

**Speaking to the Spirits:  
Thinking Comparatively about Women in Asian Indigenous Beliefs**

**Barbara Watson Andaya  
University of Hawai'i at Mānoa  
bandaya@hawaii.edu**

**Abstract**

The prominence of Southeast Asian women in indigenous belief systems has long been considered one of the region's defining features, but although recent studies on specific societies have helped to nuance this generalization, transregional comparisons are rare, especially in regard to the ritual role of senior women. Within the larger framework of "Asia" there has been little attempt to deploy the interplay between religion, gender and age as a means of crossing the area studies boundaries which academia has constructed and maintains. While focussing on Southeast Asia, this chapter takes note of the similarities and differences in the position of older women as spirit mediums in "Asia" more generally. It argues that across Asia post-menopausal women did (and often still do) play an important role in communicating with the spirit world, but that this role has been progressively undermined by the advance of world religions and official views of spirit veneration as "backward." In comparative terms, however, Southeast Asia has retained many of the older attitudes that have allowed female spirit mediumship to survive and in some cases, to flourish.

**Keywords:** women, Southeast Asia, spirit mediums, world religions, state.

**Introduction:**

This essay was inspired by a call from the religious studies scholar, Mary Keller, who has advocated new approaches to human bodies that are "possessed" by ancestors, deities or spirits. She has argued for greater emphasis on the empowerment of the possessed individual rather than attributing their altered state to compensation for social marginalization or perceived inferiority. Her focus on empowerment is significant, since a universal feature of spirit possession is the

predominance of women, especially older women (Keller, 2002, pp. 2-3; Endres and Lauser, 2011, p. 10). Indeed, in his pioneering study published more than forty years ago, I. M Lewis identified women “past the menopause” as constituting a “high proportion of shamans” (Lewis, 1971, p. 85). While Lewis believed such women were responding to feelings of social or psychological deprivation, Keller argues that “possessed” women in traditional belief systems occupy a respected status in the community as “instrumental agencies.” Far more than passive channels of communication or simple agents, they are actively connected to the supernatural forces that possess their bodies and that speak through them (Keller, 2002, pp. 9-10). Keller also reminds us that definitions of mediumship – the intermediary state that bridges the conscious self and the possessed body – are problematic, since there is an overlap with mysticism and trance. From a range of possibilities I have chosen to follow Peter Claus, who worked among the tribal Tulu of southern India. Like him, I see mediumship among acknowledged practitioners as “the legitimate, expected possession of a specialist by a spirit deity, usually for the purpose of soliciting the aid of the supernatural for human problems” (Claus, 1979, p. 29).

In discussing the position of women in societies where possession is “a significant and uniquely powerful phenomenon” (Keller, 2002, p. 8), I begin by referencing two studies that help explain my line of approach. The first is Carolyn Brewer’s iconoclastic analysis of the changes brought to women’s ritual status following the introduction of Christianity to the Philippines in the sixteenth century. She challenges the historicity of the well-known *Burning of the Idols*, painted by the nationalist artist Fernando Amorsolo in 1949, which depicts an indigenous priestess, young and nubile, offering up “pagan” images to the fire as a symbol of her acceptance of Christian teachings. By contrast, as Brewer points out, Spanish sources repeatedly refer to these ritual specialists as “old” (Brewer, 2004, p. 110). My second reference comes from an article by Erin Cline, a specialist on China. She too noted the prevalence of older women among spirit mediums, but additionally drew attention to the lack of comparative research, commenting that although there are several studies of spirit mediums among overseas Chinese in Southeast Asia, there is little research on this group in contemporary China (Cline, 2010, p. 520).

In conjunction with the expanding literature on spirit mediumship in Asian societies (Laycock, 2015; Endres and Lauser, 2011; Cott, 2014; Dawson 2010), these comments have

encouraged me to think further about a topic in which I have been interested for some time – the role of older women in indigenous Asian belief systems, especially in regard to communication with supernatural deities (Andaya, 2006, pp. 210-2). In contrast to the world religions, which allocated the preeminent ritual role to men, locally grounded religions across Asia (and indeed, in Africa and the Americas) typically provided a space for women, especially for those regarded as senior. As I have argued elsewhere, in Southeast Asia (and I suspect, in much of the non-European world), the presence of post-menopausal women as intermediaries between humans and powerful spirits was due to the “male-like” status they assumed, since they no longer embodied the mysterious forces of reproduction that could endanger male virility and obstruct channels of communication with the supernatural (Buckley and Gottlieb 1988, pp. 6-8; Andaya 2005, p. 113). Such attitudes explain why many Chinese communities favour men, although Emily Cline has drawn our attention to women as mediums in contemporary southern China. Yet possessed females could be themselves be imperilled by the ambiguities that infused the release of blood, and a male Chinese medium in Penang (Malaysia) remarked that any woman who went into trace while menstruating could be endangered because the “god” would leave her polluting body (DeBernardi, 2006, p. 259; Kitiarsa, 2012, p. 50).

From a basic assumption that spirit possession should be taken seriously as a demonstration of female power in the religious domain, I place Southeast Asia in a comparative context, viewing “older women” in Asian societies as instrumental agencies who connected their fellow humans with the spirit world. Although the advance of world religions and official views of spirit veneration as “backward” have undermined this role, I argue that in regional terms Southeast Asia has retained many of the older traditions, and that female spirit mediums can still become people of importance in their community.

### **Spirit Mediumship: The Ambivalent Female**

At the outset I recognize that in the Asian context my privileging of older women in regard to spirit possession requires some qualification, since we do at times encounter the idea of youth and virginity as a “pure” state, necessary for communication with the gods. This is probably most evident in Japanese Shinto beliefs, where young women known as *miko* presided

over Shinto ceremonies, received divination from the gods, and through ecstatic trance acted as mediums to a range of deities (*kami*) (Groner, 2007). Given the focus of this chapter, however, the most important factor is their changing status. Prior to the Kamakura period (1185-1333), the *miko* were important figures, associated with the ruling class and with great shrines, such as Ise, and were often consulted on matters of state policy. At the village level they also operated as the means by which ordinary people could receive messages from local shrine deities and contact the spirit world to find the causes of disease (Kuly, 2003, pp. 198-200). Yet as a more patriarchal and militaristic government evolved in Japan, the ritual function of the *miko* declined, and they became “wandering shrine maidens” associated with an indigent lifestyle and even prostitution (Ruch, 1990). The process was accentuated from the late nineteenth century, when the Meiji government in their determination to become “modern”, actively discouraged spirit mediums. Today a *miko* who dances or sells amulets and predictions at Shinto shrines is probably a university or high school student “collecting a modest wage in this part-time position” (Kuly, 2003, p. 201).

Yet although the *miko* certainly exemplify a widespread Asian view of virginity as a pure state, young women were also viewed as potentially capable of exercising dangerous powers in their relations with men. In China the so-called “fox spirit” could easily metamorphose into a beautiful female who could both enchant and destroy her male victims (Kang, 2013). A similar trope is found in reports from seventeenth-century Philippines, where the most dangerous manifestation of femaleness was in the spirits (*asuang*) who could take the form of a seductive young woman and lure men to their death (Rafael 1993, p. 189). One is reminded of certain Shan groups in contemporary northern Thailand, who, while believing that both men and women can become witches, feel that an attractive younger woman is especially likely to be involved with black magic or even take the form of a jealous witch spirit like those termed *phi mia noi*, literally “the spirit of a concubine” (Tannenbaum, 1993, p. 68; Tanabe, 1991, p. 197, fn. 25).

