

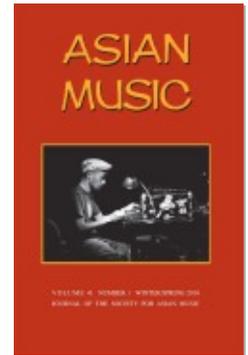


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Plucking the Winds: Lives of Village Musicians in Old and New China (review)

Hwee-San Tan

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Book Reviews

Plucking the Winds: Lives of Village Musicians in Old and New China. Stephen Jones. Leiden: CHIME Foundation, 2004. 426 pp. One accompanying CD.

This is a musical epic: a voluminous tome recounting the lives of a group of musicians who are members of a ritual association in the Chinese village of Gaoluo, in central Hebei province south of Beijing, and how a village negotiates and copes with the complex cultural change in the face of the turbulence in China from the end of imperial times through the Communist era. The book opens with a vivid account of a funeral in Gaoluo. Before long, we are introduced to the demography of the village, from detailed description of the houses and the villagers' daily chores to their per capita income. Although Gaoluo is not as poor as some areas further north and west, Jones's description still paints a stark contrast to the more affluent villages I have visited in Minnan, southern Fujian.

In this prelude, we are also introduced to the protagonists—the members of the music associations in Gaoluo—the rituals and the types of ensembles that accompany these. Jones introduces the musicians by outlining each one's personality and labeling them with “sub-Homeric epithets” (17). Readers will certainly appreciate these helpful labels as the plots thicken and a plethora of names begins to dot the pages, making it quite difficult to follow. A genealogy chart (357–61) assists further in the negotiation of the different characters, but short of cutting these pages out, it is somewhat of a nuisance to keep turning to them to find out who is who.

Part One (Making History) comprises seven chapters focused on the history of the ritual and music associations from the founding of the village from the 15th century through to the 1990s. It is both a fascinating look at historical events—from the Boxer Rebellion to the founding of the Republic, through to Japanese invasion and the civil war, to the turmoil and end of the Cultural Revolution—and a rich ethnography of the lives of the musicians and their personal and family histories. Scholars of Chinese studies and Chinese music often tend to get wrapped up with the events surrounding the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath, but the early history often gets overlooked. So to me, the first half of the history is an intriguing one, particularly the intricate web interwoven around the Catholic Church and the Chinese Catholics during the Boxer rebellion (chapter 2), and the Catholics do reappear later in the book,

after liberation. Although the stories surrounding the period from Liberation to the end of the Cultural Revolution (chapters 4–6) are familiar to most likely readers, the tragic tales of the musicians are nonetheless still haunting. During this time, opera (albeit the model *yangbanxi* advocated by the Communist party) and religious rituals enjoyed a certain revival after the chaos of civil war and the Japanese invasion, and new generations of musicians and ritual specialists began to appear. The optimism and sense of continuity however was soon to be curtailed by the political struggles of the Cultural Revolution. The stories of the individuals were very similar to what I had learned from villagers in southern Fujian, reminding us how uniformly debilitating the Cultural Revolution was to all parts of China, rural and urban. Part One ends with a look into the revival of the traditions with the advent of Economic Reform in the 1980s.

In Part Two (Living Music), Jones begins to weave a more personal tale as the relationship between him and the village musicians deepens. By the 1990s, from his description of two funerals (chapter 8.8), we can see that funeral rites and ritual music reminiscent of olden days have been fully revived in Gaoluo village. The Music Association, although its function had gradually diminished under republican and communist regimes, continues to play a key role in village life in the 1990s. However, musicians active in the group now number around thirty, compared to the hundred or so before Communist times. Jones introduces about fifteen musicians with whom he became close friends, including four whom Jones introduced at the start of the book and who were already in their seventies. Within a few years of Jones's fieldwork, several of these older musicians had passed away.

Inevitably though, mass media and pop culture also made their way to Gaoluo from the late 1980s onward. Although Jones observes (in chapter 9.6) that traditional ritual music has not changed discernibly and the current generation of Gaoluo musicians are continuing to hold on obstinately to their local culture, he does express concern for the future membership of the Music Association and the decline in the number of new recruits. Greater than the threat by pop culture was the change in social ethos brought about by capitalism: the Music Association experienced setbacks when their ritual paintings and donors' lists were stolen, twice, in 1996, when Jones returned to the village. Competition and rivalry between associations also reared their ugly heads, with the presence of Jones and his colleagues from Beijing's Music Research Institute being part of the cause for jealousy and resentment, as he notes. This certainly says much for the "shadows" we cast in the field (Barz and Cooley 2008), and the author's total involvement with the music and the musicians (right down to bringing his partner along during one of his trips), and his influence on his subjects and in return their influence on him, periodically shines through in this writing.

Some information on musical instruments, scores and repertory, transmission process, percussion and rhythmic aspects, and the vocal liturgy can be found in chapter 10; musical transcriptions are found in the appendices, and an accompanying CD provides audio examples. Anyone looking for hardcore description and analysis of *sheng-guan* ritual music in this book, however, will be disappointed. Instead they will find a fascinating story of a very personal journey intertwined with the joys and trials and tribulations of each of the musicians and their music making in a Chinese village. If one has to find one fault in this ethnography, replete with wonderful photos, it is the sheer volume of it (426 pages!). Having said that, this weighty masterpiece provides an unrivaled description and depiction of rural music making in China and will appeal even to readers with no previous active interest in that country or its music.

Hwee-San Tan

School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS)
University of London

Reference

Barz, Gregory F., and Timothy J. Cooley, eds.

2008 *Shadows in the Field: New Perspectives for Fieldwork in Ethnomusicology*, 2nd ed. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance. Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, editors. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. 340 pp.

Within its suitably disjunctive cover, *Global Bollywood* examines the local and global meanings of “Bollywood” song and dance (broadly, the popular performance and mediated culture of the Mumbai film industry). The editors successfully address the “Bollywood” label in their introduction. Although this is not a work of ethnomusicology, much of the content in this volume should contribute to the increasing number of courses on Bollywood music being taught by ethnomusicologists. The introductory essay by Gopal and Moorti is, perhaps, the best overview to date of the multifaceted histories and meanings of Hindi song and dance. The subsequent twelve essays are organized around three themes.

“Home Terrains” examines historical and industrial aspects of film, film music, and popular music in India. “Eccentric Orbits” offers three fascinating accounts of the roles played by Hindi films, songs, and dance in other culture industries (Egyptian cinema, Indonesian *dangdut*, and Israeli advertising). “Planetary Consciousness” will be of special interest to students of the Indian diaspora as it focuses on Bollywood’s performative, queer/gendered, racial, and musical presences in the West.