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CHANCE, CHOICE, AND OPPORTUNITY: EFFECTIVE TOOLS FOR MANAGEMENT

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin*

Part I

Abstract

This account offers students and professionals, thoughts on useful strategies in management situations based on the author's life experiences. Since the majority of the readers of Management Dynamics come from India and Southeast Asia, the remarks are directed with them in mind but they could be applied elsewhere as well.

The author's career trajectory was not planned. Although 90 per cent happened by chance, chance was not entirely random but led to choice and opportunity. 10 per cent was devoted to strategic planning and preparation. Her expertise lies not in management studies but in the field of ethnomusicology, that is, a process for studying not only the music itself but also the study of music in its cultural context.

The essay is divided into three parts. Observations about the author's life experiences are illustrated in Part 1 consisting of a series of brief vignettes elucidating events that shaped her thinking. Taking place between the years 1890 and 2009, these events offer commentary about historical precedents and family influences, discriminatory practices, mentors, incidents of chance and opportunity, the politics of political correctness, gender issues, and new directions in research.

Foreword

Quite unexpectedly, I received in the post a rather thick packet from Dr. Magoroh Maruyama, who is on the editorial board of the journal *Management Dynamics*. In his cover letter, he referred to me as an 'outbreeder' or one who does not always conform to societal expectations, inferring I may have encountered difficulties that needed resolution in order to achieve equanimity. What he

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perceived as my rather unusual background prompted him to write to me asking if I would consider contributing to this journal. Intrigued, he felt I could offer students and professionals my thoughts on useful strategies in management situations based on my life experiences. Dr. Maruyama communicated his interest to Professor Subrata Chakraborty, Juipuria Institute of Management in Lucknow, India who in turn asked me to submit an essay. As I am not versed in the field of management and its terminology, it took me a while to think about what I would write, how to write it, and for whom I would write it. Since the majority of the readers come from India and Southeast Asia, my remarks are directed with them in mind but they could be applied elsewhere as well.

Introduction

What prompted me to become an ethnomusicologist, university lecturer, author, editor, and Executive Director of a private music research institute that publishes books? To answer this question, one would need to refer to a statement made by Anthropologist Kenneth Gourlay who said of his field work in Nigeria: 10 per cent lay in three fieldwork objectives—limit one's fieldwork area, compile a list of different types of music with the aim of obtaining representative samples of each, and spend time doing in-depth research of and living among a selected group of people. The remaining 90 per cent is due to luck or chance. His "best" recording of female songs among the Karimojong was entirely due to chance rather than any strategic plan to obtain female songs. (Kimberlin 1999: 19-20, 24, 32).

Like the case of Gourlay, my career trajectory also was not planned because 90 per cent happened by chance. But chance is not entirely random since it can lead to choice and opportunity plus factoring in 10 percent for strategic planning and preparation. My expertise lies not in management studies with its accompanying theories and textbook knowledge but rather in the field of ethnomusicology. I have a background in music, became a specialist in African music, and have authored over sixty articles and edited or co-edited eight books relating to comparative music studies, ethics, biography, intercultural music, traditional music and modern art music in Africa, and the impact of war on music.

This essay accompanied by commentary is divided into three parts. Observations about my life experiences are illustrated in Part 1 and Part 2. Using a loosely chronological autobiographical format and overlapping timeline, Part 1

is a series of brief vignettes elucidating events that shaped my thinking. Individual names and precise locations are omitted for privacy considerations and are not germane to this discussion. Part 2 is a revised version of a talk I originally presented to the Library of Congress Asian American Association in 2002 in Washington, D.C.¹ In contrast to Part 1; Part 2 provides place and institutional names when necessary. It is an account of my two-year tenure as a US Peace Corps Volunteer and subsequent visits to Ethiopia as a US election observer, Fulbright lecturer/researcher, and conferee. It focuses on circumstances in which I found myself and how I dealt with it as an outsider and as an American of Chinese descent living and working in Africa. I also allude to aspects of my Peace Corps experience in Part 1 as they pertain to issues not clarified in Part 2. And occasionally I make references about events occurring on dates not indicated within the specified timeframe for they were relevant to the discussion at hand. Part 3 is a list of twelve observations generated by my remarks made in Parts 1 and 2 that might prove useful in management discussions.

What follows illustrates realities as I perceived them, by what I experienced, how I felt, and what I was thinking at that time. I shall describe the choices I made that helped circumvent obstacles and generate opportunity.

Part 1

EVENTS THAT SHAPED MY THINKING

Issues with which I had to contend are discussed within the context of historical precedent and family influences; discriminatory practices; the politics of political correctness²; mentors; gender roles; and the interconnectedness of chance, choice, and opportunity, all of which could serve as catalyst for addressing management issues and new research paradigms.

