demands of emotional evocation. Prevalent among the poetic genres are lyrical and landscape poems that treat frequently of love. It is this lyrical, landscape, love poetry that will be the source material in this quest to identify and explain some of the natural symbols that throng its lines. The poetry is represented by the work of **Hồ Xuân Hương**, an 18th Century poetess who wrote in *nôm* and, breaking with the conservatively Chinese-oriented styles, breathed a new vitality into Vietnamese poetry, and is further illustrated by *ca-dao* ‘folksongs, folk-ballads’.

**Hồ Xuân Hương**'s scenic odes are most certainly comparable with the Chinese world's highest genre of painting, the landscape. In the Chinese world-view, it was an attempt to give visual expression to a unified cosmology; the landscape itself may be entirely symbolic; and in it are to be found perceptive religious, philosophical and poetic intuitions. The same observations apply to **Xuân Hương**'s poetry. In Chinese poetry and landscape painting, the cosmogonic and natural motifs carried their symbols across into the conventional world, and into its unconventional counterpart in human society, whence may emanate somewhat different implications.

These implications obtain for Vietnamese culture, too, in as much as it is an analogue of Chinese culture, or of a more general pre-Sinitic corpus of culture, but the poetic language of their statement possesses a quality that is uniquely Vietnamese.

The cinnamon (*quế*), for example, is a symbol of academic success at the doctoral (*tiên-sĩ*) examinations in ‘public’ society; in ‘fringe’ or ‘private’ society, it stands for chance and sexual encounter, and further may more explicitly refer to the penis. Another example is:

con gái mười bảy bẻ gãy sừng trâu

‘a seventeen-year old girl can bend  
and break the horns of a buffalo’.

On the ‘public’ level this saying illustrates the physical strength of young womanhood. On the ‘private’ level, the water-buffalo symbolises immense power, concentratedly rutting yet repeatedly subdued by the mystical potency of a young girl, and it finds a parallel in the unicorn whose savageness is tamed by the presence of a virgin.

**Xuân Hương**'s poems are written in refined, educated language suitable for public, official audience—descriptions of scenery, for instance, executed in an exactly ordered tone-prosodic pattern on first reading; on second reading, the cogent, explicitly

sexual ecstasy-trigger of the symbols, the images, used leads one down paths of eroticism quite unacceptable to Confucian morality. Her poetry fulfils an artistic function of ordering and of heightening the ingredients of the actual world; it identifies and symbolises the polarities of experience in an apparent, though illusory, duality. There is no conflict inherent in the strict, rational discipline of the form (a Chinese 7-foot line: *thất ngôn tuyệt cú*) and the chaotic, vibrant sensuality of the emotions aroused. In metaphysical terms, for a Chinese or Vietnamese these two aspects are but faces of an ultimate unity that requires harmonious balance to be established after a struggle for ascendance. The symbol of *yīnyáng* (*âm-dương*), female and male, linked in spiral, their union, to form the *dào* ‘the uncarved block, the One’, conveys well the ecstatic and sexual nature that quickens inherent in the East Asian concept of cosmic unity.

‘The nameless was the beginning of heaven  
and earth;  
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures’.

(Lau 1963:57)

All things issue from the *dào* through the agency of *yīn* and *yáng*, so all things in the last analysis are one and the same. This philosophical explication was thoroughly treated by the Chinese though it may conceivably belong to a pre-Sinitic reservoir of ideas adopted and propagated by the Chinese who came to dominate the region.

A somewhat fuller explanation of the cosmological concept of *yīnyáng* and *dào* is given by the Sòng dynasty philosopher Zhōu Dūnyí (1017–1073) in his *Tàijī tǔshū* ‘Explanation of the Chart of the Supreme Ultimate’ (and echoed in the Vietnamese *truyện*, ‘verse-novel’, Phan Trân 1.766):

‘*yīn* and *yáng* are the one Supreme Ultimate (*tàijī*);  
and the Supreme Ultimate is fundamentally the  
Ultimateless (*wújī*). The true substance of the  
Ultimateless and the essence of the two forms—  
*yīn* and *yáng*, and the five elements (*wuxing*: wood,  
water, metal, earth and fire)—unite in mysterious  
union so that consolidation ensues. The principle  
*Qián* (the male principle *yáng*) becomes the male  
element, and the principle *Kūn* (the female principle  
*yīn*) becomes the female element. These two ethers  
(*yīnyáng*) by their interaction operate to produce  
and reproduce, so that transformation and continuation goes on  
forever’.

(Zhōu Dūnyí 1937:j.1/1-2)

The more cultured the ambience the more philosophical the couching of the concept. We find it thus restated in the *Thượng kinh ký sự* 'A journey to the Capital', dated 1782/1783, a prose work in Chinese by the famous Vietnamese physician Lãn Ông, Lê Hữu Trác, who says:

'I meditate on the profound nature of things.  
Touched by a feeling of melancholy, I look at the  
lotus withering in the well of jade, and with joy  
I contemplate the garden made golden by flowering  
chrysanthemums. I am again aware of the truth  
that the development of all living things depends  
inexorably on the evolution of Heaven, of cold and  
heat, of *yīn* and *yáng*. So man, who is created by  
Heaven, is as ephemeral as a flower, and insignifi-  
cant in this world of suffering. He is submitted  
to the violence of dangerous winds, of foetid miasmas...  
the six elements, which engender the hundred emotions.'

He goes on:

'Groups of winter dragons (*đông-giao*: ? lizards in  
winter colouring) chased each other around the  
garden, and from time to time one smelled a  
strange exotic perfume. In the calm pond of the  
West Garden, fish played with the image of the  
moon and snatch-gulped at the waves.'

Here we are presented with a Chinese image 'The Gobbling Fishes', which is a direct reference to a supposedly therapeutic sex position in the *Xuánnyǚjīng*, 'The Dark Jade Girl'. Lãn Ông also alludes to sexual congress in the context of *yīnyáng* and the *dào* with:

'Orioles sang and understood the mechanism of  
Heaven (*thiên cơ*), and played hide and seek  
among the bushes... I amused myself as I wished

and each day came home intoxicated by communion  
with the beauty of nature...’

where orioles bring to mind the compound *yīnyáng* (oanh yến) ‘orioles and swallows’, a symbol of sexual union that is always libertine.

The sexual nature of the cycle is abundantly clear. The anticipation, act, and aftermath of the union of *yīn* and *yáng*, female and male, resulting in the oneness of the quiescent *dào*, is multifaceted—erotic, philosophical, transcendental, ecstatic. Man the farmer, who is *yáng*, tills the soil which is *yīn*:

gió đông là chồng lúa chiêm<sup>1</sup>  
gió bắc là duyên lúa mùa

‘The East Wind is the husband of fifth month rice,  
the North Wind is the lover of tenth month rice.’

and between them they mirror the grand cycle of life; a harmonious union produces well-being, and more esoterically, it prolongs life, and so on.

Sex is perhaps the most potent symbol and generator of ecstasy that most systems of representation and communication, and certainly those of China and Vietnam, possess. It is, therefore, viewed as something to be controlled for the sake of continued order since it transcends the mundanely social, the everyday, the useful, and relates instantly to disorder. Consequently, a conventional morality is engineered to normalise sex, to direct attitudes about the act to conform to the idea that it serves to produce progeny, no more. Fashions in the more overt or covert expressions of sexuality may characterise a particular society at a particular period, indicating the presence of a non-specific though mordant societal malaise. The eroticism in Hồ Xuân Hương’s poetry would seem to support the suggestion. Representations of sexuality may also constitute half-hidden codes, cloaked messages about what sort of people and society produced them. These are the images one must try to capture.

The inner realisation of an object symbolically indicated, the image is as though transformed through the very act of perception. It is translated to the inner self. The retina performs like an intermediary between a concrete natural object, such as a cinnamon tree, and its symbolic significance which is assumed within the entire being of the beholder; the relativity of all realities is identified. Bản Tĩnh, a 12th Century Thiền (*dhyaṇa*) master, expressed the idea thus:

huyễn thân bản tự không tịch sinh  
do như kính hình tượng  
giác liễu nhất thiết không huyễn thân  
tu du chứng thực tướng

(Tô 1960:89)

Bodies are born from the Quiet Void (*śūnyatā*)  
 Like images in a mirror  
 Once we realise this quintessential, illusory  
 nothingness  
 We will see Reality.

Diagrammatically, the process is reminiscent of a sand-glass on its side; its duration may be but momentary, a point which is neatly evinced by the *Thiền* master Vạn Hạnh (–1018):

thân nhưđiên ảnh hữu hoàn vô  
 vạn mộc xuân vinh thu hựu khô  
 nhậm vận thịnh suy vô bố úy  
 thịnh suy nhưlộ thảo đầuphô

(Tô 1960:30)

Man's body is like lightning, here one moment,  
 gone the next

A green flourish in spring, wither-dead in  
 autumn.

Forget about grandeur and decadence, they  
 hold no dread

Growth and decay are but like dewdrops pearly  
 on a blade of grass.

Philosophically conceived, man the perceiver is the intermediary between the self that has realised him and the image engendered within his culture. He functions in the same way as was traditionally held by the Chinese to be the rôle of the king (*wáng*: *vương*), who was the intercessor between Heaven and Earth. Man now forms part of this trinity—he can entreat Nature, that is Earth, Heaven (*yīnyáng*) and their progeny, by himself; he equates with them, is of them, because he, too, is the result, the fruit, of their union.

The increasingly obvious relationship between China and Vietnam was further reinforced by a lengthy Chinese suzerainty in historical times. The cultures of the two countries became and remain intimately interrelated in Vietnam, but what obtains there may also be true for China, especially for the south and southeast. The existence of a dominating Chinese influence brought about a dichotomy of values, a series of

oppositions: north versus south, Hàn versus non-Hàn, public versus private, and Chinese versus Vietnamese. It was a distinction between *wén/văn* and *zhī/chât*: *văn* meaning ‘literary, literate, skilled, cultured (Chinese)’, and *chât* ‘unlettered, crude, uncultured (non-Chinese)’. Whereas something Chinese was considered *văn*, something of Vietnamese origin was *chât*. Similarly, one could distinguish between a piece of Vietnamese literature which drew much in form, content, and allusion, from the classical, Chinese reservoir of culture, hence exemplifying the literary productions, *văn*, of the scholar-bureaucrat, ‘scholastic literature’, and a piece of ‘popular literature’, like a *ca-dao* or *truyện cổ* ‘tale, legend’, the creation of the ordinary people, which was *chât*. This classification splits everything in two, it indicates two facets: the overt and covert significance of all things, hence parallel to, though different from, *yīnyáng*. The official culture is public culture; it is the very real façade created by the metropolitan *literati*; it is the Chinese culture of the Classics and the governmental bureaucracy. Private culture, contrarily, is what obtains beyond and below the reach of officialdom; it is the society of the *demi-monde*, the unofficial, even clandestine, illicit associations, of parallels reflecting the opposite of the public culture. This dualism affects Vietnam directly—official Chinese culture became official Vietnamese culture, although it was sometimes modified and employed out of phase to suit Vietnamese circumstances. Thus, in the 15th Century, **pre-Ming** dynasty institutions were adapted to the Vietnamese situation because the Chinese of the early **Ming** were anathema. Still, Sino-Vietnamese, *Hán-Việt*, that is Chinese pronounced *à la vietnamienne*, was used for all official communications and for all officially sanctioned literature. If one aspired to education, that was in Chinese. Yet, from the 15th Century onwards, Vietnamese written in a script, *chữ nôm*, specially created for it on the Chinese model, emerged as a literary medium, enshrining an approval of what had previously been *chât* ‘uncultured’, traditional, people’s literature. This new development reflects a surgent nationalism that contributed to an increased resistance to the Chinese culture of the oppressors, a return to the native manifested most recently in the attitudes characteristic of some of the revolutionary writers of the period from 1930 onwards.

Much of the Vietnamese xenophobia and ethnocentrism is, therefore, understandably directed against the Chinese, the inspiration of patriotic fervour giving rise to poems like Lý Thường Kiệt’s (1019–1105) famous quatrain:

Nam quốc phò hà nam đế cư  
 Tịch nhiên định phân tại Thiên-thư  
 Như hà nghịch lỗ lai xâm phạm?  
 Nhữ đẳng hành khan thủ bại Hiên

(Hàm 1968:239)

Over the mountains and rivers of the Southern  
 Country the Emperor of the South reigns  
 Thus is its fate decided for eternity in the

Divine Book.

How, you traitorous barbarians, do you dare  
come to invade (our land)?

All of you will be annihilated, without a  
scrap of pity.

or Nguyễn Trãi's *Bình Ngô Đại Cáo Thiên Hạ*, 'Great Proclamation on the Pacification of the Chinese', of 1428, which also shows an awareness of the beauty of nature and the need to conserve its resources, as in this extract:

Nào khóa liếm vét không Phò Trạch  
Nào lên rừng đào mỏ, nào xuống bể mò châu  
Nào lưới bẫy hươu đen, nào lưới dò chim trả  
Tàn hại các côn trùng thảo mộc  
Nheo nhóc thay! quan quở điên liên.

(Hàm 1968:273)

Taxes and levies emptied our mountains and lakes  
We had to go up into the forests (and mountains)  
to dig mines (for precious metals), we had to  
go into the seas to grope for pearls,  
We had to snare black deer, to net kingfishers,  
To injure (by harvesting) all insects, plants and  
trees.  
What distressing misfortune! Oh pity on our widows  
and our children!

More acerbic is the 17th Century poet Trạng Quỳnh's:

Phò Hiến

People say Phò Hiến is more fun than the capital.  
After three days, I say: there's nothing here,  
nothing.  
Just little Chinks, old Chinks, Chinks with white  
teeth  
And whores in black-bottomed skirts.

Ironically, many of these poems are written in Chinese although they are not lacking in Vietnamese also:

cô kia đội nón chò<sup>2</sup>ai  
chớ<sup>1</sup>lây chú chiệc mà hoài mấ<sup>2</sup>thân

‘young girl wearing the conical hat, who are  
you waiting for?  
above all don’t take a Chinese (as mate) or you  
will forever be losing your soul.’

Today, the new political reality in Vietnam has theoretically brought the division of peoples to an end for, in the words of HỒ CHÍ MINH:

Nước Việt-nam là một. Dân tộc Việt-nam là một.  
Sông có thể cạn, núi có thể mòn, song chân lý  
đó không bao giờ thay đổi.

(Minh 1970:65)

‘Vietnam is one country. The Vietnamese people  
are one. Rivers may run dry, mountains may wear  
away, but that truth will never change.’

Yet the awareness of a distinct identity found a further outlet in literature with the creation of a uniquely Vietnamese prosodic pattern, the *lục-bát* or 6–8 foot couplet. Well suited to easy memorising and to almost indefinite addition without becoming monotonous, it is a simple form based on word rhyme and tone harmony (Huard & Durand 1965:290sgg.) and is used by most *ca-dao*.

*Ca-dao* are regarded by Vietnamese as a song from their soul, although the word is identical to the Chinese *gēyáo*, whose earliest representatives are probably the *gúofēng*, a class of ode in the classical Chinese anthology the *Shījīng*, ‘the Book of Odes’. Vietnamese *ca-dao* are not translations from the *Shījīng*, but there are certain similarities in poetic diction, particularly in the imagery drawn from nature, so perhaps they and the *Shījīng* odes derive ultimately from a common source of pre-Sinitic natural symbolism. The *gúofēng* were studied by Marcel Granet (1919) who considered them all to be folksongs of the peasantry, sung antithetically, consisting of improvised boy-girl stanzas describing the grand cycle of life. They were, in his opinion, eulogies to the renewal of life, to the time of the spring and other great festivals held at local holy places (cf. Karlgren 1942:75). Groups of men and women, boys and girls, went on a circuit of these and there indulged in fertility orgies.<sup>2</sup> The cosmological analogy to *yīnyáng* is



immediately apparent in this interpretation, but Granet's argument is not properly substantiated (cf. Karlgren 1942; 1944). The odes as we know them today are not the original folksongs but the originals scholasticised, put into an elaborate poetic form with strict metre and rhythm. Many are not of peasant origin at all, nor are they necessarily *chansons alternées*, an idea Granet based on his observations of such musical forms among certain Tai peoples.

*Ca-dao* deal with all aspects of Vietnamese life, and do so where appropriate with humour. So one from Hiệp-hòa hamlet in Biên-hòa Province tells us:

trai ba mươi tuổi còn xinh  
gái ba mươi tuổi như chĩnh mắm nêm

'a boy of thirty is still handsome  
a girl of thirty is like a big jar of thick  
fish sauce.'

while one that is more widely known is:

mẹ ơi! Con muốn lấy chồng  
con ơi! Mẹ cũng một lòng như con

'Mummy! I want to take a husband.  
Little one! I too have the same desire as you!

Word play, riddles, and puns (Emeneau 1947:239sq.) are all part of the Vietnamese literary ensemble. They underscore the fact that one cannot read a poem without a search for hidden meanings, often ribald. One example to stress the point:

thị vào chầu thị đứng thị trông  
thị cũng muốn thị không có ấy  
vũ cạy mạnh vũ ra vũ múa  
vũ gặp mưa vũ ướt cả lông

(Hòa 1955:241)

barely conceals an unromantic description of aspects of the sex act.

So it is with Hồ Xuân Hương's poems. They are word pictures, of landscapes and of favourite scenic places, but they are also extended metaphors. The scenery also depicts male and female anatomy, and intercourse between men and women, a passionate physical union which is equated with, and at the same time is, the metaphysical union of

the Two Principal Elements (*yīn* and *yáng*) to stimulate and create the Supreme Ultimate (*tàijī*), a step nearer to the *dào*.

‘After a long while, the Ultimateless quickened and gave birth to the Supreme Ultimate which was still. After quiescence there is movement and so are all things produced.’

(Zhōu Dūnyí 1937: j.1/1–2)

This cosmic movement is everpresent in Xuân Hương’s poetry, adding yet another dimension to the lines that are already full of *double entendre*.

Vịnh núi chùa Thầy<sup>3</sup>

Khen thay tạo hóa khéo khôn phàm  
Một đờ đờgra biệtmâyhom  
Sườn đá cởleo sớrậm rập  
Lạch khô nước rổmó lam nham  
Một sủđầutrọc ngổikhua mõ  
Hai ếulũngtròn đứnggiữ am  
Đếnnơi mới biệtrằng thánh hóa  
Chỗ chân mỗigđi hãycòn ham

Ode to the mountain of the Pagoda of the Master

Glory to the Creator who, so often, shows himself skilled  
A rocky wall exposes a lot of crevices  
Tufty grass, springy, thick, climbs up the ridges  
In the cracks of the rocks water drips into trickles, sticking to the hand  
A shaven-headed monk is sitting beating the drum  
Two novices, round-backed, stand up straight guarding the sanctuary  
Arrived at the destination, one knows then that the Saint was transformed here  
Legs worn out, knees tired, one is still full of desire.

Also on the same mountain, under the magical sway of the Master (*thầy*), was the Grotto of the Gecko:

Vịnh hang Cắc-cờ

Trời đất sinh ra đá một chòm  
 Nứt làm hai mảnh hỏm hòm hom  
 Kẽ hảm rêu mọc trở toen miệng  
 Luồng gió thông reo vỗ phập phòm  
 Giot nước hủt tình rờilôm bôm  
 Con đường vô ngạ tđiom om  
 Khen ai đẽo đá tài xuyên tạc  
 Kheo hỏ hang ra lảm kếnhan

Elogy to the Grotto of the Gecko

Nature has caused a rocky mass to be born  
 Split into two blocks by a deep, deep crack  
 On its walls moss grows, the opening seems to gape  
 The pines rustle under the gusts of wind  
 Drops of water fall splat, splat  
 The path into the crevice is dark  
 Praise to the skilled sculptor who carved this rock  
 He knew how to open it up to free it  
 for many to see

Other landscapes repeat the message:

Vịnh đèo ba đôi

Một đèo một đèo lại một đèo  
 Khen ai khéo tạc cảnh chèo leo  
 Cửa sơn đồ khế tùm hum nóc  
 Thêm đá xanh hương lún phún rêu  
 Lát lẻo cành thông cơn gió tồc  
 Đăm đìa lá liễu lúc Dũnyígieo<sup>4</sup>  
 Hiên nhân quân tử ai là chẳng  
 Mỗi đìchơn chân cũng muốn chèo

Elogy to the Pass of the Three Hills

One hill, one hill, and again one hill  
 May he be praised who knew how to chisel out  
 this perilous landscape  
 The vermilion mouth (of the path) is ruddy  
 and the summit is leafy  
 The flight of steps is green with a thin  
 cover of moss  
 The pine branches sway under violent gusts of wind  
 The willow leaf is moist with falling dew  
 Wise and distinguished men, who among you  
 will give it up  
 Knees tired, legs worn out, they still wish  
 to clamber up it

Vịnh núi Kẽm Trống

Hai bên thì núi giữa thì sông  
 Có phải đây là kẽm trống không  
 Gió thổi cành cây khua lác đác  
 Sóng gào mặt nước vỗ lòng bùng

Ode to Mount Kẽm Trống (Zinc Drum)

On both sides mountains, in the middle a river  
 Isn't this Mount Kẽm Trống?  
 The wind blows and the branches of the trees  
 hit each other in a din  
 The waves break loose on the surface of the  
 water that slap-slaps in a deafening roar

The imagery in these *vịnh*, and in her other nature poetry, is usually more subtle than that of the *ca-dao*. While her poetry teems with nature symbolism that evocatively represents erotic sexuality, it rests on a community of reference and understanding which finds more explicit expression in the *ca-dao*.

Providing a good illustration of these symbols are certain plants, most of which are mentioned by Xuân Hương. The lotus is one. Associated as it is with the Buddha, its fabled purity is exalted in both China and Vietnam. Zhōu Dūnyí sums up:

‘Quant a moi, je dis que...(le lotus) est le  
symbole...de l’homme de bien’ (the *jūnzǐ*  
‘the Superior Man’)

(Daudin 1974:198)

One recurring image is the lotus in the well of jade, a fairly obvious allusion to intercourse. Hán Yù (768–824), the Táng dynasty poet, wrote the seminal quatrain on this theme:

At the summit of Mount *Tàihūa* there is  
the lotus of the Jade Well  
The stems of its opened flowers rise up  
to the height of ten *zhàng*, and its  
rhizomes resemble a skiff  
They are as cold as the snow or the white  
frost, their taste as sweet as honey  
When a petal enters the mouth, it causes  
all illness to disappear and it ensures  
a cure.

(*Quán Tángshī* 1960:3789)

to which Mạc *Đĩnh* Chi (–1346) devoted a *phú*, ‘prose poem’, the *Ngọc tĩnh liên phú* (*Anthologie* 1972:95 sqq.). Since then the topic was a favourite of Vietnamese scholastic literature (Daudin 1974:18 sqq.). Two examples from the *Hồng-đức-quốc-cận-thi tập* are Nguyễn Trãi’s (1380–1442):

Làm nhơ chẳng bén tở hòa thanh  
Quân tử hàm, nhân được thủa danh  
Gió đưa hương đêm nguyệt tĩnh  
Riêng làm cửa có ai tranh

(Thanh-lãng 1969:223)

Beautiful and pure, no impurity tarnishes it  
Sought after by refined men, from whence it  
gains its renown

In the calm night, in the clear moonlight, the  
wind propagates its perfume  
If I make it my private property, will anyone  
contest my claim?

and, anonymously:

Tình liên

Tây tử điếm<sup>2</sup>thôi hương phức phức  
Dương phi tắm đã ngọc dày dầy  
Công khi ai<sup>3</sup>nhấn nhủ  
Thú vị ông Liêm<sup>4</sup>đã biết chưa

(Thanh-lãng 1969:316)

The toilette of xīshī complete, the smell (of  
the lotus flower) is released, all perfumed,  
After the bath of Yáng Guìfēi, her jade body  
appears in all its dazzling fulness  
At that moment, who recommends it to us?  
Have you known this savour yet, Master Liêm?

(cf. Daudin 1974:188).

Underlying this fulsome praise, however, is the Taoist search for immortality, one necessarily repeated procedure of sublimation to attain which was the preservation of the Vital Essence by means of *coitus reservatus*. The lotus is exciting, remedial, and female. *ca-dao* highlight this last quality:

hoa thơm<sup>5</sup>mắt nhĩ đi rồi<sup>5</sup>  
còn thơm<sup>5</sup>đâu nữa mà người<sup>5</sup>ước<sup>5</sup>cao

‘the perfumed lotus has already lost its pistils  
where is there any perfume left that a man  
might desire it?’

The *Cung oán ngâm khúc* 1.212 echoes this:

chơi hoa cho rùa nhụy dần lại thôi

(Thiếu 1950:67)

‘he plays with the flower till it loses its  
pistil then slowly stops’.

cá hớp nhụy vàng lùa sóng

(Thanh-lãng 1969:317)

‘the fish snaps at the golden pistils (of  
the lotus) while playing in the ripples of  
the lake’

(cf. Daudin 1974:189)

A *ca-dao* further explains the roles:

thân chị như cánh hoa sen  
anh như bèo bọt chẳng chen được nào

‘your body, (girl), is like a lotus petal  
I am like duckweed and spume (I am coarse  
and transitory), how can I slip in?’

The cinnamon tree has already been mentioned several times; it occurs in many *ca-dao* like this one:

tiếc thay cây quế giữa rừng  
thơ thơ ai biết ngát lưng ai hay

‘Pity the cinnamon tree in the forest  
Who knows his perfume or his sweet-scented back?’

which incorporates puns like *ngừng lát*, whence:

‘Who knows his perfume. who would like it if

he stopped short for a moment?’

while Hồ Xuân Hương's *Khóc chồng làm thuốc*, ‘Weeping for a husband who made potions’, gives us:

cây đắng chàng ôi vị rừng chi

‘so spicy and bitter, oh my love, is the savour  
of the cinnamon stick!’

*En passant*, it should be noted that the Chinese believe that the moon, a female symbol, is the palace of the cinnamon tree (*quế cung*), again juxtaposing the two sexes.

The jackfruit is immortalised by Hồ Xuân Hương:

thân em như quả mít trên cây  
vỏ nó xù xì mùi nó dày  
quân tử có yêu thì đóng nõ  
xin đừng mẫn mớ nhựa ra tay

My body is like the jackfruit on the tree  
Its skin rough, its flesh (and scent) thick, cloying  
If you like it sir, plant your cleat in it  
But please do not examine it by feel or it  
will glue your hand with sap.

An essential part of traditional Vietnamese life is the quid of betel,<sup>6</sup> whose assembly finds immediate parallels in intercourse. It also mirrors the parts of the old legend surrounding it: the areca-nut tree (*cau*: male), the betel-vine (*trầu*) twining round it (female) providing the leaf (vagina) to wrap round it, and the rock of lime at their base which, after grinding, produces lime-paste (*vôi*: both male and female) with which to dress leaf and nut.

miếng trầu là đầu câu chuyện

‘a quid of betel is the prelude to all  
conversation’

say the Vietnamese, and conversation is a euphemism for sexual encounter. So,



sáng ngày tôi đi hái dâu  
 gặp hai anh **â**ng **đ**ôi **c**âu thạch bàn  
 hai anh **đ**ứng **đ**ậy **h**ỏi **h**an  
**h**ỏi **r**ằng: cô **â**y **v**ội vàng đi dâu  
**th**u **a**r **r**ằng: tôi đi hái dâu  
 hai anh **m**ột **t**úi **đ**ưa **t**rà **u** mời **ă**n  
**th**u **a**r **r**ằng: bác me tôi răn  
 làm thân con gái **ch**ớ **ă**n **t**rà **u** **ng**ười

‘this morning I went to pick mulberry leaves  
 and met two young men seated fishing on a stone bench  
 they stood up and asked me: where are you going  
 in such a hurry?  
 I replied: I’m going to collect mulberry leaves.  
 They opened their pouch and offered me betel to chew  
 I replied: My parents have warned me  
 that young girls should not accept betel quids  
 from strange men.’

which all seems innocent enough until, remembering that a gift of betel quids forms part of the betrothal ritual in the public culture, a suggestive *double entendre* is revealed in the last two lines:

‘I replied: my parents are very old (so  
 need me to look after them) hence  
 be intimate with the girl but she’ll not  
 eat your betel (that is, accept a marriage  
 proposal).’

More straight-forward are:

vào **v**ườn **h**ái **q**uả **c**au xanh  
**b**ờ **r**a làm sáu **m**ời **a**n **h** **x**ơ **t**rà **u**  
**t**rà **u** này tằm **n**hững **v**ôi **T**àu  
**g**ì **đ**ể **đ**ệm **c**át **c**ành **h**ai **đ**ầu **q**uả **c**ay  
**t**rà **u** này ăn thật là say  
**đ**ầu **m**ăn **đ**ầu **n**hat **đ**ầu **c**ay **đ**ầu **n**ong

đầu không nên đạo vợ chồng  
 xơi hăm ba miếng kẹo lòng nhớ thường

‘I enter my garden to cut a fresh areca nut  
 I divide it into six and invite you to chew  
 a quid of betel  
 This betel is prepared with Chinese lime  
 And I have added a little campanula in the  
 middle and some spicy cinnamon at each end  
 This betel will truly intoxicate you  
 Whether it be strong or mild, spicy or hot  
 Whether or not we become husband and wife  
 I invite you to eat two or three quids  
 to calm my excitement a little.’

and:

thiên duyên kỳ ngộ gặp chàng  
 khác gì như thế phượng hoàng gặp nhau  
 tiện đây ăn một miếng trầu  
 hơi thăm quê quán ở đây chẳng là  
 xin chàng quá bước về nhà  
 trước là trò chuyện sáu là nghỉ chân

‘Heaven’s will caused me by chance to meet you;  
 how is it different from the meeting of male  
 and female phoenix?  
 Will you accept a quid of betel  
 and tell me in which village you live?  
 I beg you to come home with me  
 First to talk and then we’ll rest our feet.’

There is also a saying:

được mùa cau đầu mùa lúa

‘if you have a good harvest of areca nuts

you have a bad harvest of paddy.’

An agricultural axiom, it also refers to the breaking of societally accepted sexual taboos. Pregnancy outside marriage, or extramarital sex, was forbidden for it was believed that such actions went contrary to the precarious balance of nature that was maintained by the observance of strict rules of conduct, of morality. Transgression of the taboos could even affect the harvest, wherefore the offender was required to pay a penalty. One *ca-dao* preserves this situation for us;

phình phình lớn giữa lớn ra  
 mẹ ơi! con chẳng ở nhà được đâu  
 ở nhà làng bắt mất trâu  
 cho nên con phải đâm đũa đi

‘Swelling, swelling, in the middle I swell out  
 Mother! I cannot live at home anymore  
 If I stay at home the village committee will  
 confiscate our buffalo  
 So I must hide my head and go (in order not  
 to lose the buffalo).’

nụ cà hoa mướp

‘buds of aubergines and flowers  
 of courgettes’

are explicit references to the glans penis and the nipples of a woman’s breasts; the saying is distilled from a folk-tale (Ngọc 1934: Vol. 1, 168). More humourously a boy sings of eggplant in a *ca-dao*:

công anh làm rể có tài  
 ăn hết mười một mười hai vại cà  
 giếng đầu mở cửa anh ra  
 kẻo mà anh chết theo cà đêm nay

‘My efforts as a trial son-in-law have merit.  
 You’ve eaten eleven or twelve jars of salty  
 aubergines.  
 Where’s the well? Open the door for me to go out

lest I die following this night's aubergines.'

Equally graphic is the *ca-dao* about prune, peach, and persimmon:

bây giờ Mận mới hỏi Đào  
 vườn hồng đã có ai vào hay chưa  
 Mận hỏi thời Đào xin thưa  
 vườn hồng có lối nhưng chưa ai vào

'Now Prune asks Peach:  
 Has anyone entered the (rosy) garden of persimmons  
 yet?  
 Since Prune has asked, Peach begs to reply:  
 There's a path for the garden, but no one  
 has yet gone in.'

The familiar bamboo is a male symbol:

gió đưacây trúc ngã qui  
 ba năm trực tiêtcòn gilà xuân

'The wind wrests the bamboo to its knees  
 Three years of faithfulness! What will  
 remain of the spring (of my youth)?

Wind in such contexts represents passionate sexual action, whence it becomes apparent that there are two puns contained in that first line: if *ngã qui* is read *ngã qui* it means 'to fell the lotus':

'the wind flurries and the bamboo fells the lotus';

if it is read *ngĩt quà* it means 'to think of the sweetmeat, or gift'.

thân em như tâm lụa đào  
 phất bính giữa chợ biết vào tay ai  
 em ngồi cành trúc em tựa cành mai

đông đào tây liễu lầy ai bạn cùng

‘my body is like a bolt of brocaded silk  
floating in the middle of the market,  
not knowing into whose hand it will fall.  
I sit on the bamboo branch, I lean on the  
apricot bough,  
peach of the East, willow of the West, who  
shall I take as my life’s companion?’

