



**Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China: Shawm Bands in Shanxi* (SOAS Musicology Series)**

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2007. xv + 148 pages, 13 b/w illustrations, glossary-index, bibliography. Includes DVD, *Doing Things Ceremonial and Music [sic] in Rural China*. Hardback, £27.50; ISBN 978-0-7546-6163-4.



**Stephen Jones, *Ritual and Music of North China, Volume 2: Shaanbei* (SOAS Musicology Series)**

Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2009. 272 pages, 15 b/w illustrations, 5 tables, 1 map. Includes CD. Hardback, £35.00; ISBN 978-0-7546-6590-8.

CHINA is a multilingual country. In addition to more than fifty minority groups speaking sixty languages, the Chinese language itself has many different dialects. The differences between these dialects are so great that people cannot communicate with each other verbally. The Huaihe River and the Qinling Mountain divide the country into north and south.

There are two different dialects in the north, one of which is Mandarin and the other the Jin dialect. Mandarin is spoken in large areas that include not only almost the entire north of China, but also Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Chongqing municipality in the southwest. The Jin dialect, however, has a relatively small range, spoken mainly in central and northern Shanxi Province, northern Hebei Province, and the northern part of Shaanxi Province. The main difference between the Jin dialect and Mandarin is that the dialect has kept the entering tone of classical Chinese, whereas Mandarin has not.

Stephen Jones has done fieldwork in the south of Beijing and central Hebei where Mandarin is spoken and has previously published his research results (JONES

1998). For the past decade, he has been interested in the traditional music of the Jin dialect area and did fieldwork there. These books are the result of his fieldwork conducted in the north of Shanxi and Shaanxi provinces.

Chinese began collecting folk songs in the field as early as the Western Zhou Dynasty (1100 BCE–256 BCE), a tradition retained to this day. During World War II, many Chinese musicologists went to the countryside and collected folk songs. However, this research lacked data on the cultural background. To select folk music pieces for the *Anthology of Folk Music of the Chinese Peoples*, from 1978 to the end of the century and under the leadership of the Chinese Musicians Association, almost every musicologist in China was involved in fieldwork all over China on an unprecedented scale. After twenty years, an enormous number of folk songs, instrumental music, ballads, operas, and dance music were collected. These materials have been published according to different provinces, municipalities, and autonomous regions. In 2005, the *Anthology* was published in more than one-hundred volumes. The *Anthology* provides a great deal of information for anyone interested in Chinese traditional music, and as Stephen Jones points out, he also benefited from the volumes on Shaanxi province (Vol. 2, xxvi).

In ancient times, the officers collecting folk songs in China only recorded the lyrics and the location and they never wrote down other relevant data, for example the informants' names, experiences, or cultural background. During the twentieth century many Chinese musicologists also did not record their informants' names, lives, and other related information.

When Chinese musicologists did their fieldwork for the *Anthology*, they had not yet learned about ethnomusicology. According to the requirements of the Musicians Association, they recorded only the informants' names and very short biographical notes so that in the *Anthology*, the informants' introductions are too brief for ethnomusicologists to do deeper research. Since the *Anthology* does not give enough information for ethnomusicological research, Stephen Jones's book is an excellent example of this aspect of fieldwork.

From the perspective of ethnomusicology, Stephen Jones recorded the customs and activities of the daily lives of the folk musicians and their musical activities from two different regions of the Jin dialect area. Volume I focuses on one shawm band, run by two brothers, Hua Yinshan and Hua Jinshan in Yangjiabu Village, northern Shanxi. This volume comprises three parts: part one explains the lives and livelihood of shawm band musicians, part two describes the role of the shawm bands and Daoist's performances during funerals and temple fairs, and part three discusses several aspects of the music, such as instrumentation, pitch, scale, notation, melodic styles, and repertoires of the band. The second volume focuses on Yangjiagou village, Mizhi County, Yulin, in northern Shaanxi. This volume discusses the ritual and music of that area in four parts. Part one gives the background of the area, part two introduces the lives of the bards, and part three discusses the lives of shawm bands and their ceremonial activities through the twentieth century. Part four describes urban music in Yulin city.

