

spiritual aspects of their environment.

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### JAPAN

UMESAO TADAO 梅棹忠夫 and MORIYA TAKESHI 守屋毅, editors. *Matsuri wa kamigami no pafōmansu: geinō o meguru nihon to higashi ajia* 祭りは神々のパフォーマンス——芸能をめぐる日本と東アジア [Festival as sacred performance: Traditional performing arts in Japan and East Asia]. Tokyo: Rikitomi shobō, 1987. 474 pages, Photos and illustrations. Cloth, Yen 2,500. ISBN 4-89776-401-7. (In Japanese)

It is refreshing to discover a book on the traditional Japanese performing arts (*geinō* 芸能) that refuses to focus on their alleged uniqueness as corroboration, or result, of the hoary nativist (*kokugaku* 国学) notion that Japan, too, is unique and stands somehow alone above the mundane fray that embroils all other cultures. The bulk of Japanese *geinō* research has been locked into *kokugaku* circularity, with scholars maneuvering fiercely to proclaim some new angle on Japanese uniqueness but all the while simply drawing from the old presuppositions: *geinō* are unique because Japan is or vice versa. Some Japanese scholars have even cited Western acknowledgements of the historical isolation of *geinō* as proof positive that the traditional Japanese performing arts are unique, distinctive, different, pure and, by implication, even superior to the performing arts of foreign cultures.

This approach is hardly enlightening, redounding rather to the discredit of those who propound it and to the detriment of any objective analysis of Japan's traditional performing arts. The clear-cut corollary of this strange intellectual stance is that no one beyond the borders of Japan can understand the intricacies of *geinō*. Yet, the obvious inconsistency of citing Western scholars to prove the uniqueness of *geinō* apparently has escaped notice in Japan. The question then arises as to why so many Japanese scholars expend so much time and energy defending the uniqueness and purity of *geinō*. Why persist in maintaining that outsiders cannot understand what outsiders cannot understand? Why say anything about it at all? Their approach smacks of preaching to the choir, not to mention whacking at dead horses.

One of the most fascinating phenomena in the development of twentieth-century Western theatre is its rich cross-fertilization with various manifestations of traditional Japanese dance and theatre, from folk and religious festivals to classical forms. Major aspects of the work of William Butler Yeats, Bertolt Brecht, Sergei Eisenstein, Paul Claudel, Jean-Louis Barrault, Gabriel Cousin, Paul Goodman, Jerome Robbins, Merce Cunningham, Lee Breuer, Robert Wilson, Ariane Mnouchkine, and Theodora Skipitares, among many others, would be inconceivable without the impact of Noh, Bunraku, Kabuki, or certain of the traditional Japanese dance forms such as Gagaku and Buyō. Coupled with this artistic appropriation, Western scholars in the past thirty years have produced scores of excellent translations and studies of Japanese *geinō*. Not to accept that these traditional performing arts have gained a substantial measure of appreciation and genuine understanding beyond Japan is myopic at best. *Geinō* have become a truly international phenomenon.

The present volume goes a long way toward dispelling the weary *kokugaku*-inspired notions of uniqueness and purity that have characterized Japanese scholarly discourse

on *geinō*. Indeed, in a brief review it will not be possible to do justice to this weighty tome. It features essays by thirteen prominent Japanese anthropologists, folklorists, and theatre scholars. The essays cover a wide range of topics, from the dramaturgical representation of divine spirits to madness in performance to the origin and development of the Okina mask to Shinto elements in the ceremonial practices of the New Religions. These essays are bound together by an axiomatic opposition to the conventional wisdom not only that *geinō* are somehow unique and pure and superior but that they originated in religious ceremony and ritual.

Perhaps the most important contribution of this book is developed by Moriya Takeshi who served as chief editor. His goal is to examine anew the Japanese *geinō* tradition and to place it within a perspective encompassing the performing arts of East Asia. He further seeks to clarify an objective view not only from Japan toward the rest of East Asia but from East Asia toward Japan. Openly acknowledging that the Japanese *geinō* tradition is merely one among many analogous world traditions, he boldly breaks through the old *kokugaku* circularity by declaring the Korean and Chinese performing arts traditions equally worthy of study and appreciation as Japan's. (Two of the book's essays concern the Korean and Chinese traditions and another is by a Japanese of Korean ancestry.) Ultimately, Moriya would consider all performing arts traditions in a comparative perspective.

