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Wang Xilin's symphonic odyssey
The sheng as a concert instrument
Taiwanese popular songs
Amiot's writings on Chinese music
Cantonese Opera in rural and urban contexts
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Front cover: Musicians at the Taipei Confucius shrine perform a reconstruction of Confucian ritual music; Taiwan, January 1998. [Photo: CHIME Archive.]
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A note on Chime Nos. 16 / 17
This (very belated) new volume of the CHIME journal does not include any papers presented during the meeting on ‘Exploring China’s Musical Past’ in Amsterdam. We still needed to work through a backlog of other papers, many of which were presented at earlier conferences. The present volume also does not contain all the book and CD reviews that we have accumulated in our editorial office in recent months: for lack of space, we must postpone the publication of a number of reviews until the next issue.
Towards an ‘early music movement’ in China

Western composers of the 17th and 18th centuries who tried to evoke images of China and Asia in music relied mainly on their imagination. The attraction that China and other remote and ‘mysterious’ places like Turkey and India exerted on Westerners in those days resulted in flights of wild fantasy. It was what audiences expected. The umbrella term for all things exotic was ‘India’, which could basically refer to any (remote or imagined) part of the world. There may be an interesting parallel here with reconstructions of early Chinese music, and the impact they have on listeners in China today: the ‘ancient’ music played on Chinese concert stages, just like the musical exotica of the baroque in Europe, offer an encounter with an unfamiliar and undreamt-of world, a world interesting less for its historical accuracy than for its remoteness, its fantastic and colourful character.

‘Historical performance, or at any rate historically informed performance has become the dominant musical ideology of our time’, wrote Harry Haskell on the early music movement in 1988. It was, of course, Western classical music that he was thinking of, not Chinese music. In the West, classical repertoires from medieval chant to Mozart and beyond, have increasingly become the domain of specialist players. Historical performances no longer attract attention for their own sake, they are part of the mainstream music scene. But in China, this development has gone largely unnoticed. Western renaissance, baroque and medieval music are hardly ever played in Chinese concert halls, neither in Taiwan or Hong Kong, nor in the People’s Republic. Ancient Chinese music, too, fails to get the attention it deserves.

There are occasional performances of ‘reconstructed’ Chinese music, but these are mostly not historically informed. There is excellent historical scholarship in China, but it comes from a handful of persistent scholars like Yang Yinliu, Cao Anhe and their followers, such as Ye Dong and Chen Yingshi, who have unearthed and reconstructed many precious music traditions. Their painstaking work has provided the basis for early music research in China today. But they have had to put up a formidable fight, and even at present, early Chinese music remains the domain of a relatively small group of theorists.

During much of the 20th century, China’s ancient and local musical traditions were widely ignored in intellectual circles, except as possible emblems of national pride. If, in the past, China investigated its own ancient music on imperial order, and on a somewhat larger scale, it happened for roughly similar reasons: the efforts of the past at ‘revival’ of past musical practices – more or less cyclically at the beginning of every new dynasty – were not empirical but rather motivated mainly by politics, by a need to establish ideal representations of the past; they were not necessarily shaped by knowledge about musical realities. Existing musical repertoires were rejected, falsified or ignored if the political situation required this.
The Dunhuang pipa scores from the Tang were not brought to light until the end of the 19th century, and the first attempts at reconstruction were undertaken by Japanese scholars like Hayashi Kenzo and by Westerners, after the manuscripts were taken out of China and stored in the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris. The subsequent efforts of Ye Dong and his students in Shanghai, and of Laurence Picken and his students in Cambridge (UK) to reconstruct Tang music are well-known and have received ample attention from scholars worldwide. There have been attempts to reconstruct instruments, and not only in the Picken project (which culminated in two fine concerts on Tang-period replica instruments in Shanghai in 1990, very likely the first concerts of their kind). One early pioneer of Chinese period instruments was Zheng Jinwen, who made more than 160 replicas of old instruments as early as the 1930s. Unfortunately, most musical performers in China have ignored all this. Zheng’s instruments disappeared during the Cultural Revolution, and the many reconstructions of Tang pieces by Picken and by his Chinese colleagues mainly gather dust on library shelves. A large gap remains between the available historical knowledge on musical practice and what is played on concert stages today.

The recent CHIME conference on early Chinese music, and the concurrent festival of Chinese music in Amsterdam (October 2005) have attested once more to this gap. Scholars may work on early music and examine scores or written sources from the past, but they rarely take (or get) opportunities to test their assumptions in practice. Singers and instrumentalists trained in Chinese conservatories may get lessons on Chinese music history, but most of them show little awareness of any possible connections between historical performance practice and what they themselves are doing. Chinese music history is habitually viewed as a monolith, a single and unchanging commodity representing ‘the ancient’. ‘Ancient’ (‘Tang’, ‘Song’ or ‘Qing’) tunes are played in modern arrangements, with modern techniques, on modern instruments, no questions being asked about the source of the music or the nature of the editing and the changes. Chinese audiences consume ancient music in the same way, as it is presented on concert stages: as a ‘timeless’ repertoire. Few listeners care to know how far removed the sounds they hear often are from historical reality.

2,500-year-old bronze bells may be accompanied by a modern symphony orchestra, and even this will be perceived by many as ‘ancient music’. During the Amsterdam China Festival, arrangements of Tang and later period tunes were performed in a concert played on the Hubei chime bells. The oldest, most faithful replica of the Zeng Hou Yi bells had been especially brought to the Netherlands for this purpose. (Later casts of the bells are less reliable, because permission was not granted to make use again of the original bells for the moulds, or because the manufacturers smoothed out the interval imperfections of the original set).

It was wonderful to have a set of bells in Amsterdam that sounded very much like the 2,500-year-old bells from Zeng Hou Yi’s grave. But quite obviously, the Tang tunes played on them are not (and could never be) those of a culture that existed one thousand years before the Tang. For want of anything better, one could resort to these tunes, but the arrangements played in Amsterdam involved modern instruments and functional harmony, moving even further away from any historical models. It may be no coincidence that the one ‘avant-garde’ piece in the programme, a work especially written for the bells by Dutch composer Theo Loevendie, struck many as sounding more ‘ancient’ than any of the pieces in the programme by Chinese composers.
Nationalist musical pride: some Chinese ‘heroes’ of chromaticism are given their own king-size statues in a newly opened museum of court music history in Beijing (see note 3 on p. 6).

Some qin (zither), pipa (lute) and zheng (bridged zither) players in China are more critical than their colleagues who play other instruments when they attempt to bring historical repertoire to the stage. They have a body of musical scores from the past to chew upon, and (sometimes) a longer tradition of scholarly study of such sources. But the vast majority of instrumentalists (qin players included) do not care all that much about scores, or they interpret them uncritically. Few qin players are genuinely at home in the pitfalls and problems of the so-called dapu (interpretative) process. Those who are do wonderful work, but they are only a very small bunch. The qin, that veritable emblem of ancient Chinese music, is underrepresented in most educational institutions. Chinese music conservatories generally focus primarily on Western classical virtuoso instruments like violin, piano and cello, and on Chinese instruments that can be taught in a (similar) ‘muscular’ fashion, as brilliant showcase instruments. Playing techniques and teaching methods are mostly thoroughly Western-influenced.

The lack of historical consciousness on the part of musical performers is problematic. Of course it is not my purpose to blame China’s musical culture for lacking an early music movement, and it would be unfair to expect the instant birth of such a movement. Until now, circumstances in China have made such a movement simply impossible. And let’s face it: a really broad exploration of early music in the West only started in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and took a long time to mature. Think of such pioneering enthusiasts as the brilliant and eccentric instrument-maker, performer and scholar Arnold Dolmetsch, who did great work, but who never appeared on stage without wearing fancy Elizabethan
costumes. In the West, musicians shifted step-by-step from antiquarianism to exoticism, from exoticism to an increasingly scholarly quest for musical 'authenticity'. These gradual transformations could not have been achieved without fundamental changes in cultural mentality, in intellectual environment, in economy. Without the tremendous sobering up of Western culture after two world wars, and without the postwar economic boom, I personally doubt that there would have been anything like the early music movement as we have learned to know it. The movement required radically new ways of looking at the past, and it also needed sufficient financial backing in order to get there.

Today there is ongoing modernization in China, and rapid economic progress, which would fulfill at least one requirement towards the realization of a more academically-styled early music practice. But the sheer presence of money is obviously not enough.

The first pioneers in the West met with considerable resistance and incomprehension, and they were themselves divided or hesitant about the best possible approach. Take August Wenzinger, who preferred to use a modern orchestra and larger numbers of players than available in Monteverdi's time when he reconstructed Monteverdi's Orfeo (and he was certainly aware of the discrepancy). Or think of David Munrow, who sometimes used non-period instruments to perform vocal parts, as he assumed that the use of voices alone would make the choral music sound too 'bare'.

Today, historically informed performances are taken for granted in the West, but ideas on practice continue to evolve, and there is no consensus on a great many interpretative issues. Conductors and players remain divided, with many of the great artists of our own time still rejecting an historical approach. Bernard Haitink will prefer 'his own' Mozart

Members of the Hubei Chime Bells Ensemble during the Amsterdam China Festival, October 2006.
over any 'historicized' one. Currently there is also a reappraisal of performing styles which cannot be viewed as 'authentic' but which are valued so highly for their artistic merits that they must be looked upon as important in their own right, as 'historical' in a different sense. For example, Thomas Beecham's gorgeously over-dressed performances of Handel's Messiah, with big brass and percussion. Not quite the Handel of Handel's days, but a great artistic achievement.  

So what about China? Traditional musicians in some quarters explore their own past in critical ways, as they have been doing for several decades. We saw fine examples of this during the Amsterdam China Festival (e.g. the reconstructions of old Mulian puppet plays by the Quanzhou Marionette Theatre, very much a labour of love, because it is being done without any support whatsoever from the Chinese government). At present there are also sporadic experiments with playing on 'period instruments', or at least on slightly modified instruments, such as five-stringed pipa and silk-string versions of various plucked instruments. Some musicians have cautiously begun to incorporate Central-Asian flavour in their performances of Tang music (in recognition of the major influx of Central Asian culture in China in that period). But all this happens only incidentally, and listeners (including certain scholars) may reject such music as sounding 'un-Chinese', because it does not fit their preconceived notions of how Chinese music should sound.

Nevertheless, the outlook on the Chinese past has begun to shift, if ever so slightly. It may continue to shift now that the influx of foreign music in China is adding new perspectives. There have been attempts to set up an international Bach festival and to form an orchestra suited for playing baroque music in Shanghai. The only available harpsichord at the Shanghai Conservatory has been repaired, so that continuo parts in baroque music no longer need to be played on a piano. Generally speaking, there is a growing recognition in China that many musical worlds exist beyond those of the symphonic romanticism or the popular synthesizer-backed songs of TV starlets that dominate the commercial media. A recent popular singers' contest on National Television bore this out by incorporating not only mainstream amusement acts but also (occasionally) rural folk singers and local opera artists. Meanwhile, the internet has begun to feature numerous clips and recordings of local traditional as well as newly invented 'homemade' music. These media can potentially play a decisive role in changing perceptions about 'ancient music'.

In scholarly research on Chinese music, there are sporadic attempts to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Examples of this were offered during the CHIME meeting in Amsterdam. Many of us who attended the meeting were impressed by Yao Yijun (of the Chinese Conservatory, Beijing), who tries to match historical data about regional opera styles with what she finds in the field, where she and her students examine (and also learn to sing) traditional vocal styles by oral performers. This is just one fine example of interdisciplinary research presented in Amsterdam, and I could give other examples.

The case of Masaaki Suzuki's Bach Collegium in Japan proves that a historically informed approach to Western music can be successful in Asia. There is no reason to think that such an approach to China's own early music should be any less successful, even though we are dealing with a totally different body of music, created for different purposes in a different environment. The country's growing wealth helps to create the necessary potential for funding, and who knows, perhaps the current no-nonsense attitude of many
young Chinese will serve as a model for people working in the cultural field. The return to China of many Chinese migrant musicians who have been abroad for years, and who have played together with musicians from a great many different cultures, and widened their horizons in this way, may also have a considerable impact. It is these migrant players who show a much stronger historical consciousness when it comes to native traditions than many of their fellow musicians who have stayed at home.

To be ‘modern’ in music does not mean to dismiss tradition. On the contrary. It means that one takes tradition seriously, and accepts it as a challenge to existing aesthetic notions – a challenge, but not an obstacle. Composers are free to use tradition as a source of inspiration for all kinds of ‘exotic’ compositions, but one would like to see alternative approaches given an equal chance.

Changes of direction cannot be expected overnight, but all the same: let us watch out for (more) musicians who can help reinterpret China’s traditional music in accordance with historical performance criteria. It could give rise to many exciting musical discoveries, perhaps even entire ‘new’ musical repertoires. I cannot think of any reason why this should fail to happen in the long run, unless politics spoils the game again. 

Frank Kouwenhoven

NOTES

3 The idea of foraging music history for nationalist symbols continues to have some currency today. The Divine Music Administration, a museum near Tiantan in Beijing which opened its doors in 2004, gives an overview of the world of Chinese court music throughout the ages. Eight Chinese music theorists who, in the course of China’s history, contributed to the notion of the octave divided in twelve pitches have been given their own ‘hall of fame’ in this museum: although history largely ignored them, and none of them except Zhu Zaiyu is known even among a handful of specialists today, they are depicted in the museum as veritable saints, complete with king-size sculptures, huge murals and shining aureoles reminiscent of the Chinese socialist art of the 1960s. The museum is interesting for its excellent documentation and beautiful displays, including some original historical instruments and many replicas. Recommended to anyone interested in Chinese music history.
4 See Frank Kouwenhoven, ‘An Interview with L. Picken – Bringing to Life Tunes of Ancient China.’ *CHIME* 4, 1991, pp.40-65, esp. pp.58-62. One could mention some other joint Western-Chinese initiatives in the realm of reconstructed music: in Paris, Musician Jean-Christophe Frisch and scholar François Picard have joined forces in recreating baroque music as it may have been played in 17th and 18th century China; in this they work together with Chinese musicians; at the University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Rembrandt Worpert and his colleagues have started a Centre for the Study of Early Asian and Middle Eastern Musics. In his reconstructions of early Chinese music, Worpert cooperates with *pijia* players like Wu Man and Cheng Yu, and with others.
The changing musical tradition of the Taipei Confucian ritual

Alan R. Thrasher
(University of British Columbia)

For nearly 2,500 years, the Chinese courts have cultivated ritual music, a tradition characterized by slow, solemn hymns, and accompanied by chimes, bells, and other instruments. These ritual ensembles have tended to be very large, and for many centuries were probably the most sophisticated orchestras in the world. While Confucian rituals were in evidence as early as the Han dynasty, Confucianism became established as official state ideology some ten centuries later. The author of the present article traces some of the backgrounds of this tradition and documents the recent changes at the Confucian shrine in Taipei, Taiwan. Here, greatly accelerated tempos, changed percussion patterns and even the use of Western harmony have entered the tradition.

The Confucian ritual is one of the few enduring symbols of traditional Chinese government theory. A manifestly exclusive tradition, past and present, this ritual and other imperial ceremonies were performed within the walled shrines of urban centres. Rank and file Chinese people had limited access to these areas, which was just as well because the slow, ponderous hymns had almost no entertainment value. The primary function of this tradition has always been to reinforce Confucian ideology, which was central to the legitimacy of the empire.

In this essay, I propose first to outline the ritual, its music and instruments, beginning with a brief historical sketch of imperial practice. Following this, I will focus upon the ceremonial revisions and shifting symbology at the Confucian shrine in Taipei, Taiwan, as observed in 1975 and again in 1998. It must be noted at the outset that the Confucian ritual music historically has been the least stable of all Chinese repertoires, for the concept of change itself is an ancient Confucian value, the central theme in the classic text Yijing (‘Book of Changes’) and known to the Han literati for many centuries.

Historical Sketch
It is clear from the ancient oracle bone inscriptions, early texts such as the Shi Jing (‘Classic of Songs’, c7th century BC), the later Li Ji (‘Record of Rituals’) and numerous archeological finds, that music and dance were part of the agricultural, ancestral and calendrical rituals of the Shang and Zhou periods (c15th century BC onward). Music was also recognized – by the Confucians in particular – as an essential medium through which cultural and behavioural values could be promoted. Most readers will know that Confucius (551–479 BC) is remembered and worshipped for his high educational and philosophical ideals
(rather than as a religious leader). Because of his fundamental influence on the direction of Chinese culture, titles such as “grand master” and “supreme teacher” were conferred upon him (posthumously) by various imperial decrees, and he himself became the object of regular sacrifices.

In classic texts such as the Lunyu (‘Confucian Analects’, c5th century BC) and the later Yueji (‘Record of Music’), a very sophisticated system of relationships and cosmological correspondences evolved. For the purpose of defining human relationships, the paired concepts of li (‘ritual’) and yue (‘music’) were assigned the utmost importance. As the Yueji states, “li controls the people’s minds, yue harmonizes their voices”. In other words, proper “ritual” observance promotes orderly conduct (by demonstrating the social relationships of subject to emperor, wife to husband, etc.), while proper “music” promotes social harmony (by encouraging vocal unison or agreement). Cosmological associations between music, the lunar cycle and the natural world were nearly as important, and both views have had a strong impact on the development of traditional music and instruments.

Based upon archeological finds and statements in the ancient texts, it is clear that the Chinese courts from the 5th century BC onward assembled huge ensembles to perform for ritual events. Such ensembles, including massive frames of bells and stone chimes, large and small drums, unusual wooden idiophones, flutes of the most diverse types, and highly sophisticated mouth-organs and zithers, for many centuries were the most sophisticated in the world. When employed for ritual purposes, this music was usually referred to as yayue (‘refined music’). Some Chinese scholars, following the thinking of Yang Yinliu (1958: 54), have reasonably suggested that the Confucian ritual music may be a preservation of the old yayue (cf. Kishibe 1980: 250–251), but others have disagreed, believing that the yayue cited in the classic texts was a different kind of palace music that disappeared long ago. The Confucian tradition, at any rate, is certainly closely related to this ancient ideal.

Ritual performances in honour of the great sage are mentioned in texts dating from the Han dynasty (206 BC – AD 220), at which time state-supported schools were requested to perform animal sacrifices.3 But it was not until about the 12th century AD (during the Song dynasty) that Confucianism became firmly established as official state ideology. While the ritual music was identified by various early names, from this period onward it was generally called “music of great accomplishment” (dachen yuepu or dasheng yuepu). During this same period, both music and instruments were passed on to Korea, where Koreanized versions of the ritual took root and thrive to this day. As demonstrated by Robert Provine (1988: 116ff.), the ritual hymn entitled “Yingshen” (examined below), which was notated in the 14th-century source Dasheng Yuepu (but reflects earlier traditions), has not only formed a central part of the historic Korean Confucian ritual, but closely resembles the hymn performed in the Taipei ritual of today. The melodic material employed in the Taipei ritual, however, is actually derived from the 16th-century treatise Nanyong Zhi (1544) (see Appendix A). While small modal differences exist between the two versions, their melodic outlines are the same – evidence of striking melodic continuity over many hundreds of years.

By the time of the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368–1911), various different ceremonials were conducted in the capital city of Beijing, including the sacrifice to heaven in the “Temple of Heaven” and others (cf. Lam 1987: 15 ff.). Sacrifices to Confucius
(dingji) were conducted in Confucian shrines, which were located not only in Beijing but in every district of the empire. These rituals were scheduled during the spring and autumn of each year – the specific date determined in accordance with the lunar calendar.

Many elements of the Confucian ritual (texts, melodic style and instruments) undoubtedly reflect ancient practice, yet its long history has been one of constant revision. At the beginning of each dynasty, scholars were assigned to reconstruct the ceremonial music based upon the orthodoxy of the oldest models, and then present their revisions to the emperor. Such revisions were ordered because, in Confucian thinking, maintenance of a proper ritual music was considered essential for ancestral piety, the welfare of the people and prosperity of the empire. Thus, music assumed a central and symbolic role in traditional government theory. Numerous treatises were written throughout the centuries, the most accessible being the Yueshu (‘Treatise on Music’, c1100) and Liulü Zhongyi (‘Basic Principles of the System of Pitches’, 1713). Both sources include many line drawings of musical instruments (some reproduced below).  

During the calamitous Qing period, a number of anomalies crept into the ceremony, including the use of popular instruments, simultaneous mixed temperaments and new performance styles. Because of this, scholars are often quite critical of 19th-century practice. In 1958, the renowned scholar Yang Yinliu wrote a fascinating account of a ritual performance he observed and recorded in Liuyang (near Changsha, Hunan province) just two years earlier. In this article, he reviews the twisting history of 19th-century cross influence between the traditions at Liuyang and Qufu (the ancestral home of Confucius, Shandong province). He also documents a good number of changes that had already been made by the early 20th century, such as the mixing of instrumental temperament systems and the inexplicable reduction of the normal four-bar hymn phrase to three bars – which, at any rate, he states was not typical of Qing dynasty practice (Yang 1958: 62–63). Finally, Yang mentions performances during the 1910s at the Nanjing and Wuxi shrines, but does not discuss them. With the fall of the Qing government in 1911 and the new cultural movement during the 1920s, there was so much skepticism as to the value of the traditional institutions and educational ideals that Chinese leaders showed little interest in revising the ceremony yet again. It slowly disappeared on the Chinese mainland.

There were occasional revivals, notably those encouraged by Chiang Kai-shek during the 1930s (before he left the mainland for Taiwan) and the above-mentioned Liuyang and Qufu rituals during the 1950s. Today, while ceremonies are occasionally staged at the Qufu shrine, the deeper ideals and symbolic associations underlying the ritual have faded from public recognition, in large part due to discouragement by the Chinese government. In Taiwan, however, the ritual has been maintained, though with an interruption during the early 20th-century Japanese occupation and with a major revision during the late 20th century. Known today as the “Confucian sacrificial ceremony” (jikong dianli), it is held only once a year on (solar) September 28th, which is named “Teacher’s Day” in honour of the legacy of Confucianism and its educational ideals.

The Confucian Shrine
Chinese Confucian shrine complexes are generally known as kongmiao (‘Confucian shrine’) or wenmiao (‘cultural shrine’). While there are architectural differences among
the various shrines in China and Taiwan, consistent features include the north-south orientation of the walled complex, position of the principal Confucian temple (dacheng dian, ‘Temple of Great Accomplishment’), which is always near the north end of the complex, a raised south-facing performance terrace extending out from this building, a broad inner courtyard flanked on both sides by smaller buildings for other ritual and educational purposes, and three very large main gates through the south wall of the inner courtyard, leading to the outer courtyard.

J.A. van Aalst in 1884 described the Beijing shrine as follows:

The Confucian temple at Peking is a spacious and magnificent building, covered with a double roof of yellow glazed tiles, which is sustained by massive wooden pillars. Access to the temple is gained by passing through three great gates and traversing as many wide courts, where weeds are growing luxuriantly. Before the temple there is a broad, elevated, marble terrace reached by a flight of steps, and guarded by handsome balustrades of elaborately carved marble. The temple [itself] has three great doors, which are wide open at the time of worshipping. Within, on the north side of the great hall and facing south stands ... the tablet bearing the words: The Most Holy Ancient Sage Confucius. (1884:25)

The Beijing shrine, built in the 17th century, is still standing, its weeds no less luxuriant. Following the early 20th-century decline of the ritual, the shrine was subsequently renamed the “Capital Museum”, the primary motivation being to attract tourists. Today, busloads arrive daily on cultural treks to view the undusted old ritual implements and instruments, purchase miniatures in the gift shops and listen to a small ensemble of professional musicians busk folk melodies on the old stone chimes. How the ancient worthies might have felt about this practice is not recorded.

Equally magnificent is the Qufu shrine. Traditionally one of the most active shrines in China (primarily because of the large number of Kong [Confucius] family descendants living in this area), ceremonies are now only occasionally staged here, mostly for tourists. Empty Confucian shrines still stand in many urban areas, such as Suzhou, Quanzhou and Guangzhou. The Hangzhou shrine was destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1960s), perhaps earlier. But half a century before this, a detailed floorplan of the inner courtyard had been made, the uppermost section showing the temple and performance terrace (reproduced in Fig. 1). Shown within the temple proper (upper half of sketch) are the Confucian tablet (top centre), five ritual tables (centre and at sides) and positions of the roof-supporting posts. Identified on the adjoining performance terrace (lower half of sketch) are the positions of musicians and dancers. Their numbers — consistently six performers of the major instruments (such as xiao and qin) and six rows of dancers (with six in each row) — are of symbolic importance (discussed further below).

In Taiwan, there are several shrines and ritual variations. The Confucian shrine in the southern city of Tainan is the oldest, built during the 17th century. Here, hymn variants dating from the recent Qing dynasty are maintained, though accompanied by a combination of ritual and common-practice instruments (e.g., erhu, pipa). The Taipei Confucian shrine is more recent, built in the late 19th century and rebuilt in the 1920s. It is also the largest. Like older shrines, it is a cluster of buildings and broad courtyards, built on a north-south axis and enclosed by a wall. The roof design, however, may have
Fig. 1. Hangzhou Shrine: Temple and Terrace Floorplan
At top: Confucian temple, showing positions of the Confucian tablet (top centre), the ritual tables, and roof-supporting posts. At bottom: the adjoining performance terrace, showing positions of musicians and dancers (Chinese characters printed upside down and sideways). [Detail of Hangzhou shrine floorplan, rpt. in Moule 1901]

been influenced by Buddhist temple architecture, for it is more highly ornamented than the shrines in China. The main temple houses an altar over which is mounted the sacred tablet for Confucius. There are no images in this building. Near the centre and at both sides are several ceremonial tables upon which sacrificial foods (grains, meats, etc.) are placed. Shown in the Fig. 2 photo is the broad entrance to the temple, with a narrow attached platform on which the bianqin gong stone chimes and most other percussion instruments are
Fig. 2 Taipei Confucian Shrine: Percussion Platform with Instruments. *Bianqing* (stone chimes) and other ritual instruments in performance position. [photo by Alan Thrasher]

positioned. Extending out from this is a relatively small ceremonial dance terrace, together with two lateral platform extensions, on which musicians perform.

**The Ritual Ceremony**

Associated with the Taipei shrine is a ritual organization comprised of local literati and government officials. This organization is responsible for overseeing the orthodoxy of the ritual and its music, a practice carried over from the imperial period (cf. Chen 1975: 49–52). During performances, the older members serve as ceremonial functionaries, announcing the various procedures in sequence. Other government officials and education ministers serve as consecration officers, and dignitaries may include the Taiwan president and Taipei mayor. The instrumentalists and dancers, however, are mostly high school students, some as young as twelve and thirteen years. Traditionally composed exclusively of boys and young men, instrumental ensembles today include girls as well. Performance in the Confucian ritual is considered an honour, not unlike the North American tradition of performing in a marching band on a national day, and as such it is promoted by local parents and the schools.

When the Nationalists arrived in Taiwan in 1949, fully committed to preserving and promoting Confucian ideology, they decided that the Qing dynasty style ritual being performed at the Taipei shrine was corrupt and in need of revision. In 1968, a Reconstruction
Committee of four scholars was appointed by president Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) to revise the entire ceremony, based upon pre-Qing practice – to the extent that this was possible. Unfortunately, on their trip across the Taiwan straight, Chiang’s followers brought only a small selection of light-weight musical instruments with them, mostly archeological items such as Shang globular flutes and stone chimes, and some Zhou bells – nothing considered appropriate for contemporary ritual usage. As an initial step in their research, the Committee travelled to Korea to study the Koreanized Confucian ritual, which was believed to preserve older instrument forms, costumes and performance characteristics. Subsequently, the Korean influence on the Taipei ritual was strong in some areas, notably in costume design and in construction of forgotten instruments, such as taogu (drum). But the Taipei-based Committee attempted to restore historic Chinese practices as well, based upon the old texts. Chuang Pen-li was appointed to oversee the music and dance. In an attempt to utilize the very earliest sources possible, Chuang selected hymn texts from Song dynasty sources (12th century), melodies and dance patterns from the Ming text Nanyong Zhi (1544) and (somewhat reluctantly) percussion patterns from Qing dynasty notations. Some instruments, such as chi (flute) and jiangu (drum), which were well documented in the Zhou classic texts (c3rd–2nd century BC) and depicted in later reliefs, were designed and constructed in the style of those most ancient models. Thus, the Taipei Confucian ritual became a syncretic mix of continuing Korean tradition, long forgotten historic Chinese practice, and what little survived into the 20th century from the last dynasty.

As performed today, the Taipei ritual begins at dawn.\textsuperscript{11} Consecration officers (in long dark robes), dignitaries, musicians (in red robes) and dancers (in yellow robes) march into position in the central courtyard and onto the raised performance terrace. The officers and dignitaries are accompanied by three series of drum rolls sounded on the large jinghu drum and single strokes on the corresponding yongzhong bell (both located on either side of the inner courtyard gates).\textsuperscript{12} Officers, carrying vessels containing offerings of previously sacrificed animals (ox, goat and pig), march back through the temple gates to the outer grounds of the shrine, where the offerings are buried in symbolic tribute to the life-sustaining earth.

The ceremony continues with a performance of the first of six hymns, “Welcome to the Spirit” (Yingshen), in which the “spirit” of Confucius is invited to descend into the shrine for recognition. Signalling the beginning of this (and every) hymn is a director holding a long vertical banner of red and yellow silk (hui) which, when raised, directs the percussionists to start the music (the patterns outlined below). The hymn is sung by a small chorus of six male singers and accompanied by the large instrumental ensemble standing on either side of the performance terrace. During this first hymn, celebrants and observers stand in honour of Confucius. Following this, at the command “kowtow”, celebrants bow three times. Offerings of food (fruits, grains, wine) in bronze and other vessels are then presented within the temple. During the second hymn, the celebrants offer incense to the spirits of the other notable sages.

With the third hymn, the dance ensemble consisting of thirty six young boys begins its first series of ritual dance postures.\textsuperscript{13} The dance ensemble is led by a director holding a long vertical staff with attached silk tassels (jie), which is used to direct movement. Each dancer holds a short red tube (historically a yue flute) in his left hand and three pheasant-
tail feathers in his right hand. The dancers move very slowly, pausing in various stylized poses for four beats each before changing to the next. During this hymn, the principal presentation officer marches to the Confucian temple and makes an offering of silk “spirit money”, followed by further sequences of respectful bows. The fourth and fifth hymns are similarly accompanied by dance patterns and more offerings and blessings.

The ceremony concludes with the removal of sacrificial vessels, escorting of the Confucian “spirit” out of the central courtyard, incineration of prayers and “spirit money” (as offerings to the gods) and performance of the sixth and final hymn. The gates are closed and the various functionaries, musicians and dancers withdraw from their positions. The ceremony concludes at the onset of early morning rush hour.14

Ensemble and Instruments

The instruments embraced by the court – most having well-documented histories of over two thousand years – are believed to be indigenous and therefore specifically appropriate for ritual purposes. Zhou court scholars (c3rd century BC), in attempt to relate these instruments to traditional cosmology and number theory (a fundamental Confucian goal), assigned them to a classification system known as “eight-tone” (bayin). In the “eight-tone” system (outlined in Fig. 3), instruments are differentiated according to their resonating media (metal, stone, skin, silk and wood) and, in some cases, by the nature of their (non-resonating) construction materials (earth, gourd and bamboo). The number “eight” is especially auspicious in Chinese cosmology, deriving from the eight “trigrams” (bagua), the ancient Chinese system of divination. It is manifest in other eight-part systems as well, such as the eight directions. Most instruments listed under these categories were used in ancestral and other state ceremonies, and later in Confucian rituals. While several of the “eight-tone” instruments became known among the general population (such as xiao vertical flute and sheng mouth-organ), the majority have remained so closely associated with the ritual they have scarcely been seen outside the walls of the shrine.

In both name and function, these instruments over time have acquired very close symbolic associations with Confucian ideals. As noted above, traditional Chinese government for most of the last two thousand years has attempted to use music to promote harmonious behaviour, notably by promotion of a “refined music”, but also by ascribing cultural values to the ritual instruments themselves. Metaphoric associations and iconic representations are so important to the ritual functions of these instruments, that they will receive some emphasis in the following discussion.15

The Confucian ritual is an ensemble tradition, almost certainly the first of its magnitude worldwide. Ensemble strength varies from one shrine to another, but at the major shrines during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, musicians have numbered between about 48 and 52 – depending upon whether directors and the signal-giving percussionists are included. The historic positions of singers and instruments on the performance terraces of the Beijing and Taipei Confucian shrines are shown in Fig. 4. Note that the Beijing tradition of ensemble size and distribution is nearly identical to the late-19th-century Hangzhou tradition (cf. Fig. 1), and only slightly different from that described by Yang Yinliu in 1958.
Fig. 3 “Eight-Tone” (Bayin) Instrument System
[Based upon the Zhou dynasty sources Shijing, Zhouli, Liji, Yili, and archeological finds]

1. METAL (JIN): Zhong bells – of different construction types and sizes, including:
   Bianzhong, set of 16 or more bells
   Bozhong, medium-sized single bell
   Yongzhong, large single bell
   [Note: other early types, such as zhen and niao, now obsolete]

2. STONE [SHI]: Qing stone chimes – usually 5-sided or L-shaped:
   Blanqin, set of 16 or more resonating stones
   Teqing, medium-sized single stone

3. EARTH (TU): Clay flutes – of small and large size, with 5, 6 or 8 fingerholes:
   Xun, globular flute
   [Note: the Shijing mentions a musical bowl made of clay (jou), which is now obsolete]

4. SKIN (GE): Gu drums – barrel-shaped, medium and large, with tacked heads:
   Jing, very large diameter, suspended in frame with drumhead upward
   Jgang, large canopy-covered drum, post mounted (often paired with an yinggu drum)
   Taogu, small handle-mounted twirling drum, with beaded cords
   Bofu, medium-sized hand struck drum
   [Notes: a) other ancient drum types with small and medium broad barrels now obsolete;
   b) the Shang “bronze drum” (tonggu) not listed within the bayin system]

5. SILK (SI): Zithers of several types:
   Qin, small bridgeless zither, 7 silk strings
   Se, large zither, 25 silk strings and bridges
   Zheng, medium-sized zither, 13 or more strings and bridges (not used in ritual music)
   [Note: a fourth zither, zhu, now obsolete]

6. WOOD (MU): Wooden idiophones of several distinct types:
   Zhu, moderate-sized wooden box, struck with a hammer
   Yu, carved wooden tiger, stroked with a bamboo switch
   [Note: the 6-slab wooden clapper (paliban) is a recent addition, having replaced the bamboo chundu]

7. GOURD [PAO]: Mouth organs of several sizes, formerly with gourd windchests:
   Sheng, mouth organ with 17 or more pipes
   [Notes: a) other historic mouth-organs (he, ye, chao), now obsolete; b) the ancient Chinese mouth harp (huang), while probably not used in ritual music, was sometimes classified in the “gourd” category]

8. BAMBOO [ZHU]: Various flute types constructed of bamboo:
   Chi, transverse flute of large diameter, 6 fingerholes
   Xiao, vertical notched flute, 6 fingerholes
   Di, transverse flute of narrow diameter, 6 fingerholes
   Paixiao, panpipe, formerly single-wing with 13 pipes, later double-wing with 16 pipes
   [Notes: a) other wind instruments made of bamboo (guan, bii, longtou di) no longer employed in ritual performance; b) the ancient chunda bamboo idiophone now obsolete]
Fig. 4  

**Positions of Musicians, Beijing Confucian Shrine, 19th Century**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sheng</th>
<th>Singer</th>
<th>Zhu</th>
<th>Yu</th>
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<td>Bofu</td>
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<td>Singer</td>
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<td>Xiao</td>
<td>Xiao</td>
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<td>36 dancers in 6 rows</td>
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<td>Di</td>
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<td>Chi</td>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>Xun</td>
<td>Chi</td>
<td>Chi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teqing</td>
<td>Bianqing</td>
<td>Bianzhong</td>
<td>Bozhong</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(front of performance terrace)

Source: wall diagram in the Beijing Confucian Shrine (44 instrumentalists, 6 singers, 36 dancers)

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**Positions of Musicians, Taipei Confucian Shrine, 1975**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Taogu</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Singer</td>
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<td>Teqing</td>
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<td>Jiangu</td>
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<td>Xun</td>
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<td>Chi</td>
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<td>36 dancers in 6 rows</td>
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<td>Xun</td>
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<tr>
<td>Xun</td>
<td>Xiao</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(front of performance terrace)

Source: fieldnotes, September 1975 (46 instrumentalists, 6 singers, 36 dancers)

Note: in the 1998 performance, each side included 8 di, 4 sheng, 1/2 xiao, 1 paixiao, but no chi.
Two other percussion instruments, located near the southern main gates, are not shown in these diagrams but are detailed in the description which follows. Four functional categories of instruments can be discerned:

1. LARGE PROCESSIONAL PERCUSSION The largest single instruments in the ensemble are drum and bell types, these employed primarily to signal the beginning of the ritual. The JINGU (‘Jin [kingdom] drum’), like most ancient Chinese drums, has a broad barrel-shaped shell, onto which two drumheads are tacked. This drum, the largest in the Chinese instrumentarium, rests in a frame, traditionally with drumhead upward (Fig. 5). According to the Zhouli (c3rd–2nd century BC), the jingu was initially a military instrument, employed for issuing orders. Zhouli commentary states that the diameter of the ancient drumhead was 6.6 [Chinese] feet (c130 cm). As preserved in the Taipei ritual, a smaller jingu is placed at the west side of the inner courtyard gates (its usual position) and struck in accompaniment of the processional entrance of dignitaries. On the east side of the gates, opposite the drum, is a single, similarly large clapperless bell known as YONGZHONG (‘yong bell’), also suspended in a large frame. As mentioned above, this bell is struck in interaction with the jingu at the commencement of the ceremony.

Fig. 5 Large Ritual Drums Left: JINGU – moderately large drum mounted on a pole, with drumheads facing sideways; covered by elaborately-decorated canopy; drumhead diameter between 60-80 cm. Right: JINGU (marked ‘large drum’, daqiu) – the largest Chinese drum, suspended in a frame with drumhead (usually) facing upward; variable drumhead diameter between 100-150 cm. [Source: Lüli Zhengyi line drawings, 1713]
2. ENSEMBLE DIRECTORS Most idiosyncratic of the ancient percussion instruments are those which "direct" the music, instruments specifically responsible for starting and stopping the hymns and maintaining appropriate tempos during performance (all illustrated in Fig. 6). Located near the centre rear of the performance terrace is an instrument called ZHU, essentially a wooden box with outward sloping sides, open at the top. According to commentary in the Shijing, the zhu is like "a lacquered grain container", which suggests a possible historic function within agricultural rites. In present-day usage, three strokes (produced by striking the inside with a wooden mallet) signal the beginning of each hymn. In the Taipei ceremony, the zhu is combined with two other ancient instruments for this purpose, the PAIBAN clapper and TAOGU drum. The ritual paiban (or shouban), a clapper constructed of six hardwood slabs bound together at one end, is held between the left and right hands of the performer and "clapped" together on strong beats. The taogu is a small barrel drum mounted on a long round handle (which passes through the barrel), with two beaded cords attached to each side of the barrel. When the handle is rotated, the beads

Fig. 6 Ensemble-directing Percussion Top, left to right: ZHU box-shaped idiophone [pr. 'ju'] – c60 cm. square at top; decorated with scenes of mountains, clouds and water. YU tiger-shaped idiophone – c60 cm. or more in length, with 27 ridges on its back; usually lacquered red or gold. Bottom, left to right: TAOGU twirling drum – drumhead diameter c12 cm. or more; typically lacquered red with designs in gold. PAIBAN (or shouban) clapper – six hardwood slabs, connected at one end by a cord. BOFU (literally 'strike-slap') hand-struck drum – drumhead diameter c25 cm. [Sources: Lüli Zhengyi drawings, 1713; taogu from Gujin Tushu Jicheng, 1725; paiban, sketch by C. Fan]
alternately hit the heads in a rapid tremolo. In performance, the pailban precedes the zhu with three strokes; the taogu follows it with three short rolls.  

Each hymn is accompanied by steady beats on the medium-sized hand-struck drum BOFU. Signalling the end of the music is the most unusual of instruments in the ritual ensemble, the YU, a carved wooden image of a crouching tiger. In performance, a switch of wood or bamboo is drawn across raised ridges on its back, producing a rasping sound. The symbolic implications of this act are powerful, though never explicated in the ancient texts. The feared tiger was once common throughout China and has been associated with many qualities, such as courage and military prowess. Popular sayings of today still recognize the importance of subjugating tigers and remaining alert to danger. But if stroking the back of this beast to make it “purr” is the signifier, the interpretation is unrecognized by participants and audience alike.

3. MELODY INSTRUMENTS The ensemble accompanying the hymns is always divided in half, positioned on left and right sides of the performance terrace. As seen in Figs. 7 and 8, flutes of five different types and sheng mouth-organs dominate the ritual ensemble. The XUN globular flute and CHI transverse flute are among the oldest. Their significance within Confucian ideology is noted in the Shijing: “the elder brother plays xun, the younger brother plays chi”. Later text commentary explains that “our minds, as brothers, must be in harmony”, a metaphoric reminder of the need for familial accord. The XIAO vertical notched flute, one of the most venerated of Chinese instruments, was similarly assigned Confucian significance. Known by its ancient name di, the vertical flute was symbolically linked to the Confucian concept of di, a different character meaning “to wash away evil from the mind”; i.e., through performance on the flute, one dispels malefic thoughts. These particular symbolic references (and that for the paixiao, below) have been explicated by Chuang Pen-li in his writings, but they are not generally understood by the Taiwan public, nor even by the ritual participants.

The fourth flute type is the PAIXIAO panpipe (literally: ‘row xiao’), an instrument nearly as ancient as the xun. The Chinese panpipe was associated with Confucian ideology by its historic name xiao, its character graph directly related to the term su, “respect”. Many texts also associate the panpipe with the legendary phoenix (fenghuang), both in terms of its sound and its wing-like profile. Last of the flutes is the DIZI, transverse flute with membrane. Perhaps because of its believed introduction from non-Chinese areas of Central Asia and subsequent use in military ensembles, the dizi has not been imbued with the deep symbolic associations as have the other flutes. It has, nevertheless, been included in the ritual ensemble for many centuries and, during the Qing dynasty, was ornamented with a carved dragon head and tail, and identified as ‘dragon-head flute’ (longtou di). The image of a scaly, five-clawed dragon is a very common decorative feature on many ritual instruments (seen in Figs. 7 and 8). Unquestionably the most potent and multivalent of symbols within Chinese mythology, the legendary dragon was a beneficent spirit force, associated with heaven, good fortune, male vigour, and indeed the emperor himself. But in the Taipei ritual this association has also disappeared, the transverse flutes used today being undecorated qudi (i.e., those employed in kunqu opera, though re-tempered to perform concert hall music).
Fig. 7 Melody Instruments: Flutes Top to bottom: CHI short flute [pr. ‘chih’] – c46 cm. in length, c3 cm. internal diameter; five lateral fingerholes, one thumbhole, blowhole on top; red lacquer with gold dragon motifs. XIAO vertical notched flute [pr. ‘hsiao’] – c56 cm. or more in length; five frontal fingerholes, one thumbhole, blowhole through end node. DI transverse flute [marked ‘longtou di’] – c58 cm. in length; six fingerholes, membrane hole, blowhole; carved dragon head and tail on these ritual flutes. On the right: XUN globular flute [pr. ‘hsün’] – c8-13 cm. in height; four fingerholes in front, two thumbholes in back, blowhole at top; colour and decoration as above. [Source: Lüli Zhengyi line drawings, 1713]

Fig. 8 Melody Instruments: Paixiao and Sheng Left: PAIXIAO panpipe [pr. ‘pai-hsiao’] – c30 cm. or more in width; ‘double-wing’ shaped profile, 16 pipes with U-shaped notches; colour and decoration as other flutes. Right: SHENG mouth-organ – 17 bamboo pipes in ‘double-wing’ shaped profile, mounted in windchest of lacquered wood, with detachable blowpipe; decoration as above. [Source: Lüli Zhengyi line drawings, 1713]
The remaining melody instruments (sheng, qin and se) are all of ancient lineage. The SHENG mouth-organ (Fig. 8), with its double-wing shaped bamboo pipes mounted in a common wind-chest, is (like the paixiao panpipe) believed to be emblematic of the phoenix. The 2nd-century dictionary Shuowen Jiezi states that the sheng “looks like the body of a phoenix; [its music is] the sound of the New Year [when] all things grow [sheng]”. Within traditional belief, the Chinese phoenix was thought to be a bird of great beauty, associated with reason, prosperity and the birth of offspring.20 This symbol today is locally understood, if superficially, because of the two cognate terms (sheng) and the highly visible wing-shaped pipes. The most prominent of these wind instruments are shown in playing position in the Fig. 9 photo.

Least audible in the ritual ensemble, but no less important, are the QIN and SE zithers (Fig. 10). The qin is a small bridgeless 7-string zither, the paramount instrument of the Confucian scholar. The se is a larger zither, an exclusively ritual instrument, with 25 strings and movable bridges. These two zithers have been treated as a symbolic pair since their earliest documentation. The Shijing, for example, says of a happy marriage, “good harmony between wife and husband is like playing the se and qin”. This saying is still commonly known among older people, though usually without any understanding as to what these specific instruments are. Of course, qin symbology is dominated by a powerful Confucian cosmology seldom understood outside the small circle of qin enthusiasts.
Fig. 10 Melody Instruments: Zithers  Top to bottom: QIN zither [pr. 'chin'] – medium-length zither (c.120 cm) without bridges, seven silk strings, shown in playing position on a table. SE zither [pr. 'seh'] – long zither (c.200 cm), 25 strings, with movable bridge under each string (not shown), in playing position on two stands. [Source: Lüli Zhengyi line drawings, 1713]

In the diagram of the Beijing shrine instrument positions (Fig. 4), it can be seen that there are six singers (three per side), just as there are six of the most significant accompanying instruments (di, xiao, sheng and qin). The more archaic instruments (such as se zither, bofu drum and chi flute) are employed in groups of two or four, while the most idiosyncratic instruments (zhu and yu idiophones) are employed singly. As noted above, this distribution appears to have been relatively standard for the late 19th century. The number six, while culturally less significant than the number eight, is nevertheless of pivotal importance within the ritual context. Chinese rituals themselves were said to be of six types (liuyi), and the historic twelve-note chromatic pitch system (liulu) was consistently explained in terms of six yin pitches alternating with six yang pitches. In addition to the groupings of six instruments, the traditions of six rows of dancers and six hymns in the repertoire have been standard throughout the Qing dynasty and into the 20th century. In the Taipei ritual, this symbology has been retained in part (also seen in Fig. 4). But the numbers of instrument groupings have changed, the 1975 ritual employing only a pair of qin zithers (now electronically amplified) and eight of the very soft xiao and xun flutes. This shift toward better acoustical balance represents a new pragmatism in the orchestration of ritual music, a trend which would continue to the present day.
4. PUNCTUATING PERCUSSION. This last group is comprised of the visually-striking sets of bronze bells, stone chimes, and large canopy-covered drums (Figs. 5 and 11). All are mounted or suspended in frames, elaborately decorated top and bottom with various zoomorphic images (such as dragons and tigers), and positioned near the west and east sides of the performance terrace. Most significant are the externally-struck ZHONG bronze bells. Unlike Western bells, outer surfaces on Chinese zhong bells are typically decorated with repetitive zoomorphic designs and, on older bells, clusters of decorative “nipples”. The number, type and arrangement of bell sets, bianzhong (‘arranged zhong’), became standardized from about the 12th century onward at sixteen loop-type flat-mouth bells of the same external size, with elliptical or round cross sections, suspended vertically (Fig. 11). Bell sets used in the Taipei ritual during the 1970s were essentially of the above external design, but of differing sizes rather than of differing thicknesses – not the usual construction design for this type of bell. By the 1990s, the Taipei bianzhong bells had been

Fig. 11 Bells and Stone Chimes Left: BIANZHONG bell set [pr. ‘bien-jung’] – 16 same-sized barrel-shaped bells with flat mouths; each bell c.24 cm. in height; ornate frame mounted on the backs of carved tigers, with carved dragon heads (in upper corners) holding strings of five tassels. Right: BIANQING stone chime set [pr. ‘bien-ching’] – 16 same-sized L-shaped stones; frame mounted on the backs of carved ducks, with carved phoenix-bird heads (in upper corners) holding strings of five tassels. Bottom: Qing dynasty style ZHONG bell with barrel-shaped profile and loop hanger. [Source: Liulü Zhengyi line drawings, 1713]
changed to uniform sizes but of varying thicknesses, after the style of the Qing courts and Confucian shrines in Korea (described above).\textsuperscript{21}

Single bells, known as tezhong (‘special zhong’) or bozhong, are larger than bianzhong bells. On ancient bozhong (with flat mouths and elliptical or round cross-sections), outer surfaces are often elaborately decorated with abstract zoomorphic designs (including crouching tigers in high relief); and hangers may be in the shape of dragons or other auspicious animals (similar designs seen in Fig. 11). In the Confucian ritual, a bozhong is struck once immediately preceding each four-word phrase.

Opposite the bells are the QING stone chimes, visible reminders of the ancient values of longevity and stability. Single stones are known as teqing (‘special qing’); sets of sixteen chromatically-tuned stones are known as bianqing (‘arranged qing’).\textsuperscript{22} Qing dynasty (c18th century) stones are L-shaped, often with inscriptions and designs on the surface of each stone (Fig. 11). The Taipei bianqing set follows this design, though the stones are in incremental sizes (Fig. 2). The Taipei teqing (large single stone) is an anomaly in that it is a replica of the famous c12th-century BC Shang stone with a stylized tiger motif inscribed on its face. This represents a clear departure from the large L-shaped stones found in the Qing and Korean traditions.

Most distinctive of the ritual drums is the canopy-covered JIANGU (‘mounted drum’), a relatively large drum mounted on an anchored vertical post (Fig. 5). Suspended over this drum is a richly-ornamented canopy, with four colourful tassels hanging from its four corners (typically held in the mouths of carved dragons) and a carved egret on top of the frame. This canopy has been a consistent feature of the jiangu drum since it was first pictured in Han dynasty art.\textsuperscript{23} In the Taipei ritual, a second similar drum is located on the opposite side of the terrace – the yinggu (‘responding drum’), which however lacks the colourful canopy. The yinggu, while mentioned in the ancient literature, is cited infrequently in Qing instrument lists.\textsuperscript{24} Both are struck with unpadded beaters and utilized in percussion interludes between hymn phrases and for other functions.

The Ritual Hymn
Six hymns are performed in the Confucian ritual, each identified by a title and melody name. The first, entitled “Yingshen” (‘Welcome to the Spirit [of the Sage]’) and sung to the melody “Xianhe”, will serve as an example of Confucian hymn style (Fig. 12). The five hymns which follow this have different texts and melodies, but are stylistically identical. Texts for the six hymns were adapted during the 12th century from statements in the ancient Confucian texts, notably from the Lunyu, Zhongyong, Liji and others (cf. Moule 1901: 133ff.). As seen in the translation of “Yingshen” (bottom of Fig. 12), essential elements of Confucian ideology are promoted, such as virtuous behaviour, welfare for the country and performance of the proper rituals.

Hymns are performed in pre-established keys, following the ancient liuli system of twelve chromatic pitch centres. During the Ming dynasty, the spring sacrifice was believed to be pitched in D (the pitch of the huangzhong or ‘yellow bell’); the autumn sacrifice, pitched in G (zhongliú) (Chuang 1998: 4). With the decision to follow the Ming pitch system, the Taipei autumn ritual is always performed in G. The hymn itself is entirely pentatonic, in a mode stressing la (e’) as the finalis – an orientation found in most Confucian hymns.
Fig. 12 ‘Yingshen’: Melody, Heterophonic Parts, Interlude and Text

(a) ‘Yingshen’ melody

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Da} & \quad \text{kong} & \quad \text{sheng}, \\
\text{Wei} & \quad \text{zhì} & \quad \text{wang} & \quad \text{hua}, \\
\text{Dian} & \quad \text{si} & \quad \text{you} & \quad \text{chang}, \\
\text{Shen} & \quad \text{qi} & \quad \text{laî} & \quad \text{gr.}
\end{align*}
\]

(b) Phrase 1: selected details of heterophonic performance

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Da} & \quad \text{zai} & \quad \text{kong} & \quad \text{sheng} \\
\text{Qin, Se} & \quad \text{zhu} & \quad \text{shen} \\
\text{Bianzhong, Bianqing} & \quad \text{yin} & \quad \text{shen} \\
\text{Bofu} & \quad \text{shi} & \quad \text{shen}
\end{align*}
\]

(c) Percussion interlude

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tui} & \quad \text{ying} & \quad \text{gu} & \quad \text{bozhong} \\
\text{jiang} & \quad \text{ying} & \quad \text{gu}
\end{align*}
\]

Title: ‘Welcome to the Spirit [of the Sage]’
Text: How great the sage [Confucius], his virtue is respected, (and he) maintains the welfare of the country; All the people want the laws, regularly-scheduled rituals, (and) prosperity in the country; The spirit is welcome here, to learn the knowledge and manner of Confucius. [Transcription: A. Thrasher, based upon 1968 Taipei revision]
As noted above (and shown in Appendix B), the hymn is introduced by three-stroke patterns of the paiban (clapper), zhu (box) and tuogu (drum), followed by a single stroke on the bozhong (medium bell). Sung by a chorus of six male voices in unison, “Yingshen” is organized in eight phrases, four words per phrase, each held four beats. Hymn length, therefore, is commonly explained as being of 32 whole-note beats (Chuang 1998: 4). Du Yaxiong points out that, historically, the hymn may well have been designed to occupy 64 half-note beats (as suggested in the 1884 van Aalst transcriptions). The number 64 was one of the ancient auspicious numbers, deriving from two systems of eight trigrams superimposed (i.e., \(8 \times 8 = 64\)), the so-called “hexagrams”. However, the presence of four-word phrases, rather than eight-word phrases, makes this interpretation speculative.

Flute accompaniment is in unison with the chorus. The remaining melody instruments perform relatively simple heterophonic variations (seen in Fig. 12), the sheng using chords of open fifths and the zithers using octave pitch reiterations (required for audibility). Bells and stone chimes punctuate melodically, the bianzhong striking each note once on every first (or second) beat, the bianqing striking the same note on the third (or fourth) beat.

Particularly characteristic of this ritual is the employment of percussion interludes. As seen in Fig. 12 and Appendix B, each four-bar phrase in the 1968 ceremony is separated by an interlude of alternating strokes between jiangu and yinggu (or yinggu and bofu). These patterns are actually noted in the 18th-century treatise Lüli Zhengyi, and are shown positioned between each phrase. In the Taipei ritual, they are preceded by a single stroke on the teqing and followed by a stroke on the bozhong. The bozhong bell (pitched in G) serves to maintain the root pitch in anticipation of the next phrase. The end of the hymn is signalled by three claps on the paiban and three strokes on the yu (crouching tiger).

