

## Review

Roger L. JANELLI and Dawnhee Yim JANELLI, *Ancestor worship and Korean society*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982. xiv + 228 pp. Includes bibliography, character list, and index. US \$25.00. ISBN 0-8047-1135-6.

Only a small portion of the fast growing number of studies on East Asian religions attempts to get away from texts or formal aspects of organized religion and reach out to the people practicing a religion. Such an approach presupposes an intimate knowledge both of the language and of the daily practices of a people. The Janellis are in an enviable position to engage in such a study because, in addition to their acquaintance with Korean scholars and scholarship, they can draw on their own long experience of repeated fieldwork. In this study they make a pervading aspect of East Asian religion, ancestor worship, accessible beyond the relatively small circle of Korean specialists. Their book is not only important for the detail with which it describes Korean ancestor worship in action, it is surely remarkable for raising a number of issues that will need to be considered in other areas as well.

One of the main concerns of this study is to account for the fact that affliction by ancestors is only very reluctantly acknowledged, although hints pointing to its existence are not lacking. In order to do so the Janellis turn their and our attention to the role of women in this male oriented society. The authors show how religious ideas concerning the ancestors are directly related to the social organization of the village, namely its agnatic lineages. In spite of a unified ideology there are variations and incongruities of belief within this same group. To explain this they analyze the heterogeneous social experiences of men and women, and it becomes evident that these experiences can be understood as being responsible for the diverging

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attitudes held by men and women.

Childhood experiences are crucial for these attitudes. Whereas boys are raised in an atmosphere of dependence on the parent and of loving indulgence, girls are made to feel that they are of lesser value to the lineage and therefore cannot depend so much on the parent. So they are led to become more independent from an early period. These two kinds of parent-child relationships form two quite different images of the ancestors. On the one hand, there is the passive and dependent ancestor of the official rituals, an inversion of the parent-child relationship in life. For four generations after death the ancestors depend on the offerings given them by their offspring in domestic rituals. Later on this dependency disappears and the ancestors become but a passive point of reference for the lineage in the periodic lineage rituals. This relationship stresses benevolent indulgence to the extent that an ancestor afflicting his offspring is practically inconceivable.

But the Janellis show that ancestors can be active and potentially hostile as well. They argue that this side of the coin seems to be related to the more ambiguous experiences of women in a male dominated lineage ideology. This is further underlined by the fact that shamans take charge of this aspect of ancestors. Shamans, however, are mainly supported by women, and are socially disapproved by the male centered society. Thus, the indisputable merit of this book is that it draws attention to these two different sides of ancestor worship. Applied to other areas, as e.g. Japan, I am convinced that this would yield new insights in the analysis of groups that often are taken to be uniform mainly because they affirm themselves to be uniform.

In this respect a remark made in passing may have much more weight. The Janellis report that information concerning cases of affliction by ancestors could be solicited only from third persons. It seems to me that this, combined with the fact that the shaman's utterings during a seance about the state or feeling of an ancestor are vague and left to the appropriate interpretation of the

listeners, further stresses the ambiguous side of the official ideology.

The Janellis certainly provide a new vantage point from which to rethink an old topic. However, I doubt whether we are already in a position to attempt fruitful comparisons with other areas in East Asia as they attempt to do at the end of this book. There are two principal reasons for this. First, in spite of brilliant studies on ancestors in China and Japan, there remains the problem of how far they, being studies of restricted areas, can be seen as representing a whole culture. Is it not necessary to pay more attention first to significant variations before we can attempt a better comparison? Confucianism and its manifold idiosyncratic interpretations and claimed applications would be only one of the points in question.

Second, I doubt whether a *yanban* village can be taken as representative of Korean villages and their social organization as such. As instances of buying into or falsifying lineage records seem to suggest, the ideology of a strong agnatic lineage certainly has its advantages. But does this mean that everywhere more or less similar attempts at creating and upholding such a strong lineage consciousness are made or have to be expected? And if not, how do other forms of social organization affect the concept and worship of ancestors in Korea?

Although the Janellis make it quite clear that their study is first of all the study of a single kin group, questions as those just mentioned arise because the title of the book suggests much more. The question of whether that claim is justified or not must be left to the future, but this book is a lucid and most significant step towards the answer. It merits wide readership and reflection.

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