

The Color of Music Heritage: Chinese America in American Ultra-Modern Music

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THE COLOR OF MUSIC HERITAGE

*Chinese America in American Ultra-Modern Music**

nancy yunwha **rao**

It is as if we had said: Europe, of which after all America is a mere western projection, ends here. The Pacific Coast is our racial frontier.

— Robert Ezra Park²

THE BUSY CROSS-CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS between Asia and America during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries had many social and political manifestations. These encounters were triggered both by the westward expansion of the Old World of Europe across the American continent and by Asians crossing the Pacific Ocean to America. The resulting racial frontier of the imagination at the edge of the Pacific, where the West and the East met, marked the limit of America's ability to extend its European legacy. A notorious response to the encounters at this racial frontier was the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act, which stopped the immigration of laborers from China by setting up a racial barrier at the national level.³ This law and its extensions sanctioned heightened anxiety and bigotry; intertwined with violence, they limited the economic and political status of Asian immigrants.⁴

Not all American responses were anti-Asian, however. Other voices, expressing a liberal ideology, insisted on American ideals such as equality and the ability of a "modern nation" to assimilate racial differences. On the eve of Congress's passing the Chinese Exclusion Act, *Harper's Weekly* staunchly defended the right of Chinese to live in the U.S. with dignity:

Considering the traditional declaration of our pride and patriotism that America is the home for the oppressed of every clime and race, considering the spirit of our constitutional provision that neither race, color, nor previous condition of servitude shall bar a citizen from voting, is it not both monstrous and ludicrous to decree that American civilization is endangered by the ‘Mongolian invasion’?⁵

A political cartoon by Thomas Nast astutely probes the hypocritical disjuncture of American constitutional provisions and the preposterous bill of Chinese Exclusion (see Figure 1).⁶

Paradoxical as they now may seem, these contrasting responses reflect how Asia’s intrusion into the United States imaginary at the turn of the century posed an acute and perplexing “racial problem,” with which American political discourses and society grappled in a variety of ways. As literary critic David Palumbo-Liu succinctly expresses it, “While crossing over would advance the geopolitical and economic interests of modern America, it would also test the social and cultural fabric of the nation and its ability to accommodate a race heretofore deemed to be radically different.”⁷ Surfacing during the 1920s, American ultra-modern music constitutes a unique response to the racial frontier represented by the Pacific.⁸ As this essay will argue, the sonic imaginations that gave rise to these musical compositions bear many traces of the society and culture of this historical moment. In a distinctive way, ultra-modern music maps the racial terrain of the American musical landscape during this turbulent time.

American ultra-modernist composers’ engagement with Asian culture in the early twentieth century has attracted scholarly attention in the past two decades. Studies have shown that American modernists of this period were fascinated and influenced by the concepts and music of Asia.⁹ Composers such as Henry Cowell, Colin McPhee, Dane Rudhyar, and Ruth Crawford wrote music that engaged the traditions of Balinese music, Indian classical music, Hindu chanting, Chinese opera, and Japanese instrumental music. Famous instances include Cowell’s use of Asian string-playing technique (plucking, pressing, and sliding on piano strings) in *The Banshee*; McPhee’s use of the gamelan in *Tabuh-tabuhan*; Crawford’s use of Hindu chanting in *Three Chants for Women’s Chorus*, or Rudhyar’s association with what musicologist Carol J. Oja calls “a

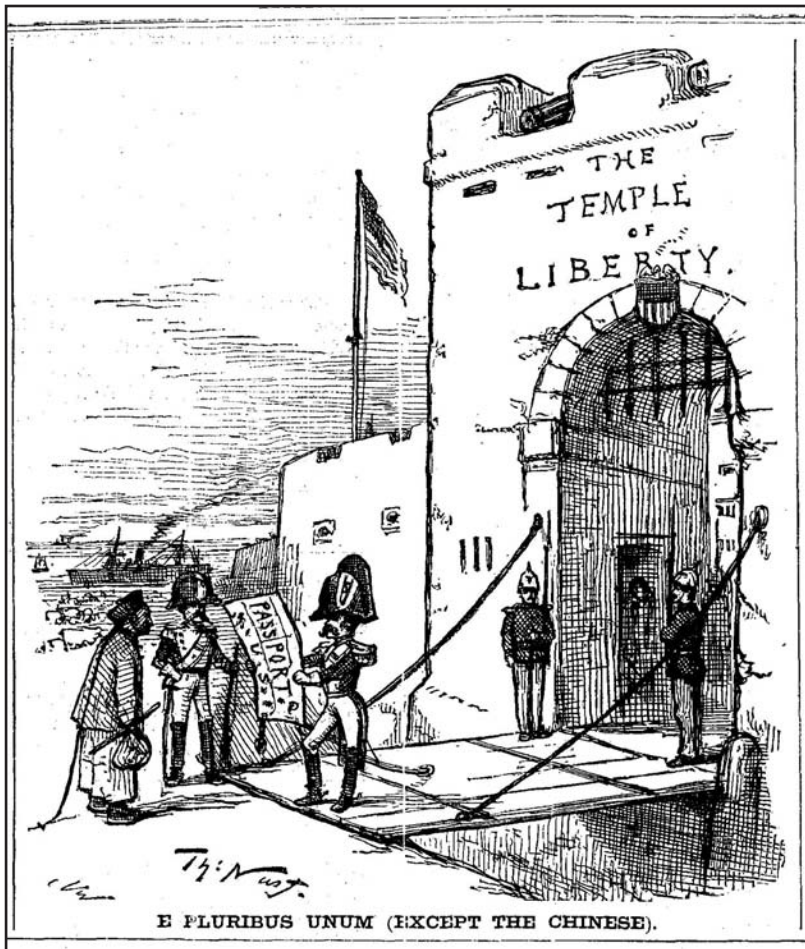


Figure 1: "E Pluribus Unum (Except the Chinese)" by Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly*, April 1, 1882, p. 207.

trans-Asian mix of religious philosophies and musical practices."¹⁰ Scholars have also demonstrated how the engagement between ultra-modern compositions and Asian culture was paralleled by the composers' eager study of non-European music traditions, as exemplified by the courses on Music of the World's Peoples that Henry Cowell and Charles Seeger offered at the New School for Social Research. The musicological society they co-founded in 1930 held regular discussions of various aspects of non-European music traditions ranging from spiritual concepts to scales, timbre, and sound.¹¹

In her monograph on trends in American modern music of the 1920s, Oja argues that Asian influence, far from being merely decorative and superficial, formed the core of musical aesthetics in the work of Rudhyar, a composer whom she reveals to have had a central impact on composers during this time. Influenced by the philosophical outlook of Theosophy, “Rudhyar’s focus on India and ‘the East’ also informed his theory of American dissonance,” which is built around the sophisticated sonic quality of “Tone” that is characteristic of the “Eastern sound”:

Like humans in an increasingly diverse social network, pitches considered dissonant could evolve new alignments to retain their essential differences yet achieve compatible coexistence. There was no better place to achieve such a multicultural sound, Rudhyar believed, than in the United States, with its rich mix of races and ethnicities.¹²

Oja’s emphasis on the relevance of locale to Asian influence in American modern music is noteworthy. Her remarks call attention to the intermingling of multi-ethnic communities in America during this historical period. If, on the one hand, the social milieu was marked by “racial problems” and hierarchy, on the other hand, “various practices of food, language, dance, performance, and everyday life intermingled,” forming a rich culture of multiple heritages.¹³ Recognizing this fact also acknowledges the necessary inscriptions of multiple heritages in the material history of the period. In fact, it leads to important questions of how to interpret this early Asian movement in modern music. What were the connections between the Asian confluence in musical modernism and the American political and social history of the time, especially the Asian “racial problem” that was at the forefront of the national debate? What was the meaning of the feverish Asian confluence in modern music within a racially-divided society where elements of “the Orient” were racially marked, and generally not valued as a social asset?

Until recently it has been difficult to address these questions; after all, the Asian confluence in American music of the early twentieth century was not seen as important. But, perhaps the problem lies still more in the basic assumptions that have hitherto framed scholars’ view of the Asian confluence—as alternatives to the European legacy, as inspirations for modernistic novelty, or as simply an exotic attraction. This underlying

framework stems from a historical narrative that is fixated, however unwittingly, on American music's relation to European musical traditions and their legacy—their extension and their negation. Implicit in such a mode of inquiry, I maintain, is the assumption that “the Orient,” first and foremost, should be considered “foreign” and thus perpetually external to the United States. This narrow conception of national identity inevitably forecloses analysis of much material, racial, and social history in American modern music. By insisting on a distanced form of “the Orient,” this conceptualization has the effect of erasing the physical existence and conceptual inclusion of “the Orient” *within* the national borders.