Confucian ritual music must certainly be one of the most homologous systems in the world. Melodies are in the tensionless pentatonic scale system and restricted to a moderate one-octave range. Not only do they move in simple whole-note values, but traditional performance tempo is as slow as 45 quarter-note beats per minute. Cheung Sai-bung (1974: 28) has suggested that an implied, but quite specific, Confucian theory of music was set out in the 2nd-century BC Yueji, in which the terms dan, xie, man and yi must be interpreted as references to proper ritual music style. Following Cheung’s analysis, dan refers to long, broad rhythms; xie means “harmonious” (probably unison) performance; man refers to “slow” tempo; and yi, to “simple” melody. These stylistic qualities are indeed characteristic of the ritual hymns, and they are commonly believed to serve as audible demonstrations of sincerity, dedication and respect. As mandated in the Yueji, “great music must be simple” (dayue biyi), an ideal unmistakably embodied in the Confucian hymn tradition. But the ancient term yi can be read two ways: yi as “simple” (as is most appropriate within this context) and yi as “change” (as in the classic Yi Jing, ‘Book of Changes’). Could this explain, in part at least, what has happened to the ritual tradition during the last quarter century?

The Shorter Edition
In the years following the 1968 revision, a number of disagreements surfaced over the use of instruments, elements of the traditional heterophonic texture and musical form. Although Chuang Pen-li had made many recommendations on the performance of the music, the Reconstruction Committee did not put all of his suggestions into effect. According to
Chuang’s research, each phrase should have been separated by a percussion interlude. But in the 1975 ceremony, I noted that two phrases were played together as a unit, followed by a completely different percussion interlude. In addition, while Chuang had recommended that the bianzhong bells be struck on beat two (of each four-beat note) and bianqing stone chimes on beat four, in the 1975 ceremony these pitches were instead sounded on beats one and two respectively. I have also seen directions for their being sounded on beats one and three. According to Chuang, these bell and stone chime punctuating patterns have been changed almost annually. Some members of the Committee also suggested the use of Western harmony and counterpoint to make the music sound more attractive, a suggestion Chuang resisted quite strongly. Ultimately, the final preparation of the music was put under the control of a director unsympathetic to traditional practice, and the hymns were actually orchestrated to include both.26

At the 1975 performance, the music was conspicuously under-rehearsed and the ensemble included instrumentalists of unsure musical training. At times, the rhythm was so uncertain that I recall wondering whether it might be wise for the ensemble to stop and start again. Indeed, the ancient classic texts mention that talent without virtue is worthless, but they are silent on the question of virtue without talent. G.E. Moule noted the same lack of
experience among the ritual musicians at the turn of the twentieth century: "The performers appeared to be quite innocent of musical gifts or training . . ." (1901:124). To see this tradition in perspective, of course, it is essential to remember that the principal value of the ritual resides in its symbolic reinforcement of Confucian ideals, for which performance accuracy and demonstration of high technical achievement are considered unworthy goals for the educated person. 

With renewed cultural awareness and increased government resources during the 1980s and 1990s, together with a reassessment of Confucian ideals, performance standards have improved. On my return visit in 1998, I found that the ensemble—now dominated by high school students of the next generation—was considerably better rehearsed. However, some further changes had been made, some quite significant. The flutes, which traditionally consisted of a balance between the five types, were now dominated by the popular and brighter sounding dizi flutes (with eight performers per side). The more ancient chi flutes were absent altogether. I was told that training on the chi was no longer available. With its disappearance, the xun-chi symbolic relationship joins the list of empty signifiers hiding within the shrines of today.

But unquestionably the greatest change of the 1990s has been structural, for hymn tempos have been more than doubled and the percussion interludes entirely eliminated. Each four-minute hymn is now performed in about one minute! Upon inquiry into these changes, I was told that the one and a half hour ritual was thought to be too long to hold the interest of most viewers, and it was trimmed to one hour. Quite obviously, notes of long duration are no longer recognized as representing sincerity and respect. However, the 1998 performance was smooth (if less virtuous), with the musicians performing in unison and traditional heterophony, and the dancers carefully choreographed.

These recent adjustments to the Taipei Confucian music must be seen as part of a survival strategy during a period of rapid political and cultural change. Unlike traditional Chinese chamber music, which has been affected more minimally by political changes, the Confucian ritual music has been subject to one revision after another. With the ascendancy of the Nationalists after 1949, the Taipei Confucian ritual formed a symbolic part of their legitimacy. To many Taiwanese, however, the ritual was seen as a symbol of cultural oppression. When the Taiwanese came to power in the 1990s, the ceremony was continued, though in a shortened form. Today, the annual ritual draws government officials, some literati, student performers and their parents, and a good number of tourists. For most Chinese people in Taiwan, however, the music holds little interest. Every several years, a new director attempts to give it some. Thus, the conflict between ancient and contemporary ideals in the Taipei Confucian ritual is continuously under review, and the ritual music will almost certainly change further in response to such political decisions and tastes.

NOTES

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to Chuang Pen-li for numerous discussions we have had over this extended period. His research was basic to the mid-20th-century revision of the Taipei ceremony. Chuang taught at the Chinese Cultural University. He passed away in 2001.
2 A cynical student once asked if the function of li was not simply to keep the people in line and yue to make them like it.

3 See Shryock 1932 and other listed sources for further examination of the early history of the ritual.

4 *Dasheng Yuepu* (1349), while written in Chinese, is known by way of references in Korean sources only (see Provine 1988: 116 ff.).

5 For reviews of Chinese ritual sources before the Qing dynasty, see Provine 1988: 66–104 and Lam 1987 and 1998.

6 The CHIME Library has a copy of an interesting (if often unclear) tape of a related 1957 ritual performance, in which phrases are also three bars in length. A spoken introduction states that the tape was made “before the Confucian tablet” inside a shrine. While the specific location is not identified on the tape, the accent (in the opinion of Du Yaxiong) appears to be of a Shandong speaker, suggesting that the location must have been Qufu – a reasonable assumption since Yang shows that performance practice at Qufu has followed the Liuyang model since the 1930s (1958: 62).

7 Du Yaxiong suggests that there is strong yin-yang symbolism in this north-south orientation. Since the main Confucian temple is located near the north end of the complex and opens to the south, facing the sun, it occupies the most auspicious yang position within the shrine complex.

8 The Hangzhou shrine floor plan is reprinted in Moule 1901, where a good description can also be found.

9 The Tainan ceremony is documented on a CD assembled in 1987 by Wolfgang Laade (Jecklin-Disco JD 652–2), together with notes on the ritual tradition in general.

10 For an overview of the Taipei Confucian shrine, its history and design, see “A Brief Introduction to the Taipei Confucian Temple” (1974).

11 Van Aalst (1884) and Moule (1901) state that the ceremonies they witnessed during the late 19th-century began before dawn and ended at sunrise.

12 Most unfortunately, the ceremony is also accompanied by the periodic roar of jet engines as planes pass a few hundred metres overhead on their approach to the Taipei municipal airport, essentially drowning out the ritual directions and music for about half a minute per flight.

13 At times during the imperial period, sixty four dancers were mentioned (8 ranks of 8 lines), but during the late 19th century and in present-day practice thirty six dancers are standard (6 ranks of 6 lines). For more on these changing formations, see Yang 1958: 55–56 and Chuang 1998: 1–2.

14 For a more comprehensive overview of the Taipei ritual, see Tung 1998. For a comparison with the Hangzhou ritual observed one hundred years earlier, see the interesting account in Moule 1901.

15 For a closer examination of the construction characteristics and histories of these instruments, see A.C. Moule’s classic study (1908), and the entries in *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* (1984), updated in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed. (2001).

16 Asked why the ancient cosmologically-correct measurement system of 6.6 feet was abandoned, the director offered the very practical explanation that such a large drum could not be fit through the small door leading to the temple. “Six” had been a number of great importance in traditional ideology
(to be demonstrated later in this article). In the 20th century, however, a new pragmatism would lead to many changes of this sort.

17 The yongzhong is pictured in Tung 1998 and in other Taiwan sources. Yong seems to be an onomatopoeic term (like zhong) of not very precise historical meaning, though generally referring to the largest of bells. Scholars believe that the yong bell was derived from the large Shang nao bell.

18 The taogu, one of the most ancient of Chinese drum types, is not mentioned in the Qing dynasty instrument lists I have seen, though Yang Yinliu (1958) cites its usage. I suspect that the Korean influence here has been quite strong.

19 Chuang Pen-li has written very detailed historic accounts of the paixiao (1963), chi (1965) and xun (1973), all with English summaries, though these studies are now in need of updating.

20 For further examination of sheng history and symbolism, see Thrasher 1996: 1–20.

21 Unearthed sets of bianzhong from the Zhou and other very early periods are of irregular numbers (13, 14, 24, 64, etc.), comprised of different-sized bells with concave mouths and leaf-shaped cross sections, suspended obliquely (if with shanks) or vertically (if with loops). The older, obliquely-suspended sets with concave mouths were tuned by varying the size of each bell, while maintaining uniform thickness. The later sets of 16 vertically-suspended bells with flat mouths were tuned by varying the thickness of the bell metal, while maintaining a uniform size — thicker bells producing a higher pitch than thinner bells. These bell types are discussed in greater detail in Thrasher 2000.

22 Stones in the ancient sets are (like the bells) usually of similar thickness but of graded size; in more recent sets, they are of identical size but of graded thickness.

23 For pictorial evidence on the position of the jiangyu (and other instruments) in ancient ritual ensembles, see Liu 1988: 30ff.

24 See Yang 1958: 54–57 for the usage of yinggu in the Liuyang ceremony.

25 G.E. Moule (1901) mentions that, in the Hangzhou ritual, only the zhu was sounded before the hymns were sung, though presumably followed by a stroke on the bozhong bell (which was consistently employed to establish pitch for the singers).

26 I have a copy of the musical notation used in the 1975 performance in which two composed lines of 18th-century counterpoint were divided amongst the flutes.

27 Yang Yinliu found an even stronger comment on low performance standards of ritual music in the 10th-century Tangshu, to the effect that “people who are slow at learning can still perform yueye” (1958: 68).

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Appendix A ‘Yingshen’ notation in *Nanyong Zhi* (1544)

Text appears in large characters (read top to bottom and right to left), followed by pitch signs in three notation systems: lūlū, fixed pitches (at right); gongche, relative pitches (centre); and an yin-yang number system, probably for bianzhong, bianqing and paixiao (left). Positions of percussion interludes not shown.
Appendix B  ‘Yingshen’ in score form

First phrase and percussion interlude as realized and orchestrated by Chuang Pen-li. (terms in Wade-Giles romanization)

Arranged & Analyzed by P.L. Chuang

Then playing the first sentence.

After playing the last sentence and drums, then playing the wooden tiger Xiü.
‘ANGRY OLD MAN’ WANG XILIN’S SYMPHONIC ODYSSEY

‘My path is more difficult than Tan Dun’s’

Yang Hon-Lun
(Department of Music and Fine Arts, Hong Kong Baptist University)

Beijing-based composer Wang Xilin (65) earned national fame in the early 1980s with romantic music he wrote in the 1960s. More recently he has produced works in a surprising ‘avant-garde’ idiom, culminating in his Fourth Symphony (2000). Wang is notorious for his combative spirit and his inclination to ‘speak out’ about cultural and social problems in his native country. In the words of conductor Li Delun, ‘Wang is very talented, but he has a strange temperament.’ Others claim that he ‘talks too much.’ Whatever his reputation, his artistic metamorphosis remains remarkable. Yang Hon-Lun interviewed the composer and took a closer look at his musical achievements – notably Wang’s Fourth Symphony.

In several articles on new Chinese music in the early 1990s, Frank Kouwenhoven expressed surprise at the fact that so very little was heard of Chinese composers of contemporary music resident in the PRC: ‘Do they lack courage? Is there no real talent left?’ he wondered. While some of their colleagues who went to live abroad (in Europe or the USA) quickly became famous, composers of new music inside the People’s Republic hardly seemed to be able to get any of their works performed on native soil, let alone succeed in attracting international attention.1

At that time, Europe and the United States were the most likely places for live performances of Chinese contemporary music. Very little xinchao yinyue – as new music was called in China – could be heard on the Mainland.2 But meanwhile the situation has changed. A growing number of PRC composers have begun to show interest in writing music in a contemporary language, as noted in a recent New York Times article.3 One sure sign of change is a meeting on new music that took place in Tianjin in October 2001. Some eighty PRC composers attended the event, where they shared thoughts on new developments in their field, and listened to recordings of numerous new Chinese compositions.

Interestingly, not only young composers, but also elder-generation artists, people now in their sixties or seventies, have taken up the challenge to participate in the contemporary music scene. Some of them did not show much enthusiasm for writing contemporariesounding works until recently. My purpose is to introduce one such composer, Wang Xilin (b. 1936), paying special attention to his Fourth Symphony (1999).
Wang Xilin earned national fame in the 1980s as a composer of orchestral music. His fiery temperament and strong-minded public statements have hampered his career in the People's Republic. In two instances this even resulted in imprisonment. But Wang continued to compose, and in the past few years some of his new works have begun to find their way to the concert stage. Wang has surprised friend and foe with his latest orchestral pieces which sound daring and experimental. His Fourth Symphony is a high point in his artistic career, a work that definitely merits wider attention. The symphony, which premiered in Taiwan in September 2001 and has not yet been performed outside Asia, earned praise from many prominent devotees of new music, including Australian musicologist Jim Cotter and Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki.

A contemporary artist
Wang Xilin is probably best known for his 1964 piece Yunnan Tone Poem, which has had more than thirty performances by orchestras in China and abroad from the early 1980s onwards. Written in a fairly romantic and tonal idiom, it remains one of his most popular works. In recent years Wang has begun to write pieces in an advanced style, a fact that has hardly been noticed by music scholars. Authors like Kouwenhoven (1990-1992), Mittler (1993 and 1997), and Liu (1998), who write extensively on the new music of China, barely mention Wang in their studies. At the time they carried out their research in China in the late 1980s, Wang was known mainly for his early and romantic works, but
was already transforming his style. From the mid-1980s onwards he experimented with serial techniques, sound masses, tone clusters, and other contemporary devices.

In 1991, inspired by a series of concerts devoted to compositions by Tan Dun, Wang Xilin organized a concert of his own music. The programme included his freshly created and forward-looking Symphony No. 3 and other new compositions. In this concert, Wang Xilin proclaimed himself a contemporary artist, not only stylistically but also in terms of his inspirational sources and his message to the public. Generally speaking, Wang’s musical programmes and personal statements reveal his concern with the suffering and hardships of the Chinese people in the 20th century. As a composer he attempts to give a musical voice to their life-long struggle against injustice and social oppression.

My main purpose here is to draw attention to this overlooked PRC composer and his music. I aim at highlighting the elder artist’s encounter with contemporary music, his gradual appropriation of new idioms and techniques, as well as his personal struggle as an artist to survive in a country faced with decades of political turmoil and economic hardships. All information presented below about Wang Xilin, unless specified otherwise, is based on my interviews and correspondence with the composer (from June 2001 onwards). All translations (from Chinese to English) are my own. Chinese names in this article are written last name first, following standard practice in China.

**A strange temperament**

Wang Xilin was born in 1936 in Kaifeng, a city in Henan Province. He received part of his early musical training at a missionary school, where (amongst other things) he learned to read Western music notation and play the harmonium. Few composers of his generation were brought up in such a Western-influenced musical environment, as Western music was not yet widespread in China in those days.4

Wang’s father was a middle-rank Nationalist military officer, who passed away when Wang Xilin was only 12. To relieve his mother’s burden, Wang joined a performing troupe of the People’s Liberation Army which happened to pass through his town. His chance encounters with Western music continued, and they were to have a significant impact on his further career. In the army he taught himself various Chinese and Western instruments as well as some fundamentals of music theory. His skills proved useful to the performing troupe, and he was frequently called upon to make compositional arrangements (of existing Chinese pieces) for a small wind ensemble.

In 1955 his musical talents earned him a studentship at the Military Band Music Conductors’ School under the Central Military Commission in Beijing, and two years
later he was allowed to attend the Teachers Reserve School in Shanghai. In 1957, he was admitted to the composition department of the Shanghai Conservatory, from which he graduated five years later with flying colours.

Wang was soon offered a position as resident composer at the Central Broadcasting Symphony Orchestra (CBSO), and his future looked bright, but his CBSO job and his brilliant professional career suddenly came to nothing when, in 1964, he took a fatal step: he made a two-hour public speech in which he attacked Mao Zedong's ultra-leftist cultural policies as formulated in *Two Instructions Concerning Literature and Art* (Mao 1967). It was all done in good faith: Wang considered it wrong for the Communist Party to ban Western music, especially 20th century music, of which he was very fond. But this demonstration of independent thinking was not appreciated by the authorities. He was arrested, locked up, and he had to face half a year of interrogation, investigation, and 're-education' through extensive supervised 'self-criticism'.

Following his release, Wang Xilin was expelled from the Communist Youth League and exiled to Shanxi, one of China's most backward and poorest regions, for a period of nearly fourteen years.

In Shanxi Wang Xilin spent his first seven years working as a coolie at the Yanbei Art Troupe of Datong City. During the peak violence of the Cultural Revolution he was once again imprisoned and subjected to humiliating interrogations. This time he was badly beaten up: he broke a tooth and lost hearing in one of his ears, and at one point he was close to losing his sanity. Not until December 1977, at the end of the Cultural Revolution, was Wang Xilin allowed to return to Beijing, thanks to intercession by the well-known conductor Li Delun. Li apparently spoke of him in apologetic terms, and continued to do so in later years: 'Wang is very talented, he just happens to have a strange temperament' (Li Delun in *Zhongguo Qingnian Bao*, 13 January 1994).

**Writing on behalf of the people**

When he returned to Beijing in 1977, Wang was 40 years old. His youth had passed, some of his best years had been wasted in hard manual work and imprisonment. He was certainly not alone in this. Numerous Chinese intellectuals of his generation and many people younger than him had gone through similar ordeals. Everyone had their own story to tell when it came to the Cultural Revolution. But if many came out of this period with broken spirits or with an inclination to keep silent about the past, this was not so with Wang Xilin. He retained his ebullient spirit and impulsive nature, and was still capable of 'speaking out' about politics if the occasion offered itself.

At a time when many people in the PRC were accustomed to speak in 'ortholalia' (to
make public statements only in strict adherence to linguistic and ideological conventions established by the Party, see Mittler, 1997:139-140), Wang Xilin, whether unchanged by his afflictions during the Cultural Revolution, or perhaps strengthened by them, continued to speak his mind in public. In 1981 he was jailed for eight days after slapping an official who had tried to exclude Wang’s *Yunnan Tone Poem* from a composition contest. Wang impressed friend and foe as an ’angry old man’, still able to flex his muscles, in spite of all that had happened to him. One observer described him as ‘a mixture of avalanche and lava’ (Han, 2000). Others feared that Wang would come to harm because he ‘talked too much’. Even in the course of the 1980s, after the ‘open door policy’ had been effectuated, the political climate in China remained sensitive, and Wang’s friends were worried because he could so easily get ‘out of control’. Said one of them: ‘Whenever he is around, who knows what he will say?’

For Wang himself it was a matter of artistic integrity: ‘I believe that a responsible composer with a sense of mission does not only dwell on compositional techniques. He will aspire to something more profound in his works, his artistic pursuits must originate in his earnest concerns for the collective human fate’ (Wang Xilin, 1996:14). Ironically, with statements like these he paid tribute to Communist views of the artist’s role in society, but Wang clearly had his own ideas about the nature of an artist’s social concerns: in 1988 he published two articles criticizing the damage caused by Mao’s cultural policies, and ten years later, in 1999, he added another two articles in which he specifically addressed artistic and bureaucratic problems on China’s symphonic and choral music scene (Wang Xilin, 1988a/b, 1996, 1999a/b).

Some of his views were well taken, some were felt to be overblown, self-serving or simply unfounded, but whatever the responses, it was clear from his writings that he continued to see composing as a means of edifying his fellow Chinese, and of alleviating their sufferings. The task was so important to him that it sometimes overruled other considerations: when offered a commission to write a celebratory work for Hong Kong’s reunion with the PRC, he declined, because he was not in a celebratory mood. His music focused— and still focuses— primarily on the ‘tragic’ aspects of China’s history.

A significant portion of his pieces, particularly those composed after the mid-1980s, are inspired by folk or literary myths and epics which highlight the sufferings experienced by Chinese people during dramatic moments in their historical past. His *Legend of the Sea* (five symphonic frescoes for choir and orchestra, Op. 35, 1998), based on a Fujian folk legend, is a case in point. One of its movements, a war episode, was inspired by the Sino-French war of 1868, in which China was defeated in the first half hour. According to Wang the music does not only evoke this particular war but makes reference to all the wars that Chinese people have had to fight or endure in the past one hundred years.

Another work, *Zhao hun* (‘Calling for the Soul’) – *Elegy for Soprano and Orchestra* (Op. 23, 1986), with words taken from the patriotic poet Qu Yuan’s *Jiu Ge* (‘Nine Songs’), commemorates (in the words of musicologist Wang Anguo) ‘the endless suffering and sad moaning that rises from the depths of China’s history’ (Wang Anguo, 1991: 40). Wang Xilin’s Symphony No. 3 (Op. 26, 1990) is intended as an ‘incisive criticism of both history and reality’ (Wang Anguo, 1991: 40), and the ‘Song of the Man in Black’ for voice and chamber ensemble, the first of two pieces based on Lu Xun’s novel *Zhu
Jian (Casting a Sword) (Op. 28, 1992), features the singer/protagonist crying out against the violence of the Japanese invasion, and sympathizing with the oppressed. Yet another vocal work, ‘Guoshang – Hymns on Spirits of State Warriors Slain in War’, for choir and orchestra (Op. 34, 1997), again based on poetry by Qu Yuan, addresses similar sentiments as ‘Calling for the Soul’. Clearly, in all these pieces the composer is striking sympathetic chords with Chinese history, and creating monuments for victims of war and disaster.

Wang’s stylistic development: from serialism to minimalism and beyond

Wang received most of his musical training in academic institutions. At the Shanghai Conservatory he learned the musical language and the compositional techniques fashionable in the PRC in the late 1950s and early 1960s – basically a tonal romantic idiom sharing many features with the music that was written in the same period in the USSR. The major focus was on choral and orchestral music, on brazen heroism and loud triumphant sounds. In the case of China, the music was (not surprisingly) infused with Chinese folk melodic elements and rhythms.

Western musical theory, compositional techniques, and instrumental playing were introduced on Chinese soil from the 1930s onwards, with a major emphasis on 19th century romantic music and Viennese classicism. Twentieth-century Western styles – whether impressionistic, expressionistic, serialist, or experimental in nature – hardly made an impact in China. They practically disappeared during Communist rule, when such styles were viewed as decadent expressions of the capitalist mind, hence as ‘forbidden territory’. Western modern music and ‘avant-garde’ remained terra incognita for many years. Wang Xilin and his contemporaries were practically unaware of new compositional techniques and musical styles that flourished in the outside world. Only when the country’s ‘open door policy’ started in the early 1980s were Wang and his colleagues suddenly confronted with compositions by Schoenberg, Stravinsky and others. Wang was over 40 years old when he first heard these composers.

He was shocked by the ways Schoenberg, Berg and their contemporaries handled tonality and rhythm. But in 1988 he was in for yet another shock, when he listened for the first time to Sang Toag’s 1947 piano piece Zai na yaoyuan de defang (‘From Far Away’). The advanced language of Sang’s music not only stunned Wang but also reminded him – again – of the great damage caused by China’s cultural policies of the recent past. It broke his heart to realize that an elder Chinese composer like Sang had tried to keep pace with international developments, but had been blocked in his efforts by the political situation. ‘It’s almost unbelievable,’ said Wang, ‘many of the new techniques found in Chinese compositions of the 1980s were already evident in the work of one Chinese student composer forty years ago! We must really ask ourselves: if we had continued along the same path since then, what would Chinese music have been like today?’ (Wang, 1988a: 9).

Whether or not inspired by Sang Tong’s example, Wang Xilin’s own compositional style underwent a drastic metamorphosis from 1977 onwards. In his early works, such as the Yunnan Tone Poem and his First Symphony (1962), he had been using a tonal romantic language like most of his Chinese colleagues at that time. During the final years of his exile, when he was allowed to compose again, he could do so only according to strict party directives: from 1972 to 1977 he wrote a series of works modelled on the notorious
yangbanxi (‘model operas’) which were promoted by Mao Zedong’s wife Jiang Qing at that time. While Wang Xilin may have had private reservations about the purport of Jiang Qing’s model works, the task of emulating their style still provided him with important opportunities. For example, it gave him a chance to explore the possibilities of westernizing and rephrasing, in a symphonic idiom, traditional Chinese music of the Shanxi region.

After his return to Beijing in 1977, Wang began to instruct himself in the contemporary compositional idioms of the West. He digested as thoroughly as he could the musical language of Schoenberg, Bartók, and Stravinsky. In 1982, in ‘Broken Tablet’, the fourth movement of his orchestral suite ‘Impressions of Mount Taihang’ (Op. 19), he combined a serial theme with the melody of a Shanxi folk ballad. In 1985 he experimented with the expressive potential of serial poems ‘Motion’ and ‘Chant’ (Op. 22), of which the second was dedicated to Shostakovich. In ‘Motion’, he explored two contrasting themes, one a powerful and majestic tune, the other a humorous and playful ditty. Both tunes were based on the same tone row.

In 1988, in ‘For Piano and 23 String Instruments’ (Op. 25) he infused a serial theme with rhythmic features of southern Chinese wind and percussion band music. In the late 1980s, he came to know Penderecki’s works, at a time when Penderecki’s music was still very little known in China. He examined the scores of Penderecki’s Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshina and St. Luke Passion and published an in-depth analysis of the Threnody in a Chinese music journal in 1990 – the first article on Penderecki to appear in the People’s Republic (Wang Xilin, 1990).

In 1988, when Wang was offered a chance to attend the fourth International Contemporary Music Festival in Leningrad, he came across John Adams’ orchestral work Harmonielehre, which turned out to be yet another decisive influence: Wang now began to incorporate minimalist principles in some of his works, most clearly in ‘Legend of the Sea’ (Op. 35).

A new composer had emerged from all these various influences, but one who remained faithful to the past in his tendency to convey a moral message in his musical works, and in his strong predilection for one particular medium: the symphony orchestra.

Wang’s first three symphonies
Of all possible musical genres, Wang is especially fond of the symphony. He views it as a major genre with a long tradition that still holds a viable place on today’s musical scene. As he stated in one of his conversations with me, ‘the autonomous nature of the symphony allows it to embrace a wide variety of content matter, historical and philosophical’.

His graduation work at the Shanghai Conservatory in 1962 was a symphonic movement, which eventually grew into a full symphony. He wrote his Second Symphony in 1979, shortly after his exile. While Wang considered the first two symphonies transitory works, he was proud of his third effort in the genre, dating from 1990. The Third Symphony, with its preference for sound masses, tone clusters, and minimalism, clearly reflected a stylistic transformation.

Its premiere, during a concert entirely devoted to Wang’s music, in March 1991 in Beijing, caused quite a stir. With its 62-minute length, its dissonant sonorities, and its powerful social message, the Third Symphony was received as a unique contribution to the Chinese
symphonic repertoire, a work unprecedented in Chinese music history (Wang Anguo, 1991). It also became one of the few symphonies for which a printed score was published in China (by the Shanghai Music Publishing House, in 2000).

Wang had yet another string to his bow. The rapid approach of the new century prompted him again to reflect on the past, his own as well as that of his fellow humans. He pondered the consequences of Communism: a political creed of which he had once been an ardent admirer, but that was long ago, since Wang was now completely disillusioned by his painful experiences during the Cultural Revolution, and could not very well fail to see the crumbling of the communist countries in Eastern Europe. In 1999, as a musical echo of these thoughts, he wrote his ‘millenium work’, the Fourth Symphony. Stylistically the music was another step ahead for the composer, but the man who had created it clearly worried the cultural officials in Beijing: they cancelled the planned PRC premiere of the piece on short notice. Nine months later the work received its world premiere, not in the PRC, but in Taiwan.

**Wang on his Fourth Symphony**

Here is the account that Wang himself provides of the genesis of this new work:

‘Ever since the premiere of my Third Symphony I had been asking myself what my next piece would be like. In September 1997, the director of the Shanghai Conservatory invited me to write a ten-minute piece for a symphonic concert in Shanghai. I set to work, and the music that was later to become the Adagio section of the Fourth Symphony emerged. The concert in Shanghai did not materialize, but the idea of completing another symphony now took shape. In May 1998, the Beijing Broadcasting Company urged me to write a celebratory work for the 50th anniversary of the PRC. However, I hated the idea of celebratory music and was unwilling to give up my plan for a symphony. In January 1999, the conductor of the Taiwan National Symphony invited me to write a 16-minute piece. At that time, many people were beginning to realize that a new era was quite near. But unlike many optimists, who greeted the transition to another millennium with joy and confidence, my own past experiences, my reflections on the past sixty years of Chinese history, and the downfall of the eastern bloc countries prompted me to look at this moment in a different manner. I felt a need to compose something in accordance with my own mood and conscience.’

‘I have always felt concern about China’s future. Though it’s now twenty years ago that the Cultural Revolution took place, it never received quite the attention and consideration in China that it deserved, that I felt would be necessary. Yes, there were occasional attempts at reflection, in writing or otherwise, but such efforts were usually censored, or quickly rejected or covered up. I think that this manipulation of people’s memories, this forced amnesia is dangerous. Hence the subject of my symphony. I wanted to express my own concerns for the future of China, looking back at our past. The suffering and sorrows in my own life were very real. I wanted to incorporate them in my music.’

**Speeches and typhoons**

The first draft of the new symphony was completed on the 27th of April 2000. After three substantial revisions, the work was ready for its premiere in Taipei in September 2001.
The concert, by the Taiwan National Symphony conducted by Chen Chengxiong, took place shortly after a severe typhoon had hit Taiwan, and was not well attended. Two of the scheduled rehearsals had been cancelled, and the actual premiere received little press coverage, if any. (I was unable to trace reviews of the work at the time of writing this article.)

There were still further obstacles ahead, first and foremost Wang’s own daredevilry in the winter of 2000 – when he made public statements that caught the attention of watchful officials.

Originally the symphony was scheduled for a concert in Beijing, on the 8th of December 2000. It was to be its world premiere, alongside with first performances of Wang’s Violin Concerto (1995, Op. 21) and his choral/orchestral work Guoshang (1997, Op. 34). A few days before the concert, officials of the Beijing Culture Bureau told the composer that the event had to be cancelled: Wang had made objectionable public statements, first during a speech to orchestral players, on the 24th of November, and later again, during a public lecture on the 3rd of December. What seemed to trouble the officials in particular was Wang’s claim that ‘the most important event that happened in the 20th century was neither the two world wars nor the great progress of science, but mankind’s ultimate rejection and effective dismantling of communism’. Such a proclamation was likely to be regarded as a violation of Chinese law. The officials told Wang that by publicly saying this he exerted a bad influence upon society. No further ‘punishment’ followed, but Wang was robbed of a Mainland premiere in Beijing of his latest compositions, including a symphony he himself reckoned among his finest achievements. It made him very sad. It is unlikely that the actual ‘programme’ of the symphony – an emphatic evocation of past tragedies (see below) – contributed to the authorities’ decision, because no such programme had been made public at the time of the cancellation. Meanwhile, the symphony received its PRC premiere in Shanghai (on the 8th of May 2004). Recorded versions of the Shanghai premiere and the Taiwanese performance have circulated among Wang’s friends, and have caught the attention of critical admirers at home and abroad. In anticipation of possible performances abroad, I propose to examine the work in some detail.

‘Lost, helpless and sad’ – a brief discussion of the Fourth Symphony
Artistically, the Fourth Symphony is a firm step forward in the composer’s development. The work is more varied in its musical ideas, more inventive in terms of its sonorities than its predecessor, and expresses an emotional and philosophical content akin to that of the Third Symphony. It is a single-movement work divided into four sections, which basically retains the dramatic contrast of a four-movement symphony. In many ways the music shares the format of the Third Symphony, based on the standard symphonic archetype.

In a written preface to the score, Wang Xilin provided a programme for this symphony even though he begins by saying that ‘this is a huge non-programmatic symphony’. The idea, presumably, is that there is no detailed narrative woven into the musical fabric, but only a general series of moods expressed in sounds. The music, in the composer’s words, mirrors his thoughts on human history, more particularly his recollections of the past one hundred years – in his view the most turbulent and grim period in the history of mankind.
The first section in the music is intended as an overall evocation of ‘human history’, illustrating that it is ‘long, chaotic, lonely, lost, helpless, sad, and confused, analogous to the composer’s life’. Section two depicts ‘disaster, crime, destruction, massacre, deceit, persecution, betrayal, malice... [and] the numerous individual lives struggling in agony to survive and extricate themselves from the deadly trap in which they are caught’. Section three is about ‘death, mourning, and funerals’, and the final section about possible hope gained from ‘mankind’s contemplations amidst ruins, ashes, destruction, and suffering...’

The changing moods in the music follow this programme. The first section is a five-part fugue for strings based on a 25-measure fugal subject in the shang mode. The theme works like a softly murmuring stream, of which the gently rippling waves gradually gain force as the music develops. According to the composer, the theme is a symphonic rendition of the melodic style of Shanxi local opera, of which he knows many tunes by heart (Ex. 1). In the second section, Wang applies sound masses to depict human cruelty. He told me he had intended the first part (mm. 127-354) as a general depiction of bestiality, and the second (355-499) as an evocation of what had happened to him in particular.

As he related to me in personal correspondence, he views the sound masses in his music as entailing distinct colours and emotions. For instance, the passages from mm. 127 to 168 and from mm. 807 to 814 represent ‘cruelty’, mm. 199-209, 240-252, and 253-264 evoke ‘chaos’ and ‘shock’, mm. 265-276 and 301-312 ‘ridicule’, mm. 729-736 and 753-766 ‘brightness’ (i.e. hope), and mm. 767-774 ‘powerful calls’. In his letters, Wang Xilin was evidently more ready to offer detailed descriptions, in spite of his statement in the score. Similarly, at m. 421, the fugal subject reappears, ‘expressing the ultimate despair of a soul beaten by evil’ (Ex. 2). Next the theme grows into a string chorale, at m. 475, with the whole orchestra joining in a passage reminiscent of the reciting tone of traditional narrative chanting (Ex. 3). The third section, representing death, mourning, and funeral

Example 1 Wang Xilin, Symphony No. 4, fugal subject (mm. 1-25)
Example 2  Wang Xilin. Symphony No. 4 (mm. 421–426)
Example 3  Wang Xilin, Symphony No. 4 (mm. 475–480)
Example 4  Wang Xilin, Symphony No. 4 (mm. 537–544)

Example 5  Wang Xilin, Symphony No. 4 (mm. 613–617)
rites, has the violins playing downward glissandi in close succession, an evocation of the lamenting and wailing heard at traditional Chinese funerals. The wailing assumes the shape of a sudden canon, with successive entries at eighth-note intervals from m. 537 onwards (Ex. 4). The violins further elaborate the theme (mm. 590–610), after which the section closes with a chorale-like setting, with all the strings playing open notes. The interlocking chords in the choral passage are tritones, and here, once again, the music appears to suggest a funeral chant (Ex. 5). In the final section the fugal subject returns, not as a purely tonal theme, but now mixed with sound blocks that pave the way for a climactic ending. The resulting mood, however, is one of hope.

In the Fourth Symphony and in other recent works, Wang Xilin displays a clear affinity with Polish composers like Penderecki, Lutoslawski and Gorecki, to which he readily acknowledges his indebtedness. He shares with them, as a powerful means of expression, a predilection for the manipulation of sound masses, but Wang’s way of realizing such sound clusters is entirely personal. He skilfully alternates them with tonal passages, and only uses them as an expressive means, not as an aim in their own right. His main objective in applying sound masses is to convey a sense of deep, torturous tragedy. He frequently projects tonal and atonal melodies on top of the sound clusters, rendering them into an effective backdrop, which makes his themes and motifs stand out in particularly poignant and striking ways. And rather than relying on any vague mass of sound or ‘noise’ to serve his purpose, Wang tends to use well-defined sound blocks, based on minutely and subtly adjusted renditions of particular figurations. Only occasionally do these carefully designed patterns disintegrate into less defined sound masses. Some of them are in fact built on traditional Chinese narrative melodies which have their own unique sonorities. Another distinctive element in Wang’s approach to sound masses is his heavy reliance on percussion instruments. He makes extensive use of the complex rhythmic patterns of Chinese luogu music and, in this way, adds rhythmic interest to an orchestral technique that is otherwise not very distinguished in terms of rhythmic control. Finally, Wang utilizes an impressive array of different techniques to create interesting sonorities. These include: cascade effects (various instruments playing a similar figuration entering at different time intervals, usually one or two beats apart); vertical juxtapositions (different layers of sound with distinct characteristics heard in combination); single figuration in sound masses (in which an entire cluster of sounds is based on a single figuration, shared by many instruments, but resulting in subtle timbral contrasts due to each instrument’s distinctive rendition of the figuration); antiphony (contrasting masses of sounds alternating in close succession) and dove-tailing (different sound blocks interlocking). While none of these techniques may be unique for Wang Xilin, their combined use and distinctive handling very much determine the expressive power of the music.

Chinese sounds
Like other composers of non-European descent who adopt a Western musical language, Wang was confronted with the question how his ethnic and cultural identity could be retained in a ‘borrowed’ language. His position on this matter differs in several ways from that of his contemporaries in the PRC. For one thing, Wang displays a superb command of orchestral writing in romantic and modern Western style, which is more than can be said of
some other composers of his generation. Already in his early works, such as the *Yunnan Tone Poem* and the First Symphony, Wang demonstrated remarkable skills of instrumentation, and proficiency and originality in his motivic treatments and developmental writing. He showed a notable interest in ‘abstract’ music at a time when many of his contemporaries were still keen to produce strongly ‘programmatic’ works. Wang’s First Symphony was the first ‘non-programmatic’ symphony written by any Chinese composer. Unlike most of his colleagues, he also showed no particular inclination towards ‘musical nationalism’ and rarely made use of existing Chinese folk tunes in his works. It was only following his visit to the USA in 1996 – as he confided to me – that he began to show an interest in writing music with a more distinctive ‘Chinese’ sound: after coming into contact with a lot of Western contemporary music, he began to look more consciously for a ‘Chinese identity’ in his music.

For Wang Xilin, musical nationalism remains a narrow-minded affair. In his view, much of the ‘Chineseness’ in his own works initially derived from the (Chinese) topics which spurred his creativity, for example the literary works on which he based some of his pieces. But even where literary texts serve as a ‘trigger’, the primary sources of his musical inspiration remain, first and foremost, his personal experience, his memories of suffering, injustice, and cruelty in China, and his concern for the fate and the future of his country, as Wang is keen to point out.

Barbara Mittler (1996: 6) has argued that the use of elements from Chinese philosophy, history or literature as an inspiration or a structural guide for a composition – what she calls the ‘mythologization approach to invoke Chineseness in music’ – is not necessarily the most effective way to convince an audience that they are hearing a Chinese piece. Outwardly Wang’s music does not always sound very ‘Chinese’ – especially if audible references to traditional Chinese music are absent. After Wang returned to China from his visit to the West, this aspect started to gain more prominence in his works; he began to see still more clearly his role as a ‘PRC composer’.

In the Fourth Symphony, Chinese traditional elements are fairly pronounced. The fugal subject in the pentatonic *shang* mode is obviously a Chinese-flavoured theme. It does not directly quote any particular Chinese folk or operatic tunes, but contains many characteristics of traditional narrative melodies which linger vividly in the composer’s mind. In fact, a number of melodic themes in the symphony are written in the *sanban* (free style of singing) of Chinese operatic music. Particularly noticeable are the themes in the third section, of which some are transformed into sound clusters. Another Chinese element, already pointed out, is the use of rhythmic patterns of *luogu* music, applied to percussion as well as to other instruments in the orchestra, on various structural levels. In the very final part of the symphony, the percussive accompaniment to the (restated) fugal subject gradually slows down, the basic rhythmic unit expanding from sextuplet to quintuplet, from sixteenth to triplet, from eighth to quarter note and then, finally, to half note, a procedure reverse to the gradual rhythmic *accelerando* that can be heard so often in Chinese traditional percussion music. In the opening part of the second section (mm. 127–174) the use of another Chinese *luogu* formula is evident. The basic units of a 16-bar sequence alternate between full orchestra and percussion: as the music proceeds, the division shifts from $8 + 8$ to $9 + 7$, then to $10 + 6$. 
Like many of his fellow composers who live and work in Mainland China, Wang believes that his music is 'more genuine' than that of his Chinese colleagues in Hong Kong or in other parts of the world (outside the PRC). 'Hong Kong composers have been brought up in a colonial environment, so their music cannot be viewed as genuine Chinese music,' he claims. Similarly, Chinese composers who migrate to foreign countries and stay away from Chinese soil for long periods, are – in Wang's view – in danger of losing 'genuine Chinese character' in their music. Perhaps Wang's attitude illustrates an identity building process – proposed as a theory by Stuart Hall in 1996 – in which the subject needs to distinguish himself from others: Wang Xilin primarily defines his own position as distinct from that of his fellow Chinese composers in Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas.

Here, for example, is how Wang sees himself as different from Tan Dun: 'Firstly, my path is much more difficult than Tan Dun’s. [Stylistically] I went through a transformation from the traditional to the modern. Secondly, I had to disengage myself from the iron grip of Mao’s ideology, which entailed a self-conscious struggle. Thirdly, because of all my experiences, I could not very well avoid developing a much more critical stance towards the past than Tan Dun and other composers of his generation. This is evident in my music, which is different in kind from Tan Dun, who based his works largely on the absorption of Western techniques. A lot of literary works were written about the Cultural Revolution, but very few musical works reflect on that period. Tan Dun and his colleagues did not experience the horrible events which the elder generation went through. I am different. To reflect on this past is my task – a much harder one [than that of the younger generation]. I am not a mainstream Mainland composer. I do not reside in a foreign country, and I am hardly known to people abroad. You see, I am not exaggerating my difficulties.'

**Conclusion**

Listening to Wang Xilin's comparison of himself with Tan Dun, one cannot escape the bitterness of tone: his past sufferings largely determine his outlook on fellow composers, as well as his artistic pursuits and his whole position in Chinese culture. During the interviews I had with him he broke into tears a number of times when recounting past experiences, and got agitated whenever he suspected the slightest lack of comprehension on my part. As a much younger person it was hard for me to respond adequately to every aspect of his experiences. There is no denying that the fame and prestige as well as the financial success which some younger composers enjoy cause him some pain – they make him even more keenly aware of the many years that were lost, the opportunities missed, and the continuing opposition against – or perceived lack of recognition for – his artistic endeavours.

As an artist, Wang Xilin is caught in a number of ideological contradictions. If his musical language can now be called contemporary, his compositional-aesthetic point of departure remains at heart romantic: Wang views 'suffering' as the key attribute of an artist, pain and sorrow as the inevitable sources of great music. He defends the symphonic tradition as 'high art' and claims to be an advocate of music for music's sake, which does not stop him from projecting historical missions onto his works, or regarding his oeuvre as a pathway to the edification and purification of Chinese listeners. He calls his Fourth Symphony a 'non-programmatic' symphony – in protest of a longstanding Chinese tradition of art works based on political propaganda – but supplies the work with a detailed edifying programme.
Because of his ‘rebellious’ nature and political viewpoints Wang Xilin could not acquire the status of a Party-sanctioned composer in China. At present he occupies no official or institutional post of any kind in his native country. In spite of the problems, Wang has not lost his sense of humour, and even jokingly refers to himself as ‘a people’s composer’ – a title which Mao Zedong once granted Xian Xinghai (1905–1945) in recognition of that composer’s ‘revolutionary’ works.

Wang Xilin’s combative spirit and his inclination to ‘speak out’ have hampered his career, but he does receive attention in some musical journals, he has been allowed to travel abroad, and a number of his musical works are now well-known on the Mainland and in Hong Kong. Some of his more recent pieces have been played at least once – more often a number of times – and were well-received, especially outside the PRC.\(^2\)

The ironies of fate have decreed that Wang is still best known for his *Yunnan Tone Poem*, a work that he wrote almost thirty years ago about Yunnan, a region in southwest China which he never visited. By contrast, his more recent pieces, like the Fourth Symphony and the choral work *Guoshang*, which express so many of his central views and beliefs, remain unknown to audiences in Beijing.\(^2\) This is regrettable, because these works, and particularly the Fourth Symphony, are vintage Wang Xilin, and in this music he addresses, first and foremost, his fellow countrymen. The symphony is a monument to the perseverance of the human spirit, and a moving tale of how an elderly Chinese composer, after facing nearly insurmountable problems, successfully reinvented himself. Meanwhile, Wang Xilin has finished his Symphony No.5 (2001), and he contemplates further works in the genre.

**NOTES**


2. In the PRC, the term *xinchao yinyue* (‘new wave music’ or ‘fashionable music’) is used to denote compositions in a contemporary, Western-inspired style (i.e. not based on functional harmony or on romantic orchestral concepts). The term was first used by Wang Anguo (1986) to set this music apart from the pieces in romantic style that still dominated the Chinese music scene in the early 1980s. ‘New wave’ was quickly adopted by others as a useful term, perhaps also because it implied something furtive and borrowed: ‘modern’ composition was viewed by many as a fashionable endeavour at the time, like so many other Western aspects of modern life introduced to the PRC in the same period: perhaps the ‘new wave’ would recede after a while and disappear again. In my article I use the terms ‘contemporary music’ and ‘new music’ interchangeably. I have tried to avoid ‘avant-garde’, a term which has served its time (‘avant-garde’ now being associated mainly with the experimental music written by artists like Boulez and Stockhausen in the 1960s). I also refrain from using the alternative ‘postmodern’, because of its more restricted philosophical connotations which could lead to confusion.


4. Most of Wang’s colleagues came to know Western music at a much later age, when they received systematic, professional musical training at one of China’s few conservatories. See Xiang (1994), Wang Anguo (1989, 1990), Wang Yuhe (1991), and Liang (1993, 1994).
5 The document incorporated two speeches by Mao Zedong, one dated 12 December 1963, the other dated 27 June 1964, in which he accused many of his fellow communists of violating party policies, not practising socialist art but paying tribute instead to feudal and capitalist art. Mao’s speeches were a reaction to the relaxed ideological atmosphere that reigned in the years between 1958 and 1962. For PRC cultural policies in Mao’s time see Chang (1980, Chapter 1), Mackerras (1981), Perris (1983), Hamm (1991) and Holm (1991).


7 The First Symphonic Compositions Competition, organized by the Cultural Bureau in Beijing. Notwithstanding Wang’s faux pas, the work was allowed to enter the competition, and was eventually awarded the First Prize.

8 Qu Yuan (339 BC – 278 BC) jumped into a river at the age of 62 after learning that his country had been taken over by the enemy. His great poetic works such as Nine Songs and Li Sao have inspired several contemporary Chinese composers, including Tan Dun.

9 For Qu Yuan’s poems in English translation, see Yang Yi and Gladys Yang (1955).

10 For a brief introduction to Sang Tong’s life, see Kouwenhoven (1990: 84-85). Like Wang, Kouwenhoven thinks highly of Sang’s talent: ‘Technically, he surpassed all his contemporaries. Sang was more than an average talent and he might have become the first Chinese composer of international stature, if history had allowed him.’

11 For detailed discussions on model opera, see Lu (1997) and Chapter 6 of Liu (1998).

12 For more information about the concert, see Bian (1991).

13 The symphony was played on the 11th and 12th of September 2001, in Taipei and Taizhong respectively.

14 Guoshang, though commissioned by the Beijing Culture Bureau in 1995, and the Violin Concerto are both currently still awaiting their PRC premieres.

15 Mm. 1-126, mm. 127-499, mm. 500-617, and mm. 618-814 in the score.

16 Shang mode: a pentatonic scale consisting of a whole tone, a minor third, a whole tone, a minor third and a whole tone. The shang mode is one of five basic modal patterns which govern pentatonic music in China. For discussions of Chinese tonality, see Li (1959), Sang (1988), Renmin Yinyue Chubanshe Bianjibu (1996), and Fan (2000).

17 Theatrical and narrative genres of the Shanxi region – where Wang spent 14 years of his life – include qinqiang, puju and shangdang bangzi. During the Cultural Revolution these traditional theatre forms were discouraged by the Communist Party, and ultimately forbidden, but the singing styles survived in revolutionary works adapted from these local forms. For more information on Chinese local theatre, see for example Jiang (1999).

18 Numerous standard rhythmic patterns are applied in luogu, Chinese traditional percussion music. In one such pattern, the total number of beats (units) always remains 8, while the distribution of the
beats over the different instruments shifts systemically with each repetition: 7+1 to 6+2, 5+3, and 4+4, etc. Many other patterns are possible. For an in-depth discussion of \textit{huogu} music, see Yang Yinliu (1980).

19 By ‘mainstream composer’ Wang presumably means composers sanctioned by the Communist Party or formally affiliated to institutions, people whose works are more readily promoted in the PRC than his own.

20 See also Wang Xilin’s Chronological List of Compositions at the end of this article. Other performances of his music included his Quartet Op.42 and his ‘For piano and 23 string instruments’ Op.25, which featured in a Festival in May 2005 in San Francisco.

21 Meanwhile, Symphony No.4 did receive its PRC premiere: 8 May 2004 it was played in Shanghai, 9 April 2005 in Beijing. The score was published by Shanghai Yinyuexueyuan Chubanshe in 2005.

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A CHRONOLOGICAL LIST OF WANG XILIN’S COMPOSITIONS

1961 String Quartet No.1 op.1
1962 Symphony No.1 op.2
1963 *Yunnan Tone Poem*, symphonic suite op.3
score published by Renmin Yinyue chubanshe (1983), recording released by the Hong Kong Hugo Gramophone Company (1996)

1964 *Zang Stockade*, cantata op.4
1972 *Planting trees*, little suite for wind orchestra op.5

1973 *Song of Red Tassels*, opera, op.6
*Sha Jia Bang*, Shangdang Bangzi Symphony op.7

1977 *Eighth of January*, symphonic chorus op.8

*Red Lantern Shines*, Shangdang Bangzi Xiqu (Chinese traditional opera) op.9
Falling of the Giant Star in Memory of Chairman Mao, symphonic chorus op.10

1978  *Saber flies*, dance music for orchestra op.11

1979  Symphony No. 2 op.12

Five Art Songs op.13

*Musical Images of Mr. Taihang*, suite for chamber orch. (woodwind, str.) op.14
recording released by Hong Kong Gramophone Company (1984),
score published by Renmin yinyue chubanshe (1996)

*Anthology of Engravings*, brass quintet op.15
score published by Renmin yinyue chubanshe (1984)

*Customs of Erhais*, suite for chamber orch. (woodwind, str.) op.16
recording released by Hong Kong Gramophone Company (1984)

1981  *Sending to the South*, two chamber pieces op.17: 1.Meditation, pf and ob.; 2.Tomb,
      pf and bsn
      recording released by China Gramophone Company (1984)
      a score of 'Meditation' was published in *Yinyue chuanguo (Music Creation)* (1984)

1982  *A small boat*, film music op.18

*Impression of Mt. Taihang*, symphonic suite op.19
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1983  *Soil off next time*, film music op.20

1984  *Poem of China*, symphonic overture for pf, chorus and orch. op.21

*Motion* and *Chant*, two symphonic poems op.22
'Tchant' was dedicated to Shostakovitch on the 10th anniversary of his death

1986  *Calling the soul—Elegy*, for sopr. and orch. op.23
      based on lyrics of the classical Chinese poet Qu Yuan

1987  *The last winter day*, film music op.24

1988  *For piano and 23 string instruments* op.25

1990  Symphony No.3 op.26
      score published by Shanghai yinyue chubanshe (2000)

*Three Ancient Melodies* for *pipa* and 25 string instruments op.27

1993  Two pieces based on Lu Xun's Novel *Zhu Jian* ('Casting a Sword'), op.28
1. *Song of the man in black*, for singer and chamber ens. (picc, bsn, clar 3 trmb,
tuba, pf, perc, str)
2. *Sacrificial dance of the eagle*, for a cappella chorus
1995  Concerto for Violin and Orchestra op. 29
   Shang (‘Die Young’), for singer, septet of folk instruments and perc. op.30
   (the septet consists of dizi, xun, erhu, pipa, sanxian, zheng, yangqin)
   recording released by Hong Kong Hugo Gramophone Company (1997)
   For the impetus of Point and Line, symphonic overture [no.1] op.31

1997  For the impetus of Point and Line, symphonic overture [no.2] op.32
   Four Choral Songs op.33
   Guoshang-Hymns on Spirits of State Warriors Slain in War, symph. chorus op.34

1998  Legend of the Sea, Five Symphonic Frescoes op.35
   written for the 2200th anniversary of the founding of Fuzhou City
   awarded the first prize at the 10th Chinese Symphonic Composition Competition, 2004
   Shanxi Style Suite for piano op.36

1999  4 pieces based on Tang and Song Dynasty Poems, for orch. & recitation op.37
   Symphony No.4 op.38
   the score was published by the Shanghai Yinyueyueyuan Chubanshe in 2005

2000  Concerto for Violin and Orchestra [no.2] op.39

2001  Symphony No.5 op.40

2002  Quartet, for clarinet, violin, cello, and piano, Op. 41
   commissioned by Ensemble Quarrain Cologne, premiered 13th April 2002 in Cologne

2002  Symphonic Ballad for orch., Op. 44
   commissioned by the Art Festival of Shandong Province,
   premiered by the Central Opera and Dance Theatre Symphony Orchestra, 29 Sept. 2002, Beijing

2004  Octet, Op. 42
   commissioned by Ensemble Antipodes, premiered 4th November 2004, ISCM, Lucerne

2004  Adagio for string quartet Op. 43
   commissioned by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, not yet performed

2004  Symphony No. 6, Op. 45
   commissioned by Beijing Symphony Orchestra, premiered 19th May 2004, Beijing

2004  Shang II, for Chinese orchestra Op. 46
   commissioned by the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra, not yet performed

2004  Duet for two marimbas, Op. 47
   premiered at Central Conservatory Contemporary Music Festival, 31 May 2004, Beijing
A MODERN PLAYER’S PERSPECTIVE

How to improve the sheng as a concert instrument?

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The sheng, a free-reed mouth organ with a vertical set of bamboo pipes and a wind-chest, is a unique instrument in Chinese culture. Traditionally a supporting instrument in instrumental ensembles and in Kun opera, the sheng sprang to a new life on the modern concert stage as a star vehicle for bravura soloists. In this article, Wang Zhengting, a conservatory-trained performer, discusses recent changes in the design of the instrument, and reflects on how modern concert versions of the sheng could be further adapted to meet concert players’ demands. His ideal is a lighter instrument, smaller in size, more logically organized in terms of pitches, easier to maintain, and equipped with an electronic device to protect it against moisture and to stabilize pitch.

The free-reed mouth organ sheng is one of many Chinese musical instruments that underwent drastic changes after the communists rose to power in China in 1949. For centuries, the sheng served primarily as a solemn supportive instrument in Chinese temple orchestras, ceremonial processions, as well as in Kunqu (Kun opera) and in Jiangnan sizhu (teahouse music in Shanghai and in parts of Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces). It continues to be heard in such traditional settings today. Furthermore, specific types of mouth organs feature in the dance music of a number of ethnic groups in southwest China. But the sheng has also acquired a new life as a modern concert instrument. It was the rise of communism and the general trend towards ‘modernization’ that led to demands for new types of music in China. In emulation of classical virtuoso violinists and pianists abroad, a new generation of players of traditional instruments began to receive training in newly founded conservatories and art schools in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Large Chinese orchestras, resembling Western symphony orchestras in overall structure and size but consisting mainly of Chinese instruments, as well as new types of smaller professional ensembles, were founded for (urban) concert purposes. In the wake of this development, traditional instruments were redesigned and adapted to produce louder sounds, to cover wider pitch ranges and to enable playing in many different keys. Some musical instruments were considerably enlarged to fill up perceived gaps in the make-up of the Chinese orchestra and other ensembles, e.g. the ‘alto’, ‘cello’ and ‘bass’ versions of Chinese traditional stick fiddles.