¹*This celebratory anniversary was in honor of the founding of the US Peace Corps, postponed from the year before due to the September 11, 2001 attack, and took place in 2002 at their annual national conference at the same time as my talk, both in Washington, D.C. A copy of my original unpublished talk is currently housed in the Green Library's Special Collections, Stanford University, California, USA.*

²*Political correctness - commonly abbreviated as PC is a term applied to language, ideas, policies, or behavior seen as seeking to minimize offense to gender, racial, cultural, disabled, aged or other identity groups.*

1890-1939

Historical precedents and family influences

I was never privy to discussions about politics from my grandparents and parents. Before coming to America, my paternal grandfather owned silk factories but later gave them away and instead worked toward alleviating corruption and served as magistrate and speaker of the Canton Provincial Assembly in the newly formed Republic of China. Of the women in my family, my paternal grandmother fought against having her feet bound and those of others she knew, whereas my maternal grandmother succumbed to her bound feet and whose tiny satin shoes that covered them I keep as a memento of that time. After settling in San Francisco my paternal grandparents continued to believe in causes dear to them as they both raised funds in support of World War II (WWII) efforts and addressed the needs of new Chinese immigrants in San Francisco. My parent's beliefs were demonstrated by their actions, such as choosing to live outside the Chinatown ghetto in a neighborhood where there were no Chinese because they wanted their children to survive in a mainstream environment speaking English without an accent. When my father first came to America, he spoke little English and when he did speak, it was in heavily accented English for which he was teased and ridiculed.

Despite virtual family opposition, my decision to join the US Peace Corps in 1962 recall resolute choices made by other family members decades earlier. Born and raised in Guangdong Province during the late 19th and the early 20th centuries, my paternal grandfather fought against the destructive influence of the Chinese warlords by supporting the provisional Republic of China in 1912. In 1930 Chicago, USA my father opened a private medical practice in Chinatown after graduating from medical school at the height of the depression. Chicago's social mores of that era forbade him from administering treatment to people other than the Chinese and other outsiders like members of Chicago's crime syndicate headed by the notorious gangster Al Capone³ who were excluded

³*Alphonse Gabriel "Al" Capone (January 17, 1899 - January 25, 1947), nicknamed Scarface, was a Italian-American gangster who led a crime syndicate dedicated to smuggling and bootlegging of liquor and other illegal activities during the alcohol Prohibition Era of the 1920s and 1930s.*

from the mainstream social milieu. Later in 1932 my father was recruited to work as a physician on an Indian reservation where he would be part of a community and not live apart as a second-class citizen as he did when he began his Chicago based medical practice. On the reservation, he learnt to speak their language, rode his horse to make house calls at their hogan⁴, and eventually became known among the people who affectionately called him 'Chief Little Bear'.

Unlike my father, my mother's life was circumscribed by her father and husband. When my mother was a young woman living with her parents in Los Angeles, she met the actress Anna May Wong⁵ and aspired to be just like her in dress, demeanor, and become an actress herself. Her father put an end to her thoughts of an acting career by cutting off her hair to teach her a lesson and to humiliate her. After she married, my mother did not work outside the home because my father did not wish to have my college graduate mother pursue an independent career. This is one reason why she later urged me to develop my own interests.

1940-1961

I was born in a nation⁶ within a nation, that is on a Navajo⁷ Indian reservation in Ganado, Apache County, Arizona, USA. Four years later when we moved to San Francisco after WWII, my early childhood experiences helped develop my interest in Western art music, reading, and acquiring a college level education. For example, I was allowed to tinker on my grandfather's upright piano and

⁴*A Hogan is a traditional Navajo house made of logs laid on top of one another and notched at the ends to interlock at the corners. Cracks between the logs are sealed with mud. Instead of having just four walls, the hogan has eight to form a hexagon and is topped by a dome shaped roof. It is constructed by placing poles between the midpoints of adjacent log walls. The entire roof is sealed with a thick layer of clay which becomes waterproof after it dries.*

⁵*American born Anna May Wong (1905-61) was the same age as my mother, Born in Los Angeles, California of Chinese ancestry; she was the first Chinese American actress in Hollywood. She made 54 films in the USA and in Europe.*

⁶*The Navajo Nation is a semi-autonomous Native American homeland covering about 17 million acres occupying all northeastern Arizona, the southeastern portion of Utah, and northwestern New Mexico. It is the largest land area assigned primarily to a Native American jurisdiction within the United States.*

⁷*From traditional anthropology, linguistics, to DNA, Amerindians especially the Na-Dene tribes like the Navajo, are more closely related to Asians, and not Europeans or Africans (Sarich and Miele, 2005:205).*

observe my grandfather play excerpts from Fredric Handel's *Queen Esther*. This plus accompanying my father to concerts featuring Western string quartets instilled in me a love for art 'classical' music. Gender differences were apparent in my family. For example, I never received an encyclopedia set for which I repeatedly asked as my father did not believe it was necessary; however, he did acquire a set for my younger brother. My brother was allowed to socialize on his own but the social activities of my sister and I were always chaperoned.

