



## Book Reviews

Anthony R. Walker (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 pages. ISBN: 81-7075-087-3.

The title, *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 honours. 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 20 essays written by academic colleagues and friends of the Walkers. Most, but not all, are anthropologists. The essays themselves are arranged under seven headings reflecting Pauline's primary interests in life: (1) music, song, and dance; (2) literature, poetry, and the stage; (3) pottery; (4) handicrafts; (5) women's issues; (6) traditional healing; and (7) religious diversity, myth and ritual. Together, the collection is 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 north-eastern Colombia. Asia, however, looms large, particularly South, and most especially, Southeast Asia. This is understandable, as, for more than 20 years, the Walkers made Southeast Asia their home. Here, Anthony taught, first, in Penang at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (1972–1978), then at the National University of Singapore (1979–1986), and, finally, from 1999 to the present, at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam. In addition, Anthony carried out fieldwork in India, northern Thailand and Yunnan Province in China. Among fellow anthropologists, Anthony 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 south-western China.

Three essays in the collection deal with this same general region. One, a poignant account by Elizabeth Hinton, recalls Pwo Karen music-making 40 years later through memories evoked by rereading field notes and listening to all-but-forgotten tape recordings. A second essay, by the linguist James Matisoff, examines syntactic parallelism in Lahu religious poetry, while a third by Paul Cohen, "In the footsteps of the Buddha," offers a fascinating account of the continuing relevance of pilgrimage narratives in Theravada Buddhism and the role of travelling monks in bringing about a present-day Buddhist renaissance among the Tai-speaking peoples of the upper Mekong and south-western Yunnan.

In the longest essay in the collection, Tarun Chhabra describes the traditional costumes of the Toda of South India, among whom Anthony did his first fieldwork, including the famous embroidered cloaks worn by Toda adults, both men and women, and the embroidery motifs that embellish them. In the section on women's issues, Richard Moore offers an insightful analysis of the changing nature of a women's fertility association devoted to

the worship of the Mountain Goddess (*Yama no Kami*) in a rural village in the Tohoku region of northern Japan, while Kim Myung-hye describes the appalling treatment of Korean women forced into sexual slavery during World War II and recent efforts to bring to light and make amends for the suffering they experienced. In a much briefer essay, Deborah Akers describes the curing sessions of faith-healers in village Nepal, stressing how these sessions work to enlist community support on the patient's behalf.

Returning to Southeast Asia, two essays deal with Borneo. The first by 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 community of Badeng, a Kenyah-related people formerly living in the Belaga District of Sarawak, but now removed to another district as the result of a major Malaysian hydro-electric project. This he does in an illuminating way by describing how, in the course of an average day, handcrafted implements and domestic furnishings were formerly put to use by longhouse people. In the second essay, Pudarno Binchin describes traditional Brunei Dusun methods of healing. A subtext of both these essays is a story of rapid cultural loss, intensified in the Badeng case by logging, deforestation and resettlement. Two essays deal with Indonesia. In the first, the late Roger Long reflects on 40 years of scholarly research to trace the impact of technical innovations — electric lighting, sound amplification, radio, television, and commercial recording — on the forever-changing art of Javanese shadow puppetry. In the second paper, Gregory Forth follows up his recent book, *Nage Birds*, to comparatively explore two seemingly pan-Austronesian themes in Indonesian bird myths, one a transformation of neglected children into birds, the other a replacement of absent parents by a bird of prey, acting usually as a father or grandfather.

While Pauline frequently accompanied Anthony in the field and, as he tells us in his Introduction, edited all of his published writings, it was in Singapore that Pauline found her own voice as a writer, particularly as a dance and theatre critic. Writing profusely throughout the 1980s, her special forte was Asian dance, including its diverse cultural roots, particularly those of Indian dance, and modern fusion styles incorporating different performance traditions. In this connection, for Singapore readers, Vineeta Sinha's essay, "A felicitous meeting: Pauline Walker and the Singapore Indian Fine Arts Society," is likely to be of special interest. Rightly noting that Pauline's prolific writings of the time not only gave encouragement to artists by bringing their work to critical notice, but, from the perspective of the present, these writings now constitute an invaluable record documenting the development of the Singapore art scene during a significant period of its history in which, as the author describes it, 'the Republic was moving, with ever increasing rapidity, towards becoming a major multi-cultural centre for the performing arts' (p. 80).

Finally, the essays, it is worth noting, are enhanced by abundant illustrations, maps, drawings and photos, while the volume's design, including its handsome cover, was the work of the Walker's son, Michael, an accomplished artist in his own right.

This reviewer was a colleague of Anthony, both in Penang 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 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.

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