New types of sheng were created as part of these efforts. Modern elements included a water compartment, a larger (copper rather than wooden) wind-chest, extra pipes (plus sounding reeds in all of them) and keys for increased pitch range and greater chromatic
possibilities. Sometimes extra metal tubes were attached to the bamboo pipes for bigger sound volume. The new types of sheng were loud and technically sophisticated enough to be used as symphonic or as solo instruments in modern settings, and in contemporary music.

As a conservatory-trained performer of the sheng, my own musical affinities lie with the new (solo) repertoire for the sheng. Traditional shengs, with their gourd or wooden wind-chests, produce unique sounds and feature unique repertoires, but in terms of technical possibilities I view the modern sheng as a superior instrument.

Yet modern instruments have limitations and problems of their own: the two main types, yuansheng and jiansheng, differ to such an extent – in pitch organization and function – that learning to play both of them basically means practising two different wind instruments. Old and new types of sheng alike give players problems with moisture condensation and are cumbersome to repair and to maintain. Modern stage musicians would benefit from a lighter and smaller, more practically designed instrument. In this article I will touch upon general aspects of the history and lore of the sheng, and then examine some problems of present-day concert instruments, and propose how their design could be made more effective.

The sheng in Chinese lore and history
According to one Chinese legend, the sheng was created in ancient times by the goddess Nüwa as a children’s instrument. Actually, during fieldwork among the Miao people in Guangxi province in 1999 I saw very young children practising the lusheng, a southern type
of mouth organ (photo p. 58). If there is a core of truth to the legend, those children must be continuing a very old tradition!

The first written references to Chinese mouth organs occur in ancient oracle bone inscriptions of the Yin Dynasty (from the 14th century BC onwards), where two types of instruments are mentioned: *yu* and *he*. The name *sheng* appears for the first time in the *Shijing* (the ‘Book of Odes’) around the 7th century BC. During the Song Dynasty (960–1279 AD), the *Songshi Yuezhi* or ‘Song Dynasty Music Book’ referred to *yu*, *he* and *chao* as three types of mouth organs of antiquity, and identified *he* as a small *sheng* with 13 reeds, *chao* as a bigger type with 19 reeds, and *yu* as a large *sheng* with up to 36 reeds or pipes. Mouth organs in use during the Song Dynasty often carried 19 pipes, but varied considerably in size, shape and sound volume. During the Ming (1368–1644 AD) and Qing (1644–1911 AD) dynasties, 17-pipe *shengs* were probably the most commonly played types. But throughout Chinese history there was considerable regional variety in the construction of the instruments, and many different models and sizes existed, as is also clear from archeological finds like those in the tomb of Marquis Yi of Zeng, in Hubei Province (dating to ca. 433 BC), and in the Han tombs of Mawangdui in Hunan (2nd century BC). The tuning was usually diatonic. Chromatic *shengs* were first mentioned in the music treatises *Yueshu* (early 12th century) and *Lülü zhengyi* (late 17th century), but presumably chromatic *shengs* only played a limited role in Confucian ritual.

In present-day practice the *sheng* family still comprises a great many different forms and types, with the bowl-shaped or rectangular wind-chest and the set of pipes of varying graded lengths as common elements. Folk musical instruments used by Han Chinese usually have 17 pipes (presumably the prevailing type since the 8th century), of which only 14 (or fewer) have reeds, the other ones being mute (added only as part of the quasi-symmetrical design).

The *susheng* (with bowl-shaped wind-chest and bamboo pipes) prevails in the south of China, especially in Zhejiang and Jiangsu provinces and Shanghai, where it can be heard as a supporting ensemble instrument in *Jiangnan sizhu* (teahouse music) (photo above). The northern *yuansheng* is favoured in Shanxi, Shaanxi and Hebei provinces as well as in other parts of northern China. It resembles the southern instrument in external appearance,
and it plays a more active role in ritual ensembles and usually has a larger wind-chest. In Shaodong, Anhui and Henan provinces the fangsheng (‘square sheng’, with a rectangular wind-chest of wood, and 14 pipes arranged in three parallel ranks) is popular (Yan 1991:1).

Among ethnic groups in southwest China, similar mouth organs consisting of gourd wind-chests and a limited number of pipes are used for the accompaniment of ritual dances: the lusheng, known among the Miao, Dong and Yao peoples, has a relatively narrow wooden wind-chest, a long blow-pipe and (usually) six bamboo pipes of varying length; the hulusişeng, a related mouth organ constructed from a dried calabash gourd (which forms both wind-chest and blow-pipe) and five or more bamboo pipes, prevails among the Yi, Lahu, Wa and Dai in Yunnan and some related groups. The hulusişeng, like the lusheng, is used in dancing.²

Changes to the sheng in the 1950s
In the early 1950s, after the communist takeover in China, a semi-chromatic sheng with 17 reeds was designed, later followed by other types and models of shengs, the number of pipes increasing to 21, and ultimately to 36 or 37. As a consequence of the many attempts to create a minyue sheng (‘national music sheng’), the sheng family expanded considerably. Prominent newcomers were the jiānshēng or jiājiānshēng (‘keyed sheng’, a fully chromatic instrument), and still larger types like the baoshēng (‘held sheng’ which rests on the player’s lap or on a stand) and the paishēng (‘row sheng’, a floor model with foot pedals).

Among sheng models currently in use there is a puzzling variety of shapes, sizes and functions. The number of pipes ranges from 17 to 37. The pitch organization of these instruments is not standardized. Shengs from different regions differ considerably in construction and use, and players of one type of instrument may not necessarily be able to play an instrument from a different area. Clearly, the sheng family has become a fairly complicated realm for those who wish to play an instrument of this type. I remember one beginning student who bought a sheng without seeking his teacher’s advice. Unaware of the existence of different types, he bought the wrong kind and was then forced to buy another one. (The alternative would have been to reorganize the positioning of the reeds within his instrument, a tedious and cumbersome task.)

The discussion of different types of sheng is not the focus of this article, but as a necessary background to my suggestions on how to improve the instrument, I would like to look in some detail at two specific modern versions of the instrument, one developed from the yuānshēng (round sheng), the other from the fangsheng (rectangular sheng). However, first of all let me acquaint the reader with some basic aspects of the construction of Chinese mouth organs.

Basic construction
The traditional sheng consists of a wind-chest of wood or (in ancient times) gourd, with a horizontally extended blow-pipe on one side.³ The wind-chest somewhat resembles a Chinese teapot, albeit one with many holes in its flat upper surface, through which a set of bamboo pipes of varying lengths is inserted. The pipes form an incomplete circle. Most pipes are playable, with a vent-hole on top, a small fingerhole and (at the bottom of the
pipe, inside the wind-chest) a free reed, traditionally made of bamboo (in modern times, of a copper alloy). Each reed tongue is activated by exhaling or inhaling via the blowpipe, and by closing the relevant fingerhole of the bamboo pipe involved. Fingerholes are operated with the fingers of both hands.

Every bamboo pipe consists of two parts: the upper cylinder (above the surface of the wind-chest), usually made of *zizhu* (dark purple bamboo), and a wooden bottom end onto which the reed is attached. The reed is glued onto the wood with a wax mixture including beeswax, resin and castor oil. Usually, there is a sound window (a rectangular hole) on the back of each pipe, situated in the part that sticks out above the wind-chest, and each pipe has a fingerhole on the outside which can be stopped by the player, except that traditional instruments usually also include three or four pipes which are mute, i.e. without reeds or fingerholes; they are simply inserted for visual reasons, to complete the circular arrangement of bamboo pipes in order of size.4

The rectangular window on the back of each operational pipe, in cooperation with the reed, controls the pitch level and the tone quality. The fingerhole acts as a valve. For instance, when blowing, one should simultaneously press a particular fingerhole to enable the air to pass through the tongue of the reed to make it vibrate which, in turn, causes the air column in the relevant bamboo tube to vibrate.

The reeds are the vital part of the *sheng*. Good reeds are sensitive, easy to activate, with a smooth surface and little leaking of air during operation. Pitch levels vary according to the size and thickness of the reed tongues. A high-pitched reed has a short, narrow and thin tongue, a low-pitched reed a long, broad and thick one. A thick tongue produces a comparatively loud sound, but the performer will need to blow harder to make it vibrate than in the case of a thin-tongued reed. The opposite is true for a thin tongue. High-pitched reeds need to be particularly well made. If a tongue is too thin, a strange sound results during blowing, even if the performer does not cover the relevant fingerhole. High-pitched reeds are delicate and easily get damaged in the process of cleaning. As the reeds are moving freely, high quality ones are expected to produce one and the same pitch during inhaling and exhaling. As is probably clear from my description, a single pipe generally contains a single free-reed, and produces one specific pitch.5

The *sheng* can be tuned by taking a mixture of wax from the tongue of the reed to make the pitch higher. To make it lower, more wax is added to the tongue of the reed. The sound window in the back of the bamboo pipe can also be adjusted in size to create slight changes in pitch level, but this method is rarely used.

The modern *sheng*

The modern *sheng* has added keys (enabling chromatic playing), metal resonance tubes (attached to the bamboo pipes), a wind-chest made of copper (rather than wood) and, inside the wind-chest, a water compartment into which warm water is poured to maintain the instrument at an ideal temperature. Without this device, particularly in cold climates, the instrument could easily go out of tune, and the reeds would be less sensitive. The air blown into the wind-chest can become much hotter than the air inside, so that playing can result in condensation on the reeds. This obviously changes the pitches and makes it more difficult to activate the reeds.
Modern versions of the *sheng* have 21 to 37 pipes and possess a unique timbre which ranges somewhere in-between the sound of a Western organ and that of traditional Chinese bamboo wind instruments. The modern *sheng* frequently functions as a solo instrument in Chinese chamber ensembles, where it blends quite effectively with the other traditional instruments and contributes to a sonorous ensemble sound.

![Pitch range for the 37-pipe *yuansheng* and the 36-pipe *jiansheng*](image)

Low pitches on the *sheng* sound much louder than high ones. To compensate for this, metal resonance tubes have been attached externally to the high-pitched pipes on modern instruments or, in some cases, to all the bamboo pipes, thus creating a better dynamic balance as well as increasing overall sound volume.

Metal keys, mainly attached to the low-pitched pipes, or to all of them, are used for two reasons. First of all, every reed leaks some air while a *sheng* is being played, and with an increased number of pipes – as in modern *shengs* – more air leakage can be expected. By using metal keys which close and open the sound windows on the pipes, leakage is reduced to a minimum: a specific reed will vibrate only if the corresponding sound window is open, and closure of that window will effectively block air from passing through the reed. In this way, the application of keys increases the efficiency of tone production. This is especially important with the modern style 36- and 37-pipe instruments which (without keys) would leak huge amounts of air and be very hard to play. A second reason for using metal keys is to enable the player to produce certain pitches which cannot be reached easily by the fingers otherwise. In such cases the keys act as extended fingers.

The *sheng* has evolved remarkably with the developments described here, and modern instruments are in many respects superior to the traditional versions. Nevertheless, I believe that many further improvements are possible.

**Yuansheng and *jiansheng***

In order to address the issue of further improvements, I propose to compare two modern types of 36- and 37-pipe *shengs*, the *yuansheng* (round *sheng*), manufactured in Shanghai, and the *jiansheng* ('keyed' *sheng*), produced in Beijing. Both instruments have a fully chromatic tuning. The *yuansheng* was developed straight from the traditional *sheng* and retains many of its basic features. The *jiansheng*, by contrast, was inspired by the *fangsheng*, but it has a new appearance and a new pitch organization which makes it more suitable for playing Western chordal progressions. The future of Chinese music remains a critical issue today, with proponents of modernization as well as ardent defenders of traditional values, so that both types of *sheng* are and will remain important in current performance practice.

Usually most of the low pitches of the *yuansheng* are supplied with keys to prevent air leakage (low pitches leak more air) or to serve as extended fingers. No such keys are fixed onto the middle and high ranges of conventional pitch-pipes, so that slides and glissandi
on high pitches remain possible. By contrast, the *jiangsheng* is normally supplied with keys on all its pipes, effectively forestalling air leakage through the reeds. On the one hand it makes the instrument easier to play, but on the other hand, because the vibration of the reeds is entirely controlled by the keys, it also impedes certain performing techniques on the *jiangsheng*, such as slides and glissandi.

Keys are an important feature of modern *shengs*. Unfortunately their technical quality is a risk factor in the manufacture of these instruments. Professional performers generally have *shengs* made on individual request, designed to fit their own special needs, and equipped with good quality keys. The keys on an average factory-made *sheng* are usually less satisfactory. New recruits of the *sheng* are often disheartened because the keys on their instrument do not work efficiently or because they produce unwanted noise, which can be fairly annoying, particularly in recording conditions.

The *yuansheng* – the instrument shown here is a 26-pipe version, played by the author – is held with both hands.

**The problem of condensation**

Before the introduction of water compartments in Chinese mouth organs, *sheng* performers usually warmed their instruments by holding them over a fire and rolling them around in their hands, or by keeping them under their coats. Musicians in rural traditional settings still resort to such practices, even though these methods usually do not prevent condensation on the reeds.

The idea of including a water compartment to warm up the instrument is already an advance over traditional methods, in the sense that it solves the problem of condensation on the reeds, but it creates problems and inconveniences of its own: when the water in the compartment cools down, the general pitch of the instrument goes up slightly. Other wind instruments like the *dizi* (bamboo flute) which may be similarly affected by changes in temperature – more warmth resulting in a rise in pitch – offer experienced players the possibility of adjusting the general pitch level by adjusting the position of the blow-hole or by modifying the intensity of the blowing, but for the *sheng* such options do not exist. If the water inside the instrument cools down and the pitch goes up, no performing techniques can compensate for this, and the only solution is to pour more water into the compartment. *Sheng* performers regularly have to change the water in their instrument, and they always need to make sure that enough warm water is available where they perform, especially in cold environments. A related problem is that the 37-pipe *yuansheng* is already twice as
heavy as the traditional 17-pipe version. Adding a cup of water will further increase its weight, and make the instrument quite a burden for the performer to handle. He needs both hands to hold the 37-pipe yuansheng and to lift it up to the level of his face so that he can play it (cf photo p. 63). In this position, the hand and arm support the instrument. The heavier the instrument, the bigger the burden for hand and arm. Added weight increases muscle tension in the hand, which will also affect the flexibility of finger movements and can hamper manual agility. By contrast, the 36-pipe jiansheng has an elongated blow-pipe which enables the player to hold the instrument on his lap (see photo). In this position the extra weight is much better supported; there is no extra weight for hand and arm to carry, and finger flexibility is not compromised.

Throughout history sheng performers have tried to solve the problem of condensation by taking various measures to improve the situation, but so far no single method has proved to be ideal. However, with the help of modern technology it may become possible to install a cordless electronic device intended to keep the temperature of the sheng at a constant level. This would stabilize the general pitch level and reduce the weight of the instrument, thus improving both its quality and its performance possibilities. Given that many closely related instruments exist in Southeast Asian music, with similar problems, an electronic device effective for the sheng could probably be applied to those other instruments as well. A water compartment cannot be used in most of the traditional mouth organs in Southeast Asia because their wind-chests are made of wood or gourd, but an electronic device might be a successful option for many players, if not all of them. (Some years ago, when I met a Japanese ethnomusicologist and suggested that modern technology might help to solve the condensation problem for the sho – the Japanese mouth organ based on Chinese models and introduced from China – he replied that Japanese players were primarily interested in maintaining their tradition, which in this case meant lighting coal on a plate and warming the sho by rolling it above the plate. But to my knowledge some sho players actually already use an electronic bag to warm up their instruments!)

**Timbre, dynamics and harmony**

For the high pitch range, from g2 to g3, the bamboo pipes of the 37-pipe yuansheng are generally equipped with metal resonance tubes to increase their sound volume. The 36-pipe jiansheng has such added tubes on all its pipes, covering its entire range. The
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pitch organization of the 37-pipe yuansheng  

pitch organization of the 36-pipe jiansheng

tubes enhance loudness but they also make the instrument sound more metallic, thus diminishing the original bamboo acoustic fidelity. Moreover, added tubes increase the size of the instrument. While yuansheng and jiansheng, with these added tubes, are effective instruments in Chinese orchestras and medium-sized ensembles, their presence may become problematic in smaller ensembles, where their sound easily gets too loud, particularly that of the jiansheng. It is not difficult to understand why modern sheng performers sometimes prefer to play their instrument without metal resonance tubes, particularly if they specialize in the more intimate types of ensemble music.

While metal resonance tubes certainly have clear advantages, they could be further improved. Different materials could be used in their manufacture, doing more justice to the sheng’s traditional timbral qualities. In addition, the resonance tubes could be designed in such a way that they are easier to take off and to put on again. This would enable performers to adapt their instrument more easily and more quickly to different sound environments and performance settings.

Another aspect that invites comparison is the pitch organization of the 37-pipe yuansheng and the 36-pipe jiansheng, which, once again, is very different (see figures above). The former instrument is designed to play traditional Chinese tunes and harmonies, while the latter enables sheng players to extend their traditional idiom with Western (functional) harmony and chordal progressions.

Four kinds of chords may be heard in the course of traditional sheng music: wubaduhe sheng (chords of fifths and octaves) and siwuduhe sheng (chords of fourths and fifths), wuduhe yin (chords of fifths) and siduhe yin (chords of fourths). In the case of wubaduhe sheng, a fifth and octave are added above the melody tone, resulting in a cluster of three pitches. In the case of siwuduhe sheng a fourth below and a fifth above the melody tone are added. In wuduhe yin only a fifth is added above the melody tone, in siduhe yin a fourth is added below the melody tone. In timbral terms, the difference between wubaduhe sheng and siwuduhe sheng is that the former results in a relatively bright sound and distinct pitches (and, hence, clear melodical contours), while the latter is richer in colour and less distinct in terms of pitch. The resulting harmonies are among the
instrument’s most distinctive features. The choice of particular chords also partly depends on the position of the melody notes. The range of the instrument is fairly narrow, so that in the higher register accompanying tones are sometimes added below rather than above the melody tones. Convenience of finger movement is yet another factor that plays a role. For example, if semiquavers in a fast rhythm are required, wuduheyin and siduheyin are used more frequently than wubaduhesheng and siwuduhesheheng. Ultimately, the choice of chords remains a complex issue, in which both composers and musicians will have to be flexible when considering available options.

Chordal sounds are amply employed in the new solo repertoire developed for the instrument in the course of the 20th century. In more traditional settings, they play an important role in many types of Chinese regional ensemble music involving sheng. The unique sonorous blend of many types of minjian chuidayue (folk wind and percussion music) would be unthinkable without the participation of sheng players: the other wind instrumentalists in the ensemble would find it much harder to harmonize if mouth organs were absent.

To an outsider, the actual pitch organization of the 37-pipe yuansheng may appear to be a random affair: its tuning arrangement (based on pure overblown fifths) is such that it facilitates, first and foremost, the playing of the traditional harmonies in a certain register, and some performers would actually say that chords are realized more easily on the instrument than single tones (Hu 1981:55). Furthermore, the 37-pipe yuansheng is tuned chromatically. Theoretically it should be possible to play traditional harmonies in any given key, but in practice the possibilities are limited: a yuansheng performer can play agreeable chords in four different keys, namely in the instrument’s natural key, or in keys a perfect fourth above this, a perfect fifth above this, or a whole tone below the natural key. Thus, if the instrument is tuned in D, the performer can play in D, G, A and C. Some experienced performers may be able to play in still other keys, but the fingering will be awkward.
Compared to the yuansheng, the pitch organization of the 36-pipe jiansheng is a good deal more straightforward and logical, and easier to remember. The fingering, too, is more convenient. Since this instrument was primarily designed to perform Western chordal progressions, it is actually more difficult to create traditional sheng chords on jiansheng!

**Technical sophistication**

Some performers can play jiansheng as well as yuansheng. Obviously this double ability considerably increases a musician's possibilities, and creates options for using different types of sheng in different situations and getting the best possible result out of every individual performance. When playing a piece in which traditional harmonies are needed, a performer will prefer yuansheng. If Western harmonies are required he shifts to jiansheng. But now that Chinese compositions involving sheng are becoming increasingly complex – the growth of instrumental techniques invites increasing adventurousness on the part of composers – there is also growing pressure on performers to upgrade their technical skills, and it is not easy to maintain very high levels of playing technique on two instruments as different in pitch organization and function as yuansheng and jiangsheng. Ever more complicated and more varied harmonies are now used in contemporary sheng music, especially in new solo pieces for 37-pipe yuansheng and 36-pipe jiansheng. The expressive range of the music is enhanced while new musical paths are explored, which inevitably leads to more sophisticated technical requirements. Players now need more time to practice to reach the expected high standards. If both the 37-pipe yuansheng and the 36-pipe jiansheng survive in the Chinese music of the future, the question which of these two instruments a student of the mouth organ should choose to study becomes a critical one. Performers equally at home on both instruments are likely to become a rarity.

**The future of the sheng**

Reforms of instruments and the artistic development of music are inextricably linked. New compositional demands lead to organic changes and vice versa. Chinese musical instruments are best improved by keeping a close watch on what happens in Chinese music. With China's open-door policy, adopted by the government in the 1980s, cultural exchange between China and Western countries has vastly increased. Clearly this has had a big impact on Chinese music and the development of Chinese instruments; one would expect future improvements to Chinese instruments to reflect in part the technical attainments of other countries in this field, while retaining Chinese characteristics of the instruments.

At present, approximately one hundred different models of sheng exist, many of which have their own distinct advantages. For the future of Chinese music, I would like to see the sheng more standardized, and improved with regard to its performing functions. It could be made lighter and easier to play, by redefining (making more logical) its pitch organization. It should also be made more hygienic and easier to repair and maintain. For example, at present the wind-chest of the instrument does not ventilate unless one blows in it, and it is moist, creating an ideal environment for germs. Since the instrument is played by both inhaling and exhaling, the task of keeping its wind-chest clean is obviously vital to the player's health.
Cleaning and maintenance

At present, the most effective and thorough way of cleaning the wind-chest of the yuansheng is by removing all its pipes and pushing a piece of cloth into the wind-chest to wipe its interior, a difficult and cumbersome task. If the wind-chest were designed to open and close freely like that of the 36-pipe jiansheng, it would be much easier for the yuansheng performer to keep his instrument clean.

Furthermore, the sheng has to be serviced regularly, which is yet another tedious process. After a certain period of use, every reed has to be detached from the foot of its pipe, in order to be cleaned. Afterwards it is re-fixed and rubbed, with great care, with a mixture of copper and lushi (or wuwanishi, a type of hard rock). This thick liquid substance is applied to make the reed more sensitive, to improve its sound, to reduce air leakage and to protect the reed from becoming rusty. The required substance is created by rubbing lushi against a copper plate. In factories this work is done by machines, but individual musicians usually do this job by hand, in which case it takes several hours to produce enough substance to repair a 36- or 37-pipe sheng. First the old substance has to be scraped off every reed. Then an electric iron is needed to solder the reed onto the foot again with mixed wax, and then every reed is rubbed with the new mixture of lushi and copper. Getting the right tuning may well mean that the entire process of servicing a 36- or 37-pipe sheng requires a whole day. Moreover, the sheng frequently needs repairing. Hence the statement, expressed by some players in former times, that it takes more time to maintain a sheng than to play it! This is an exaggeration, but it underlines the fact that much time is needed to keep the instrument in good condition. In future reforms of the sheng, designers might well want to take into account such problems, for example by improving (simplifying) the construction of the parts of the instrument, or by developing new (and more readily available) materials for cleaning and maintaining the instrument.

Finally, one possible option for reducing the number of pipes in the instrument (thus reducing its weight and perhaps also the amount of time needed for deconstructing the instrument in case of repair or maintenance) is, in the case of some pipes, to make one pipe share two reeds (two pitches). The reeds will not vibrate if the required sound window is not at the corresponding level of the reed. A high pitch can be given a low sound window, a low pitch a high sound window. In this way it might be possible to install two reeds together, provided they are sufficiently far removed from one another in pitch, and assuming that key technology to open and close sound windows on a single pipe can be further developed to accommodate this idea. In that case one could have (for instance) ‘d3’ and ‘b’ on the same pipe, with the ‘d3’ reed vibrating only if the window for ‘d3’ is opened. If possible, this would result in a reduction of the number of pipes and hence of the size and weight of the sheng, with all the technical and practical advantages of such an improvement.

As a professional sheng soloist, my aim in writing this article is to share some of my personal experiences and thoughts with readers at home and abroad. Ideally I would like to see more exporters and devotees of Chinese music pay attention to the modern sheng, to its problems as outlined above and to the further development of the instrument. The remarks in this article are intended as no more than a very modest and casual introduction to the topic. I look forward to the valuable suggestions and comments of readers.
NOTES

1 The story in a nutshell: when the world was created, rivers, mountains and trees appeared, as well as insects, fish, birds and animals, but not yet human beings. Nüwa, a goddess with a human head and the body of a snake, felt very lonely, and she tried to create beings with whom she could communicate intelligently. She pushed a rattan stick continuously into and out of the mud, and a miracle happened; the mud came alive and began to move and talk. Nüwa now shaped creatures out of this mud, giving them heads, hands and feet. In this way, the first human beings appeared, and Nüwa made sure to create both male and female beings who could breed. Their offspring were very beautiful, to the delight of the goddess, and for the happiness of these children she invented the instrument called shenghuang, a forerunner of today’s Chinese mouth organ. Children played the shenghuang while dancing and singing, and the music greatly enriched their lives. The presence of this story in ancient Chinese lore underpins the fact that the sheng is of ancient origin. There is one reference to Nüwa in connection with sheng in the Li ji (Book of Rites) (see: Li ji, vol.1, Zhonghua shuju, Taiwan, 1965, no.9, p.22.)

2 Lusheng (‘mouth reed organ’) and hulusheng (‘calabash mouth organ’) are Chinese names. Tribal names for lusheng include geng (Miao), gacheng (Dong) and other cognate terms. Tribal names for hulusheng include ang (Yi) and nuo or naw (Lahu) (Thrasher, 2001a).

3 In ancient times the wind-chest of the sheng was made of pao (gourd), and the instrument belonged to the pao family of Chinese bayin (eight ‘tones’ or ‘timbres’) classification system of instruments, which divided them according to their main material involved in producing sound. During the Tang Dynasty (618-907 AD) the wind-chests of Chinese mouth-organs were usually made of wood.

4 The modern jiansheng with 36 pipes has no fingerholes at all.

5 In high registers a slide can be produced. The most common slide on the sheng is a minor third.

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GLOSSARY

taosheng
bayin
chao
Dai
Dong
fangsheng
he
hulusheng
jiajiansheng
Jiangnan sizhu
jiansheng
Kunqu
Lahu
Lij
LüLü zhengyi
lusheng

抱笙
八音
巢
傣
侗
方笙
和
葫芦笙
加键筝
江南丝竹
键筝
昆曲
拉祜
礼记
律吕正音
芦笙
lushi
Miao
minjian chuidayue
minyue sheng
Nüwa
paisheng
pao
sheng
shenghuang
Shijing
siduheyin
siwuduhe sheng
Songshi Yuezhi
susheng
Wa
wubadu he sheng
wuduheyin
wu huashi
Yao
Yi
yu
yuansheng
Yueshu
zizhu

绿石
苗
民间吹打乐
民乐笙
女娲
排笙
袍
笙
笙簧
诗经
四度和音
四五度和声
宋史乐志
苏笙
侃
八卦度和声
五度和音
五花石
瑶
彝
竽
圆笙
乐书
紫竹
THE CLASH OF CITY AND VILLAGE IN TAIWANESE POPULAR SONGS

Images of the Hometown

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Popular songs sung in Hokkien (or ‘Taiwanese’) are no longer as commercially successful as they were in the mid-1990s. Yet even today, these songs are heard frequently in the streets of Taiwan’s cities and towns, in taxis and buses, and on a plethora of radio and cable television stations. One of the defining features of this genre is a deep nostalgia expressed by performers for their true or imagined ‘hometowns’. Such ‘hometowns’ are generally depicted as idyllic, rustic localities far removed from the dangers and loneliness of contemporary urban life; these are places associated with a protected childhood and a stable past. Departure from the ‘hometown’ is evoked in countless Hokkien songs through reference to local railway stations or harbour piers – sites at which loved ones are left behind while the protagonists venture to Taipei for work or study. Interestingly, the melodies of such songs are frequently based on Japanese enka tunes, rather than on ‘hometown’ Chinese melodies. So what are the origins of these songs? Who performs and records them? What is their projected audience? What kinds of images are sustained through the lyrics? And wherein lies their appeal to Taiwanese audiences?

A defining feature of Hokkien-language popular music produced in Taiwan is the consistent use of the image of the ‘hometown’, or ko’-hiong (guxiang). The development of the theme of the ‘hometown’ in this music is related to particular socio-economic trends – post-war ‘retrocession’ to Nationalist Chinese rule; urbanization and industrialization in the 1960s and 1970s, and so on – that have influenced Taiwanese society at different points throughout the post-war era. The result has been that a highly nostalgic depiction of the quintessential Taiwanese hometown has survived through to the present in this genre of popular music. This article examines the ways in which Hokkien-language songs have aided in the creation of a particular vision of regional Taiwan, and have worked to present the ko’-hiong as a cultural ‘Other’ to the city of Taipei.

As a student in Taipei back in the mid-1990s, I decided it was in my best interests to learn Hokkien, if only that I might be able to better communicate with the many people I had met for whom that language represented the primary means of communication. Hokkien (or ‘Min’) is a Chinese language originating in Fujian Province – the word ‘Hokkien’ is
itself the Hokkien pronunciation of the toponym ‘Fujian’, and is spoken not only in Taiwan and parts of Mainland China, but also by a number of Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. In Taiwan, this language is often referred to as Minmamyu (lit., ‘Southern Hokkien’) or Taiyu (lit., ‘Taiwanese’). The language was virtually banned from public discourse for much of the martial law era (1974–1987) in Taiwan, and has no official status today – Taiwan’s only official language is standard Chinese (or ‘Mandarin’), known locally as Guoyu, or the ‘national language’. Yet Hokkien remains the most widely spoken language throughout much of the island. It is the ‘native language’ of approximately 70 per cent of Taiwan’s population.5

When I began learning this language, my instructor suggested that one of the best ways to improve my comprehension was to listen to Hokkien popular music. Exposure to Hokkien songs could not only aid my language studies, but could further introduce me to a major form of Taiwanese cultural expression. Hokkien popular music was not difficult to find. Even in that most Mandarin-speaking metropolis of Taipei, it was everywhere: in taxis and buses; at night markets and street stalls; and on a plethora of cable and free-to-air television stations. Only later, and in hindsight, did I realize I had been fortunate enough to have commenced study of this language in a period when Hokkien popular music was at something of a commercial peak.

One of the first things that struck me about this music was the repetitiveness of particular phrases in its lyrics. The references to villages, homesickness, and lost love were so common that I began to confuse some songs with others, and to wonder whether the music was not all being composed by some small and closed set of individuals. The frequency with which particular themes appeared and reappeared was intriguing, and it led me to consider the origins and nature of this music more generally.

The academic study of Hokkien-language popular music produced in Taiwan – frequently referred to as Taiyu liuxing gequ (lit., Taiwanese popular songs) – remains a relatively minor field, even in Taiwan itself. Most of the work published thus far has examined this music from within a cultural studies framework, or else has been concerned with the role that this genre has played in Taiwan’s rather fraught cultural politics.6 Because this music was virtually banned under repressive cultural policies introduced during the latter years of martial law rule, some studies have concentrated on what this music can tell us about the survival of the Hokkien language itself on the island, and the role of this music in the creation of Taiwanese cultural identities.7

In this article, however, I plan to take a different approach, and to explore some of the issues that aroused my interest in this music in the first place. In particular, I shall examine one of the most recurrent themes in this genre – the ‘hometown’ or ko-hiong. For it is through constant references to the hometown that this music’s wider cultural influence has been arguably strongest. Hokkien popular songs remain an important part of Taiwan’s cultural landscape. And, as we shall see below, this music continues to propagate particular ideas about Taiwan through its lyrics, visual images, and even its ‘sound’.

The ko-hiong / guxiang

The Chinese term guxiang and its Hokkien cognate ko-hiong equate loosely with the English phrase ‘hometown’. These terms are used to refer to one’s (supposedly) native
place of origin, i.e., the town or village in which one’s ancestors resided and from whence one’s family originated. The concept of the guxiang has, of course, a long history of usage in the Chinese-speaking world, and is certainly not limited to Taiwan. The theorist Tang Xiaobing, for instance, has recently noted the long-term currency of this word on either side of the Taiwan Strait, and has remarked on the links between this idea and ethnic nationalism in both Taiwan and the People’s Republic of China (PRC).

In Taiwan, the idea of the hometown gained prevalence in the debates surrounding xiangtu wenxue, or ‘native soil literature’, a genre which first emerged under Japanese colonial rule in the early years of the 20th century. Xiangtu wenxue was ‘re-discovered’ and re-invigorated during the 1970s – a time when Taiwan was becoming increasingly isolated diplomatically, and as the ‘great transformation’ from an agricultural to an industrial-based economy was resulting in disparities between many sections of society. In its 1970s incarnation, and through the works of authors such as Chen Yingzhen and Huang Chunmin, native soil literature expressed a deep concern about the social fragmentation brought about through these changes, and found in Taiwan’s local landscape a means through which to express such sentiments. In much of this writing, the Hokkien-speaking country towns of southern, rural Taiwan – the ‘guxiang / ko’-hiong’ – were contrasted to the island’s burgeoning cities, especially Taipei. As the literary theorist Jing Wang has phrased it: ‘Village and city were set up as antipodes, agriculture was made to confront industry.’

Much of this writing chronicled the guxiang as a space ravaged by rapid social change and industrialization; at another level, xiangtu wenxue was imbued with a deep nostalgia for the rural Taiwan of yesteryear. The island’s villages were often presented as culturally and morally superior to the city streets of Taipei. Furthermore, the guxiang was in some cases believed to represent a cultural repository of authentic Taiwanese culture. In the context of the industrialization and urbanization that Taiwanese society experienced in the post-war decades, such depictions might be said to have developed primarily as a reaction to the social dislocation experienced at the time, much as has been the case with expressions of nostalgia in other parts of the world.

Today, the concept of the hometown of Taiwan’s past as a kind of nostalgic ‘Other’ to the industrialized and modern Taipei remains a powerful one. This is especially so within bentu (nativist) political and cultural circles for which the half-imagined and ‘remembered’ world of the hometown remains the locus of an authentic Taiwanese Taiwanese culture, one increasingly lost to urbanity and modernity. What is most intriguing, I believe, is that whilst the dichotomy of guxiang versus city/Taipei no longer claims the dominance it once had in literature, it continues to inform other forms of cultural expression, most noticeably popular music.

**Singing about the hometown**

While being celebrated in the native soil literature of the 1970s, the theme of the ‘hometown’ has a musical lineage which can be traced back even further. Since at least the 1940s, and right up to the present day, the hometown has been one of the most consistent themes in Hokkien-language popular music produced in Taiwan. Literally hundreds of songs have been written about the ko’-hiong, many sharing the same sort of sad nostalgia for the pre-industrial countryside that typified the above-mentioned native soil literature;
the titles of song such as ko-'hiong e koe (The hometown moon), ko-'hiong li-chhia (The hometown train) and kun e ko-hiong lampo' (Our hometown, the South), to name only a few, provide us with a sense how central the hometown is to this music."

The development of 'hometown nostalgia songs' (guxiang huaijiu de gequ) in the immediate post-war decades has been examined at some length by Zeng Huijia in her work *Looking at Taiwanese society through popular music.*" Zeng argues, convincingly, that the unaltering popularity of Hokkien songs which employ the hometown theme can be traced to Taiwan's history as a society of migrants (predominantly from China) for whom departure from the 'native place' has often been a part of life. The social and demographic changes that Taiwan experienced from the end of World War II have also shaped this music, and have created a ready market for songs which echo the experiences of new arrivals in Taipei and other centres. The regularity with which the images of family (especially mothers) are employed in such songs further suggests a link between the ko-'hiong and the past, the site at which a distant childhood was experienced. The necessity of pursuing tertiary studies in Taipei and other large cities, as well as compulsory military service for male citizens of the ROC, have also helped to sustain generations of listeners for whom songs expressing reluctant departure from the hometown continue to make a good deal of sense.

In many Hokkien songs, the hometown is depicted as the place in which the rhythms of family life once went on, untouched by modernity – almost as a historic 'Other' to the bustle of contemporary Taipei. Predictably, Hokkien songs employing such depictions have also been appropriated as theme songs to television period dramas – especially the so-called 'eight o'clock dramas' (ba dian dang) that grace television stations in Taiwan virtually every weeknight – which present idealized depictions of life in pre-industrial Taiwan."

Take, for example, the song *Ma-ma chieh li ia po-tiong* (Mother, look after yourself), first recorded by the male entertainer Wen Xia in the late 1960s. The sentiments expressed in this song's lyrics are typical of the sense of uprootedness found in so many Hokkien-language songs produced in that particular period:

When I think of my hometown,
Tears flow from my eyes,
My mother!
Don't worry yourself about it.
Even though I'm here all alone, (repeat)
And I'm here in this unfamiliar city –
I'll be brave.
Mother, look after yourself.

On the cold winter days,
And in the summer evenings,
My mother!
Please look after yourself, don't go catching colds.
Wait until one day soon when we see each other again, (repeat)
I'm here in this unfamiliar city,
But I will come home.
Mother, look after yourself."
The ko'-hiong, codified in the very first line of the song, is presented as the setting in which the protagonist’s mother is waiting for her child’s return. Through lyrical references to an ‘unfamiliar city’, we are led to believe that the speaker is distanced from the hometown, both spatially and temporally. The hometown is signified through references to family (i.e., the mother of the song’s title), the seasons, and so on; it supposedly evokes an intense homesickness in the singer.

Ma-ma chia⁴ li ia po-tiong is one of the most popular of Hokkien-language songs ever produced. It has been recorded and re-recorded countless times over the last four decades, becoming one of this genre’s most well-received ‘standards’. This song even inspired the title, plot and theme tune to a 1998 soap opera produced by the Min shi Dianshi (Formosa Television) network. The longevity of this song’s popularity suggests that the emotions expressed in its lyrics are still meaningful for many members of the Taiwanese listening public.

This theme of distance from the hometown, and the dichotomization of the guixiang i ko'-hiong and the city (usually Taipei), is typical of many other ‘standards’ of the Taiyu liuxing gequ repertoire. Ko-lu e ian-bang (The aspirations of an orphan girl), a song first recorded by the child prodigy Chen Fenlan in 1961, but re-recorded many times by numerous artists since then, is another typical example.⁵ The lyrics of this song tell of a young country girl who sets off from her village in rural Taiwan to seek employment in Taipei:

I asked an a-pēh⁶ who was working in the fields;
‘Which way is it to the prosperous city of Taipei ?
I’m just a pitiful girl with no one to depend upon,
I left my parents when I was little.
Even though I have no one to plan my future for me,
I want to go to the capital to make a living as a worker,
And to console these feelings of helplessness in my heart.’

Interestingly, the narrative of departure from the hometown is echoed in stories about particular songs such as this one that circulate in the music press and literature. In the case of The aspirations of an orphan girl, it has been suggested that Chen Fenlan’s own experience of making the train journey to Taipei to begin her recording career is reflected in the lyrics of this, her first hit record.⁶ Similar anecdotes surround other songs which appeal to narratives of departure from the ko'-hiong. The song-writer Zhong Hongyuan, for example, describes how he was inspired to write his award-winning Chhui hoe loan (Love of a crushed flower) during a rail trip he undertook in the summer of 1971 – it was the sight of a sad ‘country maiden’ on the platform of a small town railway station, tearfully bidding a loved-one farewell on a North-bound train, which apparently moved Zhong to pen his song.

In his study of American country music, Mark Fenster has examined the ‘...visual iconography of country lyrics like bars, small towns, traditional values...’ and various other recurrent themes common to his chosen genre of study.⁷ Fenster points out that what were originally lyrical symbols have gradually become widespread in the relatively more recent medium of music videos.
The thesis put forward by Fenster finds an interesting parallel in Taiwan. For lyrical themes such as hometown have similarly been called upon over the last decade or more as visual icons in the genre of Hokkien popular music. In the music videos produced to accompany above-mentioned songs such as *Ma-ma chi¹ li ia po-tiong* for karaoke audiences, for example, images of the hometown have been employed frequently – farmyard animals, rippling fields of sugarcane, and farmers in the rice paddies are especially popular.⁷⁷

Such depictions are overwhelmingly nostalgic, and bear so little resemblance to the realities of country life that they have provoked rebuke from some Taiwanese scholars. The theorist Karl Ning of National Central University, for example, has noted the attempts by many voices within the nativist sphere of Taiwanese cultural production to present the agricultural south of Taiwan in a fashion he terms ‘illusory’ – more akin to a dream than anything which ever tangibly existed.⁷⁸

Sites of departure: Train stations and harbours
Yet the paddies and cane-fields of southern Taiwan are not the only visual settings which have been linked to Hokkien-language popular songs. Alternative settings do exist. One of the most common of these – and one that was touched on briefly above – is the train station. A substantial number of songs that deal with the cultural, geographic and temporal distance between Taipei and the rustic hometown, or which express a sense of longing for one’s native place in ‘old Taiwan’, employ the train station, both lyrically and visually.

One of the best known examples of this can be found in the song *Chhia-cham* (Train station), first recorded by the female singer Chen Xiuliu. In the music video produced to accompany this song, Chen Xiuliu is portrayed seeing off her boyfriend as he leaves the village dressed in battle fatigues, presumably to do military service. As the train pulls away from the station, Chen Xiuliu watches her boyfriend as he waves from the window of the train carriage, then slowly fades into the distance, only to find that the scene exists in her memory, rather than in reality.

Research conducted by the Taiwanese academic Ke Yonghui on *Chhia-cham* and other Hokkien songs has revealed a great deal about the connection between the hometown, departure, and the relationship between city and country. For Ke, such themes are also

‘Nostalgic Hokkien Classics.’ This cover of a book of song lyrics, compiled by Li Zhengxiang in 1993, aptly sets the mood.
related to the issue of gender. Songs that involve the setting of a local train station, and
tell of departure from the ko-hiong, follow almost identical ‘plots’. Ke categorizes these
‘plots’ (both lyrical and visual) as fitting into a rather simple outline of gender relations:
‘The man leaves the hometown and goes off to work; the woman stays at home and waits
for him.’ 28 Ke’s analysis is certainly applicable to the story played out on the screen for the
song Chhia-cham. Yet many other songs in which the train station is used as a lyrical or
visual device portray just as many women making the train trip to Taipei as men. In other
words, though the hometown is commonly associated with a female presence, this motif in
fact rises above the question of gender. This becomes clearer once we realize that the theme
of departure from the hometown via the local train station is just as common for female
protagonists as it is for males. A perfect example is Long Qianyu’s song Hiong-chhiau
(Home sick), first released in 1994. In this recording, the song is preceded by the sound
effects of a train rattling along the tracks, gaining speed as it seems to move away from the
listener (the station?). Backing vocals then softly chant the chorus lines to the song:

The northbound train carries away my homesick heart.
So reluctant am I to leave.
My head is filled with grief, and the future is uncertain.
I can’t bring myself to look back.....
I don’t know what it’s like in my hometown nowadays.
The moonlight outside my window
Brings waves of homesickness over me.29

The female singer in this song, Long Qianyu, takes on the opposite role to that of Chen
Xiuliu in the song Chhia-cham discussed above. Rather than seeing off a loved one as he
travels away from the hometown, it is the woman herself who is leaving the hometown
behind. Whilst, as Ke has argued, gender may indeed be important, the question of
departure from the hometown, and the use of the local train station as the site from which
this departure takes place, is clearly of relevance over and above the male/female divide.

Many of the best known and most celebrated songs in the Taiwan liuxing gequ genre
make reference to the train station. Indeed, it is so common that the train as a link between
city and country, and the station as the site at which departure from the hometown is played
out, has become one of the defining features of Hokkien-language popular music as a
whole. Yet I would suggest that the train station is merely the more recent manifestation of
a much earlier theme that ran through Hokkien-language popular music in Taiwan, and one
that is still a part of the genre, that being the kang-khao, or harbour.

The train station is the place at which the world of the local hometown’s familiarity
clashes with the allure of the city, and most especially Taipei. The flow between the two
is for the most part one way; locals are sucked northward into a new and difficult life in
search of work or study. And in songs which describe departure from rural localities via
harbours, we can find an almost identical sense of movement away from the local towards
modernity and urbanity. One point of difference, however, is that in harbour songs, the
epicentre of this pull is not necessarily Taipei, and is in fact a far more ambiguous ‘Other’.
This may relate to the fact that many songs about harbours date to the early post-war era
in Taiwan, and were composed by individuals who had grown up under colonial Japanese rule – at such a time, departure from one’s hometown in rural Taiwan may well have meant taking a steamship to metropolitan Japan rather than Taipei.

The harbour has been a recurrent motif in Hokkien songs since the late 1940s. Lyricist Ye Junlin, whose career spanned more than four decades, was especially fond of using this theme, and some of his more renowned pieces describe particular Taiwanese or Japanese harbours; *Tam-sui no-sek* (The evening shades of Danshui), *Toa chun tip kang* (The ship is coming into harbour) and *Nagasaki cho-cho-san ko-niu* (The belle of Nagasaki) are three examples. So common was the use of the harbour motif in earlier generations of Hokkien popular music that some scholars have gone so far as to christen an entire sub-genre of Hokkien songs ‘*gangbian de libie gequ*’ (‘songs about harbourside departures’), noting that songs in which the image of the harbour is invoked are invariably associated with leaving (loved ones, one’s native place, and so on). This tradition has carried on into the present, as a good number of artistes have taken to re-recording earlier harbour songs (including many composed by individuals such as the above-mentioned Ye Junlin), or popularizing new ones.

A case in point is the classic *Kang-to’ia u* (Rainy night in the harbour city), first released in 1949 by one of the most famous song-writers of Hokkien popular music and a contemporary of Ye Junlin, a Japanese-trained musician and band-leader named Yang Sanlang. The lyrics of this standard are constructed around themes of nostalgic love set to a Japanese *enka* tune in what is an almost joyful celebration of heart stricken grief. All this takes place beside the harbour in Kaohsiung, a city commonly known as the *Kang-to’* (harbour city). The association between the harbour, reluctant departure from one’s native place, and lost love can be seen most clearly in the final two verses of the song:

I think of those sweet words we spoke,
Whilst standing by the ship.
It’s so strange that despite our feelings we still ended up parting.
Our past love is incomplete,
And I don’t know when we’ll meet again.
Ah, the wild scent of the sea breeze!
The evening rain never stops falling in this harbour city.

The cold sea winds blow across my aching breast
As I travel through the swell.
For her, I wasted half my life, and made the sea my home,
How can you not understand?
I have sacrificed all my love for you.
Ah, my future seems hazy!
Why does the evening rain never stop falling in this harbour city?*

Whether the protagonist is setting forth on a voyage to find his loved one, or whether it is merely that his memories are stirred as he docks amongst the ‘cold sea winds’ in Kaohsiung is unimportant. The point is that the evening rain, symbolizing the sadness of his/her parting, is falling in the ‘harbour city’, i.e., it is the setting of the song at the harbourside
– the site of departure – which defines the tone and sentiments contained in the song’s lyrics. Kang-to’ ia u in effect mirrors the sentiments of other classics such as Chhia-cham discussed above, as it is focused on the site of departure, here by sea rather than rail.

The setting of the harbour, though perhaps no longer as common as that of the train station, has nonetheless survived well into the present. It can still be located in material released by Taiwanese singers in recent years. Hoe-liam khang-bin siong-sim e ai-chheng (Heart-broken love by Hualien harbour) is one such song. Released by the female singer Li Jia in 1996, this track tells of Hualien on Taiwan’s east coast as the setting of departure between lovers:

'I think of those sweet words we spoke, whilst standing by the ship’, sings Shi Wenbin on his album Tai-gi peon tao-a (‘Half a Hokkien melody’, 1995).

The waves are rising on the water this evening.
It makes me think of how it was three years ago,
When the two of us were admiring the night scenery here by the harbour.
Happily, we talked about our lives together.
At that time, our love was true.
The love we had for one another could never fade.
But now it’s so cold,
And my heart is anxious,
My heart is breaking as I watch the scenery.
Ah... Hualien harbour,
Who could know such feelings of loneliness?"

Hiong-tho’: the ‘native soil style’
Associated with the site of the hometown (and departure from it) is a particular cultural ‘style common to Hokkien popular songs. This is encapsulated in the term hiong-tho’. As a noun, this word literally means the ‘native soil’, or the actual ground of the native place or hometown. However, used more broadly, this term takes on an adjectival function, and can be applied to an entire style or ambience which the hometown emits. People, places, food, and clothing can all be endearingly referred to as xiangtu or hiong-tho’, as can songs and performers. A singer might be said to dress in a hiong-tho’ way, for instance, or to deliver songs in a hiong-tho’ fashion. Some performers are even described as looking ‘hiong-tho’.

Not only singing about the hometown, but also appearing to maintain a cultural connection with the ‘native soil’ of the hometown is central to the Hokkien-language
popular music genre. This can be seen when we examine the sorts of personae that are established around many performers. An example of such a performer is the aforementioned female singer Li Jia, who recorded *Heartbroken love by Hualien harbour*. This artiste’s image and repertoire were based firmly on notions of southern Taiwanese hometown purity and authenticity. On the cover of her 1996 album entitled *In-ui goa ai li* (Because I love you), for instance, Li is shown playfully posing at the end of a garden path which leads up to a set of old-fashioned, wooden paneled doors just visible behind her. She is surrounded on either side by the lush green of a country garden. Distinctly humble and homely symbols such as a bicycle and rubber thongs suggest a life untainted by the hustle and bustle of urban Taipei.

Although Li Jia is typical of the hometown style, she is by no means its only representative. There are numerous examples of performers (especially female singers) who have been marketed in a noticeably similar fashion to Li Jia. One particular trend is that of vocal groups consisting of three to five teenage *hiong-tho* girls (perhaps even sisters) who project an image of untouched, hometown simplicity. Nan Taiwan Xiao Guniang (who go by the name ‘Pretty Girls from Southern Taiwan’, or the acronym PGST, in English), as well as the less successful Yinhua jiemei (The Cherry Blossom Sisters) and Kuaizi jiemei (The Chopstick Sisters), are all examples of such, presenting themselves as happy, female youth in association with the southern hometown. The repertoire of these groups not only revolves around the *guxiang*; the groups themselves are presented as sustaining *xiangtu* values and style. ‘They’ve never cared too much about dolling-up their appearances’, claims the official PGST fan website, for example, ‘perhaps there is something especially southern about them; the Pretty Girls from Southern Taiwan are just so down to earth, and so natural’.

On this point, Hokkien-language music differs substantially as a genre from songs performed and recorded in Taiwan in Mandarin Chinese. As a genre, *Taiyu liuxing gequ* appear to be deliberately distanced from the latter’s sophistication and ‘gloss’, instead embracing a ‘down to earth’ and unassuming image. An ability to present oneself in a *hiong-tho* way or, indeed, to deliver one’s songs in a fashion that speaks of hometown authenticity, is of prime importance for a large number of Hokkien-language performers. That performers of these songs are habitually described in the popular music press as ‘*nianjiu* (nostalgic)’ or ‘*bentu* (native)’ is emblematic of this.
Zeng Xinmei (on the left), a singer with strong ‘hometown values’. Here she appears together with Luo Shifeng on the cover of the soundtrack CD of Bang Hiong, a typical Hokkien TV drama. (The CD was published by Dashin Music Co., Taipei, 2001).

As if to reinforce this, some record companies add details of their singer’s place of birth or family registration, known in Chinese as jiguand, as well as other personal details, on the inside of album covers.” The 1995 album Chiu si bu-phoa, li si seng-mia (The wine is my dance partner, you are my life) released by the singer Zeng Xinmei, for example, actually goes as far as listing Zeng’s jiguand (i.e., the southern county of Jiayi).” Zeng is a typical example of a singer whose persona has been built around notions of hiong-tho’ purity. Zeng’s regional origins are alluded to in the description of her which appears on the back cover of the above-mentioned album, as ‘the sort of person who would never forget to go busking down by the quay for her family’. And in the press, Zeng has been presented as a performer with strong ‘hometown values’, such as a filial respect for her mother.” Indeed, some performers of Hokkien songs themselves stress a personal connection to either their own hometowns, or to provincial and small-town Taiwan more generally. All this is recapitulated by the ability of many artists to actually talk about their recording and performing experiences on television programmes.” The female performer Bai Bingbing, whose career in Hokkien popular music peaked in the early 1990s, yet who still records in this language today, is one example. In a biography of Bai published in 1996, the singer was paraphrased as crediting the support from her ‘hometown compatriots’ (xiangqimen) in the port town of Keelung for much of her success; it was in the night markets of her native Keelung (as well as in the markets of over one hundred other towns throughout the island) that Bai’s singing career was established – literally face-to-face with the people of the ko’-hiong.” Similar anecdotes can be found in reference to earlier generations of Hokkien singers, such as Wen Xia, the composer and first performer of Mother, look after yourself. In a recent interview printed in the magazine Sinorama, Wen notes how moved he was by his ‘performances in the country’ to which ‘farmers with their pants rolled up would pour in from all over the countryside, a dozen to a truck’.”

Local themes, foreign sounds
For a genre so imbued with nostalgia for an imagined ‘old Taiwan’, it comes as some surprise to find the sound of Hokkien popular music so markedly ‘modern’. In the use of twangy electric guitars which provide countermelodies to the main themes of many songs, as well as florid string accompaniments (produced nowadays on synthesizers), and rhythm
sections which take the form of those used in standard stage bands (conventional drum kits, electric bass guitars and Latin percussion), it could well be argued that there is little in the actual sound of a substantial number of Hokkien songs which speaks of local Taiwanese hometowns.

Perhaps most intriguing of all, however, is the overtly Japanese sound of this genre. In Hokkien popular music, ample use is made of melodies and arrangements originating in that unique genre of Japanese popular music known as *enka*. Many of the most successful standards of Hokkien music, a significant number of which celebrate the quintessential Taiwanese hometown, are in fact based on melodies directly appropriated from *enka* tunes. This has been noted by Taiwan-based musicologists; Jian Shangren, for example, refers to the ‘Japanese melodies’ (*Dongyang diao*) of many popular Hokkien songs, and notes that the adaptation of Japanese *enka* tunes in Hokkien popular songs is so widespread a practice that listeners have come to expect Hokkien songs to sound ‘Japanese’. Other theorists have argued that the reasons for the popularity of the *enka* sound in Hokkien songs lies in the mood of *enka* itself — only Japanese melodies are ‘sad enough’ for the melancholic nostalgia of Hokkien ballads.

Yet the *enka* sound in Taiwan has a history of its own, one which has been traced back a number of decades by the cultural historian Zhuang Yongming. As Zhuang has noted, the roots of the uses of *enka* in Taiwanese popular music can be found in the role of a number of influential song-writers and producers in the postwar decades who had resided or studied in Japan during the latter years of Japanese colonial rule in Taiwan, and who had maintained close connections with the Japanese music industry in the following decades. The works of Ye Junlin, Yang Sanlang and others whom I examined above, were typical of this generation who introduced *enka* influences into Taiwan’s Hokkien music world. The eclectic result of combining Japanese *enka* tunes and Hokkien lyrics has resulted in a type of song which some have dismissed as ‘hybrid songs’ (*huxue ge*); others have referred to them as ‘Taiwanese songs with Japanese tunes’ (*Riben qu Taiwan ge*).

