

BOOK REVIEWS

ILHA DO DESTERRO

REVIEWS/RESENHAS

Coagulated Rhythm [Review of Li, Li Fang and Hai Tao Yang. *Coagulated Rhythm: the Theoretical Framework and Aesthetic Interpretation of Naxi Musical Iconography*. Kunming: Yunnan People's Press, 2002, iii+337].

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Heterogeneity is a recurrent theme and simultaneously a research focus of Cultural Studies. Not unrelated to this is the focus on complex diachronic and synchronic variability in language and discourse as demonstrated within the broad range of epistemologies in Linguistics and Sociolinguistics in particular. The ongoing debate concerning disciplinary boundaries of Cultural Studies and Sociolinguistics and related entities such as Anthropology, Gender Studies, Media Studies and Sociology is itself indicative of heterogeneity, complexity and variability. These themes emerge from the rich descriptive study offered through a kind of kaleidoscopic vision that is the monograph *Coagulated Rhythm: the Theoretical Framework and Aesthetic Interpretation of Naxi Musical Iconography*.

The Naxi is one of 55 ethnolinguistic groupings in the People's Republic of China. Numbering approximately 245,000¹ (Ma 288, 432), they are found in communities in central and northern Yunnan province and also southwestern Sichuan province. Aside from the world heritage-listed ancient township of Dayan (located in the Lijiang Autonomous County in Yunnan, where American botanist and linguist Joseph Francis Rock lived between 1922 to c. 1941), the Naxi are known for their pictographic writing system, known in *Putonghua* (Mandarin) as *dongba*.

The thin line separating visual art and writing among the Naxi is one of the most interesting stories of heterogeneity told in *Coagulated Rhythm*. Focusing specifically on the study of music in any form of visual art or artifact, the authors attempt to provide a framework for research into visual images of music of the Naxi. The interconnectedness of art, writing and music can be shown with reference in Table 1 to the hieroglyphs associated with the term *dongba* (see, for example, Li & Yang, 287). The term *dongba* is descriptive of the culture of the Naxi, the spiritual medium or shaman who exemplifies the culture, the body of sacred texts that form the basis of this culture as well as the pictographic script in which such texts are written.

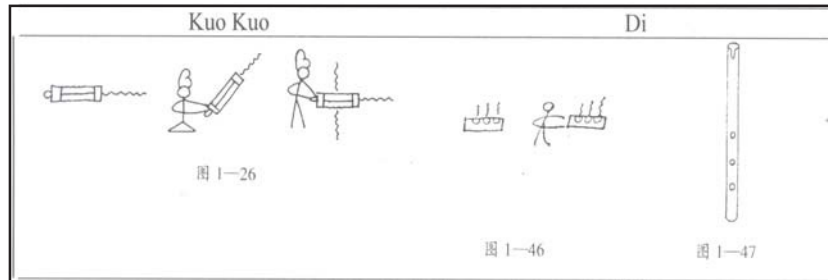
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Table 1. *Hieroglyphs associated with the term dongba*

Earlier Form		Later Forms			
Hieroglyph	Gloss	Hieroglyph	Gloss	Hieroglyph	Gloss
	“Ceremonial headgear with 5 leaves”		“Ceremonial headgear with 5 leaves – front view”		“Ceremonial headgear with 5 leaves – front view”
			“Head, breathing, speaking or reciting”		“Breath, speech, recitation or variations in pitch”
			“Man or deity breathing, speaking or reciting”		“Man or deity”
	“Man or deity with ceremonial headgear”		“Man or deity with ceremonial headgear breathing, speaking or reciting”		“Man or deity with ceremonial headgear”

It is noteworthy that while the *dongba* do in a sense form a distinct priestly class in Naxi society, the position of being a *dongba* is one that is regularly stepped out of. When not functioning as a *dongba*, a medium may well be indistinguishable from other members of society. The duality of roles played by those recognized *dongba* is mirrored by the ambiguity of the glosses of the hieroglyph associated with the term. In life as in the representation of life, the *dongba* moves seemingly effortlessly between the role of a person and the role of a deity, not to mention the role of the medium itself. Further, the representation of breath, speech, recitation, singing and music is typi-

fied by wavy or dotted lines. Compare the lines in the hieroglyphs in Table 1 with those in the ones depicting the woodwind instruments *kuo kuo* and *di* their use:

Table 2. *Woodwind instruments “kuo kuo” and “di” and their use*

Following an introductory setting out the scope, methodology and significance of musical iconography, *Coagulated Rhythm* opens with the chapter entitled “Hieroglyphs and instruments: the manifestation and framework of Naxi musical iconographs”. In this chapter, the forms in which music appears in the hieroglyphic script *dongba* are explored. The antiquity and sophistication of these forms are illustrated with reference to a range of historical sources, musical scores, drawings and contemporary practice. An important part of this chapter is the depiction of the roles of musical instruments in Naxi music and art.