Perhaps ironically, then, this fundamental assumption is being renewed by the recent interest in the Asian confluence in American modern music that has employed the concept of Orientalism.¹⁴ Since Edward Said pointed to the concept of “Orientalism” as “one of [Europe’s] deepest and most recurring images of the Other,” many activities in Western society involving imitation of or engagement with the works and practices of non-European cultures have come under scrutiny. It is not surprising that American modern music’s embrace of non-European cultures has drawn criticism by recent scholars who adopt Said’s theoretical model. For example, included in a collection of essays, *Western Music and Its Others*, is a chapter entitled “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others,” by John Corbett. As suggested by its title, the essay posits American music as a conceptual extension of the European tradition; non-European musics are the essential Other. An aim of the essay is, as its author enthusiastically vouches in the introduction, “to describe the underlying epistemic framework which provides a context for American and European classical music’s overwhelming turn to the music of ‘other’ cultures.”¹⁵ It is thus not surprising to find the following analysis of composer Henry Cowell’s colonialist position:

Already, right at the outset of the proverbial golden years of American experimentalism, a familiar nineteenth-century form of Orientalism helps guide an overriding interest in non-Western musics.... Cowell retains his positional superiority, defining and then appropriating elements that help him dislocate conventional European harmony and rhythm.¹⁶

Using the analytical framework of Orientalism, Corbett applies the familiar tropes of identifying the colonizer, Western desire, control, and the imbalance of power. A distinguishing mark of orientalist composers, as such analysis suggests, is the imperialist impulse that underlies the American experimental composers' use of Asian materials and their exploitation of Asian music to displace European influences.¹⁷ Cowell is particularly implicated in this essay by an allusion to the title of his famous book, *New Musical Resources*: "American experimentalists have consistently defined the Oriental as a generalized set of potential 'new musical resources.'"¹⁸ The essay's taxonomy scrupulously classifies the impulses and aesthetics behind various Orientalist exploitations and appropriations (superficial, conceptual, philosophical, contemporary *chinoiserie*, etc.), never departing from the explanatory formula that posits modern composers as the exploiter and the Orient as the exploited. Accordingly, American modern music's inclusion of musical materials originally from Asia was necessarily a Western exploitation of the East. But, was it really that simple?

In this type of analysis, the racial terrain in the United States and its various modalities of expression disappear. As readers might have already noted, such an Orientalist critique leaves unchallenged *precisely* the Eurocentric framework itself. By relating all modern music's elements to the various struggles with or continuations of that European tradition, this view of American modernism is predicated on the binary myths of a core American self (read: heir of a European legacy) and an exotic Other. By equating non-European musics with non-American musics—paradoxically, a necessary premise of such an exercise—the analysis ignores the period's volatile social dynamics that it sought to unveil. Certainly, it pays no attention to the complexity of the contact, negotiation, mimicry, transformation, and all the other dynamics of heritage that attended the music activities across cultural and racial boundaries on American soil at the beginning of the twentieth century. In essence, the Orientalist analysis neatly avoids the complexity that gave rise to the American music landscape, namely, the intriguing questions of how we might construe the musical heritage of people growing up on U.S. soil. Musical heritage was/is by no means determined by skin color. In light of this reality, it is not surprising that Corbett's Orientalist analysis fails to explain the

Asian confluence in American experimental music and, perhaps worse yet, lends validity to the binary myths of a core and its Other in American music history.

Such an inquiry on American music that conflates Asian musical elements with foreign/exotic influence has many analytical consequences. What this notion of “foreign-ness” excludes is the discursive interplay of nation-formations that emerged from the Asian confluence during this historical period. Its designation of the Orient as a timeless, ahistorical object allows little meaning and no *agency* to the historical and physical presence of Asians in the U.S.—they are reduced to merely representational figures of “the other” rather than being acknowledged as social actors. It entirely overlooks what Palumbo-Liu calls “a newly defined interiority” created by “the introjection of Asia into the American imaginary” during this time.¹⁹

Yet neglecting the rich layers of this newly defined interiority is serious, considering that ultra-modern composers were generally coming of age at a time when the fluidity of cultural/ethnic boundaries and the racial and social practices that marked the Exclusion period defined the American musical landscape. The *interiority* of the Asian introjection in America made this a particularly perplexing historical period. The cross-cultural musical encounter in American ultra-modern music is as much a musical-aesthetic expression as a manifestation of the discursive social formation of the ethnic-racial terrain in America at the turn of the century.

Few examples foreground more acutely the complicated issues of the political and cultural nexus, psyches, and spaces that fostered the infiltration of the “Orient” into American modernism than the relationship between Henry Cowell, an ultra-modern composer, and Chinese American music. Cowell, described by John Cage as “the open sesame in new music of America,” was an early advocate for many musical innovations in American modern music.²⁰ Cowell, the son of an Irish immigrant father and a mother from the American midwest, grew up near the “Oriental district” in San Francisco. In fact, his image as a Pacific Rim composer is so entrenched that people are sometimes surprised to learn about his central role in the 1930s ultra-modern music scene in New York City. Even so, the extent to which growing up near Chinatown influenced his musical

output remains largely unexplored. Generally treated as an incidental biographical detail, it has been used mostly to supplement explanations of his interest in non-European music, his famous motto of “embracing the music of the whole wide world,” or his flexible aesthetics rather than for its bearing on his musical innovations or his seminal theoretical work. As a result, San Francisco’s Chinatown has been little more than a backdrop against which the life story of this unconventional composer is told. Its significance remains vague or even doubtful. To understand Cowell’s Chinatown musical upbringing and its significance in his work requires that the Chinese community be moved to the front stage as a historical subject that not only produced a lively musical space in America but, in fact, gave birth to music innovation in American ultra-modern music.

MUSIC OF THE CHINESE IN AMERICA AROUND THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

The music of the early Chinese in America is uniquely powerful as a symbol of Chinatown. One of the most important reasons is its sonorous quality that could not be easily contained by any borders, physical or symbolic. In an era when live performances still predominated, i.e., the era before phonograph and cinema became widely popular, the power of music performance was unmatched by other means of communication. While a fuller study of the music of Chinese America belongs elsewhere, the following brief sketch aims to provide a picture of the context that gave rise to its existence, the symbolic meaning that preceded and then accompanied its presence, and the sounds and sights of its manifold presence. However insufficient these descriptions would necessarily be in conveying its sonic effect, they give a sense of the range and scope of sonic experiences in the American musical landscape at the turn of the century.

When it is considered an ethnic American music at all, Chinese American music occupies the periphery on the “ethnic map.” The national bureaucratic machinery that positioned the Chinese as perpetually alien operated similarly within the history of American music to structure the hierarchy of ethnic music. To this day, it is unusual for American music historians to fully acknowledge Chinese American music as an American music with a tradition that goes back 150 years.²¹ Yet this music came with Chinese immigration that began in the mid-nineteenth century, and

images of it predated that movement. As historian John Kuo Wei Tchen demonstrates, the perception and representation of Chinese things, ideas, and people in North America dates back to the early decades of the new nation, when the revolutionary elite emulated European society's taste for *chinoiserie*.²² Trade with China began to flourish in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and soon "there was an extraordinary demand for Chinese-made items in America."²³ Some notion of the Orient permeated every level of society, and the representations of Chinese people and other Asian and Pacific peoples were popularized in many dime-museums, in vaudeville, in sheet music, and in theaters.

The large increase in Chinese immigration that began with the Gold Rush in the 1850s gave a different purpose to the existence of Chinese music in the United States. Over 20,000 Chinese came to the U.S. in the year 1852 alone. When railroad construction became an important step in creating the modern American nation, 12,000 Chinese were employed by the Central Pacific Railroad by 1867, representing 90 percent of its workforce. After the transcontinental railroad was completed in 1869, Chinese immigrants moved to the larger cities, where they formed urban Chinese communities. In total, around 380,000 Chinese came to the U.S. mainland between 1849 and 1930.²⁴ The musical life of such large communities, whose residents ranged widely in their occupations and educations, was undoubtedly vivid.

For the flourishing Chinese American communities during this period, Chinese opera theaters, which performed Cantonese opera, were their most public face in American society. In *The Gold Hunters*, a travelogue published in 1857, J. D. Borthwick wrote of San Francisco's Chinatown:

[T]he streets were thronged with long-tailed Celestials,... standing in groups studying the Chinese bills posted up in the shop windows, which may have been playbills,—for there was a Chinese theatre.... The Chinese theatre was a curious pagoda-looking edifice, built by them expressly for theatrical purposes, and painted, outside and in, in an extraordinary manner. The performance went on day and night, without intermission, and consisted principally of juggling and feats of dexterity.²⁵

In 1868, when the first permanent Chinese theater—Hing Chuen Yuen—opened in San Francisco, it drew about a hundred of the city's dignitaries, including members of the legal profession, the state legislature, and the

city's Board of Supervisors.²⁶ Everything from the sets to the costumes for this theater was designed and crafted in China and shipped to San Francisco. Later in the century, the city had six Chinese opera theaters running concurrently, attracting tourists from as far away as Europe. The 1906 earthquake destroyed San Francisco's Chinatown and its theaters, but not for good. A playbill for the Great China theater (See Figure 2), one of two theaters in San Francisco that began operations in 1924, indicates the popularity and professionalism of the production. Such playbills, as well as newspapers containing daily announcements of the programs and performers, were posted in public places in Chinatown. Performances were put on nightly, attracting wealthy merchants and laborers alike.