There is nothing clandestine about the application of an *enka* sound in Hokkien-language popular music. Many of the artistes I have discussed here have recorded albums labeled as ‘*enka*’; Long Qianyu’s *Leng e enka* (Dragon’s *enka*) series of albums and Cai Xiaohu’s similar series *Ho e enka* (Tiger’s *enka*) are classic examples. Numerous songs that these and other artistes record are listed anonymously in acknowledgements as ‘*Riben qu*’ (Japanese tunes), with little attempt to hide the fact that these are, indeed, foreign melodies. Moreover, the work of *enka* transposition by figures such as Ye Junlin has been openly celebrated by the wider Taiwanese music world.

The predominance of an *enka* ‘sound’ in Hokkien popular music leads to a whole range of complex questions. For instance, to what extent do the values, themes and images so typical of this music reflect residual elements of Japanese colonialism in today’s Taiwan? Or does the presence of a strong *enka* sound instead represent a complicated set of transnational flows between musical genres in recent decades? As Jennifer Robertson has noted in her work on the Japanese concept of the *furusato* (hometown), *enka* music has been just as closely related to the ‘landscape of nostalgia’ in Japan since the 1970s as have Hokkien songs in Taiwan. The very fact that the term ‘*furusato*’, so common in the lyrics of *enka*, is the Japanese cognate of the Hokkien ‘*ko-hiong*’, suggests that the links

between Japanese enka and Taiwanese Hokkien popular music are strong. Such questions provide possible subject matter for future studies.

Some concluding remarks
With access to a wide-reaching and generally efficient transport infrastructure, it is now the case that many people in Taiwan find themselves further than a few hours’ travel from their native place of birth. And visiting the ko-hiong during Lunar New Year or other holiday seasons, many are now as likely to take a coach or aeroplane as they are to board a ‘home-bound’ train.

Yet throughout Taiwan, one can still hear the sounds of Hokkien singers lamenting the lost hometown, just as was the case over five years ago, when I first became interested in this genre. The longing for a regional Taiwan enshrined in this music continues to find a ready audience all over the island, even though this music has already passed the commercial peak it experienced in the mid-1990s. Long since industrialization and urbanization took hold, nostalgic reminiscences for the hometown of old continue to reverberate through these songs.

As an art form that has seen viewed by many as specifically ‘Taiwanese’ – and despite its very Japanese sound – Hokkien-language popular songs remain an important form of cultural expression in Taiwan. One could even argue that this music reflects many of the changes that Taiwanese society has undergone over the last four to five decades. Yet just as crucially, the images and ideas that are expressed through these songs continue to play a role in broader debates regarding the relationship between Taipei and regional Taiwan, city and country, and the island’s north and south.

NOTES

1 It should be noted at the outset that throughout this paper, Hokkien song titles are given in that language according to the so-called ‘Missionary script’, which is one of the most widely-employed systems of romanization for this language in Taiwan; personal names, however, are rendered in Hanyu Pinyin, whilst toponyms are given according to the standard spellings used in Taiwan (e.g., ‘Taipei’ rather than ‘Taipei’, and ‘Kaohsiung’ rather than ‘Gaoxiong’).

Throughout this paper, and in keeping with the standard practice in English-language scholarship, I refer to Minnan Yu / Taiyu as Hokkien. For recent instances of the use of the word ‘Hokkien’ in English-language publications about this language and its uses in Taiwan, see Chua Beng Huat – ‘Taiwan’s past / Singapore’s present mediated by Hokkien language’, Working Paper No. 149, Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore, 2000; Nancy Guy – ‘How does ‘Made in Taiwan’ sound? Popular music and strategizing the sounds of a multicultural nation’, in: Perfect Beat Vol.5, No.3 (July 2001), pp.1-17.

Mandarin, or standard Chinese, was brought to Taiwan in 1945 by the Chinese Nationalists (or KMT) following the formal cessation of half a century of Japanese colonialism and the subsequent ‘retrocession’ of Taiwan to Nationalist Chinese rule.


As the defacto capital of the ‘Republic of China’ on Taiwan, and as the home for a large concentration of people of post-war mainland China origin, Mandarin is more widely spoken in Taipei than anywhere else in Taiwan.


A phrase I borrow from Robert Mortimer Marsh – The Great transformation: Social change in Taiwan, Taiwan since the 1960s, M.E. Sharpe, 1996.


It should be noted that the hometown was a theme frequently evoked in Mandarin Chinese songs of the same period. On this point, see Tao Shaoqing – San yue zuoguo (March has passed), Huangguan Zazhishe, 1979.


Zeng Huijia – Cong liuxing gequ kan Taiwan shehui (Looking at Taiwanese society through popular music), Guiguan Tushu, 1998, esp. pp. 85-93. Similar conclusions have been reached by the literary theorist Liao Binglei in – ‘Jushi niandai liuxing gequ de chengxiang yishi: yi Chen Mingzhang he Zhu Yuixin wei li’ (City and country consciousness in the popular songs of the 1990s: Chen

5 It might be noted here that many performers of Hokkien-language songs also lead careers as television actors. A classic example of such is the male performer Luo Shifeng, who has recorded Hokkien songs for close to a decade, and who recently turned to acting in the Tai shi dianshi gongsi (Taiwan Television)'s soap opera Bang Hiong (Watching the village), for which he also sang the theme song.


7 The same song was recently employed as the theme to an evening news programme broadcast on Formosa Television. See Chen Shirong – ‘ Ko-lu e i an-bang Min shi chu qi zhaou’ (Formosa Television puts out Ko-lu e ian-bang as an unusual new theme), in: Taiwan ribao (Taiwan Daily News), 10 January 1998, p. 15.

8 A-peh is literally a term used to address one’s father’s elder brother. In this case, it appears in the more colloquial form, used to address a man of one’s father’s generation.

9 Lyrics obtained from Chen Honghui, op cit., p. 378. Lyrics by Ye Junlin, music accredited simply as ‘Riben qu’ (Japanese tune).

10 Lin Anlian – ‘Cheng mingqu de beihou: Ko-lu e ian-bang’ (The story behind a famous song: The aspirations of an orphan girl), in: Ziyuan Shibao (Liberty Times), 1 October 1996, p. 34.


13 With standards such as this one, music videos may be produced by different companies.


17 For more on Ye’s work, see Zheng Henglong and Guo Lijian – Taiwan geyao lianpu (The masks of Taiwanese ballads), Yushan Chubanshe, 2002.


20 Li Jia – In-ui goa ai li (Because I love you), Rock Records, Taipei, 1996: lyrics and music by Li Zhongqiang.

21 Although, as Jing Wang reminds us, the term has a multitude of other ‘political, socio-economic, and... literary’ connotations. See Jing Wang, op cit., p. 45.


23 Li Jia, op cit.

24 A number of the Nan Taiwan Xiao Guniang’s songs are listed in Lin Zhijian (ed.) – Taiyu liuxing xin ge (Popular new Taiwanese songs), Zongyi Chubanshe, 1996

25 See the PGST website at www.dmusic.com.tw/singer/girl03.htm
For an instance of the female Hokkien singer Huang Yiling being described in this way, see ‘Chun xin da dong; geshou tiao tiao tiao’ (There are big moves in store for Spring; singers are jumping all over the place), in: Minsheng Bao, 22 March 1998, p. 10.


‘...Minnyuyu getan duode shi zheyang de ren: wei jia jibude buzou matou yu ge de ren’. See Zeng Xinmei, op. cit., production notes.

‘Zeng Xinmei you ge baobei ma’ (Zeng Xinmei has a precious mother), in: Taiwan ribao (Taiwan Daily News), 26 January 1998, p. 15. It might be noted here that Zeng has also recorded the song Ma-ma chihli li iu po-tiong. See Zeng Xinmei – Bu sa-sama (Hazy), Country Records, Taipei, 1996.

Perhaps the most typical example of such programmes is Taiwan enka xia (The Taiwan enka show), produced by the Gala International (Ba Da Diyi Tai) cable network. On this programme, singers discuss their experiences in recording particular songs, their careers in the Hokkien popular music industry, and related topics.


Ye Longyan – Taiwan changtian sixiangsi: yibaijiwu dao yijia jujiu nian (Thinking of Taiwanese records: 1895-1999), Bo Yang Wenhua, 2001, p. 199.

See for example, Long Qianyu – Leng e enka lok: chin shi chi ai li (Dragon’s enka 6: I only love you), HCM Records, Taipei, 2002.

This was the case with the Taiwan guobao Ye Junlin chaozuo Taiyue gequ wushi nian qingzhu (A commemoration of fifty years of Hokkien song-writing by the Taiwanese national treasure Ye Junlin) concert held at the Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall, Taipei, 5 July 1996; a similar event was staged in 1998. See Yang Xiwen – ‘Zhünina Ye Junlin; shisan ti ting ta xie de ge’ (Remembering Ye Junlin: listen to the songs he wrote on 13 September), in: Ziyou shibao (Liberty Times), 5 September 1998, p. 30.

For one of the most thorough studies of Japanese colonialism and its cultural residue in Taiwan to be published in recent years, see Leo T. S. Ching – Becoming ‘Japanese’: colonial Taiwan and the politics of identity formation, University of California Press, 2001.

PERSONAL NARRATIVES AND INSIGHTS

‘Assistant’ Tanci Storytellers

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Love stories between gifted scholars and talented beauties make up the bulk of the over one hundred traditional story plots of Suzhou tanci, or Suzhou story singing (‘Suzhou chanteable’). Although the heyday years of Chinese story-singing are clearly past, local story singers in teahouses and clubs in Suzhou still manage to draw devoted and enthusiastic audiences. The author briefly traces the history and recent development of the genre, and summarizes interviews with three female performers who act as ‘assistants’ to lead performers of tanci. Today most assistants are women, while leads are usually men. Assistants mostly play secondary roles in performances, though many audience members seem to pay at least as much attention to attractive and talented assistants as they do to the leads. Artistic demands on the assistants can be considerable: ‘When you take your seat, the audience should already be saying, this performer is not bad, before you even open your mouth to sing!’

Suzhou tanci (literally ‘Suzhou plucking lyrics’) is a style of professional storytelling combining narration, dialogue, and singing accompanied by string instruments, (Zuo 1981; Zuo 1982; Tsao 1988; Wu et al, 1996; Bender 1998). Sometimes translated as ‘Suzhou storysinging’, ‘Suzhou chanteable’, and other similar equivalents, it is also known as tanchang (‘pluck-sing’). Love stories between gifted scholars and talented beauties make up the bulk of the over one hundred traditional story plots. Tanci’s companion art is Suzhou pinghua (Suzhou ‘straight storytelling’), a style of storytelling featuring one storyteller telling of heroes, court cases, and martial strife, with little or any singing and no instrumental accompaniment (Blader 1983). Both are associated with the ancient city of Suzhou and nearby Wu dialect areas of the lower Yangzi delta. Together the arts are known as Suzhou pingtan, a cognate term dating to the late 1940s that combines the ‘ping’ of ‘pinghua’ and the ‘tan’ of ‘tanci’. Both styles of storytelling have similar counterparts in the Yangzhou tradition, namely Yangzhou xianci (three-stringed banjo lyrics), also called Yangzhou tanci, and Yangzhou pinghua (Bordahl 1996). The pingtan arts share similarities with a number of other styles of orally performed narrative in various parts of China, especially south of the Jiangnan area and up the Yangzi River corridor (Bender 1996; 2001).

Although the heyday years of the pingtan arts in the 1930s and 1940s are long past (when tanci music was heard on dozens of Shanghai radio stations and story houses called shuchang seemed everywhere), the art of Suzhou tanci is still popular among devoted fans
and figures in the traditional local identity in the Wu dialect areas of Suzhou, Shanghai, Wuxi, Changshu, and other smaller cities and towns. There are today dozens of active story houses, a number of government organized troupes, and several amateur clubs. Besides live performances, television, radio, VCDs, videos, audiotapes, and even a rich Chinese website (www.pingtan.com.cn) are available to enthusiasts, the majority of whom are older men and women.

Performers of Suzhou tanci have adapted to rapid social changes over the last century and a half (Shen 1998). Music, delivery, and participants have all changed significantly, especially since the May Fourth Era of the 1920s when social reforms brought opportunities for female performers and saw the spread of new means of communication (especially radio). New musical styles, often subtly influenced by Western popular music and Chinese opera, developed rapidly in the 1930s and 1940s, and received great attention after the arts were taken under government control in the 1950s. Dialogue, once a minor part of performances in the 19th century, became so prominent that today many performances consist of 60-70% dialogue performed by storytellers when in the roles of characters (rather than the basic role of narrator).

Male storytellers of the past generally seemed to work solo (dandang), as do most pinghua performers today, sometimes with another man assisting in the dialogue and musical roles of tanci. Traditionally, the major guilds (especially the Guangyushe [Brilliant Abundance Guild] of Suzhou [Wu et al, ed, 1996:213] barred women as members. Moreover, guild members were not allowed to perform with members of the opposite sex. In the late 19th century, Ma Ruiyi, the legendary performer of the classic tanci, Pearl Pagoda (Zhenzhu ta), edited a collection of over three hundred opening ballads. A number of these lyrics satirize prominent female tanci performers, some who seem to have been blind (n.a. 1997:198). Regardless of male attitudes, there seems to have been a long tradition of women tanci storytellers (Chen 1958:205-219; Zao 1983; Fang 1997), many of whom seem to have performed in duos and trios, featuring the three-stringed sanxian banjo (the basic instrument of most tanci performances), pipa lute, and occasionally other stringed instruments. Some women told the typically lengthy tanci tales over a period of weeks or months in a mixture of singing and speaking (a favorite among some women seems to have been Pair of Pearl Phoenixes [Shuang zhufeng]). Certain venues featured women who sang only ‘opening ballads’ (kaipian), today performed as warm-up or cameo pieces before the much longer tales begin. There were also places where young female storytellers were available as intimate companions to male customers (Chen 1958:210-211; Zhou 1988: 144; Fang 1997:138-139). Though most women storytellers wore female garb, there were instances of individuals dressing as men.

In the wake of the liberating May Fourth movement of the 1920s and during the ‘bump’ tanci popularity received with the introduction and spread of radio in the 1930s and 1940s (Benson 1995; 2000), the duo constellation form grew in popularity. The traditional solo form favoured by many male performers gradually fell out of favour, due in part to the dullness of the music of the lone sanxian. By the late 1920s, female assistants began to regularly appear on stage in Shanghai to assist male leads. In some cases accomplished females had male assistants. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, male-female duos became the most favored constellation for many listeners.
government sponsored troupes in the 1950s, many women made contributions to the enrichment of tanci music, with a number of new styles of music named after them (Tsao 1988). A memorial centre devoted to one such innovator, Xu Lixian, was recently opened in Heshan Park (Heshan gongyuan) in the Fengqiao district of Suzhou.

Most pingtan performances today feature a lead (shangshou, ‘upper hand’) and an assistant (xiashou, ‘lower hand’). Although female duos are not at all rare (most male pairs have retired), the ‘ideal’ combination is a male lead and a female assistant. Since love stories are the stock in trade in the art, the possibilities inherent in the shifting between and manipulation of the male and female roles gives great potential to performers skilled in taking advantage of them (Bender 1999). Nevertheless, female duos are popular, though as noted below, some women find the male roles challenging. In the last year or two a number of young women have joined the Suzhou troupe after completing a year or so of experience performing with a master in story houses, indicating that trained performers in their early twenties are still entering the profession.

One example of a younger female lead today is Zhou Hong of the Shanghai troupe. She regularly performs the classic tanci story, Miaojin feng (Etched Gold Phoenix), a humorous love story set in old Suzhou. Like many lead performers, Zhou Hong (formally Zhou Xiaojun of the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe) spent years as an assistant, participating in duos and trios, involving both men and women. Aside from her masters (in 1992 she took the famous Yu Hongxian as a second master, incorporating part of her name in hers), Zhou Hong also learned a great deal from other performers in the Suzhou pingtan troupe and storytellers from other troupes with whom she worked. Now coming into her own, she represents an emerging mature generation of women storytellers trained in the mid 1980s to the early 1990s.

Interviws with Assistant Storytellers
Among the more-experienced women who were Zhou Hong’s mentors were several who performed with her in a special ‘middle-length’ tanci (zhongpian tanci) production in the spring of 1992. They were among nine storytellers participating in the performance of the New Version of the Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage Story (Yang Naiwu yu Xiao Baicai xin zhuang) written by former head of the Suzhou troupe, Gong Huasheng. The group toured cities in the Lower Yangzi for several months, performing for three hours at each venue,
the story told in three one hour sections by three different trios of storytellers. The middle-length form became popular in the 1950s as a way to reach a wider audience than the more lengthy story house performances given by one or two performers over a period of two or more weeks and as a way to introduce new alternatives to older and less 'healthy' tanci stories which were under attack at the time. The form is only occasionally seen today.

The story, which has been in the tanci repertoire for about one hundred years has been performed by several lineages of tanci performers. Versions of the well-known favourite in its longer form are still told and at least one recent print version has appeared (Xing and Xing 1989). In the early 1990s the story was re-worked and condensed by former Suzhou troupe leader Gong Huasheng. It is based on an actual love-affair in the late 19th century between a young scholar named Yang Naiwu, and a married beancurd seller, Little Cabbage (Xiao Baicaí). The case involved over 400 officials of varying rank, and had all the elements of a compelling story: illicit sex, murder, betrayal, wrongful imprisonment, torture, and endless layers of official corruption. Events began in a small town in Yuhong County in northern Zhejiang province, eventually reaching the court of the Empress Dowager Cixi. Gong’s adaptation of the work seemed an apt one for the China of the early 1990s, a time when corruption was increasingly a factor of daily life.

The personal narratives that follow are extracts from interviews I made with three of the nine participants during the middle-length tour. The stories were told to me in the back rooms of story houses, hotel rooms, and in homes during breaks from travel ‘on the road’ throughout venues all over the Wu-speaking enclaves in the Yangzi delta area.
Gong Huasheng and Cai Xiaojuan (right) performing a scene from Meng Lijun, mid-1980s.

(Bender 1994). (The trip included a performance in Yuhong county, which largely failed due to differences in local dialects.) As the women recount their personal experiences, they communicate attitudes towards their art, provide some very insightful comments on their supporting roles in performances, performance dynamics in the multiple performer context, aesthetics of Suzhou storytelling, and advice on what it takes to create successful storytelling events.

Cai Xiaojuan
Cai Xiaojuan is the longtime assistant and wife of Gong Huasheng, former head of the Suzhou Pingtan Troupe. When I interviewed her in their Suzhou apartment on June 1, 1992, she was 46 years old (though she pointed out that by local reckoning, she was already 48). She told me something of her background, and then talked about the proper comportment of the assistant in the storytelling duo. Assistants usually play secondary roles in performances, though many audience members seem to pay at least as much attention to attractive and talented assistants as they do to the leads. Here I have paraphrased a range of comments made by Cai, who began by explaining how she had been involved in storytelling for 39 years.

According to her lively account, a relative owned a story house in Kunshan, a city that has produced a number of storytellers, and each day after school she stopped outside to listen. She also had a maternal uncle who was an amateur storyteller (piaoyou). This uncle eventually decided to ‘jump into the sea’ (xiahai) and become a professional. He needed an assistant, but his level was so low that he could find no one with whom to perform. Later,
he discovered that Cai had the ability to listen to stories once and repeat them verbatim. He asked her if she would ‘study with him’ to become a storyteller. Thus, at age nine, after five months of preparation with her uncle, she took to the stage. Since the uncle did not have a good story, Cai sat in on the performances of a famous storyteller from Shanghai. Each day she would recite the episode at home while her uncle copied it down. (This is a fine example of what the storytellers call toushu or ‘story stealing’). Later her uncle had to quit storytelling for lack of business, but Cai took up with another storyteller and by age twelve was supporting her family, including putting several siblings through school. Her partner was a twenty-year-old man who ‘never grew up’. Thus, audiences were drawn by the sight of ‘two small people’ on stage performing as the pair toured story houses in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Later, as troupes were organized in the early 1950s, she was advised to perfect her art by studying with a famous storyteller. Although she had ‘already mastered the basics’ at age eighteen she studied with superstar Hou Lijun of the Jiangsu provincial quyi troupe for a period of time. She later took up with Gong Huasheng, married, and had a son and a daughter. By the early 1980s, she and Gong had revived a version of Meng Lijun, which led to coveted invitations to perform in Hong Kong. She often played the role of Meng Lijun’s lady-in-waiting, Su Yingxue, who is forced to marry in Meng’s stead when the talented young beauty runs away from home disguised as a young man. Meng, passing as a male, eventually becomes a prime minister; by odd twist of fate, Su becomes the foster daughter of a powerful minister in the capital and is engaged to the disguised Meng Lijun.

Cai noted that today most assistants are females (despite the gender of the lead, usually male). The leads arrange the plot and make most of the decisions on what gets performed, though in some pairs the assistant may have considerable input and certainly acts as the initial sounding board for ideas. An assistant is very important and can make or break the duo. Being an assistant is not easy and good ones tend to be very flexible. If an assistant performs with a new lead (after a duo breaks up, or in a contest or special presentation), she must be able to quickly memorize the new story and adapt to the lead’s ways. If a lead loses an assistant, he or she can at least keep the same story, but that is not the case for assistants. Today, most mixed-gender duos are married. This can be good if they get along well, but bad if they do not. Demands on assistants differ somewhat. As mentioned, Cai’s partner is Gong Huasheng, former leader of the Suzhou troupe. Gong’s ‘story road’ (shulu), or direction of narration, unfolds with complex passages of explanation and commentary, which the assistant must on occasion also share in relating. On the other hand, some leads seek assistants mainly for their ability to act the roles of lesser characters and for their skill with the pipa, which may cover up for deficiencies in the lead’s playing of the sanxian banjo. Assistants must be open to cues from the lead if he gets a sudden inspiration, or for some reason wishes to change the performance mid-course. On the other hand, Cai sometimes becomes inspired while performing, thinking, ‘Oh, if you just could say this, it would be so much better’. Later, she may make her suggestions, which seem to be followed quite regularly. On the other hand, Cai noted, ‘I’ve been with Gong so long that when he gets to a place, I can figure out what he wants me to say next. But this only comes with maturity and experience’. One important aspect is handling the last ten or so minutes of the daily episodes. The goal is to start a crisis (guanzì), but not finish it until the next day
so that the audience will return. Sometimes, however, because the opening ballad was too short or a certain passage was spoken or sung too quickly, there is time left over. There is not enough time to really finish the crisis, ‘even if you wanted to’, and the only way out is to fill in with a longish song or add some dialogue (often between lower characters). The lyrics may be made up, and are often not very good on close inspection. A lot depends on how well the lead and assistant cooperate in such situations. All told, however, inspiration on the story platform is often, ‘very often’, necessary. But you cannot give away the crisis that day. Then the next day you just take the first twenty minutes to finish the crisis.

Cai also stressed an assistant’s carriage and demeanour (Bender 1994). It should be like, ‘When you take your seat, the audience should already be saying, this performer is not bad, before you even open your mouth to sing’. This is true of both lead and assistant, but especially so for the assistant. Posture, gestures, and eye movements must all be carefully controlled.2 The eyes must reflect calmness and cultivation, and not be leering about. Cai felt that she did not have words to express exactly what quality is desired, but stressed over and over that the right way of carrying one’s self went a very long way in making an impression on the audience and holding their attention. She said that you must get control (yazu) of the audience from the start or they will not listen to what you are saying. They will be drinking tea, wandering around, smoking, etc. So you must use all your energy to get their full attention. You must convey the message: ‘You must listen, this is important’. This begins with walking out on stage and sitting down. If you do not get them early, it is very hard to get them later.

Cai also said that one must make use of one’s strengths and make up for one’s lacks. One’s posture and bearing can help do this, especially for older performers who have lost the edge on their singing and their youth. Older performers (that is, those past their thirtyies, considered the physical prime of storytelling) may still sing well, but will command attention because of their mastery of the whole art, including physical presence, which the young are still learning (at least those who work hard). This applies to other aspects as well. When one gets a script, one must examine it and see how it fits in with one’s strengths, and change it if some areas can be made more suitable for one’s own style.

‘You need to keep the content, but some things can be changed around. For instance, with the New Version of the Yang Naiwu Story (performed as a middle-length story by three groups of three storytellers), my singing roles came last. Two other assistants had sung in the episodes before mine. Coming last, I had to come up with something that could compete with these younger singers and keep audience interest. When I examined the script, I found that I could intersperse passages of speaking and singing. I used a high, authoritative voice in the Empress Dowager’s roles and discovered after we had performed twice in out of the way venues, that a certain part needed a few extra words for effect. If the script is not modified to your needs, it becomes very hard to tell.’

Xu Shujuan

Xu Shujuan, age 40 in 1992, was a member of the Shanghai troupe. She performed regularly with a member (and later vice-president) of the Suzhou troupe, Jin Lisheng. Their most popular tale was their version of the Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage story. Both were students of Li Bokang, a master of that story from an earlier generation. Xu
studied in the Shanghai Opera School (Shanghai xiqu xueyuan) and took Li Bokang as her master. In the ceremony, held in the school, she bowed three times after being introduced by a master of ceremonies. She recalls that she was wearing a dress before the ceremony, but was reminded that pants might be better for bowing, so she hurriedly changed into pants. Her training was quite serious and she feels that today’s students have a much more casual relationship with their teachers – she remembers barely speaking to her master and basically just doing as she was told. Xu had the misfortune of completing her training just as the pingtan world was collapsing in the Cultural Revolution. She went to the countryside and was not able to perform for several years. After the fall of the ‘gang of four’ in 1976, she gradually got back into storytelling, but ‘my best years were gone’.

When I asked what she thought was different between the long version of the Yang Naiwu story and that of Gong Huasheng’s middle-length version, she said that she had never liked the character of Little Cabbage (which she plays). She disliked Little Cabbage because all along she knew that Yang Naiwu was innocent, yet held her tongue. Only after the middle-length group visited Yuhong county (the home of Yang Naiwu and Little Cabbage) and she became more familiar with Gong’s version did she see that Little Cabbage’s situation might have had more sides than represented in the longer version.

She commented that the version of the story performed by the brother and sister duo, Xing Yanchun and Xing Yanzhi, was very good, but different from her and Jin’s version, even though both duos received the story from the same line of masters (Xing and Xing 1989). I also asked her if she had seen the television version of the story. She said yes but the actress playing Little Cabbage was not quite as lovely as she imagined the one in the story to be, and the actor playing Yang Naiwu was definitely much different than in her mind. Thus the story world’s hold over her imagination was even stronger than an actual apparition.

Speaking about her position as an assistant, Xu stated that she liked both the singing and speaking roles, though she felt that for an assistant, the singing roles were most important, as much of the narration is done by the lead. She feels that an assistant is a complement to the lead. She performs most of the young female characters (dan), but points out that a storyteller should be able to handle all the roles. In doing the Little Cabbage character, she tries to get into her personality, which is soft (ruanzuo), using the right tones of voice and gestures. Since it is a Qing dynasty story (most traditional stories are set in the Ming), there are fewer conventions (guiju) for gestures and voice registers (much less of the Mandarin-derived Zhongzhouyun speech style used by upper-class characters), and she is freer to use her own imagination to do a character. However, the audience must still accept the representation. She emphasized that in performance their must be ‘interaction between the performers and audience’ (taishang jiadiliu) and that she can tell what the audience is thinking by their expressions, post-performance comments and just a general feel developed through experience. Praises are easy to receive, but comments like ‘you should stay a little longer on the platform at the end, out of respect’ are harder to swallow, especially when she has done her best. ‘In storytelling, it is necessary to transmit feeling (qing) to the audience.’

One half-hour before performances she mentally prepares (sixiang junbel) herself for her roles. Today, she is a little less strict with preparation, feeling it is not necessary given the level of many contemporary audiences. ‘Even if I were much better, it would be of no
use.' Like several other storytellers I interviewed, she also regularly follows a regimen of *qigong* exercises. It is mostly for health, but she said that when on stage the exercises give her better spirit (*jingshen*) and her delivery is better. She sometimes drinks tea on the platform, though older storytellers recommend only water. During middle-length stories she doesn’t drink at all, as it is distracting, but in the longer stories, she needs an occasional discrete sip. As of this writing, Xu still appears at various *pingtan* venues, including solo singing performances at storytelling gatherings held in honour of important historical dates and events.

**Wang Xiaodie**

I interviewed Wang Xiaodie (about 50) on June 11, 1992 at a government guest house in Kunshan, again on the Yang Naiwu group tour. Wang is a longtime member of the Suzhou troupe and a very lively and humorous performer. She spent her youth in Kunshan and went around with her mother, *tanci* performer Wang Diejun, from age three. At age fourteen, she became her mother’s assistant and they toured the region performing the traditional stories, *Big Red Cloak (Da hong pao)* and *Etched Gold Phoenix (Miaojin feng).* It was a hard life, eked out in the few remaining private story houses after 1949. In 1957–58, the duo split and at age 16 or 17 she became a member of what would become the Suzhou troupe. Storytellers were divided into three groups: older ones well known before 1949, older but less accomplished storytellers, and younger ones about Wang’s age. It was felt that the future of storytelling rested with Wang’s age group and much effort was made to train them in the newer politically correct stories that were becoming mandatory. Wang recalls many performances in a wide variety of venues. For a time, all the storytellers lived at the troupe office, allowed to go home only on Sundays and husbands and wives were not allowed to live together. Gong Huasheng and Jin Lisheng were among the other young storytellers with her in the troupe. Among the traditional stories she told in those early years were the Yang Naiwu story (with Jin Lisheng) and Jade Dragonfly (Yaqingting).

In all Wang Xiaodie spent over thirty years as an assistant, though as of 1992 she had spent several years as a lead. She and another woman, told *The Romance of the Flying Dragon (Fei long zhuoan)*, a version of the story of the Song dynasty patriotic hero, Yue Fei (a popular figure in *pinghua* stories). Wang feels that a lead and assistant must be on about the same level, or else one of them will lose face. Moreover, in middle-length productions, all of the performers must be good, or the poor ones will lose face. Thus, everyone tends to work very hard due to the competition and side-by-side presentation. In thirty years of experience she has learned that you cannot just be ‘so-so’ no matter how long you have been at it. Practice is still necessary off stage. She stated that, ‘A duo is a unit, and must cooperate’. You have to have something extra, especially if you are telling the older stories. ‘Even though such stories are very good and have become highly polished over the years, they are so well known; even the audience can tell them.’ Her former partner had a good voice, and they shared mutual trust (*xinyi*) when performing.

In her transition to lead, Wang found out that the job is difficult, requiring one to know all the roles and characters. Although both the lead and assistant must know the roles, the lead has a heavier burden in assuming them. Also, she found that she could not follow male ways of performance completely, especially in the speaking and singing roles, where she
Zhao Shanbin and Wang Xiaodie (right), 1980s, performing Fei Long Chou (The Hatred of Fei Long).

found her range was not as great as that of many males. Thus, she had to figure out ways to get around it by modifying the delivery. As Cai Xiaojuan mentioned above, she had to modify many things in the voice roles to her own strengths. Also, she found it difficult to be in the position of a teacher. Since assistants seldom take students (at least for the speaking roles), she was surprised to learn how hard it is to teach.

Wang is an all round performer, accomplished in both singing, narrating, and the character roles. She says that it all 'starts with feeling (gangqing)', that a storyteller must use feeling to make a story 'good listening' (haoting). If one sloppily cracks jokes, uses crude humor, or slips poorly in and out of character, the effect is not nice and reflects on the skill of the performer. Proper handling of the basics is most important. Wang also felt that experience is a great teacher, both from practice and interaction with the audience – their real teachers. She feels that it takes about 8–10 years for a storyteller to become mature, especially in the speaking roles. The three or four years of practice in the storytelling school are not enough, aside from the fact that the students all sound the same and speak in a flat manner. Again, the test is whether or not a storyteller can get the audience wholly under control.

Wang also stressed deportment (taifeng) while on the stage. One should take care in sitting and standing, looking spirited (jingshen) at all times. One must be calm and collected, not leering every which way. The energy between performers must also be dealt with carefully. When characters (played by different performers) are interacting, the eyes must interact as well as the voices. This helps one's partner to be livelier and get better into the characterization. It is not like in the movies or theatre. 'When I speak, I require you to accompany (peihe) me well. If you follow my energy, I follow yours.' (Here, she is referring to the energy conveyed in the eyes [yanshen] and voice.) 'We are an oral art, if the narration and speaking roles are not good, it's like drinking plain boiled water.' She
emphasized that all that storytellers have is a mouth, no props or make-up or background music (except what they play when singing) and that they need to give full attention even to the smallest details or scene.

I asked about the differences between female duos and mixed duos. She replied that in some ways working with a woman is convenient, for if a mixed couple is not married it can sometimes be ‘inconvenient’. She also felt that men are more useful for handling luggage, though it is easier to have heart to heart talks with women. As far as the art goes, Wang feels that mixed duos are more desirable. Although female duos can attract audiences (‘sometimes not simply for the level of their art’), women are more limited in how they handle certain roles. Besides the voice range problem mentioned above, she also added that fight scenes by women often look bad and some male characters are hard to portray. ‘Male and female (duos) are more complete; a story will always have male and female characters.’

When asked about handling mistakes, she said that that came with experience. Echoing other storytellers, a basic principle is, ‘If you say a line wrong, just keep going, don’t correct it, just get around it. There is usually a way to patch a hole. On the other hand, if there is no way out, make a joke, something like: ‘Oh goodness, I’ve said that wrong! And you, old guests, heard it too, didn’t you?’’ Sometimes such a joke can actually help to improve the performance, so inspired jokes or quips can be advantageous.

Wang normally prepares for one hour before storytelling sessions. She does not talk to anyone and just concentrates on the upcoming two-hour performance. The last half-hour is particularly intense. She must develop feeling (peiyang ganqing) and consider what to add or subtract in order to do so. She was quite disappointed with the habits of some young performers who spend only five minutes preparing before they go on, sometimes scurrying around to get their performing clothes on. ‘You should mount the platform serenely, not out of breath because you have been gabbing and running around just minutes beforehand.’ Wang admits to occasionally being nervous, especially with unfamiliar material. However, ‘Sometimes it is good to be calm, and sometimes it is good to be a bit nervous’. In all, she wants to please the audience, she does not want them to think, ‘She is usually so good, why is she so off today?’ And she can tell the audience reactions from their expressions. ‘If you can’t see their faces, you won’t do as well. You need the feedback. In large auditoriums, you can’t see them, so it’s harder.’ (Many performers complain about the blinding effect of stage lights and the distance from audiences in auditoriums.) She said, ‘Our art consists of “jumping in and jumping out” (tiaojin tiaoqu) of various roles... This is harder to do with effect if one can’t see from their faces whether you are succeeding or not. Storytelling is different from Chinese opera. Sometimes the character must act as the narrator (in the jiaose biao mode), and you as storyteller must join the audience to listen... When I play Yang Naiwu, and speak out his heart, I must become him, speaking out his inner thoughts... jumping in and jumping out.’ Thus it is necessary to ‘work in concert’ with the audience (to have ‘huyin’), to be heart to heart with them. (In performers’ jargon this is also called houlou).

Wang still planned to tell stories for another three or four years, but would become an assistant again. She was preparing to join up with another woman, who had just split with her assistant. The newly formed duo were preparing to tell the story Butterfly Quilt (Hudie bei).
Conclusion

The above interviews are anecdotal in essence, but are valuable documents in attempting to understand what Suzhou pingtan storytellers think about themselves as artists and their art. As younger generations of women storytellers take center stage, they are faced with a dynamic social scene that will challenge them as artists upholding a tradition rooted in previous centuries. Daily they embody and enact their art in the story houses and other venues throughout the Jiangnan region. How this art will survive and prosper in the coming years will in no small part be determined by the interest and support of fans and storytelling troupes, continued government and commercial encouragement, and the dedication and agency of the present younger generation storytellers, very much including the assistants, as they grow into positions of responsibility and influence in the pingtan storytelling world.

NOTES

1 Portions of this article are based on a talk entitled ‘The Role of the Lower Hand in Performances of Suzhou Tanci’, presented at the 2000 CHIME meeting in Leiden, ‘Performers, Audience, and Patrons in Asian Performing Arts’. The interview material appears in a somewhat different context in my book on Suzhou storytelling, Plum and Bamboo: China’s Suzhou Chantefable Tradition, published by University of Illinois Press (2003). I wish to thank the Committee on Scholarly Exchange with the People’s Republic of China for a 1991-1992 grant supporting the fieldwork dimensions of this paper.

2 Foot tapping and other movements to keep time with the music are regarded as extremely bad form.

3 In the fall of 1991, I saw Wang’s mother, Wang Diejun, perform a solo version of a few episodes from Etched Gold Phoenix in the Shamao Story Hall in Suzhou. She was over 70 at the time, but still captivated the audience with her earthy rendition of Qian Zijing on one of his legendary drinking sprees and later a visit to his mistress.
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**GLOSSARY**

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taifeng
Taishang jiaoliu
tanci
tiaojin tiaochu	台凤
toushu	台上交流
tangci	弹词
tiaojin tiaochu	跳进跳出	偷书
Wang Diejun	王蝶君
Wang Xiaoding	王小蝶
xiashou	下手
Xing Yanchun	邢言春
Xing Yanzhi	邢言芝
Xu Lixian	徐丽仙
Xu Shujuan	徐淑娟
yanshen	眼神
Yangzhou xianci	扬州弦词
Yu Hongxian	余红仙
Zhongzhouryun	中州韵
Zhou Hong (Zhou Xiaojun)	周红（周小君）

Story titles:
Da hong pao
tiaojin tiaochu	台凤
daxian feng	大仙风
Feilong zhuai	飞龙传
daxian feng	大仙风
Hudie bei	蝴蝶坊
daxian feng	大仙风
Meng Lijun	孟丽君
daxian feng	大仙风
Miaojin feng	描金凤
Shanghai tan	上海探
daxian feng	大仙风
Shuang zhufeng
daxian feng	大仙风
Zhenzhu ta
daxian feng	大仙风
Yang Naiwu xin zhuai
daxian feng	大仙风
Yu qingting
daxian feng	大仙风
THE FATE OF SPRING WILLOW SOCIETY AND THE 'ENLIGHTENED THEATRE' MOVEMENT AS REMEMBERED BY THE ACTOR OU YU QIAN

Many Wasted Years in the World of Theatre?

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Spring Willow Society, founded in 1906 in Tokyo, was one of the first Chinese theatre troupes to adopt Western-style spoken drama. Without first-hand knowledge of Western staging, its young actors started to perform Western-inspired plays. They initiated this during their student days in Japan, taking inspiration from performances in Japanese. From an amateur student troupe, Spring Willow developed into a professional ensemble in Shanghai, but it fell apart in 1915. In portraying its history, the author draws amply on the memoirs of one of its most distinguished members, the actor and writer Ouyang Yuqian, who was also a skilled Beijing opera actor. The successes and failures of the group offer fascinating insights into the initial phase of modern Chinese spoken drama, with its search for new approaches and its problems of assimilation in a society still much determined by traditional Chinese culture. The keyword, for everyone involved at the time, was ‘enlightenment’.

Theatre emerges and exists in a social context. The various ways people create, perform, perceive, and respond to theatre and other performing arts are vitally dependent on the particular situation: not only on the specific place, time, and audience, but also on historical and cultural contexts, including social psychology and patterns of behaviour. In recent years, more attention has been drawn to the latter two aspects, providing fresh insight into developments in the performing arts as affected by cross-cultural contacts.

The present study reflects on the initial phase of modern Chinese spoken drama (huaju 戲劇) which became part of China’s modernization and had political, social, and cultural impacts often underrated. It examines Spring Willow Society (Chuntiushe 春柳社), one of the first Chinese new-theatre troupes founded in the early 20th century. Significantly, Spring Willow made its first appearance in the Tokyo diaspora, started by a group of highly motivated overseas Chinese students with great aspirations for drama reform following Euro-American and Japanese models. Similar to the revolutionary groups and politically engaged intellectuals among the Chinese students in Japan, the activities of Spring Willow
after 1909 moved to Shanghai, where the troupe, along with other new drama companies, could stage and express new beliefs and standards in the protective environment of foreign concessions which offered a fairly open public sphere.

The account below is largely informed by the memoirs of one of Spring Willow’s most celebrated members: the actor, dramatist, and theatre critic Ouyang Yuqian 欧陽予倩 (1889-1963). A sketch of Spring Willow’s history, with performances up to 1915, is followed by a survey of its successes and failures, and a discussion of its place in the ‘Enlightened Theatre’ kaimingxi 開明戲 (or ‘Civilized Theatre’ wenmingxi 文明戲) movement. In concluding, I shall discuss: (1) the difficulty of acculturation and inter-cultural assimilation with regard to new forms and styles of theatrical expression in competitive situations, in this case ‘Enlightened Theatre’ versus traditional Chinese opera (Beijing opera and local plays); (2) conditions for the implementation of new performance styles, considering the interaction between native and newly induced patterns of behaviour from a social psychology perspective; and (3) properties of the political and social environment in transitional societies, namely openness, receptiveness, and protection, as necessary conditions for successfully reshaping traditional lifeworld-systems.

Setting the Stage: Spring Willow’s Foundation, Tokyo Experience (1906-1909), and Maturation Within ‘Enlightened Theatre’

Spring Willow was one of the first Chinese theatre troupes to adopt Western-style drama and performance.¹ The Society was established in the winter of 1906 in Tokyo. Its founders, Zeng Xiaogu 曾小谷 (1873-1936) and Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880-1942), two young overseas Chinese students, enthusiastically propagated the study of Western dramatic arts as received in Japan.² Thus, one peculiarity of the short-lived theatre experiment of Spring Willow was the indirect reception of Western drama via Japanese models that were themselves adaptations of Western originals. Whereas the Japanese catalysts of drama modernization had first-hand knowledge of Western staging gained during visits to Europe and America,³ none of the Spring Willow members had personally experienced Western theatre. Being offspring of the Japanese shingeki undō 新劇運動, or ‘New Theatre Movement’, that was born around 1900 at Waseda and Keiō, two major Tokyo universities,⁴ the Chinese Spring Willow, very much like its Japanese counterparts, aimed at ‘betterment of [traditional] opera’ (xiju ga liang 戲劇改良, also ga liang xiju 改良戲劇) through eliminating formalistic features and adopting Western dramaturgy and themes. However, the reform of traditional dramatic arts was only secondary. The main purpose of Spring Willow was the thorough study of Western-style spoken drama and its introduction to the Chinese audience. Both tenets are declared in Spring Willow’s agenda, the ‘Spring Willow Society Performing Arts Section Special Statutes’ (‘Chunliushe yanyibu zhuanzhang’ 斥柳社演藝部專章), drafted by Li Shutong in 1906.⁵ The introduction to the ‘Special Statutes’ frankly glorifies the achievements of the ‘civilized’ (wenming 文明) countries – Europe, America, and Japan – while disparaging all traditional heritage.⁶ Although the Society’s intention to study the various literary and performing arts (wenyi 文藝) seems to take up the spirit of its model, Tsubouchi Shōyō’s 塚本巌 (1859-1934) Bungei kyōkai 文芸協會 (Literary Association, 1906), some conceptual differences in shared terminology set them apart. Without going into detail, I select two important keywords of Japanese and Chinese
drama reform, ‘new school’ (shinpa 新派 Chin. xinpai) and ‘old school’ (kyūha 舊派 Chin. jiupai), to illustrate the confusion in meaning. While the Japanese ‘new school’ shinpa 新派 was applied to modernized kabuki 歌舞伎, in contrast to the reform drama shingeki 新劇 after Euro-American prototypes, Spring Willow used the term for designating Western-style drama – ‘today popular in Europe and America’ – that ‘moves people by speech and gesture’. The Japanese ‘old school’ kyūha 舊派 referred to traditional kabuki whereas the Chinese ‘old school’ comprised all native Chinese operatic systems and styles, Kunqu 昆曲 (Kun opera), erhuang 二黃 (as part of jingju 京劇, or Beijing opera), Qinxiang 秦腔 (clapper opera), and so forth.8

Spring Willow was not the first Chinese theatre society that called for drama reform. Thinking about change had started in the late 19th century. In Shanghai, around 1899, a number of societies and colleges, among them missionary schools, began to perform Western, Western-style, or ‘new plays’ (xinju 新劇).9 Chinese writers, dramatists, and literary critics, like Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929) and Wang Guowe 莊國維 (1877-1927), proposed modifications and married the old with the new, as happened in Liang’s New Rome (Xin Luoma 新羅馬).10 In the autumn of 1904 the first Chinese theatre journal, Ershi shiji da wutai 二十世紀大舞臺 (Twentieth Century Grand Theatre), appeared but ceased publication after only two issues. In 1905 Wang Youyou 汪唄游 (1888-1937), a student at the Minli zhongxue 民立中學 (National Middle School), founded the Wenyouhui 文友會 (Literary Friends Society), which can be regarded as the first drama society in China. Lasting only some months, it mounted two plays. In 1906 Wang, Zha Shuangyun 朱雙雲, and others established the Kaiming yanjuhui 開明演劇會 (Enlightenment Drama Society). This troupe strongly emphasized the political, military, social, educational, and religious functions of new drama.11 The Enlightenment Drama Society’s radical reform programme, embracing almost every aspect of society, was mirrored in its drama concept, which can be characterized as iconoclast Theatre of Fact. By contrast, the constitution of Spring Willow showed conspicuous innocence. Though its founders underlined drama’s function for society’s ‘enlightenment’ too, they were rather cautious in formulating concrete politically or socially contentious goals. Avoiding controversial phrases, the programme stresses the artistic aspects of drama reform, focusing on refinement of drama music, setting, and costumes.12 Drama’s content should be ‘modern’, taking up contemporary themes to ‘make clear wisdom and knowledge, and to rouse [the people’s] spirit’.13 Yet this did not imply political propaganda or activism on stage. It rather meant Spring Willow’s insistence on the educational function of theatre, involving psychological sensitivity and mediation between value systems past and present. Theatre should reveal the problems and contradictions of society and offer better insight into causes and solutions to social injustice and imbalance. On the whole, the programme reflected the serious efforts of Spring Willow to develop a new, elaborated Chinese spoken drama that broke with tradition in spirit, content, and form. Intellectual enlightenment was regarded more highly than pure entertainment, earnest study of theory and acting skills was held more important than rapid success through performances that sought the audience’s applause by satisfying their appetite for the bizarre and exotic.

Spring Willow had its first performance in February 1907 on the occasion of a charity event to raise money for famine relief in China. The four actors, Zeng Xiaogu, Li Shutong,
Tang Ken 唐肯, and Sun Zongwen 孙宗文 staged one act of Alexandre Dumas fils’ (1824-1895) *La dame aux camélias* (1848), *Chahwunü* 茶花女,14 with the support of the famous *shinpa* actor Fujisawa Asajirō 藤泽浅二郎 (1866-1917).15 The inspiring performance led Ouyang Yuqian and other later reknowned actors like Wu Wozun 吴我尊, Xie Kangbai 谢康白, Li Wenquan 李文权, Huang Erman 黄二敏, and Zhuang Yunshi 蒲云石, to join the Society, which became increasingly popular.16

However, it was *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, or *Heiniu yu tian lu* 黑奴遇天禄 (Record of the Black Slave Crying to Heaven), mounted at the Hongöza 本鄉座 1 and 2 June 1907, which was considered the true opening of Spring Willow Society. Notably, the Hongöza in Tokyo’s university district had been the main site of Japanese *shinpa*’s glorious staging. This was where the course for *kabuki* reform had been set. The playbill of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* declared *The Aims of Spring Willow Society’s 1907 Grand Performance*, recalling essential points of the earlier statues:17

The greatest task of artistic performance is enlightenment. Therefore, in founding this Society, we establish a special section for studying new and old drama. [The Society] hopes to be the precursor of our country’s reform in the world of arts.

Spring Willow’s mission was clear: reform of all arts starts on stage. Indeed, theatre, as well as the novel and poetry, were the first genres to openly challenge tradition and proffer new approaches, thus predating all calls for literary and cultural renewal by the May Fourth Movement.

*Black Slave Crying to Heaven* was an extraordinary event. The number of visitors far exceeded expectations.18 The performance was discussed in several Japanese newspapers, among them *Hōchi shinbun* 報知新聞 (Information News) and *Tōkyō mainichi shinbun* 東京毎日新聞 (Tokyo Daily News). Furthermore, it received positive reviews from leading Waseda theatre critics such as Oka Onitarō 向鬼太郎, Doi Shunso 上肥春曙, and most importantly, from the influential Ihara Seiseien 伊原青青園, who together with Shunso surveyed the Spring Willow performance in *Waseda bungaku* 早稲田文学 (Waseda Literature) at length. Finally, Japanese public interest in Spring Willow’s enterprise went so far that even the organ of the Japanese imperialists published in Beijing, the *Shuntian shibao* (Juntien jihō) 順天時報, drew attention to the amateur student troupe.19 The recognition by Japanese newspapers and magazines with heaps of praise for the Chinese
students must have struck the Manchu regime and Chinese legation as a blow. It revealed the possible politico-cultural danger inherent in Spring Willow's efforts for theatre reform in the Tokyo diaspora, where the seeds for change fell on fertile ground. Whether any Chinese newspapers responded remains unclear.

When mounting *Black Slave Crying to Heaven*, the question of Spring Willow's move to Shanghai became a bone of contention between Li Shutong and the political activist actor and Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Revolutionary Alliance) member Ren Tianzhi 任天知, who later in December 1910 initiated the Jinhuatuan 進化團 (Evolution Troupe). Ren left Tokyo Spring Willow in midsummer 1907, and with Wang Zhongsheng 王鐘聲 (?)1884-1911) founded the Shanghai Chunyangshe 春陽社 (Spring Society). This troupe was the first to perform *Black Slave Crying to Heaven* on a Chinese stage.21

After its grand opening, Tokyo Spring Willow quickly declined. Some of its members had graduated and returned to China. Others were afraid their studies would be harmed by sanctions of the Education Ministry Supervisory Office that had always been suspicious of the Chinese students' theatrical activities.22 Unfortunately, no details about these events are known. But the overseas Chinese students were harshly controlled by the Supervisory Office, an institute that was headed – from December 1906 onwards – by the ambassador, who acted as Chief Supervisor. Through legal authority, this office was empowered to discipline students' social and political incorrectness. An incident in February 1907, where at Tokyo Kōbun gakuin 佐文学院 (Kōbun School) an inspector and students clashed in a fight, gave rise to the establishment of the Tongxue gongyi hui 同學公益會 (Students' Welfare Association) which, in an official complaint to the Chinese ambassador, expressed
discontent with the Supervisory Office and the governmental regulations for control and management of students studying abroad. Even though, in the wake of this conflict, the Chinese Ministry of Education formally adopted the students’ proposal and abolished the concurrently held title of ambassador and Chief Supervisor, true reforms in the original regulations were negligible. Generally, the affair tended to increase tensions between Chinese students, embassy, and government. The psychological threat exerted through state power and censorship caused students with only loose ties to Spring Willow to step out. Thus, towards the end of 1908, membership of the Society was considerably reduced. Now named Shen You Hui (Shen You Association), it mounted mainly one-act plays on some major Tokyo stages, such as the Tokiwaza (opened in October 1886 in Asakusa) and Kinkiza. A remarkable success in summer 1909 was Relei 热泪 (Hot Tears), a second-hand adaptation of Victorien Sardou’s (1831-1908) Tosca. Again, the play was hugely applauded by the enraptured Chinese audience, whereas the Japanese press, very different from the case of Black Slave Crying to Heaven, kept silent, though the performance took place at one of the great Meiji theatres, the Tōkyōza 東京座. The Japanese failure to discuss the play might be distantly related to tense relations between China and Japan after the Tatsu Maru Incident (February 1908) and a series of unfavourable events in the early Xuantong 宣统 period (November 1908 to June 1909) after the death of the Empress Dowager. The most prominent of these affairs were the Root-Tanaka entente of late November 1908 and Yuan Shikai’s 大总统 (1859-1916) dismissal from all his posts, including the presidency of the foreign office. After Yuan’s removal, the Tokyo government eyed, with increasing anxiety, the deteriorating situation in China, which was thought to be related to Japan’s influence in Manchuria. The course of events seems to have affected bilateral educational and cultural policies, too. As for the Chinese, the ‘revolutionary spirit’ of Relei called for the legation’s intervention. The government students were threatened with losing their scholarships if they continued to participate in Spring Willow undertakings.

With this last major effort that openly signified the Chinese legation’s hostility to Spring Willow, the troupe disappeared from the Tokyo scene, to re-emerge in Shanghai. Between 1910 and 1912 most of the Society’s main actors had returned to China. It was Lu Jingruo 鲁镜若 (1885-1915) who in 1912 revived the Spring Willow spirit in the Xinju tongzhihui 新剧同志会 (New Drama Fellowship). Apart from many new actors,
the Spring Willow veterans Ouyang Yuqian and Wu Wozun participated in Lu's Fellowship. The company had considerable success with adaptations of shinpa plays like Shehuizhong (Society Bell), a reworked version of Satō Kōroku's Kumo no hibiki (Clouds' Echo, 1907), and Meng huitou (Violent Repent), a modification of the same writer's Ushio 潮 (Tide, 1908). After a short intermezzo in a cooperation with the Changsha Shehui jiaoyutuan (Social Education Troupe), the Fellowship continued to perform as Wenshe 文社 (Literary Society). In 1914 it became the Chunliu juchang 春柳劇場 (Spring Willow Theatre), occupying the former foreign-run Moudeli juchang 謙得利劇場 at Shanghai Damalu 大馬路 (present-day Nanjinglu 南京路) in the British concession. Besides performances in Shanghai, Chunliu juchang toured the cities of the Yangzi valley, constantly trying to win new audiences. With the death of Lu Jingruo, who had combined the functions of actor, producer, business manager, and general provider of plays, at Hangzhou in September 1915, Chunliu juchang virtually died.

'Spring Willow Four Friends', 1914 in Shanghai. From the left to the right: Ouyang Yuqian, Wu Wozun, Ma Jiangshi, Lu Jingruo.

‘Enlightened Theatre’, of which Spring Willow was an integral part, persisted in Shanghai for a few more years in companies like the Xiaowutai 笑舞台 (Farce Theatre), founded in 1916. But the heyday of new drama had passed – for both intrinsic and extrinsic reasons. It lacked well-defined concepts and purposes. Without large audiences, effective business management, sponsorship, and promotion, it was too weak to maintain a strong position in a highly competitive entertainment world.

Spring Willow’s Features, Success and Failure, and Place within the ‘Enlightened Theatre’ Movement
The fate of Spring Willow within the ‘Enlightened Theatre’ Movement was clearly determined by its concepts and a set of tendencies that contradicted each other. Spring Willow’s idealistic leader Lu Jingruo strove for pure drama with social-psychological themes and the realization of refined ideas of Western dramaturgy. However, neither all of his colleagues nor Spring Willow’s audiences shared his theoretical and practical knowledge of Euro-American drama. The balancing act between achieving artistic perfection on the one hand, and gaining acknowledgement and support from large but poorly educated audiences on the other was a difficulty from the very beginning. The
interaction between Spring Willow and its audiences did not take place in a vacuum. Instead, a marketplace of fairly complex structures regulated mutual exchange. Rightly understanding Spring Willow’s development and its final decline would require a precise overall analysis of the early 20th century Shanghai entertainment scene, including spread and feedback effects in the southern coastal regions and the Yangzi River Valley. This task, however, is far beyond the scope of this survey. For the time being, most of our information about Spring Willow is confined to the personal reminiscences of Ouyang Yuqian, written down retrospectively in the late 1920s to early 1930s, and revised in the late 1950s. This does not diminish Ouyang’s contribution to the historiography of modern Chinese drama and the history of Spring Willow, but it accounts for limitations, especially with regard to details about the social and economic basis of new spoken drama and the requirements of commercialization. Thus, it seems impossible to draw a comprehensive and conclusive picture of all the processes in which the various troupes, managers, businessmen, and audiences were involved. Nevertheless, Ouyang Yuqian provides basic material concerning the following topics: (1) composition of Spring Willow membership (social origin and educational background), (2) repertory, (3) performance features, (4) audiences, management, and economic support, and (5) competition with other new drama companies and traditional entertainment genres.

