

BOOK REVIEWS

Walker, Anthony R., ed., 2009, *Pika-Pika: The Flashing Firefly. Essays to Honour and Celebrate the Life of Pauline Hetland Walker (1938-2005)*. New Delhi: Hindustan Publishing Corporation, xv+489 pp. ISBN 81-7075-087-3.

The title of this volume, *Pika-Pika*, is a Japanese onomatopoeic expression for the flashing of fireflies, an image, the editor tells us, that uniquely captures the special quality of the life that the book honors. This life was that of the editor's wife, Pauline, who died in Brunei Darussalam in March 2005, after a long battle with cancer.

In addition to the editor's Introduction, the book comprises twenty essays written by academic colleagues and friends of the Walkers, most of them anthropologists. Individual essays are topically diverse, ranging from an exploration of the biographical roots of an American jazz quartet to a quest for the origins of the El Dorado myth among the priest-healers of an Amerindian society of northeastern Colombia. Asia, however, looms large, especially Southeast Asia. This is understandable, as, for more than 20 years, the Walkers made Southeast Asia their home. Here, Anthony taught anthropology, first in Penang at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (1972-78), then at the National University of Singapore (1979-86), and, finally, from 1999 to the present, at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. In addition, Anthony carried out fieldwork in northern Thailand and Yunnan and, among fellow anthropologists, is best known for his meticulous ethnography of the ritual life of the Lahu, a Tibeto-Burman-speaking people of the mountainous borderlands of mainland Southeast Asia and southwestern China.

Three essays in the collection concern this same general region, one deals with Singapore and two with Indonesia. Of more direct relevance, two essays concern Borneo. In the first, "Skilled craftsmanship from Interior Borneo: Badeng traditional crafts and their future" (pp. 219-237), Tan Chee-Beng, a former student of Anthony, now Professor of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, examines the material culture of a Kenyah Badeng community that formerly lived at Long Geng in the Belaga District of Sarawak. Disclaiming any special artistic gifts himself, Tan focuses, instead, on the comparatively humble artifacts of everyday life—for example, mats, sunhats, baskets, and baby-carriers—and the technical skills and knowledge that go into fashioning them. This he does in an illuminating way by describing how these handcrafted objects are made and put to use by longhouse people in the course of an average day. Among the more notable of these objects are so-called 'dog horns' (*cong asu*), simple but functionally-ingenuous wooden collars placed around the necks of longhouse dogs to prevent them from causing mischief by inserting their heads into small openings. He also describes musical instruments and toys. In the early 1990s, the Long Geng community, Tan tells us, was divided between Roman Catholic and evangelical Protestant (SIB) longhouses. With the Keluan River flowing between them, these two congregations occupied opposite river banks. Both congregations introduced guitar bands in their church services and by the 1990s, the ubiquitous guitar has largely replaced more traditional Kenyah musical instruments. As a favorite toy, Badeng children made at the time small blowpipes of bamboo which they used to shoot paper "bullets" at one another. Teams of boys from the two rival Christian groups, using these blowpipes, waged frequent warfare on one

another in what Tan describes as "a relatively benign display of sectarian conflict" (p. 233).

When he began fieldwork in 1992, the Long Geng community, despite its sectarian divide, was firmly united in protest against the growing encroachment of logging and the government-proposed construction of the now infamous Bakun Hydroelectric Dam. Protests, however, proved to be of no avail and in November 1998, the former Long Geng community was removed and its members resettled by the state government near the Koyan River in the present-day Bintulu District. Here, living on logged-over land directly accessible by road to the coastal city of Bintulu, the community was suddenly, Tan writes, "exposed to the full force of the market economy." With few remaining forest resources and farmland scarce and difficult to reach, community members were no longer able to satisfy their own material needs. Local skills and knowledge were lost, as people, now relying on government monetary compensation and remitted wages, found it easier to purchase household necessities in town, rather than produce them for themselves at home in the ways they had been accustomed to in the past.

In the second essay, "The interpretation of sickness and the conduct of healing in traditional Brunei Dusun society" (pp. 335-65), Pudarno Binchin, himself a Brunei Dusun and currently Curator of Ethnography with the Brunei Museums Department, describes what he calls "traditional Dusun ideas about sickness and its alleviation" that, by and large, he tells us, are now known only to "Dusun old folk" (p. 338). He begins his account with a discussion of *linguh*, which he glosses as 'soul' or 'metaphysical essence,' describing the various forms this 'essence' takes and how it relates more generally to Dusun ideas of sickness and well-being. He then goes on to describe the role of 'spirits' (*limatai*) and 'deities' (*derato*) and the various categories of illness that are distinguished and explanations of their causes, ending with an account of traditional healers.

A subtext of both these essays is a story of rapid cultural loss. For the Brunei Dusun, Pudarno illustrates this, near the end of his essay, with the example of Kilat bin Kilah, the key informant of Voeks and Samban's study of Brunei Dusun medicinal plants ("Healing flora of the Brunei Dusun," *BRB* 32 (2001): 178-95), who, since the study's publication, has passed away, thus taking with him, as one of the last Dusun herbalists, much of his knowledge of plants and their preparation for healing use (p. 363).

While Pauline frequently joined Anthony in the field and helped edit all of his published writings, it was in Singapore that she found her own voice as a writer, particularly as a dance and theater critic. Later, she returned to writing in the late 90s, but, unfortunately, by the time the couple moved to Brunei, failing health prevented her from pursuing once again an active freelance writing career. She did, however, continue to edit and, in addition to Anthony's publications, served as literary editor for B.A. Hussainmiya's *The Brunei Constitution of 1959: An Inside History*.

For some readers of the *BRB*, Anthony is likely to be best known as the editor of *Contributions to Southeast Asian Ethnography*, an occasional publication which, over the course of its 12 issues, published a considerable number of papers on Borneo. *Pika-Pika* follows the same format as *Contributions*. Hence, each individual essay is abundantly illustrated with maps, drawings and photographs.

This reviewer was a teaching colleague of Anthony in the 1970s and 80s, both

in Malaysia and Singapore, and is privileged to have been a friend of the Walkers ever since. Between them, Pauline and Anthony formed a remarkable partnership. Pauline, ever optimistic and generous of spirit, helped create and sustain, wherever the Walkers made their home, a lively, eclectic fellowship of friends, students, and fellow scholars to which this wide-ranging, highly readable volume bears fitting witness.

(Clifford Sather, University of Helsinki)