My parents often made pragmatic decisions. For instance, normally people tend to choose their religion, churches and schools based on the institutions' reputation, agenda, and curriculum, but this was not the main reason in my case. Around 1948 and of my own volition I joined a Lutheran Church because I heard from friends and relatives that one did not go to heaven unless one was baptized. My parents used geographical proximity from home as the basis for choosing a church, Although my parents no longer attended church, they felt the church would instill in me the 'right' values and morals. There happened to be two churches nearby, a Catholic church and a Lutheran church. I chose the latter because it was closest to my house. It was the same way my mother selected my grammar school. There was one school located in an upper middle class area and second one in a working class area. Since the latter was closer, my mother chose that one.

One of the earliest gifts I received as a child was not a toy but my very own library card for my parents always encouraged me to read. When I was very young my mother read to me, and her efforts eventually provided an intellectual outlet for me permitting access to a larger world beyond my neighborhood. Other family 'toys' in which I indulged were commercial photographs with accompanying captions in magazines such as *Life*, *National Geographic*, and the English version propaganda magazine *China Reconstructs*⁸, as well as family photograph albums documenting family histories. These sources cultivated my interest in travel, which became a reality and precipitated my first airplane flight as I was about to graduate from college in 1962 to attend the Seattle World Fair in Washington state, USA.

⁸This international propaganda magazine founded in 1949 in Chinese, English, French, Arabic, Spanish, and German is intended to promote a positive view of the People's Republic of China and its government to people outside of China. It was renamed *China Today* in 1990.

When I was a child, the act of waiting for adults seemed to be a preoccupation of mine. As a child, I always had to wait for family and relatives while they made preparations to go somewhere outside the neighborhood. Outside of their formal work environment, they tended to travel in groups rather than alone. I became impatient waiting all the time but as the youngest I had no say in the matter. But this group mentality proved restrictive for me in college when I decided to join a sorority as my mother approved and my sister joined before me.⁹ It was comprised of entirely Chinese American women. At that time there was no housing complex available for non-white women to live and my parents forbade my sister to rent an apartment with no chaperon present. Since sororities at that time did not admit Asian women, a group of Chinese American women decided to form their own sorority and at the same time secure them a place to live. Again, most socialization centered on group activities. I left the sorority a year later as it proved socially insular and I wanted to expand my network of friends. It was then I chose not to limit my friendships to Chinese and Chinese Americans but to adopt a more diversified group of individuals.

My parents and grandparents voiced few expectations for me except that I obtain a university education and marry well. After WWII my family moved to San Francisco, not only because my father's parents lived there, but also because of our close proximity to the University of California at Berkeley which I was told by my parents I would attend. My mother also wished for me material wealth and social prestige to be acquired through a husband who was either a doctor, engineer, or lawyer—the three acceptable professions Chinese parents sought for their daughters.¹⁰ But also she told me to pursue my own goals. I have appreciated the support of my older sister and younger brother although each embarked on a different path than I. My sister married soon after graduating from the university and became a grammar school teacher in Berkeley. But her first teaching job in California was located in Tracy as Asians were forbidden to teach in Berkeley during the early 1950s. Although my brother obtained an elementary teaching credential, he became a guitar and keyboard player and vocalist in a rhythm-and-blues band and a dispatcher for a San Francisco taxicab company.

⁹*Sigma Omicron Pi sorority was established primarily for the benefit of Asian women.*

¹⁰*My husband is a research chemist (retired) and our daughter works at a veterinarian clinic in Indiana.*

Although I struggled to adopt American mainstream values of West Coast San Francisco and additionally carried on some of the Chinese customs, I remained conflicted about becoming an elementary school teacher, the acceptable occupation for women during the 1960s. Besides, my grandparents wanted me to behave according to the accepted Chinese social norms. But my paternal uncle¹¹ encouraged me to be independent and not become insular in thinking. He became the only family member who supported my decision to travel abroad.

Discriminatory practices 1

From 1946 to 1952 attending grammar school, I was teased about being Chinese. I hated the annual Halloween¹² celebration because my parents told me to dress in Chinese clothes. I wanted to blend in like everyone else, not stand out. To this day, I have never worn any Halloween apparel. The 'Ching Chong Chinaman' taunts and the slanty-eye imitations directed toward me by my caucasian classmates added to my discomfort. Behind my back and to my face, I was always referred to as a Chinese not as an American. I never knew I was an American until 1962 when I applied for my first US passport.