These comments lead towards a second area of qualification. Though middle-aged and elderly women are less likely to be accused of seducing young men, any association with spirit communication and the ability to tap supernatural powers could have negative consequences. Historians of Christian Europe have produced a huge body of literature that explores the

disturbing slippage by which many “wise women” who would once have been regarded as seers were accused of intercourse with the Devil and of using satanic powers for malevolent purposes (Lovack, 2013). Any discussion of the feminization of witchcraft in Asia would be best conducted with an eye to such studies, as well as those in Melanesia and Africa, which have demonstrated that accusations of “black magic” increase during periods of community stress, being commonly directed towards women who are older, widowed, poor, physically handicapped, strangers, or otherwise marginalized. While Russia may be an exception (Kivelson, 2014, p. 83), in late medieval and early modern Europe theologians played a prominent role in stressing the Devil’s ability to exploit female failings, whose bodies were considered especially prone to possession by malign forces.

Despite the lack of extensive historical research, we can certainly find similarities in Asia. It is difficult, however, to track the evolution of such attitudes, since sources relating to alleged witchcraft at the community and state level are much more limited in Asia than in Europe. The documentation is best in China, but it is still possible for historians to reach different historical interpretations. Brett Hinsch, for instance, contends that as early as the second century BCE witchcraft had emerged as a “new preoccupation” to become the most serious and feared crime under Han law. While men could also be accused of sorcery, it was generally believed that women had a particular ability to access “black magic.” The execution and burning of witches was carried out in public, a grim warning of the fate that could await even members of the imperial family (Hinsch 2011, pp. 94-5, 111). On the other hand, Barend ter Haar notes that although elderly women were often stigmatized as practicing harmful magic, witch-hunts as a social phenomenon were relatively rare in China. He attributes this to a relatively weak state reach and the lack of other groups or institutions interested in exploiting rumours of witchcraft for their own purposes (Ter Haar 2006, pp. 12, 30, 70; Ter Haar 2013).

Scholars of South Asia have approached the topic of witchcraft largely through the discipline of anthropology, and although early texts condemn occult practices, chronologically-framed discussions of possession are limited. Yet traditional Indian texts detail a number of ways in which “witches” (known by many different names) can be identified, and it does appear that over time they became more linked to femaleness (Saletore 1981). Tantric practices that

encouraged possession by divinities were often denounced as witchcraft, and in the early nineteenth century in western India more than a thousand women were killed as witches, far exceeding the victims of *sati*. In a disquieting persistence of such ideas, acts against “witches” are still found in India’s rural villages and tribal areas, especially after an epidemic or a failed harvest (Skaria, 1997, p. 110; Mullick, 2003; Chaudhiri, 2014, p. 24; Biswas, 2016).

Against this background it is worth noting that nearly a century ago, a Jesuit missionary working among the Munda tribal peoples of India linked witchcraft accusations to the infiltration of mainstream religious beliefs. He argued that persecution of alleged witches was a result of Hindu influences, introduced via Munda groups who had become more “hinduized.” A more recent study repeats this argument, but adds that this change also reflects the economic transition from a relatively gender egalitarian hunting-gathering society to more sedentary agriculture with an accompanying trend towards patriarchy (Mullick, 2003, pp. 124-9).

The development among the Munda represents a specific case study, but an overview of the literature suggests that the effects of religious and economic changes on women’s ritual status in Asia more generally display basic similarities. In Taiwan, for instance, the advance of Han Chinese influence saw spirit medium roles, formerly the preserve of women, arrogated by men (Brown, 2004, p. 113). As noted above, evidence relating to witchcraft in mainland China is open to different interpretations, but the rise of the state appears to have encouraged witch-hunting campaigns because (as in Europe) people condemned as wizards and witches were viewed as threats to the official authority (Hinsch, 2011, p. 94 ff; Siegel 2006, p. 18). In eighteenth-century Okinawa the promotion of Confucian ethics as the basis for administration and the accompanying condemnation of “vulgar practices” led to an ineffective campaign against the female spirit mediums known as *yuta* (distinguished from the *noro*, the state-sanctioned clan priestesses). Here, says one authority, we can see a growing divide between an increasingly Confucianized government and a peasantry who remained “steadfast to its traditional religious beliefs and practices” (Smits, 1999, pp. 114-118).

To some degree one can discern a comparable pattern in Southeast Asia. Although complementary gender relations are considered a regional hallmark, the spread of the world religions tended to widen the differences between men and women. For instance, the idea of

“heaven” as a place of reward after death and “hell” as a place of punishment was rarely if ever a part of indigenous cosmologies, but was highly developed in the religious ideas that reached Southeast Asia from India (Goh 2015). Those found guilty of casting evil spells (often stereotyped as elderly women) are doomed to punishment in one of the deeper hells. A graphic example is found among the paintings that decorate Bali’s “law court”, the eighteenth-century Kertha Gosa pavilion, where a woman is shown with her tongue cut to ribbons, a punishment for practicing “black magic” (Pucci, 1992, pp. 79, 80, 110). It has been suggested that a cultural amalgamation with the Hindu deity Durga also accentuated the bloodthirsty aspects of Bali’s powerful demon queen, Rangda, who is associated with the “witch” Calun Arung (Emigh 1996, p. 81). In the Philippines Carolyn Brewer has argued that Christianity promoted a conceptualization and a vocabulary that created a specific and negative category whereby ritual specialists, the *babaylan* became *bruha* (Spanish “witches”) (Brewer, 2004, pp. 86-9). Official condemnation thus encouraged beliefs that evil was not free-floating but was located in the body of certain individuals. In twentieth century Thailand a well-known scholar remembered that in the area where he grew up there were many spirits, *krasyy*, that took the form of old women and were believed to go out at night seeking food, which consisted of raw meat and excrement and new-born babies (Rajadon, 1961, p. 119). State edicts often supported community attitudes, and in Buddhist Burma a law dating to 1785 refers to the immersion of an individual in water to discover if they are guilty of witchcraft (Tun, 1986, p. 102). Around the same period the Italian missionary Vicentius Sangermano (1758-1819) remarked that “it is impossible to persuade the Burmese that there is no such thing in nature as witches and that they are not extremely malicious and hurtful.” In one type of trial by ordeal, “a suspected woman is placed upon a little bier, supported at each end by a boat, and a vessel full of ordure is emptied upon her. The boats are then slowly drawn from each other, till the woman falls into the water. If she sinks, she is dragged out by a rope of green herbs tied round her middle and is declared innocent; but if she swims she is convicted as a witch and generally sent to some place where the air is unwholesome” (Jardine, 1984, pp. 149-150).

The tendency to associate the arts of “black magic” with femaleness appears especially pronounced in communities subject to Christian influence. Indeed, although the status of male

shamans was often higher than that of females, missionaries almost invariably identified “witches” as women. As Carolyn Brewer has shown so dramatically in the Philippines, Spanish missionaries were particularly prone to see spirit propitiation in terms of witchcraft and Devil-alliance, and to condemn “sorceresses” as the cause of infant death and miscarriage (Brewer, 2000). The powers such women could tap were thought to present the Christian mission with its most serious challenge. A priest working in Vietnam in the late eighteenth century thus recounted how a young Christian woman tried to free herself from a spell that had caused her to be obsessed with a non-Christian man. She went to “a heathen woman, a sorcerer” who gave her small pieces of paper on which red characters, evidently the name of a powerful spirit, were written. Following instructions, she swallowed the paper but rather than being freed from supernatural manipulation, she became permanently possessed (Forest, 1998, 3:253).