Chapter 2, entitled “Stone axes and circle-dancing: the origins of musical aesthetics and visualised representations of circle-dancing”, the authors first review work concerning the origins of music, refining the focus upon Naxi music before providing a theoretical account of the origins of musical aesthetics among the Naxi. The account is based on aesthetic properties ascribed by archeologists to stone tools and the parallel developments in music among

the Qiang, the putative ancestors of the Naxi. This is followed by an analysis of images of an ancient form of folk dancing, collectively known as circle-dancing, showing discontinuities with contemporary practices and simultaneously the coagulation of rhythm on rock faces and other media on which music and dance were depicted through art.

As implied by its title, Chapter 3, “Notes and tunes: Naxi music and musical aesthetics” continues the discussion of Chapter 2. The stance taken however is not anthropological but rather musicological. Concepts developed in “western” (as in European) as well as Chinese musicology are evaluated, leading to the adoption of an analytical framework attributed to ethnomusicology that regards music as culture. Culture is understood here as cognition, behaviour and the audible aspects of music.

In Chapter 4, “Signs, song and dance: The symbolism of Naxi musical iconographs and the formation of Naxi culture”, the authors first discuss the genderisation of musical instruments

and of dance, relating musical instruments to the genders and gender-specific cultic aspects of dance. The second part of the chapter presents a lengthy analysis of musical iconographs from the perspective of ancient religious practices.

In “Choreograph, bells and drums: Musical iconographs in choreographic material and the dramatic music of drum-bells”, the authors present the uses of bells and drums to create dramatic cycles of contradiction and harmonisation. While the representation of bells and drums has remained relatively constant, the attire of the performers, chiefly that of the *dongba*, had undergone much transformation. Around the core of *dongba* music and art is a rich collection of adopted and adapted practices. What is not clear from this chapter is the extent to which the *dongba* script itself was subject to these external influences.

The sixth chapter, “Sacred sounds and the spiritual realms: The experience of ancient and contemporary Naxi music”, is largely concerned with the importing of Naxi music from *dongjing*, a form of grassroots religious and musical practice incorporating Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, as such *dongjing* is exported by the ethnic majority Han to the minorities including the Naxi. Interestingly, *dongjing* is considered to be better preserved in contemporary Naxi music than in Han music.

The seventh chapter, “Rituals and ceremonies: The propagation of and perspectives on Naxi music”, describes the central role occupied by the *dongba* in

transmitting Naxi music. Focus is placed on their status as medium between the spiritual world and the material world. Specifically, the *dongba* incorporate elements of spirits and humans so that at the same time as having the authority of spirits, they also have the acceptance of the Naxi people.

In the concluding chapter, “Expectance and transcendence: The future of *dongba* culture and the cultural essence of Naxi musical iconographs”, the authors argue strongly for the recognition of the importance of *dongba* culture. They state that *dongba*, as a culture, harmonises the relationship between the Naxi people and the spirits, nature, among its members; between its communities and, finally, between individuals and their selves. The culture and its people are mutually constitutive. These relations, it is argued, have universal significance. The volume concludes with a survey of factors shaping the future of *dongba* culture, noting the inevitability of change, including changes to the essence of *dongba* culture while seeing its preservation through these changes as a possibility.

What is the relevance of *Coagulated Rhythm* to the readers of *Ilha do Desterro*? Readers drawn to Linguistics may well be interested in investigating *dongba* as a language or possibly in evaluating its status as a language. Sociolinguists may on the other hand be more concerned about the role *dongba* plays as a mode of communication in Naxi society. Those interested in Cultural Studies may see scope in examin-

ing inter-gender and inter-generational relations in exemplars of Naxi art and literature. In reading *Coagulated Rhythm*, it is rather refreshing to be treated to a discourse quite disconnected from the delineation of boundaries supposedly indicative of intellectual or ideological traditions. While musical iconography may be the point of departure of the monograph, the authors are to be applauded for avoiding an over-emphasis on describing and applying disciplinary-specific methodology. The reader is not drawn into a self-conscious contrasting and comparing of the approaches represented by musicology, art history and semiotics to music in Naxi art and artifact. Instead, the authors offer a wide range of descriptions and provocative suggestions that raise questions traversing the boundaries that seem to be taken far too seriously by some. It cannot be said therefore that *Coagulated Rhythm* lacks thematic unity, for it is a most original exploration through the depiction of music in art of what it means to be Naxi, both in the past and in the present. I believe a translation of the monograph, itself a daunting task, will be of benefit to an audience wider than those who read the Chinese language.

Note

- 1 Based on figures from the 1982 Census. The figure is approximate due to the contested nature of ethnic identity and the varying purposes of different sets of ethnolinguistic classification criteria.

