colonial policy by staging Pan-Asian spectacles such as those inspired by the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere: *Mongol* (1941), *Peking* (1942), *Return to the East* (1942), and *Children of East Asia* (1943). Colonialism, as Robertson points out, likewise possessed its own theatrics, whether involving Japanese soldiers in Burma donning grass skirts to do the "East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere South Seas Dance" or conceptualizing colonial territories "as a newly constructed stage fitted with Japanese sets and backdrops on which native actors would speak their lines in Japanese and perform their lives as if they were Japanese" (pp. 101–4). The "as if" is crucial in this connection. "Cross-ethnicking" Japanized colonial subjects brought into the fold of the Empire were analogous to cross-dressing masculinized *otokoyaku*: both represent a "sanctioned form of passing" (as Japanese, as male), but without the freedoms and opportunities afforded real Japanese and real males (p. 96).

These kinds of connections and insights are what make *Takarazuka* an exemplary demonstration of how popular cultural productions implicate wider discourses and deeper meanings. The book's breadth exceeds the bounds of what a short review can contain. In the recent minor boom in Anglophone studies of Japanese popular culture, very few have successfully steered between heavy-handed critical analysis that saps the life (and frankly, the fun) out of its topic, and unreflective flippancy born of either head-over-heels fandom or a dismissive haughtiness. Robertson's work here is a notable exception that should be widely read for its model approach and its eye-opening content. All it lacks is an accompanying DVD of Takarazuka performances.

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Women of the Sacred Groves, Divine Priestesses of Okinawa. By SUSAN SERED. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999. $55.00 (cloth); $19.95 (paper).

Susan Sered has written a captivating ethnography of Okinawan female priestesses on an island called Henza. Based on a total of thirteen months in residence there during 1994 and 1995, she presents a highly engaging study of her subjects with whom she very clearly enjoyed excellent rapport. Her study presents a number of life histories in a very readable style that manages to be both jargon free and closely tied to the theoretical nexus she has established.

JAS readers who do not immediately recognize Sered's name can be forgiven; her work to date has focused on women's roles in Judaism and on studies of religious groups or cultic associations in which women predominate. She has previously written on "religious cultures in which women are the leaders" (p. 4), such as the Zar cults in Africa, spirit cults of northern Thailand, Korean shamanism, Candomble and Macumba in Brazil, Christian Science, Shakerism, and others. This is her first study of Japan.

Sered wanted to study Okinawa, she writes, because while the groups just named exist outside the dominant social and religious mainstream of their respective societies, on Okinawa the priestesses constitute the mainstream and are "independent of any kind of overarching male-dominated institutional framework . . . Okinawan women are the acknowledged and respected leaders of the publicly supported and publicly funded indigenous religion in which both men and women participate" (p. 4). She undertook a village study, because, she writes,

> A case study, even of a small village like Henza, provides proof that male dominance of the religious sphere is not universal, not axiomatic, and not necessary. Henza villagers offer an alternative vision of a world uncolored by assumptions about God the Father who creates, commands, and punishes His children and a renewed hope that women and men can move beyond the hierarchical paradigms that oppress the spirit and constrain the imagination.
>
> (p. 12)

This is a brave book. Sered learned Japanese purely to undertake this study, taking her Israeli husband and three children with her to live on Henza, conducting interviews with the aid of an interpreter. She received no substantial assistance from Japanese anthropologists working on Henza and other Okinawan islands. For them the preferred form of field study is to descend upon the site for a two-week blitz with an entourage of graduate students to collect the data. Sered has collected some interesting material on the bemused reactions of Henza people to being studied (invaded) by mainland academics in the summer vacation between academic terms.

Henza villagers' reactions to Sered and her family focused upon their incomprehensible dietary practices (they kept kosher) and upon the anomaly of a husband who took care of the children while Sered followed the priestesses to the sacred groves on an almost daily basis. Some of the exchanges Sered reports are quite hilarious as she comes to grips with the absence of moral absolutes in Henza and a pervasive refusal to believe that the gods would visit punishment on humanity. Not only that, the gods do not require confession, repentance, and self-abnegation to deal with the effects of misdeeds—a simple purification will suffice:

