Power and Difference: Gender in Island Southeast Asia
Jane Monnig Atkinson and Shelly Errington, eds.
Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990. xiv + 498 pp. $49.50 (cloth), $14.95 (paper)

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This book examines the cultural construction of gender in Southeast Asia, a region often viewed as lacking a ritual or economic gender differentiation. As an exercise in "interpretive" anthropology it purports to explore ideological forces, but actually takes forays into materialistic and sociological explanations as well. Southeast Asia is divided into two contrasting regions: the Centrist Archipelago (the Philippines, Borneo, Southern Malay Peninsula, Sulawesi and Java) and the Exchange Archipelago (Sumatra, Lesser Sundas, Sumba, Seram and Moluku). In Boon's pivotal article, the former is characterized by optionally endogamous "houses" competing for hierarchical position, whereas the latter has exogamous, exchange-oriented lineages with established wife-giver and wife-taker status differentials. Gender in the first case is submerged in stratification, while in the second case (Exchange Archipelago) it is an elaborated cultural symbol. Unfortunately, this kin-based contrast remains relatively undeveloped in the articles. Errington's Introduction suggests other potentially unifying concepts however; these have also received insufficient attention. For example, power is not defined or used consistently in many of the contributions, nor is Barthes' mythological approach utilized in an analytical fashion to "demystify" cultural concepts of gender. Nevertheless, the articles are stimulating and the book is an important contribution to gender research.

The first half of the collection is process-oriented and the authors share the conclusion that, despite the apparent lack of gender differentiation, women are devalued in social process. Atkinson examines differential access to spiritual potency among the Wana of Sulawesi to explain the real male-female difference in political participation. Tsing examines the interaction between gender image and participation in dispute settlement among the Meratus of South Kalimantan. Keeler investigates language use in hierarchical Javanese society to demonstrate female lack of prestige/potency. Hatley examines the stereotypical gender content of Javanese dramatic performance and how negative female stereotypes are tied to ambivalence about social change. Kuipers compares male and female ritual speech use among the Weyéwa of Sumba to show the source of male authority in agnatic lineages and to contrast it with female efficacious emotionalism. In contrast, the latter half of the volume is comprised of more traditional approaches. In an investigation of menstrual taboos in Huaulu (Seram), Valeri rejects Strathern's critique of Ortner's nature/culture dichotomy on the basis of her failure to realize the different view of nature held by "people without a scientific culture [with] the notion of natural law" (p. 266). Hoskins also follows Ortner in an analysis of Kodi (West Sumba) double descent, but notes that in Kodi cosmology gender is a metaphor for *both* mutuality and asymmetry. Rogers shows how Batak (Sumatra) gender concepts operate both in the centre/periphery relations with the wider nation state and in those of the lineage-based exchange system. Female stereotypes reflect tensions in both these arenas. Blanc-Szanton also addresses change and extra-cultural influences by examining the impact of colonialism on the Ilonggo (Philippines).

Finally, Ong investigates the interplay between Malaysian (Islamic) ideology and the image of women generated by their employment in industrial free-trade zones of Malaysia.

These articles reflect both the strengths of the interpretive approach and many of its weaknesses (see Keesing, "Anthropology as Interpretive Quest, *Current Anthropology* 1987). There are two themes at work here: (1) ideology as causal agent in gender "attribution" (influenced by Lévi-Strauss and Ortner) and (2) ideology as reflections of economic and political causal factors (Marxist feminism). The authors often mix these causal agents without attempting to grapple with the issue of what is logically prior. Many articles uncritically identify kinship practices as the source for ideological constructs (Boon, Kuipers, Valeri, Hoskins, Rogers). Valeri explicitly relates Huaulu gender constructs to alliance theory, but ends up explaining it by reference to the "deep structure" of a universal culture/nature dichotomy. Others take a functional approach, such as Keeler's argument that female lack of potency allows them to "get jobs done." There are also some disturbing methodological questions here. Attempts to interpret aspects of the "other" make them sound suspiciously like "us." For example, *their* "potency" (p. 43) sounds like *our* "charisma" and Keeler's status-related analysis of speech pattern usage (p. 133) reminds one of boundary marking with "the Queen's English." Further, although many contributors recognize alternative constructions of gender categories within the same culture, the male voice is habitually the authoritative informant, as with Valeri's analysis of taboos with their source in male feelings, perceptions and reactions (pp. 260-261).

Nevertheless, the book is an excellent resource. The articles should stimulate much useful debate in upper-level gender or regional ethnography courses. It should also initiate many interesting lines of future research.

Ethnography and the Historical Imagination
John and Jean Comaroff
Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1992. xiv + 337 pp. $55.00 (cloth), $18.95 (paper)

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This captivatingly provocative book falls firmly into the current genre of critical ethnographic and methodological literature in anthropology. *Ethnography and the Historical Imagination* is a *tour de force* of the ethnographic enterprise and attempts to locate ethnography squarely within the boundaries of the broader historical contexts which have shaped the discipline of anthropology in all its manifestations. It evokes not only the intellectual climate that spawned ethnographic interest in "native cultures," but also raises some fundamental questions of epistemology in the construction and presentation of the so-called "savage societies" to Western readers.

The authors depict the current state of anthropology as one riddled with ambivalence towards its enterprise and its "mode of inquiry that appears, by turns, uniquely revelatory and irredeemably ethnocentric" (p. 7). They concur with the pointed observation of Aijimer (1988:424) that ethnography "always has been . . . linked with epistemological problems" (and, one might add, of both conceptualization of research