While Islam never developed the same form of demonology as Christianity, and never targeted women specifically, the Qur’an does present Allah as a refuge from sorcerers who perform magic through tying knots (presumably divination) and through their control over *jinn*s. Islamic commentators were unambiguous in their condemnation of all kinds of activities – devising love potions, providing talismans, predicting the future, and so on – which were seen as efforts to appropriate God’s power (Durrant and Bailey, 2012, p 108). Yet though historical sources provide little evidence of witch-hunts in Islamic societies, women were often targeted for punishment, especially when the community was faced with some unexplained catastrophe, such as an epidemic. In 1895 a future governor, of British Malaya, Frank Swettenham (1850-1946), claimed that “plenty of people” could attest to the drowning of “ancient Malay dames” accused of casting spells. The effects of economic depression in rural areas or the intrusion of modernization may explain other references that link hostile magic to spirits in the form of elderly women (Swettenham, 1984, pp. 198-199).

Nonetheless, we must be careful in assuming that the world religions introduced unfamiliar concepts to Animist societies, Hans Schärer, who carried out fieldwork amongst the Dayak of Borneo before the Second World War, reported that “formerly” the torture and murder of *hantuen* or witches was common (Schärer, 1963, pp. 20-1, 50-9). There is little evidence, however, that women were singled out as targets. The Austronesian word *suangi* is usually



translated as “wizard” or “witch”, and in contemporary Indonesia is generally glossed as female. In premodern times, however, the German botanist George Rumphius (1627-1702) remarked that this term also referred to “wild, uninhabited, dangerous places, rocks, and islands”, and even rough-looking fruits or plants. Since men could also be *suangi*, it clearly was not gender specific (Rumpf, 1999, p. 401; Slaats and Portier, 1993, p. 140). In his authoritative study of early Filipino society, William Scott contrasted sixteenth-century Spanish beliefs that mortals (mostly women) could develop demonic characteristics with indigenous conceptions that misfortune or calamity was the work of malicious spirits in human form. Much feared, these counterfeit humans were normally killed, but the relevant point is that they could as well be male as female (Scott, 1994, p. 81; Andaya and Ishii, 1992, p. 510).

In this regard Southeast Asia may represent an exception to the general pattern that links malevolent magic to older females. On the Indonesian island of Flores, for example, Gregory Forth commented that the community he studied, the Nage, did not seem to regard witches as being mostly women (Forth, 1993, p. 119 fn. 2). Even in Bali, where the figure of the widow-witch Rangda exemplifies a relatively elaborated belief in witches (*leyak*), it is acknowledged that people of both sexes may have an aptitude for witchcraft (Covarrubias, 1937, p. 344). Furthermore, as C.W. Watson and Roy Ellen have emphasized, witchcraft has never been considered a major social problem in Southeast Asia (1993, p. 3). Southeast Asia thus slides into a more general Asian context where the identification and persecution of “witches” never reached the proportions that historians have tracked in early modern European, colonial America, Africa or even Melanesia. It may therefore be disturbing to see that some sea-going people in Indonesia, now more subject to the influence of world religions than in the past, are inclined to see submerged and dangerous reefs as inhabited by elderly female beings who are compared to “Satan,” or to believe that female river spirits, personified as “Mrs. Mange” or “Mrs. Thornback” are capable of inflicting anyone who annoys them with skin diseases and dysentery (Pannell, 2007, p. 81; Teljeur, 1990, pp. 106-107).

### **A More Positive Picture**

Having acknowledged that young women may also be ritually prominent, and that there are ambiguities attached to the “wise woman” figure, I would now like to turn to a more positive picture, using Southeast Asia as a platform by which to approach broader questions. I am particularly interested in the cultural recognition of older women as a potential conduit to the spirit world, and their “instrumental agency” in the transmission of messages from the supernatural. I argue that the absence of the forces of reproduction that blurred the femaleness of a post-menopausal body was combined with other factors that enhanced the social status of senior women, who were commonly regarded as repositories of community knowledge. In contemporary Bali, for example, when music accompanies the priestly chanting in Bali, it is the older women who indicate to the female singers which *kidung* (sung poems) should be performed (Susilo 1998, pp. 17-18). Historians, too, repeatedly encounter senior females in an instructional role. When an eighteenth-century Englishman entertained by the court of Banjarmasin (east Borneo) noted that an old woman “whom I supposed to be their teacher” was in charge of the royal music and dancing, he was describing a situation found over much of the region (Beeckman, 1973, pp. 77-79). In the same vein, a nineteenth-century missionary in Sulawesi remarked that the individuals most knowledgeable in the pre-Islamic literature of the region were not the “gurus” (teachers), men who knew a little Arabic and Koranic texts, but royal women and female courtiers (Brink, 1943, p. 184).

The bank of knowledge and experience possessed by older women also had critical applications in the lives of ordinary people, and they were widely respected as healers. According to an account from Melaka (west coast Malay Peninsula) in the early seventeenth century, the “doctors” were mostly “dayas” (i.e. a wet-nurse or foster mother), “female physicians who are excellent herbalists, having studied in the schools of Java Major. They use plants and herbs in the form of plasters and potions to relieve illness -- cloves, nutmeg, cinnamon, ginger, etc. They can distinguish illnesses by the appearance of the patient, breathing, etc.” (Mills, 1997, p. 48). It is not surprising, therefore, to find that an ailing ruler in seventeenth-century Palembang (southeast Sumatra) asked the Dutch administration in Batavia to help him locate two female “doctors” whom he believed would cure his illness (Andaya, 2006, p. 126). In the Christian Philippines the prominence of female healers in contemporary times is anchored in

the belief that spiritual potency is vital to the restoration of health. In this regard, it is commonly thought, women have greater powers than men in terms of persuasion and the ability to command supernatural forces (Lahiri, 2005, pp. 23-44; Cannell, 1999, p. 272 n. 18).

A lifetime of experience also equipped women to take a prominent position in the ceremonies associated with major life cycles, most notably birth, and in Southeast Asia one is struck by the high status of the midwife. By contrast, in the Hinduized areas of contemporary northern India and Bangladesh childbirth pollution is deemed to be even greater than that resulting from menstruation, sexual intercourse, defecation or death, and the midwife or *dai* is regarded as a “low status menial necessary for removing defilement” (Rozario, 1998, p. 149). The situation was rather different in China and Japan, where capable and experienced midwives, especially in the urban areas, received not only social recognition but could also be well recompensed for their skills. Nonetheless, recent studies have shown how the practice of midwifery came to be dominated by male doctors who drew their knowledge from written, “scientific” manuals and supported neo-Confucianist rhetoric, which included midwives in the “nine categories” of despised professional women. Furthermore, even though Chinese female doctors and midwives continued to thrive, one can still note a tendency to link them with the death of children either through infanticide or abortion (Leung, 1999, pp. 103, 123).

The pattern in Southeast Asian societies is quite different. To a greater extent than in China and Japan it seems that supervision of labour and childbirth continued to be in the hands of older women, whose familiarity with plants and other ingredients used in potions thought to contain magical powers explains their prominence as healers and midwives. For instance, one can point to the standing of the midwife (*bidan*) in Malay culture. Their presence at any birth was essential, not only in ensuring a safe delivery but because of the role they played in the rituals necessary to ensure that the baby was healthy and the mother regained her strength. An intriguing manuscript compiled in 1779 by a mosque official in Melaka lays out the ceremonies normally performed to guarantee the protection of a royal child. When his consort is seven months pregnant, the ruler summons four “famous” mid-wives who are responsible for “rocking the womb” (*mandi melenggang perut*, thought to give definition to the life forming inside the mother’s womb) (Sudjiman, 1983, pp. 69-61). Attention was focused on the umbilical cord and

the placenta, since a skilled midwife could “read” the umbilical wrinkles and predict an individual’s future life (McKinley, 1981, pp. 371-75; Laderman, 1993, pp. 141-2, fn. 74). Practices in Timor provide a particularly striking example of the midwife’s role, for here the midwife fastens a pouch containing the afterbirth to the central pillar of the house and ritually drops the soiled birth cloth on to the ancestral altar to affirm connections to preceding generations (Hicks, 1984, p. 31).