On the East Coast, the first Chinese opera troupe performed at Niblo's Garden of New York City in the 1850s, and in the 1880s a Chinese opera theater took up residence in New York's Chinatown. During the 1920s, two theaters, offering nightly performances, opened within a year of each other, including one that was housed in the famous immigrant theater, the Thalia. Advertisements for performances in the local Chinese newspaper reflected the daily change of repertoire and the casting of virtuosic performers.²⁷ On a smaller scale, Los Angeles, Fresno, Sacramento, Chicago, Seattle, Portland, and Boston all had their own Chinese opera theaters at different times. Accounts and impressions of the music and its spectacles proliferated in major newspapers, tour guides, and travelogues of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Although the opera performances had multiple functions within the Chinese community, they were also deliberately used by the Chinese merchant elite to enhance their relationship with U.S. mainstream society. While the theaters were in operation, the merchants, working around the strict immigration rules, endeavored to ensure that a constant stream of touring troupes and singers continued to replenish and energize Chinatown theaters.

The dissemination of Chinese opera in America was aided by the increasing popularity of the phonograph, which became the primary form of musical entertainment, further breaking down boundaries of geography, locale, and race. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, major American record companies such as Columbia and Victor had included Chinese records in their ethnic catalogues for the domestic market.²⁸

Chinese opera records were advertised to both Chinese and European American communities in Chinese-language newspapers as well as in English-language trade magazines such as *Talking Machine World*. At the price of \$ 1.50 per disk in the 1920s, the music could be heard at home, in shops, and in restaurants. Tourists in Chinatown would be greeted by the sounds of Chinese music floating out of the shops. Recordings could be replayed and studied, helping Chinese Americans to appreciate the music and even turn into amateur singers or musicians themselves. Sound recordings took Chinese opera to isolated places where opera troupes might not venture.²⁹

Chinese opera was not the only kind of musical activity in Chinese American communities in the period of 1849 to 1930. Silk-bamboo music, music for funeral processions, and music for the lion and dragon dances that paraded the streets on festive occasions such as the Chinese New Year were all familiar parts of the lively cultural life before and during the Exclusion Era. While the popularity of chamber music is vividly reflected in the ubiquitous Chinese instrument, *erhu* and *yueqing*, players portrayed in illustrations of Chinese people in the U.S., the music for funerals, and dragon and lion dances were particularly notable in the public sphere. As open, accessible displays of spectacle and sound, their reach went far beyond class, racial, or geographical boundaries.³⁰ Many pictures of such parades and processions have survived from the major towns that contained Chinatowns or sizable Chinese communities.³¹ And then, there were always children's rhymes, which in their unique ways crossed the boundary lines, either imaginary or physical, often drawn between ethnic enclaves. Chinese children were the favored subject of many photographers: their innocent presence was untainted by the denigrating images that were typically ascribed to the Chinese in America.

While these musics, with the image of perpetual foreignness associated with the Chinese in America, had been dismissed as having little relevance to American musical life, they were, as expressions of lively urban culture at the turn of the century, part of the developing musical consciousness of many American children during that time, Chinese and non-Chinese alike.

CULTURAL AND MUSICAL HERITAGES

As vibrant live performances prospered in the metropolises as well as in selected smaller cities, Chinese music—opera especially—constituted a part of American urban life. According to Cowell's reminiscences, his childhood was one brimming with Chinese music's sonorities:

I was raised in San Francisco. We lived between the Japanese and Chinese districts and I had many Japanese and Chinese playmates between the ages of five and nine. I sang their folk songs in their native languages just as many children on the eastern seaboard sing those songs in German and French learned from their playmates. By the time I was nine years old, the music of these oriental people was just as natural to me as any music.³²

I was taken to the Chinese opera [by my mother] many times, and used to listen from the street below to meetings of the Chinese Classical Music Association.³³

I was taken to hear a Chinese opera before I heard a European one, although I went at this time to hear concerts of string quartets, etc. As a result, Oriental music has never seemed strange to me, and I have often in composing thought quite naturally of themes in Oriental modes, or in which Oriental and Occidental elements are integrated.³⁴

I heard my father who was an Irishman hum Irish tunes, and my mother who had come from the South and the Ozarks hum old American modern tunes. And I lived in San Francisco in the middle of the Oriental Section and my playmates included Japanese, Chinese & Tahitians. So I hummed each in its own language the tunes along with the rest of them.³⁵

Each quotation differs slightly by musical genre and occasion, yet together they convey an impression of the active musical life of the local Chinese community. Cowell's childhood reminiscences are valuable for their rendering of a historically specific urban space where Chinese music existed amply in its own right and where cultural mixing was a way of life, non-threatening as alienated cultural form and pleasing to the ear. As Anthony Lee points out, contrary to the popular image of a secluded ethnic enclave, San Francisco's Chinatown at the turn of the century was a necessary passageway for the non-Chinese who traveled between the hectic life of the business district and the more comfortable residential areas on the hills.³⁶ The mingling of Chinese and non-Chinese was common in

street scenes, particularly before the 1906 fire destroyed this part of the city (Scholars have shown that the mingling was such that photographers often conspicuously removed the Caucasian to construct the image of Chinatown as an exotic land.) .

As a co-constituent of this urban space, Cowell likely took note of its music activities. His recollections show how in San Francisco, during the first decade of the twentieth century, Chinese music was part of a vibrant atmosphere. It seems Cowell's musical sound-world could hardly avoid being infiltrated by the musical sound of this urban space. In fact, an eager Cowell described Chinese musics as part of his "heritage": "All these different kinds of [ethnic] music became as natural and as meaningful a part of *my unconscious musical heritage* as were the Anglo Celtic tradition of my parents."³⁷ In reasserting the connection between his own musical imagination and Chinatown's music, and by using the term, "heritage," Cowell positions himself as not only a recipient of these musical traditions but also as someone who continues their legacy.

The abundance of musical influences in America was confirmed by another contemporary composer, though in a different pitch, if only because it betrayed a certain annoyance: "The population of America is, as everyone recognizes, a general hodge-podge of almost all conceivable racial elements."³⁸ According to Cowell's teacher, Charles Seeger, these musical traditions were so vivid for Cowell that he found them hard to exclude from his musical imagination when he began his lessons on European compositional techniques. These lessons followed what could be described as a normalizing process, as Seeger implied:

Emerging, as a child, from a strongly isolated and idolized home life in an extreme western America scarcely out of its pioneer era, Cowell is distinguished by apparently having no sense of, and no respect for, music tradition as cultural reality.³⁹

By "music tradition" Seeger meant the European alone, but ironically Cowell was the one who had a clearer view of the true "cultural reality" of early twentieth-century America.

Seeger's view differs from Cowell's not just idiosyncratically but also in its sociological framework and national self-image. Cowell once noted, "Most people in the middle and eastern parts of this country don't realize

that Japanese and Chinese music is part of American music.”⁴⁰ Yet, as the adolescent Cowell would find out, Seeger’s view was predominant in a large part of the society as well as in formal music institutions such as The Institute of Musical Art (later Julliard Music School) in New York, which he attended briefly in the 1920s. It was also the dominant view in contemporary American writing on music, which saw its object fundamentally as an extension of the European legacy. For example, using the infamous expression, the “music of indigestion,” Daniel Gregory Mason, a composer and the most widely read American author of critical essays on music at the time, wrote in 1926 that “the music of the whole world has battered our ears.”⁴¹ Mason’s disparaging remark resonates with the nation’s adverse exclusionist policy. This was two years after the passing of the 1924 Immigration Act, which used a of quota system based on a hierarchy of race to restrict immigrations from Asia and southern and eastern Europe. The Chinese exclusion was then fifty years old.⁴²

These composers’ reactions to the social fabric of racial mix during this time constitute fascinating social expressions of this historical period. In light of the political and intellectual currents then in force, Cowell’s compositions can be regarded as a dissent from the exclusionist attitude, or as a different response to the cultural reality of the multiplicity of American traditions. From a broader sense of musical heritages, Cowell and composers like him developed distinctive compositional voices.