By way of contrast, the flamboyant flower, and leaf’, is a provocative and forcefully female image:

thân em như hoa vông trên cây  
chúng anh như đám cỏ gà giữa đường  
lạy trời cho cả gió sương  
cho hoa vông rụng xuống chui luồn cỏ gà

‘My body is like a flamboyant flower on the tree  
You lot are like the couch grass in the middle  
of the road  
I pray that it will be so windy (and dewy)  
that the flamboyant flower falls and slips among  
the couch grass down below.’

Kapok and mango, too, are similarly invoked, while the coconut furnishes us with a telling juxtaposition. The scholar-recluse Nguyễn Bình Khiêm (1491–1585) wrote a poem in his collection the *Bạch vân âm thi tập* (cf. Schneider 1974:611 sqq.) commending the coconut thus:

The earth is good, the rains and dews abundant  
Flowers turn to fruit under the burning sun  
that could melt gold;  
It is a pot full of a liquid limpid and like ice  
No speck of dust from the world outside can  
enter and soil it  
The ‘green melon’ is nothing if not refreshing  
As a thirstquencher it is the equal of the

purple sugarcane.

Let's fill a gourd of this natural water  
To slake the thirst of the people.

In this poem, redolent as it is of Taoist alchemy, the actions of *yīn* and *yáng* (11.1–2), and allusions to male and female organs (11.5–6), the coconut signifies the sage striving to perfect himself in order to serve his country. All things are mutable.

nước ở bầu thì tròn  
ở ống thì dài

‘water in a gourd is round,  
in a tube it is long.’

So:

con gái chơi với con trai  
rõisau cái vú bằng hai sọ dừa

‘girls who play around with boys  
will have breasts as large as coconuts.’

which contrasts nicely with the virginity implicit in:

vú em chum chúm chũm cau  
cho anh bóp cái có đau anh *đều*

‘your breasts are pointed like areca nuts,  
let me squeeze them once, if it hurts, I’ll  
regulate it!’

The classification<sup>7</sup> of these and other plants<sup>8</sup> by the Vietnamese as male or female may depend on the similarity of their shape or general appearance to human sexual organs or erogenous zones (serpentaria *chóc*, and flamboyant leaf *vông*); to texture (jackfruit *mít*, and lime-paste *vôi*); to colour—light colours tend to be female (apricot *mai*), darker ones male (prune *mận*)—the open, red flower of the flamboyant (*vông*) and the fruit of the persimmon (*hồng*) are patently female; so too are the banyan (*đá*) leaf and flower female, though well-experienced; banyan fruit and tamarind (*me*) fruit, on the contrary, are male.

Sometimes the classing is the result of semantically implied gender, as in the case of celery (*qui-thân*=*đuờng than*, where *đuờng* is *yáng* ‘male’, whence *đuờng thân* means ‘male body, organ, penis’) Another phonetically associated gender is that of the homophonous poplar *yáng* (*đuờng*). Sex is not, however, always constant; hence the peach (*đào*) is male when paired with the willow (*liễu*), but is female, as in the *Shījīng*, when paired with the prune (*mận*). Still, the representation of both male and female sexuality by the same natural symbol is not confined to China and Vietnam; it occurs, for instance, in Western bestiaries as well (Rowland 1974:8–9, *ape*).

Naturally enough, not all of these symbols would receive immediate recognition today, yet those preserved in *ca-dao* remain widely understood.

One further point requires emphasis. Not one of the plants used as a natural symbol here is wild, uncultivated. All belong to the world of the lowland cultivator, are utilised by him and are familiar sights in his everyday life.

The wild, uncultivated members of the plant and animal kingdoms belonged to the mysterious half-world of the mountains and forests (*miền rừng núi*) inhabited by barbarians, *montagnards* (*người thượng*), beasts and plants of awful aspect and strange frightening potencies. The uncleared high land is non-Vietnamese territory.<sup>9</sup> The majority of the Vietnamese (*người kinh*) are people who till the soil, eking out a precarious existence through time-consuming, back-breaking labour. Yet their life they tinge with irrepressible optimism:

**rủnhau đi cây đi cây**

**bây giờ khó nhọc có ngày phong lưu**

‘let’s (cajole one another to) go and transplant  
paddy and plough the fields  
now there is hardship, there will be days of ease.’

**rủnhau đi dạo vườn cà**

**cà non chằm mắm cà già làm dưa**

‘let’s (cajole one another to) go for a stroll  
in the aubergine plot,  
young fresh ones we’ll dip into the sauce,  
old ones we’ll make into pickles.’

The Vietnamese live in an awareness of the rhythm of nature which is a mirror of their own existence. Maybe

sinh kỳ chàng ôi tử tác qui

‘Life is a loan (my love), death a return’

but it is all part of the one cycle, the great pattern of cosmic ebb, flow, and union.

They are a poetic people with a great sense of humour, and an appreciation of the *risqué* and ribald. Their poetry bristles with obvious sexual referents like stem and branch, door and well; it conjures up before our eyes a palimpsest of fragmented, jewelled visions, but one image remains constant. It is an exaltation of sexual love, high-honed to a peak of ecstasy recurrent.

A final poem by Hồ Xuân Hương takes us a little way down the path:

Tiền người làm thơ

Dắt dứu đũa nhau tới cửa thiền  
Cũng đòi học nói nói không nên  
Ai về hấn nhủ phường lời tới  
Muôn sông đem vôi quét giả đền

Seeing off the versifier

Hand in hand we lead one another to the  
doorway of the meditative hall (of the pagoda)  
We too ask to study, to learn to speak and  
speak and are not able  
Whoever returns to recommend the direction of  
rope  
If he wishes to come to life again, he should  
bring lime to whitewash the shrine (as an  
expiation).

(cf. Durand 1968:142)

đòn nào ngoạm ấy

‘to every pestle its mortar.’



âm	YĪN	YÁNG	dương
(sen/liên)	lotus	{ lotus seeds { duckweed ( <i>Lemna</i> )	(hạt sen) (bèo)
(vông)	flamboyant	{ chóc ( <i>serpentaria</i> ) { couch grass ( <i>Cynodon dactylon</i> Pers.)	(cỏ gà)
(gạo)	kapok	cỏ may ( <i>Chrysopogon aciculatus</i> )	
(đào)	peach	prune ( <i>Prunus triflora</i> Roxb.)	(mận)
(liễu)	willow	{ peach { poplar	(đào) (dương)
(mai)	apricot ( <i>Prunus microcarpa</i> Zieb.)	bamboo	(trúc/tre)
(trầu)	betel ( <i>Piper betle</i> )	{ areca { cinnamon ( <i>Cinnamomum cassia</i> ) = phụ-tử ( <i>Aconitum variegatum</i> ) campanula	(cau) (quế) (cát cành)
(vôi)	lime	← lime tamarind	(vôi) (me)
(mướp)	zucchini	aubergine	(cà)
(dưa)	melon		
(hồng/thị/cây)	persimmon ( <i>Diospyros kaki</i> )		
(trượt)= (nếp)	glutinous rice		
(xoài)	mango		
(mít)	jackfruit	{ banian ( <i>Ficus pumila</i> ) { banian ( <i>Ficus indicus</i> )	(đa/đa) (?sy)
	banian	← banian liquorice celery	(cảm thảo) { (qui thân) { (dương qui (thân)) { (rau cần)
âm	YĪN	YÁNG	dương
(dừa)	coconut	{ coconut { sugarcane	(dừa) (mía)

		dew	(sương)	
		spume	(bọt)	
(hương)	perfume	toad (=old man)	(cóc)	
		tadpole (youth)	(nông nọc)	
(kiên)	ant	→ (mật) honey ← yam	(khoai)	
			(khoai môn: <i>Alocasia macrorrhiza</i> Schott)	
			(khoai ngọt: <i>Dioscorea alata</i> )	
(hoa)	flowers	↔ { butterfly	(bướm bướm)	
		{ bee/wasp	(ong/ong bầu)	
(trăng)	moon	cinnamon	(quế)	
(trăng hoa)	moon	flowers	(nguyệt hoa)	
	moon	wind	(trăng gió)	
(mây)	clouds	← { rain	(mây mùa)	
	clouds		{ fish	(cá)
	clouds		{ dragon	(rồng mây)

NOTES

1. Compare Hàn Mặc Tử's (1912–1940)

Bến lèn

Trăng nằm sóng soãi trên cành liễu  
 Đợi gió đông về để lả lơi  
 Hoa lá ngây tình không muốn động  
 Lòng em hội họp, chị Hằng ơi.

(Kiệt 1968:156)

Confusion

The moon stretches herself voluptuously  
 on the willow branches  
 while waiting for the wanton caresses  
 of the East Wind  
 Flowers and leaves congeal in an

intoxication of love

My heart pounds with love, O Sister Moon

2. Xuân Hương's *vịnh núi chùa Thấy* and *vịnh hang Các-cờ* are reminiscent of this.

3. An idea of the specificity of the allusions may be seen from a parenthesised translation:

Glory to the Creator who, so often, shows  
 himself skilled (sexual prowess)  
 A rocky wall exposes a lot of crevices (vulva)  
 Tufted grass, springy, thick (pubic hair) climbs  
 up the ridges (labia)  
 In the cracks of the rocks water (secretions)  
 drips into trickles, sticking to the hand  
 A shaven-headed monk (penis) is sitting beating  
 the drum (clitoris)  
 Two novices, round-backed, stand up straight-  
 guarding the sanctuary (clitoris, vagina, cervix)  
 Arrived at the destination, one knows that  
 the Saint was transformed here  
 Legs worn out, knees tired, (euphemisms for  
 post-coital lassitude) one is still full  
 of desire.

This ode is even more insinuating in context. The Master was a Buddhist monk-magician, *Tu Đạo Hạnh*, supposedly reincarnated in a Taoist fashion as the Emperor Lý Thánh-tông (reg. 1128–1138). His dwelling place, the Sài-sơn, which was a site fraught by miracles, was a lovers' trysting place well-endowed with geomantic properties, *fēngshuǐ* (*phong thủy*), conducive to satisfactory intercourse. The grotto (vagina) opening on two flanks of the mountains (woman's loins) was always cooled by the breeze (male 'breath').

4. There is another apposite extract from Hàn Mặc Tử:

Hương thơm: Đau-thường

Ai hãy làm thinh chớ nói nhiều  
 Để nghe dưới đáy nước chèo  
 Để nghe tiếng liễu run trong gió

Và đ<sup>o</sup> xem tr<sup>o</sup>i gi<sup>o</sup>i nghiã yêu

(Kiệt 1968:152)

Perfume: The pain of love

Silence, I beg you; let's not talk much  
to listen to the water murmuring at the  
bottom of the lake  
to listen to the willow leaves trembling in the  
wind  
and to hear heaven explain the meaning  
of love.

5. From a botanical point of view stamens are indicated, but since there is no technical distinction implied in the Vietnamese and the context makes the reference female, I have translated *nhi/nhụy* 'pistil'.
6. The areca and betel were unknown to the *Shījīng* poets but, interestingly, *Guófēng* ode 4 equates a loving and loyal husband and wife with a tree and a liana climbing it.
7. The philosophical analysis of the universe in terms of the cosmological dualism of *yīn* and *yáng*, their action and interaction, permits the extension of the male-female classification to everything within the universe. As a result, the classification may be considered as an elementary interpretative treatise on aesthetics—four of the five senses may be classed by sex, even if only attributively; that of hearing, sound, tends to be the result of the union of *yīn* and *yang*. Its application within the practice of popular medicine also obtains.
8. 'The Navajo classify plants in at least three separate ways...first, plants are male and female. Another relation is that various groups are used for curing the same disease or for the same purpose, or are used in the same way. Still another is that they have similar characteristics, such as being prickly or sticky, and within these groups are large, medium, and small or slender kinds. These three types of category are independent, except that when plants are named according to size the larger one is likely to be "male".' (Kluckhohn 1960:85, quoting Wyman & Harris 1941:9).
9. A recent Vietnamese translation of the excerpt from *Nguyễn Trãi's Bình Ngô Đại Cáo* (p.31 above) serves well to illustrate the traditional awe of unfamiliar territory:

Taxes et impôts vidèrent nos lacs et nos  
montagnes  
Il fallait plonger au fond des mers, affronter  
les requins pour leur fournir des perles,  
S'aventurer au fond des montagnes pour leur  
ramener de l'or  
Se risquer dans les forêts pestilentielles  
pour piéger des faisans et de cerfs noirs.  
Ni l'herbe des prairies. ni le moindre insecte

ne furent ménagés  
Malheur a nos veuves, a nos enfants.

(*Anthologie* 1972:144)

10. lệ khi hoa **chăngchiêu**ong

‘it would be a misfortune if the flower  
did not open to the bee’

(Phan **Trần** 1. 479)

cf. Rowland 1974:100.

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\* This is the edition used for the Vietnamese texts.

\*\* Edition in 2 vols., 2nd printing, n.d. Vol.1: *Người ta*; Vol.2: *Muông chim*.

† This is the collection to which all modern studies of *ca-dao* refer. The edition is used for most *ca-dao* (2 vols. in 1).

# PADI, PUNS AND THE ATTRIBUTION OF RESPONSIBILITY<sup>1</sup>

Mark Hobart

One of the more intriguing forms of symbolism in Bali is based upon a somewhat uncommon use of nature. In certain agricultural ceremonies, various species of widely-found plant, otherwise ostensibly unimportant, are accorded a temporary ritual prominence. This is largely, it seems, because their normal designations refer in some way to the conditions of ideal cultivation, in particular to the phases of growth and the harvest yields, of irrigated rice. In each instance, there is a terminological association which relies on the systematic employment of homonymy or assonance, in a broad sense. While this does not preclude the possibility of other types of link so far untraced, it suggests the relevance of language and sensory resemblances, in the formation of symbolic connexions, in a manner which may previously have been overlooked.<sup>2</sup>

An examination of the theme and stated purpose of these cyclical rituals—the re-enactment and encouragement of successful agriculture—poses broader questions about their sociological function. Although the concerns are not unfamiliar, some of the more obvious approaches seem to fall short of providing an appropriate answer. This is so, for example, for arguments in terms such as the re-affirmation of social solidarity; as mystical alternatives in the face of technological inadequacy (Beattie 1964:207); as a method of mnemonics and ordering experience (Douglas 1966:58–72; 1968:369); and, additionally, as a regulating mechanism for cultivation (Geertz 1967:233; 1972a:30–32; cf. 1966a: 6–9; 28–9; 1966b: 52). For, most agricultural ceremonies are performed by individual farmers alone on their rice fields; capital investment in technical installations offers a potential means of substantially reducing risks and uncertainty; while the frequent disjuncture between the timing of offerings and the developmental stages of rice, with its concomitant work schedules, points to the weaknesses of hypotheses based on either the naive instrumentality or the organisational character of these rites. Under such circumstances, an interesting interpretation is suggested by the contrast of cultural statements of belief with an analysis of economic relationships in practice. On the one hand, religion emphasises the attribution of final responsibility for the fertility of the crop to supernatural agencies; on the other, ethnographic evidence indicates that insufficiency stems in no small part from the problems in social cooperation and in the democratic constitution of irrigation associations. For their structure tends to lead to the dominance of small-scale farmers, to a relatively low level of investment and possible conflicts of interest which are denied public expression. Agricultural ceremonies may, therefore,

embody an alternative explanation for the deficiencies of, and stresses within, the basic productive groups, and so may indirectly help to maintain them and the accompanying ideal of the strict equality of members of a corporation.

The organisation of irrigated agriculture in certain parts of Bali has been described in some detail.<sup>3</sup> In most features, the region round the settlement of Tengahpadang in Central Gianyar, from which the information used here is drawn, corresponds with existing accounts. Rice forms the main subsistence product and is obtained through an intensive system of annual double-cropping of a number of varieties, most of which take some five months from seed to harvest, and just under six to complete a cycle (cf. *Adatrechtbundels* XV:50). Irrigation is controlled by a special group, the *subak*, composed of persons whose terraces are fed from a single source. In this case, most riceland owned by the villagers lies on a long sloping ridge supplied by a local association known as Subak Langkih. From a river dam about five miles upstream, the water is led a tortuous route between ravines, through an intricate system of aqueducts, canals and dividing-blocks of different sizes, eventually to individual plots. The irrigation works are technically ingenious, but rely far more on the extensive use of labour to maintain the simple conduits, generally of earth or mud and stones, than on capital for secure, nowadays concrete, structures (Lieftrinck 1969:47–57). As a result, patching breaches is an almost incessant activity, especially in the rainy season (nor is this an isolated instance, see Lieftrinck 1969:21).

This whole system is under the management of the *subak*, which allocates water, collects its own agreed taxes and supervises much of the day-to-day administration. Owing to its size and topography, Subak Langkih is divided into five territorially discrete, but adjacent, sections, or *tèmpèk*, each with its own sub-channel, council and officials, under an overall head, the *klian pekasèh*. It is from these that the peasant farmers acquire water in units of *tenah*, a proportion of the total flow, adequate here to irrigate on average roughly a third of a hectare (Geertz 1967:230–31; but cf. *Adatrechtbundels* XV:44; in Tengahpadang this is commonly known as (*bi*)*bit tenah*, see *Adatrechtbundels* XV:37). Unlike the settlement wards, or *banjar*, persistent factionalism does not seem to be a salient feature of *subak* in this area. The main informal cleavage is between the restricted number of large cultivators and the majority with one *bit tenah* or less, including some share-croppers who undertake the obligations of members as part of their agreement.<sup>4</sup> While the association assesses its own levies according to the quantity of water obtained, labour and voting rights are *per capita*, not dependent on the size of holdings. Thus, ‘subsistence farmers’ comprise most of the membership, preponderate at the meetings where collective decisions are reached and influence the direction of public policy.

The timing of agriculture generally is regulated through the head of the *subak* in conjunction with its temple priest, or *pemangku*, and may form part of a regional arrangement for staggering the distribution of water supplies (*Adatrechtbundels* XV: 51–2; Geertz 1972a: 30–31; cf. Lieftrinck 1969:62–3). For ritual, this is complicated by the existence of two separate calendars in Tengahpadang and elsewhere (see Goris 1960a: 118; Grader 1960:276–8) which are of some importance in the following discussion. The first is the Hindu system (Goris 1960a: 115–6) of twelve solar-lunar months, in which the principal dates of religious significance are the full moon, *purnama*, and the new moon, *tilem*. The second is the so-called Javanese-Balinese, or *uku*, calendar, based on the



numerical computation of a set of concurrent weeks, ranging in length from one to ten days, in which the combination of the three most important weeks, of five, six and seven days, defines a fixed 210-day cycle. The *uku* system in particular is completely divorced, therefore, from the flow of observable natural events and seems to form a separate taxonomic and conceptual framework (Geertz 1966b:42–53), in which the permutations emphasise its distinct, abstract mathematical order.<sup>5</sup> Apart from their mundane application, these two schemes between them establish the dates for scheduled religious holidays and temple festivals, and indicate auspicious or dangerous periods for a wide variety of activities. In Subak Langkih, *both* calendrical systems intersect in the organisation of the rice-cycle rites.<sup>6</sup> So, for example, the main temple festival, (*pi*)*odalan agung* occurs on *Purnama Kedasa*, or every full moon of the tenth solar-lunar month; whereas the regular offerings in the ricefields normally fall on every fifteenth day, or *kajeng-manis*, by the overlap of *kajeng*, the third day of the three-day week, with *umanis*, the first day of the five-day week. Although Geertz has argued that the ceremonies are synchronised with the stages of cultivation (see below), in Tengahpadang at least, there is no simple correspondence, for the rites follow a largely predetermined pattern.

There is another complexity. The agricultural seasons alternate in this area between a rigorously supervised cycle, referred to as *kertamasa*, in which all work and ritual are coordinated in theory through the head of the association on pain of punishment, and an open one, *gegadon* (Lieftrink 1927:153; Wirz 1927:249), when each farmer is notionally free to decide his own schedule. In effect, the difference is not always so great, as the peasants fear increased damage from migrating pests if the harvesting is serial. One concomitant of this seasonal oscillation is that certain major ceremonies are performed in full only during *kertamasa*;<sup>7</sup> and, to confuse neat theories of timing still further, one of these, *nyungsung* (supposedly co-ordinated with the ‘pregnancy’ of the rice, *beling*, when the growing panicle causes the plant to swell, Grist 1953:46; see Table 1) should follow the solar-lunar calendar in *kertamasa*, but the *uku* system for *gegadon*!

An attempt to analyse the entire series of ceremonies, offerings and prayers would prove a daunting, if not impossible, task and is beyond the scope of the present work. One small part of this complex, however, does contain a relatively discrete set of ritual elements, which are of some theoretical interest, for their novelty if nothing else, as they appear to be based on the recognition of different forms of sound association, in particular homonymy and assonance, and the possible applications of these in a more or less ordered fashion in symbolisation. Nor is the use of such types of correspondence restricted to agricultural rites alone. A similar development of language forms is evident in other contexts, for example in verse and proverbs, in the traditional ‘romantic operettas’, *arja* (McPhee 1966:7; cf. 294–303), or even the humble, but inveterate, Balinese habit of punning.

The verse form of the quatrain, known among the Malays as the *pantun*, is also found in Bali (sometimes under the name of *sesenggakan*; cf. van der Tuuk 1897). This consists of two couplets, arranged so that ideally there is systematic assonance between the first and third lines, and also the second and fourth. The opening couplet may provide an allusive reference to a theme taken up more directly in its successor, or they may be effectively unrelated (for a more detailed discussion, see Wilkinson & Winstedt 1957). Commonly the first two lines alone are spoken in Bali, the audience either knowing or being left to infer the remainder through assonance.

Significantly perhaps, quatrains may be found in a religious setting. For instance, the temple of Duur Bingin in Tengahpadang possesses a pair of deities, the *Barong Landung*, who are manifest as gigantic puppets in the guise of a black male and a white female (Covarrubias 1937:287 & 355–6). This couple has, it is believed, the power to confer fertility on childless marriages and are recognised throughout much of the island. In the month following the religious holiday of *Galungan* (according to the Javanese-Balinese calendar; Goris 1960a:124–5), they are carried around the villages and animated from inside by trained members of a voluntary association, accompanied by an orchestra. A speciality of this pair is the paid performance of songs, not infrequently with explicitly sexual overtones! In the example which follows, the structure can be seen clearly, although there is no particular link between the couplets. Here, the initial two lines are essentially nonsense phrases which provide the pattern for the closing section. A rough translation follows:

Sok pècok pedemin cicing,  
 Memula lateng di Bangkiangsidem,  
 Nyaka bocok, nyaka tusing,  
 Lamun suba anteng ajak medem.  
 A dented basket slept on by a dog,  
 Planting nettles in Bangkiangsidem (a village in  
 East Bali),  
 I like her whether she is ugly or not,  
 Provided that she is prepared to sleep with me.

A similar, if simpler, form is found in some proverbs, *sesongaan*, such as:

Celabingkah di batan biyu,  
 Gumi linggah ajak liyu.  
 Broken potsherds (or tiles) beneath a banana tree,  
 The world is big (broad) with much (in it).

Deliberate plays on homophones, or homonyms, in punning is found in village conversation and exchanges, particularly in public on the roads and in coffee-stalls. A simple illustration from one of the most adept perpetrators in Tengahpadang should suffice. The standard form of greeting in Bali is to ask the other person where they are going, which elicits a reply varying with the amount of information it is wished to convey. In ordinary Balinese this is '*bakal kija?*' (literally: where will you (go) to?), normally shortened to '*ka(l) kija?*', with the terminal *-l*, elided. On being addressed once, the punster chose to misinterpret this as '*kaki ja?*', or 'where is your grandfather?'. So he riposted accordingly with '*di s~~ema~~é!*', 'in the graveyard;'—to hoots of laughter from bystanders. On another occasion, with a political undercurrent, he shamed publicly an

unpopular local official,<sup>8</sup> notorious for muddling Balinese and Indonesian (the national language), by treating the same question as a linguistic hybrid. Here, '*ka(l) kija?*' was construed as the Indonesian *kaki* (foot) and low Balinese *ja* (where), or 'where are your feet?'. The man was promptly put down with the response: '*di atas tanahé*', 'on the ground', in an equal confusion of languages. These retorts were duly circulated around the village with evident approbation.

In a more serious vein, sound association occurs in certain rituals. The most elaborated use is found in *mantenin padi*, the main ceremony after the completion of the harvest, when the padi has already been stored in the granary, with offerings, *banten*, to the goddess of rice, Déwi Sri, in effigy in a decorated bundle of rice placed by the eastern wall (for a synopsis of the rice-cycle rites, see Table 2, and for the significance of the directions: 'The Path of the Soul', in this volume). A different form is found in two earlier rituals: *nuasèn*, planting the *duwasa* (for the linked meanings, see van der Tuuk 1897), sacred clumps of padi used later to make the figure of the deity; and a small rite commonly held at the end of *mebiyu kukung*, which is considered to effect the 'marriage' of the rice, and sometimes ward off pests as well. Finally, identical plants are included in the marriage ceremony, *mesakapan*, with a similar interpretation,

*Mantenin padi* is performed some time after the harvest and drying of the grain (in Bali, this is with the ears still on the stalks, which requires early reaping). In theory, no rice can be sold beforehand (Grader 1960:277–8), although it is not unusual, in fact, for poor families to ignore this injunction out of economic necessity, for the rite may take place months later, each household acting independently. Offerings of a relatively elaborate character are placed in the granary, and at ritual sites throughout the compound, particularly in the ancestor shrines. Some of the names are interesting, for example *lumbung bek*, meaning simply: full granary. These compose part of a formidably complex and locally variable system which, as Hooykaas has pointed out, remains largely unstudied (C.Hooykaas 1973a:169; for an introduction see: Belo 1953; J.Hooykaas 1961).

My concern here is instead with some of the ritual appurtenances in the form of a set of plants which are placed at a remove from the principal offerings, on the outside walls of the granary. The classification of botanical species in Bali has been little examined, although some of these are listed and their medicinal properties designated in the palm-leaf manuscript, the Taru Pramana which states how a culture hero Mpu Kuturan distinguished them.<sup>9</sup> Other woods are differentiated according to their purity, and hence suitability for ritual use. Many of the common names provided in the Taru Pramana are related to ordinary Balinese words in some form. For instance, the manuscript includes: *buyung-buyung putih* (lit: white flies), or *uyah-uyah* (*uyuh*=salt). In certain cases, there is an apparent reference to morphological or physiological features of the species, so that *tebel-tebel* (*tebel*=thick) has both thick leaves and spreads fast (van der Tuuk 1897). For others, informants were aware of no explanation. For present purposes, it is adequate to note these unexamined aspects of classification.

The species chosen for use in *mantenin padi* vary somewhat across the island (cf. Wirz 1927:316–7). In Tengahpadang, twelve plants seem to comprise the available pool, from which those actually incorporated may be drawn.<sup>10</sup> All were found growing either in the house compounds, lanes or dry fields; but it is to be noted that many were not to be found in the vicinity of river-banks and none were distinguished for thriving in, or near,

ricefields. It is possible that this may serve symbolically to underline the conceptual separation of the growing padi on the terraces from the dry product stored in the compound for consumption.

The question arises as to why these twelve species in particular should be selected from all those known to adorn the sides of the granary. To the best of my knowledge, they are not used on any other ritual occasion. Wirz (1927) has suggested that one reason may be their bitter taste or poisonous effects, which are believed to deter evil spirits and demonic influences, although he admits that this cannot furnish a complete explanation. However, in his version the plants are hung around the doorway as a barrier, not on the sides as in Tengahpadang. This view also does not account for the many species which are neither toxic nor considered potent against malevolent supernatural beings. Further, one of these, *kayu sugih*, is in fact an ingredient of porridge and a dye-stuff as well; while *tebel-tebel* is a compound in ear medicine. Apart from this, they are apparently of little nutritional or practical value. So there are no obvious clues as to any systematic grounds for their inclusion to be gleaned from a study of their use, habitat or qualities, which I could discover. Some might be included if a diverse, and unsatisfactory, set of characteristics were made: as an example, *inih-inih* is assumed to be propitious if it grows in the ancestral shrine area, but this merely compounds the difficulties.

There is, however, one important way in which all these plants form a single class. This is their terminological value for sound association. When I first documented the ceremony, this was indicated to me with pride by some villagers. For, in contrast to much religious knowledge, held to be the preserve of the high caste priests, *Pedanda*, and about which the peasants generally professed ignorance, they stated that they were aware of the significance of the leaves. In native exegesis, these are seen mainly as homonyms or assonants of terms referring to the attributes of proper, or ideal, agricultural production which it is intended to induce. It is worth examining the series in some detail to show just how perspicacious this commentary is.

As the investigation of a number of different performances of the rite showed no discernible pattern in the order in which the plants were arranged, I shall take them as they occurred in the most inclusive instance. *Tebel-tebel* may be related to *tebel*, thick (repetition in Balinese indicates, among other things, plurality or emphasis).<sup>11</sup> *Tegteg* has a range of meanings, including fixed or substantial; while *paku kenying* can be linked with *paku*, fern, and *kenying*, to smile or laugh. *Inih-inih* is of interest, as *inih* signifies: not quickly finished, used sparingly (van Eck 1876). *Nasi-nasi*, in a similar fashion, can be treated among its other meanings as a possible reduplication of *nasi*, cooked rice, hence food. There follow three plants: *kayu padi*, *kayu emas* and *kayu sugih*; *kayu* is the ordinary Balinese word for wood, *padi* is the English paddy, *emas* is commonly translated by gold (both the metal and the colour), while *sugih* means wealthy or rich. Next is the curious *sengseng catu*, for *sengseng* generally stands for a stopper and *catu* is a measure for rice (with a hole in the bottom).

The remaining terms are more complex. *Sri benben* seems here to refer to *Sri*, the goddess of rice, but also a word which

TABLE 1. The terminological significance of plants in Matenin Padi

<u>Designation of Plant</u>	<u>Analysis of Terms</u>	<u>Indigenous Exegesis</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Tebel-tebel	<i>tebel</i> =thick	so that the contents of the granary will be thick	also called <i>kayu urip</i> , the tree of life.
Tegteg	1) fixed, substantial 2) repair, recuperate 3) <i>metegtegan</i> =relax	1) so that the padi will not be diminished, even if drawn upon often 2) the recuperation or relaxation after work	
Paku Kenying	<i>paku</i> =fern, vegetable <i>kenying</i> =smile, laugh	1) to be happy 2) <i>kenying</i> is also <i>kuning</i> , yellow the colour of ripe padi	
Inih-inih	<i>inih</i> =not quickly finished sparingly used	so that the padi in the granary cannot be finished	propitious if this grows in the area for the ancestor shrines
Nasi-nasi	<i>nasi</i> =cooked rice, food	if there is rice, then there is food	
Kayu padi	<i>kayu</i> =wood, tree <i>padi</i> =the rice plant	if there is padi, we are very happy	
Kayu emas	( <i>e</i> ) <i>mas</i> =gold (metal and colour)	1) so that the padi will be yellow like gold 2) then there will be riches like owning much gold	its leaves are an ingredient in some offerings
Kayu sugih	<i>sugih</i> =rich, wealthy	so that we become rich	the leaves are used in sago porridge and give a green colour to some cakes
Sengseng catu	1) <i>sengseng</i> =cork, stopper 2) <i>catu</i> =measuring container for dehusked rice ( <i>beras</i> ) with a small hole in the base	if the hole in the catu is closed up, then rice cannot pour out, so it stays full and brings wealth	
Sri benben	<i>Sri</i> =Dewi Sri, goddess of rice, also name of rice <i>benben</i> =wasp, (populous)	1) <i>benben</i> is <i>emben</i> , leafy, voluminous or much 2) so that the growing rice will have thick leaves 3) if there is much rice, then our feelings are happy	
<u>Designation of Plant</u>	<u>Analysis of Terms</u>	<u>Indigenous Exegesis</u>	<u>Comments</u>

Dinding ahi	<i>dingding</i> =trellis woven from coconut-leaf sometimes <i>dinding</i> =wall, screen <i>a(h)i</i> =sunlight, daylight	1) so that the padi will be surrounded by sunshine to make it dry 2) so that there will be a screen to protect the padi from pests and bad weather 3) <i>dingding</i> stands for <i>dèngdèng</i> , to dry in the sun, so that the padi will dry in the sun
Pati(h) kala(h)	<i>pati</i> =handle of knife (among varied meanings) <i>patih</i> =minister of a prince <i>kalah</i> =defeated, lost <i>kala</i> =type of demonic spirit	1) the <i>patih</i> is defeated 2) a bad <i>patih</i> is defeated and driven away, and no longer oppresses the people 3) the knife-handle is defeated by the rice-stalks because they are so thick and numerous 4) the rice is so thick, a knife gets lost in it 5) <i>pati</i> is <i>mati</i> , dead; evil demons are destroyed so that there is peace

may be used to indicate padi; while *benben* can be a wasp. Of significance, though, the latter is held to be an assonant of *emben*, leafy or voluminous. Similarly *dingding ahi* appears to be literally: *dingding*, a woven coconut-leaf trellis and *a(h)i*, day- or sun-light. With a slight shift of the vowel-sounds, however, one obtains *dèngdèng*, to dry in the sun. (This has been noted by van der Tuuk (1897) and is also the villagers' interpretation.) It may be worth recording that *ding* and *dèng* are the terms for two notes in the Balinese pentatonic scale, the others being suitably: *dong*, *dung* and *dang* (McPhee 1966:58–61). Of these plants, those which are given in the Taru Pramana tend to be identified there as cool, *etis*, a quality applied *inter alia* to a household to indicate the absence of acrimony and an adequate supply of food, with a granary which diminishes slowly (popular opinion maintained that the second of these characteristics was the determinant of the first!).