Because of their longevity, their knowledge of tradition and customs and their status as mothers and grandmothers, older women in many Asian societies were also seen as naturally gifted mediators. In Southeast Asia, as in China, they are often depicted as intermediaries who set matters right when their menfolk fail to fulfil their social or family responsibilities (Kinney, 2014, p. xxix). While this was probably most common in brokering marriage agreements, female liaison was also frequently used to reach compromises between contending parties, whether in commercial dealings or inter-state relations. Those of high birth were especially effective as negotiators because they commanded respect as maternal figures and because refusal of a mother’s plea was culturally difficult. The capacity of senior Vietnamese women to resolve dynastic crises is mirrored repeatedly in indigenous sources from other areas. A fragmentary text from sixteenth-century Cambodia similarly mentions several instances where the women of the Khmer royal family, especially the Queen Grandmother, were instrumental in finding solutions to a political impasse. A striking instance occurred in Lan Xang (in modern Laos) in 1758, when the mother of two rival princes undertook a fast to the death to force them to come to some agreement (Andaya, 2002, pp. 26-27; Stuart-Fox, 1998, p. 111). So accepted was this practice that even Europeans at times used senior women to make contact with leaders of native forces, and in 1622 an elderly female convert in the southern Philippines assisted Spanish missionaries to make contact with Lumud groups (Paredes, 2013, p. 72). Indeed, the recruitment of senior women as negotiators was sufficiently widespread for the Dutch East India officials to issue a warning that in “serious and important affairs” company employees should never use women as intermediaries (Jacobs, 2000, p. 65).

### **Older Women as Spirit Mediums**

In focusing on the religious influence of Asian women in indigenous belief systems, I have presented a largely positive picture, especially in Southeast Asia. Here there are several possible reasons for the favourable attitudes towards older women and the general lack of negative stereotypes. In the first place, because Southeast Asia was until modern times a region of low population, any individual gained status by sheer longevity. An elderly woman's position would also have been enhanced because in societies where female celibacy was almost unknown and where child-bearing was the expected lot of all females she would have confronted the very real possibility of a premature death every time she became pregnant. Death during or after labour would have meant reincarnation as a restless, dissatisfied and voracious spirit, and the very triumph over such threats meant that a woman's status rose with every successful birth. In Timor, for instance, a mother was traditionally dressed in a head hunter's costume in post-birth rituals, with the sarong, headdress and neck pendants of a successful warrior (Barnes, 1992, p. 41). Because a woman literally risked her life to bear children, it is understandable that a heavy emotional weight was invested in motherhood, and the *imaginaire* associated with maternal figures carried with it almost unassailable ideas of unselfishness and unstinting kindness (Andaya, 2002).

In turn, as I have noted, age has been consistently recognized as carrying greater experience, greater knowledge, and greater skills. Within royal households, for example, older women were usually placed in charge of training younger ones, especially in activities like dance, which often played a sacral role (Brink, 1943, p. 184). Outside the courts, ordinary women may not have been literate, but they had many other skills, such as weaving, which everywhere was a female task (in contrast to India). However, only those with many years of experience could master the most complex and ritually important designs. The Iban of Borneo considered weaving to be "the warpath of women," and the creative ability of an older woman was celebrated by the tattoos on her hand, a public display of her achievements (Traude, 1996, pp. 70, 92). Among many other Southeast Asian examples, one could cite the Baduy of west Java, where the cloth of pure white used to wrap the dead is woven exclusively by older women (Andaya, 2006, p. 221; Bakels, 1993, pp. 321, 351). Similarly, knowledge of the ingredients and proportions necessary to produce certain kinds of dyes were almost always the preserve of

mature females; in one village in Java elderly women traditionally functioned as ritual guardians of the indigo vat, the “womb” of cloth (Heringa, 1985, pp. 162-63). The same principles apply in relation to the propitiation of supernatural forces; accordingly, in Burma an older woman who acted as the leader of the work gangs who transplanted and harvested rice made the offering to the *nat* or spirit of the padi field (Nash, 1966, p. 126). Early sources from the Philippines make frequent reference to indigenous priestesses, the *babaylan*, but they were not by any means exceptional. Toraja women from central Sulawesi (Indonesia), for example, filled the priestly office of *burake*, presided over great feasts, supervised the ritual dancing that preceded a battle or some raiding expedition, blessed the rice before planting and officiated at important life events such as birth and death (Nooy-Palm, 1979, p. 285).

The status of older women as storehouses of traditional knowledge certainly contributed to their prominence as mediating conduits to the spirits in much of Asia, but biological factors created key boundaries as qualifications. The mysterious processes that ended a woman’s reproductive years and made her more “male-like” thus opened up a much larger social and ritual space than was available to younger women, while the assumption that they were no longer involved in sexual relationships established a tacit connection with the abstinence commonly required to channel ritual energies. In the larger Asian context India appears to be an exception, since Hindu women remained under their husband’s authority and widows were condemned to a lifetime of mourning, with their personal influence significantly reduced. Nonetheless, local studies have shown that in India too there is a high incidence of spirit possession among older women, through whom the goddess can reach her devotees. A trance session recorded with a spirit medium in northern India indicated that virtually all those who come to consult the goddess through this “respected mother” (*mātājī*) seek reassurance regarding illness, anxieties about the future, or misfortune (Schoembucher, 1993, pp. 239-67; Erndl, 2000). In East Asia the *yuta* of Okinawa and the *mudang* of Korea provide evidence of older practices once more widespread. Even in daily life the entry to this sexually neutral zone where perceptions of a dangerous fertility no longer applied opened up new doors for women of advancing age; in the hill tribes of Assam, for instance, pottery was traditionally made by widows and old women who had never married (Parry, 1932, p. 128).

The ambiguity of the “woman who is not woman” would have resonated deeply in Southeast Asian societies that regarded the crocodile who slid between land and sea, the legendary garuda, half-human and half-bird, or the male-female hermaphrodite with particular awe. While transgendered men have historically been prominent as spirit mediums in Southeast Asia, a similar ambivalence infuses the image of the older woman, whose female body, no longer bearing the signs of fertility, positions her at the margins of femaleness. “In Thai spirit possession”, said the respected historian Prince Damrong (1862-1943), “the medium must be a middle-aged woman” (Kitiarsa, 2012, p. 131) and in a much less researched area of Borneo one authority likewise noted that the spirit mediums (*balian*) were virtually all “middle-aged or elderly women” (Winzeler, 1993, p. xxviii). As an emblematic grandmother figure, the *nenek kabayan* of Indonesian literature mediates between two worlds, standing guard at entryways to the underworld, maintaining watch while heavenly nymphs bathe, or ruling over her kingdom below the sea (Heuting, 1933, pp. 142-44; Mulyadi, 1983, pp. 32, 171; Peltier, 1999, p. 15). Although it is common to translate *nenek kabayan* as “witch” with all its accompanying negative connotations, one scholar has reminded us that the original meaning is more like “an old nanny”, and very different from the witch of western folklore (Yassin, 2000, p. 134). Demographers have also warned against the use of literary allusions as evidence for the realities of aging, but there is a remarkable interplay between the *nenek kabayan* metaphor and the widespread perception that older women had a special ability to act as channels to the spirits, a belief that allowed them to maintain their ritual role in birth, marriages and funerals even as religious authority was increasingly arrogated by men. For example, an old Javanese poem (dated to sometime between the tenth and fifteenth centuries) while describing a royal marriage, tells us that “a nun, who was an experienced teacher,” directed the ritual intended to pacify chthonic spirits before any important life-cycle event (Worsley et al, 2013, pp. 291, 574).