I recall three incidences that my family or I had to confront regarding discriminatory practices. Nothing about it was discussed except my parents told me not to complain and do as I was told. But their actions told a different story. My neighborhood consisted of Americans of Irish, Italian, Swedish, Greek, and French ancestry. Most were protestant, Catholic, or Jewish. The first incident occurred when we first moved in and I was not given details until I was in my early teens. I heard there was a petitioner collecting signatures stating we should leave their neighborhood. But a few brave souls would not sign but welcomed us instead. So my parents decided to stay, breaking the color line so to speak, and lived there for the rest of their lives.

¹¹*My paternal uncle over his parents' objections became a watercolor artist; his father expected him to become a diplomat and lawyer.*

¹²*Halloween in the USA is celebrated on October 31; has roots in the Celtic festival of Samhain and the Christian holy day of All Saints. It is largely a secular celebration brought over to North America by Irish immigrants around the 1840s. The day is associated with the colors orange and black, and is associated with symbols such as the jack-o'-lantern. Halloween activities include trick-treating and wearing costumes.*

The second incident was my parents' exaggerated sense of fear when I informed them I was going to join the Brownies¹³ at age seven because joining would give me a sense of community and of belonging to a group. My scout leader set the pace and treated me just as one of the girls. I once confided in her that I had a strange surname and she promptly replied her husband also had a strange given name.

The third incident took place when a Jewish girl came to my rescue just as a Jewish person came to my uncle and my father's rescue earlier at critical times in their lives. For my uncle, it was a time when he was trying to make a living in Los Angeles and San Francisco as a watercolor artist during the 1930s-1950s. Until decades later, no one in the Chinese community purchased any of his paintings until he became well established as an artist. His early clients happened to be Jewish, including a prominent Jewish American banker. This was also the case with my father. In 1946 he wished to purchase a house for his family in San Francisco but no one would sell him a house outside of Chinatown. One day he saw a sign in the window of a real estate agent that said "sells homes to veterans". Since my father served in WWII as medical doctor, he qualified as a veteran. The Jewish agent sold him our first house in San Francisco and she and my father became friends ever since. In my case, I was usually taunted when I walked home the twelve blocks from school. One day a Jewish classmate accompanied me and she told the other classmates not to call me names. Later we became friends until the end of my junior high school days after which we lost touch. Almost a decade later while a student at the Junior High School about to graduate, I was invited to my first private social gathering by a Jewish classmate and now realize that all of the invitees were Jewish except me. Throughout history, Jews have been persecuted and they empathized with others in similar difficult situations. Other individuals in various capacities helped me along the way and included several mentors.

Mentors who provided key support

The chart below lists mentors¹⁴ outside my family who provided key support at pivotal junctures and helped facilitate the choices I eventually made:

¹³*One begins as a Brownie at age 7 before advancing to the older teenage Girl Scout.*

¹⁴*At the time I did not realize these individuals served in the role of mentor.*

Mentors and other individuals

Year	Country/Region of origin	Position	Type of support
1948-1957	USA	Girl Scout leader	Provided me with a sense of security and belonging.
1952-1962	Canada	Piano teacher	Encouraged my artistic aspirations
1958-1962	USA	High School choral director	Encouraged my music potential
1965-1968	Germany	University music professor	Gave me the confidence to become a scholar.
1972	Horn of Africa	Translator and interpreter	My former student provided me access during my fieldwork in Ethiopia.
1976-2007	West Africa	University music professor	He referred to me as his intellectual half and believed in my academic capabilities
1979-1982	USA	Dean, at a state university.	After I was referred to him from the Music Dept., he hired me that day.
1979-1979	USA	Dean, at a state university.	He supported my academic endeavors despite political opposition.
1979-1982	USA	State university Anthropology professor.	Based on my academic reputation, he hired me that day. We collaborated on various projects. He wrote letters of recommendation on my behalf.
1984-1997	USA. Belonged to the Cherokee Indian Nation.	Founder and first director of a private Music Research Institute, she formerly taught at two major universities.	She invited me to work with her at the Institute and believed in my intellectual capabilities.
1997	USA	University accountant.	She hired me for a full time career position despite opposition from her supervisor.

In addition to these individuals, other factors lent support. My Peace Corps experience afforded me travel opportunities, allowed me to observe other ways of living, and influenced my decision to become a specialist in African music (notably Ethiopia and Eritrea). My graduate school experiences gave me the opportunity to be a part of a diverse student body with a renowned faculty at the UCLA Institute of Ethnomusicology. Virtually all my professional connections and opportunities were derived from friendships garnered during my time in the Peace Corps and at graduate school. In addition, my memberships in professional organizations influenced the direction of my research providing me with access, contacts, publishing opportunities, and collaborations.

