

**K.S. TOM, *Echoes from Old China : Life, Legends and Lore of the Middle Kingdom* (Honolulu, Hawaii Chinese History Center, 1989, pp. x+160, ISBN 0-8248-1285-9).**

Ban Seng Hoe

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the public was not to be dissuaded until the advent of "hippie styles" in the latter 1960s. Second, B. Gordon traces the evolution of denim jeans from their production by Levi Strauss (San Francisco, 1851) to the present. Functional, unisex jeans bespoke of the American work ethic and were adopted as an anti-fashion statement during the 1920s. This central message underwent only subtle modification until jeans, in their pre-washed and designer styles, were absorbed into the mainstream by the fashion industry. Finally, S. Sim's examination of the role of the bicycle in women's dress reform provides a "revealing slice of social history". The phenomenon of women bicyclists called into question the restrictive corsets and long dresses of the 1890s. Bloomers consequently reappeared as a subversive statement of female independence, only to be condemned as "unwomanly" and "unaesthetic". Shortened skirts and the modified, more flexible corset thus emerged as a compromise in response to this social pressure.

There is little question that clothing is an important form of cultural expression; but studies of clothing must similarly take account of the cultural setting in which they reside. When done well, such studies tell us much about the symbolism of particular items of dress and the relationship between dress and popular culture; when done poorly, we learn only that Barbie has play value, musicians dress to define a persona, and punk rockers feel alienated.

Hugh GRANT  
University of Winnipeg  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

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K.S. Tom has attempted to do too much in this book; in addition to the life, legends and lore indicated by the sub-title, he tried to cover Chinese ways, origins and names, lunar-solar calendar, gods and religious beliefs, traditional medicine, marriage, birth and death, hells, discoveries and inventions, bamboo and jade, food, the civil service examination, education, couplets and toasts. The writer hardly touched on most other folklore genres such as folktales, folk life, proverbs, myths, and folksongs, and on the social life, village and community institutions of Old China. Neither did he deal much with the historical, political and economic contexts essential for a bet-

ter understanding of the custom, beliefs, traditions and socio-cultural life of a people. For example, the social organization of a village community in old China, especially the clan and lineage institutions, is important for an understanding of ancestral rituals and beliefs of a region; customs and beliefs are different from place to place.

With such wide-ranging subjects, the book is bound to be over-simplified and even superficial. Each chapter could be a book or even an encyclopedia by itself. It was therefore difficult for the writer to embark on any in-depth analysis and discussion on a particular subject. In many instances, he presented only a review of the existing literature. There were few footnotes and quotations; and there was no attempt to make any cross-references or archival annotation of the folklore topics. From the bibliography, it is obvious that the writer relied mainly on books published in English.

In discussing various topics, the writer showed his particular preferences; for example, in the chapter on Chinese philosophers, he dealt only with Laotzu, Confucius and Mencius and none of the other schools of thought such as Legalist, Mohist and Eclectic. Of all the dialect groups and ethnic minorities in China, he singled out the Hakka. Of the vast literature of China, he only briefly discussed couplets and toasts.

Certainly, with such a comprehensive and complicated subject, there were bound to have omissions, errors, different interpretations and translations. For example: the birth of Yue Fei (Yo Fei) was announced by a roc and not a swan (p. 49); Yulan Penhui, a Buddhist celebration in honour of the departed spirits and hungry ghosts might not be translated as a "magnolia festival" (p. 40); Hanlin Yuan is an Imperial Academy and not the "forest of pencils" (p. 141); the first character of a given name is usually a generation indicator and may not just be an adjective modifying the second character (p. 12); there are Chinese words for brothers (xiongdi) and sisters (jiemei) (p. 11); the character of religion is not directly corresponding to the meaning of the character "to teach"; the names of the religions or the character, "Zong" have to be added to the character, "jiao", in order to show their distinctions from teaching (jiao yu); mourning periods and dresses depend on the degrees of kinship relations between the deceased and the relatives (p. 92); and others.

Tom claims to have based his book on his personal experiences, and the recollections from his grandparents, parents and other elders — especially his older paternal aunt (p. x). They came from the Chungshan (Zhongshan) area of the province of Kwangtung (Guangdong). But in the overall discussion, the author did not make any distinctions between the traditions of Cantonese, Hakka or other dialect groups' origins, except in the discussion of a Cantonese-American funeral and chop suey.

The writer is to be congratulated for his hard work and courage in presenting such a comprehensive and diverse subject in a nutshell. I do not think he meant it to be scholarly. *Echoes from Old China* is an over-generalized book aimed for the general public.

Ban Seng HOE  
Canadian Museum of Civilization  
Ottawa/Hull

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Michael O. NOWLAN (ed.), *Michael Whelan: Folk Poet of Renous River* (Fredericton, New Brunswick, New Ireland Press, 1990, pp. xvi+150, ISBN 0-920483-45-3).

Arthur PEAKE (Cyndi SMITH [ed.]), *Ballads of the Badlands* (Jasper, Alberta, Coyote Books, 1991, pp. 64, ISBN 0-9692457-3-4).

Folk poetry, as distinct from folk song, has only begun to receive the attention it merits, for its intrinsic worth as well as its often considerable significance within communities. Predictably, the masculine verse of Black American culture, the dozens and toasting, was the first to gain notice and a sort of approval within the modern academy. Roger de V. Renwick's *English Folk Poetry: Structure and Meaning* (1980) and Pauline Greenhill's *True Poetry: Traditional And Popular Verse in Ontario* (1989), following a special edition of *Southern Folklore Quarterly* (1976), were the first to take seriously the more sentimental varieties of vernacular verse in European-origin cultures. A public beyond the academy appears much more willing to take an interest in such poetry; witness the attention given to the cowboy poets in the media. Actually, this public never ceased to read and circulate poetry. The two volumes considered here, each a collection from a single writer, one Maritime, one Prairie, are aimed primarily at them, whom Renwick called "lovers of folk poetry" (1980, ix).

Except for brief periods as a schoolteacher and bookkeeper, Michael Whelan, born 1858 in the Miramichi, lived that rare occupation, professional poet. It was neither an easy nor an abundant existence; after a lifetime of door-to-door bookselling, Whelan died in the county home in 1937 and was buried in an unmarked pauper's grave. Thirty-odd years later, when a monument to the poet was conceived by members of the community,