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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *Sug, the Trickster Who Fooled the Monk* by Viggo Brun

Review by: Donald K. Swearer

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Studies in Javanese Morphology. By E. M. UHLENBECK. (Koninklijk Instituut voor Taal-, Land-en Volkenkunde. Translation Series 19). Pp. vi + 361. The Hague: MARTINUS NIJHOFF. 1978. Dfl. 82.50.

Studies in Javanese Morphology is a collection in English of sixteen of the author's articles which appeared over a period of twenty years (1950-1969) in a variety of periodicals, the one exception being his inaugural address of 1950. Six of the articles (including the inaugural address) have been translated from Dutch and one from German. In the Introduction Uhlenbeck says that "the language described in these studies is the non-dialectal standard form of Javanese as spoken in Central Java, between 1930 and 1950, and used in written form in the publications of the . . . Bureau for Popular Literature (p. 8)." He goes on to point out that as a consequence the Javanese he describes in these papers cannot be considered identical with the present-day Javanese language.

In 1941, several years after Uhlenbeck arrived in Batavia (now Jakarta), he published at the Bureau for Popular Literature (Volkslektuur) a thin volume on the grammar of Javanese which was intended for use in the Javanese teacher training colleges and secondary schools in central Java. The onset of the Japanese occupation some months later very likely precluded its use to any great extent. About such a textbook Uhlenbeck says in the foreword to his grammar of 1941: "The study of Javanese has still not, from the grammatical point of view, progressed far, in any case not far enough by this time to issue a simple textbook. Too many problems still lie in the way of those who are occupied with this subject. The appearance of an elementary booklet is, scientifically speaking, premature."

Now, forty years later, we still await a thorough grammar of modern Javanese based on modern linguistic principles.

As the leading authority on modern Javanese, this compilation of his writings is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of this important language which is spoken by many millions on the island of Java and possesses a long literary history. In these articles he has done much of the spadework necessary to a more thorough investigation of many aspects of the language and thus opens vistas for other scholars in a field whose number, it appears, is on the increase. While it may well be that not all students of Javanese will agree with Uhlenbeck's analysis of various aspects of Javanese, they will appreciate the pioneering research he has carried out.

Although the articles do not appear in chronological sequence, if one proceeds from one article to the next in chronological order, one will undoubtedly be able to trace the development of Uhlenbeck's thinking on linguistic theory, as well as note the inclusion of new data. They are arranged in roughly this order: Structure of the Javanese Morpheme;

Study of Word-Classes in Javanese; Word Formation and Word Duplication in Javanese, followed by five articles on aspects of the Javanese verb. After two articles on the Javanese numeral and pronominal systems, four fall within the realm of sociolinguistics: the Krama-Ngoko opposition, the Use of Respect Forms in Javanese, Javanese Kinship and Focus of Respect, and Systematic Features of Javanese Personal Names. A lexicological article on the Javanese base *rasa* completes the corpus. The volume as a whole is more descriptive than theoretical and the first article in the volume deals, in summary form, with the phonology and transcription the author will use throughout his book.

It is the reviewer's earnest hope that Uhlenbeck will find the time to provide us with a grammar of modern Javanese. Probably no one is better equipped to undertake this project.

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Sug, the Trickster Who Fooled the Monk. Translated by VIGGO BRUN. Pp. 103 + vocabulary. (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, No. 27.) Lund/London: STUDENT-LITTERATUR/CURZON PRESS. 1976. £3.50.

The Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies is to be commended for making available in English translation a northern Thai folk tale of the Trickster genre. Portions of the tale have appeared in English translation in R. S. Le May, *Legends and Folklore of Northern Thailand* and his *Siamese Tales Old and New*. However, with Viggo Brun's fine translation we now have the entire cycle of Sug stories rendered from oral recitations recorded in 1971 and 1974 in the northern Thai village of Ban Myang Nga located between the cities of Chiang Mai and Lamphun.

It is to be regretted that the SIAS monograph series has not yet achieved a wide distribution in this country, for the wily Sug deserves to be read by every serious folklorist and student of religion in the country so that they may carry on their research with a sufficient degree of humor. Sug is one of the most delightfully funny tricksters in world folk literature, and deserves wide recognition as a trickster hero with the power to entertain not only his rural listeners in northern Thailand, but western scholars who read about his exploits.

Brun's translation, his MA thesis at the University of Copenhagen, would have been less effective if based on a manuscript rather than an actual recitation. He has preserved the story teller's asides and indicated audience response as well. This method helps make the tale come alive so that the teller, Po Liang Tan, is appreciated by the reader almost as much as Sug, himself. The reader, therefore, learns both from the "text" and the "context," and comes away from the tale

with a particular appreciation for northern Thai humor as embodied in the story, its telling, and the audience response.

