

provided, along with instructive analyses concerning form. The excerpts are presented in the local Miao dialect along with a line-by-line translation in Chinese. A unique feature of the book is the short discussion of a traditional form of syllabic Miao writing, which is accompanied by a pronunciation key. For folklorists interested in the epic traditions of southwest China, Wu Yiwen and Tan Dongping's work is an invaluable resource on a rich and elaborate epic cycle from the Miao nationality.

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SIBERIA

OAKES, JILL and RICK RIEWE. *Spirit of Siberia: Traditional Life, Clothing, and Footwear*. Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998. viii + 215 pages. Maps, illustrations, line drawings, appendices, glossary, bibliography, index. Cloth US\$ 45.00; ISBN 1-56098-801-0.

Spirit of Siberia is a beautiful, informative, and yet partly disturbing book. Its strength lies in the descriptions and illustrations of the traditional footwear of about dozen of the main Siberian populations. The authors' descriptions, supported by many beautiful documentary photographs and well-done line drawings, not only give us a good idea of the materials used, and of methods applied to prepare those materials and work them into footwear (and clothing), they also demonstrate the astonishing range of variations that exist within the limits of basically similar forms as they are found over the vast spaces of Siberia. Although the basic structure of footwear remains largely similar, the decorations display great variation and express each group's individuality. The uniqueness of each group is well demonstrated by the book's photographs, which are a monument to the skillfulness and sense of beauty of the seamstresses who created these truly fascinating and ingenious clothes and shoes. The rather technical descriptions provided by the authors are probably not as easily understood as the photographs because of their highly specialized vocabulary. The authors, however, do help make the text easier to read by providing a glossary where they explain the technical terms, and by several appendices where they identify the structural features of footwear and provide illustrations that highlight differences in style and form, and that make the similarities visible. It is, therefore, perhaps best to look at the appendices first so as to avoid an unnecessary stumbling over unfamiliar technical terms while reading the main text.

According to its subtitle, the book is about "Traditional life, clothing, and footwear," but of these three, footwear gets by far the most detailed attention. This is not surprising since the book grew out of the preparations for an exhibit held in 1997 at the Bata Shoe Museum in Toronto. Traditional clothing gets considerably less attention. Sometimes it is treated only rather cursorily, however, because methods of manufacturing it are often similar if not the same as those for footwear. The sections on footwear and clothing can thus be seen as complementing one another. In contrast, the sections on "traditional life," which serve as brief descriptive introductions to each chapter, are independent of the other sections and are the book's weakest part.

It is quite clear that the authors' main purpose was not to write a general ethnography. For that reason one cannot expect a detailed description of the "traditional life" of the populations represented in the volume. Furthermore, considering the number of these popula-

tions, it is practically impossible for the authors to rely only on their own first hand material for all the different ethnic groups mentioned. The use of secondary sources is to be expected. It is, therefore, not the use of secondary sources that I think is disturbing; rather it is the way in which they are used. When I read the text I found myself increasingly asking why for some populations techniques of production (herding, casefishing, hunting) were chosen as significant for representing traditional folk ways, while for others certain selected beliefs or rituals (e.g. funerals), shamans, or warfare were chosen. It is not clear what standards the authors used to decide what had to be taken up in order to present a picture of a particular population's "traditional life." The features mentioned may all be characteristic for a population but the question is how much do they tell us about "traditional life," because for them to be "characteristic" they must also be "outstanding" in the literal sense, i.e., not the usual. In this sense, a shaman, for example, cannot simply be seen as standing for everything that goes into the religious beliefs and customs of a group. Since these introductions are mainly documented with references to secondary literature, one cannot help but get the impression that the authors chose to include in their descriptions what they found in a particular source, and as a result created imbalanced presentations of the traditional life of the various groups discussed. By mentioning these points, I am not trying to imply that the authors should have written a general ethnography rather than a well-informed book about footwear as they in fact did. However, I think that this way of making selective use of ethnographic facts has its pitfalls and is easily open to misunderstanding. There is a clear example of this danger.

