

lesquelles les musiques sont jouées, la hiérarchie des interventions et les effectifs des formations musicales.

L'épilogue qui conclut l'ouvrage rappelle quelques éléments importants au sujet du terrain. D'abord, l'étude de la musique permet de comprendre les sociétés. Elle met à jour les références culturelles et sociales qui laissent entrevoir les représentations de cette société. Ensuite, le terrain est construit. Les pratiques musicales sont étudiées dans un temps donné et selon un contexte particulier; elles sont donc représentatives de ces circonstances. Enfin, Arom et Martin terminent en affirmant que « le terrain » ne peut plus être pensé comme le moment où, dans un certain espace, un « chercheur vient observer des "Autres", mais comme la situation dans laquelle se rencontrent des personnes ayant des compétences diverses qui décident de les mettre en commun pour mieux comprendre les phénomènes sur lesquels ils ont décidé de se pencher ensemble » (272).

En général, l'ouvrage atteint son objectif : il fait décidément réfléchir sur la façon d'aborder le terrain. Il contient une bibliographie assez étoffée malgré quelques lacunes quant aux auteurs et à la diversité des perspectives de l'ethnomusicologie. En fin de lecture, la question à se poser est de savoir à qui s'adresse cet ouvrage. Par moments, il semble s'adresser aux ethnomusicologues débutants, à ceux qui n'ont jamais fait de terrain, et propose des renseignements pertinents. Mais lorsqu'il s'agit par exemple de l'équipement à emporter et de la recommandation de trouver des assistants sur le terrain, ces propositions s'avèrent généralement financièrement et matériellement impossibles aux étudiants chercheurs. Un autre élément à souligner se situe sur le plan des méthodes d'ana-

lyse qui sont exposées comme les seules méthodes à suivre. Les auteurs n'abordent ou n'effleurent malheureusement pas les méthodes autres que celle empruntée à la linguistique structurale. Pour donner une meilleure vue d'ensemble de l'enquête en ethnomusicologie, il aurait été important et intéressant de puiser dans les exemples d'ethnomusicologues de diverses nationalités afin de montrer qu'il existe plus d'un type d'ethnomusicologie et que l'enquête de terrain varie selon les pratiques musicales étudiées. ❖

Chinatown Opera Theater in North America. By Nancy Yunhwa Rao.

Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2017, 440 pp. Photographs, Map, Music Examples, Tables, Figures, Appendix, Bibliography, and Index.

LEI OUYANG BRYANT
Swarthmore College

In the final paragraph of *Chinatown Opera Theater in North America*, Nancy Yunhwa Rao writes, "To chronicle the history of Chinatown theaters is to *recognize* the complex history of many of these creative expressions today, and to *recover* the voiceless from its suppressed silence" (320; emphases added). In the sentences that follow she adds how the chronicle of history must also "challenge," "relocate," "hear and watch," "reconstruct," and "build a bridge" (320). The theme of rehabilitation connects with an urgency for visibility and recognition of Chinatown opera theatre history. Earlier, in the introduction, Rao speaks to gaps in certain historical accounts that are limited to

dominant narratives. While new accounts are important additions to move beyond the exclusion, simply filling in the gaps will not suffice (11). Indeed, Rao's mobilization of Chinatown opera theatres goes far beyond filling in gaps, providing new details, or simple enrichment. Instead, she "release[s] these theaters from their repressed silence and perpetual invisibility, as well as separate[s] them from the myths about them" (8). While Rao may or may not directly situate her work with Asian American Studies per se, the perspective bears a striking connection to Cathy J. Schlund-Vials' introduction to the recent anthology *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, in which Schlund-Vials explains how a flashpoint "demands — in the face of political calamity and systemic oppression — reflection, response, and recalibration" (2018: 2). Rao's examination of Chinatown theatres in North America is just this: an act of reflection, response, and recalibration. It is a reflection on American music in response to the historic invisibility of Chinatown theatres and a recalibration to liberate the narrative from the myths and stereotypes that surround it.

Rao focuses on the 1920s as this was the "golden period" for Chinatown theatres with increased performers, audiences, performances, and print culture as just some of the evidence of a flourishing genre. Furthermore, Rao places the rising prominence of Chinatown theatre within the socio-political context of the Roaring Twenties and Chinese Exclusion Era. Herein lies the power of Rao's interdisciplinary methodological perspective and meticulous historical research. Avoiding typical polarizations, Rao examines Chinatown theatre as something that is at once transient and local,

transnational and national, maintaining tradition and inspiring new forms. Furthermore, she considers material culture with a critical lens while never losing sight of the individuals and communities of individuals (practitioners, entrepreneurs, audience members, and so forth) who engaged with Chinatown theatres.

In order to investigate the socio-political, historical, musical, and cultural threads of Chinese theatres in North America, Rao divides the twelve book chapters into five parts. The first two parts set the stage for understanding the historical and aesthetic framework within which the theatres operated. Part One takes on the circulation of peoples and culture across Asia and North America (Chapter 1), the historical and political positioning of Chinese in 1920s America (Chapter 2), and the never-ending immigration battles performers and merchants had to fight for the theatres to exist and thrive (Chapter 3). Part Two then turns to performance practice with an overview of the sights and sounds of Chinese opera performance (Chapter 4) and a close look at and musical analysis of a specific aria, "*Shilin Jita*," including five-line staff notation transcriptions (Chapter 5). Parts Three, Four, and Five then provide detailed narratives of regional scenes and the emergence and development of the leading Chinese theatres of the 1920s. Part Three includes theatres in British Columbia (Chapter 6), and developments across the United States and Canada (Chapter 7), leading to the emergence of one of the two most vibrant Chinatown opera theatres, the Great China Theater in San Francisco (Chapter 8). Part Four introduces The Mandarin Theater (the rival Chinatown opera theatre in San Francisco) and its opening

years of 1924-1926 (Chapter 9) followed by the grand productions of 1927-1928 which included prominent actors (Chapter 10). Part Five provides a glimpse of what was happening on the other coast of the United States with an examination of two theatres in New York (Chapter 11), as well as a look at the broader “transnational network” of the golden period with consideration of three theatres in Honolulu, Vancouver, and Havana (Chapter 12).

Readers should not miss the Introduction and Epilogue as they are both necessary bookends to all that transpires in the middle. In the Introduction, Rao’s elegant writing provides insight into the mind of a scholar and researcher when she writes, “As I gingerly unfolded the fragile paper and returned the two rectangular scraps to their corner, my stomach churned. What emerged were the lyrics of a famous aria from a Cantonese opera” (1). The Epilogue presents significant ways that American artists, writers, and musicians took inspiration from the Chinese theatres of the 1920s.

The critical perspective and detailed historical framework that Rao provides

to present the subject is but one of the ways in which the text stands out to provide a transformative contribution to scholarship on American music. The subject matter of Rao’s text, on its own, is a rich topic for exploration. Yet the insistence on lifting “the silence” and undoing “invisibility” results in an influential recalibration of narratives on the history of American music (8). This book is a valuable comprehensive text for scholars, students, and readers interested in recognizing and recovering the golden era of Chinese theatres in 1920s North America and for those interested in critical movement beyond dominant narratives in historical accounts. 🍀

REFERENCES

- Schlund-Vials, Cathy J. 2018. Introduction: Crisis, Conundrum, and Critique. In *Flashpoints for Asian American Studies*, 1-18. Ed. Cathy J. Schlund-Vials and Viet Thanh Nguyen. New York: Fordham University Press.