

JAPAN

ASHKENAZI, MICHAEL. *Matsuri: Festivals of a Japanese Town*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1993. xii+192 pages. Figures, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$36.00; ISBN 0-8248-1385-5. Paper US\$14.95; ISBN 0-8248-1421-5.

"In order to understand a culture, one has to know how people in that culture celebrate." Native scholars of Japanese culture and religion seem never to have felt any difficulty in accepting this "golden rule." From the time of such pioneers as Yanagita Kunio, due attention has always been given to the role of *matsuri* in the life of the people. The Japanese literature on the topic is voluminous and ever-expanding. A few exceptions aside, however, most foreign scholars of Japanese culture and religion have been less eager to focus upon this subject. The traditional Western propensity for emphasizing the ideational elements in culture and religion is certainly one of the reasons for this trend. But upon closer investigation it appears that other factors might have been partly responsible. Could there exist, for example, a latent resistance to the "participant observation" method that the study of *matsuri* requires, especially among scholars from the Judeo-Christian tradition?

In *Matsuri: Festivals of a Japanese Town* Michael Ashkenazi has rendered us an excellent service by calling our attention to the importance of festivals in Japanese society. He does so by offering a rich ethnographic account and theoretical analysis of continuity and change in the numerous festivals of Yuzawa, a small Japanese town untainted as yet by commercialism and tourism. His in-depth study will, no doubt, find its place in the growing worldwide corpus of work that has rediscovered the importance of ritual and other forms of popular religious behavior and practice. Ashkenazi accomplishes his task, furthermore, with an expertise that succeeds in balancing and harmonizing the descriptive with the theoretical and clearly reveals the author's rich experience in both areas.

Ashkenazi's study is divided into three main areas: ritual, festivity, and the organizations that support and manage *matsuri*. After an opening chapter that places the *matsuri* in their proper context, chapter 2 describes the background elements relevant to his discussion (i.e., the events, behaviors, and institutions that comprise Japanese society in general and Yuzawa society in particular). Chapters 3, 4, and 5 then present an examination of the details of the various *matsuri*, ranging from the highly structured and very formal ritual events to the less formal parades that accompany them to, finally, the (seemingly) unstructured events that constitute festivity. Chapters 6 and 7 focus on the festivals' organizational aspect, covering the overarching managerial issues as well as the role of the priestly officiants and their network. In chapters 8 and 9 the author returns to the general relationship between continuity and change in *matsuri* performance, relating the Yuzawa *matsuri* to festivals in other parts of Japan and elsewhere and also tying in some broad theoretical considerations about festivals that have arisen recently in anthropology. A glossary of Japanese terms, a reference section, and an index conclude the volume.

"Rich" is perhaps the term that best characterizes Ashkenazi's study, indicating both its strong points and its (inevitable?) limits. The attention given to detail (not for its own sake but for the importance it has in understanding the whole structure of *matsuri*) and the breadth and depth of the accompanying theoretical analyses are exactly what one would expect from a trained anthropologist; they provide a constant incentive for the reader, bringing to mind forgotten aspects of ritual and festivity,

opening up new vistas, challenging antiquated theories, and raising new problems. On the other hand, the in-depthness of Ashkenazi's study can also lead to a sort of "intellectual exhaustion"—this is not a book for mere entertainment. Indeed, even "festivity" sometimes becomes tiresome! *Des Guten zuviel?* But then another try after a short rest helps one overcome the fatigue . . .

Only a few critical remarks. Ashkenazi's use of macrons for the Japanese terms is not always correct. For example, *gu* (a suffix attached to certain shrines) and *guji* (the chief priest of a shrine) should be *gū* and *gūji*, respectively (or are Ashkenazi's pronunciations part of the local dialect?). The same applies to certain personal names, where macron use is sometimes inconsistent. Also, few Japanese sources outside of translations are mentioned in the reference section—a short bibliography of the main works on *matsuri* by Japanese scholars would have improved the volume. Finally, notwithstanding the great amount of detail in the book, I would have been grateful for a bit more information concerning the unexpected role of a Buddhist priest in one of the rituals (twice mentioned), since the relationship between Shinto and Buddhism in Japanese religion is—at least in the eyes of this reviewer—an issue that can never be sufficiently discussed. In any event, this is an excellent study and is warmly recommended.

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INDOCHINA

CATLIN, AMY, guest editor. *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology, Volume 9. Text, Context, and Performance in Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam.* Los Angeles: University of California, Department of Ethnomusicology, 1992. ISBN 0-88287-050-5.

Although ethnomusicologists often claim that their field encompasses all the world's musics, a look at current publications shows that several specific areas of the globe are receiving by far the greatest portion of ethnomusicological attention. Among the musics that Western scholars have largely overlooked are the genres from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam that form the subject of the most recent volume of *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*. This volume is therefore a most welcome contribution, presenting a wealth of material that greatly supplements our sketchy knowledge of musical traditions as rich and certainly as interesting as many that have already found their way into the ethnomusicological canon.

The volume begins with an introduction by the editor, Amy Catlin, and then presents studies by fourteen authors grouped into four large sections: 1) tribal minorities, 2) Cambodia, 3) Laos, and 4) Vietnam. Attempting to unify the theoretical approaches of over a dozen authors with as many ethnic and intellectual backgrounds is certainly not easy, and in her introduction Catlin makes the best of the impossible by outlining a text/context approach broad enough to cover all the studies in the volume. Close reading will show, however, that each contributor has a somewhat different idea of what exactly a text/context approach is. As a result, the nature of the "context" against which the music is analyzed varies greatly from study to study. For some authors, context is largely political or cultural history; for others it is social psychology; for yet others it involves linguistic factors. This plurality of approaches is, however,