

traditions about the origin of their status. It is striking that this marginalized category enjoys certain privileges that were often a puzzle or even a scandal in the eyes of ordinary society. In their traditions these privileges were traced back to an imperial descendant struck by blindness whose high social status prompted a change in the general attitude towards the blind, guaranteeing their humane treatment and providing them with an income through the establishment of a lasting exclusive professional organization. In some cases the imperial child may even have been considered to be the avatar of a merciful deity intent upon redeeming those afflicted with blindness. The deity is Myōon-Benzaiten, who became the tutelary deity for these professional groups and the object of their group rituals.

The author aims at presenting a comprehensive picture of these groups that integrates three areas: their legends of origin, their social organization and activities, and their rituals for their divine protector. According to Fritsch, Myōon-Benzaiten is the Japanese transformation of Sarasvatī, goddess of wisdom and patroness of ritual and liturgy (13–14). Ever since the aristocratic *biwa* musicians of Kyoto enshrined this deity as their divine protector, Myōon-Benzaiten has remained in some way or other the object of veneration of the various groups of blind musicians that have taken over from the court nobles. The author follows the historical development of successive groups of blind musicians who have taken over the *biwa*, and to some extent also the musical tradition from the nobles, and transmitted both, but now on the lowest level of society. She describes the *biwa-hōshi*, the specialists in the recitation of secular Heike stories and their strong hierarchical organization, the *tōdō-za*, then the *mōsō* of Kyushu as ritual performers, and finally the *goze*, the blind women performers of northern Japan and their rather different sisters, the *itako*. Fritsch succeeds in finding even small bits of tradition that at least hint that even a group like the *itako*, who do not have a musical tradition, still shares the same world. It is particularly interesting to see how these groups explain the reason for their existence and their activities by referring to similar etiologic legends and founding personalities, but interpret them differently in order to make them fit the individual circumstances of each of these groups.

The topic of this book may seem to lie at the margins of research about Japan, but it locks in with growing interest among Japanese scholars in regard to those sections of society that for too long have been ignored by official historiography. It would be too much to expect that the author would cover all aspects of the fate of the blind in Japanese society, but she certainly succeeds in showing the significant social and symbolic functions those of the blind who were organized into professional groups fulfilled in their long history. In doing this, she offers a look at an aspect of Japanese society in which the socially lowest are intimately linked with the highest to perform, with the latter's symbolic support, an important social task only the former can perform.

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MOERAN, BRIAN. *Folk Art Potters of Japan: Beyond an Anthropology of Aesthetics*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 1997. xiv + 272 pages. Maps, photographs, figures, charts, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$45.00; ISBN 0-7007-0605-4.

In 1927, Yanagi Sōetsu, founder of the *mingei* or folk craft movement in Japan, saw an unpre-

possessing black teapot in a shop in Kyushu that met his criteria for folk craft: it was cheap, functional, and made traditionally of local materials for everyday use by an “unknown craftsman.” The rest, as they say, is history. In Brian Moeran’s deft telling, this history is not only richly detailed, but is also full of paradox, tension, and highly relevant to larger issues of anthropology, aesthetics, and Orientalism.

A hamlet called Sarayama in northern Kyushu currently consisting of fourteen households has been producing *ontayaki* for roughly 250 years. Founded around 1705 with Korean roots, Sarayama-produced pottery was utilitarian rather than decorative; it consisted of such objects as pickle jars, water crocks, *hibachi*, teapots, storage jars, and dishes. Because of its traditional means of production, simple, unpretentious form, and historical accident, it became an ideal of the *mingei* movement. After Yanagi saw the pottery, he made two visits to the village in 1931 and 1951, accompanied the second time by potter Hamada Shōji. Items from the Sarayama kiln began to be known by connoisseurs through articles and exhibits, and soon after the twenty-day visit by British potter Bernard Leach in 1954, the *mingei* boom established the import of this local ware. The term *mingei* was coined in 1925 by Yanagi, Hamada, and another potter, Kawai Kanjirō, to replace the negatively understood *getamono*, or “vulgar thing.” *Mingei*, a condensation of *minshū kōgei*, literally means “people’s craft.”

