

the broader context of the ideological conflict between that political ideology and its conservative opponents. In this analysis Rizal's character remains unblemished, although he emerges as more a helpless victim than some of his admirers may wish to accept.

Despite the book's strengths, the author would have been better served by a stronger editorial hand. Sarkisyanz's occasionally awkward sentence construction made some passages nearly impossible to interpret and his unique footnoting style was difficult to follow. As well, a stronger editor would have cut substantial portions of the book's later chapters which detract from the text's central thesis and seem to offer little more than hero worship. These faults aside, Manuel Sarkisyanz's investigation of Jose Rizal's encounter with Spanish republicanism will be useful for Philippine scholars for some time to come.

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Mantras Between Fire and Water: Reflections on a Balinese Rite. By FRITS STAAL.
Amsterdam: Monograph No. 166, Koninklijke Nederlandse van
Wetenschappen, 1995. viii, 112 pp.

In the main part of this short book Frits Staal addresses the question of how to understand the daily rite of the Balinese *pedanda* priest. It is not entirely clear why he has chosen to focus on this particular issue because he does not explicitly state the theoretical context in which he is writing. From what may be gleaned from the text, however, he is concerned with the extent to which Balinese ritual is "Indianised," and it is often said that the *pedanda*'s daily preparation of holy water is the most Indianized aspect of Balinese ritual. The problem is tackled in the context of how the contemporary Balinese rite is related to its pre-Hindu precursor.

Three initial chapters discuss the possibility of analyzing the rite by reference to history, texts, society, and religion, but a negative conclusion is drawn in each case, basically because all these concepts are ethnocentric. Moreover, studying a rite through its texts does not provide much insight because the proliferation of texts providing variant readings "poses a serious obstacle to an adequate understanding of the subject matter itself" (p. 8). The concept of religion is also not very helpful because "Balinese ritual is a classic case of a ritual without religion" (p. 31). While "society" is also deemed unhelpful, I found it difficult to locate the argument where this is substantiated.

The positive gain from this discussion, according to Staal, is the significance of three Asian concepts: *mantra*, *agama*, and *tantra*. The principal difference between brahmanical ritual in Bali today and what it was in ancient times is that Indic mantras have supplanted the songs and sounds that once accompanied wholly indigenous rituals. It is not so much that Balinese ritual has been "Indianised," then, but that rituals from the different regions both possessing the same basic structure, have "converged" by the common use of *mantras*. Tantrism places emphasis on the combination of ritual and meditation, with the mantra being important to both. Although Staal asserts that Balinese ritual is much influenced by tantric ideas and practices, there is very little documentation of this fact. The argument for the relevance of *agama* is even more obscure.

The book is supplemented with two appendices which comprise half the available space. The first consists of a brief introduction by Dick van der Meij to thirty pages of drawings of *mudras*, the very complicated hand gestures used by the priest in his ritual. They were copied from a manuscript belonging to Ida Pedanda Gde Manuaba. No particular theoretical justification for including these drawings is given. The second appendix addresses the question: "Were the brahmins of Southeast Asia Brahmins?" Here Staal discusses a variety of aspects concerning the caste systems of India and Bali and the possible motives and mechanics of movement of brahmins. He concludes that Balinese brahmins are rather different from their Indian counterparts in a variety of ways and that they were in effect "Tantrics of various affiliations and persuasions" (p. 101).

As an anthropologist I find little of interest in this frustrating but lively book, because Staal is asking questions which anthropologists gave up long ago. Moreover, he admits very candidly that apart from Sanskrit he knows none of the relevant languages (old-Javanese, Balinese, and Bahasa Indonesia), so that the contextualization of such ritual in the general cultural life of the island, the *sine qua non* of anthropology, is simply not possible. Whether his argument is of interest to historians and philosophers of Asian religion is a matter about which I am not competent to write.

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