> I had seen Mrs. Adaniya and other villagers use salt to cure various physical ailments (for example, she rubbed salt on my daughter's abdomen to ease a stomachache). Even more commonly, villagers sprinkle salt on the hands and body after attending funerals in order to keep the recently departed away. I asked Mrs. Adaniya:
> Susan: Where do warui koto (bad things) come from?
> Mrs. Adaniya: What?
> Susan: For example, why do you use salt?
> Mrs. Adaniya: For example, if in this house there is death or accidents or illness, if someone had these warui koto, to get rid of it [oharai], that is what the salt is for.
> Susan: Why do warui koto come?
> Mrs. Adaniya: If you are honest and serious, no one will hate you and say warui koto about you. You have to build up good relationships with others also. If you don't have good relationships with others, if when you are alive you do warui koto, it could be that there will be a message through your grandchildren [something unfortunate will happen to your grandchildren] while you are alive. When you do warui koto a spiritual thing (rei) will come to your grandchildren.
> Susan: How do you get rid of warui koto, salt?
> Mrs. Adaniya: Salt, yes . . .
> In Mrs. Adaniya's conception, there is no ontological distinction between misfortune and misdeed—between bad thoughts and words and things—and salt can get rid of it all.
>
> (pp. 52–53)

An astonishing variety and number of female religionists are active on Henza, which may not be typical of Okinawa as a whole. During the reign of the Ryukyuan Kingdom, *noro* were appointed by the Shuri government as the priestess who performs rites on behalf of the entire island. Around the *noro* are a group of four village priestesses (called *kaminchu* or *kami-sama*), each belonging to a different clan. Besides

the *noro* and her associates, there are also clan priestesses numbering about a dozen. Somewhat confusingly, the *noro,* the village priestesses, and the clan priestesses can all be called *kaminchu* or *kami-sama*. They perform ritual relating to the island as a whole, to villages, and to clans, according to a traditional annual calendar of rites. In addition to these traditional ritualists, there are also other religionists performing a variety of rituals when consulted by a client: *yuta*, a shamanic role; *ogami*, those who perform commercialized prayer ritual, and *ekisha* (also called *uranaishi*), who are diviners and fortune tellers. Of these, the *kaminchu* are most closely connected to the *yuta* who are regularly called upon to issue a judgment (*handan*) when a woman is in the process of being identified as someone who is meant to become a *kaminchu*. Elsewhere in Okinawa the priestess system has begun to decline and *yuta* are becoming more prominent; on Henza it would seem that the *kaminchu* are clearly in charge.

Sered's principle interest in Okinawa was to identify factors associated with female religious predominance, and to pursue that aim she has constructed the first half of the book as an extended ethnography of gender. She found that salient factors in women's ritual predominance included the following: "village endogamy, extended male absence, a central role for women in subsistence work and commerce, lack of substantial inheritable property, marriage and childbirth patterns that enhance women's longevity, weak political structures, aversion to hierarchy and rules, and strong integration among women" (p. 5). She is impressed with child rearing practices which train children in gender-appropriate behavior, but in a very mild way by comparison with Israeli society. There is no preoccupation with virginity at marriage for either sex, and both would typically have several partners before marrying. Everybody on Henza has been married twice.

The chapters of the second half of the book focus on different religious rituals and a study of the life-course of the priestesses, especially the role of initiatory sickness in the decision to become a priestess. Sered describes the role of the priestesses as mainly consisting of being present at the particular ritual, more than in the performance of specific actions. The *kaminchu* "emit good spiritual energy" so that villagers want them to be present on a variety of occasions. "Priestesses concentrate, represent, and embody divinity" (p. 147). It is not that the priestess performs the ritual, but that her presence itself *is* the ritual. In general, the presence of pristesses guarantee the world's equilibrium, social harmony, and individual health. The priestesses embody specific *kami* and if other *kami* are required for a particular ritual purpose, the *kaminchu* invites them to be present. Initiatory illness is a clue to be unraveled (p. 154), not a transforming experience but a sign. Thus, it can be quite mild by comparison with shamanic illness elsewhere. Illness mildly weakens the woman's body so that she can fuse with *ka-mi*-ness. Sered confirms this analysis through examination of many detailed life histories.

This book is a genuine eye-opener for students accustomed to the characteristic preoccupation with hierarchy and rules seen in studies of mainland Japan. Full of insights in its own terms, it also offers a salubrious outsider's perspective on Japan as a whole. It challenges readers to reconsider the apparently immutable character of basic social structures and highlights the medium of religion for establishing a society's pillars of gender construction.

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Mirror: The Fiction and Essays of Kōda Aya. By ANN SHERIF. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1999. 224 pp. $42.00 (cloth); $16.95 (paper).