The shift in gender perceptions as a woman passed her child-bearing years not only opened the door to participation in activities otherwise threatened by the powerful forces of fertility, but could contribute to the notion that she had access to formidable and unseen powers. In pre-Chinese Taiwan (where indigenous cultures were very similar to the Philippines) Dutch East India Company officials described female shamans who were credited with the ability to

control natural events like the strength of the wind and the coming of rain (Shepherd, 1993, pp. 63-64). The Spanish in the Philippines reported that *aniteros* or “priestesses” were often charged with rituals usually delegated to men, such as ceremonial blood-letting; Antonio Pigafetta (1491-1535), who chronicled Ferdinand Magellan’s arrival in the Visayas in 1521, noted that “only old women” could kill the pig offered in sacrifice. “They have frequent Conversations with the Devil . . . and . . . sacrifice a Hog to him” (Blair and Robertson, 1903-9, 5: 13, 33: 167-71). When investigating “idolatry” and indigenous beliefs in the Philippine town of Bolinao, Spanish friars discovered that the transmission of Animist esoteric knowledge was entirely the domain of older women (Brewer, 2004, pp. 83, 143-57). Similarly, an English description of Java in the early eighteenth century remarked that the “pagans” (i.e. non-Muslims) usually chose older women who were proficient in “witchcraft” to be their “priestesses” (Corfield and Morson, 2001, pp. 422-3). Skilled communicators were also able to determine the outcome of an illness. As one Spanish observer in the Philippines put it in 1582, “The priestess chants her songs and invokes the demon, who appears to her all glistening in gold. When she enters trance, she declares whether the sick person is to recover or not” (Blair and Robertson, 1903-1909, 5: 133). In this empowered state women were similarly able to convey messages from beyond the grave. In seventeenth-century Vietnam, the old and “decrepit” sister of a deceased a governor was reportedly possessed by “the devil,” enabling her to “skip as nimbly as if she had been a young girl ” while proclaiming “several extravagances about “the state and place her brother's soul was in” (Dror and Taylor, 2008, p. 153). Such comments hold true as we move into modern times. In Bali, for instance, elderly women used the medium of a trance-induced dance, the solemn *mendet*, to commune with the gods, while in the Bonerate Islands south of Sulawesi the fate of boats that did not return from fishing expeditions can only be divined through the trance/dance rituals of elderly women (Covarrubias, 1937 p. 273; Broch 1968, pp. 262-82).

This historical heritage raises the question of spirit mediumship in a modernizing and globalizing world. Across Asia the modern state the state and institutionalised religion have been allies in the effort to displace or restrain popular religious practices that are at variance with the officially-espoused vision of modernity and rationality. Yet such efforts have faltered because “no civic order promoted by any state has proven capable of meeting all the fundamental



existential problems that people encounter” (Keyes, Kendall and Hardacre, 1994, pp. 6-7). Indeed, to a greater extent than elsewhere in Asia, research on Southeast Asia points to the resurgence of spirit mediumship despite a modern and increasingly urban environment. Some areas have gained a particular reputation for their ritual communities. For example, in northern Thailand, where senior women act as lineage elders in matrilineal ancestor cults and in propitiation ceremonies for the household spirits or in rituals held at planting and harvest, one researcher in the 1980s reported that 84 percent of the mediums he studied were female (Wijeyewardene, 1986, p. 146; Tanabe, 1991, p. 191; Morris, 2000; Bertrand, 2004, pp. 154-6). In Vietnam too, mediumship is said to be “heavily gendered” because of the prevalence of women in the religious sphere and the revival of spirit possession since the advent of a more open economic policies known as Doi Moi (Renovation) in 1986 (Irvine, 1984, p. 315; Malarney, 2002, p. 98; Phuong, 2007).

It is also possible to appreciate the role spirit mediums can play in a changing social environment, especially in the proliferating urban centres where the juxtaposition of dire poverty and new wealth has widened the class gap. On the one hand, spirit mediums can provide some solace to those at the bottom of the economic ladder. In Malaysia the closure of many plantations has led to a drift of poor and uneducated Tamil Malaysians to the cities, and in working class communities spirit mediums are gaining in popularity. High status Indians can also regard such individuals as powerful, even if they do not seek their assistance (Willford, 2005, pp. 51-2). On the other hand, it has been noted that in Thailand those looking for advice are very frequently educated and middle class, and mediums themselves gain national profiles through appearances as media personalities (Endres and Lauser, 2011a, p. 132; Morris, 2000, p. 183).

In meeting the expectations of different audiences, rituals associated with spirit possession have themselves changed, especially when there is some overlap with mainstream religious norms. For instance, Rosalind Morris has shown that in northern Thailand the frenetic female dancing typical of spirit sessions in the late nineteenth century is rarely found in more decorous modern performances, where mediums may be possessed by past kings noted for their Buddhist devotion (Morris, 2000, pp. 179-81). Rather than presenting themselves as an alternative to established religion, spirit mediums will position themselves as allies and devout

believers, imbued with moral concerns; a Thai medium thus visits Buddhist temples frequently, a Malay woman used her earnings to go to Mecca, while her Christian counterpart in the Philippines (where mystical communication has been absorbed within many of the cults that flourish at the margins of Catholicism) always calls on “God the Father” (Tanabe, 2000, p. 309; Kitiarsa, 2012, p. 138; Peletz, 1996, p. 164; Cannell, 1999, p. 91). Further, the contributions of grateful followers, now in cash, can yield an income that makes spirit mediumship into a viable professional occupation, where “consulting hours” can be advertised and prices listed. Although older females still predominate, a sign of this rising profitability is the greater number of male and transgendered mediums (Brac, 2011; Dawson, 2014, p. 45). In the 1960s in Burma it was estimated that less than four per cent of spirit mediums were male, often transgendered. However, an increasing number of spirit mediums are now transgendered gay men (Ho, 2009, p. 274).

Spirit mediums are themselves responding to changing expectations and expectations of greater professionalism; in the 1990s in Jakarta, for example, Chinese Indonesian women attended spirit-writing training sessions with certificates that paralleled those of men in order to better communicate with their cult goddess (Dean and Zheng, 2009, p. 241). In the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai, spirit mediumship is a “profession of inspiration” where individuals are “called” as practitioners. The professionalization of members of urban-based ritual communities distinguishes them from rural cults, where mediums are usually from the same family and acquire their training as apprentices (Tanabe 2000, p. 309; Morris, 2000, p. 111). Nor are today’s spirit mediums necessarily confined in terms of their audience. Advances in global communication and mobility have enabled some to move transnationally, like the Vietnamese who operate in Diaspora communities in the United States, Italy, France, and Australia and since 1986 are able to freely revisit Vietnam (Fjelstad and Nguyen, 2006). Despite the sceptical attitudes induced by the flows of modernity that permeate a rapidly changing world, there is no convincing evidence that spirit possession will inevitably disappear. Because human beings the world over will always experience times when access to supernatural forces seems to answer the personal problems encountered in daily life, there is every reason to believe that the need for “instrumental agency” will continue.