The final, and apparently least used plant is *pati(h) kala(h)*, the main one to present problems, not least as the Balinese were uncertain whether it should be read as *pati* or *patih*. The latter is commonly applied to a traditional royal court official, but the former has a vast range of referents (see van der Tuuk 1897). *Kalah* may be translated as defeated or lost. In contrast, others thought that the word should be *kala*, a class of demonic spirit. At least one family did not include this species, as they were undecided as to its meaning and said that they feared the consequences were it to turn out to be 'defeated minister'. Aningenious, if unsubstantiated and somewhat ungrammatical, argument was put forward by some of the more pensive, who surmised that it referred *pati* as the handle of a knife (or of the blade used to cut padi, *anggapan*) and *kalah*, as either defeated or lost, to give: to lose the knife-handle (as the rice is so thick), or to defeat the knife (for the same reason). If nothing more, this example should at least provide some insight into the processes of reasoning in symbolism developed by villagers.

This discussion indicates then that the names of the plants included in *mantenin padi* may signify, among other things, the following: the fertility of the rice plants, the full

maturation and subsequent drying of the crop, prolific yields and a secure supply of food which does not run out quickly, and so brings prosperity, happiness and relaxation from work. It may be recalled that some of the terms for offerings inside the granary referred to similar concerns. These themes are expatiated upon by villagers, and the more frequent associations are outlined in Table 1. Among the interesting features are the ways in which indigenous commentaries emphasise the recapitulation of the later stages of the agricultural cycle, and the material qualities desired in the harvest, with its less tangible benefits. Whereas it would be difficult to explain the selection of plants in terms of their observable characteristics, an analysis of the sound associations points to a remarkably consistent system.

A not dissimilar theme occurs in *nuasèn*, but in contrast, the number of plants is much smaller and more clearly circumscribed. After the bunches of young shoots have been planted to provide the sacred rice, lengths of about a foot of the foliage of the following species are temporarily inserted in the mud together with them: *da(p)dap* (? *Erythrina lithosperma*, a leguminous plant), *kunyit*, turmeric, *keladi*, taro and *andong* (unidentified, but see descriptions in de Clercq 1909:210; Wirz 1927:271). A shoot of *pinang*, areca-nut palm is an optional addition. Wirz (1927:296) has suggested that it is the type of growth of these particular plants which lends itself to symbolization. For instance, *dadap* is considered to be very fast-growing and the vertical stem of the areca-nut palm may exemplify the ideal form of the ripening padi plant. On being taxed with this view, my informants readily conceded that fast-maturing, thick leaves and so forth might be involved. They argued in response, though, with a certain logic, that this applied to innumerable other species which might have served equally well. Instead, they referred me once again to the terminology, pointing out that this was not so easily substitutable. The choice was expressed in terms of a short ditty:

don dadap apang etis,  
kunyit mara mekelenyit,  
keladi apang nadi,  
andong megelendong.

which they translated, somewhat roughly, as:

*dadap* leaves so that (the ground) will be cool\*  
*kunyit*, it lives (or sprouts on planting),  
*keladi* so that it will grow,  
*andong*—it becomes pregnant.

(\* *etis*, the state of ritual coolness discussed above, is highly desirable and a generally believed quality of *dadap*.)

The last three lines demonstrate the assonance between the term for the plant on the one hand, and the appropriate development of the rice on the other. *Dadap* once again stands apart, but Wirz's explanation in terms of its natural features is weak, as *dadap* is

perhaps the most widely-used plant in ritual to suggest coolness in contexts where growth is hardly involved, varying from *wayang lemah*, the more or less purely religious form of the shadow-play, to *metelah-telah*, the purification of the house compound after death.

The same ingredients (*kunyit*, *keladi* and *andong*) are included in the rite of *mebanten tipat balang ring tipat kukur sidayu*, commonly tacked onto *mebiyu kukung* (Table 2). In this case, they are suspended together with cakes, different types of rice and comestibles from a miniature (*dadap*) shoulder-pole, *tegen-tegan*, and carried three times (properly clockwise) round the ricefield containing the sacred rice. This is said to complete the 'wedding' of the padi which is now permitted to become 'pregnant', *beling* (see above). The same ritual shoulder-pole is borne by the male, while circumambulating the bride, during the marriage ceremony for human beings. In these last two instances, the rhyme can reasonably be construed as a reference to the fecundity appropriate to matrimony, but an interpretation of the order suggested by Wirz above, would seem curiously indirect and complicated. The occasions for use of this set of plants poses a problem. On the one hand, the same triad is found at two separate stages of the rice cycle—at the moment of transplanting and then again before the emergence of the panicle and flowering. On the other, while *mebanten tipat balang ring tipat kukur sidayu* is generally agreed to be a necessary pre-condition for the successful fertilisation of the rice-flowers, at others it is stated that the purpose of the rite is to ward off pests at the time that the seeds are maturing! One possible resolution of this difficulty may lie in a possible difference of time-scale implied in agricultural ritual.<sup>12</sup>

This discussion has, I hope, shown that there is some evidence of the organised use of sound association in a range of social contexts, including the formation of symbols in Balinese ritual. This is not to deny the possible existence of other, or even prior, connexions. There may also be differences between the various ceremonies recorded above, and there is undoubtedly a degree of flexibility in the repertory of plants adopted in different regions, which I have not been able to study in detail. Nonetheless, associations based on verbal similarity do seem to be an important element in certain symbolic sets in Bali. This approach also has the advantage that it is able to provide a relatively simple key to the system underlying the selection.

This symbolic use of common plants is one of the most coherent and explicit aspects of the complex of rice-cycle rites. As a whole, these reiterate similar concerns to those discussed above, by invoking the assistance of supernatural beings in the re-enactment of the stages of development of the rice crop, through prayers and offerings. The form of participation and the timing of the ceremonies point, however, to the inadequacies in a number of frequently assumed, or apparently promising, interpretations of ritual. Whether or not there is synchrony between rite and rice growth may be critical to the applicability of some types of argument, but it is effectively irrelevant to a consideration of the ritual cycle in terms of providing an explanatory framework for the success or failure of agriculture, by ascribing authority to agencies of posited, but unverifiable, influence. At the same time, this offers an alternative to the public recognition of the underlying structural problems of irrigation associations. It should be stressed immediately though that what is being proposed here is essentially a functional view, with its attendant limitations.

One of the rather unusual features of most of these rice-cycle rites is that, with the exception of the temple festivals, *nyungsung* and *ngesaba* which involve both collective



performances in the *subak* temple, the *Pura Mascèti*, and individual ones in the fields, there is no real gathering nor corporate ritual action on the part of the association during which solidarity might be re-affirmed.<sup>13</sup> For the ceremonies are generally carried out on the given occasion for each household separately by a member at the shrine in its own fields. They have in many ways the character of private rites, in which the collective is restricted to subordination to a set of common ritual regulations (Goody 1961:146). The theory that these are mystical devices to deal with practical deficiencies presents problems in turn, in so far as they 'may provide a way of coping with situations of misfortune or danger with which there are no other means of dealing' in the absence of empirical knowledge (Beattie 1964:207). On the one hand, the Balinese have developed an intricate pre-industrial technology for handling the problems of irrigation, fertilisation of the soil and so forth, even if it is not always fully utilised; on the other, there is often a discrepancy between the timing of crisis and remedy.

For many misfortunes, there are clearly laid down and immediate ritual mechanisms of avoidance or redress. This applies in the face of uncertainty or danger. So, before trucks or buses cross some of the more rickety bridges which span the innumerable gorges, offerings are not uncommonly made at the wayside. More dramatically, ten days before the National Elections in 1971, the head of the administrative village decided to organize a mass prayer in Tengahpadang to ask for the safety (*selamet*) and well-being of the community. Equally, in the event of falls, illness or occasionally other mishaps, ritual responses are evoked. When a giant banyan, *waringin*, tree in the settlement cracked open one night during a storm, the village senior officials rapidly summoned the priests to deliberate and it was concluded that forty-two days<sup>14</sup> (the product of a six- and seven-day week cycle) of public ritual was necessary to ensure the neutralisation of possible adverse consequences. Here, ceremonies are held in anticipation of danger, or in prompt reply to it.

In sharp contrast, rice-cycle ceremonies are scheduled according to calendars which define religiously auspicious periods, and so do not, in fact, necessarily fit the critical stages of agriculture. This creates certain difficulties for arguments about ritual which are based on their function of ordering attention or experience. Even Douglas' view that ritual in general 'provides a focussing mechanism, a method of mnemonics and a control for experience' (1966:63), applied to agricultural rites of this sort, appears a little odd. For, it would seem to imply framing the wrong moment, and a mnemonic device for an eminently visible, and more or less inevitable, natural process.

In a not entirely incompatible argument, Geertz has referred more than once briefly to the question of the functions of agricultural ceremonies as a whole in Bali. From my reading of him, it appears that these are seen not only as arranged to fit the various stages of rice-farming, but at the same time as providing the temporal framework in terms of which cultivation is organised within the *subak*, so that the rice cult, 'matching with fine precision the actual flow of agricultural activity, is one of the major regulating mechanisms.' (1967:233). Thus, on the one hand, 'these stages follow in a fixed order at a pace generally determined, *once the first stage is initiated*, by the intrinsic ecological rhythms of rice growing.' (1972a:30, his italics). On the other, 'these various ceremonies are symbolically linked to cultivation in a way which locks the pace of that cultivation into a firm, explicit rhythm.' (1972a:30).

It may be worth, however, examining the ethnographic evidence in some detail, for it shows that there are obstacles to the unqualified acceptance of these different views. After some months in the field, I enquired at some length about the ceremonial cycle in Subak Langkih of the priest of the association, together with the head of the local religious community (*désa adat*). Their ideas are incorporated in brief in Table 2, under the heading: 'Subak Priest's Interpretation'. This shows the link between the ritual schedule and the development of the rice crop. The system in this region is far more elaborate than the general outline presented by Geertz (1972*a*), but there is nonetheless a definite order in the way in which the rites are presented as coinciding with the successive phases of agricultural work and the main stages of padi maturation. According to this account, the early ceremonies initiate work, while the later ones keep pace with the developing crop. So, before any activity can begin in the fields, *muat emping* must be performed without fail (see also Wirz 1927:297); the same holds for the later rites for planting seeds, *memulih*, and for transplanting the seedlings, *nuasèn*. The following three performances of *mubu(h)in* parallel the vegetative growth of the rice, until *nyungsung* which should be held just as the panicle causes the plant to swell and become 'pregnant'. After this, *mapinunas* is given twice, so that *mebiyu kukung* then falls at about the time of flowering. Fifteen days later, *ngesaba* indicates that the padi is ripening. Finally *nyehetin*, the decoration of the sacred *duwasa* rice, occurs, after which harvesting may start. It is, at first sight, an elegant and perfectly tailored system.

Unfortunately, on closer inspection, this pattern proves

**TABLE 2. An outline of the rice-cycle rites in Subak Langkih**

<u>Name of Rite</u>	<u>Outline of Main Features</u>	<u>Subak Priest's Interpretation</u>	<u>Timing</u>	<u>Comments</u>
(Me) muat Emping	Giving offerings of <i>pemuat emping</i> to Batara Ibu Pretiwi at the point where the water enters the top field. A branch of a plant selected according to the season of the solar-lunar calendar is properly included (cf. Wirz 1927:298)	Opening the water and the ground. Before this rite, no work of any sort may be performed in the ricefields. Asking permission to begin work.	According to the calendar of the <i>subak</i> priest, or possibly of the Parisada Hindu Dharma (see footnote 6 in text)	May well occur long after work has started, both in open and coordinated seasons
Memulih ( <i>Mebulih</i> )	A very small rite in the N.E. corner of the seedbed.	Asking permission to plant the seeds	Properly as above	Commonly held before <i>muat emping</i>
Nuasèn	1) Planting a variable number of clumps of padi, in the corner of the highest field 2) Offering <i>cau petik</i> , <i>cau mum(hul)</i> and	To make the rice take root in the soil, grow and have children. Invoking the gods: Sri. Pretiwi.	As above	Often takes place after transplanting; in practice the date of performance seems relatively open and at the

	<i>panak cau</i> , also called the ‘mother’, ‘father’ and ‘children’ <i>cau</i> * ( <i>petik</i> =pick fruit; <i>mumbul</i> =rise up; <i>panak</i> =child)	Wisnu and Rambut Sidana. Before this it is forbidden to transplant.		convenience of the household
Bekèkèhan	A very small rite (which consists largely of ‘the claws and feathers of a chicken’)	Like the scratching, <i>ngèkèh</i> , of a chicken, as men check seedlings	3 days after <i>nuasèn</i>	Not performed by all families
Mubu(h)in	Three successive rites varying in core offering: 1) porridge with <i>dadap</i> leaves 2) porridge with grated coconut 3) the <i>cau</i> as above	To ensure that the padi grows well	On successive dates of <i>kajeng-manis</i> (15 days apart) which start on the first correct combination after 12 days from <i>nuasèn</i>	May sometimes be performed before 12 days have elapsed after <i>nuasèn</i>

<u>Name of Rite</u>	<u>Outline of Main Features</u>	<u>Subak Priest’s Interpretation</u>	<u>Timing</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Nyungsung	The main ceremony is in the <i>subak</i> temple and resembles a small <i>odalan</i> ( <i>vide infra</i> ). A smaller rite in individual fields with ( <i>ke</i> ) <i>tipat</i> offerings of different names,** referring mainly to the desired attributes of the crop	Occurs just as the padi becomes <i>beling</i> , pregnant (the swelling of the rice plant). This is to ensure that the flowering will be successful	In theory, this is varied specially to coincide with the ‘pregnancy’. It may be held on one of several propitious dates, but if possible <i>Angarkasih</i> or <i>Budakli(w)on</i> (combinations of the 7 and 5 day weeks)	During the <i>kertama</i> cycle, this should be held to coincide with the <i>Odalan Agung</i> , but on the occasions observed, it was not. In practice, this is often performed on the <i>kajeng-manis</i> after <i>mubuin III</i> as part of a strict 15-day series but not in phase with the padi (see text)
Odalan Agung	The full three day temple festival held in the <i>subak</i> temple, which requires the offices of a <i>Brahmana</i> priest, <i>Pedanda</i> to perform the rite of <i>ngaturang</i>	This happens just when the padi is about to form seeds	Held according to the Hindu-Balinese calendar on <i>Purnama Kedasa</i> (full moon of 10th month). The <i>odalan alit</i> . in contrast, occurs once every 210 days, so they follow separate	Apparently both are always performed on the correct date; as the <i>Odalan Agung</i> follows the solar-lunar calendar, it tends in fact regularly to fall closer to pregnancy than the other rites. With

	<i>piodalan</i> (see Belo, op.cit.) The <i>odalan alit</i> (lit: small <i>odalan</i> ) is a simpler version of this		cycles.	<i>nyungsung</i> and <i>ngesabas</i> , these resemble standard temple ceremonies more than they do the other rice-cycle rites
Mapinunas	Simple rites held on two successive <i>uku</i> dates; they include a small number of <i>tipat</i> .	To ask for the safety ( <i>selamet</i> ) for the maturing crop	Held on two successive <i>kajengmanis</i> dates following <i>nyungsung</i>	In practice, the first may be performed with <i>nyungsung</i> , the latter with <i>mebiyu kukung</i> .

<u>Name of Rite</u>	<u>Outline of Main Features</u>	<u>Subak Priest's Interpretation</u>	<u>Timing</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Mebiyu Kukung	A large ceremony which includes a range of <i>tipat</i> , of all the animals said to be found in the fields; also contains the offering <i>isin sawah</i> —the contents of the ricefield—consisting of the meat of certain land, water and airborne animals. This ends with <i>tipat balang ring tipat kukur sidayu</i> (or <i>penundung merana</i> ) which requires the use of the same ritual plants as in <i>nuasèn</i> (see text)	To ensure the safe swelling of the rice seeds. To drive away pests by giving them offerings.	Held on the <i>kajengmanis</i> after the second performance of <i>mapinunas</i>	Sometimes this is far too late, when the padi is more or less ripe
Ngesaba	A festival in the <i>subak</i> temple again. A small rite is held on the following day in the plot of each farmer.	To make certain the the padi turns yellow and ripens.	Held 15 days later on the next <i>kajengmanis</i>	This must often be advanced off its correct scheduled time, to enable harvesting to proceed without delay. Interestingly, this timing change is known as <i>ngemaling</i> =to steal
Nyehetin	Decorating the <i>duwasa</i> , sacred rice in the form of Déwi Sri	—	Performed on the <i>kajengmanis</i> after <i>ngesaba</i>	Rarely carried out on the proper date as it would be far too late. Also pulled forward ( <i>ngemaling</i> )
Manyi	A very simple rite performed on each plot just before the harvesting begins	Asking permission to cut Déwi Sri	Not organised by ritual calendars; fixed	—

			practically	
Nuduk Déwa	Cutting the sacred padi and carrying it back home on the head, to be placed in the ancestral shrines	Taking Déwi Sri back home from the fields to pay her honour	Performed at the same time as <i>manyi</i>	–

<u>Name of Rite</u>	<u>Outline of Main Features</u>	<u>Subak Priest's Interpretation</u>	<u>Timing</u>	<u>Comments</u>
Nuasèn Menekang Padi	When the padi is dry, the offering of <i>cau</i> once again in the N.E. corner of the granary, using 11 <i>cau petik</i> and 2 <i>cau mumbul</i>	To prepare the granary for the padi and for Déwi Sri	On a propitious day according to the printed calendar	–
Mantenin Padi	The rite performed in the granary of dressing the effigy of Déwi Sri and presenting offerings to her in front of, and in, the granary. Also offerings are laid out in each building and ritual site in the compound	To give thanks for Déwi Sri for the harvest. Before this date no rice may be sold or used in the house	As above	Properly the effigy is dressed before being placed in the granary, but often not. Padi is commonly sold before this rite to pay debts, etc.; but it seems not to be eaten at home. This rite is performed by households independently on dates over a period of several months.
Nonang Taèn Asep	Changing the offerings in the compound and granary—to remove the ash (lit: faeces) of the incense	No reason known for this ceremony	3 days after <i>mantenin padi</i>	The end of the cycle

Notes: Unless indicated otherwise, all offerings before *nyungsung* are placed on a low shrine, the *sanggah duwasa* beside the sacred rice. Afterwards, they are placed in the *sanggah limasan*, the raised offering table, commonly but not always, by the point of entry of water or in the N.E. corner of the top field.

\* *Can* are a special type of offering, woven in Tengahpadang from young coconut-leaf (cf. van der Tuuk 1897) and used in rice-cycle rites, with a variable number of 'children' determined by the calendrical date.

\*\* (Ke)tipat, also made from coconut-leaf, are shaped in many instances like animals and designated accordingly (see J.Hooykaas 1961:54, for an illustration).

to fit rather badly. First, the scheme corresponds to the physiological development of the rice more often than it does to agricultural activity. There is little connexion between the concentration or frequency of work and ceremonies. The heavy labour from the first hoeing, *m(eb)akal*, to harrowing, *ngelampit*, then an optional but not uncommon second

hoeing, *mungkahin*, and the careful levelling of the fields, *melasah* (cf. *Adatrechtbundels* XV:33–4) takes place with no rites at all.<sup>15</sup> The later organisation of drying, *ngenyaatin*, and flooding, *metengin*, of the fields to encourage tillering and growth, does not coincide with *mubuin*. Similarly, *ngaduk* and *ngikis*, clearing the weeds by hand and with a hoe, about a month and one to two months after transplantation respectively, depend on the state of the plants and each farmer's energy, not on the ritual calendar. In fact as Table 2 demonstrates, a large proportion of ceremonies occur after 'pregnancy' when agricultural work has effectively finished until harvest.

There are further problems in the scheduling of the ideal system. The spacing of the later ceremonies strictly fifteen days apart (on the combination of *kajeng* and *umanis*) means that, after *nyungsung*, there should be at least a minimum of sixty-one to seventy-five days before harvest, which is roughly twenty or thirty days too long, although the exact excess depends on weather conditions and how much reaping is advanced.<sup>16</sup> Again, neither in the regulated *kertamasa*, nor the open *gegadon* cycle, does theory necessarily correspond to practice; for not everyone performs all the rituals on the proper day, even when coordination is ideally enforced. In part, this deviation is explicable by reference to the procrustean problems of fitting a basically numerical calendar to the variability of actual conditions, and also by its intersection with the solar-lunar system. While most rites follow the former, the major temple festivals, *odalan*, fall according to the latter calendar (with the complicating exception of one, the *odalan alit*, which happens once every 210 days on Anggarkasih Dukut, and is completely out of phase with everything else). As a model, it seems at times to be more complicated than the reality to which it is supposed to refer.<sup>17</sup>

This can perhaps best be substantiated and illustrated with a few examples. In Subak Langkih the season starting in December 1971 was *kertamasa* and supposedly coordinated throughout the association.<sup>18</sup> *Muat emping*, the starting-signal for the whole cycle, was held not only after (21.12.71) the ceremony of *memulih*, to open the seed beds (29.11.71), but in fact when the main hoeing was already over (by mid-December). Then *nuasèn* which initiates transplanting, was performed by different peasant families during a period of over a week, in many cases well after work was finished. Nor, unfortunately, does the ritual match comfortably the growth of the rice. A year earlier, in the previous synchronised cycle, *ngesaba*, the rite to mark the ripening of the padi, was conducted *a week after harvesting had begun!* Equally seriously, in the same season, *nyungsung* fell on 9.3.71, sixty-six days before harvest; while the padi actually became 'pregnant' at the time of *mapinunas II* on 8.4.71, an entire month later. The following *gegadon* cycle saw the rite held still earlier, eighty days before harvest; whereas in the subsequent *kertamasa* it was only forty-seven days before and, for once, remotely on target. This list could be continued, but the evidence adduced should, I trust, be sufficient to show that seasonal variation and actual timing do not present as neat a picture as the ideal would imply.

It seems then that for some parts of Bali at least, analyses of agricultural ritual simply in terms of technological alternatives, mnemonic devices, or as masterplans for the cultivation system seem to fall short. While the ritual cycle was presented initially by informants as serving in part as a labour schedule, or as a marker of the phases of rice growth, further scrutiny suggests that the correspondence is poor. Such interpretations may have a certain validity at a formal or abstract level. On the ground, however, the result is less a 'model of' or 'model for', than a muddle.

The incomplete character of these arguments raises problems for which no full solution can be offered here. It does suggest, however, that it may be useful to return and re-examine the relationship between the ritual complex and the organisation of cultivation. One of the features which emerges is the striking contrast between the conception of agricultural production expressed in common belief and ritual, and the results acquired through observation. The former repeatedly emphasises the inadequacy of technology alone to produce successful crops by allocating responsibility in the last resort to supernatural beings; whereas, in practice, it seems that the variations in yield depend in no small part on the efficiency of individuals and upon the workings of the irrigation association itself. It would appear, then, that the view of cultivation propounded in ritual offers a mode of explanation (Parkin 1975:137–9), which may be misrepresentative (Bloch 1975:203–22).

In the first part of this paper, it was remarked that the indigenous interpretation of the sets of symbols based on sound association suggests the stages of ideal agriculture, and that the use of plants in some way helps to bring about the desired result. This is stressed in the employment of *mantra*, ritual formulae which invoke the various gods involved in agriculture, in particular Ibu Pretiwi, Batara Wisnu and Déwi Sri, the deities of earth, water and rice, and supplicate them to bring about the ends desired at each stage in the cycle. The forms vary greatly from farmer to farmer, depending on their knowledge of the traditional ritual language,<sup>19</sup> from the local priest's recitation during *nuasèn* to Déwi Sri, ending with an exhortation repeated



### 9. Laying out offerings for the ceremony of *Nuasen*

three times of *mum(b)ul*, rise (or spring) up, to the simple prayer of a peasant recorded at *mebiyu kukung*: 'Déwi Sri, make the rice give fruit!'

In so doing, the villagers are not denying the importance of technology in bringing about fertility, which is hardly surprising in view of their acknowledged expertise. It is

said, quite simply, though, that this is a necessary, but not sufficient condition. As they readily point out, pragmatic considerations do not always explain why one farmer has a better yield than another, nor why rain flattens one man's crops, but not his neighbour's. Agriculture relies ultimately on the performance of the standard rites, although this in itself is no guarantee of a full harvest, as successful communication with the gods is not certain. A reflection of this aetiology is found perhaps in the fact that the irrigation association does not impose sanctions for failure to observe the ceremonies on individual plots, as it is felt that the omission will provoke its own retribution.

Nor is this view of the ascription of responsibility to the gods simply a theological doctrine, remote from the everyday ideas of peasant farmers. Divine involvement in agriculture is recognised in popular thought, as the following case should demonstrate:

In 1969, the level of water reaching Subak Langkih began to drop seriously (according to all the informants who were agreed on the outline of the story given here). This was attributed to the permission granted by the government irrigation officer, *sedahan agung*, to three new *subak* upstream to tap the existing supply. Shortly after the third, and largest, of these began to irrigate, the medium of the *Pura Duur Bingin* went into trance and announced that *Ratu Gedé* (the male *Barong Landung* mentioned above) wished to go with his consort to visit his 'brother', the deity of the watershed temple near the river source at Apuh. This was taken as a sign by the villagers that the god was intervening publicly in the disagreement over water. So, when the day came, the two *Barong* were accompanied in procession by over 400 people up to the mountains where they stayed in the temple overnight. Immediately afterwards the water-level is said to have returned to normal, or even increased. Over a year later, people still insisted on taking me to the main feeder canal to demonstrate the improvement.

This suggests that the role of the gods in agriculture is not merely as vague forces who must be supplicated in the hope that they will respond with routine benefits, but as important agents who may step in of their own accord unanticipated, so that their intervention may be part of an immediate framework of action.

In contrast, ethnographic enquiry suggests a different interpretation to that offered in village religious belief. In reality, there are a number of common threats to the crop within the traditional technological limits of wet rice cultivation, not all of which stem from the uncontrollable forces of nature. Perhaps the most serious, but fortunately rare, hazard is rain during the short flowering period, which may prevent fertilisation of the flowers. More frequent is a reduction in yield due to rain (and sometimes wind) just before harvest, which flattens the top-heavy stalks and may result in premature germination and difficulties in reaping. The other main problem is the depredation of pests, *merana* (principally mice, birds and insects), but this is rarely severe, as the widespread practice of synchronising crop cultivation reduces the damage per unit area. As was noted in Tengahpadang, there are no immediate remedial rites in the event of these dangers materialising. The great ceremony to ward off pests, *nangluk merana*, is held for the region as a whole on the coast at Lebih in December (on *Tilem Kanem*,



between the sixth and seventh Hindu-Balinese months) when the fields are empty anyhow.<sup>20</sup>

As a few villagers were willing to admit privately, the factors most widely responsible for reducing productivity are of two principal types: the sheer incompetence of, and social pressures on, individuals; and the inefficiency, for various reasons, of the *subak* association. Farmers differ in their skill and diligence. They are also under moral obligation to engage in various forms of labour exchange, ranging from co-membership of special agricultural voluntary associations, through mutual help, to straight mobilisation of clients. To evade this may well be economical, but carries with it high social costs (Barth 1963:8–9). While these constraints may help to account for individual variation, they are not directly relevant to the working of the irrigation association as a corporate group.

Although Tengahpadang lies some way up the sloping plateau of South Bali and has an adequate supply of water in theory, as it is not too far from the river source, the pattern of co-ordinated but fluctuating demand results in shortage (*Adatrechtbundels XV:50*). Despite an elaborate penal code (*awig-awigsubak*) reinforced by sizeable fines, the deficiency leads to, and is exacerbated by, universal theft (see Liefrinck 1969:52). This is normally achieved by blocking off all one's neighbours' supplies at the dividing-blocks for some distance back up the irrigation channel. It also creates the possibility of conflict in periods of acute shortage. The scale of pilfering is such that application of the rules is more or less infeasible. The constantly changing forms of guard duty which attempt to cope with the problem are ineffective in dealing with the innumerable daily infractions, and may indeed fuel the disagreements (see below). As a consequence, a significant drain on labour stems



10. Repairs on minor damage to an irrigation channel in Subak Langkih

from the demands of surveillance and from the continual erection and destruction of diversions with serious implications for those with riceland at the lower extremities of the channels. The simple administrative problems of organising the equitable distribution of

water, and ensuring obedience to the rules, is almost insoluble in practice. Nature is, in many ways, a far more remote threat to the Balinese peasant than are his agricultural neighbours; but it is the former which is magnified in ritual, while the disruption caused by the latter receives no cultural expression.

A graver danger still is posed by the lack of capital investment in irrigation works. For example, Tengahpadang and the mountainous regions behind receive heavy and uneven rainfall, with the perennial risk of sudden inundation. This may result either in the silting-up of the ingenious, but simple, system of sluices and over-spills and send sand or mud spewing through the irrigation network, or in sections of the channels being washed away entirely. The frequent rupture or blockage of the ducts can deluge certain fields and damage terracing and, at the same time, leave others dry. On several occasions, whole parts of Subak Langkih were waterless for days on end during critical periods of the cycle. In one *tèmpèk* (Langkih) alone, in the first sixteen days of December 1971 (admittedly a worse time than most as it is at the beginning of the rainy season), there were four incidents of broken canals and one landslide which destroyed an entire length of conduit. A few years earlier, after a particularly disastrous series of collapses, concrete dividing-blocks and banks were introduced at the worst points, but almost all the system still consists of simple mud and stone channels, which breach easily and require constant, and often difficult, repair. While Balinese indigenous technology is remarkably sophisticated (*Adatrechtbundels* XV:29–37; Lieftrinck 1927:70 & 76–91, or 1969:47–57), actual investment seems to vary greatly between *subak* and to be far lower than the potential.<sup>21</sup> To understand some of the reasons, it is necessary to turn to the structure of the irrigation association itself.

Langkih, as all the other *subak* in the area, is run according to a strictly democratic set of rules, backed up by the ideal of the equality of all members, regardless of status or wealth. In general, for example, Balinese ritual may be conducted at a number of different levels categorised into *nista*, low, *madya*, medium, and *utama* as the highest. The choice for individuals in most situations varies with considerations of prestige and available resources. It is of interest then that I was informed that all agricultural rites conducted in the fields should properly be *nista*; although this is partly to be explained by the fact that a larger ceremony would be pure inconspicuous consumption, as they are performed alone. Equally, contributions to association temple ceremonies, labour obligations and voting rights are the same for all members, independent of differences in land or water holdings.



11. Reconstruction in progress on the weir at Mundak Bolo

The structure and ideology of the *subak* disguise, however, under a jural and normative cloak, the profound inequalities, divergences in economic interests and internal tensions

which stem from real discrepancies in the command of resources. The formal and legal equality of association members serves, in fact, to suppress and deny the differences in wealth and power which exist. In contrast to the local residential groups, the *banjar*, which have somewhat similar constitutions, but where a number of different factors encourages the development of patron-client ties (Hobart 1975), such informal groupings do not seem to emerge here. Instead, for the most part villagers are atomised and set against one another by their competing concerns in water. In certain situations, though, decision-making is influenced by sub-sections of the *subak* with rival demands, and more importantly, by informal groupings with allied economic interests. For the major decisions, not uncommonly, centre on the problem of improving the irrigation system which requires in turn capital investment. This tends to split the group in terms of wealth for, despite the rules that contributions are scaled according to the amount of water contracted, the payments weigh far more heavily on the poor subsistence farmers who have few, if any, spare funds. In this case, as they are generally in the majority (see n.3 above), the usual pattern is for the plans for amelioration to remain shelved until a sufficient crisis impels the members to minimal action.<sup>22</sup> Underneath the seeming equality of the irrigations association (Birkelbach 1973:165–9), there are profound differences.

