

Marion K. Hom. *Songs of Gold Mountain: Cantonese Rhymes From San Francisco Chinatown*. California: University of California Press, 1987. Pp. ix + 322, introduction, translator note, maps, notes.

Cathy J. McAleer
Indiana University

In the late 1840s news of the discovery of gold led thousands of Americans westward in search of a new and prosperous life for themselves and their families. They were not alone in this quest. By early 1850s thousands of men from Southern China also went to California to earn a living and to secure a future for their families back home. What greeted them was not gold and prosperity but racism, discrimination, and alienation.

By the 1870s the area known as San Francisco's Chinatown was well established, offering some forms of economic, social, and psychological support for the Chinese people living there. It was also a safe haven from physical attacks and abuses which many Chinese encountered on the streets. By 1880 nearly 10 percent of San Francisco's population was Chinese; 19,964 were men, 1,781 were women.

With the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, loneliness, isolation, and further hardships were heightened. To cope with these and other issues facing them, new Chinese-Americans created for themselves a strong literary forum. This arena of expression culminated in the 1911 and 1915 publications of two anthologies of Cantonese folksongs: *Jinshan ge ji* and *Jinshan ge erji* or *Songs of Gold Mountain*. Over seventy years later, 220 of these rhymes have been translated by Hom into English, accompanied by the Chinese text, providing readers with a long-overdue perspective on the experiences of early Chinatown residents.

Accompanying the rhymes, Hom provides a 68-page introduction which offers a detailed account of the historical context in and about which the songs were created. From chronicling the literary circles formed by immigrants, to cogently describing the intricacies of literary devices used in Cantonese folksong and poetry, Hom offers readers a broad yet detailed account of the social, psychological, historical, and literary dimensions which arose in San Francisco's Chinatown at the turn of the century.

The carefully translated rhymes combine classic Cantonese rhyming patterns with themes which reflect the thoughts and concerns of the men and women who left their families and their homeland and journeyed to the Gold Mountain.

My body aches; my heart pains me all the more.
Separation brings even more remorse.
Away at the edge of the horizon, everything seems
remote;
In Vain I long for my virtuous wife and my filial
children.
For a husband and his wife—
The two sorrows share the same origin.
I endure sleepless nights thinking of home.

I wonder if anybody at home ever thinks of me? (#74, p. 156)

Each rhyme is presented in English, using familiar poetic breaks, with footnotes to clarify literary expressions. Below each translated rhyme is the original Chinese text with occasional footnotes citing misused words. Hom also has included maps both of the regions in China where the anonymous authors originated and of the areas in United States, including a street map of San Francisco's Chinatown, where their Gold Mountain songs were created.

With its detailed literary and historical information and the rarely seen inclusion of Chinese texts, *Songs of Gold Mountain* is a valuable resource for scholars of Chinese and Chinese-American folklore as well as those with interests in Asian-American Studies.

Robert D. Pelton. *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989 (1980). Pp. 312, bibliography, index. \$10.95 paper.

Michael Atwood Mason
Indiana University

Occasionally, I fear that folkloristics has nothing to offer living people, that it is only a dry intellectual effort totally removed from the real life of the people. Pelton's *Trickster in West Africa*, however, reminds me that this is not the case: Folklore scholarship is full of human sufferings and ambitions. The book examines four tricksters from different cultures. Ananse, the Ashanti trickster-spider, weaves tales that delight and enchant as they release tensions. The Fon Legba maintains the peace between the ever present dualisms of culture. Eshu, the Yoruba trickster, helps write destiny with divination, and Ogo-Yurugu, the Dogon trickster of Promethean stature (p. 165), creates randomness to further life and order. Each trickster, in his own way, has a role that involves irony and humor.

Pelton uses a great variety of ethnographic source material to describe these characters in their contexts and then attempts to synthesize "a theory of the trickster . . . without freezing them into an abstraction or blurring their differences" (p. 223). He then uses three theoretical approaches, Jungian psychology, Levi-Strauss's structuralism, and a "neo-Durkheimian" sociology, to try to grasp the trickster's essence; each theory fails in some respect, and Pelton attempts the task himself. The trickster, he concludes, "names the nameless" and always employs irony as his first tool (p. 251). Irony, based primarily on the tension between the struggle for life and the omnipresent threat of death, permeates the trickster's behavior and social role: His wit transforms death and presents society with new opportunities. He is "the exemplar of wit in action" and thus produces a symbolic language and logic of irony (p. 282). Although his