

BOOK REVIEWS

GENERAL

VAN ERVEN, EUGENE. *The Playful Revolution: Theatre and Liberation in Asia*. Drama and Performance Studies, Timothy Wiles, general editor. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992. xviii+284 pages. Illustrations, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$39.95; ISBN 0-253-36204-0. Paper US\$18.95; ISBN 0-253-20729-0. (Higher prices outside North America)

Since the late 1960s and early 1970s, a new type of political theatre has emerged in Asia. Known as "people's theatre," "popular theatre for social change," or "theatre of liberation," it developed as a way to help the poor and oppressed become more conscious of the causes of their sufferings. Repressive political measures like martial law and military dictatorship inspire the growth of this type of theatre.

Its activities stem from the ideas of the Brazilian philosopher and educator Paulo Freire, who is particularly involved in designing educational programs that enable illiterate and semiliterate adults in the Third World to empower themselves. In general, Freire's pedagogy confronts Western concepts of education in which knowledge "is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing" (FREIRE 1973, 54). Consequently Freire's ideas stress the necessity of a new type of teacher, one who believes in and appreciates the creativity and wisdom of the ordinary people. When applied to the world of theatre, Freire's ideas imply that a new kind of actor is needed if people's theatre is to fully develop. This actor goes to the community not "to teach or to transmit or to give anything, but rather to learn, with the people, about the people's world" (15). The essential task of the actor is not to perform for the people but to help them perform their own plays for themselves.

People's theatre therefore engages itself in the building of an alternative theatre belonging to the people. This theatre is disassociated from the mass media and commercialism. It erects its stages in squatter areas, villages, prisons, schools, and so on. It emphasizes group process rather than performance. The play is created through the collective cultural action of the community. This group process makes people aware of their social situation, their creativity, their ability to express, and their strength as a group.

The Playful Revolution by Eugene Van Erven attempts to describe the philosophy, development, direction, and difficulties of the theatre of liberation in the Philippines, South Korea, India, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Thailand. The author also discusses recent attempts by practitioners to form an Asia-Pacific theatre-of-liberation movement, and proposes ways of using the Asian methodology in the West.

The book is a welcome contribution. The analyses of performance contexts, the descriptions of performances, and the interviews with practitioners contained in the volume bring to life aspects of people's theatre of which few in Asia, much less the

West, have been aware. It also serves an important purpose by documenting the activities and methods of Asian people's theatre—these can be adapted for other purposes such as the teaching of theatre and language in schools and universities and the sensitizing of target groups by socially oriented organizations such as women's groups, unions, and educational institutions.

There is a wealth of information in *The Playful Revolution*. However, there seems to be an imbalance of data on the different countries. The Philippine and Indian networks are described in greater detail than their South Korean, Pakistani, Indonesian, and Thai counterparts. For instance, the two chapters devoted to the Philippines describe not only the history of Filipino theatre but also the formation of the theatre of liberation in the north and south, the makeup of the theatre companies (including directors and performers), the methods used by groups such as PETA (The Philippines Educational Theatre Association), the stories performed, and the criticisms of the movement. On the other hand, the chapters on South Korea, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Thailand mainly comprise short descriptions of theatre of liberation companies, their main coordinators, and the plays presented by them. One wishes that more information on the methodologies and strategies used by the latter countries had been provided so that comparisons could be made.

Finally, one presumes that the author received permission to reveal the identities of the theatre-of-liberation activists. Otherwise, he might have inadvertently put those in the more repressive countries in danger.

REFERENCE CITED

FREIRE, Paulo

1973 *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Translated from the Spanish by Myra B. Ramos. New York: Seabury Press.

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CHINA

ARIS, MICHAEL. *Lamas, Princes, and Brigands: Joseph Rock's Photographs of the Tibetan Borderlands of China*. Assisted by Patrick Booz, contributions by S. B. Sutton and Jeffrey Wagner. New York: China Institute in America, 1992. 144 pages. Maps, 126 b/w photographs, appendices, selected bibliography. Paper US\$29.95; ISBN 0-295-97209-2. (Distributed by University of Washington Press, Seattle)

In order to appreciate the significance of *Lamas, Princes, and Brigands*, it is necessary first to know something of the man behind this remarkable collection of photographs: Joseph Rock (1884-1962), one of the most interesting scientist-explorers of the early twentieth century. A restless spirit, Rock emigrated from his native Austria to New York at twenty-one, went to Hawaii several years later (where, despite his lack of formal training, he quickly became the unchallenged authority on Hawaiian botany), and, in 1922, journeyed to the Tibetan borderlands as an agricultural explorer for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He made numerous expeditions during his approximately twenty years in China, collecting vast quantities of plant and animal speci-