

the situation through the practices and interpretations undergone at the *dōjō*. Evil spirits play the most eminent role as a rationale of this process. From the standpoint of folklore it is extremely interesting to follow Davis when he demonstrates with concrete cases how spirit stories actually come into existence and develop gradually in concordance with the religious progress a person makes, and how these stories provide a base for the individual by which he can get hold of certain phenomena in order to make them understandable.

From a sociological point of view the discussion of status within the group shows quite clearly the tendency of the leading members of the group to perpetuate their status among themselves, and how this attitude is supported by political, sexual and financial factors rather than by religious ones. Discussing then the alleged authoritarian attitude of leaders of New Religions and the attempt to explain the impact of these religions with the help of deprivation theories, two positions that are prominent in many other studies of Japanese New Religions Davis criticizes both stands. He insists that in spite of a marked negative attitude of the leadership towards democratic institutions the leaders are not authoritarian although they are authoritative. And deprivation theories do not really explain the attraction of such a religion because they tend to mix motives and consequences which should be held clearly apart. Like Geertz, Davis tends toward an understanding of religion as something which provides a powerful and lasting means to understand and live out one's problems by relating them to a larger context. Whether such an attitude of the believer is not triggered also by some feeling of deprivation might be open to discussion.

This book should be read by everybody who is interested in the spiritual life of Japan. It conveys much of the intricateness and complexity, and at times astonishing simplicity, of this life, something that is often lost in analytical studies of a particular problem. As a whole it is a sociological study, but it will be very helpful to folklorists, because it shows how an oral tradition, in the case of the spirit stories, emerges and also what importance and vigour folk tradition can have in a complex society.

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ISAKU, PATIA R. *Mountain Storm, Pine Breeze: Folk Song in Japan*. Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press. xi+126 pp., bibliography and bibliography, index. Clothbound \$12.95, paperback \$6.50.

This book is the product of a person with a true appreciation and feeling for Japanese folksong who unfortunately lacks the ability to clearly transmit her own understanding of the subject to others. Its nuggets of interesting information and sensitive discussions of Japanese poetry are all but buried in a torrid flow of prose, and only the most patient prospector will pan them all out. The book reminds me of nothing more than the excited blurtings of someone caught up in the enthusiasm of her subject: here is the heat of passion, but little order or coherence. Enthusiasm, however laudable, is in need of a *few* restraints.

Isaku begins her discussion of Japanese folksong by refusing to define her terms. An exact definition of a folksong, she tells us, would be "misleading," so we are simply told that "it is necessary to accept as folk song whatever the Japanese people themselves consider as such" (p. 1). Now this is very fine, but what happens if two Japanese

happen to disagree on their definitions? And when, later on, Isaku discusses the difference between "traditional" songs and "folk" songs (cf. p. 43), the need for a more precise definition is made even more painfully clear. As things stand, one is left at the end of the book with a very unclear picture of what the book was actually about.

The problem stems from Isaku's almost total lack of any critical understanding of her subject matter. I do not mean to imply by this that she does not know folksong, for surely she does; and her artistic understanding of the songs is very much in evidence in her translations. But there is no attempt to deal with the subject matter as a whole, in a logical and critical manner.

Early in the book Isaku tells us that the Japanese say their folksong is "difficult" (p. 14); the same, she says, is said about their language (p. 28). Anyone who has ever lived in Japan for any length of time will know that the Japanese are prone to say that everything from the use of chopsticks to esoteric Buddhism is "difficult," and the question is how one evaluates such claims. If Japanese folksong is, indeed, "difficult," the author needs to tell us *why* this is so. To say that the music of the songs presents "physical and technical challenges," and that its lyrics contain a "mixture of the delicate and the vulgar, of wit and emotion, of the secular and the religious" (p. 14), is really to say nothing, for the same is true of the folksong in nearly any part of the world, including Isaku's native United States.

This type of uncritical acceptance of things results in Isaku's passing on in all seriousness a number of half-truths and misleading statements that will do nothing to promote better understanding of Japan in the West. She says, for example, "In Japanese . . . a verb does not merely describe an action; a verb itself indicates the doer's age, sex, social status, and temperament" (p. 27). This is patently nonsense, but it is nonsense with some basis in fact, nonsense that springs from a lack of critical perspective. I will not go into details concerning her example here, but only note that social relationships as expressed through speech and choice of verbs in Japan are *much*, much more complicated than Isaku would have it.