Stephen Jones's book focuses on the cultural background of music and individual musicians and meticulously records many aspects of their lives, which is largely

lacking in the *Anthology*. Jones perceives the minutest details and has an extremely discerning eye. In one part he introduces Tiantian, a student in the Hua brother's band, who played in Washington, DC, and earned five hundred US dollars. He did not dare buy any souvenirs at all in the US, or in Beijing, but just bought a few cheap items of stationery for his sister and he handed his whole fee over to his master. The master turned over to him only about one hundred and twenty dollars, which Tiantian then handed over to his parents (Vol. 1, 52).

Stephen Jones's description is circumspect and very detailed. This type of description would appeal to foreign ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and ethnologists who are not familiar with China, Chinese culture, and Chinese traditional music. In my opinion this book is a good reference for scholars and students who are interested in the traditional music of the Jin dialect area, and the survey-type methodology also sets up a good example for young Chinese ethnomusicologists.

The first volume is accompanied by a DVD and the second has a CD, both based on Jones' fieldwork. Readers can not only listen to the music, but also see the performances of bands and bards, and the cultural background of the music.

Although this book has obvious value, it also has some serious shortcomings. First, in order to communicate with informants and to understand and study music better, ethnomusicologists should be familiar with the local language. Though Jones can speak Mandarin, he is not familiar with the Jin dialect, which is evident from several misunderstood words. For example, 崖畔上开花 (*Flowers bloom on the cliff*) is a very popular folk song in the Jin dialect area. In the glossary-index of the book (122) the name of this song was given as 案板上开花 (*Flowers bloom on the cutting board*). Another example is the term *Wu er wa* (呜儿哇), which is an onomatopoeic name in Jin dialect for the shawm. This word in the glossary-index was written as 味儿娃 (128), which means "the smelly boy." There are so many of these kinds of mistakes in the glossary-index that any Chinese scholar will know that the author did not understand the meanings of those words, and may misguide foreign researchers. If the author had asked a Chinese expert to read his manuscript, these errors could have been avoided.

If an ethnomusicologist wants to study a people's music in depth, he should also be familiar with its culture. As an English scholar of Chinese traditional music, Jones's knowledge of Chinese culture should be strengthened. For instance, he has noted that in Shanxi the shawm band has six members, (Vol. 1, 89), and in Shaanxi a small band has only five (Vol. 2, 150). But he failed to ask if these numbers have cultural significance.

In fact, both the numbers five and six have symbolic meaning in Chinese culture. It would have greatly added to the value of his work if he had done further analysis by consulting books written in Chinese by experts on funerary customs, or asked the informants about those numbers and discussed his findings in depth. In addition, the horizontally inscribed board in Chinese temples should always be read from right to left, but in the DVD the camera pans the inscription on the board from left to right. This shows a Western direction of reading.

Most importantly, ethnomusicology should focus mainly on the study of the music itself, rather than on the description of the cultural background of music.

Therefore, a lack of musical description and analysis is a serious problem in both books, and while they provide very good fieldwork records, providing specific detailed cultural information, analysis of the music itself is weak and shallow.

Although Jones has done fieldwork in China several times, he has not mastered the fundamentals of traditional Chinese music theory from Chinese experts. In comparison, other foreign ethnomusicologists who have studied in China are familiar with the fundamentals of Chinese music (WITZLEBEN 1995). Therefore, as he says in Volume I, he finds shawm music “hard to learn, and hard to analyze” (96).

Although these books have many shortcomings, they are an important contribution in the investigation of the traditional music of the Jin dialect area. The process of doing fieldwork for any ethnomusicologist is also a process of learning from local informants and experts. I hope Stephen Jones can continue to contribute in the field through researching Chinese music.

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