## **Conclusion:**

I have presented a cautious argument that Asia provides a laboratory in which it is possible to examine the changing status of older women as state authority advanced, the influence of world religions increased, and as sedentary lifestyle and urbanization expanded. In many societies, including Southeast Asia, older women whose bodies were possessed by spirits were empowered through their ability to connect with the supernatural world. This stemmed from their seniority, their location in a sexually neutral zone, from their social position as mothers and mediators, their prominence as healers and midwives, and above all from their liminal position between male and female. When these features are combined, we can appreciate why their skills in communing with the supernatural were accepted and respected. Such abilities, however, were easily seen as vulnerable to perversion, so that a woman acting as a spirit medium could find herself blamed when misfortune struck either individuals or the community generally.

This discussion raises questions about the women as practitioners in Asia's contemporary religious life, especially when female spirit mediums occupy a marginalized status, like the modern day *yogini* in India (Hausner, 2013, pp. 32-44; McDaniel, 2013, p. 133-47). As we have noted, secularization has certainly made inroads, but possessed women still maintain an Asian presence. In remote areas of northern Japan, faint shadows of the past can still be found in the *itako*, blind women recruited as young girls and rigorously trained in a way that recalls the mediums of past times (Blacker, 2004). Though traditionally regarded as "mean people," the *mansin* of Korea are found in many villages, where they are actively consulted by female clients (Kendall, 1985). In China female spirit mediums may attract a following because they may have a specific advantage in addressing women's concerns, and in Okinawa older women still act as *yuta*, who communicate with the spirits through shamanistic practices (Cline, 2010; Sered, 1999).

It is in Southeast Asia, however, where female spirit mediums appear to be thriving, especially in the more accommodating and eclectic religious environments of Vietnam and the Theravada Buddhist states (Bernstein, 2004). Research in the Islamic environments of Indonesia and Malaya is more limited (although in 2014 a Malay *bomoh* with his "magic carpet" was called

in to search for the missing flight MH 370), but once we move to the peripheries the role of women as intermediaries with the supernatural continues to surface (*The Star*, 2014: Peletz, 1996, p. 164). Though Muslim and Christian proselytization has roundly opposed spirit veneration, women in search of ritual standing may still find meaning in the “more durable traditions of shamanism” (Winzeler, 1993, p. xxviii). Given these region-wide traditions, a historical and comparative base must provide the foundation for any explanation of the continuing role of older women in Southeast Asia as communicators with the spirits. It should then be possible to explore more fully the shifting and often ambiguous position of senior women, to establish shared similarities while identifying the singularities of local situations, and to show how these older connections reverberate with the present.

## Bibliography

- Andaya, B.W. 2002. “Localising the Universal: Women, Motherhood and the Appeal of Early Theravada Buddhism.” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 33, 1 (February): 1-30.
- Andaya, B.W. 2005. “Old Age: Widows, Midwives and the Question of ‘Witchcraft’ in Early Modern Southeast Asia.” *Asia-Pacific Forum* 28 (June): 104-47.
- Andaya, B.W. 2006. *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Early Modern Southeast Asia*. Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press.
- Andaya, B.W. and Y. Ishii. 1992. “Religious Developments in Southeast Asia, c.1500-1800.” In *The Cambridge History of Southeast Asia*, ed. N. Tarling. Sydney: University of Cambridge Press, pp. 508-571.
- Bakels, J. 1993. “The Symbolism of Baduy Adat Clothing on the Efficacy of Colours, Patterns and Plants.” In *Weaving Patterns of Life*, ed. M-L Nabholz-Kartaschoff, R. Barnes and D.J. Stuart-Fox. Basel: Museum of Ethnography Basel, pp. 347-67.
- Barnes, R. 1992. “Women as Head hunters: The Making and Meaning of Textiles in a Southeast Asian Context.” In *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning in Cultural Contexts*, ed. R. Barnes and J. B. Eicher/Berg: Providence/Oxford.
- Beeckman, D. 1973. *A Voyage to and from the Isle of Borneo*. Dawsons: London, Reprint of 1718 edition.

- Bernstein, J. 1993. "The Shaman's Destiny: Symptoms, Affliction, and the Re-interpretation of Illness among the Taman." In *The Seen, and the Unseen: Shamanism, Mediumship and Possession in Borneo*, ed. R. L. Winzeler. Williamsburg, VA: Borneo Research Council, pp. 171-206.
- Bertrand, D. 2004. "A Medium Possession Practice and its Relationship to Cambodia Buddhism: The Grū Pāramī." In *History, Buddhism and New Religious Movements in Cambodia*, ed. J. Marston and E. Guthrie. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 150-69.
- Biswas, Soutik. 2016. "The Indian woman who hunts the witch hunters." BBC News, Assam, 10 April. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35975360> Accessed 17 October 2016.
- Blacker, C. 2004. *The Catalpa Bow: Shamanistic Practices in Japan*. London/New York: Routledge.
- Blair, E. and J.A. Robertson. 1903-09. *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*. Cleveland: Arthur H. Clark.
- Blussé, L. 1986 *Strange Company: Chinese Settlers, Mestizo Women and the Dutch in VOC Batavia*. VKI, 122.
- Brac de la Perrière, B. 2011. "Being a Spirit Medium in Contemporary Burma. In *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. K.W. Endres and A. Lauser, ed. London and New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 163-83.
- Brewer, C. 2000. "From Animist 'Priestess' to Catholic Priest: The Re/gendering of Religious Roles in the Philippines, 1521-1685." In *Other Pasts: Women, Gender and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. B.W. Andaya. Honolulu: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, pp. 69-85.
- Brewer, C. 2004. *Shamanism, Catholicism and Gender Relations in Colonial Philippines, 1521-1685*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004.
- Brink, H. van den .1943. *Dr. Benjamin Frederick Matthes. Zijn Leven en Arbied in Dienst van het Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap*. Amsterdam: Nederlandsch Bijbelgenootschap.
- Broch, H.B. 1968 "Crazy Women are Performing in Sombali'. A Possession Trance Ritual on Bonerate, Indonesia." *Ethos* 13, 3, 262-282.

- Brown, M. J. 2004. *Is Taiwan Chinese? The Impact of Culture, Power, and Migration on Changing Identities*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Buckley, T. and A. Gottlieb. 1988. "A Critical Appraisal of Theories of Menstrual Symbolism." In *Blood Magic. The Anthropology of Menstruation*, ed. T. Buckley and A. Gottlieb. Berkeley: University of California Press), pp. 1-55.
- Cannell, F. 1999. *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaudhuri, S. 2013. *Witches, Tea Plantations, and Lives of Migrant Laborers in India: Tempest in Teapot*. Plymouth: Lexington Books.
- Claus, P. J. 1979. "Spirit Possession and Spirit Mediumship from the Perspective of Tulu Oral Tradition." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry* 3, 1: 29-52.
- Cline, E.M. 2010. "Female Spirit Mediums and Religious Authority in Contemporary South eastern China." *Modern China* 36, 5: 520-55.
- Corfield, J. and I. Morson, ed. 2001. *British Sea-Captain Alexander Hamilton's A New Account of the East Indies (17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> Century)* Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellon Press.
- Cott, C. 2014. "Communication with Gods and Spirits in East and Southeast Asia" In *The Survival Hypothesis: Essays on Mediumship*, ed. A.J. Rock. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Press, pp. 135-45.
- Covarrubias, M. 1937. *Island of Bali*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Dawson, A. 2010. *Summoning the Spirits: Possessions and Invocation in Contemporary Religion*. London: I. B. Taurus.
- Dean, K. and Zheng Zhenman, 2009. *Ritual Alliances of the Putian Plain. Volume 1. Historical Introduction to the Return to the Gods*. Leiden: Brill.
- DeBernardi, J. 2006. *The Way that Lives in the Heart: Chinese Popular Religion and Spirit Mediums in Penang, Malaysia*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dror, O. and K. W. Taylor. 2006. *Views of Seventeenth-Century Vietnam: Christoforo Borri on Cochinchina and Samuel Baron on Tonkin*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.
- Durrant, J.B. and M.D. Bailey, ed. 1012. *Historical Dictionary of Witchcraft*. Second Edition. Plymouth UK: Scarecrow Press.