These problems can perhaps be seen more clearly by a consideration of the example below:

Tèmpèk Langkih possesses six branch canals which feed its various sub-sections. One of these, Munduk Bolo, obtains water from the main stream by means of a weir which raises the level by some three metres above its natural course, and consists of simple tree trunks supporting a bed of volcanic sand. The construction is unstable but cheap, and it tends to get carried away in heavy rain storms. On the occasion which I witnessed, in early December 1971, the weir broke and flooded a number of fields lower down. This had the effect of cutting off Munduk Bolo's supply of water just at the time that the fields required soaking, in order to soften them for hoeing, so that work was interrupted. After a brief consultation of the *tèmpèk* council officials, it was decided that the responsibility lay with Munduk Bolo, which consistently refused to install a more permanent structure for reasons of cost. Intense discussion ensued during which the three reasonably wealthy members (with two *bit tenah* each) tried to persuade the sixteen others (with one *bit*, or fractions) to raise the money for a concrete dam, while they negotiated simultaneously for support from the *tèmpèk*. The plans came to nothing and more time passed before the poor members eventually scraped together their contributions (in more than one case, this was lent by the rich to speed matters up) to purchase the cheapest, but least durable, tree trunks available. Five days after the initial breach, the weir was working again, but it took several days before the limited supply could soak the fields sufficiently to enable normal work to proceed, now seriously off-schedule. Within ten days the canal broke higher up, and a few months later the weir collapsed once more.

On this occasion, a certain degree of tension was evident between the richer farmers who had the ready cash to invest in a solid irrigation dam and stood to benefit proportionately more if it were built, and the poor who in some instances had not even spare padi to sell from the previous harvest.

This opposition came out in another context, in the arguments over changes in the system of guard duty, *telik*. For three seasons, this had been performed by the *tèmpèk* as a whole, divided into teams, *regu*, who took turns to patrol the ricefields. Unsurprisingly, this led to abuses, when people tended to fine their personal enemies but ignore the dubious activities of their friends. In addition, the big landowners seemed to be penalised far more often than the poor. Following a violent altercation which blew up unexpectedly one evening in June 1972, the *tèmpèk* meeting agreed to appoint officials specially for the task. It is interesting that each of these happened to come from a family with extensive ricelands.

Although there are numerous gradations in the size of peasant holdings in Subak Langkih so that there is no simple dichotomy in local thought, evidence points to a trend towards conflict between relatively small- and large-scale farmers, in the pattern of serious quarrels which break out in the ricefields. In all I have records of five recent incidents which led to violence or a complete breach of social relations. This is hardly an adequate sample for substantial generalisation, but it may still be significant that, of these, four were between men who owned two and five *bit tenah* (or from 0.57 to 1.43 hectares of irrigated riceland) on the one hand, and those with one *tenah* or even less (between 0.11 and 0.37 hectares of land) on the other. The remaining disagreement was between two notoriously cantankerous neighbours both with small plots. It would appear that there is a tendency, if nothing more, for the eruption of disputes to follow the lines of economic difference, which is arguably a reflection of underlying tension within the association.

So it seems that there is a significant discrepancy between the view of agricultural production codified in ritual and that which emerges from an analysis of economic institutions and relationships in practice. The series of rice ceremonies appears, in some ways, to provide a representation of an ideal cycle of cultivation, in which an instrumental role is ascribed to the participation of certain deities. This suggests one possible interpretation of the common use of calendars which reflect a pre-ordained ritual time-scale, rather than the actual maturation of the crop. One of the effects is to stress the separation of the changeable seasons of the natural world, where agricultural success depends on a range of more or less controllable factors, from the perfect order embodied in the calendars, where the idealised re-creation of farming is placed securely and unequivocally under the authority of supernatural forces. This apart, belief and ritual accentuate human dependence on the appropriate deities for fertility and in avoiding the uncertainties of nature. In fact, however, nature is only one among many hazards and far more proximate are the difficulties caused individually by co-members of the irrigation association and by the shortcomings of its constitution, which lead to a de-emphasis on policies for investment in technically efficient equipment and to the muting of any expression of basic economic differences.

The culturally elaborated message of ritual attributes responsibility for agricultural prosperity to the gods and, in so doing, provides a convenient collective interpretation of difficulties. Thus, it can be seen as a traditional mode of explanation (Parkin 1975:137-9)

of the fertility of the rice crop; but in recent years other views are becoming apparent with the increasing public discussion about technological innovations.<sup>23</sup> The former remains, however, a particularly attractive alternative to the potentially disruptive examination of the administrative and constitutional weaknesses of the irrigation association itself. Within this, there appear to be conflicts which derive in part from the disparity between the pattern of land-ownership and public influence, or between the reality of divergent economic interests on the one hand, and the ideology of equality on the other. To the extent that ritual provides an alternative representation and diverts thought away from the inherent structural problems of democratically constituted groups, it may be said to support the existing social system and preserve egalitarianism by denying its defects.

As a final note, there is an interesting contrast between the argument outlined earlier in this volume in 'The Path of the Soul' and in the present contribution. In different ways, they each suggest that symbolic forms and ideology may produce incomplete or inaccurate representations of the state, and implications, of social relationships, and hence obscure certain types of underlying process, in what has variously been termed 'mystification' (Cohen 1969:220–21; 1974:31–32), 'misrepresentation' (Bloch 1975:204ff.), or the creation of a 'culturally alternative explanatory mode' (Parkin 1975:137). In the first of these two papers, nature is used to justify the inequality between Balinese descent groups by representing the cultural in natural terms; in the latter, nature is used to reaffirm equality within a group by portraying the dangers to it as natural (and their resolution as supernatural), rather than cultural. In the discussion of the caste system, cosmological conceptions help to support and legitimate ideas of hierarchy; in the irrigation association, ritual symbols appear to support and protect the values of corporate solidarity. The notion of 'mystification' has generally been applied to the study of systems of inequality. If nothing else, I hope to have indicated here that it may be just as applicable to the opposite.

#### NOTES

1. I would like to express my thanks to Dr Maurice Bloch, M.R. Kaplan, Professor Adrian Mayer and Dr David Parkin for making extremely valuable comments on the original version of this paper. My gratitude is also due to Dr C. Hooykaas for being so kind as to assist me not only in my attempts to decipher some of the ritual formulae mentioned here, but also in making available references to certain of the plants and to transcriptions of the different editions of the *Taru Pramana*. The system of pronunciation of Balinese words is given in 'The Path of the Soul' (n.3) also in this volume.
2. The exceptions which spring to mind include Leach 1964, and perhaps also Fox 1974, while sensory associations feature in a somewhat different fashion in Lévi-Strauss 1966:12–22.
3. These include: *Adatrechtbundels* XV: Nos.8, 10, 11, & 27; XXIII: Nos.42–45; XXXVIII: No.72; Birkelbach 1973; Geertz 1967 & 1972a; Grader 1960; Liefrinck 1927, partly translated in 1969; Wirz 1927.
4. The official records for June 1971, of the levies and membership for the five *tèmpèk* of Subak Langkih indicate that, in each, the proportion of peasant farmers with one *bit tenah* (the modal figure) or less is roughly three-quarters, or even more. The actual percentages (from upstrem to down) are:

*Tèmpèk*

%

Sukabayu	70.2%
Langkih	74.1%
Uma Dalem	73.9%
Telun Ayah	86.9%
Keraman	86.9%

The range can be accounted for partly by differences in the wealth of the members of the various wards in the settlement. Although there is no official connexion between irrigation and residence (Geertz 1959:995–6), there is a fairly clear informal association as the *tèmpèk* in this area tend to be dominated numerically by a single *banjar* which also provides a convenient site for holding its meetings.

5. There appear to be more or less systematised alternatives for representing or expressing time in Bali, among which the calendars mentioned are important in defining the ritual time-table, and the time-scale. Whether or not their formal qualities can usefully be described as cyclical, or even ‘particulate’ (see the discussion in Geertz 1966*b*: esp. 81, n.31) does not necessarily imply that the Balinese are incapable of also recognising that time may be seen as sequential, or non-repetitive (Leach 1961:125). The views of the villages were summed up succinctly by the priest of the local *Pura Dalem*. He pointed out that, in his official capacity, he used the above two calendars to estimate ritual dates; whereas to the majority of people, as they were farmers, the cycle of seasons was seen as the most immediately relevant. For other matters, there was a chronology based on a series of well-remembered events, including wars, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions, and more recently the official (Gregorian) calendar. An idea of the irreversibility of time would appear to be implied in the local version of the Hindu theory of *karma(pala)* (see ‘The Path of the Soul’), or in proverbs or popular sayings, such as: ‘words spoken can never be replaced in the mouth!’
6. In addition, the priest had an unfortunately largely illegible manual, the provenance of which he did not know. It appeared that, for the limited occasions of its use (see below), it was gradually being replaced by a printed compendium, produced by the Hindu movement in Bali, the Parisada Hindu Dharma (Geertz 1972*b*:77–8).
7. These are *nyungsung* and *ngesaba* in Table 2.
8. For the background to this, see Hobart 1975:90–91, where he is referred to as Candidate N.
9. There are several versions, in which the number of listed plants varies. In one, translated by Weck (1938:250–81) there are 168.
10. They seem to be mainly common woodless species, although regrettably I did not have the equipment in the field to permit a detailed botanical examination or classification.
11. Most of the translations are to be found in the invaluable dictionary by van der Tuuk (1897–1912). In addition, he gives other homonyms for some of the names, which are in no way relevant here. Van der Tuuk, however, is not comprehensive on this subject and other terms were given by local informants, or are to be found in van Eck 1876.
12. Within the actual periodicity of performance, the rites may portray an order in which there is juxtaposition or repetition of successive phases of agriculture, in a manner reminiscent in some ways of Becker’s recent argument (1976) about the qualities of plot and time in the Javanese shadow-theatre.
13. Members may meet fleetingly, or at least pass through the same village temples (in particular, the *Pura Balé Agung* and *Pura Mascèti*; see Goris 1960*b* and 1960*c*) during the



- preparation or collection of holy water, *tirtha*, made by the priests before some, but not all, of the individual rites.
14. According to Geertz (1966b:46), this is the product of the six- and seven-day weeks; but C.Hooykaas (personal communication) has argued in response that this is, in fact, the common thirty-five day cycle (*tumpek*; Goris 1960a:117) with an extra seven-day week added.
  15. The soil is thought to be unsuitable for ploughing in this part of the island.
  16. Some interesting features of the rice cycle in the region of Tengahpadang emerged from a helpful discussion with Dr Ronald Ng. First, the vegetative period seems to be extended by the practice of regular drying of the fields. Then the time from the emergence of the panicle to flowering, and till harvest appear to be foreshortened in the same way. Harvesting itself is advanced as the traditional varieties of padi are reaped and carried still on the stalk to be dried at leisure in the compound.
  17. There is little reason to think that the problem of timing can be explained by recourse to a theory of historical diffusion or by reference to possible changes in the varieties of padi. The two calendars between them offer great flexibility and the particular use varies widely from area to area. Whereas in Subak Langkih the rites are held for the most part at fifteen day intervals, in the lowland region round Sukawati in South Gianyar, this is less frequent. In one instance, the ceremonial cycle is scheduled strictly every 35 days, on either *Sukra-manis* or *Budakli(w)on*, by combination of the seven- and five-day weeks to produce five ceremonies in all between transplanting and harvest.
  18. Geertz (1967:233–5) reports a different type of system involving staggered cycles between *tèmpèk* in Klungkung and referred to just as *masa* (but cf. Korn 1932:72 & 609).
  19. The *mantra* used by the local priest, which he stated to be in Sanscrit (cf. C.Hooykaas 1973b:14–5) turned out unfortunately to be largely unintelligible. In the one mentioned here, part was in Balinese, and so was translatable.
  20. For brief notes on this rite, see Swellengrebel 1960:38.
  21. The type of problems differs with local topography. Further complexities which are not discussed here, emerge in the past, as there is the question of exactly how investment in the irrigation system came about. This seems to be more by princely intervention at times (*Adatrechtbunduls* XV:40–42, or Happé 1919:185–91) than Geertz perhaps implies (1973:338).
  22. This may be one reason why the irrigation associations around Tengahpadang seemed to control fewer funds than the residential wards, where factions tended to dominate decision-making and their leaders encouraged saving and investment for a variety of ends.
  23. These have been encouraged by public speeches in the settlement from the district agricultural officer and by the growing availability of information and new strains of rice and fertilisers.

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# BURMESE ATTITUDES TO PLANTS AND ANIMALS<sup>1</sup>

Hla Pe

## INTRODUCTION

I had agreed to read a paper on 'Burmese attitudes to plants and animals' in the context of 'Natural symbols in South East Asia' without, at that time, having given deep thought to it. In preparing it the truth about the aphorism 'Marry in haste, repent at leisure' hit me right in the eye.

I have undertaken this formidable task out of weakness and out of pride—two strange bedfellows. My weakness often leads me to accepting invitations from my colleagues to speak or read a paper at seminars, and as a Burman, my pride makes me feel that Burma should not be left out of the scheme of things if I can help it.

The subject itself is vast. To do justice to it, a discriminating choice of plants and animals will be made, the attitudes specified, and then the jigsaw-like puzzle tackled to produce a pattern of attitudes, to be seen against the background of the psychological make-up of the people and their habitat, Burma.

## 1. BURMA

The chief physical features of Burma are thickly-wooded mountains in the northern region and high wooded plateaux and hills in the east and south-east; the plains in the centre intersected by three hill ranges; and the valleys of the three main rivers. And in the south are the flat areas of one of these rivers—the Irrawady.

The climate of Burma is mostly tropical. From May until October there is a regular heavy rainfall; for the rest of the year there is hardly any rain. The central part of Burma is known as the dry zone. Temperatures reach over 100° Fahrenheit, falling in the cool season to 60° and becoming progressively lower in the north.

These physical and climatic conditions are the prime factors controlling the distribution of animals and plants. Plants, cultivated and wild, and animals, domesticated and wild, are those species and genres found throughout the tropical belt of South East Asia. Most of these are closely interwoven into the fabric of the life of the Burmese people.

Politically Burma was a monarchical state from the 11th century to A.D. 1885. After some sixty years under British rule it regained its independence in 1948.

Culturally Burma has been the stronghold of southern Buddhism since the 11th century. The country possesses a vast literature: in epigraphs of the 12th century and onward, on palm-leaf and in printed books.

## 2. THE BURMESE PEOPLE

The people whose attitudes are the main theme of this article may conveniently be categorised under three heads: the ordinary, the intellectuals and the poets. The ordinary people are chiefly from the rural regions; the intellectuals are of two types—the old monastery-educated of the monarchical era, and the post-monarchical intelligentsia with a western-orientated education; the poets are primarily represented by the court poet laureates and a few modern writers.

The environmental, education and generation gaps are filled by tradition and Buddhism which sponsor a wide area of agreement for the people's beliefs and attitudes. Since the people were animists before they embraced Buddhism, and since Buddhism itself developed from Hinduism, their beliefs are bound to be syncretic. The Burmese are sticklers for tradition: theirs is the 'what my forbear had accepted must be accepted by me' attitude.

## 3. ATTITUDES

The attitudes discussed here are drawn from my own experience and observations and from those reflected in Burmese literature. They cover a wide range of materialistic, intellectual, spiritual, moral and mystical concepts, and to them I shall add, here and there, some personal comments.

The Burmese Buddhists' conception of plants and animals is that flora belongs to the realm of inanimates and fauna to that of animates. As Buddhists their general attitudes to fauna may be briefly stated. In the cosmic system of the 31 planes of existence the animal world exists below the human plane and occupies the top rung in the Four States of Misery.

Now, as to the specific attitudes of the people to plants and animals. The headings under which I shall consider them are: (1) as necessities of life, (2) as co-inhabitants, (3) as timepiece, weather forecaster and nature calendar, and (4) as supernormal objects.

### As necessities of life

#### Cultivated plants

(1) Rice or paddy plants come first to mind in this list. Rice means more than the staple diet to the Burmese. It is their life-sustainer. Western dieticians may spill enough ink to deluge the whole western hemisphere about the starchiness of rice and its lack of nutrients, but the Burmese will still cling to their belief that rice is vital to their life. They may quote from the Buddhist scriptures that people in the primordial time at the

beginning of every world cycle live on *śālī* (a Pali word meaning 'rice'). They may strengthen their argument with an instance from a stone inscription of the 13th century.

Just before the fall of Pagan, the capital city of Burma till 1287, the king sent a wise monk to the Tartars' lord, Kublai Khan, to intercede with him not to send 20,000 soldiers and many monks to Pagan. The prelate says: 'Great king! All these soldiers, all these monks will be steadfast if there is paddy. Is not paddy the root of the happiness of the kingdom? If these soldiers continuously eat nothing but toddy (because of the shortage of paddy), will they not die of pains in the stomach?' (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1928:129). The mission was accomplished.

Growing rice plants is not a drudgery, but a labour of love to genuine peasants, as opposed to those with a commercial purpose. They go through the whole process of ploughing, sowing, transplanting and reaping with loving care. All their anxieties during this period fade away when they see a panoramic view of an expanse of golden paddy waving before the north-east wind. Many a time there was a mental conflict within me, probably shared by other peasants also, as I grasped a handful of stalks with one hand to reap with the sickle in the other. It filled me with regret to have to sever the stalks that I had nurtured over the last five months or so.

Farming, contrary to what many people have asserted, is a labour of love to a real countryman, as is evident in this 18th century poem by a court poet:<sup>2</sup>

'In the wet season, when the rain falls, wife and husband go happily holding hands. The clothes on their bodies, both shirt and sarong, are torn and tattered, but they have a head-cloth of bright red cotton.

Their little sons and daughters they carry in their arms, naked and drenched by the rain. His pipe's a span long, and he bites on it as he works, hauling the plough over all the field, while the water trickles down through the crab-holes.

Long-legged frogs in baskets slung from their shoulder; water-snails and Jew's-mallow, tossed in pell-mell, with tenderest leaves for curry—pond-side cress, rot-thorn, coxinia, and all sorts—all mixed up in rich confusion.

It's sweeter than sweet, with plenty of juice. They add moon-flower leaves, and leaves of the mouse-ear, and mix it all up. When they reach home it's cooked up quickly—the rice is hot, and the curry is hot, and the fierce Shan chillies make them go *Shoo Shoo*.

With almighty fistfuls, they bend well over and gobble it down; and their children and grandchildren, as fit as can be, are all about them in tangled confusion' (Kyaw Dun 1953: II, 2–3; cf. Hla Pe 1971:98–9).

Burmese Buddhists are apt to deduce moral, spiritual and often intellectual lessons from both plants and animals in the form of proverbs and riddles, which will garnish this article in places. From the rice plant they extract this saying: 'Stalks with well-filled grains always stoop'—Wise men are filled with humility.

(2) Maize or Indian corn (*Sorghum Millet*). Maize is another staff of life which has supplemented rice since the dawn of history. Familiarity does not necessarily breed contempt. As ancient Burmans removed the wrappings and the dangling silken threads to get at the husk of a corn-cob, they conjured up the following image of a coy maid, and left this riddle:

Wrapped up well—  
How meticulous!  
Tasselled at the top—  
How lovely!  
With her rows of gems—  
How neat! (Wun 1957:4)

(3) Other cultivated plants. These are numerous. I will limit myself to a few significant plants. Some afford both leaves and fruits and others only fruit for human consumption.

The attitudes of the people to these may be inferred from the words of the monk in the inscription quoted above. In persuading the Tartar king not to invade Pagan, which he likened to a small tree, he says: 'A man who plants a garden, pours water and makes the tree grow, He would never pinch off the tips. Only when the trees have fruited, does he eat fruit' (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1928:129).

Of the fruits, coconut, banana, areca nut, toddy palm and mango have been with the Burmans since before the 13th century. Pineapple and durian (*Durio zibethinus.*) are recent comers to Burma.

Coconut and banana mean more to the people than food: they play an essential role as items of gifts offered in a tray to the pagoda or the monk, or to a deity. I do not know why they are preferred to other more delicious fruits. Perhaps because a bunch of bananas resembles the palm of a hand, and because a coconut is an enigmatic fruit. I do however know that the coconut, because of its structure, has been a source of mystery to the Burmese, who have made up the following three riddles:

- (a) Cut open the brushwood brick will appear. Cut open the brick cowry will appear. Cut open the cowry nectar appears.
- (b) A fairy well—enclosed within three walls.
- (c) White without being washed—the fairy garment. Full without being filled—the fairy water-pot (Wun 1957:3).

One of the essential features of the monasteries and pagodas in Pagan, the ancient capital city, was the presence of coconut trees and banana plants. In their company are the areca nut trees and betel-leaf plants, which though they cannot legitimately be itemised as food, may be discussed briefly. These two were offered to the images of the Buddha and to the monks in ancient times. Besides, the eating of these by the two parties at the end of a lawsuit symbolised a settlement. Often, prepared tender tea leaves served as an alternative.

Other trees that the people have in their orchards are the toddy palm and mango. The toddy fruits are consumed as food (as we have noted in the words of the monk in the inscription quoted earlier); its large leaves provide roofing material; and its juice is a beverage, which when fermented is a potent drink. These trees, too, often shelter religious edifices.

Mango (*Mangifera indica*) was a greatly esteemed tree in the monarchical period. The first crop of choicest fruits had to be sent to the king. Gardeners took care not to grow it near trees bearing bitter fruits for fear that the taste of the mango might be spoiled. Plant a *Kurrimea robusta* near it, and the mango loses its sweet taste', so says a maxim (Rat-htá-tha-rá 1923:11), which implies that bad habits are contagious!

Finally the pineapple and the durian. As exotic plants the shape of their fruits often arouses curiosity in the minds of the people. 'Plant on a fruit—Fruit on a leg' (Wun 1957:4) or 'A head with hundreds of eyes' are some of the riddles for the pineapple. The bristles on a durian fruit are a source of mystery to the Burmese. In their long experience they have discovered that the bristlier the fruit the more delectable its taste, and that in turn has given birth to a saying to that effect—which usually means the uglier a person the higher the qualities he possesses (Hla Pe 1952:79).

### Wild plants

Mother Nature is much kinder to the peoples of the tropics than to those in temperate zones with regard to the provision of food. The peasant and his wife in the song quoted above just gathered vegetables for their fare without having to go out of their way. I myself as a boy did just that. These included some that are treated here in England as delicacies: asparagus, mushroom and bamboo shoots.

Mushrooms also are a delicacy to many a Burman in Lower Burma. They emerge annually in the same spot round about the same time at the beginning of the rains. Their shape reminds the monarchistic Burmese of the royal umbrella that once adorned the palace. Hence the riddle:



‘Once a year  
I crop up—  
the pretender  
with a white umbrella’ (Wun 1957:4).

The mushroom is greatly cherished by the Burmese. Villagers start on the annual hunting expedition in a group, which disperses on arrival at the hunting-ground. Whoever finds a patch of mushrooms first strips it of its contents in silence and then makes the announcement of his success with a gleeful face. The face is so expressive that it has given an expression to the language: ‘The face that has acquired mushrooms’. On my first expedition as a novice, I shouted out ‘Mushrooms, mushrooms!’ with delight as soon as I found them, and before I had the time to pick a few the whole patch was laid bare by a pack of mushroom-hunters.

Bamboo shoot is not so rare. But its attraction to the Burmese people is its untoward behaviour as indicated in one of the cheeky riddles.

‘She wraps herself in veils in youth,  
But discards them in womanhood’<sup>3</sup>—

a reference to the shedding of its outer wrappings as a shoot turns into a bamboo.

### Domesticated animals

Cattle feature prominently in the world of domesticated animals in Burma. In the long process of their agricultural occupation, cattle are almost indispensable to the peasants from the beginning to the end when the grains are stored in the granary. As such they are most intimate beasts of burden to the people, many of whom through contact with them could not bring themselves to eat the flesh of their fellow-labourers.

The Burmese people must have been having beef as one of their dishes during the monarchical period in spite of the fact that such a habit was frowned upon by some of the devout monarchs. A knowledgeable and witty court poet, an ex-monk at that, has left a long poem, written probably in the 1860s, on the utilisation of a bullock carcass. In it he first deals with the variety of uses to which one can put its skin, horns and hooves. He dwells at length on the culinary deployment of the various cuts and the offal; and he concludes with a recipe for oxtail soup, which, if taken by a mother with a baby, he assures us, will provide more than enough milk for her husband as well as her child (Ní-gyàw-dá 1928:142–4).

As a counter to that, in 1885, the year the British occupied the whole of Burma, a group of orthodox Burmese Buddhists besought a very erudite abbot to compose an epistle against beef-eating: they apparently feared that the consumption of meat would increase with the coming of the beef-eaters. This literary piece made a great impact on the people which still reverberated in the 1930s. The passages that move the Burmese are the graphic pictures of bullocks straining themselves to pull the plough during the rains

and to draw heavy-laden carts in the dry season; and the heart-rending dialogue between two bullocks with tears in their eyes complaining to each other against the callousness of their master and his family dining with great relish on the meat and offal of their faithful employees (Le-di Hsaya-daw 1911:31–8).

At one time during the Independent period U Nu, the devout Buddhist premier tried to ban beef from the tables of the Burmese with indifferent success. All this has had an accumulated effect on the people on whom Buddhism does not sit lightly.

Meat, apart from the flesh of the water creatures, is classified as ‘four-legged animal flesh’ and ‘two-legged animal flesh’. Burmese attitudes are mirrored in the meat they prefer. Their preferences are for poultry over meat, and for fish and prawns over poultry. Many of them give up meat, others poultry and the rest give up the whole range of flesh during Buddhist Lent which lasts approximately from the full moon of July to that of October. Buddhism, it should be remembered, does not proscribe meat-eating.

As already stated, I grew up on a farm until I came to England many years ago. We had the whole range of farm animals—cattle, buffaloes, horses, pigs and goats; geese, ducks and fowl. I gave nicknames to many of them according to their looks, colour, character or temperament. We never had beef on our table. But occasionally we had pork, duck or chicken. I conjured up in my mind every time I put a morsel in my mouth the image of the probable victim, wondering whether it was the meat of ‘Mr Ugly’, ‘Mrs Greedy’ or ‘Master Black’. The ordeal was too much for me, so by the time I went up to the University of Rangoon I had become a vegetarian.

### Wild animals

During the war acute meat shortage in England was supplemented by rabbit and hare. I never touched them, since as a youngster I had owned two hares as my pets. Many Burmans do not eat the meat of wild animals. Venison, wild boar and pheasants are occasionally obtained, but people on the whole do not care for them. They are not great meat-eaters either on religious or sentimental grounds.

### As co-inhabitants

### Plants

The plants concerned are mostly wild trees, which may be treated under three headings: for shelter, building material and fuel.

The hot season in Burma lives up to its name, with the temperature soaring over 100° Fahrenheit. To the travellers and labourers in the open, shade is like an oasis in the desert as is evident in this extract from a poem written in the 16th century for the ear of the officials:

Like a great banyan-tree which affords pleasant shade and shelter with its flourishing overhanging foliage and spreading branches and roots, a place of refuge for all travellers at the crossroads, giving an equal share of cool shade and shelter to all who come to take refuge under it without discriminating between the low-born and the noble,

So also you shall not break off or deviate even a hair’s breadth from the unbroken traditional practice of giving nurture, maintenance and

largesse to all alike who approach you, be they your own kin or strangers’  
(Kyaw Dun 1926:57).

This is echoed in a proverb: ‘A good tree can lodge ten thousand birds’ (Hla Pe 1962:47). The meaning implicit in these two quotations is obvious.

The lines in English, ‘Blow, blow thy winter wind, Thou art not so unkind as man’s ingratitude’, has its counterpart in Burmese: ‘Taking shelter in the shade, breaking the branches’ (Hla Pe 1962:34). A large tree such as the banyan or the Acacia, *Albizia lebbek*, symbolised a benefactor who provides cool shade and shelter—comfort and protection. It is a cardinal sin for Burmese Buddhists to turn against their benefactors such as parents and teachers!

All secular buildings up to the end of the monarchical period were of wood. Brick was reserved for religious edifices. Teak, ironwood (*Inga xylocarpa*) and *Lagerstroemia flos-reginae* Ratz. are only a few of the numerous trees that the Burmese regard with great attachment, since their timber provides them with a roof over their heads.

Wood is also a source of energy for the people. Cooking and heating is done chiefly by wood or charcoal. Some people are rather discriminating in their choice. They always go after a tree called ‘monkeys’-slip’, so named because its bark is so smooth that even monkeys experience great difficulty in climbing it. The botanical term for it is *Lythrum fruticosum*.

The Burmese people, as noted above, are apt to draw lessons from plants, their co-inhabitants. A flower, a fruit and a plant will suffice to illustrate this point.

The flower of *Butea frondosa* Roxb., the flame of the forest, seems to have fascinated and puzzled the people since the 15th century as it features prominently in the literature of that period. It is one of the most attractive flowers, but it is scentless. A person who has only looks without moral, spiritual or intellectual qualities is often referred to as a ‘human flame of the forest’ (Rat-htá-tha-rá 1923:16).

The curious formation of the flower has also contributed two riddles to Burmese literature:

- |  |     |   |
|--|-----|---|
| (1) A golden monk<br>a one tusker,<br>a Shan hat<br>a Chinese saddle,<br>a parakeet. | (2) | An elephant’s tusk—<br>but not a tusk.<br>Body of a monk—<br>but not a monk.<br>Head of a crow—<br>but not a crow (Wun 1957:5–6). |
|--|-----|---|

The flower consists of five petals and has the colour of a monk’s robe. It has one prominent stamen; hence ‘one tusker’ or ‘a tusk’. The form of the petals is likened to a Shan hat or a Chinese saddle. The keel (beak-shape) suggests the beak of a parakeet. The dark calyx is described as the ‘head of a crow’ in the second riddle.

The fruit in question is the *Datura*, popularly called the thornapple. Its capsules are prickly and it contains *daturin*, an alkaloid, in both the seeds and the leaves. If used in poisonous quantities, it causes delirium, coma, and death. It symbolises not a dilemmatic but a ‘trilemmatic’ situation (if such a word may be coined):

Grasp it—it stings.  
 Smell it—it chokes.  
 Eat it—it maddens (Wun 1957:5).

The plant concerned is the water-plant. A very wise but strong-willed minister in the 13th century offended his master, the king. He was at once exiled to a distant place. On the way there 'a great wind arose, the big trees broke and split, but the water-plants broke not, but only leaned and swayed. And, seeing it, the minister was taken with remorse and said: "I, a servant of the king, have not been as wise even as a water-plant. Because I have acted as a big tree it has come to this".' (Pe Maung Tin & Luce 1923:161).

### Animals

As Buddhists the Burmese people show compassion and kindness to the animals, their co-inhabitants, whose world, as already stated, is just below theirs. As earthlings they hold certain set attitudes to both the domesticated and the wild. Let me illustrate the first point with three anecdotes.

Soon after Burma regained its independence in 1948, a group of foreign and Burmese zoologists drew up a project and asked for permission from the Mayor of Rangoon to catch some fish from the Royal Lake in the City for research purposes. The mayor, having balanced the suffering and death of the fish against the advancement of scientific knowledge that would be made if he gave his consent, refused the request.

A very high Burmese official took over the residence of his predecessor, a devout Buddhist, and found the attic infested with cockroaches. The new incumbent also had no desire to exterminate them himself. He got round the problem by mentioning this serious matter to two of his ambitious subordinates.

I have seen many times people getting hold of most dangerous snakes—vipers and cobras, by means of noose or a bamboo, split at the top, and flinging them away without killing them. But not all Buddhists, we may be certain, are cast in the same mould.

To their natural work-mates and friends, the beasts of burden, the cultivators have a sentimental attachment; but many Burmese people look upon them as dumb animals devoid of sensitiveness. 'Playing a harp before a buffalo' says a proverb (casting pearls before swine). (Hla Pe 1962:20).

Among other domesticated animals, goats are a byword for shamelessness, and dogs are held to be destitute of any good qualities or redeeming features. (Sweeping statements are dangerous. I have had three dogs which were more faithful to me than some of my alleged friends.) Elephants, which are credited with intelligence of a high degree, together with horses, are regarded as the paraphernalia of officials. 'Parents', says a proverb, 'would like to see their son riding on an elephant, surrounded by horses; not trampled by elephants and kicked by horses' (Hla Pe 1962:51).

Of the wild beasts, the tiger stands for ferocity and savagery; the deer for meekness; the monkey for naughtiness; and the monitor lizard for untruthfulness because of its forked tongue. But some people see some of their co-inhabitants in a different light. Here are three of them.

The first is a bumble-bee, delineating its shape, colour and habit, the second a dragon-fly, and the third a turtle:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <p>(1) Black-robed and short naped this lonely anchorite<br/>lives in a cell.<br/>He prays all the time and drinks wine (Wun 1957:6–7).</p> | <p>(2) Big head—<br/>Narrow neck—<br/>Tapering waist—<br/>Tiny loins—<br/>Flies in the sky.<br/>Is he a god or King of gods? (Wun 1957:7)</p> |
| <p>(3)</p>  | <p>Four oars row hard.<br/>Her ladyship sits under the canopy (Wun 1957:8).</p>   |

As timepiece, weather forecaster and nature calendar

The first two are animals and the last is made up mainly of plants, particularly flowers.