THE SLIDING TONE AND CHINESE SONIC IMAGERY

While, given its spectacle and prominence, the music of Chinese America ranged widely, it is hardly surprising that Chinese opera constituted an important part of Cowell’s early experience. Throughout his entire musical life, Cowell was fascinated by the notion of the sliding tone, a musical element that he associated in particular with Chinese operatic singing as well as Chinese string-instrument technique. Originating from vocal or instrumental slides in tone, the concept is applied by Cowell to larger structural designs and also to the dimensions of tempo and dynamic in systematic ways, all of which would seem to have little in common with its origin.⁴³

Nevertheless, there is an example where the link is made unequivocal. In his unpublished treatise, “The Nature of Melody,” Cowell identified the shape of a unique slide as particularly Chinese and provided a musical example: “In Chinese music belonging to a certain convention, there is employed a use of sliding tone which is like the *appoggiatura*, except that it comes after instead of before the tone, the slide thus ending in midair, so to speak.”⁴⁴ (See Figure 3.)

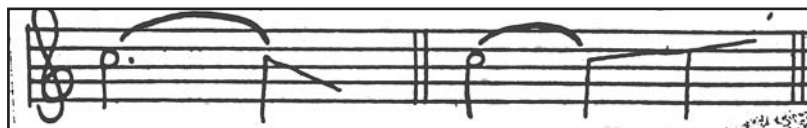


Figure 3: Sliding tone “ending in midair” from “The Nature of Melody” by Henry Cowell. Reprinted by permission of the David and Sylvia Teitelbaum Fund, Inc., as successors to Henry and Sidney Cowell.

The colossal sliding gestures in Symphony No. 11, “Seven Rituals” (1953), might seem merely a structural design. Yet Cowell’s annotation on the symphony’s holograph hint at the origin of the sonic image: “all strings end in midair” is written by his hand next to all occurrences of the type of sliding motion found in the third measure following rehearsal number A.⁴⁵ (See Figure 4.)

The exploration of the sliding tone concept constitutes one of Cowell’s most original ideas in his music innovation. The most celebrated example is *The Banshee*, composed in 1925. *The Banshee*, perhaps the most anthologized of all Cowell’s works, is considered to epitomize the legacy of the American ultra-modernist tradition: the strings inside the piano are plucked, swept, and rubbed by fingers or hands to produce sliding pitches or fixed pitches with ever-changing timbre. The instructions to perform directly on the strings of the piano with fingers or fingernails echo the performing tradition of such Chinese string instruments as the *guqin*, *gujen*, or *pipa*. Through techniques such as strumming, plucking, scraping, and stopping the piano strings, Cowell produces muted tones and a wide variety of harmonics—a sonority that was hitherto unheard on the piano. In their differently nuanced shapes and tone clusters, these tonal slides constitute what Cowell later described as a core narrative that

The image displays a page of musical notation for Henry Cowell's Symphony No. 11, movement v mm. 7-12. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system includes Flute (Fl.), Cello (Cel.), Solo Violin (Solo Vins.), and Violins (Vins.) 1 and 2. The second system includes Cello (Cel.), Solo Violin (Solo Vins.), and Violins (Vins.) 1 and 2. The music is in 2/4 time and features complex rhythmic patterns, including triplets and sixteenth notes. Dynamics range from *pp* to *p*. Performance markings include *rit.* (ritardando) and *a tempo*.

Figure 4: Henry Cowell, Symphony No. 11, movement v mm. 7–12. . Copyright © 1957 (Renewed) by Associated Music Publishers, Inc. (BMI). International copyright secured. All right reserved. Reprinted by permission of Music Sales Corporation (ASCAP).

can be associated with the piece: the ambience, the imaginary wailing, and the swift movement of the fairy woman who, in Celtic legend, prophesied deaths. Yet in a letter to Nicolas Slonimsky, Cowell noted the importance of the subtle tone quality: “The [musical] interest in the Banshee ... is not that it suggests a banshee, but in the remarkable number of subtle qualities of tone, and the way in which they are built into musical form.”⁴⁶

In order to create these complex and nuanced tonal slides, Cowell invented new piano techniques for *The Banshee*. Performance techniques

involving piano strings are employed for the first time, and they pave the way for such innovations as the prepared piano, which John Cage first devised in 1940 (*Bacchanale*). As a scholar recently noted, “the prepared piano was the culmination of Cage’s exploration of some of Cowell’s ideas” which resulted in “sliding a metal cylinder along [the piano strings] (*Second Construction*, 1940), and sweeping [the piano strings] with a stick (*First Construction [in Metal]*, 1939).” Cage went on to write nearly thirty compositions for the prepared piano, and at least 120 composers have composed works featuring the prepared piano. In an important way, the tonal slide on piano strings in *The Banshee*, together with the tone cluster (*Adventures in Harmony*, 1913, and *The Tides of Manaunaun*, 1917) and percussive piano technique (*The Leprechaun*, 1928–29), establish the historical significance of Cowell as the first composer to systematically explore unusual piano sounds and extend the instrument’s playing techniques.⁴⁷

Through Cowell’s advocacy, sliding tones and Chinese music in general received more attention from his fellow composers. Local Chinese musicians performed in Cowell and Seeger’s courses on world music in the New School of Social Research in the 1930s. Seeger noted, “We went to the Chinese music society in Chinatown. They had a room about fifteen feet square, quite high, with the instruments that they played hung up on pegs around the walls. We would ask them to come up and give a performance.”⁴⁸ When the famous Chinese opera singer, Mei Lan-fang, visited New York City in 1930, whose three-month U.S. tour resulted in 52 performances in major cities, Cowell’s fellow composers came to share his enthusiasm. Marion Bauer predicted in the popular Chicago-based periodical, *The Musical Leader*, that “Mei’s performance would be stimulating to musical imaginations [for composers who were present].”⁴⁹ Ruth Crawford was so drawn to Mei’s vocal slide and musical expression that she described them in length in a diary entry.⁵⁰ Her use of sliding tones in her song, “Chinaman, Laundryman” (1932), based on a poem written by a contemporary Chinese American author, H. T. Hsiang, reflects a keen sensitivity to the nuances and symbolic power of tonal slides and so warrants a brief discussion.⁵¹

Cast in the form of a dialogue, the poem alternates between the exploitative and sneering voice of the bosses and the discontented,

dispirited voice of the laundryman, figures of racial oppression and class exploitation, respectively. On the one hand, Crawford uses several types of downward slides, as well as *Sprechtstimme*, for the laundryman's indignant monologue. (See Figures 5a and 5b.) Upward slides, on the other hand, are generally associated with the boss's line. When the boss sings "Chinaman, go back to China, if you don't feel satisfied!" the distinctive type of upward slide—which, "ending in midair," Cowell identified as Chinese—is used for the mocking of "Chinaman" and "China" in his sarcastic voice. (See Figures 5a and 5b.) Placed in this context, the Chinese slide, intentionally docile and effeminate as it recalls the falsetto of Chinese operatic singing, denotes the boss's intentional caricaturing of China and the Chinese man as emasculated figures.⁵² In this satirical context that Crawford creates, the Chinese slide embodies the conflation of race and emasculation, a troping of a stereotype popular in the American imaginary. The provoking effect of the slide's mockery is apparent, which the laundry worker rejects in downward slides, "Don't call me Chinaman!" Turning the Chinese signifier on its head, Crawford's insightful reading of the social critique in Hsiang's poem is reflected in her nuanced use of the slides.⁵³

While Crawford's song incorporates sliding tones in a pointed social critique, Cowell's sliding-tone concept has been manifested in other general ways in the work of subsequent modern composers. In a separate study, I have discussed how the sliding concept—a deliberately *gradual* motion between two fixed points—became the basis of numerable innovations, each with different aesthetic possibilities, employed in the work of Cage, Conlon Nancarrow, Elliott Carter, James Tenney, and others. In tempo, the sliding concept evolved into complex rhythmic schemes shared by Conlon Nancarrow's acceleration studies for player piano and Elliott Carter's metrical modulations. In dynamics, it became the seed for works such as Crawford's famous *Andante* from *String Quartet 1931* and some of James Tenney's well-known works, such as *Having Never Written a Note for Percussion* (1971). In other words, the sliding-tone concept blossomed significantly in some of the most original compositions in American modernist music.⁵⁴ Cowell's prediction to Cage, in a letter of 1936, that sliding tone would be a promising direction for modern composers is ultimately substantiated by the significant places this body of sliding

The image displays a musical score for the piece "Chinaman" by Ruth Crawford. It is divided into two systems. The first system is labeled "Recitativo" and "Moderato (♩ = 66)". It features a voice part and a piano part. The voice part has the lyrics: "Chi-na-man!" "Laun-dry-man!" "Don't call me 'man!'" "I am". The piano part includes performance instructions: "8.", "sempre p", and "senza pedale". The second system continues the music with lyrics: "worse than a slave,..." and "Wash!...". It includes a piano part with a "3" marking and a "Wash!" instruction. The score uses treble clefs for both parts and includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings.

