

ing pad for future scholars to further develop many of his findings. I anxiously await his next publication.

Michael A. KARDOS
Glen Burnie, Maryland

WU YIWEN 吳一文 and TAN DONGPING 覃東平. *Miaozu guge yu Miaozu lishi wenhua yanjiu* 苗族古歌與苗族歷史文化研究 [A Study of the Ancient Songs of the Miao Nationality and Miao nationality history and culture]. Guiyang: Guizhou minzu chubanshe, 2000.

The Miao nationality (*miaozu* 苗族) consists of over seven million people, most of whom reside in Guizhou 貴州, Hunan 湖南, Yunnan 雲南, and Sichuan 四川 provinces and the Guangxi Zhuang Nationality Autonomous Region. The present work concerns groups of Miao in southeast Guizhou, particularly in Taijiang County. The so-called “ancient songs” (*guge* 古歌) are a cycle of creation and migration epics sung in antiphonal fashion. At least three print versions of the cycle have appeared over the last two decades, one of which was collected and edited in 1983 by linguist Ma Xueliang 馬學良 and the Miao scholar Jin Dan 金旦, who is also the father of Wu Yiwen, one of the authors of the present text. (Jin Dan is also the author of *Bangx Hxak* [Song Flowers], reviewed in volume 48 of *Asian Folklore Studies*). The book under review here is a collection of folksong-like lyrics that singers intermittently put into their epic singing performances. It is a companion text to the Ma and Jin epic cycle and provides valuable information and discussions on many factual aspects of the cycle, in some cases expanding greatly on the already compendious footnotes of the original song text publication. Although the Ma and Jin text has been condensed for easier reading on the printed page (many of the repetitive passages were left out) and edited to a minor extent for politically incorrect content, the text is still of some value to ethnographers and certainly qualifies as what Honko has called a “tradition-oriented” literary text.

The theoretical underpinnings used by the authors of the present study are basically those found in traditional Marxist sources, such as Henry Lewis Morgan, with little apparent use of more recent Western theory. The great value of this work, however, lies in its rich contextual information supporting the epic texts, which in some passages contain encyclopedic catalogues of traditional material, aesthetic, and spiritual culture. When I was researching the Miao epics in the mid-1980s, I was lured into the field by Jin Dan in order to gain answers to many questions I had on the names of plants, the practices of blacksmiths and silversmiths, locally derived metals and chemicals, etc., that often appear in the songs. Many of the same questions to which I was given oral explanations in the field are carefully answered in the present text. Virtually every sort of reference to flora and fauna, minerals, farming tools, architecture, foodways, clothing, herbal medicine, religious practices, social organization and kinship (including the clan “drum societies”), life cycle customs, folk song and dance, etc., in the epics is covered in a useful and thorough manner in the book. Since migration epics are sometimes performed in similar contexts as the creation epics, a discussion of migration lineages is also included.

There is also space given to discussions of form, content, and performance style. Although not unique to southwest China, one interesting aspect of the process of performance is the antiphonal style in which the epics are delivered. Two groups of singers (often a pair of men singing in opposition with a pair of women) exchange passages of the songs and responses stimulated by questions concerning development in the unfolding story line, characters, or items that play roles in the action. Examples of line types and poetic passages are

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.

Mark BENDER
Ohio State University
Columbus, Ohio

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-