As a background to the timepiece, let me give a specimen of sights and sounds in a forest at dusk from a Burmese poem: <sup>4</sup>

‘The wild cock crows rejoicing  
And the birds excel in their utterance of sweet notes.  
The shadow of the solar circle moves round,  
The sunbeams fade and the twilight comes, then,  
The monkey squeaks and the peacock shrieks—  
Calling aloud to their mates.  
The imperial pigeon coos as it flits past;  
In the remotest part under the greenwood trees  
The drunkard bird is sipping intoxicant;  
The eagle whistling on a hill is waiting to swoop;  
The green barbet, which dwells happily in the midst of the  
forest

Seems to be calling, as is its way, time and again,  
For the whole forest to hear.  
The tiger’s growls rumble;  
The ounce darts about,  
The great wild cat runs and leaps;  
The sharp-nosed squirrels and the hare run across,  
The woodpecker and the king-crow  
Clutch and climb along the creepers;  
The mynahs are talking aloud;  
There are pyedogs and golden dogs,  
And wolves with shaggy tail ends:

The barking deer barks,  
 The brow-antlered deer roars;  
 And the elephant trumpets;  
 Delights abound.  
 The gentle breeze spreads pleasantly' (Hla Pe 1971:95–6).

In the pre-colonial period many people in rural regions had to depend upon the cocks as timepieces during the hours between 6 p.m. and 5 a.m.; this practice still continues in many a remote area. Those in the royal city had the royal gong or time-drum to indicate the time throughout the twenty-four hour period. Here is an extract on the subject from a Burmese play written in 1879. The husband is explaining the nocturnal hours to his wife:

'In our country village...there is no sweet pealing time-gong or time-drum. Just like our fathers before, we are satisfied to take the crowing of the golden cock...as giving the correct time. The evening cock-crow denotes... 'the children's bed-time' (8 p.m.). A little later it crows with full voice, all the adults will be lying in their beds. It is termed "the head- on-pillow cock" (10 p.m.). Again after that, it is rightly called "bachelor's return" (that is from courting: 11 p.m.). After this is "midnight cock". Before the glassy colour has appeared on the sky, in the hour of half dark and half light, the cock crows and declares the time and it is known as "cock of earliest dawn" (3 a.m.). One crow after this the aurora emerges. Glassy colours spread out and boldly streak the eastern sky. This is usually called "the daybreak crow" (5 a.m.)' (Hla Pe 1952:61).

In his exposition on the 'clock of the cock' the husband has left out the first crow of the cock, which is 'roosting time'—that is 6 p.m.

About the weather forecaster, we have this riddle:

'He lives in a tree-palace—  
 the wizard who can tell wind or rain' (Wun 1957:8).

It is the gecko or the house lizard. There is a belief among the Burmese people, especially in rural regions that its weird cry tells the coming of the wind or rain. In between each of its successive cries, Burmese children can be heard asking: 'Rain or wind?' The Burmese maintain that the gecko is one of the seven vulgar creatures who announce their own names (that is, advertise themselves). The others are the pied crested cuckoo, the Burmese spotted owlet, the Bengal brown fish-owl, the Burmese red-wattled lapwing, the common iora and the Malay koel (Hla Pe 1962:25).

The institutionalisation of flowers and plants as a nature calendar was started by Burmese poets in the monarchical period. There is a saying: 'If you want to know the name of the month, look at the flower', which reminds me of an old English slogan: 'If you want to know the time, ask a policeman'.

The Burmese year contains twelve lunar months, each ending with the new moon. And each month has a significant flower or flowers, or other phenomena. I shall however deal with only one of these months by giving you some excerpts from Burmese poems: this is the month of *Tagù*.

*Tagù* is the first month in the Burmese calendar. It coincides with part of March and part of April. *Thìn-gyan*, the festival of the New Year, is celebrated in the middle of April by offering water to the elders and deluging with it the relatives, friends and even strangers. The representative flowers are *yingat*, the *Gardenia Coronaria* and *padauk* (*Pterocarpus*); and the other phenomena are the new tender leaves in place of the old ones and the melodious calls of the cuckoo.

Here is an excerpt from an 18th century poem:

‘Over and again I long sadly for home.  
The trees are now strung with dashes of emerald  
And rows of shoots and buds.  
Whichever way one looks  
The previous *yin-gat* flowers of purest gold  
Are flushed with freshness’.

The poet continues:

‘The new year has begun,  
And everywhere creates new things.  
This is the time the loveliest girls of the city  
Pour out the ritual water and pray.  
How I yearn for my home’<sup>5</sup> (Hla Pe & Okell 1967:124).

The sentiments of this 18th century poem are echoed in this modern song:

‘Come, come with me:  
As is our custom, our tradition,  
At the turn of the year, when the *padauk* tree  
Proudly unfurls its blossom.  
We make sport with water, crystal clear’....  
In the month of *Tagù*,  
At the time of the New Year  
Religious offerings are flowing free.  
And the people are drenched with water....  
The old leaves are falling  
And the new leaves showing,  
And a gentle breeze blows  
All these things move me....  
The cuckoo gives its melodious call

From a tall tree;  
 And now at *Thìn-gyan*  
 Its sweet cry pierces the young lover's heart'<sup>6</sup>

(Hla Pe & Okell 1967:124-5).

As supernormal objects

A huge volume could be written on this subject. But I shall confine myself to a few: the banyan-tree and the hibiscus (*H.rosasinensis*) among plants; and the vulture, monitor lizard and white elephant among animals.

(1) There are numerous species of banyan-tree. Nevertheless ordinary Burmese people associate every one of these trees either with the tree under which Buddha attains enlightenment or with the abode of a deity. And they hold it in awe. Many interesting stories are being retailed about banyan-trees, but I would like to relate the story told to me by my old teacher, the late Professor J.A.Stewart and his wife, a Burmese lady.

Stewart, a Civil Servant, was in charge of a district in Upper Burma during the First World War. He was also a captain in the army and had under him Burmese and Indian Sappers and Miners—the forerunners of the Royal Engineers.

There was an enormous banyan-tree with a temple for the Guardian deity in the centre of the town where Stewart had his headquarters. It was impeding the flow of traffic. Nobody dared touch it. In the end the elders approached Stewart about the tree. Stewart summoned his soldiers, put dynamite around the tree and demolished it within a few seconds. Three weeks later Stewart and his men were ordered to go to Mesopotamia.

Many citizens of the town, including Mrs Stewart and the Burmese soldiers' wives attributed the cause of their husbands having to leave their homes and families to the destruction of the deity's abode. Incidentally, to those conservationists who want to preserve the woods and forests from the vandalism of the shifting cultivators, I would suggest the planting of banyan-trees in strategic places among other trees.

(2) The hibiscus is said to be a flower that brings illluck to the wearer. This belief probably originated from a legend that in ancient times corpses were sent walking to their graves by placing this flower either in their hair, or in their ear-hole.

Here is a lament from a girl, who disregarding her parents' advice wore it and fell headlong into disaster:

'I saw it as I came,  
 The bright gleaming flower sheltered from the sun,  
 In sport and with mirthful intent,  
 At the beginning of Lent,  
 I decked myself with it.

Alas! woe is me!  
 Before the month of *Taw-thalin*,  
 When the *yìn-ma* tree was in flower



And the rainy season had  
 Changed into the winter of that year  
 I was parted from my first love' (Hla Pe 1971:102).

The animals under the heading of supernormal objects are not all purveyors of ill-luck, but the monitor lizard is: its entry into a house presages poverty. A good-for-nothing person in Burma is often dubbed a monitor lizard.

The vulture is very much an undesirable bird in the eye of the majority of the Burmese people, who assume that the house on which it perches is doomed for ever. But in fact it depends upon the cardinal point from which it comes to alight on the house and to which direction it departs, and the time it perches (Taing 1908:148; 150).

I would end this paper with the most auspicious animal, the white elephant.

The syncretic belief of Burmans in Buddhism, animism, magic and astrology has manifested itself in many ways. One is the Burmans' attitude towards the white elephant. To them a white elephant is a compound of divine and sacred being. The Buddha himself was reincarnated as a white elephant in many existences; it is also one of the seven requisites of a universal monarch; and the presence of this sacred animal brings prosperity and rain to a country suffering from drought. Besides it is endowed with transcendental power. It was natural for the Burmese kings to take pride in the number of animals they possessed and they were eager to assume the title of Lord of the White Elephant—or of several White Elephants. History has many accounts of Burmese monarchs waging wars on Thailand for their possession.

Ironically, as is well known, it was from Thailand that is derived the saying: 'That's a white elephant!'<sup>7</sup>

I have attempted within a limited space to present as coherently as possible some instances of Burmese attitudes to plants and animals. It is however like trying to put a gallon into a pint pot. For obvious reasons there are many gaps, some of which may be bridged by future contributors to the same subject.

#### NOTES

1. The transcription of the Burmese words in this article follows the system recommended by J.W.A.Okell (1971).
2. The translation is by John Okell.
3. From the author's notes on Burmese riddles.
4. The passage which follows is a sequel to the poem quoted by Mr Philip Stott in a lecture entitled *Nous avons mangé la forêt* and later published (cf. Stott 1978).
5. 'On the month of Tagù'.
6. 'One New Year's day (1932)'. The translation is by John Okell.
7. See *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* s.v. 'Elephant'.

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# A FEW REMARKS ABOUT THAI<sup>1</sup> POLITICAL SYSTEMS

Georges Condominas

I would like to limit the scope of this article to what I call the *espace social* of the Thai-speaking montagnards.<sup>2</sup> The remarkable linguistic unity of the Thai-speaking populations throughout South East Asia has always impressed linguists, just as their geographical expansion, and its rapidity, from North-East to South-West, has struck historians. This physical spread over South East Asia was all the more striking as the documentation which epigraphers and philologists had at their disposal (quite early) showed that the Thai had extended their domination over an immense territory in a relatively short space of time, from the South of China to Assam on one hand, to the North of the Malay peninsula on the other. The very type of source available to historians (Chinese annals concerning Southern barbarians, Thai epigraphic documents and Pali and Thai chronicles) imposed on them a kind of research which belongs to what we call in French *histoire événementielle*. This approach results in tiresome details about places and dates, biographies of kings and warriors, and the only references available about the cultural background deal with the splendour of different reigns. On this point, we may add that archaeology has provided first-class and beautiful documentation. In short, we know about the facts, deeds and customs of the ruling class, but next to nothing about the common people. They are hardly mentioned at all. Possibly they served as models for the Chinese analysts who rarely had time for anything that was not Han, and who gave very sparse and vulgar descriptions of the common herd.

As to the nature of this type of expansion, it was not so much a 'flood', as Louis Finot has called it, as a political takeover by a ruling class of Thai origin which had already been established for some time in the country, to quote the very words of George Coedès. It is true, however, that this statement is true only in a certain number of cases. The great epigrapher was, no doubt, when he wrote those lines, thinking of the birth of those kingdoms which occupy the regions where the borders of present-day Laos, Thailand and Burma come together. It is quite probable that in several other cases there were vast expeditions with conquest of territories and populations.

In so far as political systems, which are the subject of this article, are concerned, here too, documentation related to the state systems which the Thai developed, is quite abundant where it concerns royalty and the court: etiquette, rules of succession, titles, etc. Whether it be the Lännā Kingdom or the Lānchāng or the Ayuthaya Kingdom or their present heirs in Laos and Thailand, we know that the rules of organisation and the life-

style of the ruling class were strongly influenced by those of the Mon Kingdoms and the Khmer Empire. Beside the fact that we need to reconstruct the history of the society as a whole, and not only of one of its classes, the process of formation of Thai state systems has always interested us. The *système à emboîtement*, which we shall attempt to translate, is not the system of the Russian doll: it is, literally, an 'emboxing' or 'encasing' system. I have said that the ethnographer is a historian of the *Lumpenproletariat* of the Third World, and I do feel that it is a very honourable profession, but like a good number of my colleagues working in South East Asia, I should like to make my small contribution to the history of the ensemble without limiting myself only to the ethnic groups disdained by the scribes in the past and despised by the kings.

I shall explain what I mean by *système à emboîtement*. For example, when we have a *Miang*, it covers a group of *bān*. This *Miang* can also be part of another *Miang*, itself having a group of *bān*, etc., etc. You can see a group here, then another group and that they are all inside a kind of box within a main box also called *Miang*. When we consider this from the point of view of the religious systems, we see that the organisation of the rural community has a certain parallel with religious organisations at the level of the *Miang* (the word is taken here to mean 'principality'). We thus have a hierarchical, subsuming type of organisation. The *phī Miang*, which means 'spirit of the principality', is in French called *génie tutélaire du Miang*, guardian spirit of the *Miang*, which is closer to the facts. The protective spirit of the principality covers, or subsumes the various *phī bān*, protective spirits of each of the villages which form the *Miang*. We could also demonstrate, with a stretch of the imagination, that the *phī bān* exerts its authority over the *phī hian*, the spirit of each household belonging to the village. But here, it must be specified that the *phī hian* has a very limited jurisdiction, whereas that of the *phī bān* (and the *phī miang*) not only bears upon all the inhabitants, as does the *phī hian*, but also on the entire territory including the forest and the waterways.

To take the hierarchy in ascending order, we are forced to go back to the semantic field of the word *miang*, which designates at the same time the capital (the main village where the *fia* resides) and the whole territory of the principality. But the important point is that the word does not distinguish, on the level of vocabulary, as do Western languages and the Chinese language, for instance, between territories of different status.

All are *Miang*, be it a state as powerful as Thailand (*Miang-Thai*) or a small principality over which this state exerts its authority. Likewise a small-scale fief, when it is absorbed by a more important one, will conserve its name of *miang*. Its guardian spirit conserves the title of *phī-miang* as well as its jurisdiction over the same *phī bān*, even though it has to pay tribute to the *phī miang* whose authority it has acknowledged.

Of course, one can show that there exist some specific words, such as *Chiang*, as in *Chiang-Mai* or *Chiang-Saen*. But in daily life, if you hear the sentence "I am going to the *Miang*", you know it means 'I am going to the capital'. This linguistic rarefaction and impoverishment always occurs at this level. We may speak of *caractère indifférencié* in this connection, which is equivalent to the loose structure described by Embree; but I am not very anxious to go into a mixture of psychological and sociological data here, so let us leave it at that and go on to find historical reasons, especially the extraordinary speed of the Tai expansion, to explain the linguistic phenomenon.

First, we must consider the characteristics of the expansion of the Thai groups. We note that, as we go through the chronicles, the Thai chiefs belong, or claim to belong, to the same family. The same structure is found in the origin myths collected at the beginning of each chronicle. They give the characteristics of the aristocratic groups of warriors who went on expeditions to find valleys where they could have ricefields. Alongside these family links between chiefs, is a second characteristic, which is their strong solidarity. Looking through the histories of South East Asia, and the part concerning the Thai kings, or those who were at the origins of Thai kingdoms, one always notices that they try to protect this cohesiveness. For example, when one of the most famous of them Rama Khamheng, did wrong to one of his cousins (as it happens, with the cousin's wife), the wronged king, instead of killing the guilty one as he was perfectly justified to do, preferred to seek some arrangement, some compromise which would maintain the cohesiveness between them. Another example shows, in the story of Sukhothai, the way that they won against the Khmer chief of Sukhothai; constantly, in the chronicles, it is shown that the princes try to safeguard this solidarity.

This is essential in all the histories of the Thai group. And perhaps it is in this fact that resides the origin of many of the confederations, which is an important point when considering Thai political systems. For example, *Sipsong Panna* and *Sipsong Chaotai*; *sipsong* means 'twelve'. I only want to mention *Nanchao* in passing, not because they were Thai but because they were probably influenced by them. There are other examples, to this day, of these confederations. Of course, they were strongly maintained when the Thai were obliged to accept a state more powerful than themselves, China, in the main, but also Vietnam, for *Sipsong Chaotai* are in fact sixteen and eighteen.

When one of those rulers became much stronger than the others, he tried to arrogate the power of the whole confederation to himself. And this is the beginning of the Thai states, which involves different considerations such as the ecological situation, for with the kingdom of Lännā and the kingdom of Lānchāng, you have an opening to large plains.

Another characteristic rarely mentioned is the polyethnic constitution of those political entities (confederations and *miang*). In Northern Thailand chronicles translated by Notton or Wyatt, for instance (and there are the same examples in other chronicles as well, whether written in Pali or Thai), reference is always made to alliances between the Thai chief and the aboriginal chiefs, usually an Austroasiatic people. But those references to alliance disappear, and the references to aboriginal chiefs disappear altogether, in the writings of Western historians. One comes away with the feeling that the Thai conquered their kingdom, or what became their kingdom, either against a great civilisation such as the Mon kingdoms or the Khmer Empire in decline, or against 'savage' and 'primitive' populations. I have tried, elsewhere to show that the Lawa of Northern Thailand, for example, had quite an elaborate political system well before the arrival of the Thai. What now emerges, in the court rituals, in myths and in folklore, of the kingdom of Luang Prabang, of Champassak or Chiang-Mai, is that there are mentions of well-organised, pre-existing populations. But what happened after that, is that all those early populations were reduced to serfdom subsequently, when the Thai chiefs' status became very strong. In the Tai-dam (Black Tai) chronicles, for instance, the history of Lang Chuang is very significant. This chief is the youngest child of Khun Borom, himself the son of the highest Deity. Because he has no kingdom, Lang Chuang goes with a group of warriors

through the mountains, along the valley, until finally he discovers a large plateau, covered with ricefields and densely populated. In the myth itself, you have the proof that he recognises that the entire region had been largely exploited before their arrival, and that it is in fact the site (which became very famous later) of *Đien bien phu* (Mu'ong Theng). I must take my examples from this part of the Tai dam of Vietnam, because anthropology in this part of South East Asia is nowadays bringing all these facts to light. In Western writings, one gets the impression that the structure of the population is made up of Thai divided into nobles and commoners, with nothing in-between. There are references, in the background, to Kha (Austro-Asiatic groups). But with the work of Vietnamese ethnographers, who were, because of the way they were obliged to work, living in the villages close to the people, we begin to perceive the importance of the other groups. *Đang Nghiễm Vạn* placed the *tao* at the top of the hierarchy, being the head of the feudal family. Under him, come the peasantry, divided into 'free peasants', all Tai, and those peasants in the state of serfdom, called *Kuang Nyok* by the Tai, and *Pua'* by the other ethnic groups. Here arises the distinction between Tai and non-Tai. At the lowest level are the *Kon H̄an*, which means 'people of the house', 'domestics', but in the state of slavery, *Khoi*. Those who speak Lao will recognise this word. But when examining another work by *Đang Nghiễm Vạn*, which he published on the *Khmu'*, he mentions that they live mostly in Northern Laos; a few of them went into Thailand, and there are small groups which went to North Vietnam. They were introduced, as *Đang Nghiễm Vạn* says, or they inserted themselves, into the Tai political organisation, as *Pua'*. Their status is extremely low, theirs are the most difficult *corvées*, theirs the highest tributes to pay in kind, and they must provide the hardest labour, compared to the *Laha* or the *Kháng*, who settled in the country before them. They have the lowest status of all those groups.

The *Laha* are a linguistic group very recently discovered by the Vietnamese. They belong to the family that Benedict called the Kadai, and are made up of about one thousand people, which is far from negligible. How were they discovered? During the colonial period, the French went and visited all those villages the people spoke Thai, were dressed in Thai fashion; the French believed they were Thai. It is only when they had lived among them and heard them speak their own language that the Vietnamese anthropologists realised they were not of the same family. This fact is very important. The process of Thaisation lasted for centuries and acculturation became very rapid.

When the *Laha* are asked, not their ethnic status, but their social one, they answer: '*pen pua'*, *pen pāi'*'. *Pen* is 'to be' and *pua'* means 'assistant', but in fact represents a serf, and *pāi* is given for the rhyme, a verse filler with no particular meaning. It is only placed in the phrase for balance (not to be confused with *pai*, which has a short *a*).

Here is a rapid presentation of the *Laha's espace social* and what they know of others. At the time of the power of the *tao* and the *fia*, there were three villages: the one I visited, *Bān Ung Kam*, *Bān Bo Mā'* and *Bān Nōng Zang*. The first two villages were held by the notable known as the *ho luang*, whose village was seven kilometers away. The *ho luang* was a Tai but not part of the aristocratic group; he was a Tai commoner (*pai*). Besides this leading person, it was known that the *fia* was a *tao*, a noble whose title was *ānñā*—the word resembles *phāñā*, but the relation stops there. At the time, the *Laha* possessed no wet ricefields, but had to work for the *fia* and *tao* (i.e. the nobles), for the *ho luang* in fact. They had to repair his house, and render the *corvées* that the master required and when he wanted them to. Where certain lighter tasks were concerned, they had a system

of rotation: one family furnished workers, then another family did the same, and so on. But when heavy work was involved, the entire village was enlisted for the ricefields or the cotton-fields of the master. They had to bring their own food and the *ho luang* only supplied the food on certain, special occasions. It becomes apparent here that an upper class existed, or something resembling a class of nobles; *tao* for the men, *nāng* for the women. As to the commoners, what Đàng Nghiêm Vạn called 'free peasants', the *pai*, were also Tai. The serfs *kuang nyok* (which means 'serfs of the interior', *kuong* meaning 'interior') were Tais but were very poor and preferred to be among the master's retainers. As a result, they lost all rights of representation inside the village, inside the *bān*, they had no more power of decision. The last group were the *pua' pāi*, who were not Tai. They can be assimilated to what the Tai Dam call *Sā'* or *Chā'* in Tai Khao, corresponding to *Kha* in Lao or Thai. This word means, on the one hand, 'slave', and on the other 'montagnards'. So, when I asked a Khmu' how they say 'Laha' in Khmu', he answered 'pua', which is the name for the lower class. They therefore use as an ethnonym the word designating a social class. It is very important to note that the ricefields attributed to the *tao* are in theory in collective ownership and are worked by the common people, or free peasants, as *corvées*, and by the *kuang nyok* and *pua' pāi* when the *tao* demands it. If the commoners do not want wet ricefields themselves, they are not obliged to work on the master's wet ricefields; they can grow rice by swidden in the mountains, and not be obliged to render *corvées*.

The commoners represent the true centre of the group's social life, which is a *bān*, (translated by us as 'village'). But, in fact, the *bān* has its autonomy, such that, if the *seigneur* has committed too many excesses or abuses, the *bān* can decide to leave his *m̄tang* and go away. This characteristic can still be found in larger, contemporary *espaces sociaux* like that of the Lao. I remember a certain visit during the colonial period, when many French administrators told me they could not accomplish any road work, because when they asked the village to work on the roads, if they happened not to be favourable, they would pack up and disappear. The entire village went away. Thus, the *bān* has the right, when they no longer agree with the *fia*, to hold meetings and decide that the *fia* is no longer their *fia*; this can be found in the history of Laos, for example, where this occurred at a different level: the Kingdom of Lan Sāng at its beginnings: Fa Ngum's grandfather was forced to leave by the decision of the royal councils at large. This happened also later to Fa Ngum himself, who is regarded as the founder of Lan Sāng (which became Laos). Even though they render *corvées*, the *pai* are free to select the power that rules them. Another aspect, too, of the same principle, is that the *fia* has the right to control a number of villages of serfs and the ricefields that they must work. If he loses his functions as *fia*, he has no more ricefields and no more villages to work on them.

It is a major aspect of this social system. From a religious point of view, the *fia*, the *tao*, the nobles, come from *Then Luang*, the great god; they all belong to the same family, to the clan of *Lo*, and after their death, they go into a kind of sphere in which everything is good and from where they look over the former peasants. As to commoners, they originate in a gourd, as is attested in all the myths of origin of the different Tai groups; they all come out of that gourd. When considering the ethnic aspect of this political system, then, one sees that the non-Tais come from a hole pierced by an iron poker, which explains why they are all dark-skinned. The Thai are white-skinned because in

certain myths the Kha has wiped the edges of the hole before their exit, or else because they came out of a second gourd which was not pierced by an iron poker but opened by a clean blade. On the ideological level, too, the explanation presents the nobles as descending from the sky, while the other people all come from one (or two) gourds. There is an opposition here between Thai commoners and serfs who originate (as we saw above) from a clean hole, and the non-Tai (i.e. *Sā'* or *pua' pāi*) who come from a dirty one. We may note here that the myths give the nobles a privileged line of descent which stems from their divine origins. However, the ownership of the land is regarded as collective, though the periodic redistribution of the land gives these nobles a good part of it as well as making them takers of manpower.

What we have described takes place on the small, *m̄tang* level, when one reaches the level of the state, the land becomes the property of the king, as in Laos or Thailand. We wish to stress the fact that on the lowest level of the *m̄tang*, the ownership of the land is collective and is reinforced by the autonomy of the *bān*, and by the existence of serfs who lived in special villages (and not in the same villages as the free people who participated in collective decisions). But there is the seignorial power which expresses the unity of the group at the political and religious levels. This seignorial power controlled the economic resources of the group and also appropriated to itself one part of the work of the men belonging to the group, and of their resources.

If, for the small *m̄tang*, the most closely-related system is one we call 'feudal', when talking of the *m̄tang* at the state level where the king has ownership of the land, we have what we call the 'Asiatic mode of production'. It would, however, be very dangerous to assimilate it to the systems described in the great hydraulic civilisations of South East Asia such as the Vietnamese or the Khmer. There is an intermediate level between the Vietnamese and Khmer (which, what is more, differ from each other), on the one hand, and the feudal *m̄tang*, on the other. In the systems we are considering, there is a kind of beginning of the Asiatic mode of production, without the great hydraulic works.

In anthropology, as in all social sciences, there are styles and fads, just as in fashion. Sometimes, everything is termed 'feudal', later 'feudal' is out, mention it no more!

In the case of the small *m̄tang*, there are many features which are indeed very close, if not absolutely similar, to the Western feudal system. A certain comparison seems justified moreover, with Western feudal systems and to a much lesser extent, with what we call the Asiatic mode of production (for example, the absence of private land ownership). However, there is this autonomy of the *bān* which is so essential, and which prevents a perfect equation. Another difference is this polyethnic organisation, which is absolutely crucial, for when considering the Laha peasant's *espace social*, it is not at all the same as that of a free Tai peasant. It is, on the other hand, very close to the *espace social* of a *kuang nyok*, who is Tai but does not enjoy the status of a free man, though being Tai, he obtains better treatment than the Laha and other *Sā'*, who are all *pua' pāi*. This illustrates the fact that, for the study of social and political groups, the anthropologist must not merely consider cultural facts, but must examine carefully the modes of production of a group, in order to better establish the relationship that exists between the group and all its members.



## NOTES

1. Following the practice of Maspero, the author uses the spelling *Tai* to refer to small isolated ethnic groups (Tai dam, Tai khao,...as they call themselves—without aspiration), and *Thai* for the language family. This usage differs from the Anglo-American convention according to which *Tai* refers to the language group and *Thai* to the peoples of Thailand as well as to the standard language, as spoken in Bangkok.

However, in Vietnam, the convention is to write *Thai* (rising tone) for the groups who call themselves Tai dam, Tai khao,...and *Tay* (falling tone) for a second group, formerly known, in colonial times, as *Tho*.

2. For further details and bibliographical references, cf. *Essai sur l'évolution des systèmes politiques thaïes*: in the congratulatory volume dedicated to Professor Karl Gustav Izikowitz, to be published in 1977 in *Ethnos* (Stockholm).

# ARCHITECTURAL AND POLITICAL SPACE IN THAILAND

Andrew Turton

When I moved into my London flat after field-work in Northern Thailand one of my best friends gave me a copy of a book of poems by W.H.Auden called *About the House* (1966) and this punning title could be an alternative title to this article Let me, as a preliminary, quote a few lines from it.

This is from *Thanksgiving for a Habitat*:

Territory, status,  
and love, sing all the birds, are what matter:  
what I dared not hope or fight for  
is, in my fifties, mine, a toft and croft  
where I needn't, ever, be at home *to*

those I am not at home *with*, not a cradle,  
a magic Eden without clocks,  
and not a windowless grave, but a place  
I may go both in and out of.

And a few lines from *The Common Life*:

I'm glad the builder gave  
our common-room small windows  
through which no observed outsider can observe us:  
every home should be a fortress,

equipped with all the very latest engines  
for keeping Nature at bay,  
versed in all ancient magic. the arts of ouelling

the Dark Lord and his hungry animivorous chimeras.

Of course Auden's poetic creation is a highly personal, idiosyncratic and syncretic microcosmology, and I am here intending to deal with a so-called 'total social fact', a collective representation which, with variations, is found over a very wide cultural area, and undoubtedly with many hundreds of years of history.

The house is, as Cunningham has said (1964) in his article on the Atoni house:

'one of the best modes available to a preliterate society to encapsulate ideas.'

and although I am here referring to literate Thai societies, there is all the more reason to respect the symbolising potential of the house. I shall be content in this instance, if I can demonstrate some of the density and comprehensiveness of the symbolism of domestic architecture in one part of northern Thailand, but I hope that some of the suggested interpretations which set the symbolism of the house in a wider context may have wider and comparative interest.

I want to consider the house as a unit in a set of political spaces, and architectural symbolism not merely as a system of classification but as part of ideology. As Mark Hobart says of the symbols he analyses elsewhere in this volume; he looks at them not merely as a cognitive system of classification but as a system for making simple statements about social structure (1977). But the further question imposes itself—what kinds of statements?—and perhaps not all so simple. And Hobart also speaks of symbols 'justifying the unjustifiable'. This is another aspect of ideology then, not merely collective representations through which 'men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in imaginary form' (Althusser 1971) but, so to speak, the collective misrepresentations which are produced at the same time—what Mannheim (1936) called the 'more or less conscious disguises of the real nature of the situation'.

\* \* \*

There is fairly marked variation in size and solidity of village houses in Northern Thailand, but despite the variations, all contain the same basic elements of spatial arrangement and symbolism; that is to say houses in the village. On the other hand, quite substantial houses on garden sites and hill-fields do not receive the same ritual treatment. We might say that a householder's strategy is to build a bigger and better house as soon and as often as he can. Houses are not replaced when physically necessary but according to certain social requirements and processes. Building a house can also be an important statement about status and a claim to prestige. I propose first to describe the ritual practices involved in building the house and installing its owners and occupiers, following which there is a disjunction as I move on to just one line of interpretation, which takes us into wider spaces.

The ritual of building is really the ritual of 'planting the house-posts' (*puk sao*). The householder approaches an expert (*acan*) who is usually architect, builder and ritual expert, and usually a former monk. After the initial discussion as to the variable factors in lay-out and size of the house, the project is under the control of this expert, an important

point. Houses are always built between harvest and the next first ploughing, usually in the three months or so between the harvest festival and New Year. But within this period, an auspicious day, moreover an auspicious one for digging, and in an auspicious month, must be selected for the planting of the posts. At dawn on the chosen day, the posts are laid out in parallel over the



12. Village house in northern Thailand (1969). House of a small landowning farmer's family. Main house entrance is aligned North-South; granary (on right) situated to the South. Note the *kalae* on the roofs

site, also parallel with the direction in which the *nagas*, the serpentine creatures whose kingdom is under the ground, are lying during that three-month period. The tops of the posts must lie towards the *nagas'* heads and the earth dug out is piled up on the side of the hole away from the *nagas'* head. The householder will have prepared an offering for the expert, partly as material recompense for him and partly for him to make an offering in turn to his teacher spirit. This offering is placed high up in the north-east corner of the house until the house is formally handed over to the householder on completion. It represents the temporary ownership, and the authority of the expert, his symbolic sign-board, so to speak. Explicitly it contains his spirit teacher who protects the unfinished house during what might be regarded as its dangerous liminal, or betwixt and between stage.

The ritual scenario of planting the house-posts is briefly as follows: first, there are the offerings to the four guardians, the *lokapalas*, the regents of the four corners of the world. This offering is made before almost every public ritual act whether in house-site, temple or field. A small stick with a cross-shaped attachment in the middle is placed in the earth to the north or east of the site. Six small standard token offerings are made: at the four corners to the four guardians; at the top to Indra, ruler of the heavenly kingdom; and at



13. Housebuilding expert “exorcising the earth”. This ritual is performed prior to the “planting of the house posts”. Behind the expert are offerings to his “spirit teacher” (mat, rice alcohol etc.) and to the *sao phaya* (coconuts, sugar-cane and large offering tray top left).

the base to the Earth Goddess, *Nang Thqranī*. This is said to call all six as witnesses to the good intentions of the ritual act which follows. It can also be seen as a device for creating a microcosmic point of reference for placing the ensuing ritual within an auspicious cosmic order. Despite the name of the ritual, the up/down axis is the more powerful. There is a further hierarchical element in that the four guardians are said to be superordinate, respectively:

North – over the *yakshas*

South – over the forest spirits

East – over the locality spirits; ancestral spirits and the Earth Goddess *Nang Thqranī*

West – over the *nagas*

After that is done the offering is made to the spirit teacher, as already mentioned.

Then thirdly: the *exorcism of taboo*—which is a recitation of a text with no material symbolism. The aim is to for-fend the consequences of all kinds of past, current or future breaches of rules which are said to be *khu't*, which I gloss as 'taboo'. This is a large set of rules. Interestingly they refer very largely to what we may call village community rules rather than state-political rules. They include rules about marital and sexual relations; about animal categories; about behaviour proper to forest and non-forest zones; about short-comings in ritual observance. One important category concerns basically cognitive distinctions relating to houses and house-sites. For instance, to mention a few, it is taboo:

to use wood for building a house from one's own  
garden or from a funeral grove or from  
two different houses  
to use old floor timbers to build a roof  
to re-use house-posts upside down  
to extend the boundary of a house-site  
to enclose houses of two non-related families within  
one fence  
to sit in doorways  
to keep certain images of mythical creatures and  
real creatures with symbolic significance  
inside the house

and the list is by no means complete.