Figure 5a: Ruth Crawford, *Chinaman*, *Laudryman*. Reprinted by permission of Theodore Presser Company.

boss says: "Chi - na - man,

go back to Chi - na, if you don't feel sat - is - fied!

The musical score is written in G major and 2/4 time. It features a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The vocal line includes lyrics and is marked with a '3' above it. The piano accompaniment consists of two staves, with the right hand playing a melody and the left hand playing a bass line. The score is divided into two systems. The first system shows the boss speaking and the singer beginning the melody. The second system shows the singer continuing the melody and the piano accompaniment providing harmonic support. The score includes various musical notations such as treble and bass clefs, notes, rests, and fingerings.

Figure 5b: Ruth Crawford, *Chinaman*, *Laudryman*. Reprinted by permission of Theodore Presser Company.

works holds in the history of American modern music.⁵⁵ Furthermore, Michael Hicks, in considering the origin of Cowell's tone cluster—one of his other famous musical innovations—also notes the significance of the sound of the gongs and ceremonial drums of his Chinese neighbors that “undoubtedly saturated [Cowell's] musical imagination.”⁵⁶

To the extent that the musical life of Chinese America played a part in the creation of ultra-modern aesthetics, we may consider the musical innovations discussed above as embodying and therefore negotiating ethnic spaces in the realm of modern compositions—in the sonic ideas behind their creation, in the social context that fostered their inception, and in the social critique they sometimes evoke. Insofar as music always speaks through other music, American modern music is permeated by sonic ideas of Chinese America. Thus, the music of Chinese America, mediated through some modernist composers, affected the musical discourse of ultra-modernism in a prominent way: it has given rise to sonic, textural, and temporal innovations that play significant roles not only in American ultra-modern compositions from the 1920s and '30s, but also to this day.

CHILDHOOD REMINISCENCE AND CULTURAL MEMORIES

If Cowell's musical works, unlike Crawford's, were implicit in their negotiations of ethnic space, his social critique in words was pointed and unrelenting. When he reflected on the future of modern music, Cowell tirelessly reiterated the importance of valuing all musical traditions in America. In particular, he lamented the excessive emphases that the mainstream music establishment and institutions put on their European rather than non-European ancestries. In this respect, for Cowell “the Orient” was not just a distant place on the other side of the Pacific Ocean; it was also a location within America's national borders. While for the popular imagination Chinatown's music represented an obstacle to the extension of a European heritage, this was a conceptualization that Cowell found deeply troubling. In fact, Cowell's words themselves constitute *active resistances to the erasure of such ethnic space in American music*.

To be sure, throughout most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Chinese immigrants were viewed as a symbolic violation of the

national ideal of Anglo-Saxon purity. Similar racial prejudice greeted the sounds and images of their music. Travelogues and news articles of this period heaped ridicule on the theaters of Chinatown. Yet from memories of Cowell's generation—born at the century's close—we can decipher another point of view. This is the point of view of children in this era. Whereas in the face of severe racial discrimination cultural difference often worked to affirm boundaries between adults, it could be less forbidding for the young, especially with something as malleable as sonorities. For some impressionable youngsters, their relation to the musical presence of Chinese America at the turn of the century could be unfiltered and instantaneous. Cowell's reminiscences suggest a vivid picture of the urban space as a playground. And it was, at both the level of individual history and the level of collective cultural history. A magazine description of Cowell's fellow composer, Cecil Cowles (1893–[?]), who grew up in San Francisco around the same time, also recaptures this simple fascination: “As a little girl she used to follow Chinese funerals and come home with the weird [*sic*] Chinese music running through her head.”⁵⁷ Photographs of funeral and festival processions in the Chinese communities of America show how spectacular these ceremonies must have been both for ordinary bystanders and for photographers. Cowell's account of himself as a mesmerized child reminds us that the symbolic power of these events resided also with features other than the spectacle—the thrilling sonority. The musical activities of Chinese America created musical space whose sonorities reached far and lingered long.

The child's perspective often exposes the world hidden from view by the ideology of the dominant society. Scholar Susan Buck-Morse's reading of the German philosopher, Walter Benjamin, reminds us of the important role that the child plays in his writing of the collective cultural history of Berlin. As Benjamin writes, “The Ur-history of the nineteenth century which is reflected in the gaze of the child playing on its threshold has a much different face than that which it engraves on the map of history.”⁵⁸ Social hierarchy, Benjamin reminds us, is as mythical as fables or fairy tales for children. Children's relation to the world surrounding them centers on the act of play—the imitative play that makes characters out of everything: people, animals, nature, and sounds. Their curiosity

keeps them amused and largely oblivious to boundaries. Seen in this light, children are far from being passive receptacles; instead, they are deeply entangled with the surrounding world.⁵⁹ Childhood reminiscences recapture fragmented memories—of which sonority is a part—and they contribute to the collective cultural history in ways unconstrained by the dominant historical narrative. Therefore, accounts like those of Cowles and Cowell, both referring to San Francisco at the turn of the century, can themselves be read as expeditions into the deep memory of the American music landscape, rendering the *interiority* of its racial terrains. Through the eyes and ears of these composers' childhoods, we perceive the significant presence of Chinatown and its music in urban spaces during this period: Chinese children's rhymes, the instrumental music of the street parade, or the opera and orchestral tunes pouring out of the windows of theaters or stores.⁶⁰ The children's enthusiastic gaze uncovers the traces of musical space created by Chinese America, one that is more significant than has been recognized.

For Cowell personally, this cultural memory was inseparable from the sound world that constituted his "unconscious musical heritage." What became of it, then, when Cowell's childhood perception was confronted by the social hierarchy, such as the racial troping in popular songs' depictions of Chinatown? For their part, Chinese Americans, who as children had superbly mediated between cultures, would be troubled during adolescence as they discovered that "the identity imposed on them as 'Chinese' (or worse, as 'Chink' and 'Chinamen') was far more powerful [in] determining their 'place' in America."⁶¹ Cowell, their European American counterpart, would also be inevitably confronted by the "Othering" of a culture, Chinese American music, that was once familiar and his own but whose sonic imagery became aligned with the "inferior," the foreign, and the weird—stereotypes that characterized its people. Through such a socialization process, Chinese sonorities were redesignated as marginal, or as the Other, of society and the nation. Whether or not Cowell internalized this alienation as Chinese American adolescents often did, or subscribed to the stereotyping as non-Chinese American adolescents might, he necessarily mediated between the different perspectives.

Mediating among cultural heritages set the stage for complicated processes that include alienating, resisting, reconciling, emulating, ex-

ploring, and remembering. Cowell's general references to Chinese music as "primitive tradition" in his writings, for example, might be viewed as derivative of such a socialization process. In those pages, Cowell clearly used the notion of "primitiveness" to suggest a certain authenticity in his musical innovation. More importantly, Cowell's advocacy of non-European American traditions was tireless and persistent. It could be read as a form of resistance to the transformation of his own multi-ethnic musical upbringing—a "return" to his "unconscious musical heritage." It is in this way that Cowell's work could bear witness to the interiority of U.S. racial terrain at the beginning of the century, when elements of "unconscious musical heritages" speak across texts or genres, as the example of sliding tones shows. As a historical agent, this sonic idea, engendered in the musical space of Chinese America, finds expression in the dialogical space of U.S. modern music despite denials of its American citizenship, and of its visibility in the historical narrative of American musical life. At a subconscious level, therefore, Cowell's music reflects a dialogical space among culturally diverse voices.

The plain pentatonic tunes and simplified harmony that were frequently used to represent Chinatown in popular sheet music and vaudeville skits could not be more different from Cowell's concept of Chinese America. When the prominent Boston music critic, H.T. Parker, criticized Cowell's *Irish Suite*, a three-movement work for orchestra and string piano that includes *The Banshee*, comparing it to vaudeville, Cowell complained bitterly in a long letter to Slonimsky.⁶² The incident reflects the composer's at-times futile resistance in a period when ethnic cultural references could easily be given derogatory connotations. Racial troping and mocking undesirable ethnic groups are usually tactics of a nation full of racial tension. In contrast, Cowell's endeavors to enhance his own understanding of various non-European musical traditions worked to validate these traditions by infusing the music with the weight of knowledge. In the late 1920s, Cowell was invigorated by such scholarly research. He embarked on a prestigious Guggenheim Fellowship in 1931 to study world music and comparative musicology with eminent scholar Eric von Hornbostel in Berlin, and upon returning to the U.S. he went on to teach world music courses at the New School.

