

then seems to shift to a consideration of how various forms of media are used to promote reading, literacy, and education. The author is also concerned about how to stimulate and develop reading among children and how to help people in rural areas get access to reading materials, which are mainly distributed in the urban areas.

The last two chapters concern literacy in developing countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. The popularity of the electronic media, especially television, is questioned and identified as the cause of the setbacks in literacy, since people seem to spend time watching television rather than reading. However, the author recognizes that television is not the only cause of failures in promoting literacy—other causes lie in the home environment, community environment, and school environment. Turning to historical and cultural factors, the author accepts that in most rural areas the local languages are still used in ordinary daily life, while the national language (which came later with the concept of nationhood) is more of an “outsider’s language,” and that this is why it is hard to convince people of the importance of literacy. Some countries in Africa solved the problem by transcribing folktales related by traditional storytellers in the local languages, translating them into the national language, editing and printing them, then using them to practice reading in order to achieve literacy.

Overall, it appears to me that the book touches upon a variety of topics, and oftentimes it may seem confusing to go back and forth between media and literacy. My guess is that the author has three subjects in mind at the same time: one, the importance of folklore in oral societies; two, the emergence and the use of new forms of (mass) media in various countries; and three, the problem of literacy in conjunction with the existence of these new media. The link between these three subjects in the author’s mind lies, I believe, in the fact that, first of all, traditional folklore deals with “the folk” in nonliterate societies, while modern media are the new form of communication of “the mass” in literate societies. Whether it be the “the folk” or “the mass,” they comprise the majority of the population in the respective types of country. Second, traditional folklore through time has functioned as both entertainment and education in traditional societies, and so have the mass media in modern societies—this is why the function of the mass media in entertainment and in education are brought up alternately in the discussion. Third, folklore and mass media are mediated by the fact that traditional folklore, to some extent, shapes both the form and content of the programs broadcast in the mass media today. Thus, though the book may appear eclectic, it is at the same time comprehensive and insightful.

All in all, I think this is quite an interesting work. It discusses various forms of media and cites case studies from a number of different cultures. The book, in effect, illustrates the development of the media, from oral tradition to written tradition and up to the modern mass media in the present age of information. Besides, one rarely finds books on mass media that try to bridge oral-traditional cultures and literary-modern cultures, as this one does.

Siraporn THITATHIAN-NATHALANG
Sukhothai Thammathirat University
Nonthaburi, Thailand

JAPAN

AVERBUCH, IRIT. *The Gods Come Dancing: A Study of the Japanese Ritual Dance of Yamabushi Kagura*. Cornell East Asia Series 79. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University East Asia Program, 1995. xvi + 326 pages. Glossaries, b/w photographs, bibliography, index. Hardcover US\$25.00; ISBN 1-885445-67-9. Paper US\$15.00; ISBN 1-885445-79-2.

Dance, “read like a rich and informative cultural text” (258), forms the fundamental basis for Irit Averbuch’s profound research into a certain form of *yamabushi kagura* in the mountainous part of Honshū in northern Japan. *Kagura*, the most ancient of Japanese performing arts, is widely spread over the country as a part of ritual performance in Shinto shrines. Generally classified as folk performing art, it is further divided in two large categories: the *mikagura* (performed in the imperial palace and shrines related to it) and *sato-kagura* (performed in the countryside). This study is mainly concerned with the latter, and concentrates primarily on the Dake school (*ryū*) of *Hayachine kagura* in Iwate Prefecture, where worship of mountain deities always has been popular and the influence of *yamabushi* (mountain ascetics) strong.

Looking upon dance as “a metaphor for life itself” (36) and suggesting that “the real seat of *kagura*’s power lies in the choreography of its dances, which evokes and activates its symbols of power” (170), the author uses participant observation as well as the personal experience of learning and performing some of the dances as points of departure for her arguments. Her study focuses on the deeper meaning of some of the dances, the interaction between dancer and audience, and the concept of *kamisama*, the “god” or “deity,” as a performer/spectator.

The book consists of seven chapters, a conclusion, and two glossaries, one for Japanese terms and the other for names and places. Twenty-eight black-and-white photographs form a separate appendix, illustrating the dances discussed in the book. The introductory chapter outlines the history and theory of Shugendō (Japanese mountain asceticism), its ritual-oriented practice, and its deep influence on Japanese performing arts. The author introduces both her personal opinions and current definitions of the concept of dance as term, metaphor, and symbol in various research disciplines. In her investigation of whether one can talk meaningfully about dance outside its social and cultural context (26), Averbuch stresses that the *kagura* dance cannot be understood apart from the Japanese cultural and religious tradition of which it is a product (37).

