

and crafts knowledge in the PRC today. She sees this resulting in a new generation of fashion professionals being largely trained abroad (p. 102), where lecturers would be required to have worked for several years in the market before passing on their expertise. Surprisingly, she seems little concerned with the immediate impact of the first lockdown that hampered the launch of JNBY's seasonal collections, but rather notes how the slowing down has given her time to consider the future of the company. Reading how JNBY turns to sustainable clothing and more ecological production attests to a planetary thinking that sees Chinese designers equally and jointly engaged with peers around the world and looking at the pandemic as a healthy break rather than a deadly blow to the creative industry.

A strength of the conversation series lies in bringing together diverging political positions, for instance in the different stances of Pi Li (chapter three), curator of Hong Kong's M+ museum complex and Zhang Zikang (chapter four), director of the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA) museum in Beijing. While Pi views the pandemic as a huge blow to the museums and focuses on the perceptual limitations of online exhibitions, Zhang sees the need for museums to go virtual as a great opportunity to reach out to younger, less educated and regionally distanced new audiences. Zhang's stance also resonates with that of urban studies researcher Jiang Jun (chapter nine), in that both seem to agree with the PRC's official fostering of new media technology, including its strict censoring. Given the tight monitoring even after the lifting of pandemic regulations and the largely censored "white paper" protests, readers will thus doubt Zhang's optimistic belief in the advantage of a one-party system that controls museum information and citizens' mobility alike.

In sum, Jiang allows us to travel back in time, compare and witness how the beginning of the global pandemic not only fuelled anxieties of cultural difference and national control, but also showed the need to overcome our screens and epistemic borders, to sustain mutual dialogue, while affirming just how related we really are.

doi:10.1017/S0305741023001364

Kunqu: A Classical Opera of Twenty-First-Century China

Joseph S. C. Lam. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2022. 300 pp. HK \$700.00 (hbk). ISBN 9789888754328

Ming Yang

Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing, China
Email: yangming@bfsu.edu.cn

In *Kunqu: A Classical Opera of Twenty-First-Century China*, Joseph S. C. Lam introduces kunqu to an English readership "as both a performance and a discourse of Chinese lives and dreams" (p. xiii). Lam claims to present kunqu in a unique way: "holistically" (p. 1). He organizes his 209-page text into ten chapters, constructing kunqu from temporal, spatial, personal, performative, musical, cultural and intercultural perspectives. After stating his goal for a holistic presentation (chapter one) and introducing current kunqu institutions, practitioners, vocabulary and theories (chapter two), Lam investigates the aesthetic, historical and cultural roots in the lasting appeal of kunqu, which he describes as being both "heavenly" and "earthly" (chapters three and four); reviews the individuals that kunqu has been created by, for, and of, as characters inside the plays and people in real life (chapter five); examines kunqu from the perspective of what he refers to as "yuescape"



(that is, the dynamics between kunqu music/performance [*yue*] and various agents within the sites of performance) (chapter six); and analyses the continuous development of kunqu in performance, music and culture (chapters seven, eight and nine). The monograph ends with “Kunqu at a crossroads” (chapter ten).

Lam is keenly aware of the challenges in presenting such a “multifaceted and multivalent” subject of kunqu (p. 9). Kunqu is a centuries-old, multidimensional, living tradition of China. As one of the oldest extant *xiqu* (Chinese theatre) forms, kunqu synthesizes literature, music and performance, each of which has developed into a subject of study and appreciation in its own right. The 2001 UNESCO designation of kunqu as an Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) has led to changes in its production, self-projection and reception by globalized audiences. Lam is of the opinion that prior kunqu publications had limitations: those works were either structured in a “single, linear” pattern along the course of kunqu development or approached from a disciplinary perspective (p. 9). Lam chooses to follow neither of these well-travelled paths. Nor does he focus on a certain composition by integrating a number of disciplinary studies together. Lam sets out to present kunqu to a wider group of readers in his own way, and he certainly achieves his goal.

Lam’s holistic construction of kunqu is informed by his specific strengths – his background in Chinese language and culture, international scholarly training, intercultural academic achievements, and experiences of studying, researching, teaching and producing kunqu. He provides the reader with insiders’ accounts from the point of view of Chinese kunqu practitioners while maintaining his observation through an international and intercultural lens. Lam constructs a narrative of kunqu in the 21st century with methods and theories from across the study of humanities – inter-disciplinarily and multi-disciplinarily. He presents a comparative study methodology, closely connecting the separate aspects through comparison and contrast – past vs. present China; kunqu vs. other *xiqu* forms; Chinese kunqu vs. “non-Chinese” ICH masterpieces; and kunqu productions at home vs. abroad with Chinese vs. international audiences as well as different interpretations of the same kunqu play/piece in different times by different artists. The comparisons and contrasts are reinforced with detailed case studies, in some cases aria by aria (see specifically “The ‘Zither Seduction,’” pp. 134–144), from production to production (see pp. 167–169). Finally, Lam’s *Kunqu* offers a comprehensive, complete, up-to-date (2022) collection of research data on kunqu and current kunqu scholarship in multiple formats in the book’s text and appendices (especially works published after 2001).

Like any other work of cross-cultural scholarship, Lam’s book invites further discussion, reconsideration and, at certain points, correction. Take, for example, Lam’s proposition of a *qingchun dianya* (literally, “youthful” [and] “refined”) paradigm for kunqu performance in discussing China and Chinese people (see p. 209). Lam argues that “*qingchun dianya fugui* (literally, ‘wealthy [and] noble’) kunqu characters are emblematic” of Chinese men and women that are “beautiful, young and productive and are making China a twenty-first-century superpower” (p. 22). Kunqu does embrace “youthful and refined” characteristics; yet there needs to be more substantiation for the legitimacy of *qingchun dianya* as the paradigm for kunqu performance and discourse. Another instance is Lam’s discussion of “flowery women (*huadan*)” in his summary of kunqu female role (*dan*) subcategories (p. 37). Generally, the primary kunqu *dan* subcategory for unmarried elegant young ladies and newly wedded female royalty is *guimendan* (literally, “boudoir” *dan*). *Guimendan* encompasses all leading female characters discussed in this monograph – Du Liniang (*The Peony Pavilion*), Li Xiangjun (*The Peach Blossom Fan*), Chen Miaochang (*The Jade Hairpin*), and the imperial concubine Yang Yuhuan (*The Palace of Eternal Youth*). Elsewhere, Lam’s translation of the *qupai* (“tune pattern”) “Lanhuamei” as “lazy bird” (p. 141) is misleading: it has nothing to do with *huamei*, a type of singing thrush, but rather derives its title from earlier classical Chinese poems, in which a lonely beautiful young lady had no intention (*lan*, “lazy”) to paint (*hua*) her eyebrows (*mei*) in the absence of her sweetheart.

Unfortunately, this monograph is marred by frequent typographical errors – Immaneul (correctly, Immanuel) Hsu, Vera Schwarz (Schwarcz), Li Xiangju (Xiangjun), In Heritance (Inheritance), 朱賣(賈)臣 and Shocking New (News), to name a few (pp. 59n5, 59n6, 125, 214, 250, 274). Though minor, they impair the book's credibility as an authoritative scholarly work.

Quibbles aside, *Kunqu: A Classical Opera of Twenty-First-Century China* by Joseph S. C. Lam is an enthusiastic endeavour to introduce kunqu – as a theatre art, a music tradition and a continuing memory of Chinese culture – to readers interested in these aspects. I greatly look forward to future works by Lam and other scholars to expand and explore the research along the path that this book has already marked.

doi:10.1017/S030574102300139X