



Shzr Ee Tan, *Beyond 'Innocence': Amis Aboriginal Song in Taiwan as an Ecosystem*

Farnham, Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2012. 312 pages. 20 b&cw illustrations, 1 map, and 11 music examples in a CD. Hardback, £60.00. ISBN: 978-1-4094-2436-9.

BEYOND 'INNOCENCE' offers a detailed and fascinating account of the musical world of Taiwan's indigenous Amis people and a background to one of the most well-known musical copyright cases worldwide. Shzr Ee Tan sets out the background concerning the copyright case at the beginning of the book, clearly explaining the complexities of the legal discussions around sampling of the recorded singing of Amis singers Difang and Igay by the band Enigma for their song "Return to Innocence"—a song which remained in the Top 100 for thirty-two weeks after its release in 1993, had registered sales of an estimated eight million copies, and was selected as the theme song for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics (2–3). As the book's title suggests, Tan then moves well beyond this case to explore Amis song in the present, the main focus of the book. Yet Tan's ongoing mentions of the Amis song involved in this case (which we learn is now referred to using expressions that translate as "the Olympic Song" or "Difang's Song" [6; 245–46]), and her discussions of the ways that the case subsequently influenced views on music and rights held by various members of the Amis community (for example, 196 and 208), punctuate the book and are one of its many interesting and instructive aspects.

The book focuses upon two interrelated central themes that link together a vast array of information and analysis concerning contemporary Amis song. The first theme is apparent in the book's subtitle: an approach to Amis song that involves understanding it as an "ecosystem." In lengthy explanations of her use and application of this term (6–13; 236–41), Tan writes that she "draws upon the concept of an ecosystem, both as a model and a metaphor, to describe Amis aboriginal song beyond classical anthropological or sociological analyses" (8). She "use[s] the prefix 'eco' instead of, simply, 'system,' as this better describes the living, changing and occasionally unpredictable nature of Taiwan aboriginal song" (9).

The second theme of the book concerns the way in which the Amis concept of *ladhiw* (generally used to refer to certain forms of Amis singing) and the Han Chinese concept of *yinyue* 音樂 (usually translated into English as “music”) apply to and inform Amis people’s understanding of the many contexts in which they sing. As Tan puts it, “the fundamental argument of this book is founded on the categorical divide between *ladhiw* and music” (145). Tan’s focus on this latter theme reflects a long-standing ethnomusicological concern that Hugo Zemp, among others, is particularly noted for addressing: “The study of folk classification is a first step towards an understanding of what constitutes music for a society, after which one no longer poses the question concerning the nature of music in the same terms” (ZEMP 1978, 63).

Following the introduction, Tan commences her analysis by guiding the reader through recent centuries of Taiwanese social and political history and gives a background to the Amis and information on her fieldwork situation (Chapter 1). She presents an overview of various indigenous and non-indigenous analyses of Amis singing activities and includes many examples of Amis songs, their central features, and particular instances in which certain songs were and are sung (Chapter 2). She then looks at singing within various festivals in Amis villages—especially the festivals held in summer to celebrate the harvest (known by *kiloma’an* and other Amis names, and usually referred to in Chinese as *fengnianji* 豐年祭) and the various Christian festivals that are also now an important part of the musical life of Amis communities (Chapter 3).

This leads to a discussion of the staging of Amis singing both in terms that Amis people describe using the Chinese *biaoyan* 表演 (“performance”) and also in relation to performance discourse (Chapters 4 and 5). Tan discusses not only rehearsed song performances and karaoke within the village context but also the influence of the expanding world of Taiwanese Aboriginal pop, of which Amis singers are an important part. Amongst the many interesting observations and analyses in these chapters are discussions of the unexpected ways in which many forms of Amis performances (including pop songs) are incorporated into or influence village *ladhiw* music-making (195–96), and how Amis singers and Tan herself negotiated performances given by an Amis group visiting London in 2003 (163–73).¹ In the concluding chapter Tan returns to the two themes of the book. She draws on her earlier analyses to deconstruct notions that *ladhiw* and *yinyue* can be considered in dialectical opposition and pulls together the various strands of her ecosystem-based analysis of Amis song.

Throughout the book, a wide range of specific examples from Tan’s field experiences and interviews are arranged around discussions concerning the book’s two central themes, and many of these examples also feature on the accompanying CD. The CD includes nineteen excerpts from Tan’s audio and video field recordings, with the tracks and singers listed in the text.² The examples described in the book, and those featured in digital format, are a wonderful asset to the book and provide a wealth of firsthand material to support the discussion. They also offer invaluable points of comparison for researchers working in numerous related areas. Tan’s command of Chinese, Japanese, and English—as well the ability she seems to have

achieved in the Amis language—were obviously key to her obtaining such rich material, and her ongoing work with Amis communities at junctures over a period of ten years is admirable.

Finally, Tan must be commended for adopting the model of an ecosystem in her analysis. This relatively novel approach or “theoretical cut” (SEEGER 2002) within her discipline of ethnomusicology offers the potential to provide new insights from a new perspective. As Anthony Seeger notes, “a great deal of the debate within our field actually comes down to each approach looking at the result of its own theoretical cut and insisting to other scholars that what they describe is wrong because it is so clearly different. Different questions will yield different results. So instead of accusing one another of misinterpreting music, we need to recognise that we might learn something from these differences” (SEEGER 2002, 189). Tan succeeds in convincing the reader to take a slightly different perspective on Amis singing and, by extension, music-making in other environments. Her approach means that the book will be of interest to many readers, not only those whose primary focus is the music of East Asian minorities.

NOTES

1. Tan’s comparison of her own experiences with those that Helen REES (2002) describes during a visit of Naxi minority musicians from China to London are particularly engaging.

2. Additional acknowledgements in the main text of individuals and communities who were involved in the research would also have been welcome.

REFERENCES

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