1962-1971

Chance and opportunity 1

I became interested in ethnomusicology¹⁵ by accident. Immediately after my university graduation in 1962, on a whim, I joined the Peace Corps because I wanted to observe how others lived and experience their world before settling down, marry, and raise a family. I did not specify any particular country on my application because I had yet to travel outside the USA, so I was assigned to teach in Ethiopia. In college I majored in musicology, the study of Western High Art music. So after my arrival in Ethiopia the music sounded so different from anything I had heard before and opened up a whole new experience for me. Later I began in earnest to expand my knowledge of music into other parts of the world. After my two-year tenure in Ethiopia/Eritrea, a fellow Peace Corps volunteer suggested that I should be an ethnomusicologist. I asked her: "What is that?"

Shortly after I enrolled in graduate school at the University of California at Los Angeles, I began formal training in ethnomusicology which is an approach to the study of any music in its cultural context. One could say I conducted fieldwork prior to having any formal training, however haphazard, before I enrolled in graduate school. Using a borrowed 3-inch reel-to-reel Phillips' tape recorder, I recorded music in Mendefera/Adi Ugri and environs in addition to my teaching duties. The town is located in a desert environment where the weather ranged from warm to hot and dry where there were sand storms, little water, and three hours of electricity per day. I traveled by foot, mule, bicycle, land rover, and cooked on a kerosene stove. Nearby within walking distance, I taught junior high-level classes at a middle school that was formerly a prison during the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (Eritrea) between 1882 and 1941. Sparsely furnished classrooms contained rows of wooden benches, a small blackboard and one piece of chalk per day. One outdated textbook was shared among every three to five students in a room totaling thirty-five of mostly male students and two or three female students. In 1963 I was featured in a documentary film *The Lion*

¹⁵The field of ethnomusicology commenced in Europe in the 1880s, Germany in particular first coined as comparative musicology, and did not become popular in the United States until during the 1930s. In the collection of recordings under the Folkways Records label, most are field recordings by ethnomusicologists. The Smithsonian purchased Folkways Records and is now reissuing many of these old recordings.

and the Cross (Part 1) because the producer wanted to film a village with a diverse group of Peace Corps volunteers working in a rural area. The fact that I was Asian fulfilled part of the 'diversity' requirement. Those two years prepared me physically and mentally for later fieldwork and travel. I learned to speak elementary Amharic and minimally read and write Amharic script.

The politics of political correctness 1

During my university undergraduate years (1958-1962), my music department professors were comprised of Ivy League¹⁶ alumni who transplanted their eastern-bred formality and attitude to the Berkeley, California freewheeling environment. These incongruities proved a bit unnerving to me during my initiation into college life. Thankfully my graduate school (1965-1968, 1970-1976) environment was vastly different where I studied at the Institute of Ethnomusicology (now called Department of Ethnomusicology) at the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA). The campus was located in southern California and known for its informality coupled with a rigorous academic environment with a renowned international faculty. My teachers included the American born Director M.H. who was also my major professor. He studied in Holland and conducted fieldwork in Java and Bali, Indonesia and Ghana. C.S., the founder of the discipline of musicology played a unique and central role, whose inspiring lectures demonstrated the connections between musicology and other fields and disciplines such as anthropology, folklore, ethnomusicology, and physics. L.K. was a geophysics Professor with an interest in music. D. M., was a specialist in the court music of Thailand, and K. W., was a specialist in Africa and an organologist (study of musical instruments) and was my MA thesis advisor. He was born in Germany but left due to Jewish persecution to live in England but spent twelve years in East Africa as a museum curator. During his tenure as a professor at UCLA, the Black Power movement¹⁷ at UCLA was gaining momentum and some of its

¹⁶*Ivy League refers a group of eight private institutions of higher education in the Northeastern USA and includes Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Brown, Columbia universities, Dartmouth College, and the University of Pennsylvania. The term has connotations of academic excellence, selectivity in admissions, and social elitism.*

¹⁷*"Black Power" is a political slogan and a name for various associated ideologies. It is used in the movement among black people throughout the world, primarily those in the United States and was most prominent in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The movement emphasized racial pride and the creation of black political and cultural institutions to nurture and promote black collective interests, advance black values, and secure black autonomy.*

adherents unfortunately targeted K. W. whom they viewed unjustly as a white scholar teaching African music. Such a waste and tragedy for a man who fled Germany because of persecution and now 'fled' UCLA because their movement believed courses on Africa should be taught by black people because non-black scholars would only do so for exploitation. So K.W. left UCLA to teach at a university in the Midwest until his retirement.