Fourthly, there is the *exorcism of the wood*. This refers only to the house-post timber. Even though the spirit occupant of the tree which has been cut down may well have been propitiated, it is held that potentially harmful influences may still exist in the posts. Exorcism is done with spells and by driving metal nails into each post and each post has a magical formula attached to it. There may be some seventy or eighty of these posts in one house, always with an odd number.

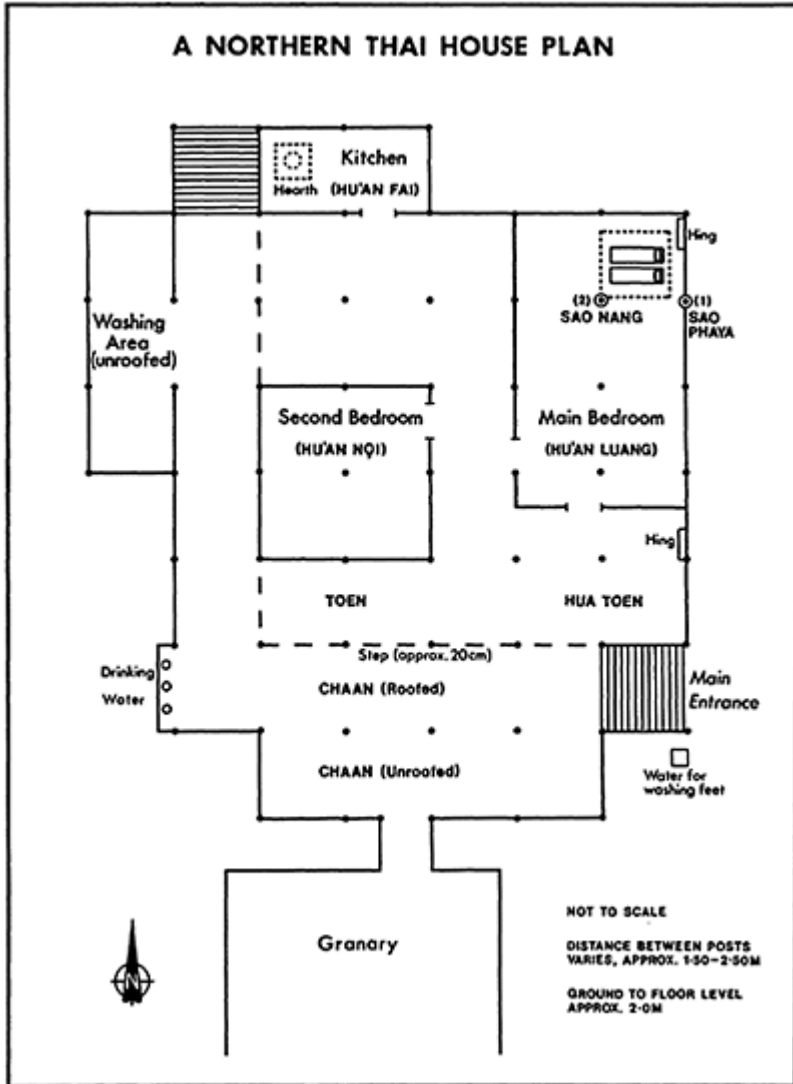
The next item in this ritual scenario is *the exorcism of the earth or offerings to the nagas*, and it is the most elaborated element in the scenario. Some earth is removed from each of the extreme corner holes with a stick, and placed in an offering tray and disposed of outside the house-site 'to remove spirits'. Stones are buried in the earth near each of the four extreme corner holes, and the whole site is sprinkled with lustral water. Leaves with auspicious names (sometimes punningly auspicious sounding names) are placed in all the holes. Gravel is also placed there, again said to chase away spirits, and finally special offering trays containing food, money, red and white cloth, are placed in the two principal post-holes of the special posts, the senior of which is called *sao phaya*, and the second which is called *sao nang* (I will come back to these). And the *nagas* under the ground are invited to eat and bless the householders. I came across an interesting ambiguity, which is already there in the title of this part of the ritual, 'exorcism of the earth or offerings to the *nagas*', two experts disagreeing as to whether to bury the offering tray under the post, one of them saying it should be taken outside the house-site as an exorcism.

That was the climax of one section of the scenario, but its final part is the *tying the soul of the principal posts*. The *sao phaya* has a political title, and is said to be male and the chief of all the other posts. *Sao nang* is female and makes up a pair with *sao phaya*. These posts are said to possess souls, *khwan*, which in this ceremony are called and fixed with the post, which has already been cleared of other presences and powers. The other posts have no hierarchy or *khwan*. The principal posts may only be re-used in the same function and for the same householder. Apart from standard contents of the offerings the two most distinctive elements are large clusters of bananas, sugar-cane and coconuts, and a shirt belonging to the householder. These are also found in Cambodian house-post ritual (Porée-Maspéro 1961) and in certain *lakmu'ang* cults to which I return.

The next ritual scenario I want to discuss is the entering or going up into the new house. This may take place, in the case of a very small house, even on the same day, but usually a few weeks or months later, even the following year. As for any big ritual event an auspicious day is chosen, invitations have been sent out, and a day of preparation has preceded it. As always the *thao thang si* offering to the *lokapalas* is made, followed by the offering to the expert's spirit teacher, and thirdly, food is sent to the temple which is the only involvement of monks or of the temple in the whole series of construction and installation rituals. The guests include senior kinsmen, friends and patrons from other villages and districts. It is auspicious to invite strangers, especially from hill-dwelling minority groups, and the food for this occasion has to be better than for any other domestic ritual, such as for ordination or funeral rituals. So we can say that the householder's network of kinsmen and others, senior and junior, is mobilised to its fullest extent.

The construction rites ended with the installation, it will be recalled, of the most powerful single element, the principal posts, and so appropriately this ritual for the installation of the householders begins its core sequence with the blessing of the already installed *sao phaya*, and in this case, this most senior post alone. Following this, the whole of the principal bedroom, the *hu'an luang* marked on Figure 1, is blessed and dowsed generously with water. This is followed by another ritual called '*controlling the wood*'. As if to make assurance doubly sure, nails are once again hammered into the posts, but this time in a hierarchical order: the four corners of the *hu'an luang*, and then

the *sao phaya* and the *sao nang* and then all other posts in no special order. This is followed by the burning of gunpowder, again in hierarchical order, in the following parts of the house; the four corners of the *hu'an luang*; at the bedside in the north-east corner; at the doorway of the *hu'an luang*; at the upper threshold of the house, at the top of the stairs; at the threshold of the kitchen; and at the house-site threshold. The experts commented that this was again 'against evil', and 'to frighten the spirits' and that it was 'fire against fire' just as they used 'water against water'.



Then an offering is made to the *thewada hu'an*. An address is made to each of the four corner-posts again of the *hu'an luang*, and a small offering is nailed to the top of each,



although, in fact, these *thewada* are supposed to live on the roof. *Thewada* connotes a heaven-dwelling category of supernaturals. We could say now that all the four principal elements, (*that thang si*) water, air, earth and fire, have been negotiated, starting with earth and ending with air.

The house is now ready for human occupation. There is a moment of some anxiety, especially as to the exact timing of the entrance, but the general atmosphere is one of humour. The installation ritual can be seen as stages in the assumption of ownership. First, there are gun-shots fired before the householders cross the lower threshold, where a bamboo slat is placed across the threshold. There the new householders are interrogated as to who they are, what their intentions are, and why they want to enter. This is followed by further gun-shots marking each transition. There is another barrier at the top of the stairs; in the case I observed this was a woman's silver belt. Here the expert, who is still in charge of the house, challenges the householder and a symbolic sale is conducted with a kind of inverted bargaining. The householder asks to buy the house say for 1,000 *baht*, the expert says: 'Won't you buy it for 500 *baht*?' and the householder says: 'No, 2,000', and so on, and with much joking they are allowed to pass. There are more gun-shots. Auspicious objects are brought into the house. And then the expert cedes the house to the householders, using the same terminology as in inheritance before death of parents (<sup>m3p</sup> *hu'an*). All this takes place in the *hu'an luang*, the principal bedroom, while guests are handing money to collectors, who hand it to the expert, who in turn passes it on to the householders.

The householders now offer food to a group of male elders, not necessarily kin-related, who reciprocate with a long chanted blessing, against all evil and invoking all happiness, fertility, wealth, safety, health and long life. This is the ritual climax and, I would maintain is of the utmost importance for understanding this particular village society. Not to put too fine a point on it, the elders, who represent the highest political authority at the village level, are granting the house, and the jural and economic rights that go with it, to the new occupants. The meaning of this part of the ritual is fundamentally changed when, as is now common in other parts of Thailand, monks are substituted for lay elders. The local experts were very much against this transformation, arguing in their terms that on the one hand the power of the Buddha was greater than that of their spirit teachers who would be offended and punish them, and on the other hand that a house is not an object of sacrifice (whereas other structures, e.g. bridges and temples are). The house is an object of sacrifice only at death, when, as with the non-Buddhist Tai of Vietnam, a large model house full of necessary items, is given to the dead (cf. Maspéro 1950).

After the symbolic climax the householders offer food to their guests. There are moments of licence; there is eating, drinking, singing, horse-play and water-throwing, much as at New Year ceremonies.

\* \* \*

I should now like to review some of the more important symbolic structures which have been created in the physical and ritual construction of the house; first considering what use is made of some of the co-ordinates offered by the three-dimensional hollow form, especially orientation, height and interiority. All houses are orientated in the same manner (as in Figure 1). Several writers have established sets of basic meanings for the cardinal directions in Thai village culture. Tambiah stresses the East/West axis in terms

of purity and auspiciousness (Tambiah 1969). In Richard Davis' analysis for Northern Thailand, North and East are combined as against South and West in a series:

North and East=Human settlement—senior—male—right hand  
 South and West=Forest—junior—female—left hand (1974)

I do not claim to have a very sophisticated analysis even for my own data on this point, but I am inclined to speculate that we may have to do with two distinct axes: one of purity—East-West; and the other of power—North-South. With the North/ South axis so to speak, being capable of swinging into another plane to combine with an up/down axis of power. In ordinary usage North is used to mean 'above', and South 'below'. Just a few indications: East is the direction of sacred shelves of spirit teachers and ancestral spirits, which are marked on the diagram as *hing*, on the East wall. East is the direction to which the head must point when lying down. It is the direction in which the temple is oriented.

West is the direction of the head during cremation; the direction in which exorcised influences are disposed; the direction, usually, of funeral groves and of the washing area and kitchen of the house. The kitchen is known as 'the funeral grove of 100,000 spirits'. No house entrances ever lead from West to East.

South to North is as I shall show, the direction of increasing authoritative and power. These two sets of coordinates can combine, as we see in the Balinese and Burmese cases discussed elsewhere in the present volume (Hobart 1978; and Shorto 1978). North-east is the most auspicious, pure, powerful and life-enhancing; South-west is the direction of the head in burial of suicides; North-west is the location of the kitchen, low on purity but perhaps rather higher on power. These two-dimensional co-ordinates also combine with relative height and degrees of interiority.

Let me start at the bottom. 'Under the earth' can be dangerous. Magical attacks against householders are said to be made by burying human bones or magical formulae or substance in the house-site, in the ground. 'Under the house': the area under the kitchen and wash-place is never used, except for hostile magical purposes. Men possessing certain magic may never go under a house at all, not even their own house. The area under the north-east corner is perhaps most used, especially for a woman's loom. 'Upstairs in the house': most houses have two internal floor levels with a small step, up to an area known as *toen* (these terms are marked in fig. 1). I was told that this step represented the power of the householder. Visitors must be invited to make the physically minimal transition onto this level. Visiting monks will always be on this level, and also close kin, especially unmarried ones, who are quite likely to be there without invitation. Young and junior people are rather unlikely even to be invited up, and for senior visitors mats are added, woven rattan or grass mats, to give an extra level and kind of space. Above the principal door to the *hu'an luang*, (which has two doors) are kept many optional symbolic objects. Further above head height are the shelves or altars for spirits. On the roof, the top end of the gables may be extended into the fork-shaped structure known as *kalae*, a pair of symbolic horns said to 'toss away taboo'—'*khwit khu't*'. These are also found on Tai Dam houses in Vietnam, apparently only those of the nobility.

Degrees of interiority are used in close combination with height and direction. The house-site fence is the first line of defence, as it were, against all malign influences or

unwanted presences. Bodies of those dying inauspiciously are not brought back into the house-site. On returning from the funeral grove after an auspicious death, everyone must wash in lustral water outside the house-site before re-entering. All exorcistic rituals held inside the house end with the disposal of items outside the site. During an ancestral spirit sacrifice, the gate is sealed with cotton and a *taleo* 'taboo indicator' is placed on the gate. A prospective son-in-law is described as 'a work buffalo who has knocked down the fence', and one of his first tasks as a new son-in-law is, rather ostentatiously, to repair house fences as well as other boundaries.

Not all things or creatures allowed into the house site may enter the house. For instance the *phi tong lu'ang*, the Mrabri people, hunters and gatherers, who used to visit the village in earlier times, were never invited to enter the house. To enter the house, feet should first be washed at the foot of the steps. At ordination, the young ordinand separates himself from parents and from the life of the household in a water-pouring ceremony at the foot of the house stairs. The top of the stairs, we have already met in the house ritual. One item of child-birth ritual is a challenge to the spirits to claim the newborn child if it is theirs or to relinquish further claims. This is done at the top threshold of the stairs and communication is made with the spirits, so to speak, by stamping on the floor heavily, an act otherwise classified as taboo.

Once inside the house, the principal stages of interiority are these: (they are marked in fig. 1) there is an unroofed verandah '*chan*', a roofed section on the same level; then there is the *toen*, already mentioned; and the eastern end of the *toen*, the *hua toen* (head of the *toen*) is where senior visitors and monks will be seated and fed, it is also where a man will make offerings to his spirit teacher. A further degree of interiority is the *hu'an ngi* the small bedroom (the second bedroom in fig. 1). Not every house has one, but where there is one, that is where the daughter and her husband will sleep. I have already made several references to *hu'an luang*, the principal room of the house, which is reached through the main door, the southward facing door, only on occasions when the house is 'opened up' for major rituals, especially new house rituals and funerals. The new son-in-law passes only once through this door (*into* the bedroom), namely immediately after the marriage ceremony; and a corpse is taken out through this door at funerals. The room is divided into two sections, divided symbolically by the line between the two principal house-posts. All heads when sleeping will point to the east. The male head of the household sleeps to the north of his wife, and then children and other couples, further south, under separate mosquito nets. There is a further set of symbolic microspaces of mosquito nets and mattresses which I do not propose to discuss here.

No one may sleep anywhere in the *hu'an luang* if the householder and wife are absent; no one not of the same descent group as the householder and wife may ever sleep in the *hu'an luang*. No married couple may sleep together in any part of the house unless they are of the same descent group as the householder, and no unmarried adult male may ever enter the *hu'an luang*; overstepping that mark is equivalent to a sexual trespass and requires a sacrifice (Turton 1972). In fact, even sitting on the same mat or even floor-plank is regarded as a sexual trespass during courtship, and it is a game for agemates to run underneath the house with a plank trying to align it with two people, to cause trouble. Of course, no ordained novice or monk may ever sleep in any ordinary house.

I have inevitably left out much detail but it will already be clear that the house is a complex structure of zones and thresholds with rules for transition between them, for

alignment between and within them, and for behaviour inside them. The whole structure must be treated with respect by the householder and others. It is taboo for a woman to curse her own house or a man to strike his, and for anybody else to curse or strike another person's house; it is an offence against house and descent group spirits.

\* \* \*

I suggest now that we need to consider three sets of political-spatial relationships involved in this house symbolism. The three sets are:

Relationships between social units within the village community sphere.

Relationships between these units and the highest social unit, the state.

Relationships between social units and 'nature', so to speak, the material world which the social units transform in production.

I am going to look at only some aspects of the first two of these sets, not the third, perhaps disappointingly, where I think it is very fruitful to follow up some ideas contained in Endicott's analysis of 'Malay Magic' (1970), which I think are very relevant to this case too. It seems to me that unless each of these sets is conceptualised as theoretically distinct, we shall not have an adequate basic framework to begin to explain the symbolism of the house. I must add here that my discussion focuses mainly on a historically earlier situation, chronologically perhaps about the end of the last century.

It has perhaps already emerged, though I cannot recapitulate, that the house as a finished physical structure is also a concrete representation of an ideology of most of the basic social units and relations at the village level. Not the only representation, but the most important I think, especially when combined with *ad hoc* and regular rituals and even routine uses of the house, when meanings are exchanged between those rituals and uses, and the symbolic meanings already established in the house.

We saw how the symbolic structures defined and regulated relations among members of the household itself: relations of age, sex and generations; relations of affinity and descent. Beyond the household relations with ritually qualified elders as a social category; even relations with monks, a social category specifically defined as non-householders, not even house dwellers. The household is related to an exclusive matrilineal descent group, with from two or three to over twenty member households, with important social control functions (cf. Turton 1972). I referred to the sealing off of the house-site during sacrifices to the ancestral spirit. Also represented were the household's relations with a wider set or network of kinsmen and neighbours, with whom it maintains regular reciprocal relations including the crucial exchange of labour in production.

The principal material symbols of the social categories involved so far are: the *sao phaya* as chief symbol of the house and household itself, the basic economic and jural entity; the *cao thi*, locality spirit of the house compound, which may be a multihousehold compound, this locality spirit is also represented by a wooden post. There are the *cao thi* of garden and hill-field sites possessed by the household, and the ancestral spirit shrine. There is a specific opposition between kin groups and units of territory expressed in a brief origin story of ancestral spirits, in which an undifferentiated category of spirits was brought to men for sale: those which were bought became ancestral spirits (at the same price as it costs to buy them on marriage); the rest were discarded in the forest and

became forest spirits. It is those non-specific forest spirits which are transformed into specific locality spirits whenever forest is cleared to make space for domestic use or cultivation. The householder, so to speak, negotiates ownership and use directly with nature.

In the case of the locality spirits of irrigation systems, these also represent the collectivity of irrigation association members, often a hundred or more households from several different villages. Locality spirits also represent clusters of non kin-related house sites, either whole hamlets or sections of larger villages. I refer to these as *phi ban*, of different orders. The relationship between individual household, village section and village is most clearly expressed in a collective New Year ritual of exorcism at which each household places an offering on a large litter, one for each village section, and these, together with a water-pot for each household, are carried to a central point near the *thao thang si*, post inside the temple compound. The offerings and water pots are blessed by an elder and are then returned to the village section where the offerings are thrown outside the section's perimeter while the water-pots are emptied over the ground of each house-site, a classic ritual form.

These spirits mentioned are in a sense subordinate to the chief locality spirit of the village cluster (containing in this case three villages) which in this case has the title of a legendary king. They are subordinate in that for instance no annual sacrifice could be made to ancestral spirits, lower-order locality or irrigation spirits, until the senior locality spirit had received a sacrifice, nor formerly could the ploughing start before he had received his sacrifice. But there is not a very precisely defined hierarchy: the *sao phaya*; the ancestral spirits, the irrigation spirits for instance standing rather apart from the set of village locality spirits, that is locality spirits of village section and village cluster. The chief locality spirit of the village cluster is the highest level of locally generated, locally relevant cults. His functions, apart from providing general benefits of fertility, health, success and so on, include the exclusion of unwelcome outsiders, specifically pregnant women, owners of spirits of witchcraft, and to some extent the deprecations of official representatives of the state, specifically in connection with conscription.

I must stress here that the village community described has in the past been remarkably autonomous. In earlier times its autonomy was enhanced by the fact that there was no resident representative of the state in the valley in question, and that moreover villagers were of the category of free peasants who owed rent to the King or his delegated representatives, not in labour but in kind, almost a tribute relationship. Many autonomous features persisted strongly until the middle of this century, and perhaps for those reasons, this case offers some interesting possibilities for considering earlier historical patterns, especially with regard to political units, '*mu'ang*', situated closer to the periphery of the traditional state.

We have seen how at the village community level, both in the symbolism of the house, and in a local set of cults, though not a straightforward hierarchy of cults, social relationships and groupings are represented in ideological structures. These relations include relations of inequality and subordination, age, sex, generation and expertise, but they are characterised by reciprocity and redistribution. No single individual represents the community as a whole. There were no headmen, at least until the Siamese administration which began about 1910 in this area. No class of people is permanently in control. The ideology of social relations at the village level corresponds rather directly

with real relations. I would argue that the correspondence is less apposite in the ideology of relations between local community and the state. Fundamentally, this is a relationship between a producing class and a class of non-producers, between a ruling class and a subordinate class. It is not a relationship of reciprocity or redistribution, as is the appropriation of a local surplus *via* the elders and *via* the ideological structures they control. It is a relationship of unequal exchange, of exploitation. A critical function of the ideology of this relation is to represent it as something else.

For example the King is regarded as owner of all the land. The King is regarded as a source of, or at least as a mediator with, supernatural powers controlling fertility and material well-being. In Marx's words: 'the communal conditions for real appropriation through labour... appear as the work of a higher unity' (1964). The King is conceptualised as being at the top of an extended social hierarchy of many levels, not of two fundamental classes, a hierarchy which the concept of merit also serves to reinforce and make less questionable. The cult of the locality spirit of the state '*sao inthakhin*', is at the summit of a hierarchy of apparently similar cults.

The idiom of payment of economic obligations which are due to this 'higher unity' as owner of the land, is in terms of showing respect for parents and elders, *dam hua*, even of sacrifice or merit-making, with rent or taxes referred to as *sin bun*. On the other hand, actual experience of the relationship is often experience of oppression and behaviour quite unlike that of parents and elders. Ideological relations are critical in the process of appropriating a surplus from the producers. If this characterisation is at all correct, we would expect the contradiction between the two fundamental classes to be represented in the ideological structure.

At first sight we do seem to have a simple inclusive and exhaustive hierarchy of cults and social units. Here is a list of terms that I have introduced:

*sao inthakhin* – the locality spirit of the state, also called *lak mu'ang* or *phii su'a mu'ang*

beneath that are:

*lak mu'ang* – of constituent territories of the state.

*phi (su'a) ban* – the locality spirits of the component political units (village communities) of each *mu'ang*.

*phi caothi* – are the units within the villages.

*sao phaya* – which I introduce into this set as the symbol of the basic constituent unit, the household.

There are a number of references to *sao inthakhin* in the Northern Thai chronicles (Notton 1926–1932). The cult is said to have been inaugurated by Indra, and the annual offerings always include offerings to Indra, the Earth Goddess *Nang Thengant*, four guardians. The cult, like subordinate cults, is concerned with fertility, the establishment of rights of ownership of territory, political protection and the defeat of enemies. They are also associated with New Year ceremonies. The cult is re-established after a crisis in the state. Offerings by all citizens are obligatory and are so substantial in one reference that they almost amount to a form of tax. The symbolic offerings correspond, as we know them through the chronicles at least, very closely to those made to *sao phaya*.

Is there an equivalence between *sao phaya* and *sao inthakhin*? The house-post has an honorific title, the one always, incidentally, prefacing the name of Indra. It is at the head of the social and symbolic hierarchy within the house and household, it is said to be the 'headman of all the posts'. It establishes the householder's right of ownership; the identity of the householder is established with the obvious symbolism of the attachment of the householder's shirt mentioned earlier. The post is there by permission of the *nagas*, if it is not actually a transformation of the *naga* King himself. The similarity with the Khmer case will be apparent in which, according to Porée-Maspéro, there is a symbolic equivalence, which runs as follows: senior house-post=householder=house spirit=owner of the land=King of the *nagas* (and even)='the earth itself' (1961). But why is the most individuated symbol equivalent to that of the highest state symbol? Is there a simple homology and hierarchy? Is it a perfect fit? And what is the relationship between ancestral spirits and political territorial spirits?

A connection between a set of cults corresponding to a set of political units has been noted by a number of authors. Condominas writes of Laos:

'The political dependence of the villages on the capital finds its expression in the cult of the guardian spirits, for protector spirits of the various villages form a symbolic hierarchy similar to that of the political groupings they protect' (1975).

Đặng Nghiêm Vạn writes of the Tai of Vietnam:

'Thai religious thought, at least in its essential manifestation—cult of Heaven and Earth, cult of the soil, both integrated into the cult of the Lord, which in turn often blends with that of ancestors—is not without relation to the feudal organization of society, which is served by trying to inculcate upon the peasants more or less marked fatalism and submissiveness' (1972).

Spiro writing on Burma refers to:

'...the obvious isomorphisms between the hierarchy of structural levels with which the *nats* are associated and the structural hierarchy of the Burmese political system' (1967).

He even refers to:

'...a perfect fit between the *nat* [spirit] structure and the social structure'. Spiro goes even further though. The ideological hierarchy: 'not only reflects, but was instituted by the political order'. And again: 'Together with Buddhism, the cultus of the house *nat* is an instrument *par excellence* of political integration'. Drawing on the work of Shorto and Mendelson, Spiro speaks of a process of substitution, or assimilation, of pre-existing cults and of the subordination of them in a political system which dominates and integrates both cults and the social units they represent (Shorto 1963; Mendelson 1961). In other words, there is a continuing process of ideological struggle. This is a locus of ideological struggle. Spiro quotes Mendelson on the need for the Burmese state for:

‘constant buttressing against fissionary tendencies symbolized by particular local spirits’.

and indeed as well as assimilation, there is abolition; Mendelson again:

‘a central religious cult would tend often to eschew or even suppress local cults of particular *nats* in periods of royal dominance’.

The case of Lao King in 1527 banning spirit worship, destroying shrines and replacing the *phi mu'ang* of Luang Prabang with a Buddhist temple, may be an instance of this (Condominas 1975). Also noteworthy is that a community which was building its own Buddhist temple would be granted immunity from rent or state *corvée* during the period of temple construction (Keo Manivanna 1969). In a similar manner, the chronicle of an old temple in the Northern Thai valley where I did field-work—a chronicle covering some 300 years—is a series of events in which a visiting party of princes and nobles repeatedly exhort the local population to rebuild the temple, each time within a year or two of a major political upheaval in the state (Sanguan Chotsukharat 1965).

Visiting princes also came periodically to perform a sacrifice to the *lak mu'ang* of the valley. Now this cult was in marked contrast to the cult of the chief locality spirit of the village cluster referred to earlier. The *lak mu'ang* cult was initiated by the political superior, but not every year apparently; a sacrificer dressed in red, killed a buffalo; the *lak mu'ang* was said to represent the princes' patrilineal ancestors. The 'congregation' was only so defined in relation to this cult. The *phi ban* cult, on the other hand, was initiated by villagers and took place every year, with other *ad hoc* offerings during the year; no meat was offered, or might be offered, and all villagers brought their own offerings. The spirit was indeed a legendary king, but was also taken as the ancestral spirit of a local descent group, in fact matrilineally related, albeit the largest and most prestigious group in the village at the time of the field work. The congregation at the full annual sacrifice, to the village cluster spirit, was also a locally co-operating community for a variety of functions, and on a basis of reciprocity. When the old political order gave way to the Siamese administration (locally as I have said in about 1910) the *lak mu'ang* cult ceased immediately. There was no local need or function for it; whereas the *phi ban* cult continued strongly.

Among the Tai of Vietnam, also, alongside the *lak mu'ang* which represented the chief's ancestors, there was a *phi* or *fi ban* which represented the local community. There was also a cult of ancestors representing kin groups within the local community and a sacred house-post, symbolising, as the author puts it: 'the destiny of the entire household', and especially fertility, there were seeds and phallic symbols hanging from it (Đặng Nghiêm Vạn 1972). Interestingly, for those Tai groups, the wooden post of the *lak mu'ang* was said to be the principal house post of a subterranean house. And I think there are some interesting connections here between this and the myth, recorded and analysed by Tambiah in which after a struggle between human and *naga* princes, human habitations specifically and political regalia are absorbed into the earth by the *naga* kingdom, whose king is subsequently worshipped as the village cluster locality spirit, to whom sacrifices are offered every New Year (Tambiah 1970).



Returning to the Tai of North Vietnam: the *lak mu'ang* was identified with the chief at each sacrifice by the placing of the chief's shirt or tunic on the post. At the beginning of a new dynasty the old post would be destroyed and a new one set up, much as the Northern Thai householder sets up his new post. In the Northern Thai case we also found the set: ancestral cult, community spirit cult and *lak mu'ang*. In other parts of Thailand and Laos this opposition is not reported, just possibly in some cases due to the level of ethnographic focus. Condominas, for Laos, takes the *phi ban* to represent a level in the political hierarchy, straightforwardly and without contradictory elements (1975). But he does say that the *phi ban* spirits were usually a married couple, the first founder of the village and his wife, though also sometimes high officials, even legendary kings and deities. He also suggests that 'ancestor' and 'guardian' spirits may be one and the same. In the Lao area of North-east Thailand, Keyes describes the *phi puta*—(*pu* in N.E.Thailand—but not in N.Thailand—is father's father, *ta* mother's father)—as both village guardian spirits and ancestral spirits (Keyes 1975). In Tambiah's locality of N.E.Thailand, culturally also a Lao area, the village spirit was the *tapu ban*, (*ta* and *pu* again), held to be the village's founding ancestor who was subordinate in turn to a locality spirit of a cluster of sixteen villages referred to as *tapu byng*, the swamp spirit, who was at the same time the 'father-in-law' of the *tapu ban*, the single village locality spirit, and at the same time the King of the *naga* kingdom below the ground. Tambiah does not indicate how this spirit might be related to any superordinate set of cults.

I suggest that several processes have been at work here. On the one hand there is the establishment and development of local communities directly appropriating from nature, so to speak, with their own ideas of legitimate ownership and attempted control over supernaturally granted benefits of fertility and so on. On the other hand there is the process of their incorporation within higher and wider political units with a somewhat different idea of ownership and access to supernatural power. In these processes ancestral spirits would appear to have been transformed into spirits of small localities wider than original kin groups, and these spirits have in turn been transformed into either royal ancestors and/or spirits of social units subordinate to a higher social level, in turn represented by a higher order cult. And at the same time, there would appear to be a certain amount of *two-way* appropriation of ideological forms.

I suggest further, that this process may also have been a major ideological factor in the incorporation of non-Tai ethnic groups into at least the periphery of Tai political systems. I could cite very suggestive evidence for the *Khmu*, *Lua*, *Karen*, *Lamet* and *Kachin*. An important paper published recently by Jonathan Friedman has shown the importance of the process in the formation of Shan type Kachin chiefdoms (1975). In this process a successful and ambitious man is able to insert himself, so to speak, between the local community and their distant collectively worshipped ancestral spirit, which is already a territorial spirit, claiming that the spirits are those of his own particular descent group—plausibly so, since the success which gave him the economic backing to make him, an ambitious man, able to make the claim, was by definition due to his good relations with the spirits as formerly conceived. At the same time he claims the right to own the land of the whole territory and the sole right to mediate with the spirit on behalf of the community. The transformed spirit *mung nat*, (from the Shan *mu'ang*), and also the chief celestial spirit are worshipped henceforth not at the communal altar but at the chief's house, which receives a Shan name. Also symbolising this shift is a new sole right of the

Chief 'to erect the large main house post' which again has Thai (Shan) features. As Friedman puts it (1975):

'the structure of the chiefdom is already present in the relation between the community and the territorial spirit.'

\* \* \*

In this article I have presented some of the ethnographic details of house rituals, and have developed some of the possible lines of interpretation starting from the fundamental symbol of the house-post. It is offered as the outline of a programme for further investigation.

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# NATURAL SYMBOLS IN JAVA

Anthony Christie

Przyluski (1931:54) described the essential nature of 'Indochinese'—and by extension, South East Asian—culture as being a cosmological dualism, in which the mountain and the sea, the winged and the aquatic tribe, the men of the heights and those of the coastal plains are opposed one to the other. This view, which is at first sight an attractive one, seems to have commanded general support, but I propose to argue that the concept of opposition is inappropriate. We should, I believe, think rather in terms of complementarity or of chiasmus. The pattern is frequently chiasmic, but it should also be noted that the cross-overs take place within a continuum, that the apparent oppositions are aspects of a totality.

This continuum may find expression in a unitary symbol such as Adi-Buddha or Sanghyang Acintya, a sexless rather than bisexual form, (it may not even have an iconic manifestation), or in hermaphroditic form, *ardhanārīśvara*. This seems to be found more frequently in South East Asia than in the Indian subcontinent. The latter was the source for another apparent opposition wherein we can find not only internal chiasmi, but also an ultimate continuity, a repetitive cycle which seems to have been a South East Asian, even specifically Javanese innovation: I refer to the struggle between **Pāṇḍavas** and Kauravas, Pendawa and Korawa as they are known in Javanese. The internal chiasmus can be exemplified by the case of Adipati Karna, son of Dewi Kunti and Betara Surya, the Sun God who impregnated her, as she bathed, while still a virgin.