In describing the tent of the Evenki shaman, the authors rely mainly on the famous article of ANISIMOV (1963); but they significantly misrepresent it in several instances. First, they say that "[h]istorically, women were thought to be shamans," (88) but Anisimov makes it quite clear that "the first shamans, the primogenitors of later shamans were thought by the Evenks to have been women, *mythical old women*, the guardians to the world of the dead" (ANISIMOV 1963, 97; my emphasis). Second, they mention that for the construction of the tent a larch tree was placed in the tent's center so that "[i]ts roots were in the hearth" (88); but Anisimov says that the tree was suspended from the smoke hole and its lower end "placed *next to the fire pit*" (1963, 86; my emphasis), because a small fire was kindled in the center of the tent. Third, the authors state that "[i]nside the shaman's tent, wooden figurines of moose, reindeer...and other animal spirit helpers were placed.... Additional spirit helpers with spears were placed inside the tent to prevent the spirits of hostile shamans..." (88; my emphasis). A look at the illustrations in Anisimov's article that represent a ground plan and a side view of the area where the tent is located (1963, 94–95) is sufficient to disprove this statement. In addition to the illustrations, he describes in detail that those figurines that our authors mention as being inside the tent are in fact placed outside of it in two areas that Anisimov explicitly distinguishes from "the tent proper" (87–93). Of course, it would be irresponsible to take just one single unfortunate case in order to judge a complex work. But since the source in question here can be understood even by someone who is not familiar with its language (because of the illustrations), it is disturbing that it is misread by speakers of that language (English). It becomes difficult not to ask questions about the authors' reading of other sources.

Fortunately, however, this book is not a general ethnography, and even the case mentioned does not impair the accuracy of the authors' description of Evenki footwear. The authors present very valuable material and interesting insights concerning the "shoe culture" of Siberian populations; but for more extensive ethnographic information, the reader is advised to go to the sources. Many of them can be found in this volume's bibliography.

REFERENCE CITED:

ANISIMOV, A. F.

- 1963 The shaman's tent of the Evenks and the origin of the shamanistic rite. In *Studies in Siberian shamanism*. ed., Henry N. Michael, 84–123. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Peter KNECHT

THAILAND

NATHALANG, SIRAPORN T., Editor. *Thai Folklore: Insights into Thai Culture*. Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Press, 2000. xviii + 233 pages. Color plates and b/w photographs. Paper 250 baht. ISBN 974-346-046-2. (Distributed by Chulalongkorn University Book Center, Phyathai Road, Bangkok 10330, Thailand)

Thai Folklore: Insights into Thai Culture, a collection of ten articles, is the first publication of Thai folklore in English to come out of the Thai Studies Center of the Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University. Eight of the articles in the collection have been published earlier either in journals or books. Most of the studies concentrate on the subgenres of oral narratives: folktales, myths, Jataka tales, and ghost stories. Three studies examine folksongs, folk beliefs, and puppet theatre.

The editor, Siraporn Nathalang, contributed three articles on folktales and myths. The first article, "Different Family Roles, Different Interpretations of Thai Folktales" (a reprint from the special issue, "Folklore and Folklife of Thailand," *Asian Folklore Studies* 48 [1989]) concentrates on issues related to family roles, family conflicts, and individually-derived meanings of folktales. In her second article, "Thai Folktale Drama on Television: Tradition and Modernity," Nathalang analyzes the effects of modernity and social change through the Thai folktales and folk dramas that have been adapted into various television series. Plot, character, and new stylistic developments occurred in one series as folk drama story writers became more conscious of changing Thai values, and of the presence of a young television audience. For example, monogamy as the current family value became the part of the story line in one drama as opposed to polygamy in the story line of the older dramas. In another drama, the heroine was characterized as capable, with skills of her own instead of being beautiful but helpless as the heroines of the past. In her third article, "Thai Creation Myths: Reflection of Thai Relations and Cultures" (first published in *Thai Culture* 2 [1997]), Nathalang continues with her comparative interest in the study of pre-Buddhism creation myths of various Thai-speaking groups as indicative of the relationship between these groups and their belief systems. She categorizes the myths into three types: the world as created by a pair of creators, human beings as coming out of a giant gourd after the flood, and the first male and female as *devadas* (angels) who could not return to heaven after having eaten the fragrant soil on earth. The advent of Brahmanism and Buddhism in the region saw the syncretism of indigenous beliefs and the new religions. In some versions of the myths, however, Nathalang sees evidence of a rice-growing tradition of the Thai peoples.

William Klausner's three articles, taken from his book *Reflections in the Log Pond* (1972), center on jokes. "Siang Miang: Folk Hero" gives a synopsis of four stories that tells of the wit, guile, and craftiness of the northeastern folktale hero Siang Miang. Klausner sees Siang Miang's behavior as a psychological safety valve for the rural masses, which also served