Other social movements might have influenced him in a similar direction but in more complicated ways. In the 1920s, Cowell was closely connected to musicians who embraced the practice of Theosophy. As an organized transatlantic religion led in America by Helena Blavatsky, Theosophy was known for its criticism of the “religious ethnocentrism of the West,” and was characterized by its emphasis on Asian philosophies and “Universal Brotherhood.”⁶³ In the mid-1930s Cowell, as a member of the Composers Collective, also embraced the pan-ethnic internationalism of the Cultural Front movement.⁶⁴ Though each had a different ideological undertaking, and was sometimes idealistic to a fault, these ventures all share a similar conceptualization: they consider ethnic cultural traditions such as Chinatown operas as essentially Asian or *international* rather than *within* national borders. Paradoxically, the displacement and the spatial distance worked to legitimize the subjects—that is, to un-racialize them—which Cowell might even have welcomed for pragmatic purposes. That pragmatism came, of course, at a cost. For a period of time from the late '30s to the early '50s, it appeared that Cowell was a composer who embraced “the whole world of music,” a mantra so famously associated with him that it was embraced by scholars in 1997 as the title of a symposium celebrating his centennial.

Ultimately, though, that “international” notion did not appear to have been satisfying to Cowell. For a 1961 Tokyo conference, “East-West Music Encounter,” Cowell delivered a paper as the representative from the U.S., on which occasion he sought to come to terms with the idea of Asian influence on American composers of the century. In preparing this paper, he made numerous long drafts whose titles varied: “Eastern Influence on Western Music,” “Influence of the Orient on Western Music,” “The Influence of Eastern on Western Music,” and so on. By then, the notion of world music provided the most popular explanatory model for Cowell’s iconic role as a spokesperson for non-European music. But as an abstract, timeless, and vaguely-distanced notion, “world music” dangerously reduces the complexity of the phenomenon and erases the presence of the real people who comprised part of his own experience. Cowell, having experienced at first hand the local history of Asian confluence in America, knew this danger well, which may explain why he hastened to supply the second half to his famous motto, which is indicated in italics below:

I have never believed that a composer in the 20th century, particularly in the United States, should limit himself to musical ideas drawn from those developed only in Europe, and only during the last 350 years. It seems to me it is time to learn to live in the whole world of music, *that world of all the people who are part of the United States*.⁶⁵

ULTRAMODERN MUSIC AND THE INTERIORITY OF THE U.S. RACIAL TERRAIN

To consider the American racial terrain at the turn of the century through American ultra-modern music—a child of its time—and, by the same token, to consider American ultra-modern music from the vantage point of Chinese America, placing the racial terrain at the very core of ultra-modern music, is essentially to rekindle a dialogue between two histories that were some time ago intertwined rather than separated. The interiority of this racial terrain was molded by the interlaced cultural contact where negotiation, mimicry, and transformation necessarily attend activities across racial boundaries. Just as the musical sounds of the Chinatown community could not be contained conveniently by zoning ordinances or other types of barriers, the creative impulse of American composers, Asian or not, could not be easily disciplined by racial boundaries and social order. To the extent that music allows the crossing of boundaries at a fundamental and visceral level, musical compositions are particularly rich embodiments of various modalities of Asian infiltration in America. Furthermore, considering the *material effect* of the lively music-making—such as Chinatown opera—significantly transforms Chinatown from a marginalized Other, a representational construct, to what historian Mae M. Ngai calls “a social actor” in the contact zone of multi-ethnic traditions.⁶⁶ The contact zone, which fostered the type of cultural mixing studied here, reflects the psyche of the co-habitants of American cities, and, as an important locale, its significance in the cultural history of America cannot be underestimated.

It is the contact zone that Cowell’s musical-cultural memories of Chinatown uncover: the child’s gaze at the urban playground. In an important way, Cowell’s reminiscences reflect a historical space—the childhood of his own generation, born at the century’s close. What appears vividly in Cowell’s reminiscences is an unsevered connection between Chinese

and non-Chinese America before it was censored out of existence by the process of socialization. Uncovering the unsevered connection in the American music landscape is not unlike restoring Caucasian figures to historical Chinatown photographs where they were routinely etched out in order to create the image of purely exotic Chinatown. Both speak the truth that the image of the pure self-enclosed Chinatown was a product of popular imagination and enduring racial stereotype.⁶⁷ With insights from social history and photography, scholars John Tchen, Anthony Lee, and Mary Ting Yi Lui have shown that Chinatowns' borders were never fixed or impenetrable as they were thought to be.⁶⁸ I would add that music—as sonic space—comprises a pointed example of the inevitability of intermingling rather than separation in urban America. Recognizing this reality is essential not only to unearthing hidden meaning and to opening up possibilities for interpretation but also in appreciating Chinese American music as an *agent* in American music history.

A common assumption has been that the aesthetic pursuit of modern music gives rise to the phenomenon of Asian confluence in music, one that consequently leads to analyses that scrutinize either modern music's "turn" toward Asian influence or modern composers' "borrowing" of Asian materials—the Other—to forge their musical aesthetics. Yet that assumption is unfortunate. Its explanatory model of appropriation or borrowing is deeply flawed: it all too easily subscribes to the self-Other divide and erases the agency of Chinese America rather than recognizing its space and history. Could it be that composers such as Cowell found the ideal of modern music *adaptable* to their aesthetic vision and sonic imagination, rather than vice versa? This essay proposes that the aesthetics of ultramodern music has at its foundation the sonorities of multi-ethnic musical heritages. In other words, American ultramodern music, as an innovative response to its historical context, grew out of the rich and wild-ranged sonorities in the American musical landscape of the early twentieth century.

Furthermore, by separating the cultural heritage from the hereditary biological traits of a composer, this study exposes and refutes the often-unquestioned (and unspoken) assumption that the European tradition alone constitutes the musical heritage for European American composers.

The notion of cultural inheritance proposed here opens up further spaces for inquiry, calling, in particular, for analysis of various trajectories of Asian America in musical texts, especially ones that by authorship or genre alone may not seem relevant. Such inquiries, unconventional as they might be, are important because they constitute a positive step toward rectifying the situating of Asian America too narrowly at the margins of the dominant and the downplaying of the complex and multiple imbrications of the Asian in America.

Later in his life, Cowell seemed even more determined to wrestle with the mainstream view of American sonic space, often interrogating the common notion of citizenship in American music. For a lecture to Peabody Conservatory students in the 1960s, Cowell wrote, "I present myself to you as a person who realizes from his own experience that the music of Japan, as well as that of China and other oriental countries, is part of American music."⁶⁹ In the spirit of testimony, Cowell's words seemingly reckon with those electrifying moments and voices which speak from his childhood. His unmistakable tone of advocacy also brings to mind the lone figure in Nast's pithy cartoon. What distinguishes Cowell from the liberal-minded cartoon that probed the hypocrisy of exclusionist policies is that Cowell's position does not just result from lofty ideal, but also is derived from a *musical instinct* fostered in concrete historical experience. Insofar as the Asian music traditions that thrived in turn-of-the-century America constitute Cowell's "unconscious musical heritage," they are also America's own.

Henry Cowell may exemplify the kind of historical figure whose "crossing" of perceived boundaries, reflected prominently in his prolific oeuvre, musical innovation, childhood reminiscence, and out-spoken advocacy of national self-image, offers rich analytical potentials for engaging with the complex layers of interiority in American racial terrain. And as this analysis focuses on a particular Chinese American space in American ultra-modern music, it should not be viewed in isolation, but rather as points in a larger and dynamic circuit of cultural infiltrations that characterized this time. As we accept the challenges arising from enlarging the frame of genealogical reference in American Music from one that focuses on the Atlantic world to one that includes the Pacific,

the explanatory model of the core West and its Other will not suffice. To the extent that the separation of “Asians” from “Americans” has, and continues to be, deeply ingrained in the American imaginary (while they, in fact, have merged and continue to merge), it is all the more urgent that we retool the analytical perspective to understand the nuanced contour of the racial terrain in American music at particular historical moments and the various modalities of its expression, as they are fundamentally constitutive of our own historical situation.