One of the strengths of this book is that it contextualizes a rich, tightly focused ethnography within discussions of the implications of the data to larger theoretical questions, much in the manner of Dorinne KONDO’s *Crafting Selves* (1990). One of MOERAN’s goals for this revision of his *Lost Innocence* (1984) was to do just this: to use the Japanese data to “make comparisons or deductions of theoretical interest to anthropologists in general” (4). *Folk Art Potters of Japan* does this well, and should be of interest to, besides Japan scholars, those interested in problems of aesthetics, Orientalism, tradition and modernity, the workings of “art worlds,” ideology maintenance, and the emergence of individualism in traditional settings.

In the more traditional ethnographic sections of this book, Moeran shows the details of pottery production, how changes in production have resulted in changes in community organization, key differences between this village and those of previous village studies that looked at purely rice farming communities, and the way the local ecology limits the number and size of households.

When the focus shifts to the existence of the art world in Japan, we see how the complex network of collectors, dealers, *mingei* “experts,” and consumers has affected the world of the potters. Here fascinating tensions and paradoxes come to play. For example, customers want signed pieces, and yet this violates the ideology of the “unknown craftsman” and also threatens the community solidarity of the potters. Increasingly, production of utilitarian pieces—one of the defining criteria of *mingei*—is giving way to smaller, decorative pieces due to the space restrictions of the urban consumer. Potters often are frustrated by consumer demands that are at odds with the technical limitations of their equipment and materials. One book not cited in the bibliography that illuminates some of these same themes from a very different perspective is Lewis HYDE’s *The Gift* (1983).

The two largest theoretical issues in this work concern aesthetics and Orientalism. The meaning of Moeran’s subtitle is that an anthropology of art must move beyond a simple location of art in “a culture,” looking rather at the more complex picture of influences between and within cultures. He proposes an anthropology of values rather than aesthetics; this broadens the undertaking by situating art in the larger context that usually includes extra-aesthetic values in addition to those of art worlds alone. Additionally, while aesthetics tends to refer to “high” culture, values concern any aspect of culture that deals with beauty or taste. Increasingly, this takes place in a world system. In the present case, Moeran shows how William Morris and the Arts and Crafts movement of England influenced Yanagi’s notion of

mingei, which in turn influenced European and American potters. Leach both learned and taught techniques during his 1954 visit.

In a related argument, Moeran shows that what may seem (and is often described) as a purely Japanese phenomenon has parallels in other cultures and times. “[T]he philosophy of *mingei* is the sort of moral aesthetic that tends to arise in all industrializing societies that experience rapid urbanization and a shift from hand to mechanized methods of mass production” (21). This is an internal phenomenon, in which a simpler past is idealized. In parallel fashion, technologically advancing cultures may idealize “primitive peoples” from other cultures, as did earlier European and American anthropology (p. 44), or discover in “the Orient” aesthetic delight (221). In contrast to SAID’s argument in *Orientalism* (1978) that an external, hegemonic discourse creates the Orient, Moeran argues for both internal and external creation and manipulation of the discourse of *Japonisme* (and more currently and internally, *nihonjinron*), for the existence of a “non-hegemonic interaction between different traditions” (226).

This rather hasty summary does not do full justice to the complexity and skillful interweaving of these arguments. Although grappling with abstract theoretical matters, this book is well organized, highly readable, and always grounded in the case study of the potters. Influences are always shown to be reciprocal or circular and not linear (135). The splendid photographs bring the pots and the setting to life. If Blake can “see a world in a grain of sand,” Moeran can in a grain of clay, and he has depicted it for us in rich and satisfying detail.

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BRAY, FRANCESCA. *Technology and Gender: Fabrics of Power in Late Imperial China*. A Philipp E. Lilienthal Book. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997. xvi + 419 pages. Map, illustrations, glossary, references, index. Cloth US\$50.00; ISBN 0-520-20685-1. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-520-20861-7.

In recent years the history of Western science and technology has seen a small but significant increase in the publication of books and articles on the role of women, but, strangely enough, this trend has not been equally represented by their colleagues who research China. Being the