M. H. required his students to focus on two contrasting cultures not our own. However, after the Black Power coupled with the Civil Rights Movements got underway, attitudes began to change during the 1970s where students were encouraged to study the contributions made by their own ethnic group. Soon various ethnic fiefdoms spouted up, each vying for power in academia, hence began the rise of ethnic studies departments including Black, Native American, La Raza¹⁸, and Asian American Studies, departments, and centers. This put me at a disadvantage when I began applying for university teaching positions in 1976 when jobs in my field were unduly scarce and departments were looking for black scholars to teach African and African American music. Today, most scholars teaching African music are from Africa or are African Americans.

Another dilemma surfaced while I was a M.A. student when I enrolled in the Amharic language course taught by an internationally renowned linguistics and language professor at UCLA. I asked him if I could copy some of his field tapes of music to use as a basis for a master's thesis. He turned me down because he did not think I was a serious student probably because I was married and the mother of a young child. K. W. informed him otherwise and K. W. told me he relented and would lend me the tapes. Since he never informed me personally I decided not to use his tapes. Several years later when I was selecting my PhD dissertation committee, I did not select him even though it was understood his name on my dissertation would have made it easier for me to obtain a teaching position. He was famous for his work on many Ethiopian languages and for decades embarked on numerous field trips throughout Ethiopia. Still his earlier reluctance to help me was a stumbling block for reconciliation. Eventually, my M.A. thesis was based on cassette tapes loaned to me by an Ethiopian graduate

¹⁸*In the United States the politicized La Raza ("The Race") is defined as a person of Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, South or Central America, or other Spanish culture or origin regardless of race.*

student whose friends routinely mailed him cassette tapes of Ethiopian music from Ethiopia. He later distinguished himself as a Political Science Professor at various institutions and was a former Ethiopian Ambassador to a European country.

A contributing obstacle I faced was that my major area of study in African music did not match my ethnicity and I felt the negative outweighed the positive in terms of career advancement. If I had chosen Asian music or picked a neutral subject I would have fared better. Between the 1960s-1980s, political correctness was paramount in academic hiring decisions. I was passed over for hiring at several American universities because I was considered a Chinese or Asian whose expertise should be on Asia or Asian American subjects. The fact that my expertise was the Horn of Africa and Africa in general, caused uncertainty and confusion among departments.

In spite of this obstacle, I was invited to teach at a middle school and high school in Ethiopia and four universities in the United States, Ethiopia, and Nigeria. Also I have given talks and lectures at various institutions in the USA, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. As I participated in various activities at home and abroad, I began to realize that gender also played a role.

1972-1978

Chance and opportunity 2—Gender culturally defined 1

After obtaining my M.A. degree, I was not going to continue my education but considered taking a one-year teaching appointment at a local junior college. But through my husband insistence, he advised me to return to UCLA and enroll in their Ph.D. ethnomusicology program. His remarks had a major impact on my career. By heeding his advice, it gave me the credibility to help establish a new music department at a West African university. Also, it allowed me to become a book publisher and work with many authors who are university level academics. And I was eligible to apply for two Fulbright fellowships which were granted to conduct research projects in Ethiopia full time and utilize my former students to translate and interpret for me as necessary.

It was that indefinable element of chance that led me to study mäsiṅqo music in Ethiopia in 1972 when my preliminary proposal was for either a survey of Ethiopian musical instruments or wedding music. I was discouraged by some

Ethiopian women from studying mäsiṅqo music. The kərar (5 and 6 stringed plucked lyre) or b ≡ g ≡ na (10 stringed plucked lyre), which both men and women played, would be better, they insisted. They suggested I should study church music or wedding music, but not common everyday male mäsiṅqo music usually found in the bars, market places and parties.

I did study b ≡ g ≡ na but only much later when I finally found a teacher. But regarding my kərar lessons, at the beginning, a highly regarded player was recommended. No matter how great his talent, this kərar teacher constantly had hangovers and this made my lessons sporadic and unpredictable. So I eventually gave him up as a teacher when a mäsiṅqo player whom I met at the Yared Music School in Addis Ababa during my second month in Addis Ababa offered to teach me. My main focus was not organological¹⁹ in nature, but theoretical, to learn the basic grammar or rules of Amhara music.

It was by chance that I was invited to record the three-day Moslem Adari wedding festivities of the groom's family in Harrar. Within the first few days of my arrival in Harrar with my interpreter, three strangers invited us to attend their family's wedding celebration. I selected one of the three invitations where I was assigned by a married elder female spokesperson to the role of unmarried young woman who was permitted to converse and recorded music performed by unmarried girls, married women, adolescent boys and girls. I was at that time married and the mother of a young child, but did not bring my family along. I was accompanied by a male interpreter-assistant who was allowed to be present among the girls and the women to assist me though he could not do this under normal circumstances. Though I passed by places where the married men carried on their activities, I was not given the opportunity to talk with or record them although I was able to converse with the immediate male family members of the groom's family with female members present.