Although Karna is the half-brother of Yudistira, Bima and Arjuna, he fights against them and their half-brothers, the twins Nakula and Sadewa, as an ally of the Korawas and even kills Bima's favourite son Gatutkaja, before himself dying at the hands of Arjuna. Yet Karna is held up as a model of right *satriya* behaviour, as Anderson has correctly stressed (1965). This view is probably implicit in the Indian tradition: the duty of the *ksatriya* is a major theme in the *Bhagavad Gītā*. What is not to be found in the Indian tradition is the idea that, of necessity, once the Bratayuda is over, and Parikesit alone has survived to become the ancestor of the kings of Java (they are of the lineage of Arjuna), the Korawas have to arise from the dead, for the cosmic system itself depends upon the co-existence of Pendawa and Korawa. This is the substance of the *Korawāśrama* (Swellengrebel 1936; cf. the considerable discussion in Schrieke 1957 on wider implications of this concept). The position of Karna, apparently ambiguous, is in fact proper, and recognised as such. This is the case, of course, in the *Mahābhārata* itself, where a major theme is the conflict which involves friends and kin, the essential element,

too, in the later *Bhagavadgītā*. The role and treatment of Bima (the usual Indonesian spelling used here to distinguish him from the prototypical Bhima) illustrate a characteristic set of conflicts, contrasts, oppositions within a group, that of the Pendawa. Here are five satriya, by definition *halus* characters, of whom four, when depicted as wayang puppets, for example, display modesty and restraint in every way.

The twins, Nakula and Sadewa, minor players, are, like the centrally important Yudistira and Arjuna, shown with the head bowed, a straight line from the forehead to the nose, almond-shaped eye, little or no jewelry, small size as befits a satriya puppet. The fifth, Kunti's son by Bayu the Wind god, has the build of a wrestler, the round eye which indicates lack of refinement, is married to a female giant, and has an ultimate weapon, his right thumb-nail Pancanaka. He is likely to use an uprooted tree as a club. He talks *ngoko*, and does not *sembah*, even to the gods. There is little that is *halus* here, yet paradoxically it is also Bima, as we shall see, who is the hero of the *Nawaruci*, and cognate texts, which are concerned with the search for self-knowledge and spiritual power. It is contrasts of this kind which lend weight to the caveat entered by Coedès:

Il faut se défier des classifications trop systématiques, des cadres trop rigides dans lesquels on force, non sans dommage, une réalité mouvante et souple. (1964:26)

Conceptually the terms employed in Bali for directions, *kaja*, to the mountain, *kelod* to the sea, would seem to belong squarely in a system of binary opposition, but in reality the terms which also carry the concepts upstream and downstream, imply the stream which links the two poles: the system thus becomes a continuum. A further, though by now scarcely unexpected, complication is that *kaja* has well-defined associations with water, while *kelod* is the direction connected with fire. At first sight one may rationalise the latter by reference to the Indian concatenation South-Agni-Fire, but I feel that the pattern is typical of native South East Asian patterns of thought, since parallel chiasmi can be found in many of the non-indianised cultures. (A more cautious term might be 'less indianised': much work has still to be done on this question.) An admirable example is afforded by the Ngaju Dayak material which we owe to Schürer (1963). In their lifetimes men are hornbills, women water-snakes; dead women are buried in hornbill coffins, dead men in water-snake ones. The coffins are boat-shaped, a reminder of how often the realm of death is reached by water. On the Dong-son drums the canoes are crewed by plumed figures; among the **Barèt-speaking** Toraja the shaman priestess travels by a boat with a crew of birds:

Row, ye birds of bright plumage,  
use the oars, ye ospreys,  
with one pull of the oars we are far,  
as soon as we row we advance.

But this boat, as the song makes plain, is travelling through the air (J.Hooykaas 1956:293). Nor are the Toraja alone in conceiving of aerial voyages by boat. The same idea is to be found in Sumatra.

Such a cross-over is most obvious perhaps in the case of the shadow-theatre where the disposition of the puppets to the right and left of the *dalang* is seen to be of great significance. In the end the Korawas of the left will be defeated by the Pendawas of the right, yet to the viewer of the shadows, to the generality of the audience, including, should he be present, the ruler himself, the Pendawa forces are on the left, the Korawa on the right. The problem is however made more complicated by two further considerations. The first is the question, to which Pigeaud drew attention in an important paper (1927), of the relative seniority of the two parties in terms of left and right hand, a point to which we shall return later when we come to consider the history of Bubukshah and his brother Gagang-aking. The other concerns the original pattern of the shadow-theatre performance. As is well-known, current practice in Java enables the audience to watch from either side of the screen, in contrast with the usual manner of performance in Bali and Malaysia where the *dalang* is enclosed, with his musicians, in a booth. But there is evidence to suggest that the older Javanese tradition may have placed a group of the more distinguished audience members, together with the host who paid for the performance, on the shadow side of the screen in the *dalam*, the enclosed area of the nobleman's house so that it is they alone who participate in the *shadow-play* (e.g. *Bimasuci XXII* (Prijoheotomo 1934:182–3); cf. Rassers 1959 for general discussion, though open to criticism).

In a mystical interpretation of this layout the provider of the performance is the unseen, etherial soul, Suksma, the puppeteer being Pramana, the material soul. Such an interpretation, dating from the second half of the eighteenth century, and characteristic of court intellectual activity in Central Java at that time, provides an interesting contrast with the remarks of such Muslim theologians as Ibn al-'Arabī and Iban al-Fāriḍ or Saladin's minister al Qādī al-Fādīl (Jacob 1925:49, 53; Nicholson 1921:191; cf. Arnold 1965:13–55. The general argument was that seeing the shadow, rather than the reality, might turn the observer's thoughts towards divine reality. This argument was not unfamiliar to Javanese divines, who devised an entire spiritual metaphor based upon various forms of public entertainment in which *wayang kulit* was equated with the *sharī'a*. They also used the metaphor of the *dalang* as God which is found in Arabic sources (Jacob 1925:49).

For Ibn al-Fāriḍ it is the soul of man which is compared with the puppeteer: when the screen is removed, the soul recognises its oneness with God (Nicholson 1921:191). This is the stage which in the extended Javanese metaphor to which we just referred is symbolised by the *ronggeng*, the unmasked dancing-girl who is *ma'ripat* (=Ar. *ma'rifa*) Gnosis, of divine Unity. Rinkes (1912) includes *babads* in which these ideas are discussed. An element which seems to recur in the Arab theologians is the moment of truth when the screen is removed. Thus al Qādī al-Fādīl:

What I have seen carries with it a weighty lesson; I have seen kingdoms come and go, and when the curtain was rolled up, lo! the mover of all was but One (Arnold 1965:15, citing Jacob 1925:53).

I do not know of this argument in Javanese sources, perhaps because at the end of the performance the screen remains in position, with the *kekayon* planted firmly in its centre. This is also the case in Bali, but there we find that in the case of a performance given to entertain the gods at the *odalan*, foundation anniversary of a temple, a piece of string replaces the screen, since, I was informed, the gods could naturally see the puppets anyway. In Java the screen may be omitted when the performance is a *ngruwatan*, purification, though this is not always the case and the reasons are not altogether clear. It seems that the performance should be in daytime (but cf. Mayer 1906 in Rassers 1959:45n.; Inggri 1923) and that the screen should be removed, though the lamp is left hanging (Rassers 1959:51). It seems to me probable that the absence of the screen, like the daylight performance, is a conscious act of reversal to reinforce the power of the ritual. There are many other apparent paradoxes in the performance of *Murwakala*, the usual story which is performed on these occasions, but there is no room to pursue them further in this context.

Ritual performance provides another set of examples of apparent oppositions which are not in fact polar. At first sight Rangda and Barong must appear absolutely opposed, but it is soon clear that their opposition can equally well be analysed as interaction. Further, as Belo pointed out (1949), a man who has worn the Rangda mask may well be possessed later during the same ritual by a Barong spirit, while those who have danced Barong may be entered later by Rangda. During a ceremony at Pura Panataran Kewiman it was not uncommon for women to become possessed and to try to turn the kris against themselves—wholly male behaviour in normal circumstances; conversely, a disarmed man, weeping at the loss of his kris, joined in the *mendet*, a women's offering dance. Such ambiguities are to be seen in other aspects of Balinese belief: the treatment of twins, at once miraculous and unclean (Belo 1970), provides many interesting examples. There is reason to think that what can still be observed there was, in fact, once more widely distributed in neighbouring areas, even if Bali is not quite a museum of Majapahit as has sometimes been claimed. Thus, I know of no historical evidence to suggest that the caste distinction pertaining to twins of opposite sex was observed in 14th century Java.

Yet in present-day Bali *anak kēmbār bunching* bride and bridegroom twins are unclean if born to a *jabā* (=śūdra) family (approx. 94% of the population), but an auspicious sign for a *triwangśā* one (=brahmin, **kṣatriya** or vēśya). Indeed, there is nothing extant, to my knowledge, about the significance of multiple births in pre-Islamic Java. On the other hand, Belo reported that '*bunching* means the same as *ardā nari swari* [Skt *ardhanarāśvarī*] which, applied to the gods, means the male and female, the god and his wife in one person.' (1970:33), and the divine hermaphrodite was certainly well-known in the Majapahit period. There was considerable agreement among Belo's informants that there was something godlike about such a birth, the children then being free to marry one another. Here an explanation may lie, for the story in the *Usana Bali* of the demon Maya Danawara recounts how, after his defeat by Indra, he was transformed into two parts, brother and sister, Mesula-Mesuli, who became raja of Pejeng. Such a story is, as we shall see, common enough in Indonesian creation myths.

We have already drawn attention to the nature of the *wayang kulit* and the distribution of the puppets. We may here resume with a reference to sexual ambiguity which seems to follow, in part, on the above. Our attention is drawn to Budiharja's note on Semar:

In truth, the person of kyai lurah Semar is mysterious to define. Call him a man, his face is that of a woman; if he is called a woman, his appearance is masculine (1922:23).

But this is not the only ambiguity about Semar. He is the most senior of the *panakawan*, the advisers, to the Pendawa and other groups ('goodies' were such a definition possible in wayang thought, as is becoming increasingly the case under, I believe, the influence of Western films). His language is coarse, often obscene, he farts and belches: he is, in a word, *kasar*, yet he is also a god as well as clown 'the most spiritually-refined inwardly and the most rough-looking outwardly...the eldest descendant of He that is One (i.e. God), elder brother to Batara Guru' (Geertz 1964:275–8). In many ways he subsumes the concept of Javan-ness, in a tradition other than that of IndoJavanese culture. He has no prototype in the Hindu epics. In such 17th—19th century texts as the *Babad Kediri* it is Semar who expresses the *zaman buda* before the coming of Islam. Meeting Sunan Kali Jago, one of the nine *wali* who are said to have brought Islam to Java, Semar gives voice to misgivings about the power of Allah, pointing out the contrast between Java's tropical fertility with its green rice fields and groves of trees and bleak desert which surrounds even the holy places of Islam. Semar, I believe, is yet another expression of the ambiguous nature of the cosmos as it is seen by the Javanese, and, indeed, by many other Indonesian peoples. Many examples of this are to be found in the material conveniently brought together by **Stöhr** (Stöhr & Zoetmulder 1968). A typical specimen involves an undifferentiated lump which divides into two halves. These later become male and female. After a long traverse, one from the source, the other from the mouth of a river, or some other hazardous pair of journeyings, they meet and begin the process of creation. Frequently there is a first phase, after the meeting, which comes to nothing, and the present creation follows only after a second meeting and union. One result of this device, whether conscious or not, is further to distance the world of men from the Prime Cause who has no role in this creation.

It must not be imagined that such ambiguities are confined to the tribal areas of Indonesia. It may manifest itself in the importance attributed ritually to transvestites, not only in Kalimantan, but also in the central region, in Java and Bali. It is present, in my view, in the complex story in which Candra Kirana, a princess, becomes king of Bali. She is the beloved of Pañji, prince of Janggala, a realm which is dialectically opposed to her own kingdom of Daha/Kediri. She and her companion, Ragil Kuning, who is Pañji's sister, have many adventures *en travesti*; Claire Holt says that she 'assumes male disguise', but in some of the stories the two girls turn themselves into men. In one story they hang their hair and their breasts upon a thorn-tree. Candra Kirana thus transformed becomes king of Bali, and marries a princess, but is restored to her own form after a fight with Pañji, at this time commanding a Javanese army. In this she has to wound him, which she does after fighting with kris, by means of a hairpin (I shall avoid the temptation of a psycho-analytical study of the theme). But there are other explanations of her male state which amount in the end to the effect that she has, unwittingly, offended the gods or is the victim of the magic power acquired by another.

The possibility that the Pañji cycle is connected with natural phenomena has, of course, been canvassed, as it has also in the case of the Damar Wulun stories. Damar Wulan's name, Radiance of the Moon, is very similar to that of Candra Kirana, Moon-



beam. There may once have been some element of cosmology in these stories which related also to dynastic matters. At this distance in time it is difficult to be sure. What does seem to be clear is that in the Pañji cycle, rulers are male. Candra Kirana has to become male in order to rule over Bali, though the proximate cause of this sex change, in one story at least, has nothing to do with her Balinese adventure. The plot is, as usual, complicated. She has disappeared from home, and then returned in a strange bloated form, a transformation which is due to the attempt of a demon to swallow her. She will resume her normal beauty only if she is remarried to Pañji. A handsome mountain man must also be found to serve as her bridesman. (Meanwhile the king of Bali has fallen in love with Candra Kirana and sends his warriors to seek her hand; this is only one of a number of subplots). In fact Candra Kirana has woken in a forest to which she has been translated from her husband's palace: her distress causes a natural disturbance *gara-gara* causing the gods to send to enquire its reason. S.H. Bromo is despatched from heaven for this purpose, is angered by Candra Kirana's efforts to avoid him, and consumes her to ashes from which a handsome young man emerges. (Is this reminiscent of a śaivite theme where the god of love is destroyed by Śiva, whose passion he has sought to rouse at the behest of the gods?.) She is then told that she is to serve the false Candra Kirana, actually a demoness who has obtained a boon of marriage to Pañji by the practice of austerities *tapas*. (The deception is not revealed until this point, but is of course known to the audience anyway.) Her duty is to serve as the bridesman. She is duly discovered in the forest by the palace servants who take her home to fulfil this task in which she is to be assisted by Ragil Kuning, Pañji's sister.

The wedding takes place and the following day Candra Kirana, by the manner in which she folds a betel chew identifies herself to Pañji, though she is still in the guise of a handsome mountain man.

General confusion: she and Ragil Kuning flee to Bali, whither Pañji pursues them at the head of a Javanese army. (Pigeaud 1938:452; cf. Holt 1967:309–11). In this lakon she actually becomes queen of Bali, in place of Klana, but sequels indicate that she reverts to male in order to fight Pañji. I do not know of any sovereign queens of Bali. In Java, however, where Damar Wulan remains male throughout, as does Pañji, he defeats the foreign demon Menak Jingga and is ultimately rewarded with the hand and the throne of the Virgin Queen of Majapahit, (where suzerain queens did historically occur). She is the object of Menak Jingga's passion, as is Candra Kirana of Klana's. What is striking in the Pañji cycle, as to a lesser extent in that of Damar Wulan, is the persistent ambiguity of role, reminiscent, it seems to me, of the chiasmi across the *kelir* in the *wayang kulit*. It is clear that by now that we are far from the stories of Indian origin which seem to have formed the basis for the earliest Javanese literature of which we know anything. But it would be rash, indeed, to assume that the understanding of even those tales was the same in the Indian subcontinent and in Indonesia. Berg's remark that despite the appearance of the Pendawas, the *Nawaruci* is of Indonesian structure, seems likely to me to be valid for much earlier manifestations of Javanese narration. Nor are these conclusions, however tentative, confined to texts, for we may see much the same phenomena displayed in architectural remains, some of which can also be related to textual data.

I refer to the *tirtha*, sacred sites associated with water, which are a marked feature of early Javanese remains, many of them apparently laid out in some directional conformation, though not necessarily in accordance with conventional cardinality. None

is so obvious an exemplar of such a pattern as the Khmer site of Nak Pan. This shrine, Buddhist in intention, has a square central pool, and four subsidiary tanks on the main axes, linked with the main pool by pipes which open into a vaulted space with a lotus pedestal under the outfall: each pipe terminates in a head, of a man to the east, then a lion, a horse and an elephant. In the middle of the central tank, on a lotus pedestal surrounded by entwined serpents, (the meaning of the Khmer name Nāk Pān), their tails to the west, their heads, separated to mark the entrance to the east, is a small shrine whose frontons show scenes from the life of the Buddha (Hair-cutting: E; Great Departure:N; Under the Bodhi tree:W; the S. is defaced). The false doors on the S, W and N sides have Lokeśvara in relief. To the south of this shrine, in the main pool, was a group of *linga*, to the west, the famous representation of the bodhisattva rescuing, in the form of the horse Balaha, Simhala and his fellow-merchants from the island of ogresses.

As Finot and Goloubew pointed out (1923) this is a version of the Buddhist lake Anavatapta, in the Himalaya, where Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, arhats and rishis bathe and from whose four sides the four great rivers of the world pour forth, through lion, elephant, horse and bull gargoyles (Coedès 1947; cf. Glaize 1940). The tirthas of Java and Bali do not reproduce this particular image. Nāk Pān is, so far as I know, its only architectural manifestation in the Buddhist world, but the mountain as the source, *par excellence*, of water, is quite characteristic of both countries. The river has its origins on the mountain, it flows thence to irrigate the rice fields, and the shrines on the mountain link the fructifying water and the beneficent ancestors for the prosperity of crops and people. Jalatunda and Belahan on the slopes of Mount Penanggungan, two among a hundred shrines or more on that east Javanese mountain which represents the top of Meru, will serve as examples (cf. Kempers 1959; pls 185–8; 200–2, 204). The shrines are specifically those of the royal ancestors: irrigation is a royal duty; these are Wittfogelian societies. The Khmer incriptions make it clear that maintaining and improving the water supply is the first duty of the king. The evidence from Java seems to confirm the pattern. But it does not seem that every *tirtha* was an Anavatapta though the schema is reflected in some Javanese texts; the Sri Tanjung story will serve as an example.

Betari Durga tells the eponymous heroine of a bathing place whose eastern pool has a silver wall. Here the grandparents *kaka nini* bathe. The wall of the southern pool is of pink (*dadu*) copper: this is the bathing place of the mothers and fathers *bapa babu*. Children and their wives *anak rabi* bathe in the western pool which has a golden wall, while the iron-walled northern pool is the bathing-place for grandchildren and great-grandchildren *putu buyut*. Each pool performs a different purifying function. In the central pool, in the middle of which is a *nagasari* tree, says Durga, *sanra niy sun adusa* 'my own body is bathed'. The wall of that pool is *amancawarna* polychrome. The pattern is clear enough: the colour code is cardinal, white, red, (*dadu* pink is unexpected) yellow, black and a multicoloured centre. Where we might expect deities of the quarters, five generations of the family, two in the northern pool, with the goddess herself in the centre. Once again, though, I have to admit that I cannot find an architectural translation of this scheme on the ground. Various texts make it clear that the watering-places have a more than secular function.

Thus *Nagarakertagama* (19, 2, 4) has a reference to the ruler, after visiting Trasungai, river source, bathing at Capahan and performing *tirthaśewana* water-devotion (Pigeaud 1960). Cult at river sources persists and the kratons of Solo and Jogja still send offerings

to the sources of the Bengawan Solo and the Kali Progo. Later in the same text (26, 1 & 2; 27, 1) there is a reference to a coastal site with what appear to be floating pavilions linked by causeway in a radiating pattern. (One is reminded of the *bale kembang* the water pavilions of the central Javanese kratons in the 19th and 20th centuries.) The king, who bathes, is compared with a god and his goddesses. It is perfectly clear that there is sexual intercourse as well as bathing with successive palace women, and those who observe it realise that it **Laksmī**klesa, wipes away impurity (27, 1, 4). The bathing and intercourse motif is not infrequent. Another feature of many *tirtha* sites is mentioned in connection with the wooded hill hermitage of Sāgara (32, 2–5). There are reliefs, with inscriptions, partly illegible, illustrating a poem *kakawin* and others, round an artificial pool *bwat rānten*, illustrating a story *katha*. Similar sites are described in the story of Bubukshah and Gagang-aking (van Stein-Callenfels 1918) to which we shall return. The remains of sites of this type are fairly common in east Java: the reliefs may have some dynastic reference as Bosch demonstrated (1961), others providing *bhakti* texts, offering salvation in exchange for devotion, surely reflecting the concept of wiping away impurity. It is probably significant that the waters are often piped to issue from the nipples of female figures, (e.g. at the Balinese *tirtha* of Gua Gaja). At Belahan the water flows from the breasts of the two goddesses Śri and **Laksmī** who are the wives of the king as Visnu. It is relevant to note that in Bali, Visnu is not only associated with north, *i.e.* the mountain *kaja*, but also with water. The related themes are obvious enough.

A rather different version of the complex of pools is given in a considerably later text than the **Śrī**Tanjung. This is the *Maniq Maya*, first published, I think, by Raffles which, although of 18th century date has links with older sources including the *Tantu Panggèlaran* (Pigeaud 1924; cf. Poerbatjaraka 1952:135–40 for this point). Here the pools or seas contain forts which are associated not only with gods, but also with days of the week, colours and metals. Crawford noted in his *History of the Indian archipelago* that the Javanese consider ‘the names of the days of their native week to have a mystical relation to the colours and to the divisions of the horizon’ (1820:1,290). He goes on to give details of this ‘whimsical interpretation’ which accord well with the indications in the *Maniq Maya* as we shall see. The forts are of the following metals, from the East clockwise: silver, red copper, gold, iron, and, central *perunggu* bronze, an alloy and the metallurgical equivalent of Durga’s *amancawarna*. Each fort, the word is *kuṭa/kiṭa*, is set in a sea *segara/jaladri/tasiq* of a different fluid. Again clockwise from East they are: coconut milk, blood, honey, indigo and, in the centre a sea of hot water *tasiq wedaṅ*. It is not, at first sight, easy to explain the last term, for it can scarcely be said to represent an amalgam of the cardinal fluids as do *amancawarna* and *perunggu* their respective colours and metals.

Reading again the admirable paper by Damais (1969) to which I gladly acknowledge my indebtedness, as also for much stimulating discussion before his regretted death, I was struck by a reference to a passage in the *Chandogya Upaniṣad* (3, 3, 1–5) where the aspects of the Sun *Adityah* are assigned colours for the quarters: red, white, dark, *kr̥ṣṇa* and very dark *paraḥkr̥ṣṇa* (the replication of W and N is curious), Zenith *urdhwadīśah* is associated with the term *kṣobhata* which Hume translated as ‘seemed to tremble’ (1971:204), a version confirmed by Senart who, in addition to ‘*qui semble trembler*’ also uses the expression ‘*vibrant*’ (1930:33; 35). I incline to the view that we must assume a somewhat similar origin for *wedaṅ*, for simmering water undoubtedly seems to tremble.

The appropriateness of the term seems to depend on a further consideration: the distribution of the gods in the system that is preserved in the *Maniq Maya*. East is Mahadewa; South Sambu; West Kamajaya; North Wisnu. In the Centre we find Batara Bayu, the Wind God and father of both Hanuman and Bima. On this unexpected attribution Damais commented:

La position de Bayu au Centre est compréhensible, si l'on pense aux relations entre le Centre et le Zénith (1969:104 n.3).

This does not seem to provide an explanation for his displacement from the usual north-west, though the connection between wind and trembling may appear suitable enough. It is interesting to note, however, that the position at north-west is occupied by a deity called Siwah, where the intrusive *h* inevitably recalls the word *siwah* which, as Damais noted, would belong with Centre, (strictly at Zenith), where we find Wāyū in the *Chāndogya-Upaniṣad* 3, 13, 5. But the themes of Centre, Bayu and *siwah* suggest another line of enquiry which we may pursue, where Bima performs 'despite the appearance of the *Pendāwās*' as it were. Bima is the rescuer, the rescuer who became such by first rescuing himself, a story which forms the subject of various texts *Dewaruci*, *Bimasuci*, *Nawaruci* (Prijoetomo 1934; Stutterheim 1956:107–43).

The story line is framed by the *Pendawas*, though their presence, as Berg remarked (1928:56), does not make it an Indian story: its structure is Indonesian. Bima is with his brothers; on the instructions of Drona, chaplain and advisor to the rival Korawas, he leaves them to see the water of life (unsuccessfully since it is illusory); he discovers himself; returns home and, finding his brothers under siege, defeats the attacking ogress and they all have a feast. The final and brief closing episode reminds one of any shadow theatre *lakon*. The main, central section of the plot is concerned with the search. First he is told that it is in a well on top of a mountain, but as he ascends he is attacked by two great snakes which he kills. They promptly turn into godlings, explain that they had been expelled from heaven for some minor misdemeanour, thank him for releasing them and tell him that his mission is vain. They fly off to heaven (beneficiaries of Bima's redemptive role); he returns to Drona. The latter is surprised to see him alive, but sends him off again, this time into the middle of the ocean. There he is attacked by a sea-monster whom he kills with great difficulty, and then makes his way to a small island where he is dragged, half-drowning from the water by a deity who lives there.

The deity, who is a dwarf, asks the purpose of his dangerous journey, tells him that the water of life does not exist, but that there is a real secret which will be revealed if he will crawl into the stomach of the deity by way of his ear. This Bima does, despite the discrepancy of their sizes. (In a shadow theatre performance, the two identical puppets—for Bima and Nawaruci, the deity are two aspects of the same being—make this point vividly.) Within the deity Bima finds a featureless and unintelligible world. A light appears and then the deity explains the world's orientation both in terms of the compass and of a linked colour system. Emerging, Bima recognises that he has conducted a voyage of self-exploration. He returns once more to Drona to whom he gives a pseudo-elixir, and devotes himself to *tapas* in order to achieve total enlightenment (in the course of which he understands that he must die in the great war against the Korawas). He goes to find his brothers, whom he rescues from the attacking giants. There is a victory feast

and the story ends. The importance of this story can be understood by reading Mangkunagara VII's account of the meaning of *wayang kulit* for Central Javanese *priyayi*. Here the importance of self-knowledge and of *semadi* make clear how the incongruous figure of Bima, violent, impolite, uncouth, though a *satriya*, emerges as a supreme spiritual model and leader. The internal contradictions in Bima himself are underlined in the nature of his voyage: up a mountain to a well; out to sea to an island—water in land and up; land in water and down. The last stage is within himself, the resolution of these oppositions.

Another *wayang* story associates Bima with a *kawah*, the bubbling lava pool in the middle of the floor of a volcano: A hot water, trembling pool within an island surrounded by the walls of the volcanic cone which brings to mind the *wedani* (= *ksobhata*?) centre of the cosmos set out in the *Maniq Maya*, the centre associated with Bayu, who is, of course, the genitor of Bima. The latter is, as Stutterheim pointed out (1956), linked with volcanoes and statues of him are frequently found on their slopes. The Javanese tradition is that Pandu, his pater, and Marim are, as a result of a row with the gods, carried off by Yamadipati, ruler of the underworld, and cast into a *kawah* which thereupon bubbles furiously. Bima arriving home, finds the remainder of the family in distress and learning the reason, flies (as befits a son of Bayu), to the rescue with his mother Kunti and eldest brother Yudistira in his head-dress, while the others and the panakawans cling to his sarong. He is about to plunge unheeding into the *kawah* when the gods remind him of his 'passengers'. He leaves them on the edge, rescues his father and Pandu's second wife, and takes them up to heaven where they are installed on a special level which is twenty-nine steps high. There, it is agreed by the gods, the whole family will be reunited after the others have fulfilled their roles in the war against the Korawas.

The pattern of heaven depicted here reminds us both of temples like Suku and Ceta on the slopes of Gunung Lawu, and of the terraced shrines of the western hills of Java which are associated with the Badawi (cf. Kempers 1959:Pls 329–38; Schnitger 1939:42). But there is also the concept here, I believe, of the volcano which not only distributes fertile soil but also recycles souls after a suitable period of 'purgation' And certainly we see Bima in his salvationist role yet again.

In yet another *lakon*, at one point the Korawas have acquired the water of life which is enclosed in an octagonal jewel, but Bima gets it from them by treachery. The Pendawas rush off bearing the prize to what seems to be the Dieng Plateau, a great volcanic floor which was an early religious centre. There they are ambushed by the Korawas who tickle Bima in an attempt to force him to give up the jewel. He wriggles so much that the jewel slips from his fingers and shoots into the air to fall down the well Jalatunda in the middle of the great cone. The elixir is thus lost to both the conflicting sides and to humanity.

The moral appears to be that mankind cannot be saved by elixirs, but only *diri sendiri*, by their own efforts, in the pattern which Bima has set in the story of Nawaruci. There seems to me to be no doubt that the Bima of this cycle is a pre-Indian figure, associated with a mountain cult, who despite identification with the Bhima of the *Mahabharata*, retains a special spiritual significance for the Javanese. This was finally translated into a sophisticated form during the 18th and 19th centuries. I think too that the opposition mountain/ sea which we have already discussed, while clearly present in these stories, is distinguishable from the concepts which are linked with volcanoes as a specific and

separate type of mountain: at least two native traditions are encapsulated here, to say nothing of Indian accretions from such sources as the *Markandeya Purana*.

That the mountain is multifunctional cannot be denied. As one pole of a dual system it has already been discussed here. It also serves as a separator or a middle in a linear system: I distinguish here its function as a centre in a cosmic diagram. The linear pattern is best seen perhaps in the *gunungan*, the flat, more or less leaf-shaped object which occupies the centre of the screen in the *wayang kulit*. At the start of the performance it separates the two opposing groups, Pendawas and Korawas; it marks the intervals in the action; it can also represent such other natural objects as a forest (perhaps here it is the *kekayon* from *kayu* wood, timber); by its wild fluttering it can indicate a *gara-gara*, an upset in nature which demands divine intervention. (A *gara-gara* occurs regularly at the end of the first third of a shadow play, when the main characters and the story line have been set out and the clowns introduced.) Such an upset in the natural order may have a variety of causes: a god has been disturbed; a character, often an undesirable one, has practised *tapas* so intensively that he has gained power over the gods themselves; a mysterious happening has disturbed the order of nature or the certainties of the kingdom. The *gara-gara* is portentous as when the ardour of Senapati's devotion upon the shore at Parang Tritis causes the sea itself to boil to the great discomfort of the fish who beg Ratu Rara Kidul, Queen and Goddess of the South whose palace is under the Ocean, to intervene. The subsequent events foretell the foundation of a new dynasty, Mataram Baru, in favour of Senapati and his heirs, under the benign protection of the Goddess who also becomes the mystical bride of the successive rulers. As a result, the four royal houses of Central Java send offerings to the shore at Parang Tritis, and also to certain mountain tops, including Merapi, a volcano, and Gunung Lawu where the post-disappearance *keraton* of Brawijaya, last king of Manapahit, is located.

The cosmic pattern, with a central mountain is, of course, well known in India and persists in South East Asia, though there does appear to be a greater concern with it in the countries of the mainland than in the islands. Since in this volume H.L. Shorto deals with the Mon material, I will only draw attention to one aspect of the cosmic pattern. The mountain is at the centre of four continents, differently shaped, with ocean outside these, and a ring of mountains around the outer edge. The mountain is at the centre of the cosmos, but so far as the people of the southern continent are concerned, the same mountain is the north which is the home of Viṣṇu in, for example, the Balinese theist system. But if we remember the *gunungan*, we can find it in its role of separator/link in a linear system, often in an East/West lay-out. An admirable example of this is to be found in the story of Bubukshah and Gagang-aking which I propose to consider as a final demonstration of the natural paradoxes which are discussed in this article. We should note, in passing, that the interchangeability of tree and mountain, to be seen in the *kekayon/gunungan* of the shadow theatre, is also to be found in the art of East Java in the 14th century for on the terrace of Panataran the brothers whose story we are about to examine are depicted as seated on either side of a tree-trunk, rather than on opposite flanks of Gunung Wilis as the literary sources require (cf. Kempers 1959: p1.301).

It was van Stein Callenfels who drew attention to five reliefs on the pendapa terrace at Panataran which he identified as summarising the story of the two brothers (1918). He also noted that the implications of the tale confirmed van Eerde's conclusions as to the

relationship between Buddhist and Śaivite priests in Bali and Lombok. He, in turn, had reported a situation to which Friederich had called attention (1887:98):

It is true that they (Buddhists) are said to be allowed to eat all kinds of animals, cows for example, which the worshippers of Siva are forbidden to eat, and dogs and other unclean things, but they are not accused of actually eating them. As for the relations between Śivaism and Buddhism, the Panditas state that Buddha is Śiva's youngest brother, and that the two sects exist peacefully side by side, although the Buddhists do not worship Śiva, and the Śivaïtes do not adore Buddha.