- Emigh, J. 1996. *Masked Performance: The Play of Self and Other in Ritual and Theatre*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Endres, K.W. and A. Lauser. 2011. "Introduction: Multivocal Arenas of Modern Enchantment in Southeast Asia." In *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. K.W. Endres and A. Lauser, ed. London and New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 1-19.
- Endres, K.W. and A. Lauser. 2011a. "Contests of Commemoration: Virgin War Martyrs, State Memorials and the Invocation of the Spirit World in Contemporary Vietnam." In *Engaging the Spirit World: Popular Beliefs and Practices in Modern Southeast Asia*, ed. K.W. Endres and A. Lauser, ed. London and New York: Berghahn Books, pp. 144-62.
- Erndl, K.M. 2000. "A Trance Session with Mātājī." In *Tantra in Practice*, ed. D. Gordon White. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, pp. 97-118.
- Fjelstad, K. and N.H. Nguyen, ed. 2006. *Possessed by the Spirits: Mediumship in Contemporary Vietnamese Communities*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.
- Forest, A. 1998. *Les Missionnaires français au Tonkin et au Siam XVII<sup>e</sup>-XIII<sup>e</sup> Siècles: Analyse comparée d'un relatif succès et d'un total échec*. Paris: L'Harmattan. 3 vols.
- Forth, G. 1993. "Social and Symbolic Aspects of the Witch among the Nage of Eastern Indonesia." In *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*, ed. C.W. Watson and R. Ellen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 99-122.
- Goh Geok Yian, 2015. Southeast Asian Images of Hell: Transmission and Adaptation." *Bulletin de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient*, 101: 91-116.
- Groener, G. 2007. "Female Shamans in Eastern Japan during the Edo Period." *Asian Folklore Studies* 66, 2: 27-53.
- Hausner, S.L. 2013. "The Category of the Yoginī as a Gendered Practitioner." In *'Yoginī' in South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. I. Keul London: Routledge, pp. 32-44.
- Heringa, R. 1985. "Kain Tuban. Een Oude Javanese Indigo Traditie." In *Indigo. Leven in een Kleur*, ed. L. Oei. Amsterdam: Stichting Indigo, Fibula-van Dishoeck.
- Heuting, A. 1933. "Het word kabayan en de oude vrouw." *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde van Nederlandsch-Indië* 90: 141-44.

- Hicks, D. 1984. *A Maternal Religion: the Role of Women in Tetum Myth and Ritual*. De Kalb: Northern Illinois University, Center for Southeast Asian Studies Special Report. No. 22.
- Hinsch, B. 2011. *Women in Early Imperial China*. Rowman & Littlefield: Lanham, MD. 2011.
- Ho, T. C. 2009. "Transgender, Transgression, and Translation: A Cartographer of *Nat Kadaws*: Notes on Gender and Sexuality with the Spirit Cult of Burma." *Discourse* 31, 2 (Fall): 273-317.
- Irvine, W. 1984. "Decline of Village Spirit Cults and Growth of Urban Spirit Mediumship: the Persistence of Spirit Beliefs, the Position of Women and Modernization." *Mankind* 14, 4 (August): 315-24.
- Jacobs, E.M. 2000. *Koopman in Azië: De handel van de Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie tijdens de 18de eeuw*. Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg Press.
- Jardine, John, ed. 1984. *The Burmese Empire a Hundred Years Ago as Described by Father Sangermano*. Delhi: B.R. Publishing: reprint of 1893 edition.
- Johnson, A.A. 2014. *Ghosts of the New City: Spirits, Urbanity and the Ruins of Progress in Chiang Mai*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kang, X. 2013. *The Cult of the Fox: Power, Gender and Popular Religion in Late Imperial China*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Keeler, W. 2016. "Shifting Transversals: Trans Women's Move from Spirit Mediumship to Beauty Work in Mandalay." *Ethnos* 81, 5: 792-820.
- Keller, M. 2002. *The Hammer and the Flute: Women, Power and Spirit Possession*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Press.
- Kendall, L. 1985. *Shamans, Housewives and Other Restless Spirits: Women in Korean Ritual Life*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Keyes, C., L. Kendall and H. Hardacre, 1994. "Introduction: Contested Visions of Community in East and Southeast Asia." In *Asian Visions of Authority: Religion and the Modern States of East and Southeast Asia.*, ed. C. Keyes. L. Kendall and H. Hardacre. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 1-18
- Kinney, A. B. 2014. *Exemplary Women of Early China: The Lien Zhuan of Liu Zang*. New York: Columbia University Press.



- Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2011. *Mediums, Monks, & Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today*. Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books.
- Kivelson, V. 2014. *Desperate Magic: The Moral Economy of Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Russia*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.
- Kuly, L. 2003. "Locating Transcendence in Japanese Minzoku Geinô: Yamabushi and Miko Kagura." *Erudit* 25, 1: 191-208.
- Laderman, C. 1993. *Taming the Wind of Desire: Psychology, Medicine, and Aesthetics in Malay Shamanistic Performance*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.
- Lahiri, S. 2005. "The Priestess and the Politician: Enunciating Filipino Cultural Nationalism through Mt. Banahaw." In *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. A.C. Willford and K. M. George. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, pp. 23-44.
- Laycock, J.P., ed. 2015. *Spirit Possession around the World: Possession, Communion, and Demon Expulsion across Cultures*. Santa Barbara, Ca. ABC-CLIO.
- Leung, A.K. C. 1999 "Women Practicing Medicine in Premodern China." In *Chinese Women in the Imperial Past: New Perspectives*, ed. H. T. Zurndorfer. Leiden and Boston: Brill, pp. 101-34.
- Lovack, B. P. ed. 2013. *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Malarney, S.K. 2002. *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam*. London: Routledge Curzon.
- McDaniel, J. 2013. "Yoginīs in Bengali Religious Traditions: Tribal, Tantric and Bhakti Influences." In *'Yoginī' in South Asia: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. I. Keul London: Routledge, pp. 133-48.
- McKinley, R. 1981. "Cain and Abel on the Malay Peninsula." In *Siblingship in Oceania: Studies in the Meaning of Kin Relations*, ed. M. Marshall. Lanham and London; Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, Monograph No. 8, pp. 335-418.
- Mills, J.V. ed. and trans. 1997. *Eredia's Description of Malacca, Meridional India and Cathay*. Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society, Reprint 14.