Notes

- * I would like to thank Nadine Hubbs and John Hobbs for their careful reading of early incarnations of this article. The paper was first presented at the annual meetings of Society for American Music and the American Musicological Society, where I have received invaluable feedback, for which I am grateful.
1. Robert Ezra Park, “Our Racial Frontier on the Pacific,” *Survey Graphic* 9 (May 1926) 192–6, also collected in Robert Ezra Park, *Race and Culture* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1950), 138–151.
 2. The Page Law of 1875 excluded Chinese prostitutes and contract laborers. Then, the Chinese Exclusion Law was passed in 1882 by the United States Congress, and signed by President Chester A. Arthur. Under this law, Chinese laborers, unskilled or skilled, were excluded from entering the United States. Only merchants, diplomats, tourists, students, and teachers were allowed to enter the country. The Exclusion Law was extended in 1892, 1902, and indefinitely in 1904. For more on the history and effect of the Page law and Chinese exclusion laws, see George Anthony Pepper, *If They Don't Bring Their Women Here: Chinese Female Immigration Before Exclusion* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999) and Erika Lee, *At American's Gates: Chinese Immigration During the Exclusion Era, 1882–1943* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 2003).
 3. Mari Matsuda, “Planet Asian America,” *Asian Law Journal* 8 (2001): 172.
 4. “The Chinese Bill,” *Harper's Weekly* XXVI (April 1, 1882): 194.
 5. “E Pluribus Unum (Except for Chinese)” *Harper's Weekly* XXVI (April 1, 1882): 207. Thomas Nast was very critical of the immigration policies, as shown in over fifty cartoons in the magazine.
 6. David Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American: Historical Crossings of a Racial Frontier*, (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999).
 7. This is hardly surprising, since when many of these composers came of age, the national debate about the exclusionist practice was most vigorous and the racial climate was severe. For example, as legal scholar Mari Misuda writes, “Membership in the Ku Klux Klan reached all-time highs in the 1920's, not only in the South, but also in the North and the Midwest as well,” and “race

- riots' were epidemic in the early twentieth century." Matsuda, "Planet Asian America," 174–175.
8. David Nicholls, "Transethnicism and the American Experimental Tradition," *Musical Quarterly* 80/ 4 (1996): 569–94; David Nicholls, "Reaching beyond the West: Asian Resonances in American Radicalism," *American Music* (Summer 1999): 125–128; Carol J. Oja "Dane Rudhyar's Vision of American Dissonance," *American Music* 17/2 (Summer 2000), 129–45; Carol J. Oja, *Colin McPhee: Composer in Two Worlds* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, c1990). See also H. Wiley Hitchcock, "Henry Cowell's Ostinato Pianissimo," *The Musical Quarterly* 70/1 (Winter 1984): 23–44; Mervyn Cooke, "'The East in the West': Evocations of the Gamelan in Western Music," *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 258–81; John Corbett, "Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others," *Western Music and Its Other: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, eds. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163–186.
 9. Carol J. Oja, *Making Music Modern*, (New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 98.
 10. Nancy Yunhwa Rao, "American Compositional Theory in the 1930s: Scale and Exoticism in 'The Nature of Melody' by Henry Cowell." *Musical Quarterly* 85/4 (2001): 595–640.
 11. Oja, *Making Music Modern*, 105.
 12. John Kuo Wei Tchen, *New York before Chinatown: Orientalism and the Shaping of American Culture, 1776–1882* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 53.
 13. Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London: Penguin, 1978).
 14. Corbett, "Experimental Oriental," 167.
 15. *Ibid.*, 167–168.
 16. For another application of Orientalist analysis, see Mina Yang, "Orientalism and the Music of Asian Immigrant Communities in California, 1924–1945," *American Music* 19/4 (2001): 385–416; "New Directions in California Music: Construction of a Pacific Rim Cultural Identity, 1925–1945," Diss. Yale University, New Haven, 2001, and her unmasking of "Cowell's orientalist practice" and "unequal power relationships" in her book review of *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music*, eds. Yayoi Uno Everett et al., *American Music* 23/3 (2005): 397.
 17. Corbett, "Experimental Oriental," 168.
 18. Palumbo-Liu, *Asian/American*, 18.
 19. Quoted in David Nicholls: Henry Cowell, Grove Music Online ed. L. Macy (Accessed 10 June 2007), <<http://www.grovemusic.com> >.
 20. An exception is the inclusion of Chinese American music in several important reference books, for example the entry on "Chinese American" in *The New Grove dictionary of American music*, eds. H. Wiley Hitchcock and Stanley Sadie

- (London: Macmillan, 1986) and, more recently and significantly, *American Musical Traditions*, eds. Jeff Titon and Bob Carlin (New York: Schirmer, 2002), Vol. 5: *Latino and Asian American music*. The issue is complex. Deborah Wong provides a nuanced analysis of pertinent issues regarding Asian American music: see Deborah Wong, *Speak It Louder: Asian Americans Making Music* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 11–16.
21. See Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*.
 22. Carl Crossman, *The China Trade: Export Paintings, Furniture, Silver and Other Objects* (Princeton: The Pyne Press, 1972), 4.
 23. Ronald Takaki, *Strangers From Different Shores: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 31.
 24. J. D. Borthwick, *The Gold Hunters* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 83.
 25. Ronald Riddle, *Flying Dragons, Flowing Streams: Music in the Life of San Francisco's Chinese* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1983), 36–94. This book is a pioneering overview of the presence of Chinese music in California. Several scholars have explored further: Wing Chung Ng, “Transnational Mediation of Enclave Culture: Chinatown Theater in San Francisco and Vancouver before the Pacific War,” paper presented at 2003 conference of Association for Asian Studies, New York City; Daphne Lei, “The Production and Consumption of Chinese Theatre in Nineteenth–Century California,” *Theatre Research International* 28/3 (2003): 289–302.
 26. For the musical life of New York’s Chinatown in the 1920s, see Nancy Yun-hwa Rao, “Racial Essences and Historical Invisibility: Chinese Opera in New York, 1930,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 12/2 (2001): 135–62 and “Songs of the Exclusion Era: New York’s Cantonese Opera Theaters in the 1920s,” *American Music* 20/4 (2002): 399–444.
 27. Richard K. Spottswood, “Commercial Ethnic Recordings,” *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, (Washington, American Folklife Center, 1982), 51–66, in particular the figures on pp. 54, 57, 62. The interest of record companies in making records in foreign languages did not decline until early 1930 with the onset of the Great Depression. See also Sai-Shing Yung, *Cantonese Opera from the Gramophone: A Cultural History (1903–1953)* (Hong Kong: Research Institute for Humanities, Chinese University of Hong Kong, Cosmos Press, 2006).
 28. Mark Katz, “Making America More Musical through the Phonograph, 1900–1930,” *American Music* 16/4 (winter 1998): 448–475; for a discussion of the advertisements in Chinese-language newspapers published in New York City around this time, see Rao, “Songs of the Exclusion Era.”
 29. For this reason, the pictures of Chinese funeral or festive processions from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America are numerous. In addition to the coastal cities, they can be found even from such places as Denver. The completion of the transnational railroad was also celebrated by a festive procession. For a study of Chinese vaudeville performers, see Krystyn Moon, *Yellowface: Creating The Chinese In American Popular Music*

- And Performance, 1850s–1920s*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). For several other types of musical making of Chinese American community, see Su Zheng, “Immigrant Music and Transnational Discourse: Chinese American Music Culture in New York City,” Ph.D. thesis, Wesleyan University, 1993.
30. For example, see Chinese Parade, c. 1907, photo # 72–201.117 Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho.
 31. Henry Cowell, “Music of the Orient,” *The Peabody Notes* 17/2 (1964): 2–5.
 32. Henry Cowell, “Oriental Influence on Western Music,” in *Music In East and West* (Tokyo, 1962), as quoted in Joscelyn Godwin, “The Music of Henry Cowell,” (Ph.D. diss., Cornell University, 1969), 71. Also see Cowell, “From Tone Clusters to Contemporary Listeners,” *Music Journal* 14/1 (1956): 5–6.
 33. Cowell Collection, New York Public Library.
 34. Henry Cowell, “Musical Autobiography,” April 6, 1961 (accessed October 14, 2005), <<http://www.archive.org/search.php?query=creator%3A%22Henry%20Cowell%22>>
 35. Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 9.
 36. Henry Cowell, “From Tone Clusters to Contemporary Listeners,” *Music Journal* 14/1 (1956): 5.
 37. Henry F. Gilbert, “The American Composers,” *Musical Quarterly* 1/2 (1915), 170.
 38. Charles Seeger, “Henry Cowell,” *Magazine of Art*, 33/5 (May 1940): 323.
 39. Henry Cowell, “Music of the Orient,” *Music Journal*, 21/6 (Sep. 1963): 25.
 40. Mason was the most notable anti-modernist critic of his time. In this important 1926 article, “The Dilemma of American Music,” he wrote, “Since 1914 musicians of every country on earth have flowed in upon us in an unending stream.... Alas, the confusion of traditions among us is disastrously bewildering.... Where shall we recapture our native tongue?” The general tone reflects the intense anti-immigration climate of the twenties. Daniel Gregory Mason, *The Dilemma of American Music and Other Essays* (New York, Macmillan, 1928), 11, 13. This was originally published in *American Mercury* 7 (January 1926): 55–61; “Most widely read...” See MacDonald Smith Moore, *Yankee Blues* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1985), 5.
 41. The Page Law of 1875 that barred the entry of Chinese prostitutes and contract laborers marked the beginning of immigration laws that prohibited entry of Chinese into the United States.
 42. See Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1930; rev. Cambridge University Press, 1996).
 43. Henry Cowell, “The Nature of Melody,” Section III: “Scale,” p. 80, Cowell Collection, New York Public Library.
 44. Holograph of Symphony No. 11, Cowell Collection, Library of Congress.
 45. Letter from Cowell to Nicolas Slonimsky n.d. [approx. Mar–April 1929], Slonimsky Collection, Library of Congress. In this letter Cowell indicates