Reference

Ma, Y. (Ed.). (1994). *China's Minority Nationalities*. Beijing: Foreign Languages Press.

A Multitude of Latino Shakespeares [Review of Kliman, Bernice W. and Rick J. Santos (ed.). *Latin American Shakespeares*. Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2005. 347 pp.]

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The title of this volume of essays comes in handy: *Latin American Shakespeares*, in the plural, hinting at there being as many Shakespeares as there are productions, adaptations, translations, and films based on his work. Jorge Luis Borges himself affirmed, "When I think of Shakespeare I think of a multitude" (qtd in Tiffany 146). Nothing new here, since performance theory has made a point of not seeing the bard as one canonical, unified author, but as plural. The good news brought by this book is that it enables us to find out that so much has been written about Shakespeare in Latin America, especially in Brazil, Mexico and Argentina, while, alas, almost nothing appears from Paraguay or Bolivia. The editors, Bernice W. Kliman and Rick J. Santos, do not try to present hypotheses for this discrepancy, but the seventeen essays they select show

a wide range of what has been studied in Brazil.

The book is divided into three main parts, "Stages," "Pages," and "Screens." In the first part, José Roberto O'Shea analyzes one of the first theater stars in Brazil, João Caetano dos Santos, and how his productions, based on Shakespeare translated not from English, but from Ducis's French, affected the creation of a national theater. Roberto Ferreira da Rocha demonstrates how intentions and results do not always go together, as in the case of a production of *Coriolano* during the Brazilian dictatorship which failed to make its main character an authoritarian villain. Margarida Gandara Rauen writes about a production in Curitiba based on *The Tempest*, where she acted as translator and assistant director, while Jesús Tronch-Pérez discusses a Mexican production of *Hamlet* in the nineteenth century in which the avenging hero does not actually kill anybody. Gregory J. Racz, Juan J. Zaro and Catherine Boyle offer relevant and detailed examples of Shakespeare translated to non-anglophone cultures, namely Neruda's rendition of *Romeo y Julieta* in Chile, León Felipe's *Paraphrases* (i.e. free adaptations) in Mexico, and Chilean poet Nicanor Parra's transcription of *King Lear*.

The second part of the book is perhaps the most interesting, as we read Grace Tiffany delving into how Shakespeare has influenced Borges's oeuvre, or José Luiz Passos telling us how omnipresent *Othello* is in Machado de Assis's *Dom*

Casmurro. Moreover, Passos insightfully reminds us that the protagonist's last name in Machado's most commented on novel, Bento Santiago, can well be a reference to Saint Iago. While Lorena Terando points out the influence of *The Tempest* on Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier's *Los Pasos Perdidos*, Ines Senna Shaw deals with how Shakespeare can be sold in fairytale format to teach young girls to act like, well, girls. The most provocative article in the volume, Shaw's is the only one to approach gender studies.

The third part of the book, dedicated to screen adaptations, suffers slightly in relation to the previous sections. Alfredo Michel Modenessi's and Thaís Flores Nogueira Diniz's essays, evoking, respectively, Cantinflas's parodic film *Romeo y Julieta*, and a clip from the *chanchada* *Carnaval no Fogo*, are descriptive at best. Things get better with Philippa Sheppard's analysis of Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo+Juliet*, originally released as *William Shakespeare's Romeo+Juliet*, apparently without irony. Sheppard competently details the myriad of Latino references in that mainstream film, and she does a good job arguing that these two lovers would not survive without each other in the chaotic setting presented by the 1996 movie—shot in Mexico. Aimara da Cunha Resende has the most powerful article in this section, in which she studies how *Romeo and Juliet* has been cannibalized by *cordel* literature to reinforce patriarchal values, as well as by the *telenovela* *Pedra Sobre Pedra* to put

some intellectual glitter on a popular product. But her analysis is somewhat marred when she says that the soap opera *Pantanal* was aired on Bandeirantes TV (284), since any Brazilian familiar with the history of TV will recall it was the biggest success of Rede Manchete's short reign.

A fourth part in the book consists of only one article. In an exhaustive survey, José Ramón Díaz Fernández manages to list everything Shakespearean that has been translated, adapted and criticized in Latin America. In the published criticism, three Brazilian names clearly stand out as the most productive, O'Shea's, Rauen's and Resende's. That these three are among other fine researchers in this volume is a sign that further legitimizes *Latin American Shakespeares*.

This book is highly-recommended to anyone who wants to have an idea of what has been done to Shakespeare in Latin America, and especially in Brazil. By taking the canonical playwright out of his Anglophone context and adapting him to Latino realities, the authors reunited by Kliman and Santos are surely making Shakespeare their own. May more Shakespeares from the Latin viewpoint arrive.