It was in Ethiopia where I learned the rules of conduct and behavior were determined by the event, place, and individuals with whom I interacted. For example, when I took mäsiṅqo (single stringed bowed lute) lessons at home or at the Music School, I was perceived as an American female student. When I played the mäsiṅqo in a public setting, I was treated as a male performer, as playing the mäsiṅqo is primarily a male tradition. When I played the b ≡ g ≡ na (10-stringed

¹⁹*Organology is the study of musical instruments.*

plucked lyre), I was allowed to be most like myself as the *b፤ g፤ na* is an instrument usually played in the privacy of one's home for oneself or one's family and friends. Not only did the rules of conduct in Ethiopia determine how one was perceived, so were the ramifications of political correctness as practiced in the United States.

1979-1985

The politics of political correctness 2

After returning to the USA from Nigeria, political correctness, a uniquely American phenomenon, was at its zenith where degree of expertise was secondary to skin color or ethnicity as criteria for filling a position. After applying for a position at San Francisco State University's Music Department which at that time employed no non-white scholars, the chairman hired a caucasian woman specialist in early (western) music and Latin American Music. She taught Western music courses and one course called Music Cultures of the World. The Chairman then recommended I apply at the School of Ethnic Studies Department also known around campus as the 'intellectual ghetto' whose Dean hired me on the spot to teach one course and recommended I contact the Anthropology Department. So I met with the Cultural Anthropology Professor D.A. whose areas of specialization included Nigeria. D.A. invited me to develop a new course in ethnomusicology as part of the Music and the Arts series. It was approved with one caveat. The Music Department said I had to delete the word music from the course title and description as music was part of their department jurisdiction. I obtained a joint appointment from 1979 to 1982 as part-time lecturer teaching one course in anthropology and two courses in the School of Ethnic Studies. I left after 1982 because it was the period in which the university was a hotbed of political correctness and where one's academic expertise seemed to matter less than one's political convictions. Only three individuals supported me, including the Anthropology Professor, the Dean of the College of Social Sciences, and another Anthropology Professor who was also a Japanese American and who sympathized with me but seemed powerless to do anything about it. In Ethiopia and Nigeria I was hired because of my educational background and expertise and not based on my ethnicity. Although educator Linda Chavez addresses the issue of race in student admissions, her comments below can be applied also to the hiring of new faculty:

For 40 years, we've maintained a kind of cognitive dissonance in our public policies when it comes to race. On the one hand, we have condemned — and made illegal — racial discrimination. On the other, we've condoned — even actively encouraged — racial preferences for favored minority groups.

If it is wrong for an employer to refuse to hire someone because of his or her skin color or ancestry, why is it right to require that same employer to achieve and maintain a certain racial and ethnic balance in the workforce?

How can race and ethnicity be impermissible bases on which to deny admission to students but be perfectly acceptable factors in deciding which students to admit?

Welcome to the Alice-in-Wonderland world of affirmative action. Proponents used to argue that such programs were necessary to overcome the effects of historical discrimination. Now, they claim affirmative action isn't about remedying past discrimination, it's about promoting diversity. ("Race and the Election", Yahoo News, by Linda Chavez 10/31/08)

However, being an outsider gave me a unique vantage point allowing me to consider varying viewpoints divergent from my own. Also, I learned discriminatory practices and the propagation of political correctness can impede yet offer opportunities resulting in new research possibilities such as that described under "New directions in research".

1986-2009

Discriminatory practices 2

A distinguished and respected African American scholar wrote a review of *Intercultural Music*, one of the early volumes I co-edited and author of one of the articles. She raved about the ratio of white and black scholars who contributed to that volume and made a point of stating there were more black contributors than white. But as renowned as she was, she did not bother to check the backgrounds of all the contributors as she should have done. She was presumptuous in not realizing that I was neither black nor white.

The politics of political correctness 3

The most recent example of political correctness that disturbed me at my work place occurred on January 20, 2009 when my colleagues and I were

watching former President W. Bush going onto the tarmac and making his way onto the plane that was to take him to Crawford Texas following President Barack Obama's inauguration. Individuals at my workplace were heckling him, calling him names, and telling him to go away. It did not matter if you like his policies or not, but their taunting reminded me of myself in grammar school walking home from school when classmates taunted me. I know how Bush must have felt even though he might have said otherwise. I believe Americans should show civility to a former president who represented the USA to the rest of the world.

Chance and opportunity 3

I was invited to join the Music Research Institute in 1986, a non-profit educational corporation founded by a colleague in 1984 who was a half Cherokee Indian. She left the university's Native American Studies department where she was a full professor because she wanted greater autonomy than what the university could offer. After her death in 1997, I reorganized the agenda, used part time volunteers, and paid contract proofreaders and translators. A year later, I became Executive Director.