- that he gave the title to the piece after it was written to “give the musical idea to people who do not have good enough ears to take interest in the music itself.”
46. See Edwin M. Ripin and Hugh Davies: ‘Prepared Piano’; Hugh Davies: ‘Instrument modifications & extended performing techniques,’ *The New Grove Dictionary of Music Online*, ed. L. Macy (Accessed 30 April 2003), <<http://www.grovemusic.com>>; D. Charles, “About John Cage’s Prepared Piano,” *Writings about John Cage*, ed. Richard Kostelanetz (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 46–54; David Revill, *The Roaring Silence: John Cage, a life* (London: Bloomsbury Pub., 1992), 69–71. All sources quote Cage’s own account of how his idea of prepared piano was inspired directly by Cowell’s exploration of piano techniques.
 47. *Reminiscences of an American Musicologist: Oral History Transcript: Charles Seeger*, interviewed by Adelaide G. Tusler and Ann M. Briegleb (Los Angeles, CA: Oral History Program, University of California, 1966, 1970 and 1971), p. 228.
 48. Marion Bauer, *The Musical Leader*, March 27, 1930.
 49. Ruth Crawford, Diary, 27 February, 1930. “27 February. We go to the theater to see Mei Lan Fang. Noted Chinese actor. Henry [Cowell] at lunch tells us a few things about Chinese singing. Hooks as [Henry] calls them. Approach a note by a slide from below, and sustain the note. Or by a slide from above and sustain the note. Or leave the note in either of these ways. There are also combinations of these hooks, infinite almost. At the theater we hear what Henry means.” This famous account and the diary entry are first quoted in Judith Tick, “Ruth Crawford’s ‘Spiritual Concept’: The Sound-Ideals of an Early American Modernist, 1924–1930,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 44 (1991): 244–245.
 50. H.T. Tsiang, *Poems of the Chinese Revolution* (New York: Liberal Press, 1929). H. T. Hsiang wrote several works that belong to the genre of leftist socialist fable: *And China Has Hands* (New York: Robert Speller, 1937), *China Red* (New York City: The author, 1931); *Hanging on Union Square* (New York City: The author, 1935).
 51. This distinction in musical contour importantly provides the drama of this song, as Ellie Hisama notes: “By drawing out this basic distinction between boss and worker, Crawford underlines the opposition between them.” Hisama’s analysis of this song, though focusing on large-scale contour rather than slides, similarly shows how a clear division between the launderer and the boss is based on the large-scale contour that characterizes their statements. See Ellie Hisama, *Gendering Musical Modernism: The Music of Ruth Crawford, Marion Bauer, and Miriam Gideon* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 60–98. It is worth noting that the slides disappear in the last section of the song, where it reaches a sense of resolution when the laundryman reverses the exploitative situation by celebrating the working class’s power to transform the world.

52. This paragraph benefits from the discussion of parody in Yayoi Uno Everett, "Parody with an Ironic Edge: Dramatic Works by Kurt Weill, Peter Maxwell Davies, and Louis Andriessen," *Music Theory Online* 10/4 (2004), (accessed August 5, 2007) <http://www.societymusictheory.org/mto/issues/mto.04.10.4/mto.04.10.4.y_everett_frames.html>.
53. In a separate study, I examine how Cowell's theorization of the slide influenced the use of dynamics slides in the third movement of Crawford's *String Quartet 1931*, tempo slides in Conlon Nancarrow's *Studies for Player Piano*, John Cage's *Music of Change*, and Elliott Carter's *Variations for Orchestra*. Certainly many more instances exist; for example, both David Nicholls and Kyle Gann also have pointed out the use of sliding concepts in the work of Karlheinz Stockhausen, La Monte Young, and Iannis Xenakis. See this author, "Cowell's Sliding Tone and American Ultra-Modernist Tradition," *American Music* 23/3 (2005), 281–323; Kyle Gann, "Subversive Prophet: Henry Cowell as Theorist and Critic," in *The Whole World of Music: A Henry Cowell Symposium*, ed. David Nicholls (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1997); and David Nicholls, "Henry Cowell's New Musical Resources," in Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources*, with notes and an accompanying essay by David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173. In addition, Johanna Beyer, a student of Crawford and close friend of Cowell, also used a strikingly large number of sliding tones in her compositions of the 1930s.
54. Correspondence from Cowell to Cage, March 23, 1937, Cowell Collection, New York Public Library.
55. Michael Hicks, "Cowell's Tone Clusters," *Musical Quarterly* 77/3 (1993): 428; Mina Yang traces the use of gong and woodblock in Cowell's percussion composition *Ostinato Pianissimo* back to his growing up in Chinese neighborhoods. See Yang, "New Directions in California Music," 215.
56. *Journal-American*, Mar. 16, 1939, quoted in *A Handbook of San Francisco Composers* (History of San Francisco Music, Vol. VIII), 80. Little about the life of Cecil Cowles seems to be available, yet her debut in New York City was reviewed in *The New York Times*, October 26, 1920.
57. Walter Benjamin, *Passage Work*, 1139, quoted in Susan Buck-Morse, "Benjamin's *Passagen-Werk*: Redeeming Mass Culture for the Revolution," *New German Critique* 29 (1983): 220.
58. The editors of a recent book note that, "[O]n a very fundamental level, the young represent embodied memories of their societies' culture." See *Musical Childhoods and the Cultures of Youth*, eds. Susan Boynton and Roe-Min Kok (Wesleyan, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 2006), xv.
59. For more on the widespread stereotyping of Chinese people in American popular music of the early twentieth century, see Judy Tsou, "Gendering Race: Stereotypes of Chinese Americans in Popular Sheet Music," *repercussions* 6/2 (1997): 25–62. In this excellent study, Tsou identifies three kinds of stereotyping of Chinese: demasculinization, exoticism, and dehumanization. See also the study of Asian-themed Tin Pan Alley songs by Charles Hiroshi

- Garrett, "Chinatown, Whose Chinatown? Defining America's Borders with Musical Orientalism," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 57/1 (2004): 119–173.
60. Sucheng Chan, "Race, Ethnic Culture, and Gender in the Construction of Identities among Second-Generation Chinese Americans, 1880s to 1930s," in *Reclaiming America: Constructing Chinese American Identities during the Exclusion Era*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 157–58. Similar accounts can be found in numerous memoirs or literature by Chinese Americans. For example, Pardee Lowe, who was born in America to Chinese parents and went through the American educational system of the 1930s, records a similar incident in his memoir, *Father and Glorious Descendant*, the first published book-length literary piece from Chinese America that became a mainstream success. Lowe had grown up in suburban San Francisco and served as a church youth leader throughout his adolescence. As a first-year student at Stanford University, he tried to look for work through the church near Stanford: "When I approached the church social worker she said she had 'hopes, but also grave doubts.' Miss Jewett's approach to my employment was entirely conditioned by one fact: I was Chinese. This was something totally unexpected, as my long years of service in our neighborhood led me again to think of myself as nothing but American. I told her as much. 'It isn't my fault,' she explained trying to be gentle about what she called 'cruel facts.'" After an encounter with a potential employer who insisted on speaking in pidgin English, "I was thunderstruck. It was the first pidgin English I had heard in years. But the tenor of her long and embarrassed message, without its repeated and emphatic declaration, was perfectly clear. It was 'Me no likee, me no wantee Chinee boy!'" Nonetheless, Lowe admitted that he "still did not understand the meanness and cruelty of race prejudice." See Pardee Lowe, *Father and Glorious Descendant* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1943), 190–193.
 61. Letter from Cowell to Slonimsky, [n.d.] Slonimsky Collection, Library of Congress.
 62. Tick discusses the importance of Theosophy to circles of musicians and ultra-modernist composers, in particular Ruth Crawford. See Tick, "Ruth Crawford's 'Spiritual Concept'", 233.
 63. Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997), 131–133.
 64. Henry Cowell, "Eastern Influence on Western Music: Address presented before the East-West Music Encounter, Tokyo, 1961," Cowell Collection, New York Public Library.
 65. See Mae M. Ngai, "Transnationalism and the Transformation of the 'Other': Response to the Presidential Address," *American Quarterly* (2005): 60.
 66. A pointed example of this racial stereotype is the popular song, "Chinatown, My Chinatown." For more discussion on this song, see Garrett, "Chinatown, Whose Chinatown?"

67. Several fantastic works illuminate this concept from different perspectives. See Tchen, *New York before Chinatown*; Lee, *Picturing Chinatown*; Mary Ting Yi Lui, *The Chinatown Trunk Mystery: Murder, Miscegenation, and Other Dangerous Encounters in Turn-of-the-Century New York City* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).
68. Cowell, "Music of the Orient," 25.