(1) Composition of Spring Willow Membership: Social Origin and Educational Background

The founders of Spring Willow and almost all the Society’s actors during the Tokyo years were overseas Chinese students in Japan who stemmed from elite families. These children of the ‘new tide of thought’ were well educated both in classical and modern subjects (including foreign languages) that had become part of the recently established education curriculum. Due to his grandfather’s engagement in the political, social, and educational reform movement of the late 19th century, Ouyang Yuqian, for example, had been a disciple of the eminent scholar and reformer Tang Caichang 唐才常 (1867-1900). He later entered the liberal-minded new-style school Jingzheng zhongxue 經正中學 (Jingzheng Middle School) in Changsha.32

Some of Spring Willow’s members, such as founding members Zeng Xiaogu and Li Shutong, were well versed in poetry, painting, and music, and initially sought to remould the traditional heritage in these fields. Li Shutong, for instance, enrolled in 1906 in the Tōkyō bijutsu gakkō 東京美術學校 (Tokyo School of Fine Arts) to study Japanese-style painting.33 However, he immediately changed to Western-style painting and eventually became a student of the famous yōga painter Kuroda Seiki 黒田清輝 (1866-1924).34 Li Shutong was the one who painted the setting for Black Slave Crying to Heaven, obviously drawing on Western naturalism.35

Though a few Spring Willow actors like Li Shutong had some experience of new drama before participating in the troupe,36 most of them – and this is another characteristic – were more familiar with Beijing opera and other local plays. Ouyang Yuqian had been attracted to traditional opera in his early youth. He continued to act as a Beijing opera singer until late in his life. Xie Kangbai was a skilful singer of Beijing opera erhuang 二黄 arias.37 In addition, he and Wu Wozun had been members of Beijing opera amateur troupes before they left for Japan and joined Spring Willow.38
Finally, some of Spring Willow’s principal performers, for example, Zeng Xiaogu and Lu Jingruo, were directly linked to the Japanese shinpa and the Fujisawa school of acting as well as to Tsubouchi Shōyō and Shimamura Hōgetsu’s Bungei kyōkai, the cradle of Japanese shingeki. The connection with shinpa on the one hand, and shingeki on the other, had larger implications. Not only the concepts and acting style of Spring Willow, but also its selection of plays was inspired by both sources.

The composition and size of Spring Willow membership in Japan and later in China remains unclear. Judging from the programme of *Black Slave Crying to Heaven*, the number of actors in June 1907 was between forty and fifty.39 In this large-scale performance, supernumeraries were engaged: Japanese, Korean, and Indian fellow students from the Art School were given walk-on parts.40 However, this was exceptional. There are no indications that, after *Black Slave Crying to Heaven*, the Society had a big membership or that it comprised any non-Chinese actors. Besides the ‘regular members’ (actors), the statutes suggest that ‘assistant’ and ‘honorary members’ (both Chinese and foreigners) belonged to the Society.41 It seems that several members of Sun Yat-sen’s (1866-1911) Tongmenghui had either been actors, like Ren Tianzhi, or backers who hoped to utilize theatre for spreading political messages.42 The latter were possibly appointed as honorary members,43 but disappeared completely after the defeat of the 1911 Revolution.

After mounting *Black Slave Crying to Heaven* in 1907, only the hard core of Spring Willow, including Zeng Xiaogu, Li Shutong, Ouyang Yuqian, Xie Kangbai, Wu Wozun, and Liu Zongjie, was left. In the days of the Shen You Association after Zeng Xiaogu and Li Shutong – the Spring Willow founders – had resigned,44 a new face, the Fujisawa disciple Lu Jingruo and later head of Spring Willow Theatre, made his debut and became the troupe’s star. In 1912, with the start of New Drama Fellowship, Ma Jiangshi 马绛士 won a reputation overnight.45

Aside from the acting stars, almost nothing is known about set designers, property managers, carpenters, or musical directors. There is, however, evidence that during the New Drama Fellowship’s co-operation with Changsha Shehui jiaoyutuan, the troupe employed two set painters and a Japanese carpenter, all experts in their fields.46 Concerning the deportment and social behaviour of the actors, Ouyang Yuqian complained that several stars were ‘arrogant and proud’, despising common people. They ostentatiously displayed an eccentric and bohemian life-style without regard for their increasing dissociation from the public, which disapproved of their behaviour.47

(2) Repertory
Spring Willow’s repertory included four different categories of plays: (1) adaptations of European plays that were received either through Chinese or Japanese translations, (2) adaptations of Japanese shinpa plays, (3) plays composed by Society members, and (4) adaptations of traditional literary heritage and recent novels.48

With regard to the first category of plays, the three famous ones, first mounted on a Japanese stage, *Chahuanü* (1907), *Heinsu yu tian lu* (1907), and *Relei* (1909), are representative. *Chahuanü*, the Chinese version of Alexandre Dumas fils’ *La dame aux camélias*, is remarkable for its introduction of the theme of conflict between social conventions and personal inclination, one of the most important subjects of early 20th century theatre. Naturally this subject was not entirely new to Chinese theatre, but due to
the social revolution in early 20th century China and the reassessment of women’s place in society, it became central in the 1910s and 1920s.

*Heimu yu tian lu* was an adaptation of Lin Shu 林纾 (1852-1924) and Wei Yi’s 魏易 translation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s (1811-1896) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In a patriotic manner, Lin Shu, in the preface to their translation, compared the situation of the slaves with the treatment of Chinese labourers in America, a highly explosive theme at that time. The topic of oppression and liberation seems to have appealed to Chinese students in the Tokyo diaspora. The Christian emphasis of the Stowe novel – Tom’s steadfast faith in the face of intolerable trials – was completely abandoned. More importantly, however, the story implied criticism of the slavery-like practices of both the non-Chinese Manchu regime and the foreign imperialists that had made China and her pro-reform forces, likened to the black slaves, victims of selfish political and economic interests.

*Relei*, later renamed *Rexue* 熱血 (Hot Blood), was a further adaptation of a version of *La Tosca* by Victorien Sardou in an arrangement of the shinpa playwright Taguchi Kikuchô 田口昌男. Kikuchô’s drama was performed by the shinpa stars Kawai Takeo 河合武雄 and Ii Yôhô 伊井雄峰. Spring Willow members, after attending the Japanese performance, decided to select the play for their repertory. Their choice of this piece, a romantic tragedy, had two reasons. First, the play contained only four principal roles, which made it possible for the small Spring Willow membership to undertake, and second, its anti-autocratic and pro-freedom thought appealed to the actors as well as to their audience. However, *Tosca* is mainly a psychological drama about the clashes between single individuals. Although history, politics, and ideals are in the background and sometimes serve as pretexts, the real motivations are strictly personal. The story of cheating and doubt, the inappropriate use of objects and situations in a systematic way, creates a suffocating atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. This did not escape the notice of the Chinese audience, who easily connected the plot with experiences of their own lives, taking the various individuals as representatives of particular interest groups. *Hot Tears*, first arranged and directed by Lu Jingruo, was later integrated into the programme of New Drama Fellowship, albeit seldom performed due to its provocative message.

The second category of plays, the shinpa adaptations, comprised *Ai haibo* 愛海波 (In Love with Sea Waves, 1910), based on Kawakami Otojirô’s 川上音二郎 (1864-1911) stage arrangement of a Japanese translation of T. H. Hall Caine’s (1853-1931) *The Bondman* (1890), *Shehuizhong*, after Satô Kôrokô’s *Kumo no hibiki*, *Meng huitou*, an adaptation of Kôrokô’s *Ushio*, and finally an adaptation of the famous tragic novel *Hototogisu* 杜鵑 (The Cuckoo) by Tokutomi Roka 徳富蘇花. This play, in the Chinese version bearing the title *Bu ru gui* 不如歸 (Nothing Better Than Return), inhaled the spirit of subjective romanticism and was to become one of Spring Willow’s most famous plays.

The third category of plays comprised pieces composed by Spring Willow actors themselves. This group included one-act plays, such as *Sheng xianglian* 生相戀 (Loving Each Other a Lifetime, 1907), *Huajia yu qi mei* 畫家與其妹 (The Painter and His Younger Sister, 1907), and *Ming bu ping* 明不平 (Cry Against Injustice, 1908 or 1909). Other
successful plays were *Jiating enyuanyanji* 家庭恩怨記 (Domestic Resentments Record) and *Yuanyangjian* 醉鳧劍 (Mandarin Duck Sword).

The fourth category of Spring Willow plays encompassed twenty to thirty dramatizations of popular traditional and contemporary novels, such as Cao Xueqin’s 蕭雲萊 (1715-1763) *Hongloumeng* 紅樓夢 (Dream of the Red Chamber), *Shuihuzhuan* 水滸傳 (Water Margin Tradition), and Wu Woyao's 吳沃堯 (1866-1910) *Henhai* 恆海 (Sea of Woe, 1906).59

In their plays, Spring Willow seldom overtly touched on politically contentious themes. Only two productions overtly sought to inflame resistance against the prevailing regime; these were *Yundongli* 運動力 (Movement’s Strength) and *Huanghuanggang* 黃花崗 (Chrysanthemum Hill) at the dawn of the 1911 Revolution. On the whole, however, the repertory consisted of romantic or naturalistic tragedies and melodramas full of passion, violence, and moral instruction. Here the influence of the Tokyo Bungei kyōkai appears in Spring Willow plays and performances. Even though Lu Jingruo, who in 1912 became the leader and artistic director of the troupe, was trained in Japanese shinpa which he studied with Fujisawa Asajirō, his concepts of theatre, aesthetic taste, and selection of themes were clearly indebted to the Bungei kyōkai’s ideas of shingeki. Lu had been a member of the association before he joined Spring Willow for Tosca in 1909. He was attached to Shimamura Hōgetsu and the renowned actress Matsui Sumako 松井須磨子, and devoted himself to the study of the European dramatists Shakespeare (1564-1616) and Ibsen (1828-1906). In the Bungei kyōkai production of *Hamlet* he played a soldier.60 As a member of the Bungei kyōkai, Lu probably attended Tsubouchi Shōyō’s lectures on *Hamlet*; classes on applied psychology, elocution, and acting; Kaneko Umajō’s 金子馬吉 philosophy of art; Shimamura Hōgetsu’s English conversation and introduction to Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*; Ihara Toshirō’s 伊原敏郎 (1870-1941) lectures on kabuki history; Tōgi Tetteki’s 東儀典 teaching of music and expression through gestures; and Doi Shunso’s exercises in elocution and acting.61 Coming back to the romanticism and naturalism in Spring Willow plays, it cannot be emphasized enough that Lu Jingruo absorbed and applied ideas from both intellectual and artistic movements – which had been thoroughly discussed by his teachers Shōyō and Hōgetsu – long before these currents of thought entered Chinese literary debate in the 1920s.62 Lu’s preference for European dramatists like Shakespeare and Ibsen and the Russian writer Tolstoy (1828-1910) all of whom he wished to produce on the Chinese stage, foreshadowed the positive reception of these authors in China following the May Fourth Movement.63 Regrettably, no records survive on how Lu understood and interpreted romantic and naturalistic drama as imparted by his Japanese teachers. One suspects that, similar to Tian Han 田漢 (1898-1968) in the early 1920s, he might have adopted the idea of Shōyō’s ‘self-conscious and rebellious romanticism’ that branches out into emotional and intellectual aspects with further subdivisions.64 Here, it is important to note that Shōyō’s interpretation of romanticism became linked to democracy and socialism in political and social frameworks, and with purification and democratization of the arts, sweeping away ossified traditions.65 Due to these conceptual implications, Spring Willow plays dealt not simply with grave problems of feudal society, such as arranged marriage, corruption of officials, usury, and opium abuse, as stated by Ouyang Yuqian, but, more abstractly, implicitly rebelled against the old value system by displaying new mentalities.
In most of the frequently staged tragedies the main character or characters commit suicide, resolving 'contradictions of feudal society' by passive resistance and self-sacrifice. Ouyang Yuqian ascribes this kind of dramatic answer, which according to him is anchored in a pessimistic worldview and negative attitude towards life, to the social origin of the actors and playwrights, who for the most part came from scholar families. This argument may not be immediately intelligible, but becomes plausible when considering the traditional portrait of the Chinese scholar in times of oppression who preferred heroic self-destruction to political activism. But again Ouyang's critique oversimplifies the matter. With regard to romantic and naturalistic drama, suicide is the most moving means to resolve tensions between individual personalities and the environment which influences their actions. As naturalist writers intended to create 'true to life' plays, it is almost inevitable that the strength of the environment must often be evident in the plays if the playwright was to be successful in his aims. The contrast of past and present environments of the various characters causes tension throughout the play and eventually leads to the suicide of one individual, unable to reconcile problems arising from environment and circumstance. Suicide involves shame and despair, yet it was seen as a noble and courageous act to choose death over dishonour. Here traditional Chinese concepts and elements of romanticism and naturalism cross borders.

In general, audiences were not really attracted by Spring Willow's complicated psychological plays, in which the artistic ideals of Lu Jingruo crystallized. Some critics argued that the plots were 'too advanced' and overelaborated, not conforming with Chinese customs and emotive patterns, and thus not comprehensible to the masses.

(3) Performing Features
Unlike most of the 'Enlightened Theatre' companies, Spring Willow preferred to use full-length scripts as the basis of their performances. However, as Ouyang Yuqian emphasizes, only 'six or seven' of more than eighty plays of the repertory had written scripts, providing full dialogues and stage directions. The overwhelming number of Spring Willow plays were so-called 'act-outline plays' (mubiaoxi 目表载) – typical of the first wave of reform drama – giving only the plot, but no written dialogues. Although Spring Willow innovated traditional performance techniques by adopting the Western model of dividing a story with unbroken action into separate acts and bringing down the curtain in between, the actors sometimes had to employ 'outside the curtain plays' (muwaixi 暴外载). These extemporaneous performances bridged the scenes to prevent the audience from becoming restless. A famous example of such insertions was the performance of Black Slave Crying to Heaven in Tokyo 1907. Ouyang recalls that 'in this play there were many insertions which now seem to have had absolutely no reason. According to my recollection they were originally not in the text, but many were added extempore.' He further remembers that he with three others, all dressed as little girls, performed a group dance, and that Japanese, Korean, and Indian fellow students had walk-on parts introducing scenes without any connection with Uncle Tom's Cabin. Moreover, a visitor from China sang a Beijing opera aria, whereupon the audience and some attending Japanese theatre critics loudly applauded.

Concerning the actors' training and acting skills, only a few of the Spring Willow performers, such as Zeng Xiaogu and Lu Jingruo, had proper knowledge of Western performance techniques. Some of them modelled their acting style on Japanese shinpa
idols.\textsuperscript{\textit{72}} Lu Jingruo, for example, followed Li Yōhō when acting in \textit{shinpa} adaptations.\textsuperscript{\textit{73}} Ouyang Yuqian, who impersonated the female parts on stage (a traditional usage which prevailed in the early years of both Japanese and Chinese new drama with some remarkable exceptions),\textsuperscript{\textit{74}} adopted the style of Kanai Takeo.\textsuperscript{\textit{75}} Another tried and tested method was the empirical study of Westerners’ movements and gestures by observation and imitation. Ouyang Yuqian chose this approach when preparing the role of Tosca in \textit{Relei}. He studied photographs and films showing Western ladies, went to the train station where he listened to their conversations, and watched their movements and facial expressions. In order to bring himself closer to the life and feelings of the early 19th century Italian female Tosca, he read novels and poems (Chinese and Western in Chinese translations) in which this type of woman was portrayed. The impersonation of Tosca through experience and empathy was Ouyang’s ideal.

A further important characteristic of Spring Willow was the use of the standard language, or \textit{guoyu} 国语 ‘national language’, on stage, an option that appears distantly related to ideas of the revolutionary nationalists of the Tongmenghui.\textsuperscript{\textit{76}} Accordingly, those actors who spoke with a strong accent, such as Lu Jingruo, had to practise standard pronunciation before being allowed to perform publicly.\textsuperscript{\textit{77}} However, this choice, which distinguished Spring Willow from most of the ‘civilized theatre’ troupes, who preferred the use of local dialects (\textit{fangyan} 方言) for performance, was probably one of the causes of the troupe’s alienation from local audiences, who were not accustomed to the northern \textit{koine} (see footnote \textit{76}).

\section*{(4) Audiences, Management, and Economic Support}
That audiences as well as theatre management and economic support have an important impact on a company’s repertory and survival goes without saying. The audiences of Spring Willow in Japan included mainly Chinese students and fellow students of the international community in Tokyo. Japanese, Korean, and Indian students attended the performance of \textit{Black Slave Crying to Heaven}. Among the guests at this performance were prominent Japanese men, a few Japanese women, distinguished persons of the Indian nobility, and members of the Tongmenghui,\textsuperscript{\textit{78}} who presumably schemed to make Spring Willow a vehicle for propagating their social and political ideas. Later, when New Drama Fellowship and Spring Willow Theatre mounted plays in Shanghai, the audiences were composed of friends, students, intellectuals who favoured the new drama movement, businessmen, and interested citizens of the urban area. Yet Spring Willow never attracted large audiences. As already stated, its plays were difficult to understand. The actors neither used the ‘language’ of the common people nor catered to their psyche.\textsuperscript{\textit{79}}

The management of the actor-manager Lu Jingruo was rather loose and disorganized. A scion of a scholar family, Lu’s pride forbade seeking financial support from entrepreneurs or businessmen. Therefore, he raised funds relying on the mediation of relatives and friends. For a period of time, the bookstore owner Zhang Jingjiang 张静江 supported Spring Willow. When Zhang lost his capital, Spring Willow’s monetary stream ceased flowing.\textsuperscript{\textit{80}} Generally speaking, the troupe was constantly in financial need.\textsuperscript{\textit{81}}

The group of Spring Willow supporters and backers in Japan comprised mainly actors and critics of the Japanese \textit{shinpa} and \textit{shingeki} movement who sympathized with the Chinese students’ endeavour,\textsuperscript{\textit{82}} as well as members of the Tongmenghui. There is
no evidence that New Drama Fellowship and Spring Willow Theatre got considerable sponsorship during their three years as professional and travelling theatre troupe.

(5) Competition with Other New Drama Companies and Traditional Entertainment Genres

Between 1907 and 1914 many new drama companies were established. Most of them, following the example of Ren Tianzhi and Wang Zhongsheng’s Evolution Troupe, focused on political and social enlightenment. The political drama of the pre-revolution years drew heavily on the shinpa school’s sōshi shibai (teatre of courageous young men’, or ‘teatre of political ruffians’), which used the stage for ‘lectures in costumes’, in other words, for political propaganda and social criticism. However, the impetus of political drama lost vigour and vitality after the suppression of the 1911 Revolution. The post-revolution companies, such as the Kaimingshe (Enlightenment Society, 1912), Minmingshe (People’s Voice Society, 1913), Qiminshé (Awakening People Society, 1913), Minxingshe (People’s Rise Society, 1913), and others, focused on social issues in so-called ‘family plays’ (jiatingxi 家庭戯). Their political plays insisted uncompromisingly on reform and modernization. The performances of these companies were improvised in almost all cases and often lacked coherent plots. In the eyes of Spring Willow, who stressed the artistic aspect of drama, these plays were superficial and attempted to appeal to audiences through empty slogans and catchwords.

But even the more popular new drama companies who won larger audiences than Spring Willow had financial problems. The Evolution Troupe, for example, shared for a time the Shanghai theatre Xin xinwutai 新新舞台 with a Beijing opera company, until internal conflicts about the timetable led to a split. This episode is telling. The entertainment sector of the partly Westernized wealthy commercial centre Shanghai was dominated by traditional forms of leisure entertainment, Beijing opera and local plays of the Jiangnan region, like the Tanhuang or Shaoxing opera. The enthusiastic response of the audience when the ‘king of the acting world,’ the Beijing opera star Tan Xinpei 謝鑫培 (1847-1917), visited Shanghai in 1913, is a perfect example of the difficulty of new drama to gain the people’s hearts, and thereby the support of financially powerful entertainment managers. Of Tan’s visit it is recorded that:

for more than ten days in advance, people displayed advertisements for the great king in large golden characters, they stuck them all over the streets and on the doors of the theatres. They joined electric lights together to form characters, specifically showing his wonderful features...

The people flocked in large numbers to see his performances. The case reveals the importance of charismatic personalities on stage to arouse audience interest. Charismatic personalities ‘Enlightened Theatre’ never produced, only ephemeral stars.

Concluding Remarks

Many 20th century Chinese theatre critics in their assessment of ‘Enlightened Theatre’ found fault with its amateurishness. Superficial knowledge of Western drama, its texts, and techniques were regarded as obstacles for new drama’s acceptance and, at the same
time, as reasons for its decline, observable after 1916. Spring Willow, in particular, was criticized for its loftiness, along with stiffness in expression and use of literary language. These features were held to be an inappropriate response to audience desires. Ouyang Yuqian, in a short introductory note to his memoirs, regretfully confesses that he ‘wasted many years in the world of theatre’.99 But he goes on to qualify this statement, which presumably reflects personal frustration of high aspirations. He admits that ‘Enlightened Theatre’ and Spring Willow anticipated many features of the New Culture Movement and developments directly following the May Fourth Movement of 1919, yet failed to bring about an aesthetic, cultural, social, or political revolution.

The problems of new drama were manifold. Terminological and conceptual confusion obscured the dividing lines between reform opera and spoken theatre, both indiscriminately referred to as xinju ‘new plays’. There were no fundamental considerations about the definition of new drama and strategies for fostering offshoots. New drama’s place in Chinese society and the world of performing arts was not really fixed. No one ventured to organize the various theatre troupes, which may be roughly divided into a more extrovert, political faction, as represented by the Evolution Troupe, and a more introvert, artistic faction, as exemplified by Spring Willow. Ouyang Yuqian repeatedly points out that the strange and fanciful nature of modern drama, especially the employment of contemporary Western clothing and props, gradually lost its attraction. What had appealed to the audiences in the very beginning, became part of their daily life after some time. This was particularly true of the situation in the rapidly growing metropolis Shanghai, the ‘other China’ that became the centre of new drama.90 According to Ouyang Yuqian, the obstacles to the development and dissemination of Chinese spoken drama were as follows:

(1) lack of skilled artistic personnel (including directors, actors, and assistant staff) educated in drama theory as well as in performance;
(2) shortage of written scripts that could be appreciated with regard to both theme and literary composition;
(3) unfocused ideas about the place of spoken drama in society, taking into consideration its function as educational tool, weapon of social and political criticism, and its role in aesthetics;
(4) commercialization and entertainment business interference (through compradors and profit-oriented businessmen);
(5) inadequate analysis of audience customs and mentality.91

Concerning Ouyang’s first point, the lack of well-trained personnel, no serious effort was made to establish theatre schools where acting, stage direction, and playwriting were taught. Regrettably, Wang Zhongsheng and Ren Tianzhi’s Tongjian xuexiao 通鉴学校 (Comprehensive Mirror School), founded in February 1908 in Shanghai, was an unsuccessful experiment that lasted for only two months.92 Unlike the Japanese drama reformers, the Chinese precursors of new theatre did not manage to produce serious playwrights. Adaptations of Japanese and European plays were limited in number and quality.93

The place of the newly evolved spoken drama in society was intrinsically intertwined with the role of the audiences and business entertainment. With regard to Spring Willow,
I already pointed out the difficult communication with audiences of lower social strata, basically due to use of elaborate codes of verbal and non-verbal expression. Several critics diagnosed Spring Willow’s failure as inability to adapt to the needs of their audiences. When people, or certain groups of people, behave publicly – as in the case of a performance – they offer evidence for others to contemplate, evaluate, compare, and respond to. Thus, audiences serve as receptor and as evaluative framework. Generally, effective communication with the audience

...requires tailoring or fitting information to...[their] knowledge and value system, using terms, symbols, and evidence that will be comprehensible to them...[It further] requires that the information be presented in ways that are expected to be most likely to be accepted...This process requires role-taking skill in being able to place oneself in the position of the audience and anticipate how they are likely to perceive various ways of packaging desired self-identification.\(^{94}\)

With regard to this abstraction, Spring Willow was in a dilemma. It tried to communicate with a public whose value system, language, and symbols were not the same as those of their own group. Effective communication was only possible with like-minded people who shared Spring Willow actors’ experience. The gap between urban masses and Westernized intellectuals was deep. Quyang recalled that Lu Jingruo was unable to understand the ordinary Chinese people’s mind,\(^{95}\) and hence selected plays that would appeal only to the educated. Although social injustice and oppression, themes that Spring Willow presented in abundance, were problems of almost all members of society, the theatrical mode of expression made it more or less incomprehensible to uneducated audiences.

At this point, I return to one Spring Willow trait which made its performances’ strange: the use of standard language on stage. Language is an important input of social communication and serves as a critical mediator of personal perception and impression formation. Speech is a constituent of all theatre, but in Western spoken theatre speech is crucial for conveying content and meaning. If speech is not intelligible, content and meaning cannot be understood. One may argue that Beijing opera with its special ‘language’ in arias and spoken parts – combining phonological features of northern and River dialects\(^{96}\) – was also unfamiliar to southern audiences, but had solid support in Shanghai and other places where local audiences received it sympathetically. However, in contrast to modern Western drama, Beijing opera does not employ speech as the main carrier to express meaning. Beijing opera is a highly sophisticated operatic form that fuses singing, dialogue, and movement (including acrobatics) according to fixed patterns. Thus, it is a combination of various symbolic codes whose meaning Chinese audiences had known from childhood and comprehended in all its subtle variations. The Chinese spectator, therefore, read the performance against a known conceptual background filled with religious, philosophical, historical, aesthetic, and social information. Furthermore, librettos or chapbooks were widely available; amateur Beijing opera troupes attracted large groups of fans. Thus foreknowledge and familiarity – acquired in the course of upbringing and socialization – were the decisive preconditions for understanding the play. Western drama, its verbal and non-verbal code, acting and stage convention were unfamiliar to early 20th century theatregoers. People were acquainted with it neither from early
Chronology of the Spring Willow Society (Chunliushe 春柳社) and Its Successor Organizations

1906 Winter  Founding of the Spring Willow Society by Zeng Xiaogu 曾小谷 (1873-1936) and Li Shutong 李叔同 (1880-1942). 'General Statutes of the Spring Willow Society Performing Arts Section' ('Chunliushe yanyibu zhuanzhang' 春柳社演藝部章章).


1907-1908  Performances of one-act plays as Huajia yi qu mei 畫家與其妹 (The Painter and His Younger Sister, 1907).

1908  Spring Willow changes name to Shen You hui 申酉會 (Shen You Society).

1908-1909  Performances of one-act plays as Ming bu ping 喧不平 (Cry Against Injustice).


1912  Foundation of Xinju tongzhihui 新劇同志會 (New Drama Fellowship) in Shanghai by Lu Jingruo reviving the Spring Willow spirit. Adaptations of Japanese shinpa plays like Kumo no hibiki 雲の響 (Sounds of Clouds, 1907; Chin. Shehuizhong 社會鏢, Society Bell) and Ushio 湖 (Tide, 1908; Chin Meng haitou 猛田頭, Violent Repent). Performances in Shanghai and Yangzi region.

1913  Cooperation of New Drama Fellowship with the Changsha Shehui jiaoyutuan 社會教育團 (Social Education Troupe).

1914  Foundation of Chunliu juchang 春柳劇場 (Spring Willow Theatre) in Shanghai by Lu Jingruo. Performances in Shanghai and Yangzi region.

1915 September  Death of Lu Jingruo in Hangzhou. Disbandment of Spring Willow Theatre.
youth nor through later systematic introduction. The situation for new drama was highly unfavourable. Not only was language a psychological hindrance for positive reception of an audience most of whom communicated in local dialects, but also the non-verbal behaviour, the complex signalizing system of gestures, facial expressions, and postures, were hardly comprehensible. Only a few members of Spring Willow's audiences, the new intellectuals, were fairly accustomed to Western drama and its modes of expression. But their number was insignificant. When Spring Willow tried to adapt their plays to common audiences' tastes, offering *tanci* and popular novel dramatizations, they lost the small group of new drama connoisseurs. Disappointed at the low quality of hastily prepared 'act-outline plays' whose artistic quality was far below that of the few plays that followed written scripts, the 'understanding experts' dissociated themselves from Spring Willow. Even worse, Spring Willow's remoulded repertory was not well received even by those audiences to whom it tried to appeal.97 Thus the troupe's financial collapse and disbandment was inevitable.

To sum up, Chinese spoken drama in its early phase had an educational function and aimed at political and social enlightenment. It was part of China's modernization and grew in a revolutionary atmosphere that particularly nurtured political activist 'Enlightened Theatre' companies like the Evolution Troupe. Chinese spoken drama was an urban phenomenon that could only develop in bridgeheads to the West. In the early 20th century, these bridgeheads were Tokyo and the hybrid 'non-Chinese' metropolis Shanghai, with its unique political and social openness.98 Not by accident, Spring Willow and other new drama companies made their debut in these two cities. Until 1909, Tokyo had been a safe place for Spring Willow to study Euro-American and Japanese theatrical modes. The germs of new drama could develop in relative freedom from Manchu oppression and censorship, sheltered by Japanese teachers and Chinese modernists in Japan. Forced by increasing difficulties owing to the deterioration of domestic affairs and foreign relations, Spring Willow moved to Shanghai. At this time the situation in Shanghai as an economic, technological, and financial centre with a cosmopolitan outlook was likewise favourable. This city being a world trading centre with international status, the Manchu regime's political and legal influence was largely reduced. Moreover, during the late Qing, Shanghai 'was the only city on Chinese soil where one could publicly stage one's passage from a traditional to a modern life-style'.99 This meant the emergence of an urban bourgeoisie with implications for the growth of the modern sector, including the entertainment business. Shanghai was the place where successful implementation of new drama forms seemed possible, because here receptive potential was found. However, all new drama troupes had problems attracting large audiences. Though initially arousing curiosity, none of them found permanent support from the public. As a consequence, almost all troupes suffered from financial need and were incapable of maintaining a stock company or occupying a theatre for a longer time. The verve of new drama was suffocated by Shanghai entertainment leaders who promoted only profitable performances and shows. What was to become profitable and what not, was decided by the audiences. Thus, through the vote of the audience, only the most attractive companies were sponsored and put under contract.

Early Chinese spoken drama was scarcely a 'drama of the people', but a drama initiated and nourished by an elite who had emerged towards the end of the 19th century challenging traditional ways in search of innovation. The new drama promoters belonged
to the first generation of young Chinese intellectuals raised in a transitional society that adopted Euro-American and Japanese models for reform. In this way the Chinese new drama movement and Spring Willow pertained to an overall change that affected virtually all aspects of life. Spring Willow appeared first on stage in the Tokyo diaspora as an amateur student troupe. It underwent a gradual transformation into a troupe of professional though not wholly institutionally trained actors. The l’art pour l’art approach of Spring Willow’s social dramas was dismissed by many audiences. Facing competitive pressure, its actors tried to adapt to current taste. In so doing, while adding improvisation and superficial performances, they failed to intensify their study of Western dramatic art.

Spring Willow and other new drama companies paved the way for modern spoken theatre in China. Many efforts of the often criticized ‘Enlightened Theatre’ yielded positive results immediately after the May Fourth Movement. Since the early 1920s, new drama played an important role not only on the stage, but also in literary life. It became established as an independent art form, and was acknowledged as a literary genre. In 1929, Hong Shen 洪深 (1854-1955) praised Spring Willow as the only ‘Enlightened Theatre’ troupe which really contributed to the case of new drama.¹⁰⁰ And in 1957, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the birth of modern Chinese drama, which actually coincided with the 50th anniversary of Spring Willow’s opening, Tian Han considered the Society to be the true precursor of new drama.¹⁰¹ What the founders of Spring Willow had sought to accomplish, namely to lay the groundwork of modern Chinese drama, became a historical fact.

NOTES

For Zeng (first name Yannian 姚年, but better known by his style Xiaogu), and Li (first name An 奥, also better known by his style Shutong), see Ouyang Yuqian 歐陽予倩, Zi wo yanxi yilai 自我演"院以来 (Since I Am Performing Theatre) (hereafter Zi wo yanxi yilai), in Ouyang Yuqian quanjji 欧陽予倩全集 (Ouyang Yuqian’s Complete Works) (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1990), 6:7, 10 (hereafter OYQJ); Nakamura Tadayaki 1956, pp. 18-21.


The leading figures of the shingeki undó were Tsubouchi Shōyō 増田涉 (1859-1934), the founder of Bun’gei kyōkai 文芸協 (Literary Association), and his collaborator Shimamura Hōgetsu 島村北月 (1871-1918). Generally, their reform involved the modernization of traditional Japanese drama and other literary genres through the study of Western models. See Komiya 1956, pp. 42-47, 288-291; Ortolani 1990, pp. 229-32. For the Japanese shinpa and shingeki movements, see Komiya 1956, pp. 27-48, 263-310; Ortolani 1990, pp. 219-49.

According to Ouyang Yuqian, the Society also comprised an Art Section (Yishubu 藝術部), a Literary Section (Wenxuebu 文學部), and a Music Section (Yinyuebu 音樂部). See Ouyang Yuqian, ‘Huiyi Chunliu’ 回憶春柳 (Recollections of Spring Willow), OYQJ 6:156n1 (hereafter ‘Huiyi Chunliu’).

‘Chunliu shihou yanxiu zhuanzhang’ 春柳社演劇專章 (The Spring Willow Society Performing Arts Section Special Statutes) (hereafter ‘Special Statutes’), in Aying 阿英, ed., Wan-Qing wenshu congchao: Xiaoshuo xiju yanjiu juan 晚清文學叢潮: 小說戲劇研究卷 (Late Qing Literature Collection: Short Story and Theatre Studies) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), p. 635 (hereafter WQWC). The statute originally appeared in the Shanghai Beixin zazhi 北新雜誌 (Northern News Journal) 30 (1907). Only the first four items of the constitution concentrate on drama reform while the remaining entries concern organizational matters, such as occasions of performance, public distribution of scripts, membership subscription, members’ duties and responsibilities, honorary membership, meetings, publications, and so forth.

‘Special Statutes,’ WQWC p. 636.

Ibid.

Dolby 1976, pp. 202, 278-79n. 9; Chen and Yuan 1993, pp. 461-63; Tian Beixiang 1993, pp. 3-5.


‘Special Statutes,’ WQWC p. 636.

Ibid.


Asajirō was the teacher of Zeng Xiaoou. The Japanese theatre critic and playwright for the Meijiya 明治屋, Matsue Shōyō 松尾松賞, favoured especially the acting of Li Shutong. See Ouyang Yuqian, ‘Huiyi Chunliu’, ibid., p. 146.

Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., pp. 7-8.

According to the critic Ihara Seiseien, more than 3000 spectators attended the performance. For Seiseien’s account, see Nakamura Tadayaki 1956, p. 30. Cf. ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ OYQJ 6:154.

For a summary of the reviews, see Hama Kazue 1953, pp. 112-17; Nakamura Tadayaki 1956, pp. 30-34.

The Tongmenghui was formed by Sun Yat-sen (1866-1911) and Huang Xing (1874-1916) in December 1905. Though all members of the Tongmenghui were committed to a change of regime, their ideas of reform varied extremely. Some of the participants favoured creating a strong centralized government, others pleaded for no government at all. The Tongmenghui combined anti-imperialists, xenophobic nationalists, cosmopolitan Westernizers as well as provincial gentry leaders. For the political importance of this political group and its social and economic concepts, see J. B. Grieder, *Intelliectuals and the State in Modern China: A Narrative History* (New York: Free Press, 1981), pp. 177, 189-92, 195-96, et passim (hereafter Grieder 1981).

Ren had studied in Japan. In 1905 he became a member of the Tongmenghui. The Shanghai performance of *Black Slave Crying to Heaven* differed from the Tokyo Spring Willow production. The Chunyangshe did not use the script of Zeng Xiaoqiu, but a version by Xu Xiaotian 朴恬天.

‘Zhongyao yilai, OYQJ 6:11-12.

For the events, see Huang Fu-ch’ing, *Chinese Students in Japan in the Late Ch’ing Period*, trans. K. P. K. Whitaker (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1982), pp. 20-25.

One of the one-act plays Spring Willow mounted was one later frequently performed: *Ming bu ping* 喋不平 (Cry Against Injustice), adapted from a play by the French dramatist Georges Courteline (1858-1929). This play, together with another non-identified Polish play, is considered to be the earliest published huaju. See ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ OYQJ 6:157; Dolby 1976, p. 279.n. 13.


‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ OYQJ 6:165.


See also p. 112 in this article. For the Chinese critics’ evaluation of *Shehuizhong* in the theatre journal *Gechang xinyue* 今春新月 (Crescent Moon of the Stage), see D. Tschanz, ‘The New Drama Before the New Drama: Drama Journals and Drama Reform in Shanghai Before the May Fourth Movement’, *Theatre InSight* 10.1 (1999): 54.

For details of Xinju tongzhihui, the Changsha Shehui jiaoyutuan co-operation, Wenshe, and Chunliu juchang, see *Zi wo yanxi yilai*, ibid., pp. 26-53.


Ibid., pp. 200-17.

For the reform schools and the new orientation in education, see Grieder 1981, pp. 152-58.

The Tōkyō bijutsu gakkō 東京美術學校 was founded by the Japanese government in 1887 for teaching Japanese painting (Nihonga 日本画). In 1896 the Western art department was added. Ernest F. Fenellosa (1853-1908), Okakura Tenshin 吳執心 (1862-1913), and Hashimoto Gahō 橋本雅邦 (1835-1908) were instrumental in its founding.

Li was also well acquainted with Western music and a gifted piano player. See *Zi wo yanxi yilai*, OYQJ 6:7, 12; ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ ibid., p. 152; Hama Kazue 1953, pp. 119-21.

See photograph of the final scene of *Black Slave Crying to Heaven*, in Tian Han 於漢, et al., ed., *Zhongguo huaju yundong wushinian shiliaoji 中國话剧運動五十年史料集* (Fifty Years Chinese Spoken Theatre Movement Historical Material Collection) (Beijing: Zhongguo xiju chubanshe, 1958), cover page (hereafter ZHYWNS). [All photos in the present article are taken from this source.]

Li Shutong got in touch with modern drama at middle school. Inspired by a school performance, he wrote the play *Wenye hunyin* 文野婚姻 (The Refined and Vulgar’s Marriage). See Tian Benxiang
37 Zi wo yanxi yilai, OYQJ 6:8.
38 Ibid., pp. 7-8.
40 Ibid., p. 152. The staging of Chahuanu inspired many students to enter the society, among them Japanese and Indians.
41 'Special Statutes,' WQWC pp. 636-37.
42 For Spring Willow members' connection with the Tongmenhui, see Zi wo yanxi yilai, OYQJ 6:8, 18.
43 Ibid., p. 8.
44 Ibid., p. 17.
45 'Huiyi Chunliu,' OYQJ 6:165-66.
46 The set painters were Tang Youuang 汤有光 and Fujita Senshin 藤田洗身, a brother of Lu Jinguo's Japanese wife. See Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., p. 33.
48 They further dramatized popular yaozi 湮詩 (plucking rhymes, the commonest form of popular balladry spread throughout South China), but only those of 'high value' as proclaimed in their 1914 agenda. See the programmatic 'Opening Leaflet' (1914) of the Spring Willow Theatre, reproduced in ZHYWNS 1: photograph, inserted between pp. 22 and 23. For a detailed overview of Spring Willow's repertory, see 'Huiyi Chunliu,' OYQJ 6:166-73.
49 Zeng Xiaogu wrote the script. See Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., p. 9; 'Huiyi Chunliu,' ibid., p. 147.
50 Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., pp. 8-10; 'Huiyi Chunliu,' ibid., pp. 146-47. For details of staging, see ibid., pp. 147-53. For the Japanese reviews, see Hama Kazue 1953, pp. 111-17; Nakamura Tadayuki 1956, pp. 26-34.
51 For the performance of Relei, see 'Huiyi Chunliu,' OYQJ 6:157-64.
53 For Otojiro, see ibid., pp. 41, 265-67, 273-74, et passim; Ortolani 1990, pp. 221-23.
54 Nakamura Tadayuki 1957, p. 43; 'Tan wenmingxi,' OYQJ 6:182.
55 'Huiyi Chunliu,' ibid., pp. 165, 167-68; 'Tan wenmingxi,' ibid., pp. 182-83.
57 In this play Ma Jiangshi featured in the role of the main tragic character. For further shinpa adaptations of the Chinese new drama, see 'Tan wenmingxi,' OYQJ 6:197.
59 Ibid., p. 173.
60 Ibid., p. 167.
61 For the Bungeo kyokai's curriculum, see Komiya 1956, p. 292.
62 A summary of these debates that include Tian Han's and other Chinese writers' reviews of Shōyō's and Hōgetsu's ideas of romanticism and naturalism, is found in B. S. McDougall, The Introduction of Western Literary Theories into Modern China, 1919-1925 (Tokyo: Centre for East Asian Cultural Studies, 1971), pp. 93-108, 149-58, 162-68, et passim (hereafter McDougall 1971).
64 McDougall 1971, p. 95.
65 Ibid., p. 97.
66 'Tan wenmingxi,' OYQJ 6:196.
67 Ibid., p. 197.
68 Ibid., pp. 166-67.
70 Ibid., p. 151. Quoted with minor alterations after Davis 1968-69, p. 38.
71 ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ OYQJ 6:150-51, 152.
72 The Spring Willow actors regularly attended Japanese performances to become more familiar with certain ‘Western’ acting devices. The more advanced Spring Willow members taught the beginners acting techniques and elocution, dressing and make-up. See Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., pp. 13, 15, 19.
73 For Li Yisho, see Komiya 1956, pp. 271-72; Ortolani 1990, p. 224.
74 One of the most notable personalities of Japanese shiinpa, Kawakami Otojirō, selectively used actresses for certain female roles. In 1908 he founded the first modern school for actresses, the Teikoku joyū yōsejo (Imperial Actress School), headed by his wife, the former professional geisha Kawakami Sadayakko 川上 真枝 (1872-1946). See Komiya 1956, p. 274, Ortolani 1990, p. 223. The Minxingshe 民興社 (People’s Rise Society), formed in 1913, was the first wenmingxi company where male and female actors performed together, see ‘Tan wenmingxi,’ OYQJ 6:199, 216.
75 For Kanai Takeo, see Komiya 1956, p. 272; Ortolani 1990, p. 225.
76 The heavily ideologically charged term guoyu refers to baihua 白話, the northern vernacular language which was spoken as well as written. The spoken form (commonly called guanhua 官話, or Mandarin) originated as a means of oral communication between court officials who were from various parts of China and could not easily communicate because of great differences among the Chinese dialects. During the 19th century spoken baihua, based on the dialect of the administrative centre Beijing, became widely used among bureaucrats and businessmen. Spreading throughout northern China, baihua acquired the character of a koine (i.e. a standard language jointly used for communication by speakers of different languages within a certain area). See M. Dolezelová-Velingerová, ‘The Origin of Modern Chinese Literature,’ in M. Goldman, ed., Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 18-19.
77 Zi wo yanxi yilai, OYQJ 6:15.
78 ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ ibid., pp. 151, 164.
79 The Spring Willow actors were regarded as ‘aestheticians’ who did not tolerate the ‘mediocre’ taste of the masses. See Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., p. 21; ‘Tan wenmingxi,’ ibid., p. 198.
80 Ibid., pp. 198-99.
81 Zi wo yanxi yilai, OYQJ 6:44-45; ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ ibid., p. 178.
82 Fujisawa Asajirō, for example, supported the Spring Willow student-actors not only in staging and directing, but also in renting suitable stages for performance. With the help of Asajirō, Spring Willow was able to occupy the famous Japanese theatres Hongōza and Tōkyōza. See Zi wo yanxi yilai, ibid., p. 16; ‘Huiyi Chunliu,’ ibid., p. 154.
83 See also p. 107 above.
84 Ouyang points out that ‘at this time all political speech on stage lost its colour’. See ‘Tan wenmingxi,’ ibid., p. 188.
85 For a summary of these companies and their repertoires, see ‘Tan wenmingxi,’ ibid., pp. 184-217.
86 Ibid., p. 188.
87 Ibid., p. 185.
88 Quoted after Mackerras 1975, p. 45.
89 Zi wo yanxi yilai, OYQJ 6:2.
92 Ibid., p. 185.
Though the Chinese ‘age of translation’ – the starting point of the New Theatre Movement in Japan – was opened, large-scale translation of foreign plays began only after the time of the Literary Revolution. Zheng Zhenduo 程振铎 (1898-1958), in a 1921 survey, discovered more than thirty plays that had been translated since 1918. See Davis 1968-69, p. 43.


‘Tan wenmingxi,’ OYJ 6:196.

For the division of Chinese dialects, see P. Kratochvil, The Chinese Language Today: Features of an Emerging Standard (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1968), p. 16 and Fig. 1. The arias of Beijing opera use a special pronunciation for some words (shangkouzi 上口字) which is different from Beijing vernacular with regard to the colour of main vowels and/or codas. For examples, see Zhongguo yinyue cidian 中國音樂辭典 (Chinese Music Dictionary) (Beijing: Renmin yinyue chubanshe, 1985), p. 343 (hereafter Zhongguo yinyue cidian). Phonologically, the shangkouzi system is thought to be based on the Hu-Guang dialect (Hu-Guang yin 湖廣音), centred in the Wuhan/Wuchang region, but realized in Zhongzhou yim (Zhongzhou yin 中州韻), used in the Henan region. This particular feature is said to origin with Tan Xinpei; see Zhongguo dabaike quanshu: Xiqu quyi 中國大百科全書: 戲曲曲藝 (Great Chinese Encyclopedia: Traditional Opera and Operatic Arts) (Beijing: Zhongguo dabaike quanshu chubanshe, 1983), p. 162. As for the pronunciation of the spoken parts of Beijing opera, nianbai 念白, there also exists a system of distinct tone phonemes and rules of articulation that diverge from the Beijing dialect, see Zhongguo yinyue cidian, pp. 284-85.

For a summary of Spring Willow’s unsuccessful struggle for survival, see Bo Bin 林彬, Zhongguo huajishi gao 中國話劇史稿 (Chinese Spoken Drama Draft History) (Shanghai: Shanghai fanyi chubanshe, 1991), pp. 28-29.


C. V. Yeh, ‘The Life-style of Four Wenren in Late Qing Shanghai,’ Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies 57.2 (1997): 419.


Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot’s writings on Chinese Music

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In 1750 the French Jesuit Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot arrived in China and started his work there as a Catholic missionary. Like other Jesuits of his time he immersed himself deeply in Chinese language and culture. Amiot developed a special interest in Chinese music, which resulted in various publications, notably ‘De la Musique des Chinois, tant anciens que modernes’ (1780). The arid and specialized content of that work probably prevented it from becoming very popular, but in Western scholarship, it occupied a unique place, and continued to do so for more than a century. The continued relevance of Amiot’s writings, especially about music theory and court ceremonial practice in China, is recognized by modern scholars in the West and in China alike. The present article discusses Amiot’s contributions to Chinese music research from historical and cultural perspectives.

At the time of Marco Polo, China and Chinese culture grew into major sources of fascination to Europeans. The country continued to hold a special interest for the next seven centuries. Ironically, many people in Europe developed very specific ideas about China without obtaining much genuine knowledge of the country, if any. From the late sixteenth century onwards, with the arrival of Matteo Ricci and his Jesuit successors in China, followed a series of attempts at religious conversion of the Chinese and at the dissemination of Christian culture in China. As a first step in this process the Jesuits sought to achieve a better understanding of the country’s own language and culture.

The imperial court of the Qing dynasty (1644–1912) supported Confucian ideals, which meant, amongst many other things, that in court ceremonial practice, music was expected to play a significant role, as it had done in the state affairs of earlier Confucian governments. During the reign of the Kangxi Emperor (1662-1722), Jesuits like Pedrini and Pereira were instrumental in getting the Emperor personally involved in the performance and appreciation of Western music at the court. They also wrote a section on Western music theory for the imperial compendium Lulu zhengyi (Collected Basic Principles of Music). At this time, relatively little information on Chinese music was available in the West. This began to change when the Jesuit Du Halde published his Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l’Empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie
chinoise (General History on China) in Paris in 1735. But arguably one of the most significant writers on Chinese music in any European language in the eighteenth century was the French Jesuit Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot. This article focuses on Amiot's contributions to Chinese music, and aims at assessing his historical and cultural impact on scholarship in this realm.

Introduction
From the late sixteenth century onwards Jesuit missionaries became active in China. There was a general recognition in Europe that they were a significant source of information for Europeans on various aspects of Chinese culture. Other missionary orders had proved much less sympathetic to China, and Western merchants, who usually operated at a considerable distance from the capital, were mainly concerned with their own affairs. It was the Jesuits who, following the policy established by Matteo Ricci, endeavoured to approach their tasks from within the culture, by acquiring a true understanding of the society in which they were living. By the end of the Ming dynasty, the work of Ricci and his colleagues had won the Jesuits a position of influence in some matters at court, although they experienced many difficulties, and were sometimes eyed with suspicion.

It is hardly surprising that the early Jesuit missionaries did not accept the totality of Chinese culture. While the principles of Confucius seemed to accord with the principles of Christianity, or could be made to seem so, other aspects of Chinese culture struck the Jesuits as mere manifestations of superstition, which ought to be condemned. At the time of Ricci such views inspired learned Christian converts of their own accord to destroy libraries of traditional Chinese works on geomancy. Modern scholars have regretted the consequent loss of knowledge about early Chinese science. And there were other setbacks. In the final stages of the Ming dynasty, at least one Jesuit was forced into exile, following the conversion to Christianity of some of the women of the Imperial household.

Nevertheless, under the Qing dynasty the Jesuits eventually succeeded in regaining a leading position at the court. The Jesuits were employed at the court largely for scientific purposes. They were involved not only in theoretical matters such as calendar calculations, but were allotted even more practical tasks, like conducting a cartographical survey of the Empire, or acting as engineers for the Emperor in the manufacture and provision of elaborate toys, fountains and mechanical organs.
Towards the end of the Kangxi Emperor’s reign, their work was marred, from their own point of view, through the interference of Rome. In daily life at the court, the Jesuits had managed to steer towards a happy compromise between the traditional ritual requirements of the Chinese state and the demands of the Catholic Church: converts were allowed to continue their participation in Confucian ancestral rites, and in most dogmatic questions the Jesuits tended to recede into the background, and to avoid confrontations. But the enemies of the Jesuits at the Vatican were not pleased. They saw to it that a more rigid interpretation of Catholic principles was forced on the mission. The Emperor, with no allegiance to any foreign barbarian, papal or otherwise, could not but be offended by the tone of the communications from Rome, and, indeed, by the treatment of his servants, the Jesuits. He was now inclined to keep them more at bay, except in their roles of scientists.

Under the Qianlong Emperor (1737-1796) the Jesuits regained some of their old influence, but preaching Christianity was henceforward a forbidden activity in China. The eighteenth century brought the missionaries renewed persecution, particularly in the provinces, and at the court the Jesuits now operated under stricter conditions. Nevertheless, the Qianlong Emperor, in many ways a worthy successor to his grandfather the Kangxi Emperor, continued to require their services. Throughout his long reign (1735-1796) there were Catholic priests at the court, even after the suppression of the Jesuits in France in 1764, two years after the expulsion of the members of the Society of Jesus from Macau: while hostility to the Jesuits led to the official suppression of the Society by the authorities in Rome, former Jesuit priests retained some elements of influence at the Chinese court.

Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot

Jean-Joseph-Marie Amiot was born in 1718. He entered the Society and was sent to China as a missionary. He reached Macau in 1750 and was received by Bishop de Souza, the Jesuit, Portuguese nominee for the see of Beijing, which de Souza was to occupy only after the death of Clement XI.

The Mass in celebration of the arrival of the new missionaries was sung to the sound of Chinese instruments. It is quite characteristic of the Jesuit approach that they welcomed the use of Chinese elements in the rituals, to make participants feel more at home. In the same way, the mechanical clock in the Beijing church played both Chinese and Western melodies.

After he had arrived in the Chinese capital, Amiot – who became known in China as Qian Deming – did not only take up the study of Chinese language and the traditional classics, but also developed an early interest in Chinese music. In 1754 this interest resulted in his translation of Li Guangdi’s treatise Gu Yue Jingzhuo (Canonical Book and Commentaries on Ancient Music). Through his superior, the Procurator of the Chinese Mission, Father De Latour, Amiot sent the translation to M. de Bougainville, the secretary of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in France. Unfortunately, the manuscript eventually disappeared, but before it was lost a number of writers consulted it and quoted from it in their own works. One of these writers, Abbé Arnaud, made some use of it in his article on Chinese dances in the Journal Étranger. Others who borrowed from the translation included the composer and theorist Rameau, in his treatise Code de Musique pratique, the Abbé Roussier in his Mémoire sur la Musique des anciens and De La Borde
in his *Essai sur la Musique ancienne et moderne*. This enthusiasm for sources on Chinese music in France coincided with a general increased interest in exoticism.

The suppression of the Society of Jesus in France in 1764 cut off Amiot from his religious superiors, and largely blocked his channels of communication with interested scholars and dilettanti in France. However, one day, when some books arrived which he had ordered from Europe, the package included Roussier’s work on ancient music. Many years later, Roussier’s book – which quoted from Amiot’s translation of Li Guangdi – was to inspire him to resume his work on Chinese music.

With his first translation, sent to Father De Latour in 1754, Amiot had promised further supplements on an annual basis, as his superiors might think fit. He received no news about his translation of Li Guangdi, which he had destined for de Bougainville. De Bougainville received it before his death, but the lack of any clear positive reaction in France was discouraging. The French Jesuits, after all, had many other preoccupations.

**Amiot’s scattered comments on music**

In 1763, Amiot’s communication with De Latour was interrupted. Amiot turned his attentions to other matters of scholarship, resuming his work on music only in 1774. The result of this was his contribution to the series of *Mémoires* on the history, sciences, arts, customs and practices of the Chinese by the missionaries in Beijing, assembled by Amiot, and published in Paris between 1776 and 1789.

The vicissitudes which the Jesuits missionaries underwent during the later part of the eighteenth century did not prevent Amiot from making a significant contribution to this series. In spite of all the problems he was able to continue his work of scholarship, and to contribute to the *Mémoires* not only a volume devoted to music but many other writings as well. A number of his letters that were incorporated in the series became widely known. Many of the parts written in later years were concerned with the difficulties that the suppression of the Jesuit order had brought about.

Volume XI of the *Mémoires* includes letters from Amiot written in 1783 and 1784. In one of these he describes the Kangxi Emperor’s preoccupation with music, which was based on an age-old Chinese tradition that music is an affair of state, and that it is essential for every ruling family or dynasty to have its own proper music for the great traditional ceremonies. In the same letter he makes passing reference to the fact that he had sent to France ‘the work of Pereira and Pedrini’ ten or twelve years earlier. This presumably refers to a book on Western music that was appended, as a fifth volume, to a series of four volumes on Chinese music written on command of the Kangxi Emperor, the *Lulu zhengyi* (Collected Basic Principles of Music). There is no record of any appearance of the work in Europe, nor do we know to whom it was sent.