Chapter 2 presents the context of the *Hayachine kagura* through descriptions of geography, legend, history, and occasions of performance, including a specific performance calendar. It was the *yamabushi* who first introduced, organized, and performed the *kagura* as part of their practice at Hayachine, a mountain with a potent and mysterious nature that is itself worshiped as a many-sided deity. Two schools of *kagura* originated in this area: Dake and Ōtsugunai—the first with a stern, masculine character and the second with what is regarded as a gentler and more feminine character; it is suggested that these are aspects of the *A-UN* concept, brought to Japan by esoteric Buddhism (51). The chapter discusses the purposes and roles of the *kagura* performances mentioned, and also considers the tradition of wandering *yamabushi* performing their symbolic and magical gestures and steps according to a secret tradition. Even if many sources of power are lost nowadays, performers are regularly invited to villages to provide religious and magical services, to give blessings for good health, and to prevent misfortune. With the help of instructive examples, the author underlines the importance of having a *kagura* performed on the right occasion, as the performance is mainly put on to entertain the *kamisama*. Asking whether the artistic level of the performers makes any difference to the efficacy of the performance as kami worship, Averbuch concludes, with an opinion slightly divergent from the *kagura* masters, that the quality plays an enormous role in the generation of power (77).

The third chapter extensively describes and explains the setting of the *Hayachine kagura*, including stage, costumes, dance structure, and music—the interacting components conveying the magic power of the performance. The repertory, divided into five basic categories, is briefly presented and further differentiated in *omote mai* and *ura mai* (“front/face dances” and “back dances”). Averbuch relates this division to the yin/yang principles, and this division

into yin/yang dances is taken as evidence that the dances are of *yamabushi* origin and influenced by Buddhist traditions (119).

In chapter 4 the author goes into a more detailed description of one category of dances, the *shiki no mai* (“ceremonial” or “ritual” dances), consisting of twelve pieces divided into six *omote mai* and six *ura mai*, performed during the day and the night respectively. This description is followed by analyses and personal comments, and the dance cycle is summarized from a number of different aspects, including historical interpretation and structural significance.

In the following two chapters the discussion enters into further details on two specific dances, explaining symbols and interpreting the overall impression. Chapter 5 deals with *Yama no kami mai* (the Dance of the Mountain God), the most important part of the *shiki no mai*. Chapter 6 discusses the *Gongen mai* (usually translated as “lion dance”), the most sacred and complicated form of *kagura*, performed as a finale of the whole performance. The greater category of *shishi* (lion) dances, of which there is a great variety in Japan, is assigned to shamanistic and magical practices dating to prehistoric times and historically connected to a wider Asian system of mythological beasts (215). The dances are described and discussed gesture by gesture, step by step, in combination with the music and chanting of the narrators; the description concludes with reflections on similarities and differences in the shamanistic process it expresses.

Chapter 7 examines the entire *kagura* event, including the relation between performer and audience and the concept of *kamisama* as spectator or dancer. Roughly divided into two parts, the discussion concentrates on the *kagura* and its human or divine audience. Averbuch states here that in *kagura* the human is touched by the divine, and the boundaries between human and divine are dissolved (249), and, later, that it is primarily the dance that “embodies and executes, in both function and meaning, the power of the *kagura*” (255).

In her concluding remarks Averbuch further emphasizes the importance of dance in *kagura*: “In the *kagura* the gods come dancing, to bestow, and receive, their life-force” (257). Returning to the initial discussion on the nature of dance, referring to the accomplished examination of the meanings and functions of ritual dance performance in religious and cultural life, the author maintains the ontological existence of the *kagura* dance.

Though the book is an impressive example of well-prepared scholarly investigation, the problem of analyzing theater and dance by dividing the entity into fragments and thereby dismembering the whole is obvious; but the author is well aware of the danger, adducing the analogy of a dissected frog: it can be studied in pieces, but is dead as a frog. Still, if this kind of analysis has to be done, I find the method used in this book to be applicable. Though the dances are lost, we gain a lot of understanding of the context in which they appear and of the meaning of each dissected part. The interdisciplinary view brings religion, anthropology, and theater studies into a sound cooperation. Another strong point of the investigation is that the author is combining high scholarly standards with personal experience and serious devotion to her subject. Explanations of terms and phenomena are sometimes excessively repeated, and the photos could have been better chosen and discussed in the text, but these flaws in an otherwise qualified and interesting work ought not to keep anybody interested in the subject away from an easily accessible and useful book.

Christina NYGREN
Stockholm University