The book's other major contribution, propounded by Umesao Tadao in his essay, also goes far to undermine the old *kokugaku* approach. Umesao suggests that the performing arts in Japan, and elsewhere, antedate religion and in fact provide the culture for the origin and development of religion. Umesao convincingly offers the sense of ceremony and ritual observed in animal behavior—he discusses at length the monkey, so prominent in Japan's folklore—as the origin of the performing arts. What transforms animal performance, which is instinctive, into human performance, which is calculated, Umesao goes on, is imagination. Imagination-activated performance, he suggests, may have originally developed in connection with two primordial human activities: funerals, as to cope with the fear of death, and asserting kingly power, as to legitimize and maintain that power. Some kind of publicly rendered performance, Umesao claims, was virtually indispensable in these two arenas of human activity. Only at this point in the development of human society, hypothesizes Umesao, does religion—nurtured in the culture of the performing arts—take shape, also within the machinations of human imagination.

Umesao's theory of the imagination as central to the emergence of human performance is surely borne out by what happens in any effective theatre production. Consider, for example, the comments of Inoue Hisashi on his much acclaimed play *Keshō* (Make-Up, 1982). On opening night, he was shocked to realize that he the playwright, director Kimura Kōichi, and actress Watanabe Misako had "disappeared from the play." Only the play itself remained on stage. "I was reminded," Inoue concludes, "that a play comes to life only in the imagination of the spectators. We—playwright, director, actor—are mere midwives for the creation of the magical space of theatre."<sup>1</sup>

Finally, Umesao's theory of performing arts evolving from animal behavior and preceding religion in human affairs is provocative in that it places *geinō* in a far wider, extra-Japanese context, thereby avoiding the pitfall of the old *kokugaku* connection. But it should be noted that neither Umesao nor his colleagues in this book discount the particularity and peculiar characteristics of *geinō*. Rather, they celebrate and clarify those characteristics. The authors simply want the traditional Japanese performing arts to be disabused of groundless notions of uniqueness and purity and to be

appreciated objectively and widely for what they truly are: one fascinating tradition among many.

Every chapter in this book provokes substantial thought. It is well worth a close reading. Not all the contributors are as revolutionary in their thinking as Moriya and Umesao; one or two might not fully agree with the two editors. But scholars of *geinō* and of Japanese *geinō* scholarship will benefit hugely from this landmark work.

NOTE:

1. From the program of *Keshō's* recent North American tour.

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WALTHALL, ANNE. *Social Protest and Popular Culture in Eighteenth-Century Japan*. The Association for Asian Studies Monograph No. XLIII. Tucson, AZ: The University of Arizona Press, 1986. Xviii+268 pages. Maps, illustrations, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$19.50; ISBN 0-8165-0961-1.

Social protest movements can be and have been studied from a variety of standpoints such as political, economic, ideological, and so forth. Rather than opting for one of these lines Walthall takes the position that such movements are only the surface of a much more complex substratum of beliefs, values, and attitudes of their actors. In order to understand the significance of an incident such as a rice riot in Edo, it is important to see it not only from the authorities' side, but also from the side of the actors themselves. For this purpose Walthall makes wide use of documents which may sometimes be shunned by historians but which are of primary interest to folklorists, namely tales, songs, chronicles, etc., created by the actors themselves. Walthall does not analyze the form or structure of such texts. She rather strives to disclose what they tell us about how their authors judged their own situation, what they did to redeem it, and how they assessed the result of their struggles. In this respect Walthall's study offers quite a different view of what happened in Japanese farming villages during the time of the *pax Tokugawa*, the Tokugawa or Edo Period, compared to the mostly static picture offered by most Japanese folklorists. They, in a continued effort to unravel the original and pristine form of customs or forms of social relationships and functions, often present a picture of life in a village which seems to be far removed from, or certainly not seriously involved in, tensions which could dangerously threaten the very functioning of a community.

Walthall concentrates on events during the Tenmei years (1781-1789), a period of conspicuous unrest caused by the farmer's precarious economic situation. In order to explain the reasons and consequences of those happenings, she includes the century before and after those years as their long-range historical context. The author rests her argument largely on linguistic evidence of the forms of protest which surfaced during this period. This includes mainly three types of documents: the petitions filed by the villagers with the ruler after thorough deliberations and following a prescribed form; the chronicles, written by persons of a certain status, like a village headman, as a warning to their successors as to what could happen if they should dare to abuse their position bluntly to their own advantage; the tales, which are *post factum* accounts