Further letters from Amiot appear in Volume XII, which deals with the life of Confucius, and Volume XIII, which contains work by Cibot on the sonorous stones. Volume XIV includes a letter written on 25 January 1787 which Amiot had sent to France together with a *yunluo* (a set of gongs) of the kind that was used to attract the attention of the Emperor, while Volume XV includes Amiot’s study of the comparative history of the Jewish and the Chinese people.
Amiot’s letter describing the *yunluo* is of interest in that it expresses clearly a sense of a shared identity which he now felt with the Chinese among whom he had been living for so long already. He points out that French musicians will not feel tempted to play their sonatas or ariettas on a Chinese *yunluo*. In France everything is done with rapidity, at a jump, movement is a necessity, rest kills you, as he tells his correspondent; you must fly, dance and run, for fine music. In China, however, everything is orderly; singing is to be listened to without any effort or struggle on the part of the listener. ‘If we play an instrument’, he adds, ‘it is so that each sound that we produce may be able to penetrate to the depth of the soul to produce there the effect we have in mind.’ He goes on to say that the gongs of the *yunluo* are all played separately, and that they ‘bring together among them the sounds of all the other instruments’, i.e. that they have a leading role in the ensemble. Amiot’s observations are clearly based on the leading role of pitched percussion instruments in ensembles commonly used in Chinese state ceremonies. Such ensembles play only music that is simple, harmonious, slow and based on a single melody. Very likely, he would have said something very different if he had had opportunities to comment on folk music in China. When he first reached Beijing Amiot had tried to win over new listeners for Rameau and Blavet. But here, in his letters, he assumes the role of an apologist for traditional Chinese musical practice. He now identifies himself with the Chinese, and, by implication, condemns the French spirit of levity that had proved so alien to his first audience in China.

There are passing references to music in earlier volumes of the *Mémoires*. A volume compiled in 1772 on the military art of the Chinese reminds us of the identification of the five notes of the pentatonic scale, *gong, shang, jue, zhi, yu*, with five colours, yellow, red, green, white and black, as well as with the five flavours sweet, sour, salt, bitter and piquant. Music can be used in the control of the soldiery.

The idea of the use of music to weaken the enemy is Platonic in its supposed effects. The hearts of the enemy can be softened by voluptuous music, as we are told, rather similar to the way in which the Greek modes of Asia Minor were considered, by Socrates in The Republic, to be corrupting.

Illustrations and descriptions of a few instruments follow. The *zhengluo* is described as a kind of large basin on which one beats with a wooden hammer. The watches of the night are, as we are told, marked by drums, and two kinds of trumpet are used for signals. These latter are an octave apart, and one has a conical end, the other a bulbous. Two more instruments are described, a fish-shaped percussion instrument played with two sticks before the door of the general (*mayui*) and a conch, used to sound a retreat (*hailuo*). The first of these has nowadays lost its fish shape, and resembles, rather, a human skull.

All this is insignificant compared with Volume VI of the *Mémoires*, which contains Amiot’s chief work on Chinese music, plus a rather shorter work by Father Cibot on sonorous stones. In Amiot’s contribution in Vol.VI we have the first serious attempt to describe the theory of Chinese music in a Western language. The work is intensely specialised, and hence limited in popular appeal. At the time when it was written it offered obvious difficulties to the general reader. While later French writers made direct use of Amiot, his study illustrates the clear divergence, that had increased in the course of the eighteenth century, between the amateur and the professional in Chinese studies.
Amiot’s Volume on Chinese Music: a bird’s eye view

Amiot’s *De la Musique des Chinois, tant anciens que modernes* was edited in Paris by Roussier, who adds his own – sometimes misleading – footnotes. The author explains in some detail the circumstances from which the work emerged, and, in all modesty, offers it as an imperfect introduction to the study of Chinese music: he is too isolated from other scholars in the West to present a genuine treatise on the subject, and what he has written must be viewed as no more than a mémoire, for the use of European scholars.

Amiot’s ‘Preliminary Discourse’ is of more than anecdotal interest. He explains how, upon his arrival in China, he had set to work to study the language and the customs of the Chinese. To recommend himself to the educated, he paid particular attention to the study of mathematics. In music he had acquired some skills as a player of the spinet and the flute, and his first efforts in China had been to convince the Chinese of the superiority of European music: to learned Chinese visitors to the Jesuit house in Beijing he played *Les Sauvages* and *Les Cyclopes* by Rameau, as well as the finest flute pieces by the French composer Blavet, but this made no impression on his audience. When he asked them about it they replied that European melodies were simply not made for their ears, nor their ears for such melodies, and therefore their lack of appreciation of European music was understandable. One scholar added that Chinese music went through the ear to the heart, and from the heart to the soul; it was felt and understood: ancient Chinese music was something more than that, it was enough to hear it to be enraptured. Amiot then continues by explaining the comparison that the Chinese traditionally made between earlier and contemporary Chinese music, and as it was recorded by earlier foreign visitors to China.

Such remarks about the difficulty of understanding melodies of a foreign culture, as well as the encouragement which Amiot received from the astronomer Father Gaubil, eventually led him to undertake a study of Chinese music. He stumbled upon the ignorance of his learned Chinese friends when it came to this particular subject, but he persevered in the study of the Chinese classics, from which it emerged that, from ancient times onwards, music had always had great importance in Chinese culture. Meanwhile he searched for some source that would clarify the theory on which the whole science of Chinese music was based.

It was again Father Gaubil who suggested that Amiot should translate Li Guangdi’s *Gyue jingzhu*. We have already noted the subsequent fate of this translation, and the influence it had on a number of writers on cultural subjects.

Matters remained at a standstill until Amiot received, in 1774, a copy of Roussier’s book. He was impressed by it, but he felt that the author lacked a proper knowledge of Chinese music. Clearly, Roussier had not grasped that the division of the octave into twelve semitones, by the triple progression to twelve terms, was an ancient invention of the Chinese. He failed to realize that the Egyptian correspondences of the calendar and music were derived from an earlier Chinese source, just like Pythagoras applied Chinese theory of an earlier age to his measurements of proportion in sound.

A genuine understanding of Chinese music theory, which takes into account its long history of interaction and intrinsic connections with cosmology, could have led Roussier to adopt the Chinese notion of music as an all-embracing principle in the universe. Amiot, thoroughly in touch with the Chinese view on the matter, enters the dispute about the
relative antiquity of the civilisations of Greece, Egypt and China by firmly allowing priority to the last. He is anxious to provide material on the basis of which European scholars can investigate the Chinese claims, but he is also appalled by the uncritical use and misinterpretation of his earlier translation of Li Guangdi in the writings of Rameau and Roussier. Clearly, whatever its original imperfections, his work has been tampered with.

In *De la Musique des Chinois*, however, Amiot aims to present an account of the Chinese musical system, while, inevitably, in view of the ramifications of the subject, ignoring the very wide connections of the system with other aspects of science and philosophy in China. With some justification he goes on to warn readers of the uninteresting nature of much that he has to say. Not only is there something of aridity in the matters to be discussed, but the inevitable presence of a large number of Chinese terms may deter readers.

Bearing in mind his earlier experience with uncritical adaptations of his translations, he goes on to warn his editors not to change transliterations of Chinese, which represent the sound of the language as spoken at court. He must have had fears, one gathers, of some provincial missionary retransliteration of the quotations from Chinese in his work by transliteration from other Chinese regional dialects, with the very real possibility of destroying their essence or making mistakes. This would evidently downgrade the importance of his work. As a further safeguard he sent two copies of the work, one to Bignon, the King’s Librarian, and the other to Bertin, Minister and Secretary of State.

Together with the second copy he sent some Chinese instruments to Europe, which were to be added to the Bertin collection, such as a *qin* with seven strings, a *qing* – a single chime stone – and a *sheng* (mouth organ) with the names of the notes written on the pipes. He also added a diapason – a bamboo pipe of the official pitch standard – made by one of the Kangxi Emperor’s sons. This includes on it the dimensions of the principal Chinese instruments. Indeed, these instruments had traditionally been associated with the performance of court and ritual music for various forms over two millennia in China. The fact that Amiot was able to obtain a diapason made by a son of the Kangxi Emperor was an indication of the high degree of respect that was granted him, especially since pitch standard had the connotation of authority in China: it could only be determined by the Emperor.

Bertin fled the violence of the French Revolution, but his property was confiscated by the State. Items from the Bertin collection – the result of years of correspondence with members of the Jesuit foreign mission, and letters from Amiot from 1766 onwards – were dispersed among various public collections. Today, little remains of the instruments which Amiot had sent, as we are told, except for a *sheng* and two *qin* which are currently kept in the Musée d’Ethnographie.

To give more than the briefest summary of Amiot’s book on music would be difficult. He has consulted some sixty-nine specialist Chinese sources, in addition to the standard histories, and these he lists in a bibliography. The first part of the book deals with musical instruments and their Chinese categorization (according to the materials of which they are made). The second part is devoted to an account of the *lù*, the twelve fundamental semitones. The third part consists of additional articles on the nature of sound and other Chinese musical principles, and these are followed by an account and transcription of the ‘Hymn to the Ancestors’. The book incorporates a set of plates and tables which illustrate
not only the instruments but also the various theories outlined in the text. Below, the various parts of the book will be discussed in more detail.

The Eight Sources of Sound\(^3\)

The first section, on Chinese musical instruments, begins with an article on the eight sources of sound (bayin): animal skin, stone, metal, clay, silk, wood, bamboo and gourd. In Chinese tradition, these are assumed to be the main sources of sound in nature. There is a mystical connection between the bayin classification and the set of cabalistic signs known as bagua (eight trigrams), popularly ascribed to the legendary emperor Fuxi. The three lines in Fuxi's trigrams represent the three principal kingdoms of nature, animal, vegetable and mineral, while the total number of trigrams is limited to eight. Amiot finds in this intrusion of trigrams an element that has led to obfuscation in the study of the Chinese system of music. He goes on to survey the various obstacles which have complicated this study of Chinese musical theory in the course of the country's turbulent history. It is in the work of Zhu Zaiyu and in Li Guangdi's treatise on Chinese ancient music of a century later, a work itself based on a number of earlier books, that he finds his chief sources of information. Amiot has to rely on the references which they give, since – in the absence of Ming Dynasty material, suppressed by the Qing government – there is no way of checking them for himself. In the order in which he discusses the musical instruments, he follows Chinese conventions of his own time, while acknowledging the more ancient Chinese order of metal, stone, silk, bamboo, gourd, clay, hide and wood.

In the second section Amiot deals with the instruments made of hide, which come under the general term tambour, drum. He lists the types of drums, starting with the most ancient one, the tugu, with its clay base. When clay was eventually replaced by wood, sandalwood or cedar were preferred in the South and mulberry in the North. Amiot specifies eight different kinds of drums dating from the early dynasties. He finds references to the zugu in the Xia dynasty, a period which he dates as starting in B.C. 2224. The Shang dynasty, the beginning of which is dated to B.C.1756, brought the yinggu. In the following period, the Zhou dynasty, which started in B.C.1122, the yinggu continued to be used, while the xungu appeared, an instrument similar in form to the zugu, with two small drums attached. The jinggu is described and illustrated, with its different names according to the applied decorations on the barrel, and the larger and the smaller taogu, as well as the barrel-shaped xianggu and the cylindrical bofu, filled with rice husks. These are all illustrated in the copious plates which enlivened Volume VI of the Mémoires.

The third article in the book deals with the sounds of stone, which – as musical performance – Amiot assumes to be an exclusively Chinese phenomenon. He refers to the legendary Emperor Yu, the tamer of the Yellow River, who reportedly decided what kind of stones each province in his empire was to contribute for musical use. Suzhou had to deliver raw materials for the fouqing: stones on the banks of the River Se, which, because of their exposure to air and sun, had become hard and produced a particularly clear sound when struck. Yuzhou was to provide stones of varying sizes (according to the tuning) for the cuoqing, Liangzhou jade stones for the liqing.

Around 32 B.C., during the reign of Chengdi of the Early Han dynasty, an ancient qing consisting of sixteen stone slabs was found on the bottom of a pond, and in A.D. 247
Amiot's figures 1-5: Bianqing (set of 16 stone-chimes of the same size but varying thickness) in a highly decorated frame and other solitary chimes with different colours.

A yuqing, a set of sonorous stones of jade, with sixteen slabs, was presented to the Emperor after it had been discovered in (what was then called) Suzhou Province. Scholars of the time noted that, apart from the traditional twelve li, it featured four additional pitches. They also observed that the instrument was perfectly in tune.

Amiot goes on to distinguish between the teqing and the bianqing, the former a single sonorous stone slab, used to give the signal to begin or to finish a performance, and the latter a set of sixteen stones that was used in ancient music. Furthermore, he introduces the shengqing and the songqing. The full use of the last two instruments is explained in detailed notes which accompany the illustrations.

In his fourth article Amiot looks at metal as a source of sound. He claims that the earliest use of metal for musical purposes was the founding of bells in China, notably the founding of the fundamental bell, the lowest one in a set of twelve that was tuned to the semitonal divisions of the octave (before the Qing dynasty added four bells that were still lower). Three kinds of ancient bells are distinguished, baozhong, tezhong and bianzhong, which all differ in size and in use. The first, a single bell, was used to start a piece, or as a signal to dancers or players; the second, of medium size, played a musical part in an ensemble, and then there was the third type, the bianzhong, which had the smallest bells, a set of sixteen, which were structured according to the tuning and ordering of the bianqing. Although Amiot deals with stone before metal, in fact the metal instruments, the bells, preceded the sonorous stones in order of construction. Traditionally bells come before sonorous stones in ancient texts and would seem to come first for practical reasons of tuning.

Amiot associates the later destruction of the old bells during the Qin Dynasty with the burning of books which supposedly took place in that period, and with the subsequent cultural renaissance in the Han Dynasty, which was less outspoken where music culture
was concerned, and which featured the production of sets of seven (rather than twelve) bells. Around A.D. 640, during the early Tang dynasty, a more settled period of Chinese history, the Emperor Taizong led an attempt to restore the ancient musical traditions. A principal element was the discovery of sets of bells of the earlier period and the possibility of demonstrating again the 84 so-called modulations, in which each note of the twelve lī could serve as any one of the seven degrees of the scale. Thus, theoretically any bell could serve as the fundamental for a heptatonic mode. Amiot continues with comments on the later history of the bells. Theorists did not stop arguing about such matters as the exact pitch organization of bell sets and the correct pitch of the fundamental bell (huáng zhòng). While farther ancient examples of bell sets were discovered, several attempts were made to cast new bells and to readjust tunings, resulting in a variety of different ‘tuning standards’ accompanied by a host of theoretical treatises. (These are discussed in detail in Pian, 1967.) As always, theory was often of more importance than practice.

The whole account of the tuning of bells is of some general importance in that it clearly shows that eighteenth century Chinese scholars who studied the nature of early acoustic practice believed in the division of the octave in twelve pitches and in the possibility of 84 modulations.

‘Clay’ as a material source for musical instruments comes next in Amiot’s survey, and involves a discussion of the xún, the globular clay flute, with its five holes for the five tones of a pentatonic scale. The instrument is modelled on the structure of an egg, its interior dimensions resembling a hen’s egg, its exterior ones resembling a goose’s egg. Eventually xūns were made in two different sizes, with six holes, resulting in a seven-note scale.

‘Silk’ follows next, a material particularly associated with China, where its manufacture was first practised. The chordophones qin and se are described. Ancient (silk-)stringed zithers. According to tradition the qin originally had five strings, which accorded with the five planets, the five elements, while the se had fifty strings, eventually reduced to twenty-five. Amiot follows here, as elsewhere, the Ming music theorist Zhu Zaiyu in his correction of other accounts of the qin, joining him in the claim that the qin has always had seven strings, with two different systems of tuning. The first of these made use of the five-note scale, while the second added two semitones. He touches on the symbolism of the qin, and its peculiar position in literature.

Four kinds of se are described, with 25 strings, and five sets of five bridges representing the colours blue, red, yellow, white and black. Zhu Zaiyu is again followed in his clear view that the number of strings, after its reduction to 25, remained constant. Misunderstandings had arisen from accounts of works to be accompanied by five, fifteen, nineteen, twenty-three or twenty-seven strings; these instructions simply implied the number of strings to be used, not the number of instruments, or what kind of instruments. Amiot expresses his admiration for the se, and considers no European instrument its superior, not even the harpsichord, of which the metal strings and noisy mechanism are, in his view, unpleasant to more sensitive ears.

In the category ‘wood’, the percussion instruments zhu, yu and chongdu are introduced. The first instrument is a box-shaped one, in origin a measure for food-stuffs: the second instrument has the shape of a sleeping tiger, with a serrated back-bone, and it is normally played (struck) at the end of a ceremony. The third instrument consists of strips
of wood on which the words of a song are written, or at least its beginning lines. Twelve strips symbolize the twelve lù. Traditionally, these strips were struck lightly against the palm of the left hand to mark the rhythm of the music. All three instruments were viewed as symbols of man's organization in society, his dominance over the animal kingdom and his abilities of communication through writing.

Amiot answers objections that 'bamboo', the next category, is no different from wood. In fact the plant is, he tells us, neither strictly a tree, nor an ordinary plant, but something in-between, or both things at the same time. Bamboo is of the greatest use to mankind for a variety of purposes, but particularly for music. The foundations of Chinese musical pitch theory have always been associated with sounds produced on bamboo pipes. Amiot refers to the early use of bamboo for blowing pipes which produce different notes when blown, resulting in the construction of sets of twelve, in accordance with the twelve lù. He also discusses the eventual split into two sets of odd and even numbered pipes, yāng and yīn, as the seventeenth century Portuguese Jesuit Semedo had already signalled, incidentally, in his own treatment of the lù, in his History of China, published in London in English translation in 1655.15

Later, as we are told, the xiao was devised, another type of flute, endblown, with sixteen different sizes, the instruments joined together in the manner of panpipes. These sets were made, in two basic sizes, an octave apart. Amiot introduces the paixiao (Chinese panpipes), used in ceremonial music.

A further section adds information on the yue, yet another flute. Zhu Zaiyu had personally experimented with the manner in which the three holes of the yue could be used to produce different pitches. With all the three holes stopped the flute produced the fundamental note, and, if blown with more force of breath, a pitch of a fifth higher. Amiot identifies the resulting notes as F and C. Opening the first hole produced G and (blown with more force) D, and opening the first as well as the second hole and blowing in the two different ways described gave A and E, while stopping only the middle hole gave B. Opinions differ on the period in which six holes were introduced on the instrument, resulting in the twelve notes of the lù.

The basic pitch of the yue was originally based on huangzhong, the fundamental pitch of the lù, but later twelve different sizes of yue were made, so that the instrument could be used in many different kinds of music. The di differed from the yue in that one end was partly blocked, giving a small aperture. The modern instrument is transverse.

A rarer instrument is the chi, blocked at both ends, and blown, transversely, across a middle hole, with three holes on either side. Amiot quotes Zhu Zaiyu on the rarity of the instrument, on the difficulty of playing it, and on its exact and symbolic measurements.

Amiot excuses his lengthy treatment of 'bamboo' by reminding his readers that, in Chinese practice, bamboo is at the basis of the measurement of sound. He recalls the efforts of Ling Lun to establish the lù, which he dates to B.C. 2637, the period of the Emperor Huangdi.

Next, a long description follows of the symbolic nature of gourd, representative of the vegetable kingdom, and used for the sheng, a mouth organ with a variable number of pipes attached to a wind-chest. The unusually favourable impression which this particular instrument made on earlier (Western) visitors to China is presumably due to its capacity of
producing chords – a capacity unique for the zheng among ancient Chinese instruments. The first part of *De la Musique des Chinois* concludes with this account of the eighth source of sound, plus a warning about the complex nature of what will follow, namely a theoretical discussion of the twelve lū.

To a modern reader, it may well appear strange that many of the better known Chinese instruments are not included in Amiot’s list. For example, there is no mention of plucked lutes like the *pipa* and the *sanzhian*, or of any other plucked instrument, for that matter. There is also no record of the bowed string instruments, or of the *yangqin* (dulcimer). Double reeds are not included either, and Chinese percussion instruments are certainly not dealt with in full. It was not Amiot’s intention to provide a popular or full account of the Chinese instrumentarium. His primary aim was to list the instruments which, in ancient times, supposedly represented the proper sounds of the eight sound sources.

**Amiot’s Explanation of the Lū**

Amiot’s advance warnings about the next part of his text are fully justified. His explanation of the lū is inevitably complex, and has little to appeal to the imagination. By way of introduction we are told the story of Ling Lun, as related in the early Chinese histories. The Emperor Huangdi ordered Ling Lun to create standards and basic rules for musical practice at the court, and to ‘regularize’ music. For this purpose, Ling Lun travelled to Xie Xi in the Northwest of China, in an area with bamboo forests. Each bamboo stem had knots that divided the stem into separate segments, or pipes. Basing himself on Chinese sources, Amiot tells us how Ling Lun returned with a series of bamboo pipes which gave the twelve semitones.

At this point Roussier intervenes, in a footnote, to point out that twelve intervals of a semitone would actually imply the usage of thirteen pipes, since a semitone is an interval between two pipes, and not a note in itself. In this, of course, he misunderstands the nature of the lū, which provides twelve notes only, generated in the way hinted at by Semedeo, not twelve intervals.

The traditional account of the activities of Ling Lun, the legendary minister of the Yellow Emperor, appears in various sources, the earliest being the *Lushi Chunqiu* (Master Lu’s Spring and Autumn Annals), which have been dated 239 B.C. Amiot, taking his Chinese chroniclers’ accounts at face value, evidently regards the China of the legendary Yellow Emperor as the very birthplace of the musical scale, and assumes that its theoretical foundations came into being no less than eleven centuries before Pythagoras. His view is not shared by a modern researcher like Kenneth Robinson, who is more inclined to point at the mathematical achievements of the Babylonians as a common source for acoustical theories developed in both Europe and China.

Ling Lun’s next step, as Amiot explains, was to measure the lengths of the pipes which he had brought back to the Court. He did his measuring with the help of black millet grains (*shu*), which he found to be of a regular size. The grains were oval rather than spherical, and had to be lined up in a specific manner to allow for standard measurements. For example, if the grains touched one another at the narrowest diameter, Ling Lun’s fundamental bamboo pipe turned out to be 100 grains in length. If the grains were arranged in a different way, touching one another at the widest diameter, the pipe was 81 grains long. Ling Lun took
this measurement of 81 grains as his standard. He reportedly gave the name gong to the fundamental sound. Gong means Imperial Palace, Royal House, and the word symbolizes the centre in which all the sources of light that illuminate the rulers meet. In a musical sense, gong meant the principal sound on which the pitch system was based. The pipe that produced the gong was called huangzhong, ‘yellow bell’, a name that was said to combine the colour of earth and the invariable metal of the bell.

Measurements were then made of the diameter and the volume of the fundamental pipe, three grains and 1200 grains respectively. Names were given to the length of the grain (fen), and to the vessel that could contain 1200 grains (yue). At a later stage a decimal system of measurement replaced the earlier one, that had been based on the number nine, and the grain became the basic unit in this measurement system, to be divided or multiplied by ten to give the other units of measurement, which varied from 10,000 grains down to a ten-millionth. The same system was used for the measurement of volume, based on the 1200 grain yue, though various ancient sources reported on the existence of other systems which had a far less convenient arrangement of units.

Amiot points out that the musical measurement of the fundamental pipe gave rise to all other measurements, musical or geometric. The fundamental pipe, the huangzhong, was the basis of the twelve lü, but also provided a standard for other quantitative measurements. Amiot explains that if the 1200 grain-volume huangzhong was divided into twelve equal parts, there were 100 grains for each part. The weight of this was known as zhu, the basic unit used for weighing. Similarly, grains themselves were classified and divided into groups for the purpose of measuring weight.

Amiot now issues a further warning to the ‘common reader’, and allows him to skip some of the passages that follow, in which the argument becomes increasingly technical, and where transliterated Chinese terms, so bewildering, proliferate.

The second article of this second part of De la Musique des Chinois deals specifically with the lü, divided into two groups of six, according to the principle of yang and yin. That is to say, the twelve semitones are grouped into six odd numbers (yang) and six even numbers (yin) in the order of generation, the order in which pitches are generated from a fundamental, and these are variously named, with different names for different specific pitches. Amiot goes on to list the names of every note and to explain its related symbolism. The first, the huangzhong, is that of the eleventh moon, time of the winter solstice and the beginning of the astronomical year. The second term of the series of yanglù bears the name taicou, symbolising the first moon, the beginning of the official year, a time when growth begins, but everything is still equal. Guxian, the third of the yanglù, corresponds to the third moon of the official year, the name meaning ‘the old renewed’, in recognition of the natural growth that takes place in nature at this time. The fifth moon of the year is identified with the fourth term, ruibin, ‘little necessary’, and the seventh moon by the fifth term yize, meaning ‘put to death, instrument of torture’, but actually referring to the time of harvest. The ninth moon is represented by the sixth of the yanglù, wuyi, ‘not yet finished’, an accurate enough description.

The system is carefully correlated, and it will be seen that the terms of the odd numbers are identified with odd numbered months, starting at the beginning of the astronomical year. The yinlù have similar correlations. The first, dalü, is identified with the twelfth moon; the
name means ‘great co-operator’, referring to the co-operation of yang and yin. The second of the yinlù, jiazhong, corresponds with the second lunar month, and the name – ‘bell held on both sides’ – implies the germinal power of seeds. The third is identified with the fourth moon, and bears the name zhonglù, ‘middle co-operator’, which stresses again the helping role of yin in this view of cosmology.

Linzhong, the fourth even term, corresponds with the sixth moon, ‘bell of the forests’, in reference to the growth of foliage at this time. It is followed by nanlù, related to the eighth moon, ‘co-operator of the south’. The final term of the yinlù is yingzhong, the tenth moon, ‘the waiting bell’, as winter waits for spring.

All these terms in the progression of the lù are equated with the characters of cyclic progression, the twelve terrestrial branches, which, with the ten celestial stems, make up the traditional cycle of sixty years. The complexities of the system, and its comprehensive frame of reference, are of vital interest to scholars of Chinese music.

Four hundred years later the Emperor Yu reintroduced the old length of 81, but this was again replaced by his successors, with a length of 100 grains, exterior diameter of five and interior diameter of three, with five tenths and three hundredths of a line (the ‘line’ being the equivalent of the millet grain in measurement). Succeeding dynasties made their own changes in this fundamental measurement, until the time of the destruction that was wrought by the Qin dynasty. It was left to the Han to endeavour to restore the supposed practices of former times. In the Han Dynasty the measurement of 81 lines was restored, each inch being composed of 9 lines. The huangzhong was given an interior diameter of 3 lines, four tenths and six hundredths.

Various practices seem to have been followed until the reign of the Wanli Emperor, and the work of Zhu Zaiyu of the Ming dynasty. This scholar cast a metal foot length, of
which Amiot showed an illustration. The foot-long piece of metal had a cylindrical cavity throughout its length, with a circumference of nine lines, the diameter of the huangzhong, a capacity of 1200 grains, and a weight of twelve zhu. Blowing across the aperture at the end of the cast produced the fundamental note.

This model by Zhu Zaiyu carried on one side the division of the foot into 81 grains, consisting of nine nine-grain inches. The other side carried the division into 100, as used in normal measurement of length. Written on another part of the model is the necessary explanation of the musical division; 32 more characters contained the information that this was the original fundamental measure, containing eight sounds, the seven principles, the five tones, calculation, measure, geometry, balance and weight.

Amiot, following Zhu Zaiyu, goes on to give the measurements of the groups of the lü that he distinguishes. He starts with the double, the lower octave based on a huangzhong of two feet (200 lines) and adds a second middle octave, the commonly used mean or natural lü, based on the one foot huangzhong, and a third group of lü that are half this length, sounding an octave higher. The calculations are exact and detailed, taken to a hundredth of a line.

Amiot follows Zhu Zaiyu, and includes a long quotation translated from the Han dynasty compendium by Huai Nanzi on the importance of the number three, and the lunar correspondences, in fact illustrating the way in which the lü were derived from nature.

The system can be fairly succinctly described. The process of triple progression, by adding and subtracting a third, is simply a matter of the fundamental pitch, with a length of 81 grains, losing one third of its length to give a sound a fifth higher (the ratio 2:3 being the interval of a fifth). If F is 81, then the C above is 54. One third is then added to produce a fourth below, so that G will be 72. The order of the lü, as generated in this way will be:

F C G D A E B F# C# G# D# A#

Mathematically, the proportions between each term may be represented by 2/3, alternating with 4/3. A second series can be generated by reversing this process:

B E A D G C F Bflat Eflat Aflat Dflat Gflat

The first seven terms of these two generations of the lü coincide, and result in the pitches of the diatonic scale. Addition of the last five would make a scale of seventeen pitches, without the modifications introduced in China to reduce the number to twelve. Giving the series numbers of grains, starting from a fundamental 81, we find the first five terms are integers, the rest fractions of a grain, which can be rounded without making any physically measurable distinction. For example, the sixth term would be 42,666 grains (that is, two thirds of 64 grains). Rounding up to 43 grains makes a difference of one third of a grain, which, in practical terms, is minute.

The relationship between the notes of the lü can, of course, be expressed numerically in ratios. The fundamental may be taken as 1, the second term as 2:3 (two thirds of 1), the third as 8:9 (four thirds of two thirds of 1), and so on, until the twelfth term, which is 65536:177147.
Roussier objects to the approximation involved in rounding figures up or down, but this objection is hardly a practical one, whatever its theoretical justification. As is so often the case, Roussier’s editorial notes show no very great understanding of the text he is editing.

It should be added that, in the history of Chinese acoustic theory, the progression was eventually extended, theoretically at least, well beyond the twelfth term. A total of 360 terms was reached to correspond with the days of the year, although this figure, calculated by Qian Lezhi, was not used. In the second century B.C. Jiao Yanshou made practical use of a series of 64 lü, when he made 60 transpositions of the five-note scale for each month of a five-year cycle. The next important theorist was Jing Fang, whose hypothesis of the 53 lü in about 40 B.C. divided the octave aurally into 53 ‘commas’, although the number seems to have less mystical significance.

Amiot is not concerned with these early experiments, which he would, in any case, have classed as misguided. He does, however, devote considerable attention to the mystical interpretation of the lü by means of trigrams, hexagrams and other cabbalistic devices. These tend to obscure his view of the Chinese system of music, however necessary he may have thought them, in the context of the period in which he wrote his book, and given the place where he wrote it – the Beijing of the Qianlong Emperor.

In short, there are eight possible arrangements of the three lines of the trigrams, either complete, or with lines broken. Of the six lines of the hexagrams there are 64 possible versions, derived from the pairing of trigrams. The lines of the hexagram, when unbroken, are represented, each one, by the number nine, perfection being six unbroken lines, symbolizing heaven, and yang. The opposite may be seen in the hexagrams of six broken lines, each one designated by the number six, and, in this case, representing earth, and yin. In this system huangzhong is represented by what is called ‘the first nine’, five broken lines on an unbroken base; its yin counterpart, linzhong, consists of five unbroken lines on an imperfect broken line as a base. The so-called ‘second nine’ consists of two unbroken lines at the bottom of the hexagram, and four broken lines above. The hexagram represents the third term of the series, and is followed by an even number, yin term, based on two broken lines.

Other uses can be made of the hexagrams, in the interaction of yin and yang, imperfect and perfect, female and male. Obviously, the real importance of these lines is in their oracular power. The 64 hexagrams have individual names and meanings, and analogously the twelve lü carry extra-musical significance, between the heaven of the six complete lines and the earth of the six broken lines, symbolizing the quietude of yin.

Amiot records further symbolism in the use of the numbers in the generation of the lü. The nature of this symbolism depends on the significance of odd numbers as yang and celestial, and of even numbers as yin and terrestrial. Amiot quotes the Yijing in the distinction between 1-3-5-7-9 which have, as part of the total 10, a beginning but no end, and 2-4-6-8-10, which have the end but no beginning.

In another diagram Amiot shows clearly how the lower numbers 1-2-3-4-5 can be considered as generators of the higher, 6-7-8-9-10. The generator 1 and the first generated term, 6, are placed at the foot of the circle in the illustration, with 2 and 7 at the top; the first pair signify water, the second fire, the notes D and C (yu and zhi). Placed at the East, the numbers 3 and 8 symbolise the element wood, and the note A (jue), and 4 and 9, at the West, represent metal and G (shang). At the centre of the compass are the numbers 5 and
10, representing the universal principle, earth, and the gong of the huangzhong (which Amiot identifies with F). The measurements of the relevant pipes are also given.

From Amiot’s treatment of the hexagrams and numerical symbolism, we can see an almost 17th century European attitude at work, not necessarily in Amiot himself, but in his sources, who are, we must remember, principally Zhu Zaiyu, from the Wanli period of the Ming dynasty, and Li Guangdi from the early eighteenth century. Numerical and mystical doctrines had their part to play in Western music, particularly in the academic study of the subject in the later Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. Amiot, in a sense, is relating the Chinese equivalent of such studies.

The Third Part of the Volume on Music18
The third section of De la Musique des Chinois starts with an article on the note, a modified sound of fixed duration and limited extent. A second article goes on to discuss the matter of the so-called seven principles, and echoes Zhu Zaiyu in justifying the place of the semitonal intervals in the heptatonic scale, against those literati who had held that the true Chinese scale was pentatonic.

A third article deals with the question of Chinese counterpoint. Here Amiot indulges in casuistry. To the question ‘Have the Chinese ever known harmony?’ he replies with an emphatic affirmative, in that the Chinese musical system is one of general harmony between matters physical, moral and political. This, of course, begs the question. The inclusion in Amiot’s book of the monodic Hymn to the Ancestors can hardly be adduced as evidence, no matter how true the ‘harmony of spirit’ it may represent. (See music example.) Amiot’s readers would have needed the experience of a genuine exposure to Chinese musical culture to appreciate this spirit.

A further article deals with the tuning of the seven-stringed qin. This is followed by an apology for including, at the request of Amiot’s assistant Yang, the transcription of the Hymn and a series of relevant plates. (Yang had begun to work with his French master at the age of 22, and remained with him for thirty years.)

Ultimately, Amiot has perhaps failed in his original intention, which was to support the claim to greater antiquity of Chinese acoustical and musical theory. In writing on this matter he accepts Chinese traditional chronology without any form of critical examination. In this he behaved much like his European counterparts, no matter how ‘rational’ they may have seemed on the surface. Biblical chronology posed considerable problems to Western scholars, and the chronology of Greek myths was also clearly a part of European thinking. China presented just another set of dates to be accepted and correlated, and used as evidence in dealing with questions about the origins of things which occupied so many scholars’ and amateurs’ minds.

Amiot, in a summary of his own conclusions, claims that the Chinese, long before other peoples, developed a musical system that was comprehensive and that relied on the use of triple progression; he claims that the Chinese invented this system and that it eventually became the source of Greek and Egyptian theory, so that Pythagoras might well have visited China to draw his theories from Chinese sources. The Chinese musical system, says Amiot, is all-embracing in its many different applications, and foreign scholars should not be misled by the false interpretations by later theorists of the original system.
He adds a translation of the *Hymn in Honour of the Ancestors*, and a description of its majestic and solemn performance. The musicians are described – the players of the *sheng, qing, qin, se* and *bofu* – as well as the singers and the dancers. When the Emperor arrives before the memorial of his ancestors, the musicians begin to intone the hymn, and Amiot tells us that this enters the very soul, and arouses in the heart the most delicious feelings that it can be affected by. This, he tells us, is how music, in ancient times, worked great marvels.

**Addenda et Corrigenda**

After the publication of *De La Musique des Chinois tant anciens que modernes*, as Volume VI of the *Mémoires concernant les Chinois*, Amiot had still more to say on the subject of Chinese music, at least in his private correspondence. Roussier, on his part, had questions to ask, points to be checked, and Amiot admits to guess-work in having attributed the division of the octave into twelve semitones to the earliest of Chinese philosophers.19

Other work by Amiot included a translation of the Qianlong Emperor’s *Praise of the Town of Mukden*, a text that provoked satirical imitation in Europe. He also translated a passage from the *Zhouli* (Ritual Classics of Zhou) on the duties of ancient magistrates to direct musical rituals.

In 1779 Amiot added a supplement to his *De La Musique des Chinois*. We learn about this in a letter from Amiot to Bignon, the Royal Librarian; the supplement was preserved in manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale and was never published. Roussier, to whose attention it was recommended, and Amiot admits to having been unable to make use of it.

Amiot’s 1779 translation of the Tartar-Manchu Hymn, a song that was sung on the occasion of the conquest of Kin-chwen, was published in 1792. Its chief interest probably lies in the account that Amiot gives of his efforts to acquire a copy of this occasional piece, which was deposited with the Tribunal of Rites. Amiot drew attention to the fact that there was no Manchu notation, only Chinese, which may have been a source of earlier misunderstandings on the matter.

Amiot’s letters to Bertin have been preserved. Many of them deal with musical topics. Amiot also wrote about the ritual dances, the second of the two *Mémoires* on the subject surviving in manuscript, with a translation of the song ‘Kou Koung’ (Jiugong), music for the Confucian ritual.

Finally, a separate collection of Chinese melodies was sent by Amiot to Bignon, together with the Supplement. The melodies were not published, and, if they had been, they might have misled scholars. The tunes were contemporary; 40 out of the 54 items in the collection were secular, while 13 were taken from Catholic services held in the Jesuit church in Beijing.

**Conclusion**

For a long time Amiot’s work on Chinese music remained of fundamental importance to the study of this subject in Europe. His contribution is still recognized by modern scholars, also by scholars in China, although it has been pointed out that the lack of information on Chinese folk music and opera makes his investigation incomplete.20 While contemporary French writers have made some use of Amiot’s data and its conclusions, his work seems to
have had relatively little effect on the general state of knowledge on this subject. Apparently
the very aridity and specialised nature of Amiot’s book on music ensured that it did not
receive the kind of popularity that was accorded to the Du Halde’s general historical survey
of China of forty-five years earlier.21 While Du Halde’s work was translated into various
other languages within a few years of its appearance, and was to have a broad impact on
Western views of China and the Chinese, the title of Amiot’s work only appeared translated
in a Spanish list, and there were no signs of any further translation.

In Amiot, we can see the culmination of the Jesuit tradition of disseminating Catholic
ideals to China via the study of Chinese language and culture, an attitude that was
unfortunately soon replaced by primary interest in trade, in the course of the nineteenth
century. It is evident that no similar contributions to the study of Chinese music in any
European language emerged until the mid-twentieth century, when the growing enthusiasm
for ethnomusicology began to bear fruit. Notwithstanding the limitations of Amiot’s work,
modern scholars of Chinese music still value his contribution particularly in the realms of
theory and practice of ceremonial music.

NOTES

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6 Amiot, J.-J., Mémoires concernant l’Histoire, les Sciences, les Arts, les Moeurs, les Usages des
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8 Mémoires: L’art militaire des Chinois, Paris, 1776, 81, footnote.
9 ib. 104.
10 ib. 382.
11 J.J. Amiot, De La Musique des Chinois tant anciens que modernes, vol. vi of Mémoires concernant
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14 Pian, Rulan Chao, Song Dynasty Musical Sources and Their Interpretation, Harvard-Yenching
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GLOSSARY

bayin 八音
di 简
bianqing 答聲
di fen 分
bianzhong 纔鍾
diu fouqing 浮聲
bofu 矛鍾
gong 宮
bozhong 鉛鍾
guxian 姑洗
chi 矛
guyue jingzhuan 古樂經傳
chongdu 鈿鍾
hailuo 海螺
chouzheng 打箏
huangzhong 黃鐘
chu 幹
jiangu 建鼓
cuoqing 咬聲
jiao Yanshou 焦延壽
dailu 大吕
jiazhong 矮鐘
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The Return of Yellow Music

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For those who only recently made their acquaintance with the lively pop and rock scene of Beijing or Shanghai, it may be hard to believe that, just two decades ago, popular music was still a highly sensitive issue in the People’s Republic. Frequent public condemnation of ‘yellow music’ – a term emphasizing its supposed vulgar and decadent character – Chinese pop was the subject of frequent official attacks in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Not a new phenomenon, for China had been familiar with such ideologically biased criticism ever since the first urban musical shows and dance halls had appeared in the late 1920s. The author traces the ‘return of yellow music’ on the mainland from the late 1970s onwards, and screens its critical reception in journals like ‘People’s Music’ and brochures like ‘How to Distinguish Yellow Songs.’ One striking conclusion: the proliferation of yellow music in China had little to do with the economic power of Hong Kong or Taiwan. Another point of special interest: the exact criteria for judging music as ‘yellow’, hence harmful: didn’t those husky, trembling voices and unstable rhythms (syncopations!) and slippery lyrics betray a pathological mind or a cold greed for money?

Before the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, music for the masses in China consisted mainly of ‘revolutionary songs’ (geming gequ 革命歌曲) and music in the style of the ‘model’ theatrical works (yangbanxi 样板戏). When political pressure and ideological control were relaxed in the late 1970s, especially as political power shifted from Hua Guofeng to Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the repertoire of Chinese artists was renewed and commercialized entertainment music was reborn on the Chinese Mainland. In an article that appeared in the monthly Renmin yinyue 人民音乐 (People’s Music) in 2001, the author wrote:

No matter whether it is people in the profession or the somewhat older audience, many cannot forget the tremendous controversy evoked by the first flourishing of popular music in the early eighties. On the one hand, it was considered a resurgence of the ‘yellow music’ of the past, or ‘decadent music’, or [the Hong Kong and Taiwan] ‘fashionable songs’ under the conditions of reform and opening up, something that had to be contained or even wiped out; on the other hand, it inspired a number of Chinese musicians to devote enthusiastic efforts to this kind of music and that resulted in positive action. In the early eighties, Chinese popular music found itself in this sharp antagonism, at times reaching the point of an extremely rapid development and surge in the heated dispute. However, the two debating sides paid almost no attention to this crucial point, namely that the rise of popular music was not at all simply the result of the ‘opening up’ leading to overseas popular music entering China, but it was rather the necessary outcome of the changes in the pattern of
social and economic life brought about by ‘reform’. Although it was only by the nineties that we established the leading position of the market economy, once the digital watch, the folding umbrella and the cassette recorder had appeared, the conditions were there for the natural growth of popular music.¹

The historical background

The ‘yellow music of the past’ refers to the new songs of musical shows and dance halls that became popular in Shanghai and other big Chinese cities from the late 1920s. A pioneering and prolific composer/songwriter at that time was Li Jinhui 李锦辉 (1891–1967). The ‘Li school’ (Lipai 嘉派) fused elements from the Chinese folk tradition with jazz to be performed as stage shows or by Western-style bands in dance halls. The song texts were typically on romantic themes and the most celebrated singers were young women. This new popular music was recorded on gramophone records and subsequently also adopted in sound films. It was disliked and attacked both by Chiang Kai-shek’s New Life movement and by left-wing critics and labeled ‘yellow music’ or ‘yellow songs’ (huangse gequ 黄色歌曲), meaning something like pornographic or depraved songs and music.²

Another type of song for the masses that arose in the 1930s had political messages, such as songs of social criticism and national salvation (jiuonge gequ 救亡歌曲) with patriotic and anti-Japanese themes. They were propagated by left-wing students and intellectuals and appeared in left-wing films. The most famous composers in this category are Nie Er 欧阳(1912–35), who was a member of Li Jinhui’s ensemble but then left and severely criticised Li’s popular songs, and Xian Xinghai 冼星海 (1905–45). Both Nie and Xian were later glorified by the Communists as ‘People’s Musicians’³. Other prominent left-wing song composers of this era who were still alive in the early 1980s are He Luting 平林 (1903–99) and Lü Ji 龍階 (1909–2002).³

The yellow music flourished throughout the 1930s and 40s. It was despised by many left-wing people, including many who gained positions of power in the music world after the Communists came to power in 1949. One song that gained long-lasting popularity and at the same time caused particular offence was He ri jun zai lai 何日君再来 (‘When Will You Come Back Again?’). It was used as accompaniment in two late 1930s films and was recorded by the young Zhou Xuan 周璇 (1920–57), who went on to become the perhaps most famous singer of the 1930s and 40s. The theme is that of a woman drinking with her lover and expressing sorrow at their imminent parting. That was subject to a number of different interpretations and was viewed with deep suspicion not just by Communists and left-wing intellectuals but also by the Kuomintang censors and even by the Japanese authorities in occupied China.⁴ The left-wing view was that it was a depraved song only concerned with love and sorrow, neglecting what was happening in society, or even worse, a traitor’s song, perhaps expressing longing for the return of the Japanese army.

There was no sharp line separating patriots from providers of yellow music. Zhou Xuan acted in left-wing films,⁵ Liu Xue’an 刘雪庵, who wrote the music for ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ as a young student and subsequently suffered criticism and persecution on account of that, also composed ‘patriotic’ songs.⁶

After Liberation in 1949 the yellow music largely ceased being played and performed in public on the Mainland but was fondly remembered by many. Yellow music was
condemned in 1956, but when cultural controls were subsequently relaxed as part of the Hundred Flowers policy, such songs as ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ were widely played again and large numbers of records with the old popular music were manufactured in 1957. The buyers included many young people. After the launch of the Anti-Rightist movement later in 1957, the authorities again sought to suppress yellow music. In Hong Kong, Taiwan and among overseas Chinese the pre-Liberation yellow music survived. After Liberation some of the most famous singers and song writers who had been active in 1940s Shanghai moved to Hong Kong where the Shanghai-style songs in Mandarin became known as shidaiqu 时代曲, meaning ‘contemporary songs’ or ‘fashionable songs’. Taiwan pop music had its own style influenced by Japanese as well as Shanghai popular songs.

The return of yellow music

In the People’s Republic of China the 1930s and 40s left-wing music tradition was dominant in the 1950s songs for the masses and eventually evolved into the revolutionary songs of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) that were in praise of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought, or based on the Chairman’s writings, such as the so-called ‘quotations songs’ (yulage 语录歌). In the early period of the Cultural Revolution many eminent composers and others who had held positions of influence in the 1950s and early 60s were purged or effectively sidelined. In the late 1970s many such people were rehabilitated. Lü Ji, for example, was the chairman of the Chinese Musicians’ Association in the 1950s and early 60s and became the target of struggle and criticism and labelled a revisionist early in the Cultural Revolution but he reappeared in public life before its end. When the Musicians’ Association was reconstituted after the Cultural Revolution, Lü was reelected chairman at a national congress in 1979. In a speech at that congress he spoke at length about music life in the seventeen years between Liberation and the Cultural Revolution. It seems Lü, and probably many others in the Association, looked forward to continuing the work initiated in the 1950s while avoiding the leftist errors of criticising prominent musicians and suppressing such genres as light music. However, the old musical establishment no longer exercised as much control of music for the masses as had been possible in those earlier years. In the first couple of years after the death of Chairman Mao and the fall of the ‘Gang of Four’, Cultural Revolution style mass songs were still much in evidence, for instance songs in praise of ‘the wise leader Chairman Hua’, but as Deng Xiaoping consolidated his position they fell out of fashion and Communist Party controls over cultural creativity were loosened. The beginnings of a commercialized market for entertainment music can be traced back to 1979–80 when the first indigenous ‘pop stars’ of the People’s Republic emerged, such as Zhu Fengbo 柘逢博 and Li Guyi 李谷一 (b. 1944).

At the same time as domestic controls were relaxed, the policy of ‘reform and opening up’ (gaige kaifang 改革开放) ended the isolation of the Chinese people from the outside world and vastly increased exposure to Hong Kong, Taiwan and foreign culture. Another important factor was the introduction of ‘new’ technology. The beginnings of yellow music in the 1920s and 30s had coincided with the introduction of gramophones and radio broadcasts, and in the late 1970s and early 80s the spread of pop music was boosted by the proliferation of compact cassette tapes and cassette tape recorders. Cassette tapes had been in common use in Hong Kong and Taiwan since the 1960s, including recordings of Chinese
pop music, but it was only in the last years of the 1970s that cassette tape recorders became widely available on the Mainland. Cassette tapes were easy to transport – and to smuggle past customs inspection – and easy to copy. As a result the authorities lost much of their ability to police the market for music. From the end of the 1970s copies of cassette tapes with Hong Kong and Taiwan pop music spread across the Mainland at the same time as home-grown pop music was reborn. Early examples of Mainland popular songs include two by Li Guyi from the film Xiao hua 小花 (Little Flower, 1979). Li provided the singing voice of the female lead played by Joan Chen 陈冲 who won a best actress award for her role.

The Taiwan singer Teresa Teng (Deng Lijun 鄧麗君, 1953–1995) enjoyed great popularity in Hong Kong and Taiwan, as well as in Japan and other Asian countries in the 1970s. Large numbers of records and tapes with her music were produced, for instance eight albums under the title Dao guo zhi qing ge 島國之情歌 (‘Love Songs of the Island Country’) which Hong Kong Polydor Records brought out from 1975 to 1984. By the early 1980s her influence became pervasive on the Mainland as well. To many of those who had been brought up on revolutionary songs and model opera, her sweet and soothing lyrical ballads represented something entirely new and amazing and seem to have made a strong impression. Despite being banned by the authorities, her songs spread on copied cassette tapes and were imitated by Mainland singers and composers. Teng was the daughter of a military family, a well-known supporter of the Kuomintang government in Taiwan and known for her many shows for the Republic of China armed forces. She never visited the Mainland herself, but when she performed in Hong Kong in 1983, 3000 people are said to have come from the Mainland for her first show in the Hong Kong Coliseum.

However, many in the Mainland music establishment loathed Teresa Teng. Particularly offensive to those of her critics who had been left-wing students or music workers in the 1930s and 40s was the fact that Teng’s repertoire included some of the most despised ‘yellow songs’ of their youth, notably ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ and Yelaixiang 夜來香 (‘Tuberose’, literally: ‘fragrance of the night’). As one writer expressed it in the Renmin ribao 人民日報 (People’s Daily): ‘Many of our comrades carried out a struggle against the popular songs of the period of enemy and puppet rule. To put it bluntly, as soon as we hear this song [i.e. ‘When Will You Come Back Again’], it arouses strong disgust.’

Much of the yellow music controversy revolved around Teresa Teng’s songs. Although her music was a frequent target of criticism, she was only very rarely mentioned by
name in publicly circulated newspapers and periodicals. Nonetheless, there is no doubt who is meant when her music is denounced. Teresa Teng song titles were mentioned freely and frequently and she was occasionally referred to as 'a certain pop star'. Some discussions of 'pure love songs' (chun aiqing gequ 纯爱情歌曲), that is to say songs that are solely devoted to the topic of love, brought up the so-called Daoguo qingge(sic) 诗歌 情歌 (Island Country Love Songs) and mentioned songs included in the Teresa Teng collections Daoguo zhi qingge (Love Songs of the Island Country).

There was less reason to be circumspect about mentioning names, when the readership or audience was restricted. For instance, in a speech delivered on 15 October 1979 to a conference arranged by the culture group of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, the music critic Zhao Feng 赵沨 (1916–2001) said: 'We may say that when Chiang Kai-shek thought of occupying the Mainland he was dreaming, but as for Teresa Teng occupying the Mainland she has in a sense achieved it in part.' The general lack of open and widely publicized attacks on Teng as a person should perhaps be seen as a reluctance to antagonize a popular celebrity and not ruling out an eventual visit to the Mainland.

In the few exceptional cases when she was mentioned by name, the writers made no attempt to be nice about her. The magazine Funü 女 (Women) had a short hostile article about her in 1980 in which she was said to be averse to performing on the Mainland because of her anti-Communist views. When Liu Ji was interviewed in 1982, he said, perhaps somewhat wishfully: 'Now everyone has had enough of Teresa Teng and suchlike, because that has no artistic vitality... In Hong Kong and abroad, the likes of Teresa Teng are popular in bars and dance halls but cannot ascend to the refined concert halls' (shang bu liao yinyuehui de daya zhi tang 上不了音乐会的大雅之堂).

**Airing of opposing views**

Some Mainland singers were thought to imitate Teresa Teng too closely. One song that caused controversy was Xianglian 乡恋 (Love for my Home) as performed by Li Guyi for the soundtrack of a television drama about Wang Zhaojun 王昭君, the Han dynasty beauty who was sent north to marry a chieftain of the Huns. The song's theme is the sorrow of parting from one's beloved, but nothing in the lyrics clearly refers to Wang Zhaojun or suggests an ancient context. Li Guyi is from Hunan where she had traditional music training and a successful early career as performer of Flower Drum Opera. After being transferred to the Central Symphony Orchestra in Peking in 1974, she sang such works as arias from the model opera Hong deng ji (The Red Lantern) accompanied by piano music. The earliest successes of her pop music career, such as the Little Flower songs, retained Chinese folk characteristics. 'Love for my Home' was more uncompromisingly in the Hong Kong-Taiwan style. Some nicknamed her Li Lijun 李丽君, 'Li' being her own surname and 'Lijun' Teresa Teng's given name.

In the 10 February 1980 issue of the twice monthly newspaper Beijing yinyuebao 北京音乐报 (Peking Music Journal), 'Love for my Home' was attacked as a worthless imitation of Hong Kong-Macao pop music, a commodified product of capitalism with a colonial flavour. Neither song nor singer was mentioned by name. In its next issue the *Peking Music Journal* published a number of contributions, mainly in the form of readers' letters, which represented widely diverging opinions of 'Love for my Home', now mentioned by...
name. On the one hand it was argued that it was gloomy, sentimental and decadent, the kind of music that leads a state to ruin (wanguo zhi yin 亡国之音), on the other that it was bright and healthy and a ‘beautiful, moving masterpiece’.  

In the same issue Li Guyi also defended herself. She noted that she had most recently received several hundred letters offering support and encouragement. She claimed that over a longer period thousands of letters from students, workers, peasants, soldiers, and science and technology workers had ‘expressed a common desire hoping that [she] would be able to sing more songs and more beautiful songs to beautify and enrich their life.’ She went on to discuss her singing techniques, making the points that she had been trained in the Chinese vocal tradition as well as studying Western techniques and that she used different styles for different songs. The use of Western techniques should not be equated with singing Hong Kong and Taiwan pop songs. However, there was nothing wrong with drawing lessons from the healthy and useful aspects of popular songs (liuxing gequ 流行歌曲). In an article printed next to Li’s own contribution the debate was summed up and the author declared that both criticism and countercriticism should be allowed.  