A list of half-developed topics could go on indefinitely, for the book is virtually filled with them, but I will drop this area and move on to something new, the author's perplexing lack of sensitivity to the English language. The writing throughout the book is, in a word, bad. To cite but one minor example, we find the term "city ditty" used as a translation of the Japanese *dodoitsu* (p. 43); why, one asks oneself, could not the expression "urban ditty" have been used here, to avoid the horrid combination of sounds of Isaku's term? An attempt to read the book aloud will leave the reader in tears or stitches, whichever comes first. I say this is "perplexing" for Isaku shows great sensitivity to the language of the folksongs she has translated in the book. Indeed, her discussion of the poetry of folksongs is in some places outstanding (pp. 24-39), and in particular I applaud her discussion of the poetic ambiguities of the Japanese language and its possibilities for multiple meanings. The translations are also accurate.

Related to the egregious prose is an equally egregious job of proofreading. On the first page of the text we find that the author was "encouraged" to continue her study of folksong (p. ix), and on the last page of the bibliography that the folklorist Yanagita Kunio (identified incorrectly in the entry as Yanagida Kunio) produced a "vast number of words" (for *works*; p. 121); the last, at least, has the virtue of being grimly ironic to anyone who has ever looked in despair at the several volumes of Yanagita's collected "words." On the pages in between one finds proofreading lapse after proofreading lapse. In chapter five, for example (pp. 66-83), I counted eighteen such mistakes.

There is a host of other complaints, some major and some minor, and I will simply

list a few of them here. We are seldom told if a translation represents an entire song or a selection from one; the discussion of the historical background of folksong is woefully inadequate; there is no attempt at comparison with songs of other traditions at all; there is a misrepresentation of the sequence of events in Japanese myth on p. 5; the Romanization of Chinese words is creative, to say the least; and, finally, there is no reference anywhere in the book to the "mountain storm, pine breeze" of the title, leaving one to suspect that it is just another play to attract readers by providing a sufficiently "exotic" title.

The book does have some virtues. I have mentioned the translations; also important is the fact that some attempt is made to discuss the songs as performance pieces. Music is sometimes provided, which is a service to the reader. And the nineteen-page "discography" of recorded performances of folksongs is another such service.

Unfortunately, however, in spite of these virtues, the book does not live up to its potential. Isaku obviously has a real contribution to make, but her effort here falls far short of its goal.

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EGENTER, NOLD. *Bauform als Zeichen und Symbol. Nichtdomestikales Bauen im japanischen Volkskult. Eine bauethnologische Untersuchung, dokumentiert an 100 Dörfern Zentraljapans.* (Constructed form as sign and symbol) 1980, Zürich: Organisationsstelle für Architekturausstellungen, ETH-Hönggerberg. 241 pp., 950 illustrations, bibliography. Paper, sFr. 30.—. ISBN 3-85676-013-1 (In German).

After having read this book I am perplexed and ask myself how I can come to terms with such a publication. It is a catalogue compiled for an exhibition organized by the Federal Institute of Technology at Zurich and held under the title "Göttersitz und Menschenhaus" (Throne of gods and house of men) in November 1980. Contrary to other publications of this sort, it is not just a handbook that explains the exhibited items one by one, it is much more of a treatise concerned with a much neglected aspect of the history of architecture or building. Egenter approaches his topic first of all from a general historical point of view. Yet he aims at more than only at the historical development of forms. He thinks that an analysis that pays close attention to the material and structure that go into the construction of primitive, non-domestic building lead to new insights especially about how a given material and certain building methods may bring forth directly the ideological meaning of the resulting structure.

In order to demonstrate this he investigated certain cultic objects built from reed, bamboo, straw and trees, i.e. all natural materials, and used in celebrations and festivals of the *ujigami*, the village deity, in the area of Ōmihachiman, a city on the shores of Japan's largest lake, Lake Biwa. He collected his material in the years 1972-1976 from a hundred villages which show an astonishing consistency in the fundamental form of these celebrations. At the same time there is a great variety in the methods of building the cultic objects, in their individual forms and also in the larger social or religious systems they symbolize.