

NYGREN, CHRISTINA. *Gastar, Generaler och Gäckande Gudinnor. Resande teatersällskap, religiösa festivaler och populära nöjen i dagens Japan och Kina* (Ghosts, Generals, and Gorgeous Goddesses: Travelling theaters, religious festivals, and popular amusements in contemporary Japan and China). Stockholm: Carlsson Bökforlag, 2000. 437 pages. Numerous b/w illustrations, color plates, glossaries of Japanese and Chinese terms, bibliography, index. Paper SKr 375; ISBN 91-7203-919-1. (In Swedish with English summary)

This book is a detailed overview of contemporary theater and other popular spectacles in China and Japan of the 1990s. Although written entirely in Swedish and aimed mainly at a general readership in Sweden and Scandinavia, it also is probably of some interest to specialists elsewhere. The author is a Swedish scholar of East Asian theater traditions who builds on earlier Swedish publications. English titles for two of these works are *Fruits from the Pear Garden: Theater in China* (1986) and *Encounter between East and West: Metaphor and Convention in a Japanese Shingeki Performance* (1993).

The stated aim of the present work is to paint a picture of the continuing popularity, the staying power, and the social context of living theatrical and performance traditions of modern Japan and China, which currently face wide-reaching social and economic transformations. We are invited to follow the author on her wide travels in these two countries. There are no detailed analyses of texts or of single performances; instead the bulk of the book consists of descriptive narratives, interspersed with more general observations as well as with enlightening excerpts from the author's diary. The diary pages that open the book relate the many obstacles created by the Peking-style bureaucracy that interfere with an extraordinary shadow play performance. Perhaps the diary entries create an impression that is too pessimistic. True, there is much frustration of this kind in China, but red tape is also on the decline there. As we learn from the rest of the book, traditional forms of theater are being openly and enthusiastically revived after many years of suffocating government controls.

The section on local operas in China exemplifies this. It includes observations on the *yueju* opera popular in and around Shanghai, *yangju*-style opera in Nanjing, and traveling ensembles in interior provinces. Such ensembles, both state-sponsored and private, clearly enjoy a vast market. We are treated to highly interesting descriptions of itinerant performances of *jinju* and *luju* in the rural areas of Shanxi and Anhui, which include the repertoires, reception, logistics, and economics of these performances. The chapters on China also include discussion of the cities, where television already reigns supreme, but where there also still exists a viable market for live performances. In Shanghai, this competition is based at venues like the Dashijie (Great world) Entertainment Palace, the Worker's Palace, at re-emerging traditional teahouses, and other similar venues for popular theater, opera, and *pingtan*, the original Chinese storytelling accompanied by string instruments. Performances by outside professionals alone clearly cannot satisfy the masses. Thus, for example, in the city of Tangshan, amateur shadow play ensembles are maintained by mining workers and performed as much for the pleasure of those staging the play as for those watching it. On a grander scale, in rural areas such as Anhui and Shanxi, the people themselves now stage theatrical performances as formal components of New Year and other festival celebrations, including plays put on to comfort the gods. Among the most interesting parts of the book are Nygren's accounts of these developments, where performances are not just staged with the locals as audience but where people are participating as spiritually involved performers. Here we learn of current inventions where Mickey Mouse and other exotic deities-to-be are incor-

porated as actors in a traditionally based local play, in ways that Disney could never imagine.

The part on Japan begins with a description of itinerant theater groups performing the *taishū engekī* popular plays, which are often performed at hotels, spas, and other places to entertain and attract customers. Such plays are also performed at theaters in Tokyo and Osaka frequented by aficionados. As in China, the author follows, admires, and interviews the various members (old and young, male and female) of several such traveling ensembles. She discusses their lives, their audiences, the historical roots of their art, and the art's affinities with more elevated and more heavily formalized art forms like the kabuki. A discussion of the famous all-women ensemble of Takarazuka and their exquisite venues is also included, as an example of "elevated" popular culture (and also as one example of formalized onstage transgression of gender roles).

Yet another section visits the whole issue of Japanese local festivals (*matsuri*) as popular performance. The author explores the multiplicity of meanings invested by the various participants and onlookers into the festival and its components, including the roles of demons, lion dancers, and other animal dancers. This discussion, focusing on the community-solidifying powers of the *matsuri*, also investigates the use of lion dancers at grave rites (as *hakajishi*, in "grave lion" performances during the Obon festival).

The nature of the book as an overview of so much very interesting materials does not allow much space for in-depth analyses. But the *matsuri* might also be explored in Bakhtinian terms, as liminal time providing release from the solidity of everyday working life. The relative lack of Japanese-style popular festivals in China could actually provide grounds for an enlightening comparison between the two countries, which otherwise is conspicuously lacking in a book treating both. In China such frivolity as one meets with in the Japanese *matsuri* no longer exists as it is currently prohibited in most places there, and the traditional forms that might sustain it may indeed be mortally wounded in most places—but popular festivals are on a comeback, as can be seen in the curious revival mentioned by Nygren of *yangge* harvest dancing, which today is done outside of its original peasant context.

The bibliography might have been more generous. Jennifer E. Robertson's book *Takarazuka* (Berkeley, 1998) and the like might have been included. On the historical roots of the hereditary transmission of performance arts in China, one should note the recent work by the Swedish scholar Anders Hansson, *Chinese Outcasts: Discrimination and Emancipation in Late Imperial China* (Leiden, 1996), which includes excellent reviews of the status of artist groups.

In sum, the book under review offers an exciting overview and introduction of the state of popular theater and performing arts in China and Japan. The book is the result of wide-ranging investigations and is a useful point of departure for the discussion of such topics as the complex impact of television and the coming new media. The book has a Japanese-Chinese character index for cross reference, and is richly illustrated with the author's photographs of many performances and ensembles.

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WACKER, MONIKA. *Onarigami. Die heilige Frau in Okinawa*. Europäische Hochschulschriften, Reihe 19/B, Volkskunde/Ethnologie, Abt. B. Band 55. Frankfurt/M: Peter Lang GmbH, 2000. 230 pages. Tables, bibliography. Paper DM 79.00. ISBN 3-631-36061-4. (In German)

Studies of the interaction of religion and society on the Ryūkyū islands have for a long time