Li Guyi was criticized and praised elsewhere by people in the art and music world. October saw the publication of a lengthy and flattering piece about Li, her controversial song and the opinions expressed about it in the Peking newspaper Guangming ribao 光明日报 (Guangming Daily). It was noted that she had been compared to a bar singer and said to be pandering to vulgar tastes. The critics of the song connected it with other undesirable social phenomena, derisively summarized in the Guangming Daily as bell-bottom trousers, Hong Kong hairstyles and even increasing youth crime. The authors of the article claimed, among other things, that more than 90 percent of the letters Li received from the public were appreciative and supportive and that concert audience response to ‘Love for my Home’ was enthusiastic. A month later the Guangming Daily followed that up by printing a number of mostly positive letters in response to the article and an admiring magazine article also appeared at about the same time reviewing Li’s past life and career. After that the controversy petered out. When Liu Ji was asked a year and a half later to comment on ‘Love for my Home’, he noted that there were different opinions. Liu himself thought the main problem was that the song was out of accord with the historical character Wang Zhaojun and added that ‘it can be seen that the song’s content and the performance style are none of them historically materialist.’
多恋

你的身影，
你的歌声，
远在你的心中，
昨天虽消逝，
分别难相逢，
怎能忘记你的一片深情，
昨天虽消逝，
分别难相逢，
怎能忘记你的一片深情，

我的情爱，
我的美梦，
永远留在你的怀里，
明天就要来临，
却难得和你相逢，
只有风儿送去我的一片深情，
明天将来临，
却难得和你相逢，
只有风儿送去我的一片深情。

小螺号

小螺号，响呀响呀
海鸥听了展翅飞
小螺号，响呀响呀
浪花听了笑微微
小螺号，响呀响呀
声声唤船归
小螺号，响呀响呀
阿爸听了快快回，
茫茫的海洋，蓝蓝的海水
吹起了小螺号，心里美

军港之夜

军港的夜啊静悄悄，
海浪把战舰轻轻摇，
年轻的水兵头枕着波涛，
睡梦中露出甜美的微笑，
海风你轻轻地吹，
海浪你轻轻地摇，
远行的水兵多么辛劳，
回到了祖国母亲的怀抱，
让我们的水兵好好睡觉。

Love for My Home (Xiang lian)

The shape of your silhouette,
And the sound of your song,
Are impressed on my heart forever.
Yesterday has vanished,
After parting we won't easily meet again,
How can I forget your deep love?
Yesterday has vanished,
After parting we won't easily meet again,
How can I forget your deep love?

My love,
My beautiful dream,
Will remain in your embrace forever.
Tomorrow's drawing close,
But I won't easily meet you again,
There is only the wind sending me your love.
Tomorrow's drawing close,
But I won't easily meet you again,
There is only the wind sending me your love.

The Little Conch Shell Trumpet

Little conch shell, blow di di di,
The seagulls hear it and spread their wings to fly.
Little conch shell, blow di di di,
The wave spray hears it with a little smile.
Little conch shell, blow di di di,
Each tone calls the boat to return.
Little conch shell, blow di di di,
Daddy hears it and quickly comes back.
The wide open beach, the blue water of the sea,
Starting to blow the little conch shell, I am happy in my heart.

Night in the Naval Port (Jun gang zhi ye), first verse

Night in the naval base is so quiet,
Waves softly rock the warship,
The young sailors rest their heads on the billows,
And a sweet smile appears in their dreams.
Sea breeze, blow softly,
Waves, rock them softly.
The sailors have endured hardships in distant voyages,
After their return to the embrace of the Motherland,
Let our sailors sleep well.
The lack of contrition and humility in Li’s March 1980 article suggests that she was not without support and that the criticisms had not appeared very threatening or caused any loss of self-confidence. It was possible to take a fairly positive approach to liuxing gequ, ‘popular songs’, in the official press and argue that they could contain something valuable. Liuxing yinyue 流行音乐, ‘popular music’, otherwise often had a pejorative sense of commodified music that was little better than yellow music. In July 1980 the Beijing wanzao 北京晚報 (Peking Evening News), the closest to a popular tabloid newspaper that could be found in China at the time, carried an article about Liu Xue’an, the composer of ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ who had been branded a rightist in 1957. The article stressed Liu’s patriotic activities in the 1930s and 40s. It conceded that some of his compositions might have had faults but argued that most were patriotic, progressive and healthy. ‘When Will You come Back Again’ was said to have been composed for a film made in 1937 and had then also been used in a progressive and anti-Japanese film, Guidaotianzhang 孤岛天堂 (Orphan Island Paradise), directed by Cai Chusheng 慈楚生 and produced in 1939 by a left-wing film studio in Hong Kong. Liu’s own opinion was that “there are unhealthy aspects in the song that reflect problems existing in my view of life at the time. Afterwards others made unscrupulous use of this song; that was not my original intention, but it had ugly consequences and that caused me pain.” The next day the paper felt free to publish a sort of defence of the notorious song. It was stressed that it had been part of the soundtrack of the progressive and anti-Japanese film Orphan Island Paradise in which the young heroes listen to the song as they set off to join the revolution. It was noted that some people claimed the song expressed the feelings of a traitorous Chinese looking forward to the coming of the Japanese army, but that idea was rejected as a distortion of history. At a time when many political purge victims had been recently rehabilitated, there were perhaps many who felt that Liu Xue’an had been wronged. In August the famous singer and actress Li Lili 李莉莉 who had had the leading female role in Orphan Island Paradise wrote a piece for the Peking Evening News stressing the patriotic nature of the film. She argued that ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ had a double meaning. She had played a dancing girl who cooperated with a group of young patriots. Her performance of the song at a dance party in the film was a signal for her friends to take action against enemy agents. Having rapidly achieved their goal the heroes flee to join the anti-Japanese guerillas, while the girl is still singing ‘After we part tonight, when will you come back again?’ In her article Li argued that in such a context the lyrics certainly expressed no longing for the Japanese. That was later followed by an article by the old composer He Luting who had been Liu’s schoolmate in the early 1930s. He sarcastically observed that since Liu was made a rightist, naturally no one had dared doubt that ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ was a ‘traitors’ song’. He Luting himself had been criticised in the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957 and was later purged and suffered greatly in the Cultural Revolution.

The suggestion that ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ could have any redeeming features was soon refuted in a couple of newspapers and in People’s Music on the grounds that the song was actually originally conceived as accompaniment for a politically backward ‘soft film’ called San xing ban yue 三星伴月 (Three Stars Accompany the Moon). It was
also claimed that the use of the song in *Orphan Island Paradise* implied no approval but was simply there for plot development: it was the traitorous characters who wanted to listen to it and the song reflected the dark side of Shanghai during the war.\(^{31}\) The *Zhongguo qingnian bao* 中国青年报 (*China Youth Daily*) explained that the ‘Japanese aggressors and the domestic reactionaries of that period quickly began a shameless propagation of it as if it were the most precious thing; putting it together with a photo of a semi-naked woman they threw it into the frontline as a spiritual bomb to numb and dissolve our army and people’s resolve to fight against Japan.’\(^{32}\)

More easy to understand than the attacks on ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ is the anger at the reappearance of a song directly associated with Japanese wartime propaganda. *Zhina zhi ye* 之夜之所 (*‘China Night’; Shina no yoru 夜の所 in Japanese*) was the theme song of a film with the same name from 1940 which starred the singer and actress Yamaguchi Yoshiko 山口淑子, known in China under the name Li Xianglan 李香兰. She was born in Manchuria in 1920 to Japanese parents and her early career flourished in Manchukuo and other areas under Japanese control.\(^{33}\) ‘Tuberose’ was one of Li’s successes. Her early films, including *China Night*, were made by Japanese directors at the Manchurian Film Studio and were very strongly pro-Japanese. Even when the theme song was used with a different name and different lyrics, it still upset old Party cadres who remembered the war years.\(^{34}\) Although Li Xianglan’s songs were condemned by those who touched on the historical origins of yellow music, Li herself was not mentioned or attacked. In the 1980s she was a member of the Japanese Diet, visited China several times and had been involved in Chinese-Japanese diplomacy.\(^{35}\)

A different cause for dismay arose with thirteen-year old Cheng Lin’s 凌琳 appearance on stage in October 1980. The following month the *Guangming Daily* 广明日报 introduced the young singer in a short notice, with a picture, as fresh talent from an opera troupe run by the Political Department of the Navy. She was well received by the audience according to the paper, which made no reference to discordant views.\(^{36}\) She was trained as a player of the two-string fiddle *erhu* 二胡 but switched to singing under the guidance of a musician who dabbled in song-writing. Her most well-known song was *Xiao luohao* 小螺号 (*‘The Little Conch Shell Trumpet’*). Attacks on Cheng Lin at that time were not as public as those on Li Guyi but were serious enough to force her return to the *erhu*. In writings from a few years later she was said to ‘wholly imitate a certain Hong Kong-Taiwan pop star’ and the ‘style of bar and dance hall music’. It was also implied that she had been led astray by her mentor and that the latter was just motivated by a desire to make money and lacked proper qualifications for composing songs and making musical arrangements.\(^{37}\) Years later Cheng Lin herself complained that she had had too little say in the way her early career was managed.\(^{38}\)

The Political Department of the Navy was a breeding ground for dubious music. Not long after the above-mentioned controversies subsided, one of the most frequently played songs of the early 1980s caused a stir. That was *Jungang zhi ye* 船港之夜 (*‘Night in the Naval Port’*)\(^{39}\) as performed by Su Xiaoming 苏小明, a member of the Song and Dance Ensemble of the Political Department of the Navy. In this case criticisms were relatively mild and were played down in *People’s Music* by the editor, Li Yedao 李业道. The problem with the song was said to be that it was too beautiful, gentle and peaceful, almost like a lullaby – the waves are rocking the young sailors to sleep in their ships. In the minds
of some that was not the right image of military life. The navy is supposed to be always prepared for battle. There were also objections to the musical arrangement with brass, drums and syncopated rhythms, which were found to be too much like the dance hall music of old Shanghai.⁴⁰

This period, late 1980 and early 1981, seems to mark the end of a phase in which it was easy to express relatively tolerant views on popular music. In 1981–83 the critics of yellow music were on the offensive and dominated public discourse.

The debate turns one-sided
In 1980 and the following years the monthly People's Music, published by the Chinese Musicians' Association, had frequent articles on popular music. From the August 1980 issue People's Music had a new editorial team headed by Li Yedao as editor and Wu Yongyi 伍聰鸣 as deputy editor. Both took an interest in vocal music and Wu (born circa 1920), in particular, seems to have been an activist in countering the spread of yellow songs. He also served as the head of the secretariat of the Chinese Musicians' Association. From 1981 a less tolerant attitude to popular music became prevalent in the rest of the media too. This development was not limited to music. Although generally speaking the cultural climate remained relaxed by past standards, the Party was setting stricter limits to free expression, for instance in the form of the so-called 'Four Basic Principles' (originally formulated by Deng Xiaoping in 1979)⁴¹ and condemnations of 'bourgeois liberalization' as exemplified in 1981 by the criticism of the writer Bai Hua 白桦 and his screenplay for the film Ku lian 苦恋 (Bitter Love). A Central Committee directive of August 1981 warned against 'vulgar and low tastes'.

The debate on popular music in the media and at conferences was dominated by the music establishment: middle-aged and elderly composers, music critics, editors and bureaucrats who had been music administrators and educators in the 1950s, in charge of enforcing and to some degree shaping Party policy. Many of the older critics of yellow music had been left-wing students and intellectuals active in the 1930s and 40s and some, but far from all, had spent time in Yan'an during the war years. As it became obvious that Deng Xiaoping's ascent to power did not usher in a return to the 1950s but was opening the doors to the progeny of 1940s entertainment music, many of them clearly became alarmed. Several writers attacking popular music seem more obsessed with the songs of the bad old days, especially a few particularly notorious ones, notably Maomaoyu 毛毛
而 (‘Drizzle’), Taohuajiang (‘Peach Blossom River’) and Tabei kuaiche (‘Express Train’) by Li Jinhui, as well as the most prominent target, ‘When Will You Come Back Again’, and ‘Tuberose’. When modern pop music is discussed, the examples sometimes seem selected at random and the songs are all said to be much of a muchness, ‘commodities’, the products of an ‘automatic production line’.42

The views and emphases of different writers naturally varied. Many held what can perhaps be characterized as moderate conservative views, disapproving of much of the Hong Kong and Western pop music but balancing that with a strong affirmation of the need for good and healthy ‘light music’ (qing yinyue 轻音乐) and ‘lyrical songs’ (shuqing gequ 抒情歌曲). Some music critics argued that simply banning undesirable music would not work. The prominent composer Li Huanzhi 李焕之 (1919-2000) and the music critic Li Ling 李凌 (b. 1913), writing in 1979 and 1980 respectively, argued that one need not be too apprehensive of popular songs (liuxing gequ 流行歌曲), lyrical songs and light music from outside the Mainland. Not all are unhealthy and music must not be rejected just for being foreign. It was best not to be dogmatic but to keep a clear head and analyse what is good and what is bad.43

Such arguments in favour of popular music did not disappear from the Chinese media after 1980, but attempts to put forward those views became more timid and subdued. Most people still seemed to agree that good light music and lyrical songs were needed and that it was up to the musical establishment to take the initiative in creating and promoting healthy and uplifting (jiankang xiangshang 健康向上) music of this nature in order to counter the Hong Kong-Taiwan imports and their imitators. In connection with lyrical songs, a common view was that love songs were needed, especially by the young, but there should not be too much of them to the exclusion of other topics for lyrical songs, for example praise for the Party.44 Several people emphasized that China should take its own road (zou ziji de lu 走自己的路),45 creating songs with national characteristics. As a result conferences and symposia were arranged and selections of approved songs were publicised. An early example of the latter are the widely propagated fifteen ‘broadcast songs beloved by the masses’ (tongzhong xi’ai de guangbo gequ 听众喜爱的广播歌曲) selected in early 1980 by the Central People’s Broadcasting Station and the editorial board of the magazine Gequ 歌曲 (Song).46 Old favourites from the early years of Communist rule were also extolled. In May 1982 the People’s Daily published a reader’s letter together with an editorial comment calling on the nation to sing Shehuizhuyi hao 社会主义好 (‘Socialism is Good’), one of the most often heard songs of the late 1950s. The paper also reprinted the music and lyrics.47

Another topic of concern related to popular music was the question of the existence of a ‘generation gap’ and the possibility that different generations had different aesthetic sensibilities.48 Nobody seems to have thought it a curious generation gap that had the youth scandalizing their parents or grandparents by listening to the kind of music the latter had disapproved of in their youth.

One man who found little or no value in Hong Kong and Western pop music was Zhao Feng who was editor of Yinyue yanjiu 音乐研究 (Music Research). Writing for his own publication he took a relatively nuanced stand in January 1982, but two months later he delivered a blistering attack on ‘pure love songs’. Hong Kong-Taiwan pop music was said to pollute ‘our country’s socialist music life’, being vulgar, filthy, but very seductive, and
the song texts were about vamps, gigolos, whores. In the same issue of *Music Research* Li Huanzhi reiterated that Hong Kong and Taiwan songs ought to be analysed. There were some relatively good ones, such as the ‘campus songs’ (*xiaoyuange* 校园歌) from Taiwan, but there was no question of learning from the decadent rubbish of night-clubs and dance halls. Li also stressed the seductive capability of the latter category. He concluded that Chinese song-writers had received new ideas from outside but must not just imitate others; they should take their own road. Other parts of Li’s article were devoted to the efforts to select songs for the masses and to the generation gap. His own greatest popular success had undoubtedly been ‘Socialism is Good’. Otherwise the journal *Music Research*, presumably because it regarded itself as scholarly and specialist, paid less attention to popular music than *People’s Music*.

Occasionally condemnation of Western pop music was also coupled with criticism of avant-garde music (*xianfengpai* 先锋派). Although quite a few among the older generation of composers had studied abroad in their youth, the main Western influence on their work was nineteenth century music. They favoured a style described by Barbara Mittler as ‘pentatonic romanticism’.

The onslaught in the media was accompanied by government action. In March 1982 the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council issued a directive about the ‘Strict prohibition of the importation, copying, sale and broadcasting of reactionary, yellow and vulgar music and video products’. *People’s Music* organized a conference in April to discuss the implementation of the directive. Following that the editorial board also compiled a booklet entitled *Zenyang jianbie huangse gequ* 怎样鉴别黄色歌曲 (*How to Distinguish Yellow Songs*), which was published in June 1982. It begins with an introduction by Wu Yongyi about the yellow songs of the 1930s and 40s. Wu cites many song titles and his article is thus a good guide to these songs. It is followed by a relatively weighty article on the nature of Hong Kong-Taiwan songs by Zhou Yinchang 周荫昌, a music critic working in an army college. Born in 1936, he was younger than the most active contributors to the discussion of yellow music but old enough to have experienced some of the old songs first-hand. Both of these articles had already appeared in *People’s Music* earlier the same year. In addition the book contains a number of shorter pieces mostly reprinted from *People’s Music* and the Shanghai paper *Wenhui bao* 文汇报. The contributors include the well-known composers Qu Wei 曲维 (b. 1917) and Ding Shande 丁善德 (1911–95). At the end is an article by Wu Yongyi on jazz and rock music in the capitalist world.

Zhou Yinchang’s contribution was actually a reworking of an article from early 1981. A comparison of the earlier and later versions of Zhou’s article yields some evidence of the hardening attitude to yellow music. While much of the substance of his arguments remained the same, differences in the introductory paragraph reflected the changing political climate. The 1981 article had attacked the Cultural Revolution ultra-left: the proliferation of popular music is a side-effect of expanded contacts with the outside world but also the evil result of the cultural destruction wreaked by Lin Biao and the Gang of Four. It is quite possible Zhou wrote that at about the same time as the Gang of Four and some of Lin Biao’s associates were brought on trial (November 1980 to January 1981). However, Zhou also wrote that ‘There is really nothing wrong with people liking certain
popular songs". In 1982 that tolerance had vanished. In 1981 he had stated that popular music had had "an influence that must not be ignored and has become a social question that causes concern". In 1982 that was strengthened to "an obviously harmful influence and ... a social question that has aroused general concern". Another example of increasing belligerence is Zhou's discussion of the Teresa Teng song Xiao cheng de [sic] gushi 小城的故事 ("Small town tales" - the correct title should be Xiao cheng gushi). He had stated that it showed many characteristics of Chinese folk song and found nothing very objectionable about the lyrics. The problem was that the singer performed it in an overly sweet and soft way. Furthermore, that sort of song frequently came as part of a collection of songs that included 'low-grade things'. In 1982 there was a more elaborate account of those negative aspects with added comments about commodification and capitalist profits. The 'low-grade things' included lyrics with reactionary Kuomintang propaganda of which examples were given.

Musical reality

Whether or not a generation gap existed, there was certainly a gap between the political line and what the masses actually listened to. The media and the musical establishment were in broad agreement about the harmful nature of yellow music, but it was alleged in 1982 that in Peking municipality alone 200-300 manufacturers copied Hong Kong-Taiwan yellow music cassettes.

Song and dance troupes and light music concerts offered Hong Kong-Taiwan-inspired entertainment and 'tea music' (chazuo yinyue 茶座音乐) to their audiences. In 1983 People's Music carried a description of light music concerts held in Shanghai in the previous two years. At least one was primarily aimed at foreigners, Overseas Chinese and Hong Kong and Macao residents and may thus have been more outrageous than concerts for domestic consumption. Hong Kong and Taiwan contemporary songs dominated all of the concerts and there were also songs from old Shanghai and foreign music ('jazz', 'jazz rock'n'roll' and 'disco').

Managers and performers developed strategies for dealing with the political pressure. The author of the People's Music article from 1983 notes that the list of items in one of the concert programmes did not correspond exactly to the actual performance. Some of the most enthusiastically received songs were not on the programme, including at least one Teresa Teng song, a couple of Japanese songs and the American 'Oh Carol'. In other cases artists were said to have two versions of the concert programme and two styles of performance: one that was shown to their leaders and another for the paying audiences.

The situation was not too different away from Shanghai. A description of a concert in Kunming notes that a certain older singer, who had been well liked in the 1960s, had the poor taste to sing 'Tuberose' and received applause and even whistles. Another female artist performed the songs of 'a certain pop star from Taiwan'.

It was not just the music itself that the musical establishment found deplorable. Concert venues were said to have 'bar style' decorations. Female singers had weird hairstyles and flashy and revealing dresses or short skirts or short pants. The appearance of presenters was no better. On stage the artists were swinging, swaying and wriggling their bottoms. Audience behaviour was rowdy with people whistling and shouting, and some were even said to be trying to pull at the singers' skirts.
Cheng Lin resumed her singing career in 1982 after being accepted into the Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble and appeared with them on the stage of the Great Hall of the People. The following year, at the age of sixteen, she visited Hong Kong and her singing sounded ever more like Teresa Teng. On the Mainland her audiences expressed their enthusiasm with lots of applause as well as whistles and people shouting 'really fantastic!' (zhen gouwei 真够味). The Peking Tape Recorder Factory produced and sold 30,000 copies of a cassette with eighteen of her songs, allegedly in contravention of state regulations. This time there was a stronger and more public reaction in the press. Most of it was hostile, although one striking (token?) exception in the Peking Music Journal praised her 'beautiful, moving' singing and her 'natural, simple and pure voice'. The target of the criticism was Cheng Lin’s singing style and the musical accompaniment rather than her repertoire. Her songs had lyrics on such themes as memories of childhood, mother's love and even the 'Four Modernizations' and life in the navy.

On a brief visit to Shanghai in early September 1983 I found that a cassette tape produced in Canton and entitled Meng zhong de mama 梦中的妈妈 ( 'Mama in my Dream') seemed to be selling very well in Nanking Road. It contained mostly foreign songs sung in Chinese, as well as English, Japanese and Spanish, by Cheng Fangyuan of the Oriental Song and Dance Ensemble. The title song was a Hong Kong adaptation of 'Bahama Mama', originally performed by the West Indian-German disco-oriented band Boney M. The original English lyrics describe Bahama Mama as having the biggest house in town and six beautiful unmarried daughters. 'You'll meet her daughters/They'll be treatin' you to honeycake/They'll be sweet and nice to you/And maybe there is one you'd like to take/Well then you'll know just what to do.' The Chinese lyrics lack any similarity to the original: 'Mama, Mama in my dream/Last night I dimly saw your white hair/.../You stretched out your hands waiting for your child to come back home/I caught the gleam of sincere tears in your eyes/How can I not be heartbroken...'

People's Music denounced 'Mama in my Dream' as an 'American song with a rhythm stimulating utter frenzy' (jiezhou ciji shifen kuangre de Meiguo gequ 节奏刺激十分狂热的美国歌曲) and the Peking Music Journal observed that the original lewd lyrics had been replaced but the tone of the song stayed the same. Returning to Shanghai in the middle of September, I found that the cassette tape was no longer on sale. Rumour had it that it had been banned.
The campaign against spiritual pollution
In the early 1980s many intellectuals were taking an increasing interest in humanism and the young Marx's concept of alienation, ideas that were less than orthodox in the Chinese ideological context. More conservative Party members sought to refute such notions as the existence of alienation in socialist China. At the same time many were worried about some of the rapid social and cultural changes, in particular rising crime and the spread of foreign culture and ideas – from pornography to philosophy. In summer 1983 a general crackdown on crime began, accompanied by many executions. The Party also launched a rectification movement with the remnants of the Cultural Revolution leftists as the main target. In October 1983 the rectification and criticism of unorthodox views on alienation and humanism were turned into a campaign against 'spiritual pollution' (jingshen wuran 精神污染). This was quickly widened to take in all manner of undesirable cultural and social phenomena, such as obscure (i.e. modernist) poetry, science fiction and other unorthodox literature, as well as new fashions, permed hair and yellow music. However, it should be emphasized that yellow music was merely a secondary and minor target. From October 1983 to January 1984 the Party ideological journal Hongqi 红旗 (Red Flag) carried several articles on spiritual pollution and socialist alienation but none of them brought up the topic of popular music.

On 31 October the famous elderly writer Ding Ling 岭 (1904–86) was interviewed in the People's Daily. She stated that filthy things could not be tolerated in socialist literature. Such things led astray naïve youths who lacked social experience. She complained, among other things, about decadent music being acclaimed by audiences and she deplored cases where people had laughed derisively at the song Meiyou Gongchandang jiu meiyou xin Zhongguo 没有共产党就没有新中国 ('Without the Communist Party There Would Be No New China').

Prominent figures in the music world made statements in response to the campaign. On 5 November an interview with eighty year old He Luting appeared in the People's Daily. He took the opportunity to reiterate his long held opinion that although music ought to encourage people's fighting spirit, it was also necessary to express the political content through excellent artistic form. In the past, he noted, he had been attacked for criticising poor composition. In regard to spiritual pollution he pronounced that music ought to be purified and went on to blame the Gang of Four for the fact that young people were lacking in cultural attainment. He Luting's remarks should probably be seen as an expression of unease with the current campaign and a warning against letting it evolve into a Cultural Revolution-like assault on any kind of culture that was not overtly political and revolutionary. On the other hand, there is no reason to doubt that He Luting genuinely disliked much of the Hong Kong and Taiwan pop music. He noted that some of the songs were actually yellow music from the thirties. In the same interview he also expressed disdain for Western abstract avant-garde music. In a Guangming Daily article on the same day, Zhao Feng expressed the opinion that there were two target areas for the elimination of spiritual pollution in music. One was decadent music from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the West, and the other was avant-garde music which had recently appeared in China.

The campaign reached a peak in November. The drive against spiritual pollution in music was not entirely limited to attacks on undesirable phenomena. The People's
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Daily reported that weekend song classes in the city of Anyang taught about 200 ‘healthy and uplifting songs’ to ‘mould the spirits of children and youth’. These included songs recommended by the Chinese Musicians’ Association, the Central Committee of the Communist Youth League, the People’s Liberation Army General Political Office, as well as ‘film and television songs beloved by the masses’ and ‘excellent Chinese and foreign folk songs’.74

The Chinese Musicians’ Association convened an enlarged meeting of its presidium on 8 November. Lü Ji made a self-criticism stating that although efforts had been made to stem the tide of Hong Kong-Taiwan pop music, these had not been thorough and firm and lessons had to be learnt from this. Various other members of the old guard contributed their views. Sun Shen 孙慎 (b. 1916), Li Ling and Li Huanzhi all identified the imitation of the Hong Kong-Taiwan style as a major aspect of spiritual pollution in music. Li Huanzhi also thought the debate about Cheng Lin in the Peking Music Journal had been useful. Sun Shen and Zhao Feng expressed concern that there had been some support for bad music even within the Association and among leaders.75

The Musicians’ Association chairman Lü Ji had made a vehement attack in August on greed for money and the vulgar pop music of the capitalist system that was spread everywhere by cassette tapes. However, at that point he had hardly said anything concrete about yellow music.76 Presumably as a result of the 8 November meeting, Lü made a statement that appeared in the Peking Music Journal on the 10th and was also added to the quarterly Zhongguo yinyue 中国音乐 (Chinese Music) as an unnumbered page. He stated that spiritual pollution was serious in the field of music and associated it with alienation. His brief comments echoed the views on yellow music expressed in the previous years as well as the current political rhetoric. ‘We music workers are socialist engineers of the soul and must hold high the banner of socialism and communism, sing of the heroes dedicating themselves to construction for the sake of the modernization of our country, sing of our rich and exciting life, and sing of resplendent communist ideals.’ He went on to urge the study of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought and the Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping.77

The December issue of People’s Music carried a kind of editorial by the pseudonym Zhong Jia 中佳 deploiring Western and Hong Kong-Taiwan musical influence. ‘When will You Come Back Again’ and a couple of other old yellow songs were mentioned. The author exhorted his readers to raise even higher the banner of socialism and sweep away filth but also urged that it ought to be done with some discrimination and that a concrete analysis of should be made in each case. The article thus contained another appeal against going to extremes.78 An article by Lü Ji likewise condemned various forms of spiritual pollution while warning against indiscriminately sweeping away all lyrical music.79 This was followed by short pieces by Li Ling and others who also voiced somewhat abstract support for the current campaign.

In January People’s Music had a short piece by Li Huanzhi where he again brought up the case of Cheng Lin and the imitation of Hong Kong-Taiwan songs. He expressed the opinion that the latter were unhealthy and vulgar, but on the whole his criticism was rather mild in tone. Li also adopted an attitude towards new Western music that was less dismissive than Zhao Feng’s remarks in November, while also concluding that Chinese composers should take their own road and create socialist music with Chinese characteristics.80
The widening of the scope of the campaign against spiritual pollution caused dismay and passive resistance among many intellectuals. With memories of the Cultural Revolution fresh, no doubt many feared that it could turn into a political purge. Foreign investors and others saw it as a sign of a potential reversal of the economic reforms. The movement was soon restrained and had fizzled out by spring 1984.  

Although this did not lead to an immediate end to disapproval of yellow music, the conservative forces were weakened. In 1985 my son learnt to sing a song called Xuehua 雪花 (‘Snowflake’) in the kindergarten of the First Ministry of Machine Building in Peking. Three years earlier that song had been criticized in People’s Music for giving rise to less than healthy emotions. The mid- and late 1980s saw the emergence of the ‘northwest wind’ (xibaifeng 西北风) style in popular music, which was inspired by North China folk music, and also a more direct Western influence in Chinese ‘disco’ and rock music. The most well-known Chinese rock singer, Cui Jian 崔健, formed his own band in 1985. Although Chinese rock faced obstruction from the authorities, the cultural atmosphere had by the late 1980s become so tolerant that no thorough attempt was made to stamp out rock music. This new music had the character of a youth subculture and only partly replaced the softer Hong Kong-Taiwan style pop. The careers of such singers as Li Guyi and Cheng Lin flourished. In 1999 Li was elected to one of the posts as vice chairman of the Chinese Musicians’ Association. Ten years after publication the book How to Distinguish Yellow Songs was regarded as an embarrassment.

The arguments presented against yellow music

In describing the faults of the Hong Kong-Taiwan songs and Mainland imitations many writers resorted to vague and sometimes intemperate invective. The songs were described as vulgar (diji 低级), ‘oily’ or ‘slippery’ (youquiang huadiào 油腔滑调), sexually suggestive and seductive. The lyrics were predominantly concerned with love. They were definitely not ‘healthy’ but were of the kind associated with bars, dance halls and night-clubs. In the first years of the 1980s Western-style social dancing was still frowned upon. Zhou Yinchang made distinctions between songs with different themes: some are about the life of petty townspeople and everyday life, but the most numerous categories are the vulgar and filthy ones on the one hand and the more refined ‘pure love songs’ on the other. Zhou used a couple of ‘Island Country Love Songs’ as examples and found their characters and contents nebulous. As noted above, some songs were even found to have reactionary, anti-Communist contents.

‘Pure love songs’ were much discussed. The participants in a forum on love songs organized by People’s Music in December 1981 found many such songs to have vacuous, shallow and in some cases vulgar contents and they raised the question whether love songs should express love or lust. The style was generally too light and soft or, even worse, listless and sentimental. It was felt that the love in such songs was separated from reality, neglecting social context and educational function. The lyrics were just about ‘you and me’, ‘being together forever’ etc. Others thought such songs plunged people into sentimental misery: quite a few describe abandoned women pining for their lovers. Alternatively they encouraged enjoyment for the moment, intoxication and living as if in a dream while forgetting reality. Elsewhere Zhao Feng made the point that the protagonists of pure love songs tended to have no clear identity, belong to no specific time period and exist outside
history, nation, class – the lyrics are just about two people and their love for each other. Zhao argued that love ought to be connected with revolution and the socialist cause. 88

The love song lyrics often mentioned kissing and embracing. Anything suggestive of sexual promiscuity aroused particular indignation. An example in that category that was mentioned by several writers was Bie zai xingqitian 到星期天 (‘Never on Sunday’). The song is from the film with the same name from 1960 in which Melina Mercouri plays a prostitute in Piraeus. Teresa Teng recorded the song in Chinese but it was not one of her major successes. While Mercouri was singing ‘Oh you can kiss me on a Monday…/Or you can kiss me on a Tuesday…/But never, never on a Sunday/A Sunday/’Cause that’s my day of rest’, the Chinese lyrics were more decorous: ‘Any day I can go out with you, have fun and chat (pei ni youwan he tan tian 陪你遊玩和谈谈)/Any day you like/Whether it’s rainy or sunny/Every day is fine with me./But absolutely never on a Sunday/Because on Sunday/I will rest and sleep…’ That did not placate the Mainland music critics. Zhou Yinchang found it utterly filthy and hinted not so subtly that it was a prostitute’s song. 89

It is likely that most Mainland music critics had foggy notions of the origin and meaning of such adaptations of foreign songs. When interviewed about yellow music in 1982, Lü Ji noted that the lyrics of ‘Never on Sunday’ may seem superficially innocuous. However, progressive personages from Hong Kong had been alarmed to hear such a song performed by Mainland artists. Lü’s understanding was that in Hong Kong, Macao and abroad the song was actually performed by such pop stars who sell their bodies. 90

It was generally taken for granted that the lyrics have only one correct interpretation, namely the one held by the musical establishment and the Communist Party leadership. The song texts may seem innocuous to inexperienced and perhaps ill-educated youth, but those who understand about the origins and historical circumstances of those songs have a duty to teach the young the actual meaning and connotations of the texts. It is not just for the sake of sparing the feelings of the older generation who have experienced the old society and the war with Japan.

At least one writer advanced the argument that the bad character of yellow songs was only related to the lyrics. In other words, if the words of a song are removed or unknown, one cannot determine whether the melody itself is red (i.e. progressive), yellow or black (i.e. fascist/imperialist). ‘Pure music’ (chun yinyue 纯音乐) is thus neither good nor bad. 91 The relatively few people who discussed this matter in print tended to reject the notion that yellow songs could have certain musical characteristics that were good. During the Cultural Revolution and earlier it had been firmly asserted that music had class character. By the early 1980s the members of the musical establishment seemed no longer so sure that absolute music had class character or any other inherent meaning. Wu Yongyi in 1982 expressed doubt on the usefulness of class character as the sole tool for musical analysis but also insisted that the circumstances of the creation of a composition and the intentions of the composer needed to be examined in order to get at the ‘true meaning and nature’ of the music. 92

In How to Distinguish Yellow Songs Wu asserted that ‘music and lyrics equally affect the expression of yellow content.’ 93 In an article in 1980 Li Ling mentioned that during the war against Japan, someone had written patriotic lyrics to be sung to the tune of Li Jinhui’s ‘Peach Blossom River’. However, others found that ridiculous ‘because the old song’s ideological content and the allure of the tune were frivolous and lewd’. 94
Zhou Yinchang wrote at greater length than most on the inherent characteristics of the music and put forward various arguments and judgments that were also voiced by others. Like Wu Yongyi he thought there was a connection between bad lyrics and bad music. According to Zhou the Hong Kong-Taiwan songs have a softened, restless, seductive beat (ruanhua, dongdang, daiyou youhuoxing 软化，动荡，带有诱惑性). Syncopation is used continuously with a softened, unstable, restless result. That is combined with portamento and musical ornamentation to produce a sad, sentimental, even seductive effect. Zhou suggested that those who listen to such music are enticed to follow the rhythm but are not quite able to do so. 'As soon as you listen to it, you will by necessity (to different degrees) come under its seductive influence, that is something no one can escape.' Zhou went on to note that voice production is frequently trembling and has a breathy, husky colouring. In his opinion that is related to the sort of language tonality and intensity that is encountered under pathological conditions of drunkenness and dissipation. He also described the manner of singing in a soft, sometimes almost spoken manner, with a seductive and coquettish voice. Extensive use of portamento has an unctuous, frivolous, teasing result. He makes the point that 'a certain Hong Kong-Taiwan pop star' used these various techniques in 'When Will You Come Back Again' which is thus even worse than the old version.

Zhou Yinchang presented three versions of a short extract from a song as examples. In the first version the music moves, in Zhou's view, in a clear well-ordered way, the rhythm well adjusted to the melody. In two stages he then introduced different degrees of syncopation and other changes. He explained that this makes the musical extract at first more lively and then gives it the flavour of popular music (liuxing yinyue). It becomes 'tender, sentimental, pleading, with a seductive nature.'

The idea that music has an inherent power which can effect moral and political change is found in Confucian writings and other early Chinese texts. The phrase mimi zhi yin 聆音之音, which is repeatedly used in writings denouncing yellow music, refers to the kind of
music that has the power of ruining a state. It means something like ‘decadent music’ and is a variant of mimi zhi yue 嬈靡之乐 with the same meaning. The latter occurs in the Han Fei zi 韩非子 and in Sima Qian’s 司马迁 Historical Records where it is used to describe the music composed by Music Master Yan (Shi Yan 师延) for the enjoyment of the cruel and debauched last king of the Shang 商 dynasty. After the defeat of the Shang, Music Master Yan is said to have drowned himself in the Pu 濊 river. Centuries later his ghost was heard playing on the river banks. The music was memorized and played at court in the state of Jin 晋. The sage-like Music Master Kuang (Shi Kuang 师旷) warned that tunes in certain modes were too sad (bei 悲) and would harm those who listened to them, except for men of exceptional virtue (de 德). His advice was disregarded and the result was a violent storm followed by three years of drought. The ruler of Jin was struck by a fatal disease.

Although no one actually suggested that Teresa Teng might cause drought or pestilence, the critics of yellow music did to some degree agree with the ancients in believing that certain musical characteristics are inherently harmful to listeners and to society. Music Master Kuang’s warning against excessively sad music brings to mind that a common charge against yellow songs on the theme of love was that they tend to be too sad and make people listless and passive rather than rousing them to action.

In 1980 a Peking newspaper printed an embellished version of the story about the tune from the banks of the Pu river in modern Chinese. This version had a happy ending: Master Kuang persuaded everyone that they ought to listen to fine and healthy music rather than the sounds of decadence. A short commentary on the story noted that some bad songs were circulating in China, such as ‘China Night’ and ‘When Will You Come Back Again’, which could corrupt people’s thought and spirit. The readers were exhorted to learn from Music Master Kuang’s words that one must not persist in playing music that leads a state to ruin.

Several contributors to People’s Music referred to the authority of Confucius as they discussed the social function of music. After quoting the saying ascribed to Confucius that ‘for changing the customs there is nothing better than music’ (yi feng yi su mo shan yu yue 移风易俗莫善于乐), one (pseudonymous) writer went on to observe that ‘revolutionary, progressive and healthy music truly reflects the nature of socialist life’. In addition to Confucius that writer also referred to the opinions of Lu Xun and Plato - an eclectic choice of authorities. He approvingly noted that Plato favoured simple, solemn and rousing music while rejecting those popular tunes of his day that were sad, soft and gentle. While conceding that Plato had been an idealist philosopher serving the interests of the exploiting class, he maintained that Plato understood the link between music and morality.

In a country ruled by a communist party it would be natural to expect the use of Marxist theory to elucidate the yellow music phenomenon. However, on the whole, attempts at Marxist analysis were few and feeble, at least in the openly published sources, although Marxist terms were used. The pejorative term ‘commodification’ (shangpinhua 商品化) occurred ever so often. It should of course not be ruled out that more ambitious attempts at Marxist analysis were circulated internally without being made available to the general public and foreigners, perhaps because no general consensus emerged.

According to Wu Yongyi, yellow music developed as a means by which capitalists made money. In his introductory article in How to Distinguish Yellow Songs he refers to new sales techniques, commodification, and capitalists only being interested in profits and
box office value'. The capitalists care nothing for the effects on art and society. Decadent music, ‘a negative ideological phenomenon’, had existed in China since ancient times as the ‘dregs of folk music’. Using standard Maoist terminology, Wu states that the yellow music of the 1930s arose under semi-colonial and semi-feudal conditions as foreign capitalism entered China and compradore capitalism and national capitalism evolved. Modern capitalism thus created the conditions for the birth of commodified music and the Western economic and cultural invasion of China brought the influence of Western music in the form of records, films etc.\textsuperscript{104}

The flowering of yellow music after the Cultural Revolution was commonly seen as a resurgence of an unalmented past.\textsuperscript{105} That is true in part: the Mandarin contemporary songs of Hong Kong (and to a lesser extent of Taiwan), the shidaiqu, were certainly a direct continuation and development of the entertainment music that had flourished in Shanghai and other Chinese cities before Liberation, although naturally Hong Kong and Taiwan pop music of \textit{circa} 1980 was not a fossil from the 1930s or 40s. Furthermore, records and cassette tapes of the songs of the earlier era were available for purchase in Hong Kong. Some artists made newly arranged recordings of ‘oldies’, such as Teresa Teng’s late 1970s version of ‘When Will You Come Back Again’.

The enthusiasm for yellow music was initially blamed, like so many other things, on the Gang of Four. The suppression of light music and lyrical songs, including songs about love, in combination with inferior music education during the Cultural Revolution, had created a void that music from outside filled (\textit{cheng xu er ru} 来虚而入), helped by the policy of opening up to the outside world. As China was supposed to be a socialist society, it was hardly feasible to hold indigenous capitalists responsible for taking advantage of this void. However, it was a common criticism in the early 1980s that music, and indeed art and literature in general, were too often provided by people who were ‘only looking for the money’ (\textit{yi qie xiang qian kan} 一切向钱看). At a symposium on the musical life of the masses convened by \textit{People’s Music} in February 1980, Sun Shen argued that applause was by no means a measure of quality. What was important were the social effects. Music should impart education, knowledge and appreciation of beauty.\textsuperscript{106} In 1983 a \textit{People’s Music} article argued that the ‘responsibility system’ introduced in agriculture as the people’s communes were broken up was not suitable for song and dance activities.\textsuperscript{107}

In his discussion of the origins of yellow music Wu Yongyi offered almost no general explanation for the attraction of yellow music to consumers, although he claimed that in the 1930s many lost hope in the revolution, withdrew to their private world and adopted the philosophy ‘if we have wine today, let’s get drunk today’.\textsuperscript{108} But who were the consumers and the audience of yellow music in the 1980s? Wu and many others debating the issue referred to ‘some people’ or ‘some of our young people’ (\textit{yi bufen qingnian} 一部分青年) or ‘quite a few of the young audience’ in the cities. Li Huanzhi wrote that a ‘considerable range’ of people took an interest and that ‘not a few’ had become captivated. Sometimes the implication was that the young people were misled because they suffered from lack of proper education under the Gang of Four. Occasionally there were statements to the effect that quite a large number of people were influenced and not just the young but also professional music workers.\textsuperscript{109} Some even suggested that the rot was reaching into the ranks of the middle-aged. At the height of the campaign against spiritual pollution \textit{People’s}
Music complained that a minority of the audience, composers and performers had created a 'public opinion' that ridiculed those who criticised yellow music. At the same time Zhao Feng stated that it was frightening that some Mainland composers and singers regarded slavish imitation of Hong Kong-Taiwan pop music as glorious. He noted that some such imitators had apparently even emerged from the armed forces.

Conclusion
One striking aspect of the proliferation of yellow music in China is that it had little to do with the economic power of Hong Kong or Taiwan. The Hong Kong music industry lacked a distribution network on the Mainland and could not actively impose its products on the Mainland market, especially since key products were banned. Considering the amount of piracy that was going on, the commercial benefits for the Hong Kong industry may have been quite limited, at least in the short run. Strong consumer preferences seem to have been the driving force in the ascent of yellow music. The supply of homegrown pop music came about in response to this consumer demand, as economic reform made it possible and profitable to do provide such music, even while flouting official regulations and directives. Mandarin pop songs from Hong Kong and Taiwan were attractive to many who had been fed a one-sided diet of 'revolutionary songs'. The Mainland music critics themselves acknowledged that previous policy had created a suppressed demand, a void that Hong Kong-Taiwan pop music filled.

Those responsible for the production, marketing and performance of the new popular music, the people allegedly 'only looking for the money', were largely the leaders and the employees of state and cooperative enterprises and organizations. China in the early 1980s was not a private enterprise economy. Most of the urban economy was under some form of public ownership and indigenous private enterprises were still few and small-scale. Nonetheless, the elimination of restrictions in force during the Cultural Revolution meant that state and cooperative enterprises were free to try to make more money for themselves and cultural organizations were gradually becoming more dependent on self-generated income.

If we accept the view that it was mainly a section of the youth audience who were enthusiastic about yellow music, then we could see it as one aspect of the emergence of a youth subculture or a counterculture after the repression of the Cultural Revolution. However, the popularity of the various kinds of yellow music was so widespread that it may be more reasonable to see it as one part of the musical mainstream. It was, however, subculture in the sense that it was subordinate to the officially promoted culture.

The views expressed in print on yellow music, especially after 1980, were overwhelmingly those of the musical establishment. Many of those who discussed and attacked yellow music in the music publications and made statements in the other media were senior music critics and music bureaucrats. A substantial number of the articles on yellow music appearing in People's Music have what appear to be pseudonymous authors. Some of them may well have been written by Wu Yongyi or other members of the editorial staff. Pseudonyms are also common in the Peking Music Journal.

Many of the remarks on youngsters who took an unhealthy interest in yellow music seem at best avuncular, at worst condescending and patronizing. It was suggested, for instance, that to the young who had had a poor education during the Cultural Revolution
anything novel, such as the ‘Island Country Love songs’, seemed good and exciting. However, such music could not ‘help these youths dispel emptiness and establish confidence’. The young people themselves could not easily discern what was good and bad. In the words of Lü Ji: ‘As far as teachers, household heads and leading comrades are concerned, they must give more guidance to the young, help them to distinguish good and bad, and introduce healthy music for them to listen to.’ Having no previous experience of yellow music, the young needed to have the circumstances of the old society explained to them. Already in 1979 Li Huanzhi argued that ‘The older generation has a responsibility to talk to the young people about the struggle on the musical front before Liberation and to talk about the poisonous effects of yellow music in order to raise the young people’s power of discernment in music.’ Discussing Cheng Lin at the time of the spiritual pollution campaign, he commented that it had been entirely necessary to criticise her imitation of bar singers. Such criticism amounted to cherishing the young performer and helping her to healthy growth on the artistic road. A few writers produced fictitious dialogues with a young person being instructed by someone older and more experienced.

As noted above, audience reactions departed from the code of behaviour that the authorities wished to impose. Shouting and whistling were seen as signs of lack of cultural attainment, sometimes encouraged by performers who ought to have seen their task as elevating the aesthetic taste of the masses. The criticisms of misconduct at concerts fit in with the propaganda efforts of the early 1980s. The political leadership exhorted people to build ‘socialist spiritual civilization’. Two sets of widely used slogans known as ‘Five things to pay attention to and four beautiful things’ (wu jiang si mei) were aimed to cajole the masses into adopting more polite and decorous manners.

Was there a xenophobic element in the hostility to yellow music? Perhaps not very much. There was certainly a perception that undesirable phenomena were entering the People’s Republic from outside, but since that outside world was primarily the ethnically Chinese societies of Hong Kong and Taiwan, the attitudes of the Mainland musical establishment were not exactly anti-foreign. As is well-known, in twentieth century China many academic musicians and other intellectuals looked on Western music as superior to Chinese music in important aspects, for instance regarding Western music as more scientific in the use of harmony and in musical instrument technology. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China they remained in favour of learning selectively from the West. Even the radical left of the Cultural Revolution shared some of those assumptions despite attacks on Beethoven and other Western composers. The musical establishment admired a limited range of Western classical music but generally disliked both Hong Kong and Taiwan pop music and much of American and European jazz, rock and pop music.

At the same time as the musical establishment held Western classical music in high regard, they also retained a commitment to traditional Chinese views on the social function of music. References to revolution and socialism did not preclude the use of arguments from Confucius and Music Master Kuang, as well as Plato. Watered-down Marxism was strengthened with the authority of great minds of both Chinese and Western civilization as the musical establishment and the Party strove to elevate the taste of the masses and make them more cultivated.
NOTES

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1 Jin Zhaojun 2001: 25.
2 Concerning Shanghai popular music, Li Jinhui’s career and the controversies surrounding his popular songs, see Jones 2001: ch. 3, and Wong 2002. The term huangse 色, literally “yellow colour”, can also mean “decadent”, “pornographic”, “obscene”. I am not altogether sure of the origin of that meaning. However, some of those who denounced yellow music in the early 1980s explained that the terms yellow publications and yellow songs were derived from the expression the ‘yellow press’ in late nineteenth century America which in turn got its name from the comic strip ‘The Yellow Kid’. See Wu Yongyi 1982a:5, and ‘Wenhuabu Zhengyanshi fuze tongzhi jiu jianbie huangse luyin’ai wenti da benba zhijie wen’ 1982.
3 Jones 2001: ch. 4.
5 Two of Zhou Xuan’s most famous songs are Sijie 四季歌 and Tianya genli 天涯歌女 from the ‘progressive’ film Malu tianshi 马路天使 (Street Angel, 1937) in which she had the leading female role. The songs were composed by He Luting. Zhou’s enduring popularity in China in the early 1980s was such that some apparently wanted to recognize her as ‘the founder of national vocal music’. See Li Ling 1981:20.
6 Liu’s best known patriotic composition is Changcheng yao 长城谣 (‘Song of the Great Wall’). On his death in 1985, Remmin yinyue printed a respectful obituary. His patriotic activities were noted and ‘When Will You Come Back Again’ was left unmentioned. See ‘Daonian Liu Xue’an tongzhi’ 1985:37.
7 ‘Caged Songsters’ 1958.
8 Wong Kee Chee 2001: 30–39. According to Wong, shidaiqu is a Hong Kong term that does not seem to have been used in the same sense in Shanghai. See Wong Kee Chee 2001: 10–13.
11 Gu Linxiu 1995: 8–9, 12.
13 Liu Chi 1981. Similar sentiments were expressed by others. See, e.g., Li Huanzhi 1979: 107.
14 Excerpts from Zhao Feng’s report were printed first in the Yinyue tongxun 音乐通讯 (Music Bulletin) of the Chinese Musicians’ Association, then in the Yinyue wenzhai 音乐文摘 (Music Digest), and finally in the People’s University reprint series Yinyue, wudao yanjiu 音乐舞蹈研究. See Zhao Feng 1980b:11.
15 The Funiu article was reprinted in Henan ribao, 20 Jan 1981. See ‘Deng Lijun qian ren qie ge’ 1981.
16 Li Ning 1982:22.
17 Xianglan was from the music score of Sanxia chuanshi 三峡传奇. Text by Ma Jinghua 马靖华 and music by Zhang Piji 张兆基.
21 Li Guyi 1980.
22 Zhen Ping 1980.
23 Li and Deng 1980.
27 Sha Qing 1980.
29 Li Lili 1980. Also see Steen 1999/2000:134. Li Lili was one of the most famous singers from Li Jinhai’s song and dance troupe. She and three other young singers specializing in love songs were known in the 1930s as the ‘four great heavenly kings’. (The four heavenly kings, or devarajas, are fierce-looking guardian deities usually found in the first hall inside the entrance of large Buddhist temples.)
30 He Luting 1980.
31 Ying Guojing 1980 appeared in Wenhuibao on 17 August 1980 and ‘Bixu zunzhong lishi 1980’ in Zhongguo qingnian bao two days later. In another article in Rennin yinyue, 1980:9, Nan Yong argued that it is only the negative characters in the film who are keen to listen to ‘When Will You Come Back Again’. See Nan Yong 1980. For a summary of the arguments in Beijing wnbao and a refutation of them, see also Zhang 1980.
33 Concerning Li Xianglan’s career in China and her different identities, see Stephenson 1999, and Steen 1999/2000:135. She was also known as Shirley Yamaguchi in Hollywood in the 1950s. I have never actually heard a recording of Li Xianglan singing China Night either in Japanese or Chinese. In Japan, as in China, China Night remained popular after the war and was recorded, e.g., by Watanabe Hamako 濱辺浜子 and Misora Hibari 美空ひばり.
34 See, e.g., Zhou Yinchang 1982:8, and ‘Nuli jianshe shenhuihui yingshen wemn’ 1982:4. Also cf. ‘Caged Songsters’ 1958. China Night was also recorded, e.g., by Yao Li 姚莉, under the name Chun de meng 春的夢 (‘Spring Dream’) with lyrics that were entirely different from the original.
39 Text by Ma Jinxing 马金星, music by Liu Shizhao 刘诗朝.
41 The Four Basic Principles are upholding the socialist road, the dictatorship of the proletariat, the leadership of the the Communist Party, and Marxism-Leninism Mao Zedong Thought.
42 Zhao Feng 1982c:18–19.
43 Li Huanzhi 1979; Li Ling 1980:24.
44 A composer who used the medium of lyrical songs to praise the Party was Shi Guangnan 施光辉, composer of Zhu jiu ge 资酒歌. See Li Huanzhi 1980:19–20.
45 ‘Taking our own road’ had been emphasized by Lu Ji in his address to the Chinese Musicians’ Association in 1979. See Lu Ji 1980: no. 2, pp. 1–2.
46 Even the songs in this selection did not completely escape hostile criticism. They included Li Guyi’s two contributions to the film Little Flower, as well as Taiyangdaodao shang 太阳岛上, composed by Wang Liping 王立平, Zhu jiu ge (see note 43) and Zaijian ba, mama 再见吧, 妈妈 – the last one is about a soldier saying ‘see you again’ to his mother before going off to fight the Vietnamese. (It was praised by Zhou Yinchang.) For a discussion of this selection of songs, see Su Xia 1980:18–21.
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48 Yinyue yanjiu carried a summary of this debate. See ‘Guanyu “liang dai ren honggou” wenti de tuoshi’ 1982.
49 Zhao Feng 1982a:3–5; Zhao Feng 1982c:17–18. In a couple of shorter pieces from 1980 and 1982 Zhao also firmly rejected Hong Kong and Western music. See Zhao Feng 1980a; Zhao Feng 1982b.
51 Zhao Feng 1980a; Guo Weicheng 1983.
54 Wu Yongyi 1982a.
55 Wu’s views of capitalist jazz and rock are generally hostile and sometimes idiosyncratic. He writes that ‘rock music’ (yuobaixi [Rock] yinyue 搖滾音樂) emerged in the 1950s. It was characterized by crazy rhythms, a screaming form of singing and simple melodies. In the 1960s rock developed into ‘rock and roll’ (yuogun [Rock and Roll] yinyue 搖滾音樂). See Wu Yongyi 1982b:57.
59 ‘Nuli jianshe shehuizhuyi jingshen wenming’ 1982:3.
64 Wang Chen 1983; Zhong Lü 1983; Dan Xin 1983:42.
65 He Yin 1983; Dan Xin 1983:41; Zhao Feng 1984:5.
67 Wang Yue 1983; Dan Xin 1983:42.
68 Meng zhong de mama, Taipingyang yingying gongsiti (Pacific Audio & Video Co.) P–2059, Canton, 1983. The foreign songs on this cassette include ‘Yesterday’, ‘Que seria sera’, ‘Sad Movies’, ‘Donna Donna’ and the very popular ‘Song of the Straw Hat’ (Caomao ge 釘釘歌) from a Japanese film but sung in English by Cheng.
70 ‘Bu neng yi diiie de jingshen chanpin qu wuran shehui’ 1983.
71 Guo Weicheng 1983.
72 Guo Weicheng 1983.
73 Zhao Feng 1983.
74 Deng Wenchang and Di Heping 1983.
76 Lü Ji 1983a:3.
77 Lü Ji 1983b.
78 Zhong Jia 1983.
79 Lü Ji 1983c.
80 Li Huanzhi 1984.
81 For an account of the spiritual pollution campaign and its social causes, see Gold 1984.
84 Concerning the development of Chinese rock see Baranovitch 2003:31–48
85 Andreas Steen has described how he tried to persuade Shanghai librarians to let him read the book in 1992 and how he was told that they no longer spoke of ‘yellow music’. See Steen 1999/2000: 149–50.
87 ‘Puxie jiankang xiangshang de aiqing gequ’ 1982:11–12.
90 Li Ning 1982:21.
91 Li Depei 1982:34.
92 These opinions were expressed in an internal (neibu 内部) document quoted in Mittler 1997:137.
94 Li Ling 1980:25.
98 Zhou Yinchang 1982:12–13. Cheng Lin’s style of singing was described in terms similar to those used by Zhou. See Dan Xin 1983:42.
104 Wu Yongyi 1982a:5–6. Similarly worded comments had been made in Renmin yinyue the previous year. See Ran Tong 1981:17.
108 Wu Yongyi 1982b:3.
111 Zhao Feng 1983.
112 For a short discussion of the social reasons for the popularity of Hong Kong-Taiwan music, see Steen 1994:58.
114 Li Ning 1982:22.
116 Li Huanzhi 1984.
119 The five things to pay attention to were civilized behaviour, courtesy, hygiene, orderliness, and morality. The four beautiful things were beautiful mind, beautiful speech, beautiful conduct, and beautiful environment.
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Cantonese Opera Performance in Rural and Urban Contexts

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In the mid-19th century, local Cantonese opera gained a toehold in the city of Guangzhou. It gradually began to displace other kinds of opera which had come to the city in the course of the 18th century, in the wake of merchants from 'outside'. Not surprisingly, Guangzhou's growing wealth and trade potential attracted numerous entrepreneurs as well as many types of performers. Cantonese opera had long been a 'travelling' ritual genre, catering first and foremost to the local countryside. But growing piracy had made the roads dangerous. In urban Guangzhou the genre eventually found shelter, and gained new prestige among the city's elite. It found Guangzhou's merchants and entrepreneurs ready to sponsor and to organize commercial performances. In the early 20th century, the first permanent theatres were constructed to house such performances. This paper traces the gradual process of urban-rural bifurcation of Cantonese opera, and its changing patterns of organization and finance.