A lack of bookstores in Oakland where I work, prompted me to investigate the holdings at the Asian Branch of the Oakland Public Library nearby. The Asian Branch Library had an array of fiction and non-fiction books on Asia and the Diaspora.²⁰ These included books well known outside the USA but hardly noticed or omitted in the USA. I was eager to read all of these books that I had previously missed and now realize how skewed book selections could be at some bookstores and libraries.

New directions in research

The catalyst that sparked the subject of my 2005 paper titled "Reflections on Music and Other Connections between East Africa (Ethiopia, Eritrea) and East Asia (Japan, China)" was *The Star Raft* by Philip Snow (1988).²¹ It is about the exploration of the 15th century explorer Zheng He whose 600-year anniversary was being celebrated in Singapore. A few years later a colleague

²⁰*Each of the branch libraries in Oakland reflects the demographics of the community in which it is located.*

²¹*My husband discovered this book in a remainder books catalogue.*

who is a specialist in Chinese music invited me to accompany her to Singapore to attend The Third International Conference of Institutes & Libraries for Chinese Overseas Studies, Singapore, August 18-20, 2005 — Maritime Asia and the Chinese Overseas (1405 – 2005). Although I did not know what Chinese Overseas Studies meant, I prepared a paper reflecting my knowledge of Africa and general knowledge of Asia.

About a month before the conference my colleague informed me she was unable to attend as her husband was very ill and that I could cancel. Had she attended, she would have introduced me to many of her colleagues. Curiosity got the better of me and I decided to attend without her. This was the first conference devoted to the contributions of Chinese and the Diaspora incorporating individuals like myself. I finally learned the meaning of Chinese Overseas Studies that included others like myself. For the first time ever, I felt a sense of identification. My presentation created quite a stir as no scholar present had ever thought of the possibility of connections between Asia and Africa, music or otherwise, but instead focused on connections between Asia or Africa and the Americas. The back jacket cover of *The Star Raft* points out this lack of connection:

Three-quarters of a century before Columbus crossed the Atlantic, a fleet of Chinese treasure ships came to the East African coast...The fleet was called the Star Raft, and its arrival marked the beginning of formal contacts between Africa and the Far East...the book is an authoritative and lucid analysis of these two centres of culture, and of their changing responses to the challenge of Western values, from the fifteenth century to the present day.

...the relationship has been a curious mix of friendly altruism, mutual economic interest, and cold political opportunism. Often too, it has been founded on incomprehension, for profound psychological and philosophical differences have caused Africans and Chinese alike frequently to miss the true significance of their collaboration... "The Star Raft" is an absorbing exploration of one of the most significant-and-least understood-cultural and political encounters in history.

At the conference I saw at a book exhibit one publication I had never heard of titled: *The Encyclopedia of the Chinese Overseas* by Lynn Pan (Harvard University Press, 1999). It describes Americans of Chinese ancestry living in all continents in the world and their contributions in all fields and disciplines. However, the entries for Africa are minimal and include South Africa, Mauritius, and

Madagascar. In 2009 I shall present an expanded version of the paper I previously presented in Singapore, but this time in Africa. Part 2 that follows will focus on the Peace Corps in general, my tenure as a volunteer and beyond, and address concerns relevant to those living in Asia and the Diaspora.

Part 2

HOW BRUCE LEE ALMOST MET CHOU EN-LAI: ANOTHER VIEW — FROM A PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEER IN ERITREA

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin

Abstract

Part 2 is an account of the author's two-year tenure as a US Peace Corps Volunteer and subsequent visits to Ethiopia as a US election observer, Fulbright lecturer/researcher, and conferee. The content focuses on circumstances in which the author found herself and how she dealt with them as an outsider and as an American of Chinese descent living and working in Africa. She also alludes to aspects of her Peace Corps experience in Part 1 as they pertain to issues not clarified in Part 2. And occasionally she makes references about events occurring on dates not indicated within the specified timeframe for they were relevant to the discussion at hand.

Topics include: Foreigner in America, why the author joined the US Peace Corps, Walkout in Virginia, Peace Corps Service, Pebbles and Stones, Almost Meeting Premier Chou En-lai, Separate but not equal, Brown like us, Chuck Norris and Bruce Lee in Ethiopia, and general observations of her Peace Corps years.

Introduction

The US Peace Corps allowed me to live outside the USA, be independent, make my own decisions, and learn to communicate with people from a different culture I had never met and for which I had no previous knowledge. To help me acclimatize to living and teaching in Ethiopia, I underwent two months training at Georgetown University in the USA and an additional two weeks training at the