- Morris, R. A. 2000. *In the Place of Origins: Modernity and Its Mediums in Northern Thailand*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- Mullick, S.B. 2003. "Gender Relations and Witches among the Indigenous Communities of Jharkhand, India." In *Gender Relations in Forest Societies in Asia: Patriarchy at Odds*, ed. G. Kelkar, D. Nathan and P. Walter. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 97-144.
- Mulyadi, S. W.R. 1983. *Hikayat Indraputra: A Malay Romance*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications.
- Nash, J.C. 1966. "Living with Nats: An Analysis of Animism in Burman Village Social Relations." In *Anthropological Studies in Theravada Buddhism*, ed. M. Nash et al. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, Cultural Report No. 13.
- Nooy-Palm, C.H.M. 1979. *The Sa'dan Toraja: A Study of Their Social Life and Religion*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Pannell, S. 2007. "Of Gods and Monsters; Indigenous Sea Cosmologies, Promiscuous Geographies and the Depths of Local Sovereignty." In *A World of Water: Rain, Rivers and Seas in Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. P. Boomgaard. Leiden: KITLV Press, pp. 71-102.
- Paredes, O. 2013. *A Mountain of Difference: The Lumud in Early Colonial Mindanao*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program.
- Parry, N.E. 1932. *The Lakkers*. London: Macmillan.
- Peletz, M. 1996. *Reason and Passion: Representations of Gender in a Malay Society*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Peltier, A-R. 1999. *The White Nightjar: A Lao Tale*. Chiang Mai: École Française d'Extrême Orient.
- Phuong, P.Q. 2007. "Empowerment and Innovation among Saint Tran's Female Mediums." In *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post Revolutionary Vietnam*, ed. P. Taylor. Singapore: ISEAS, pp. 221-249.
- Pucci, I. 1992. *Bhima Swarga, The Balinese Journey of the Soul*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.
- Rafael, V. L. 1993. *Contracting Colonialism: Translation and Christian Conversion in Tagalog Society under Early Spanish Rule*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

- Rajadon, P.A. 1961. *Life and Ritual in Old Siam*, ed. and trans. W. J. Gedney. New Haven: HRAF Press.
- Rozario, S. 1998. "The *Dai* and the Doctor: Discourse on Women's Reproductive Health in Rural Bangladesh." In *Maternities and Modernities: Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences in Asia and the Pacific*, ed. K. Ram and M. Jolly. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 144-76.
- Ruch, B. 1990. "The Other Side of Culture in Medieval Japan." In *The Cambridge History of Japan*, ed. K. Yamamura. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 4: 500-543.
- Rumpf, G. E., ed. E.M. Beekman. 1999. *The Ambonese Curiosity Cabinet*/New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Saletore, R.N. 1981. *Indian Witchcraft: A Study in Indian Occultism*. New Delhi: Abhinav Publications.
- Schärer, H. 1963. *Ngaju Religion: The Conception of God among a South Borneo People*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff.
- Schoembucher, W. 1993. "Gods, Ghosts and Demons: Possession in South Asia." In *Flags of Fame: Studies in South Asian Folk Culture*, ed. H. Brüchner, L. Lutze and A. Malik. New Delhi: Manohar, pp. 239-67.
- Scott, W. 1994. *Barangay: Sixteenth Century Philippine Culture and Society*. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.
- Sered, S. 1999. *Women of the Sacred Groves: Divine Priestesses of Okinawa*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Shepherd, J. R. *Statecraft and Political Economy on the Taiwan Frontier 1600-1800*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Siegel, J. T. 2006. *Naming the Witch*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Skaria, A. 1997. "Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India." *Past and Present* 155 (May): 109-141.
- Slaats, H. and K. Portier, 1993. "Sorcery and the Law in Modern Indonesia." In *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*, ed. C.W. Watson and R. Ellen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 135-48.

- Smits, G. 1999. *Visions of Ryukyu: Identity and Ideology in Early-Modern Thought and Politics*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Stuart-Fox, M. 1998. *The Lao Kingdom of Lān Xāng: Rise and Decline*. Bangkok: White Lotus Press.
- Sudjiman, P.H.M. 1983. *Adat Raja-Raja Melayu*. Jakarta: University of Indonesia Press.
- Susilo, E. 1998. "Gamelan Wanita: A Study of Women's Gamelan in Bali." MA Thesis, University of Hawai'i.
- Swettenham, F. 1984. *Malay Sketches*. Singapore: Graham Brash: reprint of 1895 edition.
- Tanabe, S. 1991. "Spirits, Power and the Discourse of Female Gender." In *Thai Constructions of Knowledge*, ed. M. Chittrakasem and A. Turton. London: School of Oriental and African Studies, pp. 183-212.
- Tanabe, S. 2000. "Autochthony and the Inthakim Cult of Chiang Mai." In *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. A. Turton. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon, pp. 294-318.
- Tannenbaum, N. 1993. "Witches, Fortune and Misfortune among the Shan of Northwestern Thailand." In *Understanding Witchcraft and Sorcery in Southeast Asia*, ed. C.W. Watson and R. Ellen. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, pp. 67-80.
- Tayanin, D. 1994. *Being Kammu: My Village, My Life*. Ithaca, N.Y.: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Teljeur, D. 1990. *The Symbolic System of the Giman of South Halmahera*. Dordrecht, Netherlands/Providence, R.I.: Foris.
- Ter Haar, B. 2012. Where are China's witches?" <https://chinaleiden.weblog.leidenuniv.nl/2012/11/27/china-seminar-05-december-2012-barend-ter-haar-where-are-chinas-witches/>  
[Accessed Oct. 16, 2016.](#)
- Ter Haar, B. 2006. *Telling Stories: Witchcraft and Scapegoating in Chinese History*. Leiden: Brill.
- The Star*, March 12 2014 <http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2014/03/12/Missing-MH370-Bomoh-uses-magic-carpet-to-find-Boeing/> Accessed May 2, 2014.
- Traude, G. 1996. *The Women's Warpath. Iban Ritual Fabrics from Borneo*. Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History.

- Tun, T. 1986. *Royal Orders of Burma, A.D. 1598-1885. IV A.D. 1782-1787*. Kyoto: Center for Southeast Asian Studies, University of Kyoto.
- Wijeyewardene, G. 1986. *Place and Emotion in Northern Thai Ritual Behavior*. Bangkok: Pandora.
- Willford, A. C. 2005. The Modernist Vision from Below: Malaysian Hinduism and ‘The Way of Prayers.’ In *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*, ed. A.C. Willford and K. M. George. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Southeast Asia Program, pp. 45-68.
- Winzeler, R.L. 1993. “Introduction” In *The Seen, and the Unseen: Shamanism, Mediumship and Possession in Borneo*, ed. R. L. Winzeler. Williamsburg, VA: Borneo Research Council.
- Worsley, P., S. Supomo, T. Hunter and M. Fletcher, ed. and trans. 2013. *Mpu Monaguna’s Sumanasāntaka: An Old Javanese Epic Poem, Its Indian Source and Balinese Illustrations*. Leiden: Brill.
- Yassin, M. ed. 2000. *Traditional Literature of ASEAN*. Brunei: Secretary General of ASEAN.

BIO:

Barbara Watson Andaya is Professor of Asian Studies at the University of Hawai’i and formerly Director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies. In 2005-06 she was President of the American Association of Asian Studies. Educated at the University of Sydney (BA, Dip.Ed.), she received an East West Center grant in 1966 and obtained her MA in history at the University of Hawai’i. She subsequently went on to study for her Ph.D. at Cornell University with a specialization in Southeast Asian history. Her career has involved teaching and researching in Malaysia, Australia, New Zealand, Indonesia, the Netherlands, and since 1994, Hawai’i. She maintains an active teaching and research interest across all Southeast Asia, but her specific area of expertise is the western Malay-Indonesia archipelago. In 2000 she received a Guggenheim Award, which resulted in *The Flaming Womb: Repositioning Women in Southeast Asian History, 1500-1800* (a Choice Academic Book of the Year in 2007). Her current project is a history of religious interaction in Southeast Asia, 1511-1900, with a focus on Christianity and gender.