Sug first appears in the cycle as a *dek wat*, a young attendant to a monk who makes the Venerable a complete buffon, tricking him into eating dog excrement, drinking hot chili water, going out on his morning alms rounds at 2:00 A.M., and finally losing his head—literally! Sug then takes the monk's place as abbot and through devious means builds up a reputation as a soothsayer with magic powers. In one episode in the abbot cycle Sug is asked to aid the king's wife who after three days of labor still cannot give birth to her child. Sug, not knowing what he will do, enters the queen's chambers and chants a mantram he made up on the way: "round pillows and musk melons." The queen, hearing the "birth spell" suppresses a laugh: "She wanted to laugh (at the abbot's spell) but was afraid the people would scold her. It was just as if she pressed. The child shot out. [laughter]." Sug's escapades continue until he returns to lay life, marries and becomes a farmer. In this part of the cycle we find the better known episodes beginning with the "Daring Bear Fighter," and ending with Sug being given half the kingdom to rule.

The reader who is familiar with the traditional deference given to secular and religious authority in Thailand may be surprised by the tale. Sug fools ordinary folk, of course, but monk and king are the primary targets. There is a difference between them, however. Sug knowingly fools the monk who acts the buffoon, while his ability to deceive royalty and benefit from it results from a combination of chance, his own wit, and royal favor. Does this mean that Thai villagers have disdain for Buddhist monks? I think not. Rather, it reflects the ability to poke fun at the familiar which, on the one hand, represents an ideal, but, on the other, does not fully embody it. Hence, the ambiguity in the Sangha is reflected in the attitude and the behavior of the laity toward it.

Sug, the Trickster Who Fooled the Monk is a bilingual text with transliterated northern Thai and the English translation on facing pages. It also has a complete vocabulary, making the volume a helpful resource for the study of northern Thai, especially when used in conjunction with Richard Davis, *A Northern Thai Reader*. It is encouraging that northern Thai or Thai Yüan is beginning to receive more study in the West as well as in Thailand. It is a rich language with a not insignificant literary tradition which has been woefully neglected. Students of the Shan, northern Thai, and Lao should encourage the Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies to publish literary northern Thai as well as this delightful tale from the folk tradition.

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A Village Ordination. By PHRA MAHA THONGYOY WORAKAWINTO. Translated by THOMAS SILCOCK. Pp. xxiii + 93. (Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies, No. 25). London: CURZON PRESS, LTD. 1976. £3.50.

Thomas Silcock is a man of many talents—a social scientist (economist) by profession, a student of Thai and Southeast Asian history and culture, a published poet, and a dedicated Quaker. In *A Village Ordination* he has undertaken an exceptionally difficult and demanding task: the translation of a long Thai poem written by Phra Maha Thongyoy Worakawinto, abbot of Mahatat monastery outside of Rattaburi, central Thailand.¹ Such an undertaking confronts three major problems: Thai poetry is difficult to render into an effective English translation, and is done, ideally, I suppose, by a bilingual Thai poet; it calls for intimate knowledge of rural customs and traditions which Westerners usually come by only if they are acute ethnographers; and, since the subject matter is a Buddhist ordination, firsthand knowledge of Thai Buddhism and its institutional life is almost a prerequisite. Of course to be able to meet all of these conditions would be unrealistically demanding. We are fortunate that Professor Silcock did not take such considerations so seriously to heart that he refused to accept Dr. Adul Wichiencharoen's, Rector of Silapakorn University, and the J. F. Kennedy Foundation's invitation to translate this poem. As a result he has provided the English reader with a rich cultural and religious resource; a sensitive and insightful look into the total meaning of a rural Buddhist ordination celebration.

The poem relates the story of Pian, sent to the local monastery at age seven by his father and mother to be educated and properly socialized. It paints a marvelous picture of the strict and demanding abbot, Boon, and of the daily activities of the temple boys (*dek wat*): helping during *piṅḍapāta* rounds, morning lessons, childish pranks during the abbot's afternoon nap, and being schooled in local crafts. At age 14 Pian returns to lay life to help his parents farm, but after six years, concerned for his moral well-being and their own future merit (*puññā*), they encourage him to be ordained a monk. The poem then develops a detailed description of the ordination preparations; the elaborate reenactment of Prince Siddhattha's renunciation; visiting the village spirit shrine; both normative and contextual details of the ordination ceremony itself; Nāi Suan's spirit calling sermon on merit, virtue and the monastic life; the ordination as a rite of community celebration and social reinforcement; Abbot Boon's sermon on training and meditation; receiving ritual instructions from the preceptors; and receiving the monastic precepts. The last section of the poem paints a poignant picture of the activities, joys, and frustrations of a new monk's life.