With this in mind we may turn now to the story in summary form. I base this account on that of Rassers in his fundamental study 'Siva and Buddha in the East Indian archipelago' which first appeared in 1926 (1959:65–91).

The two brothers, Kebo milih and Kebo ngraweg, are driven from their family because of their interest in meditation. They go off together and after various interesting adventures find a guru from whom they seek instruction as to the Great God. They are accepted as pupils and given the names by which they are usually known: Bubukshah Glutton and Gagang-aking Withered-Stem, the latter being the older, though we are told that they are as alike as twins. The change of name is accompanied by a celebration which includes strong drink, music and a *tandak*, a dance with a female singer-dancer (compare the *rongging* who symbolises Gnosis above). During the night, the brothers receive instruction and by morning are initiates, though they do not depart until an auspicious day when they go off together and, after various episodes, reach the top of the mountain which stands on the border between Janggala and Majapahit. There it is agreed that Gagang-aking should build a hut on the West, Bubukshah one on the East. They look for water, but Bubukshah is really more interested in a supply of *tuwak* toddy. They clear the area by firing the forest, and Bubukshah eats the animals killed by the flames, or puts them by for later consumption. Once the huts are built, Gagang-aking establishes an austere regime of meditation and abstinence: Bubukshah, as befits his name, eats and drinks without restraint.

There is, in the text which was furnished by Purbacaraka, much of the contrast between their two life-styles. Finally the gods are aware the unusual powers are being acquired on Gunung Wilis (a *gara-gara* !) and a giant is sent to test their faith, inconclusively. They, in turn, send their souls to ask **Bhaṭāra** Guru for a ruling on the merits of their different manners of pursuing illumination. This appears to be inconclusive also, and the two continue to argue on behaviour. Indra persuades **Bhaṭāra** Guru to send Kālawijaya as **the** White Tiger, to test the two hermits for enlightenment and to bring to heaven whichever, if either, is qualified. The tiger first visits Gagang-aking and asks for food, which for him is human flesh. Gagang-aking as a result of his asceticism is only skin and bone, but points out that his brother is big and fat. The tiger then goes to see the latter and is warmly received, being offered rice, *tuwak*, and meat. These he refuses, repeating that he eats only human flesh, and asking for Bubukshah himself, a request that is granted. The tiger criticises his host for his indiscriminate eating, unsuitable for a *wiku* monk. Bubukshah justifies his action by pointing out that he does it deliberately to enable humble creatures to be reborn as higher beings, including

government officials! If he were to find a person in one of his traps, he would eat him. Before being eaten himself, he would like to inspect his traps for the last time so that nothing should suffer a lingering death.

While he is doing this the tiger fixes a dwarf in one of the traps and Bubukshah adds the creature to the rest of his catch. This he dresses and eats, though he suspects that it is a deliberate test. He then purifies and perfumes himself and sitting peacefully offers himself to the tiger. The latter springs at him as a final test, but Bubukshah does not flinch, and the tiger is forced to admit that the whole thing is a test. Gagang-aking then appears and asks to go wherever his brother goes. This is agreed and the tiger sets off to heaven with Bubukshah riding on his back and the older brother clinging to his tail. When they arrive the Gods are in council, their secretary having with him the book of records of good and bad hermits. Bubukshah is awarded a place in the highest heaven, while Gagang-aking is allowed only a fractional share in the delights which his young brother is to enjoy. It is hardly necessary to add that for Rassers the story

is nothing but the typical tribal ancestor-myth told here in the language of medieval Java and partly altered to fit the milieu and the ideas then prevalent (1959:84).

I do not propose to follow him down this particular alley, but invite the reader to consider some of the features which are common to the various themes which we have adumbrated.

My preoccupation in this article has been with the nature of the apparent oppositions in which Javanese, and indeed Indonesian culture is so rich. I stress the word apparent, for it is my contention that in the Javanese context, at least, we are dealing with wholes and that the unreality of opposition is shown both by the quite typical case of Karna, or the much loved Kumbakarna in the case of the *Ramayana*, and by the fact that left becomes right for the viewer on the other side of the screen. I am much influenced in this approach to the material by the difference which I see between the cardinal cosmic pattern (? of Indian origin), which I find in mainland South East Asia and the linear one which, it seems to me, is more characteristic of the Indonesian world. (It is tempting to see an influence here of its equatorial position, where sunrise/sunset equals East/West and the year is equinoctial.) The linearity finds many expressions: East/West, *kaja/kĕlod*, left/right, elder/younger and so on. Lévi-Strauss, in answering 'non' to his questions '*Les organisations dualistes existent-elles?*', prayed in aid of the anomaly, as he claimed, 'that the Indonesian moieties are always conceived of as being one male, the other female' (1956; 1963:157). In terms of the diagram which is adduced in support of the argument, this is obviously true, and Lévi-Strauss remarks:

The Indonesians do not seem to have been troubled by the presence of moieties which, theoretically, may be either male or female, although each one comprises an approximately equal number of male and female members.

In my view the Indonesians' indifference is quite natural: the moiety is an academic contrivance. Reality, Indonesian reality, construes the situation as a totality which can be



expressed as two parts, neither of which can exist without the other. The metaphor is that of the undifferentiated lump which splits into two and whose parts come together again, or the typical transvestites of the Indonesian world, the system of mountain/sea which are elements in a river-system. The younger brother, of two who are alike as twins, is both glutton and *tyaga*, the older ascetic and yet received in heaven only through his brother's acquisition of merit. In fact the whole scheme is elegantly subsumed in another version of the story of Glutton and Withered-Stem which is included in the *Tantu Panggelaran* (Pigeaud 1924:175). The supreme deity, of the visible series, Betara Guru, is manifest in the form of Mahampu Palyat a śaivite mystical priest who divides himself into two parts: Mpu Barang, a śaivite, and Mpu Walubang, a buddhist saugata. The latter goes to the West, the former to the East, both to seek an hermitage—the directions are the opposite of those in the Bubukshah story. The important thing, here, is that the two parts are twins from a single origin: their opposition is an expression of their unity. But we must not expect that the reality is diagrammatic: it is always, in the words of Coedès, *mouvante et souple*.

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# THE PLANETS, THE DAYS OF THE WEEK AND THE POINTS OF THE COMPASS: ORIENTATION SYMBOLISM IN 'BURMA'

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Toute habitation humaine est projetée dans le 'Centre du  
Monde'.

(Eliade 1968:215)

Every architectural 'frontage' is an interior view of the  
mind which produced it. (Lethaby 1956:87)

Attitudes to the cosmos in the cultures of the world seem to be drawn towards two opposed polarities, which one might term *dynamic* and *static*. In the dynamic view the cosmos is essentially the theatre of a cyclic process which is also dramatic; the same things have to happen over and over again at the proper time each year, or sometimes at longer intervals; and they have to be helped to happen by our doing the right things at certain seasons. Few of us probably have considered that we are heirs, through our Middle Eastern Judeo-Christian religion, to this attitude, typically predicated of the ancient Near East. But it seems to me to live on in the view of the world as something that progresses from one state to another (and is not even its dramatic aspect evident, for instance, in Marxists who, believing the revolution inevitable, feel nevertheless obliged to help it on its way?). This no doubt makes it harder for us to understand the opposite, static apprehension, in which the emphasis is laid rather on the preservation of a cosmic harmony, in particular between our bit of the cosmos and the macrocosm as a whole. To those who hold that view, it is self-evident that the processes of the cosmos have kept it going for a very long time. Far from there being an impulse to give the cosmic processes a regular push, there is an impulse to sit steady, and to reproduce as closely as possible in one's own parish the conditions that make the cosmos go round without wobbling. That 'static' view is (I would say) typical of both India and China.

Some scholars—mainly in the interest of setting up a dialectic opposition in South East Asia—have contrasted India with China, and have argued that China is the centre of the harmonic view, whereas India is the realm of the 'charismatic king' who does as he

pleases. Against that one might quote Dumont's observation (1972:113–4) that it is easier to become a king than a brahmin. Though you cannot appoint yourself a brahmin you can appoint yourself king; but that makes you a kshatriya, and then you are caught up in the harmony-maintaining obligations of dharma.

If you go into a village in Lower Burma you will be asked quite early in the proceedings 'What day were you born on?' If you then reply, say, 'the 25th of September, 1919', you will be met by a gale of laughter. It is not the right kind of answer. And if it takes you ten minutes and the back of an envelope to arrive at 'Thursday', there will be more laughter, for this piece of information is one any Burman has at instant recall.

Nevertheless, Burmans also have horoscopes, of a conventional kind. They are drawn up at birth, produced when the subject needs to consult an astrologer, kept private to him for obvious reasons, and thrown away in running water when he dies.

The connection between the planets which animate horoscopes and the days of the week is reasonably obvious, since the Burmese calendar like our own comes ultimately from Babylonia and enshrines a corresponding association between heavenly bodies, days, and obsolete deities. The connection between these and points of the compass, or directions, is more idiosyncratic. It impinges on daily life whenever a villager considers the matter of safe travel. You might say one day 'I think I will go into town tomorrow'.—'Do you really need to go tomorrow?', they will ask. 'Yes.' 'All right, we will go tomorrow.'—You will not be called very early next day. 'Well, it is a bit late', is the next stage. 'We had better go after lunch.' After lunch, the boatman will be having his siesta, and—to cut the story short—in the end you will go into town the day after. A little research will reveal that you were proposing to travel east on a Wednesday, and you will be more sensitive to unexpressed reluctances in future.

One more element of my title needs comment. Leach in a 1960 paper introduced the term 'Burma', in inverted commas, to indicate that he was going to base his assertions on the country where he had done his field-work but that he believed them to be more or less generally valid for mainland South East Asia. I shall stick as much as possible to matters of which I have direct knowledge, front field-work and from tests, but the structural framework is much more widely applicable. In principle I offer parochial illustrations of a structural system which can be found all over South East Asia and equally in Indonesia.

I must touch on one last topic before my theme is fully unfolded. The day on which a Burman is born controls the name which he will be given, by the allocation of initial letters to each day of the week. (A good exposition of the system is in the *Burmese-English dictionary* s.v. 'akkharā, 'letter of the alphabet': Stewart & Dunn 1940) Now this is simply a particular application of the technique of *kein*, by which any entity known to culture can be assigned to a numerological index on the basis of its name. The new-born Burman is being assured of such a *kein* as will not clash with that of his birth-day, and of its planet. In fact all Burmese divinatory and prophylactic arts might be argued to reduce in the end to numerology. This is made plainer by the form of the Burmese horoscope itself, in which the planets are denoted, not as in ours by ideographical symbols, but by the appropriate numbers.

For an example of the operation of *kein* one cannot do better than quote the account of the founding of Martaban in 1287 as it is told in the Mon *History of Rājādhirāj* (Candakanta 1910:122–3).

When they were preparing and levelling the site they caught a tiger (*kla*). They called the Master of Dhaguiw Mhāsmī, the Master of Wā Krau [Wagaru, a town a little way down the coast], and the Master of Kā Wong and asked the three scholars to explain the omen. The wise men considered it: ‘Ah, *kla*, tiger—*k* is the name of the Moon; then subscript *l*, that is a name of Rāhu [the black planet which causes eclipses and governs Wednesday morning]; Moon and Rāhu in conjunction amount to “tiger”. Reckoning that Rāhu enters into conjunction with the Moon, Rāhu is bad, so bad enters into the good auspices. Therefore the city my lord is now founding will have a certain difficulty. But there is another matter: the tiger is the king of beasts, and considering that point, the city of us humble persons will enjoy a great deal of might and power.’

Later on they caught a python (*kla*) within the enclosure, and they called the scholars again to explain it. ‘Hm, *kla*; that’s Moon and Rāhu again; but with them there’s a Saturn name in final position, all three together. And then too the python is a great creature, it is a creature that has no poison. Considering that, my lord’s city will be a seaport, with many rich and wealthy men and many prominent citizens’, the scholars said.

Later on again they found a peacock (*mrāk*) sitting on eggs. The three scholars were instructed to explain this omen too. ‘M is a name of Jupiter; *r* of Rāhu; then a Moon name in final position, all three in conjunction make “peacock”. As to Rāhu, it is also a name of the elephant [the planetary animal of Rāhu]; so in future this city will acquire an elephant. As for the peacock sitting on the eggs, the nature of peacock’s eggs is to be white, not black. Since it is so, the elephant will be a white one. When it gets the white elephant, seeing that Jupiter and the Moon are in conjunction everyone who is allied with it will be obliged to send liberal presents.’ All three omens were thus explained by the learned scholars.

That text is 400 years old. These days there is not very often the occasion of clearing the site for a new capital, even for a small kingdom; but the system of *kein* enters very much into the imaginings of an ordinary person in the village.

The actual divinatory procedures will depend on the art which is being employed; the point is that the system of reference makes it possible to equate the material of one art with that of another. And that leads to the further point that underlying these equivalences is one grand classificatory system for all perceived phenomena, of a kind we have learned to associate with what were once called ‘primitive’ cultures, but here mapped out on the more peripheral manifestations of late Hinduism.

We must begin in a smaller way than that; so to narrow the field of view I propose to look at traditional accounts of the symbolism of the points of the compass—fairly well known, I think, for the various countries of South East Asia. Each point is associated with a life-stage, an element, a planet, and a colour. Note, first, that the order is important, running from east clockwise to north. So, in Burma, we have for east: birth, air, Jupiter, and white; for south: life, fire, Mars, green (or blue); for west: dying, earth, Venus, red; and for north death (i.e. being dead), water, Saturn and yellow.

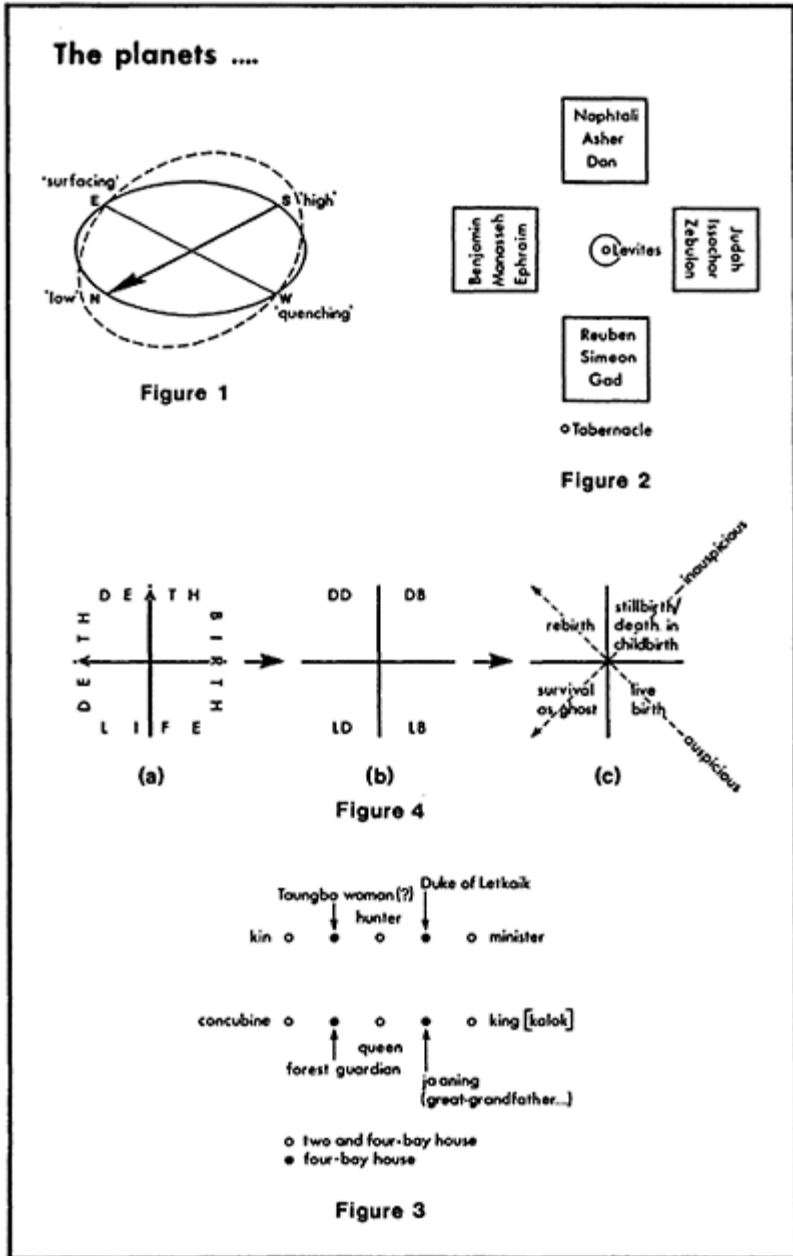
Colours provide a signalling system and a way of indicating orientation associations in all kinds of cult contexts. They may indicate other appropriate associations too. Thus Tai ordinands are invested first in either a red or a green garment and then a white one placed over it (Tambiah 1968:59–60). This is said to signify the transition from lay life to Buddhism; but in terms of life-stage associations, which in Thailand differ from the Burmese set just noted, it can be read as leading from life or birth to dying, in preparation for ‘rebirth’ as a monk (who wears the yellow of the transcendent centre!).

Colours in fact differ from country to country more than any other item. Relevant sets can be quoted from both India and China, and one could probably attempt to account for all local variations on that basis. Let us note only that in Java-Bali, the most Hinduistic of South East Asian regions, the colours are (from east onwards) white, red, yellow, and black or blue-black, and these reproduce the hierarchy of the Hindu varnas as prescribed in the *Nātyaśāstra*: brahmin, kshatriya, vaiśya, śudra. That is the key to the placing of the castes in the ceremonies as Mr Hobart describes it in his paper in this volume. ‘Castes’ were part of the *literary* furniture of early South East Asia, but in places other than Java and Bali they were transmogrified. (Thus a proverb of the Gayo hillmen of North-west Sumatra declares ‘Four are the castes...’, *sarak òpat*, but on inquiry this turns out to mean: the raja, his deputy, the imam, and the populace or freemen.)

Most important for our purposes are the associations of the directions with the life-stages: birth, life, dying, being dead. I believe that the clue to these can be found in the earliest Mon terms for the points of the compass (Figure 1). ‘East’ and ‘west’ are clear enough. ‘East’ is *mirmok*, etymologically ‘surfacing’, a term applicable to e.g. a fish that comes to the surface. ‘West’ is *pirlit*, ‘quenching’, which coupled with ‘east’ implies something going into water. These are surely the sun emerging from and sinking back into the river of ocean which girdles the Buddhist universe; but this is not the classic Buddhist account of the course of the sun, rather the course of the sun as *observed* by someone who sees the universe in Buddhist terms.

In the early texts ‘south’ is simply called *samlwā* ‘high’ and ‘north’ correspondingly *smar* ‘low’. By the fifteenth century *kyā* ‘wind’ had been added to these terms, making them more difficult to interpret; *smar kyā* can be understood as ‘under the wind’, but *samlwākyā* cannot ordinarily be understood as ‘above the wind’ (though obviously the term people do not understand tends to be explained by the one they can). The later terms have been cited in explication of Angkorian Khmer *karom kyal* and *le kyal*, presumed but not proven to denote ‘north’ and ‘south’; and so we come back to the Malays’ ‘land below the wind’, I shall ignore these accretions. ‘High’ for the south is an obvious name to a people who live far enough north of the Equator to observe that the sun at its zenith is in that direction. And ‘low’ for the north then implies a logical extrapolation, mapping a course for the sun which emerges at the world’s eastern rim, ascends to a high point just south of us, then dives back into the river of ocean to reach its nadir at midnight beneath the earth to our north. As I have said, there is a tension between what the sun is observed to do and the orthodox cosmology in which the sun circles round a mountain in the middle of the earth big enough to keep it invisible all through the night.

This must have led to the thought that just as the sun goes through a succession of cycles, so human beings go through a succession of life-cycles, in which one death leads to another birth. The notion is not Hindu, for Hindus place the realms of the dead in the south. But we do find the ‘Burmese’ life-stage symbolism in the burial practices of the



Ronte Kuki of the Indian border region. Normal burials take place west of the village (as they do ideally in Burma); children under one year and women dying in childbirth are buried on the east, the direction of birth; and people who die accidentally, in their prime, are buried on the south, the direction of life (Shakespeare 1912:174). (Remember that in

Eastern India at least, and all over South East Asia and the islands, to die of an accident is to die in an irregular way, a dangerous event requiring special precautions to be observed; and the most dangerous possible form of death is a death in childbirth.)

The life-stage association is a technique of projecting temporal sequence on to a spatial frame of reference—saeculum on to cosmos. As we shall see, the sophisticated notion of reality as ‘events in a space-time manifold’ is inwoven in traditional South East Asian thought.

At this point it is necessary to say something about models of the cosmos. Of these there are several, even within orthodox Buddhist tradition. The first we may term the cross-in-circle model—



like a Roman augur’s *templum*—and it is very simple. In the middle of a round flat world there is an enormous mountain, equated loosely with the Himalaya, and that holds up the heavens. Up in the mountain are four lakes, from which issue four rivers that flow down to the river of ocean round the outside of the world. Round that is a mountain wall which stops the water running off the edge. This first model is never entirely lost; but later it gets elaborated.

The second model in historical sequence we may term the quincuncial model:



Mount Meru at the centre is now isolated in unapproachable majesty. The segments of the first model have moved through 45 degrees to become separated continents. Ocean and the ring-wall remain. But our abode is now identified with the southern continent, *Jambudīpa*, the other three being by definition unknown to us. Hence a modification develops. As soon as a Buddhological current appears in Buddhism, attention begins to be focussed on the area of the Buddha’s ministry, with the result that an analogue of the first cosmos is created in *Jambudīpa* with the Bodhi tree as its new centre; a sort of encapsulation of I in II.

The third model, which we may diagram in side view somewhat as a spinning top,



belongs to orthodox Buddhism in the strictest sense. On the upper axis are located first of all the heavens, in the lower region, and above them more rarefied realms up to the realms of utter formlessness where the most rarefied spirits dwell. On the lower axis correspondingly are located the various hells, with ourselves living on the now reduced disc at the middle. The model becomes indefinitely repeated, there are an infinity of universes, *cakkavāḷa*, all over of which we merely live in one



These models are concurrent. We need have no doubt that in South East Asia, and probably anywhere else in the Buddhist world, incompatible beliefs are held simultaneously; there is no such thing as what Spiro (1967) calls a 'belief system'. It is far more 'these fragments I have shored against my ruins'; and that is already there in canonical Buddhism.

We are still some way from seeing why the points of the compass should have anything to do with the days of the week. However, if you want to represent a complicated cosmos of the third sort, one obvious way to do so is to flatten it. That is indeed done on betel boxes, by what may be no more than a convenient convention. If you give your planets positions as in the classic Buddhist model, they go in circles round Meru; but drawn at any moment in time they must be in a particular position, and so acquire a conventional position to the north-east or wherever the case may be. One can see that such a belief may be inherited; it requires an imaginative jump to see what *use* it might be.

Let us pursue the mapping of time on space. Tambiah (1970:32 sqq.) has noted how cosmology is used to articulate doctrines about the cycle of rebirth, which unreel against a time-scale that is very hard for the ordinary human intellect to comprehend. There is a short and obscure Mon inscription which furnishes a good illustration of the process (Shorto 1958). It was thus described by Duroiselle (1921: Appx. A, no. 16) in his *List of inscriptions found in Burma*: 'Record of offerings, with pious aspirations as to future rebirths and elaborate curses on those who may destroy the offerings'. The record of offerings is there; then it goes on with two sections which respectively say 'Now those who uphold this, whether men or women, may they know great bliss in the physical worlds and beyond...'; and in the second limb 'But those, men or women, who corrupt this gift, may they be born into the four wretched states...'; and in specification the text explains everything that could happen to a Buddhist in the course of rebirth. It can all be projected on to this elaborate and unrealistic cosmos because there is a place there for everybody. That arises because an earlier belief in one life with a heaven and a hell has been overlaid with a doctrine that everybody is reborn. So we get a multiplicity of heavens; but presence in heaven can only be incarnation and can only go on for so long, then one comes down and is reborn on earth again and somebody else takes over 'as Indra'. In our inscription this idea overflows into the terrestrial world. 'When they are born as kings, may they be like Asoka', and so on; but in a lower degree, 'may they be born as'—not 'like'—'the four rich men Jotika, Mendaka, Dhanāñjaya and Punna'. These were characters of the Buddha story, fabulous rich men around the lifetime of the Buddha, and they have been put into a world which is just as timeless as the world of the gods; or, to look at it another way, a timelessness second only to nirvana has entered the Buddha's secular existence by infection of the utter timelessness of his transcendent one. I find this perfectly solidary with the attitude towards relics, the main function of which is to continue into our world the physical and worshippable presence of a being who has gone into an utterly timeless and absent one.

One cannot discuss this topic without some allusion to the role of the microcosm in Burmese politics, or political ritual, through the centuries (cf. Shorto 1963; 1967). The capitals of the Burmese kings had a conventional form which was designed to reproduce, schematically, that of the cosmos as it was understood. That entailed locating the axis of the world in the middle of Burma; the first of the epigraphs to this lecture indicates that

that is less absurd than it may seem to us, but in any case the Burmese were doing no more than take a leaf out of the book of the Chinese, the biggest power on their borders. However, did that not disappear with the disappearance of the kings? Hardly, because the creation of a microcosm governs also the shape and design of the ordinary village pagoda; its boundary wall is precisely called a *cakkawā*, i.e. it is the ring of mountains which surrounds the world.

The microcosm, apart from proclaiming a comforting view of where the centre of the world is, helps to create the sort of harmony that will make the world go on. The same intention is present in the Hindu doctrine of dharma, which was certainly being propagated by the kings of Burma at the beginning of the 12th century. It is also present in the making of a micro-microcosm which draws the kingdom into the capital (as in the cult of the 37 nats; Jayavarman VII's Bayon; and numerous organizations of groups that recognise clans), as a sympathetic device supplementing more 'practical' measures for keeping the provinces under control.

Some clues are to be found outside South East Asia. Van Ossenbruggen, in enforced idleness during the 1914–18 war, read Durkheim and Mauss and a good deal else and was struck by parallels between 'primitive' classificatory systems and those of the Javanese (van Ossenbruggen 1917). Thus to the Javanese 'one' means: masculinity, femininity, sun, earth, moon, thunder; human being, nose, navel, heart; and generally things which can be regarded as self-contained. 'Two' means: shoulders, soles of the feet, ears, arms, etc.; twins, double, equilibrium, etc.; 'three': fire, amphibians, tripartite artefacts; 'four': water and all kinds of fluids; 'five': wind, strength, giants, the hurricane, the five **Paṇḍava** brothers, the five powers; and so on. Van Ossenbruggen noticed that while Australians allot all natural species and objects to clans, many Amerindians allot them to directions. For the Zuñi, for instance each direction outside the centre has its colour, and the centre has all six; and in the pueblo the clans are correspondingly distributed in seven segments.

The link between clans and directions lies in the living arrangements of partly migrant Indians. The only Iroquois longhouse now is the council chamber and ritual centre, though it is asserted that once the Iroquois lived in longhouses. The longhouse is also a model for, or a microcosm of, the territories of the Six Nations of the Iroquois. The Senecas kept the western door and the Mohawks kept the eastern one. (In Negri Sembilan, the ruler is elected by the chiefs of four subordinate territories, who are summoned by chiefs from four intermediate ones called 'verandahs', *serambi*. Again, there is a saying in *Rājādhirāj* that Ava is the 'verandah' of Pegu.)

The paradox that emerges from van Ossenbruggen's work is that so close a structural similarity should exist between, on the one hand, the taxonomy of a nomad culture-cluster, and on the other that of a sessile one. It is easy enough to see the value of a microcosm to a nomad or slash-and-burn culture. Figure 2 reproduces an arrangement found in Numbers 2; the camp of the Israelites in the desert, with the tabernacle in the middle and the Levites guarding it. The figures refer to the order of march: each day the eastern camp moved off first and the others in sequence, but the tabernacle still in the middle (like the Burmese king riding surrounded by the four regiments of his guard), and at night they made camp again in that order.

The Bororo are not nomads, but they move their villages frequently. They have eight clans, each of which is subdivided, and there is at least a notional arrangement of how the

clans should be laid out in the village, and two ritual experts whose job it is to supervise the allocation of the clans to their sectors when a new village is set up. Lévi-Strauss has observed that if they are prevented from settling in the proper order and implementing the village model (even though all villages do not correspond exactly), radical social disorganisation results. Furthermore, the Bororo allot all natural species to clans in just the way we have noted (Crocker 1969).

How would this sort of thing be useful to people who were not on the move? I will quote an instance from Celebes, where the petty rajas have circular meeting-houses which form the lower storey of their granaries. The radial ceiling-beams of these meeting-houses mark the station of everyone who should appear at council, so that absentees can immediately be noticed and identified. (And this works for the Gilbertese *maneaba*.) Looking into cosmic behaviour in South East Asia, one notes very soon that it affects the seating arrangements at the courts. Thus in the Burmese court under the last dynasty, the Konbaung, there were three audiences a day, at the first of which attendance was compulsory for the whole court. They sat according to a prearranged order and, again, absences were at once detectable. (Akbar's *Dīwān-i-Khāsat* Fatehpur Sikri is a calendar building, of an eclectic sort which reflects Akbar's encouragement of all religions. Its ceiling exactly reproduces the framework of an Indian, or Burmese, horoscope diagram. The Emperor was seated on a lotus mountain in the middle, while his four ministers took station at the corners—as on the four continents of a type-II cosmos—each with his own gangway to come up and pass papers to the Emperor.)

I conclude with a piece of speculative structuralism by way of a diversion, concerning the 'meaning' of south-east. This is a particularly significant direction. First, in Burmese houses the house spirit resides in the south-east post. In those Mon houses occupied by the head of what is called 'clan' in the literature, but is rather (part of) a patrilineage still practising common cult, the lineage spirit (*kalok*) resides in the same post. (The Burmese and Mon cults have a good deal of superficial similarity, and uninquisitive observers can easily miss the differences between them.) Secondly, all Burmese capitals until relatively late times have had a sacred mountain to the south-east of them.

In the Mon case, the lineage spirit is an ancestor who has been enlisted into the role; a lineage can be split and a new one set up, and then another ancestor is enlisted—there is no shortage of ancestor spirits. The Burmese, however, identify the house spirit with the chief of the 37 nats, the Mahagiri Nat of Mount Popa. But when we look into that we find that the Mahagiri Nat was in fact the ancestral spirit of the kings of Pagan. So we are back with the ancestor spirit; but the Burmans all acknowledge the ancestor spirit of the Pagan dynasty, whereas the Mons have one for each family line. There is an old set of names for house posts (Figure 3) which suggests that though we now pay attention to the spirit of just one post, the posts formerly housed a whole collection, a court in effect, of spirits. And when Kyanzittha built his palace at Pagan in 1102 there were 37 significant posts in it, to which the 37 territorial nats of the Burmese realm were severally inducted; another micro-microcosm.

Why the south-east post? Dobby (1950:35) gives a rational explanation (which I do not throw at geographers as a reproof). The monsoon 'is so important for mainland farmers that they have come to look on southerly and easterly aspects from which the rain comes as auspicious and locate their houses accordingly'. My observation on that is that our monsoon comes from the south-west.

A structuralist explanation might follow the lines set out in Figure 4. It begins with the separation of orientation symbolism into two superimposed axes, which assert an opposition of states: life/death, and one of processes: birth/dying. (The semantic bivalence of 'death' is common to English and certainly many South East Asian languages.)

This binary analysis has the advantage of enabling us to assign values not merely to four cardinal points but to any location, by quarters, as in (b). We arrive at 'dead death', 'dead birth', 'live death', and 'live birth'. 'Live birth' is straightforward to interpret, and 'dead birth' we can equate with stillbirth; with which I propose we should associate the supremely dangerous death in giving birth. What interpretation is to be given to 'live death' and 'dead death'? For 'live death' survival as a ghost makes sense in a Buddhist context or otherwise; it is no paradox for a Buddhist, though it may be for us, that 'dead death' should mean rebirth.

Inserting these we arrive at (c). We can now add the auspicious and inauspicious axes running in the directions shown. The auspicious course from south-east runs from 'live' or auspicious birth to auspicious death: rebirth. As for the inauspicious axis from north-east to south-west, death in child-birth is believed to lead with peculiar certitude to continuation as a malevolent ghost; as in the whole Indonesian complex of the *pontianak*, which works under a different name for virtually all mainland countries.

We now see that south-east is not only the most auspicious direction, but is particularly appropriate for a holy mountain where the royal ancestor was born, and for its micro-reflex in every house in the south-east post.

To allow rationalism the last word: that location of the holy mountain would have made perfect sense to any Indians who were around in the first millennium A.D., since in puranic tradition the lokapāla of the south-east is Agni—hence the name *āgneya*, Mon 'agnay, for south-east—and among other things Agni is head of the ancestors.

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