

MOERAN, BRIAN. *Language and Popular Culture in Japan*. Japanese Studies. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989. ix+196 pages. Figures, bibliography, index. Hardcover £29.95; ISBN 0-7190-3041-2.

This book from the Manchester University Press series on Japanese Studies is a collection of essays drawn from the author's writings over the last ten years. Virtually all of the pieces have appeared previously in other publications, but it is unclear to what extent they have been revised here. The chapters bear some of the unevenness one might expect from works that originally had specific and perhaps very limited audiences in mind, but for the most part the author's overriding themes are evident and the essays engaging.

The chapters vary considerably in the kinds of material they discuss—witness such titles as "Speak Japan, Japanespeak," "California car-lore," and "The good, the bad and the noodle western," but most attempt to analyze some specific use of language to offer insights into popular culture. The author somewhat apologetically identifies his approach as "semi-linguapological," a hybrid of semiotics, linguistics, and the insights of a social anthropologist. He claims that sociolinguistic approaches to the study of language in Japan have concentrated too much on a "'microlevel' approach which views the use of language in everyday social relations, and attempts to gauge in what way language does, or does not, parallel social behaviour" (2). The author admits to drawing rather freely from several disciplines and thus risking the reprobation of each, but what may be missing by rigorously staying within the bounds of one discipline is made up for with witty and insightful descriptions of how the language is used in Japanese society.

Moeran explores what might be considered a refinement of the Whorfian hypothesis that a people's view of the world is strongly determined by the structure of the language they speak. The departure from classical Whorfian analysis comes with Moeran's emphasis on Japanese lexical and semantic categories rather than grammar and syntax. The focus in this collection of studies is more on a "macrolevel" approach, concentrating on "the way in which social ideals are reflected in the *keywords* used to describe such different phenomena as sports, aesthetics, and film" (2-3).

In general the analysis is strongest when the author explores examples of keywords that make up the discourses of popular Japanese culture today. In the fourth chapter, "Keywords and the Japanese 'spirit,'" the author attempts to define the concepts that go into the cultural meaning of the word *seishin* (spirit) in Japanese society, and how this overlaps with, and differs from, the concept of *kokoro* (heart). The primary source for examples is the annual summer high school baseball tournament, with additional illustrations from art, pottery, and advertising. The analysis does not seem to entirely justify Moeran's conclusion that there is a "hard core" of keywords (perhaps not more than a hundred) that "seems to deal adequately with all aspects of Japanese culture" (72), but anyone who is able to read and understand Japanese will recognize how many of the words he examines in this chapter do crop up in a variety of discourses. What is not clear is to what extent the reach of "keywords" in Japanese differs from that found in other societies. There are several chapters that take a comparative perspective, in particular "The poetics of advertising" and "The media mosaic," which compare Japanese advertising language and discourse with British.

Although the book bears some of the disjointedness one might expect from a collection of essays written over a period of almost ten years, it is a welcome foray into

interdisciplinary territories, and there is material of interest to students and scholars in a variety of fields.

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PLUTSCHOW, HERBERT E. *Chaos and Cosmos: Ritual in Early and Medieval Japanese Literature*. Brill's Japanese Studies Library 1. Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990. xii+284 pages. Bibliography, index. Cloth Dfl 125.— (ca. US\$62.50); ISBN 90-0408628-5.

This study is divided into four unequal parts: on "ritual and literature," on "Shinto ritual in Japanese literature," on the "Shinto-Buddhist synthesis and the ritual arts," and on "literature and exorcism." A major premise of the book is that ritual has played a structuring role in Japanese aesthetics, poetical and literary forms, and theater, either because "ritual forms" pervade the modes of production of culture, or because the genres under consideration were performed in ritual settings. Those are very different issues, but they are treated throughout the book as though production and performance, simply because of their ritual settings, are equivalent for the purpose of analysis. However, not one single ritual is ever discussed, even though that is the only thing that might shed light on what the author means by ritual.

The dominant theme echoing through this interesting but flawed study is that it is quite improper to study Japanese early and medieval culture without knowing ritual modalities of action in the religious systems of classical Japan. I believe this to be true, but I also believe that that "truth" cannot be demonstrated without a serious look at the ways in which scholarship treats ritual, and it is here that problems begin. The author is adamant that he will not review ritual theories, because it is a book about literature, but that is not enough of a precaution when dealing precisely with the issue of ritual and its relationship to cultural forms; some current theories might properly reinforce some of the author's contentions, while others might, also properly, put them in serious jeopardy. Disregarding theory is no guarantee of objectivity, especially when authors such as Eliade and Jung are used as though they were the object of agreement among scholars, and as bastions of unquestionable authority. Nonetheless, we have here one of the very few attempts at communication between historians of literature and of religion, and in that sense, the book is welcome.

While some readers might be annoyed, like this reader, by some of the sweeping generalizations, followed by overinterpretations, that mar an otherwise honest and erudite discussion, others will be attracted by some insights that are well worth pondering. For example, while it seems that the author conflates, with too much complacency, the categories of ritual, symbol, practice, and religious literature in too brief of an entry into his subject, he then offers a problematic analysis of one poem by Bashō, and it is not clear at all what, in that discussion, is supposed to explain what: does knowledge of classical ritual forms actually help produce a more incisive interpretation of Bashō? Not in the least. I do not know whether the author visited the Yamadera (Ryūshaku-ji) in Yamagata prefecture, where Bashō composed his famous "*shizukesa-ya / iwa ni shimi-iru / semi no koe*" haiku, but it *is* important to go there in this case, because the rocks that dot the slopes of that mountain temple are filled with holes that were the result of erosion, and it then becomes obvious that the poet's image to the