Scholars of music and culture in East Asia have given some attention of late to the dynamics of the relationship between rural and urban contexts of music-making.¹ My own work on Cantonese opera (粵劇), in south China has also revealed interesting differences between the urban and the rural contexts with respect to performance practice, repertoire, the relationship between opera performance and ritual, and even local government policy. What I have observed in the 1980s and 1990s is a gradual shift away from the institutions and modes of business transaction of the Mao years and back to those more characteristic of the first half of the 20th century.

Much of the character of the contemporary divide between urban and rural performance of Cantonese opera is a direct inheritance from the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and understanding a little of the history of this form of music drama will illustrate more clearly the roots of contemporary practice.

Historical Background
In the first half of the eighteenth century, the city of Guangzhou² began to develop as a major business and foreign trade center, and merchants from many other provinces flocked there, followed promptly by opera troupes from their home regions. These troupes from other provinces, introducing a rich variety of opera styles to the Guangzhou area, came to
be known collectively as ‘outside troupes’ (外江班), which came to be contrasted with the

The ‘outside troupes’ catered primarily to an urban bourgeoisaudience (the
comparatively well-to-do merchants from other provinces as well as the more educated
urban locals) and their performance activities were, by and large, concentrated in the city of
Guangzhou. Indeed, for a period of approximately one hundred years, from the latter half
of the eighteenth to the latter half of the nineteenth century, ‘outside troupes’ dominated
the Guangzhou opera scene to the exclusion of ‘local troupes’ made up of local ethnic
Cantonese performers. In 1791, at the peak of documented ‘outside troupe’ presence in
Guangzhou, there was a total of forty-four registered ‘outside troupes’ from Anhui, Hunan,
Jiangxi, Jiangsu, Fujian, Guangxi, and other provinces (Sfn 1963:109).

The ‘local troupes’, operating out of the smaller city of Foshan and throughout the
nearby rural areas, were active primarily among the less-educated rural peasantry and in
the smaller towns and cities of Guangdong province.

‘Outside troupes’ and ‘local troupes’ maintained a rather complex symbiosis for about
one hundred years, but on the simplest level their relationship might be characterized
as follows: ‘outside troupes’ were urban, sophisticated, northern (‘outsiders’, i.e., non-
Cantonese), and were dominant in local power relations and generally enjoyed greater
prestige; by contrast, ‘local troupes’ were rural, rustic or unsophisticated, local ethnic
Cantonese, and had comparatively little power or prestige.

Some time before the year 1854, local opera started to gain a toehold in the city of
Guangzhou (Au-yèuhng 1983:85-87). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, pre-
modern Cantonese opera succeeded in displacing the ‘outside troupes’ and shifting its
primary performance and audience base to Guangzhou. Performances at that time were,
for the most part, staged for ritual purposes or for the occasional entertainment of the urban
bourgeoisie.

There were no permanent theatres in Guangzhou, Hong Kong, or Macau in which
local troupes could perform, nor were urban, non-ritual, commercial performances on the
horizon, until approximately the turn of the twentieth century (Laih & Wûhng 1988:313ff).
Prior to this, permanent stages located on the grounds of one or two urban temples were the
closest thing to permanent performance venues for Cantonese opera troupes. Performances
on temple grounds, however, were rather rare. Mostly, performances in the urban areas (as
with rural performances) were staged in temporary and dangerously combustible mat-shed
theatres.

Bifurcation
What occurred in early 20th century was not so much the urbanization of Cantonese opera
performance, but the gradual development of an urban rural bifurcation of performance
activities and audiences. The large cities of Guangzhou, Hong Kong, and Macau were
the base of the Cantonese opera ‘avant-garde,’ such as they were, and the urban middle
class audience emerged as their primary patrons. A residual corps of conservative troupes,
however, continued to serve the needs of the rural communities and were rather oblivious to
contemporary developments in the cities. Performances in the countryside remained, even
as they are today, primarily for ritual or festival purposes. Ritual performances were geared
to the seasonal religious needs of specific communities – villages or neighbourhoods – and troupes were obliged to travel to the various communities for temporary performance stays.

Most opera troupes of the nineteenth century and the early years of the twentieth century were itinerant troupes. They traveled from one performance booking to another in large red boats that plied the many rivers of the region (see Chânh 1983; Mahk 1983:25ff), and opera performers (who were, at the time, members of all-male troupes) began to be known as ‘the sons of the red boats’ (红船子弟). These ‘red boats’ are known to have been used extensively up until the late 1930s, when the Japanese occupation of China began.

During the early years of this century, as had been the case for centuries before, the waterways around the Guangzhou-Hong Kong area were the haunt of pirate bands who would occasionally terrorize even defenseless opera troupes (see Chânh 1983). The situation became bad enough that some troupes were reluctant to tour the more remote areas without armed escorts. The threat of pirates was one important factor in the emergence of an urban base for Cantonese opera performance in the early 20th century.

**Permanent Theatres**

When permanent theatres, used exclusively for the commercial performance of opera, began to be constructed in the urban centers during the early years of this century, a number of large-scale, primarily urban-based troupes were organized. They were collectively called ‘the large Guangzhou / Hong Kong troupes’ (省港大班) (Laih & Wöng 1988:32ff). The first such troupe was the Jûk Hông Nîhn (祝庚年) troupe, organized in 1919. Though these troupes did spend a certain percentage of their time in the countryside, the base of their activities was the major cities of Hong Kong, Guangzhou, and Macau. The newly constructed permanent theatres were not necessarily associated with a specific neighbourhood, so audiences were often drawn from across many neighbourhood boundaries. Consequently, theatre performances did not, of necessity, fill any specific community-based ritual need (although such could still be the case).

Merchants and entrepreneurs became active in the organization and sponsorship of troupes and the booking of commercial performances. While still the norm in Hong Kong and other locales where Cantonese opera is performed, this practice was abandoned in the People’s Republic from the 1950s through the 1980s.

Urban audiences saw themselves as more sophisticated consumers and were in fact more diverse in terms of economic class, and most of the many innovations of the early 20th century were responses to their demands. Traditional scenery, for example, generally in the form of a table, two chairs, and some sort of banner or curtain to be hung upstage, was highly functional for a rural, itinerant troupe. But long-term residence in a large city allowed for the development of more elaborate and realistic scenery and props. Lighting and sound technology were also able to develop. And new opera scripts were written that addressed the unique concerns of the urban bourgeoisie. These and many other innovations were not mirrored in the rural context.

The operas one would have seen staged for a rural village festival in the early years of the 20th century were geared for the consumer tastes of a minimally educated rural peasantry (see Mahk 1983:35ff; Aû-yêuhng 1983:88-91). They featured a much greater variety of role-types than was becoming the fashion in urban commercial performance.
where modern scripts more and more often tended to emphasize the interactions among only six principal role-types. Most importantly, rural performance had to offer a great deal of visual and aural stimulation. Of special popularity among the rural audience were the many sensational techniques, tricks, and martial exchanges that were common to martial operas of the time. The urban theatre audience, considering themselves modern, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan, tended to respond more positively to love stories or intrigues. An urban theatre audience actually remained seated and watched the operas more than their country cousins, and the theatre setting was a much more intimate one than the open village performance space. Many of the earlier role-types with their unique and sometimes quirky acting techniques were quickly made obsolete among the more modern and sophisticated audiences of the cities. Consequently, the urban-rural divide was drawn in part along the lines of repertoire as well as troupe organization and structure, among other factors. This tends to be the case even today.

Organization

Cantonese opera troupes, up until the early 1950s, were organized on a yearly basis (GWY 1984). In Guangzhou, performers and impresarios would congregate at the Tóuh Tóuh Géui restaurant (陶陶居) in the southwestern district of the city to engage in a traditional mode of business interaction called jâm pîn (揷盆) in which troupes for the upcoming season would be tentatively organized. A sponsoring organization, or an individual entrepreneur, would bring together a group of performers and sign them to contracts of a year in duration. The performance year traditionally began on the birthday festival of Gan Yn, the goddess of mercy, which fell on the nineteenth day of the sixth month of the lunar calendar (generally some time in early August). Each booking in the countryside would be approximately five days in duration. The troupe would stage afternoon, ‘prime time’, and all-night performances (the latter generally lasting till dawn) each day except the first when there was no afternoon performance.

The first fifteen days of a troupe’s activities each season were a trial period during which the sponsor would observe the troupe’s potential for success. If the troupe appeared problem-ridden in any significant way during this fifteen days, it could be disbanded. Past the fifteenth day, a troupe would generally see out the year intact. The troupes usually had a short recess, called a ‘small disbanding of the troupes’ (小散班) during the lunar new year period. The end of the performance year was generally some time late in the lunar fifth month, at which time the troupes officially disbanded; this was called the ‘large disbanding of the troupes’ (大散班).

An organization called the Auspicious Occasion Hall, or Gát Híng Gṳ̄ng Só (吉慶公所), became a mediating organization between a rural village hiring committee and the performing troupe or its impresario. In this capacity, the Gát Híng Gṳ̄ng Só was succeeded in the PRC during the Mao and post-Mao periods by the local ‘performance offices’ and, in particular, the rural area ‘scheduling station’ (see below), and in Hong Kong and abroad it was succeeded by the ‘Guild of the Eight Harmonies’ (八和会馆).

The Japanese occupation and the second World War had a significant impact on most performance activities, whether urban or rural, and the situation in the PRC from 1949 to the early 1980s was rather anomalous with respect to the rural-urban relationship, so
I won’t discuss those periods here. Instead I’ll jump forward to the 1980s and 1990s, a period in which the character of the urban-rural divide in many ways closely resembles that of the early years of the 20th century, which I’ve just discussed.

‘Performance Offices’
All ‘literature and arts’ events and other such activities that require the use of a stage or performance hall – such activities might include performances of spoken drama, regional opera, music, shuōchàng, or various Western arts, as well as events such as fashion shows, certain indoor sports activities, body building competitions, martial arts exhibitions, acrobatics shows, and magic shows – are scheduled through a local ‘performance office’ or ‘performance company’ (演出公司).

The Guangdong Provincial Performance Office oversees the work of performance scheduling throughout Guangdong province. Fourteen other lower level performance offices and ‘performance scheduling stations’ (演出排期站), or ‘performance management stations’ (演出管理站), are involved in the scheduling of performances on the city/district and county levels, respectively.

Of the dozen or so performance venues in Guangzhou in which Cantonese opera performances are most frequently staged, one or two come under the direct administration of the Provincial Performance Office. All other venues in the city are administered by the city performance office.

Performances are most often scheduled in the following theatres:

- Yähn Mähn (‘People’s’)
- Chihn Jeun (‘Press Forward’)
- Gwông Mihng (‘Bright, Glorious’)
- Nàahm Fõng (‘Southern’)
- Chôi Háiung (‘Rainbow’)
- Sâ Hôh (a local place name)
- Yihn On (‘Yanan’)
- Baak Fà (‘Hundred Flowers’)
- Fõng Chyûn (‘Fragrant Village’)
- Mähn Yih (‘Cultural Entertainment’)
- Yáuh Yih (‘Friendship’)
- Sun Yat-sen Memorial Hall
- The central stage at the Guangzhou Cultural Park
- The Guangzhou Number Two Workers’ Cultural Palace

The performance offices recognize that the typical Cantonese opera consumer is upwards of forty years old. The bulk of the forty-and-older Cantonese opera audience is reportedly concentrated in the Sâi Gwâan (秀关) district, in the southwest quadrant of the city above the river. Because of the inconvenience of public transport and the lateness of the hour when most performances terminate, these folks generally dislike traveling out of Sâi Gwâan district to attend performances. The three theatres located in this area – the Yähn Mähn, Chihn Jeun, and Mähn Yih – are, therefore, the most active venues in the city for Cantonese opera performance.
The Booking of Performances
Approximately once a month, the authorities of each performing troupe in the Guangzhou area submit a tentative performance schedule to the appropriate performance office. The schedules reflect the operas to be performed and the optimal dates and venues. The performance office then draws up a preliminary master schedule of dates, venues, and troupes for the entire month, making adjustments where necessary in dates and places in order to avoid either an undesirable dearth or an excessive concentration of performances in a particular place at a particular time. Performance office personnel then distribute the preliminary master schedule among all the appropriate troupes in order to solicit responses. The performance office then produces a revised master schedule, if necessary, based on the responses solicited. This revised schedule is then circulated among the appropriate theatres, who may also request revisions. At last, a final master schedule for the particular month is produced and circulated.

A theatre and a troupe will often get together and make a tentative agreement to stage a series of performances, but the ultimate approval and scheduling decisions are the responsibility of the performance office. Furthermore, cadres of the local or provincial government cultural offices can exercise the authority to dictate where and when, and even what, a troupe will perform.

In order to stage performances for commercial profit a state-supported troupe must first receive a ‘commercial performance permit’ (营业演出许可证) from the appropriate performance office. When a troupe tours outside the jurisdiction of the local performance office, arrangements must be made to obtain performance permits from all appropriate performance offices or scheduling stations in the areas where they plan to perform.

A typical series of performances in the city of Guangzhou lasts for six days, generally Tuesday through Sunday. Mondays are reserved for setting up or taking down scenery and stage equipment, and for moving to the next venue. In recent years, there have been months during which performances have been staged in nearly every theatre on each day of the month except Mondays. There have been other months, however, during which not a single performance was staged. Precise statistics on the average number of Cantonese opera performances scheduled and staged during a given month or year are surprisingly difficult to come by. Curiously, such records are simply not kept by the various performance offices. But it is possible to extrapolate rough numbers from observations.

As I perused of a representative sampling of final master monthly schedules issued by the city performance office during 1986 and 1987, including an extraordinarily active period during May and June of 1987, I noted an approximate total of 480 performances in eighty series performed by the eight active city- and provincial-level troupes, plus the five most active troupes from the suburbs and other larger cities in the region. Adjusting for the rare instance of a series of performances that was approved subsequent to the printing of the final master schedules, and for the even rarer instance of the performance by a particular troupe of more than one opera during a single evening, an average for a moderately active year would likely be between 450 and 500 performances of Cantonese opera in and around the city of Guangzhou. These figures have not changed appreciably during the last decade.
The Contemporary Urban/Rural Divide
During the period of my dissertation field research in the mid 1980s, the two words invariably on the lips of every urbanite even remotely connected with Cantonese opera were ‘crisis’ and ‘reform’. I noted a number of well-conceived and well-articulated theories concerning a crisis in Cantonese opera, theories that had Cantonese opera either passing through a brief low spell in popularity or in danger of imminent demise (Ferguson 1988:228-270). I documented the many policies governing reform in the arts as well as the myriad efforts to breathe new life into what was seen as an art form that was losing its original audience and failing to attract new, younger consumers, an art form that was losing ground to film, television, social dancing, clubbing, eating, and karaoke singing.

When discussing the ‘crisis’ in Cantonese opera, however, a clear distinction must be made between the situation in the city of Guangzhou and the situation in the rest of the province, particularly the rural areas. The urban and rural contexts are really two different worlds with regard to the popularity and consumption of Cantonese opera. The ‘crisis’ is only apparent in Guangzhou, and to a lesser extent in smaller cities like Foshan and Shenzhen, where there is a much wider variety of entertainment alternatives.

Roughly eighty percent of the population of China is spread throughout the rural areas of the country, and more than fifty counties in Guangdong and over twenty counties in Guangxi are said to be regular Cantonese opera consumers. With numbers like these, it is easy to imagine that the idea of a universal ‘crisis’ in Cantonese opera might be something of an overstatement on the part of some urbanites.

The economic conditions in some parts of the southern Guangdong countryside are better than they have ever been before, and the rural population can more easily afford to hire troupes and stage performances than at any previous time. While televisions are not yet to be found in every rural home, a growing percentage of the population has access to television sets (especially in the more affluent areas), and a significant number of letters to local and provincial governments and to Guangdong Television indicate that a majority of the Cantonese-speaking peasantry want Cantonese opera on the television.

The rural audience of the 1980s and 90s has tended to be as conservative in its tastes as it has been throughout the past century. It is said that the rural audience insists on jän sōän jän sē‘ui (-real mountains & real streams'), meaning that they demand performances of the older, traditional, ‘authentic’ Cantonese opera. So far, they have not responded favorably to contemporary stories or extensive modernizing reforms, and certainly not for operas performed for specifically ritual purposes.

Performance Scheduling – Spring Festival, 1987
The most significant traditional holiday in China is the lunar new year festival. During the first fifteen to twenty days of the first lunar month most rural villages and county seat neighbourhoods in southern coastal Guangdong hold an annual celebration, generally three to five days long, called a nihn laih (年来) (‘yearly customs or routines’). Cantonese opera performances are often an important part of the festive nihn laih celebrations, and most opera troupes are kept quite busy performing in the countryside throughout much of the first lunar month.

The cost of hiring a troupe is computed on a per performance basis: ¥800 per
performance for county level troupes, ¥1200 per performance for city/district level troupes, and ¥2000 or more per performance for provincial level troupes. A series of performances lasts three to five nights (there are no matinee performances), so the basic cost of hiring, for example, a city level troupe would be anywhere from ¥3600 to ¥6000. Add to this figure the costs of accommodations (the troupe is often housed in the village school), and food (the village usually hires a cook to prepare meals), and local transportation, and in 1987 a village could expect to spend perhaps ¥4500 to ¥7000 for a moderately prestigious troupe. The city level troupes have tended to be the most popular since their performances are of a high quality but their prices are within reach of most moderately prosperous villages.

If a village is especially affluent it might choose to hire two troupes at the same time to perform simultaneously, side by side in friendly and high-spirited competition, making the nihn laih celebrations especially festive and exciting. Hiring two troupes demonstrates to neighbouring communities that this village is very ‘imposing and mighty’ (hōu wāi) and that they ‘have the right stuff’ (hōu būn sīh or sāuḥ būn sīh). The two troupes are placed on make-shift stages positioned either perpendicular to each other or side by side, and separated by a distance of a few score feet. Such an arrangement adds significantly to the quality of that most indispensable of elements in a Chinese festival: yiht naauh (Mandarin: rénao), meaning ‘heat & noise’, and the success of a village nihn laih celebration can be measured in part by the level and duration of festive yiht naauh or ‘heat & noise’ generated by ritual opera performances such as these, among other elements.

In order to hire an opera troupe, a village has a couple of alternatives. It can deal directly with the troupe it hopes to hire, or it can retain the services of an intermediary. This intermediary can be either a private entrepreneur, called a hei ngāah (戏牙), or it can be the local ‘performance management station’ (or ‘performance scheduling station’). The intermediary is responsible for bringing together troupes that wish to perform in the countryside during the spring festival, and village authorities who wish to hire them, and for overseeing all negotiations and details of the contracts between the two parties. Contracts are generally signed by (a) the authorized agent of the troupe, (b) the intermediary, and (c) the village representative. Contracts specify dates and locations of performances, fees and terms of payment, arrangements regarding accommodations, transportation, and stage facilities, and also stipulate terms regarding cancellation and forfeiture.

If the ‘performance management station’ is retained as intermediary, it receives a straight commission of 2.5% from the troupe and ¥10 per performance from the village. An independent hei ngāah acting as intermediary generally receives a straight commission of five to seven percent. He can, however, make a special business arrangement with a troupe, called ‘contracting’ (承色). Under the terms of this special arrangement the hei ngāah puts a troupe under contract for a fixed number of performances, over a fixed period of time, and for a fixed price. The contractor then arranges the dates and locations of the performances with various rural villages, charging as much as he can from the villages above and beyond the amount he promised to pay the troupe. The total difference, often substantial, becomes his personal profit. In the mid-1980s, the government sought to proscribe this kind of transaction because the possibility for exploitation of the villages was too great. In 1987 the provincial Department of Culture circulated a document outlawing this practice of private ‘contracting’. These restrictions have since been relaxed considerably.
The people of the two adjacent counties of Ngh Chyûn (吴川) and Dihn Baahk (电白) are acknowledged as being among the most enthusiastic consumers of Cantonese opera in the southern Guangdong countryside. Approximately fifty Cantonese opera troupes were involved in month-long performance tours in these two counties during spring festival, 1987, over thirty of them in Ngh Chyûn alone. There is no other rural area in Guangdong that is so active in the consumption of Cantonese opera.

There is a rural township (乡) in Ngh Chyûn County called Bok Mauh (博茂). It is actually a small cluster of five separate villages (村):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Note</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Daaih Miuh</td>
<td>(大庙) ('Big Temple')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gun Ngahah</td>
<td>(官街) ('Government Yamen')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeng Tavo</td>
<td>(井头) ('The Well')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sai Bin</td>
<td>(西边) ('The Western Rim')</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louh Hau</td>
<td>(路口) ('The Intersection' or 'The Crossroads').</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the 1980s Bok Mauh became rather prosperous by rural standards. In 1987, three out of the five villages were able to hire their own Cantonese opera troupes as part of their nihn laih celebrations.

Some time before the turn of the lunar new year, the Hôh Jai Gûng troupe from Guangzhou telephoned the Ngh Chyûn station to inform them of their desire to perform in that area during the spring festival period, and to request their intermediation. The troupe requested that the station arrange performances in a total of four locations, one of which turned out to be in the village called Western Rim in Bok Mauh township. The troupe performed for three nights in Western Rim and was housed and fed in the local party cadre school for the duration of its stay in Ngh Chyûn county.

The residents of Western Rim made special requests of the troupe concerning the operas that they wished to see performed for their nihn laih celebrations. The focus, not surprisingly, was on martial plays, those that included much in the way of spectacle, of color, of ‘heat & noise’. In addition, the troupe was expected to perform one or more of a handful of traditional short ritual skits, what Chan Sau-yân (1991:54ff) calls ‘ritual playlets’, one or two of which would typically be performed immediately preceding the featured opera of the evening.

These ritual playlets generally include four items:

1. *The Six Kingdoms Invest a Chancellor* (Luhk Gwok Fûng Seung) (六国封相)
   [a.k.a. *The Grand Six Kingdoms Invest a Chancellor* (Luhk Gwok Daaih Fûng Seung) (六国大封相)]
2. *A Birthday Greeting from the Eight Immortals* (Boat Sln Hôh Sauth) (八仙贺寿)
3. *The Heavenly Maiden Offers a Son* (Tim Gèi Sung Jî or Sung Jî) (天姬送子)
4. *Promotion to the Rank of an Official* (Gà Gûn) (加官)
   [a.k.a. *Dance of Promotion to the Rank of Official* (Tiu Gà Gûn) (跳加官)]

Numbers 2 and 3 above are frequently combined and performed in sequence as ‘Hôh Sauth Sung Jî’ (贺寿送子). In addition, Chan also describes yet another item, a short ritual observance called the ‘sacrificial offering to the white tiger’ (*Jai Baahk Fû*) (祭白虎), that
is occasionally performed prior to any other dramatic activities if the performance stage had been ‘built on a piece of land that had never been used for such a purpose’ (1991:54).

The practice of performing one or two of these ritual playlets immediately preceding the featured opera on the first evening of a series staged in the countryside is still common practice among Cantonese audiences outside the People’s Republic. But such practices, connected as they are to folk religious observance, were outlawed during the socialist period until recent years.

Unlike other areas of artistic activity in the PRC, such as contemporary painting, in the urban Cantonese opera community there appears to be no self-conscious fetishizing of rural performance practices, of ‘rusticity’, as a key to ‘authenticity’. In and of itself, ‘rusticity’ – being rural – bestows little cachet. Among urban performers and officials there is simply the acknowledgment of rural tastes, demands, and (in particular) ritual needs. In the mid 1980s that acknowledgment took the form of an unprecedented willingness on the part of cultural bureau and opera officials to accommodate the demands of rural ritual tradition and rural audience expectations by allowing the performance of these ritual playlets. As authorities cautiously allowed local nihn laih celebrations to resurface during the 1980s they took great care to make sure that they were (at least superficially) entirely secular occasions. Alters and ‘god boxes’ and temple buildings were devoid of any effigies or representations of deities, incense being offered to the thin air. But religious content has slowly crept back into the nihn laih observances, aided in part by the relaxed policy toward the performing of the ritual playlets. Rural audiences expect the performance of these playlets, and nihn laih celebrations are simply not successful or efficacious without them.

Officials at the time did not, however, make the same allowance for urban audiences that they did for rural ones, although this is becoming more common. Curiously, though, since the mid 1980s every troupe that has embarked on a performance tour abroad has prepared these ritual playlets to be performed for urban audiences in the far-flung cities of Europe and North America where there are Cantonese-speaking consumers.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the 20th century, urbanites in south China have tended to view rural audiences as unsophisticated rubes who, in Bourdieu’s terms, lack the ‘cultural capital’ that distinguishes the city dweller from the bumpkin. But fifteen or more years of prosperity in some corners of the Guangdong countryside have enabled some rural villages or families to, in essence, buy ‘cultural capital’ and demonstrate their bün sih by mounting very elaborate, expensive, yih naa shih celebrations. In the 1980s, lavish expenditure on such things as large-scale banquets by rural villagers had become the stuff of legend in the cities, indicating something of a turning of the tables with respect to the possession of ‘cultural capital’. And in fact wastefulness became an important indicator of a village’s or a family’s bün sih. Having the resources to waste (or to give the appearance of wasting) considerable amounts of food in a country where famine and want have been constants throughout history is sure evidence of prosperity, and as I’ve indicated, having the financial resources to hire a provincial- or city-level troupe (or preferably two) for one’s nihn laih celebrations is probably one of the soundest investments in ‘face’ that a village can make, resulting in a quantum leap in their perceived wài or bün sih.
NOTES

1 Notably at the September 1999 conference of the European Foundation for Chinese Music Research (or ‘CHIME’), the focus of which was “Music in Cities, Music in Villages: East Asian Music Traditions in Transition.” This article is a revised and expanded version of a paper read at that conference, “Cantonese Opera Performance in the Context of Spring Festival Nian Li Celebrations in Rural Southern Guangdong.”

2 I have chosen to Romanize certain Chinese terms in putonghua (‘Mandarin’) using the Pinyin system, and other terms in Cantonese using the Yale system. Those in the former category include, among other things, geographical names and some proper names. The names of ethnic Cantonese writers on Cantonese opera (see sources cited) are rendered in Cantonese, as are a number of terms either unique to Cantonese opera or that would only tend to confuse if rendered otherwise. In a paper such as this, the choice to use Cantonese over putonghua, or vice versa, is always a difficult one to make. I hope the logic of my choices is obvious.

3 Most of the information from this point forward was obtained during fieldwork through observation and in interviews with the following: Lòh Ngài (罗载) instructor and vice principal, Guangdong Cantonese Opera School; Chêui Dâk-Lyûnh (程德雄) instructor, Guangdong Cantonese Opera School; Maâh Chû-kâh (麦群华) Director, Guangdong provincial Performance Office; Leuhng Ji-hêuhng (梁自強) Director, Guangzhou City Performance Office; Lâh Jûng-kâuh (梁中球) manager, Performance Scheduling Station, Ngh Chûyûn County (Guangdong) Bureau of Culture; Yûh Yûh-nûh (余玉辉), head of the Ngh Chûyûn County Cantonese Opera Troupe

4 Yûh Yûh-nûh (余玉辉), head of the Ngh Chûyûn County Cantonese Opera Troupe, personal communication

5 Most of the information for this section was obtained during fieldwork through observation and in interviews with the following: Lâh Jûng-kâuh (梁中球) Manager, Performance Scheduling Station, Ngh Chûyûn County (Guangdong) Bureau of Culture; Yûh Yûh-nûh (余玉辉) Head of the Ngh Chûyûn County Cantonese Opera Troupe; Hêui Yuuh-kêuh (许玉辉) Head of the Hôh Dai Gûng Cantonese Opera Troupe

6 These are mid-1980s figures; amounts have increased significantly over the past decade, but I haven’t as yet had the opportunity to update the figures.

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Chinese patterns of reception of Japanese theatre during the time of modernization

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Towards the end of the 19th century, Japan was the country where numerous Chinese students went to study Western culture and science. Although Japan was not the West, it was in touch with the West, and was geographically much closer to China than either Europe or the United States. Moreover, Japanese culture bore the imprint of two millennia of contacts between China and Japan. There were perceived advantages to studying in Japan as opposed to travelling all the way to the West. The scant evidence available suggests that few of the Chinese visitors showed interest in traditional Japanese performing arts. Why was this the case? As one student wrote in his diary: 'The pronunciation was gloomy and unclear. Only because of the shamisen accompaniment could I keep listening.'

This essay attempts to show how Chinese visitors' responses to both modern and traditional Japanese drama during the period of modernization were shaped by the cultural and historical relationships that existed between the two countries, and by contemporary social contexts. First, I will examine the circumstances that brought about a reversal of the unidirectional cultural flow between Japan and China. Then I will discuss some specific examples of responses by Chinese audiences in Japan.

A reversal of roles
In the remote past, China was the place where Japan sent students to absorb culture. The Japanese started doing this as early as the seventh century, and went on to send students to China during the next two hundred years. Even after official embassies ceased in the ninth century, Japanese priests continued to cross the ocean to study and, as trade between the two countries continued, the current of cultural transmission remained rather unidirectional. As late as the mid-nineteenth century, cultural transmission still largely flowed from China eastward to Japan. However, as Japan became engrossed in the process of modernization, the targets of its learning also shifted. The pursuit of bunmei kaika (Western civilization and enlightenment) during the first two decades of the Meiji period (1868-1912) penetrated every layer of Japanese society.

Before the Meiji Restoration (1868), China was way ahead of Japan in the race to assimilate Western culture. In Japan, most of the information concerning the West – in
the form of books, magazines, and newspapers, etc. – came via China or through Chinese translations. In fact, since trade and other exchanges with overseas countries were limited to China, Korea and Holland from the early seventeenth century onwards, all information from overseas that reached Japan did so through the hands of Dutch or Chinese traders, in the form of Chinese or Dutch translations, or in other Western languages. But soon after the Meiji Restoration, Japan eagerly started to absorb Western culture through all sorts of channels. Concurrently, it developed its military strength. Japan’s victory over the Qing forces in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-95) was a great shock to the leaders of Qing Dynasty China (1644-1911), and marked the beginning of a shift in the flow of information about the West passing between China and Japan. In 1896, one year after the end of the war, thirteen Chinese students were sent to study in Japan. By 1906, the number of Chinese studying in Japan exceeded ten thousand.

Attitudes towards Western education, study abroad, and the eventual choice of Japan as a prime destination of that time can be summed up in the words of Zhang Zhidong, a senior statesman in the Qing government. Zhang believed that ‘studying abroad for a year is better than studying Western books for five years’ and, as for the country to study, ‘Xiyang [literally, Western Sea, i.e. the West] is not as good as Dongyang [literally, Eastern Sea, meaning the ‘East’s West’, i.e. Japan]’ (Wu 1997, 73). Zhang elaborates on the advantages of choosing Japan as the destination (pp. 73-74):

> It is nearer, thus more students may be sent there; it is more accessible to China, therefore easier to manage; written Japanese is closer to written Chinese, so it will be easier to become well versed in the language; Western books are abundant there, and the Japanese have already refined and tried to improve all the unimportant parts of Western study; and since Chinese and Japanese customs are similar, it will be easier to assimilate. Thus, with a minimum of energy, maximum results can be achieved. Nothing could be better than this.

Due to its relative proximity, convenience and affordability, Japan offered Chinese students an opportunity to learn about the West without having to take the trouble to go there. Education in Japan was expected to provide the key to success for Chinese in their quest for an expedient path towards modernity. Around this time, while infatuation with the West was approaching its peak, the long-lasting relationship between the paternal China of former times and its filial neighbour, Japan, began to reverse itself.

**Chinese audiences in Japan**

Chinese visitors’ experiences and comments during this period on no drama, a traditional Japanese theatrical form, reveal how processes of cross-cultural construction of meaning are reflected in Chinese preferences for one form of theatre over another. They illustrate how theatrical forms may be perceived, and accepted or rejected, at the site of cultural confrontations.

Very few records of firsthand Chinese responses to no between the 1870s and 1920s exist. Given the fact that tens of thousands of Chinese crossed the Japan Sea to be hosted by Japanese cultural institutions during that period, one cannot help but wonder why there are so few such records. What is more, Chinese responses are ambivalent at best,
and more often misleading, blatantly inaccurate, or altogether uninterested. Some Chinese who attended live performances and left accounts of their impressions were in Japan on official embassies. Others belonged to the vast majority of Chinese nationals who had come to Japan to study. Like most of their Western counterparts, these were accidental visitors to the art who had entered Japan for purposes unrelated to no. However, at least in one respect, the situation of Chinese visitors who encountered no differed fundamentally from that of Western visitors. Whereas cultural relationships between Western countries and Japan were still largely raw and unformed, those between China and Japan, already spanning two millennia, had had ample time to develop.

During Japan’s quest to be counted among Imperialist powers, distinguished visitors from foreign nations, a few official embassies from China among them, were treated to special performances of no. When American president Ulysses S. Grant visited Japan in 1879, he attended a no performance staged for his benefit. Grant’s praise for what he witnessed made a considerable impact on key figures in the Meiji government. During this period, when Japan was caught between its pursuit for modernization and the need to preserve its own identity, no testified to the historical legitimacy of Japanese culture. Japanese newspapers gave very enthusiastic reports of the important foreign visitors’ responses to these occasions, though first-hand accounts from the Chinese officials themselves are lacking or – in the case of the few that exist – fail to substantiate the claims of the press.

In September 1902, Dai Zhen of the Qing imperial family attended a no performance on the Umewaka stage, but he left no record of his response. Another official visitor from Qing was Sheng Xuanhai. In October of 1908, he, his wife and daughter, and Tang Shaoyi were treated to a lavish welcoming ceremony, and were escorted to the Kudan Nō Theatre on the following day. For their benefit, synopses of the plays to be presented had been prepared in advance. If the report by the Tokyo nichichi newspaper is to be trusted, the guests ‘seemed to understand the content of the performances, and appeared to feel the deepest inspiration’. Unfortunately, no account by Sheng or his party remains.
A Chinese official’s peculiar views on no

Some personal accounts survive from visitors who stayed in Japan for longer periods. One such account is by the statesman and poet Huang Zunxian (1848-1905). Born in Guangdong, Huang became a counsellor at the Chinese embassy in Japan at the age of twenty-nine, in 1877 (Huang Zunxian 1981, 9). Later he would serve as a counsellor in England, and as consul general in San Francisco and Singapore (Cihai 1989, vol. 3, 5375). He was one of the first to write a comprehensive account of the Meiji Restoration for the benefit of a Chinese readership. His book, entitled Riben zashi shi (Poems on miscellaneous Japanese topics), first published in 1879, covers a wide variety of subjects, including Japanese customs, literature, geography, arts, and contemporary politics. Each entry takes the form of a poem written in response to a particular subject, followed by a brief explanation. Huang Zunxian’s entry on no (1981, 196; 1968, 222) reads as follows:

Sarugaku is also called sangaku. It is also commonly called no. After another transformation, it became dengaku. [...] The head of a troupe of actors is called dōyū, next come the waki performers, comic rolls, kyōgen performers, and the singers, or jiutai. Many phrases originate from Buddhism. The appearance [of the performers] is similar to that of prostitute-actresses.

This passage is followed by a description of musical instruments used in no performances. In the context of a description of the stringed instrument known as the bōwa, Huang again refers to sarugaku (1968, 227):

What is called sarugaku is actually men singing and dancing, dressed in ladies’ clothing. It started at the time of Hōjō, and became popular during the Muromachi period. Toyotomi Hideyoshi learned it in person. After that, royalty, nobles, and the like all powdered their faces, applied rouge, and imitated actors.

Huang does not reveal how he came by this information. Many of the points he makes regarding sarugaku are misleading; some are grossly inaccurate. The first statement above gives the impression that sarugaku, sangaku, and no are interchangeable terms for one and the same art form. In fact, each of these three terms had its own independent uses in the course of history. For instance, by the Meiji period – when Huang published his book – the terms no and nōgaku had come into common use. His explanation of dengaku as derived from no is also misleading. We can find historical records of dengaku-no and sarugaku-no as two different types of no – rather than one being a derivative of the other – which were performed simultaneously and competitively. Also, Huang’s identification of the waki, in combination with his failure to identify the protagonist, or shīte, shows the inadequacy of his knowledge about the art form he was trying to summarize.

Huang’s comparison of performers to prostitute actresses and his descriptions of rouged and powdered faces have no basis whatsoever in fact. The shīte performer in the majority of no performances wears a mask, rather than makeup. Even in the case of the unmasked waki performers and shīte roles which do not require a mask, the performers must always reveal their unadorned features, free from powder or rouge.
Given the inaccuracy of Huang’s claims, and the fact that there are no precise references in his book to specific occasions, whether he even saw a performance of no during his four-year stay in Japan remains questionable. Since he does not state how he came by this information, we are left to wonder what led him to his conclusions. It is difficult to assess the damage done by the publication of such misleading reports. Certainly the Chinese who had access to Huang’s book far outnumbered those who had actually attended no performances. Those who may have had subsequent opportunities to see no are likely to have been prejudiced by Huang’s remarks.

A literary man sympathetic to kyōgen
The accounts of another Chinese traveller appear to be more firmly grounded in first-hand experience. Zhou Zuoren (1885-1967) was a well-known writer who travelled to Japan in 1906 at the age of twenty-one and stayed until 1911. He was renowned not only as a brother of the author Lu Xun (1881-1936), but also for his translations, and his active engagement in the modern literary movement (Peng 1994, 1019-1022). While in Japan, besides doing translation work with his brother, he also studied at Rikkyō University in Tokyo.

Zhou would later publish a kyōgen translation, entitled Kuangyan shifan (Ten kyōgen plays, 1926),11 in Beijing. In the preface, he says, ‘kyōgen is what I fundamentally like.’ He adds: ‘this little book is not for the study of kyōgen. My abilities are not even sufficient to undertake such an endeavour [...] The only reason I translated these kyōgen pieces is because they are interesting and fun. I hope the readers will also find them interesting’ (p. 3).

The translation of each play in the book is followed by explanatory notes, including commentary and background information, and sometimes historical data on kyōgen. In one of his explanatory sections, Zhou contrasts the characteristics of no with those of kyōgen (p. 55):

Expressions used in no are magnificent, employing many set phrases, depicting heroism, and promoting Buddhist virtues. Kyōgen, which makes use of the colloquial language of its time, depicts absurdities and instances of foolishness in society. Officials and masters in kyōgen are all crude; priests are quite corrupt, and ghosts and supernatural beings are also tricked and cheated. It is exactly the opposite of no. Its humour is very naive and simple.

Zhou’s impressions of a no performance may be found in Shichiri Jūkei’s essay, ‘Onō o mitaru shina jin no inshō’ (Impressions of a Chinese who saw a no performance), published in his 1926 book, Yōkyoku to genkyoku(Yōkyoku and yuanqu). According to Shichiri, Zhou Zuoren, by then a professor at Beijing University, had seen a no performance during his previous stay in Japan and had written the following account in one of his essays:

The developmental process of Japanese drama is generally very similar to that of China. However, the process by which it became a mainstream performing art – due to its political and religious associations, specifically, its role as a ceremonial art of the bakufu – froze its cultural development at a certain period of time; for five hundred years from that moment up to the present time, the artistic form of the original was preserved. This is what is called nōgaku. In Japan too it is a special art; however, if we see it from a Chinese perspective, it is even more meaningful. This is because through nōgaku we may make inferences about [Chinese] dramatic forms during the time before Yuan drama.12 Something which,
by contrast, already became extinct in China a long time ago, was preserved overseas. Of course, it more or less went through a process of Japanese nationalistic naturalization, due to the religious thought which flourished in Japan and specific Japanese artistic characteristics. Nevertheless, Japanese traditional and contemporary 素 and 能, the so-called tragic dramas and comedies, are all sworn brothers of Chinese ancient drama, and in them we can find much similarity. [Shichiri 1926, 3-4] 13

In this statement, Zhou claims that the art form has a Chinese pedigree, and that its historical value lies in the assumption that it is a preserved version of a pre-Yuan original. Despite the generally positive tone of his remarks, the references to the Japanese role in developing 素 as a cultural property sound pejorative and condescending. Zhou reduces Japanese influences on the art to a ‘nationalistic naturalization.’ He implies that 素 was appropriated and its development ‘frozen’ for five centuries.

Nonetheless, Zhou Zuoren was enthusiastic about finding similarities between 素 and Chinese traditional drama. He offers no specific evidence to support his assumption that the two theatrical forms are kin to each other. As for 能, he is content to take pleasure in its simplicity and likable humour, but he does not try to grasp its role as a constituent part of the totality of a 素 performance. Nor does he account for it in the context of his hypothesis of a common ancestry of Chinese and Japanese classical theatre.

Yang Banshan’s poems on 粉墨
Yang Banshan14 is another figure who commented on the similarities between 素 drama and Chinese drama, specifically Jingxi (Beijing Opera).15 He was a regular contributor to 粉墨く子 (Yōkyoku;16 a monthly magazine devoted to communication among 粉墨 circles in Japan. (Yōkyoku refers to the text of 素 libretti. The chanting of 粉墨 has been widely practised among non-professionals throughout the history of 素.)17 In one of his articles, Yang Banshan introduces himself as a native of Tianjin, and a 粉墨 lover who has lived in Takamatsu, the capital city of Kagawa prefecture on Shikoku island, for a long time. After this brief self-introduction, he states that he is not a specialist on the drama of his native nation. Nevertheless, he repeatedly refers to role types of Beijing Opera, and then builds on these descriptions by comparing each role type to its nearest equivalent in the 素 canon. For example, he compares the zhengsheng (male) role in Beijing Opera to the 粉墨 role of the 素 play, Tadanori (a warrior play); that of laosheng (old male) to the 粉墨 of Sanemori (also a warrior play: the warrior, Sanemori, is depicted as a old man); and wusheng (martial male figure) to the 粉墨 of Funabenken (a play in the fifth category: the 粉墨 in the second act is a defeated martial figure). Then follows a comparison of role types of Beijing Opera with 素 masks (Yang 1925, 69-71). Yang himself confesses that his description of Beijing Opera in relation to 素 is not at all systematic (p. 71). Like Zhou Zuoren, he was intrigued by the idea that 素 shared similarities with a Chinese dramatic form, but he did not endeavour to clarify why this was the case.

Between 1925 and 1926, Yang Banshan wrote poems about his impressions of individual 素 plays, and under the title of ‘Yōkyoku zatsuei’ (Miscellaneous poetry on 粉墨) contributed a set of four poems to almost every issue of Yōkyoku, based on plays he had read. It appears his interest was mainly in 粉墨 libretti: the focus is on
the textual (rather than visual or performative) content of the play. For Yang, yōkyoku is an independent organism able to live detached from the other constituent parts of no performance, and the study and practice of yōkyoku, a worthwhile end in itself. In this sense, he is like many of his contemporaries among Japanese yōkyoku enthusiasts.

One student’s observations on Japanese theatre
Huang Zunsan (1883-1927) was one of the first students chosen to be sent to Japan with public support by the Hunan provincial government. He arrived in Japan in June of 1905. During his more than seven years in Japan, he studied at Kō bun Gakuen (Kō bun Academy),18 Waseda University, and Meiji University, from which he graduated with a law degree. He kept a detailed diary of these seven years. There is only one entry in which he refers to the experience of going to see a play and gives his general impressions of Japanese theatrical forms. This entry (Huang Zunsan 1986, 166), dated 5 January 1909, states:

Invited by a friend, I went to see a Japanese play at a theatre in Hongō.19 The stage background was simple and rough, characteristics representative of Japanese tastes. Much tragedy, little comedy. The pronunciation was gloomy and unclear. Only because of the accompaniment of the shamisen [a three-stringed Japanese banjo] could I keep listening. Other [theatrical forms] such as realistic drama, because they give great consideration to human expression, are very similar to Western modern drama. Neither traditional nor modern drama use gongs or drums; whereas in the traditional theatre shamisen and biwe are used, in modern drama, there is only movement and the spoken word.

The number of Chinese studying in Japan peaked during the period of Huang’s stay. Huang and other Chinese visitors had crossed the ocean not to study Japan, but to study Western culture from a safe distance.

New theatre in Japan
It is important to note that many Chinese students would eventually express greater interest in the Western-inspired works of the Tsukiji shōgekijō (Tsukiji little theatre). The Tsukiji shōgekijō, founded in 1924, was the first theatre built in Japan to produce modern dramas. It was the original centre for the shingeki (literally, new drama) movement, which attempted to create a theatre of Realism as exemplified by the works of Ibsen, Chekhov and Gorky, among others. Shingeki tried to break away completely from the influence of traditional Japanese theatre. Zhen Hua, who studied in Japan from 1933 to 1937, recalls: ‘At that time, [...] the Tsukiji shōgekijō was the place we, the progressive Chinese students, frequented. There we saw many Japanese shingeki and European modern plays performed in Japanese’ (Jinmin chūgoku zasshi sha 1982, 133). Another student, who stayed in Japan from 1928 to 1930, recalls: ‘I often went to the Tsukiji shōgekijō with friends from the Leftist Artists’ Association’ (p. 88).20

In this light, it is perhaps apt that Meiji Japan was the site of the first performance of modern Chinese drama. In 1906 the Spring Willow Society (Chunliu she) was established
A scene from *John Gabriel Borkman* by Henrik Ibsen (translated by Mori Ōgai), performed at the Tsukiji shōgekizyō, September, 1924. From the collections of the Tsubouchi Memorial Theatre Museum, Waseda University.

by Chinese studying in Japan who would later become leading figures in the development of modern drama in their native country. Their first production, *Chahuanü* – adapted from two acts of Alexandre Dumas’s *La Dame aux Camélias* – was staged in 1907 (Ma 1994, 36). They received guidance from Fujisawa Asajirō (1866-1917), a leading figure in the new theatre movement in Japan, and founder of *Tokyo hatyū yōsei jo* (Tokyo School for Actors’ Training). The Spring Willow Society’s second production, an adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (*Hei-nu yu tianlu*), followed in June. Osanai Kaoru (1881-1918), theatre critic and leading modern dramatist in Japan, who would later found the renowned Tsukiji Little Theatre, attended this performance and praised it in a review (Ge 1997, 12).

Just as Chinese students of natural and social sciences learned about Western advances in these fields through Japanese sources, the pioneers of modern Chinese drama learned about modern Western theatre conventions from their Japanese counterparts, pioneers in modern Japanese drama.

The theatre reform led by those Chinese dramatists was a direct reflection of the larger prevailing need for social reform in China. For Chinese intellectuals of this period, social reform was a common goal in all pursuits, and theatre was no exception (Ma 1994, 37). To modernize China, and thereby regain international status, the study and appropriation of Western knowledge was considered primary. Traditional systems of knowledge, including Confucian precepts, had to be rejected, or so it was argued. Japanese traditional theatre was perceived more as an obstacle than an aid to the development of such an idea, and the use
of nō by Japanese high officials to promote a Japanese national identity held little appeal for Chinese theatre reformists who, like their countrymen specializing in medicine and law, were there to learn about the West.

Conclusions
For Chinese who came to Japan at the beginning of the twentieth century, traditional Japanese theatre forms such as nō held little interest. They were perceived either as offspring of Chinese traditional drama, or as simply irrelevant. Though some, such as Yang Banshan, favoured yōkyoku, few shared his enthusiasm. The historical and cultural relationships between China and Japan prior to the modern period – informed by two millennia of Chinese cultural dominance – coupled with Chinese interest in Western culture, were arguably the principal factors contributing to this lack of interest. Chinese visitors viewed Japan as an expedient path to Western knowledge, while discounting the worth of cultural properties native to Japan. This is exemplified by the attraction they felt to the Tsukiji Little Theatre, preferring it over traditional forms, and underestimating the intrinsic aesthetic merits of nō.

The evolving cultural relationship between Japan and China during this period is a fertile arena for discussing what Lidia Liu calls 'institutional practices and the knowledge/power relationships that authorize certain ways of knowing while discouraging others’ (Liu 1995, 3). The popular Chinese slogan of the 1890s went: ‘zhongxue wei ti, xiuxue wei yong’ (Chinese learning for the essential principles; Western learning for the practical applications). Japan is nowhere to be found in this equation, even though it was the destination of the vast majority of Chinese seeking Western knowledge. Japan’s sudden military advancement made it worthy of study, but did not merit cultural legitimacy in the eyes of its traditional cultural parent. It was merely a more approachable 'West.' The paucity of records of Chinese visitors’ responses to nō during this period is itself a testament to how Chinese people’s views were shaped by their political and cultural milieu. The inaccuracies, misunderstandings and omissions of those that did witness nō – or at least wrote about it – may be better understood in the light of the evolving cultural relationship between the two countries, and the immanent, silent influence of the Western imperial powers.

NOTES

1 According to H. Paul Varley, Japan sent a total of four missions to China during the Sui Dynasty (581-618), and fifteen during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). See Varley (1984, 21).
2 Japan’s policy of national seclusion was completed in 1639. Japanese trade and foreign relationships were limited to the Netherlands, Korea (under the reign of the Li dynasty, 1392-1910) and China (under the reign of the Ming dynasty, 1368-1644, followed by that of the Qing,1644-1911). The relationship with Korea was maintained through the daimyō (feudal lord) of the Tsushima (the island located east of Nagasaki and south of Korea) domain.
3 The number of Chinese students in Japan rose to about two hundred in 1899, one thousand in 1903, thirteen hundred in 1904, roughly eight thousand by the end of 1905, and thirteen thousand or more
in 1906” (Fairbank and Reischauer 1989, 394). Sanetó Keishú refers to a record listed in Liu dong wai shí (A history of studying abroad in the East), stating that there were over ten thousand students who went to study in Japan in 1915. He also alluded to Liu dong wai shí bu (A supplement to a history of studying abroad in the East), which states that there were almost twenty thousand students in the same year (Sanetó, 1939, 3-4).

4 According to the records of the Chinese Department of Education, in 1931, 303 students (7 official, 296 at their own expense) were studying in Japan after having received certificates to study abroad. This compares with 146 (22 official and 124 at their own expense) in the U.S.A., 138 in France, and 67 in Germany. There were all together 425 students studying in countries other than Japan. However, if we consider the Japanese registry of Chinese students studying in Japan in that same year, there are 1,421 names. See Sanetó (1939, 37-40).

5 The year 1887 (Meiji 20) marked the last publication in Japan of a Western book translated from the Chinese language. After this publication, Japan stopped depending on China as its cultural mediator. See Sanetó (1939, 65). During the period between 1902 and 1904, under the auspices of a group of professional translation organizations in China, about 533 types of books were translated from foreign languages into the Chinese language and published. Among those, 321 types – over sixty percent – were translated from Japanese sources. See Wu (1997, 92).


7 The plays presented were Momiji gari, Yochi soga, and Tsuchigumo. See Kurata (1997, 124-25).

8 The Hōjō family served as regents to the Kamakura (1192-1333) bakufu (shogunal government) for generations.

9 For further discussion of the historical development of the use of these three terms, sarugaku, sangaku, and nō, see Omote and Amano (1987, 6-8).

10 For further discussion, see Omote and Amano (1987, 27-29).

11 The ten plays he translated are Koppi, Obogasake, Setsubun, Nariagarimonono, Hanako, Konusubito, Kakiyamabushi, Kaminari, Dobukacchiri, and Nō.

12 Yuan zaju (Yuan drama) was a particular performance genre of the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368). According to James R. Brandon, “[B]y the time the Ming dynasty [1368-1644] fell in 1644, zaju was no longer performed at all and it survives only as a genre of literature” (1993, 30).

13 Shichiri does not provide information on the source of this essay.

14 Little background information is known on Yang Banshen.

15 Jingxi is also known as Jingju. In English, it is also called Peking opera.

16 Yōkyokukai (1925-1926, vols. 23 - 24). Yōkyokukai was first issued in 1914 by Maruoka Katsura.

17 For further discussion of the practice of the chanting of yōkyoku, see Omote (1979, 278-303).

18 Kōbun gakuin was established in 1902 with the purpose of providing basic education for Chinese students who came to study in Japan. It was closed in 1909. See Sanetó (1939, 101-2).

19 Hongō is in the current Bunkyō ward of Tokyo. The area used to be called Hongō ward.

20 The Leftist Artists’ Association was established in 1928 by Chinese students studying in Japan. The founders included Xia Yan and Xu Huazhi, among others.

21 After China’s defeat in the Opium War (1840-1842) and the consequent opening of its doors to the imperial powers, the country experienced a chain of disastrous events that extended from the mid-nineteenth into the early twentieth century. These included defeat in the Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895); a failed reform movement (1898); the failure of an anti-foreign power movement that resulted in the formation of a semi-colonized state (1900); the humiliating effect on China of the Russo-Japanese war (1904-1905); and the massive student demonstration against the treaties drawn up by the imperial powers at Versailles, at the end of World War I (1919). All played indispensable parts in changing socio-political and cultural conditions as China continued its movement towards the formation of a modern culture that offered alternatives to traditional (Confucian) values.
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A HYBRID-POPULAR MUSICAL THEATRE OF KOREA

Ch’anggŭk

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Korea, unlike its neighbours China and Japan, did not have a tradition of professional, indoor theatre before the twentieth century. For a long time the country lacked a substantial merchant class who might have made such a theatre possible. But Korea did have various indigenous performing genres with theatrical elements, notably the musical storytelling genre p’ansori. In the early twentieth century, the singing style and the traditional stories of p’ansori were combined with Western theatrical conventions to create a new hybrid-popular theatre genre: ch’anggŭk. The western influences were largely indirect, and due to Japan’s colonial presence: Japan had exported its own popular interpretation of Western melodrama, shimpa (‘new school’) to Korea, and with it the notion of commercial indoor theatre. This article traces the subsequent fate of ch’anggŭk in Korea. The genre had to compete with early cinema and with changing popular tastes. Before it was even five years old, its exponents already began to refer to it as ‘old drama’ in a bid to stress its native traditional roots.

‘Hybrid-Popular Theatres in Asia’ was the theme of a series of panels at the conference ‘Audiences, Patrons and Performers in the Performing Arts of Asia,’ hosted by the European Foundation for Chinese Music Research (CHIME) and the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) at Leiden University, the Netherlands, on August 23–27, 2000.1 In the call for proposals, the panel convenor, Hanne de Bruin, had suggested the term ‘hybrid-popular theatres’ as a name for the novel forms of theatre that arose in many parts of South and Southeast Asia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as a result of ‘direct and indirect contacts between indigenous expressive genres and Western, melodramatic performance conventions and proscenium stage techniques, which were “imported” into Asia during colonial times.’ She further noted that ‘The emergence and rise to popularity of the hybrid-popular theatres appears to have been stimulated by the demand among local audiences for “novelty”,’ and that ‘For their revenues, the hybrid-popular theatres depended on the new convention of ticket sales and on the exploitation of a newly emerging “performance market”. Their grounding in a commercial base distinguished them from earlier theatres, which depended on community or royal patronage.”

I was immediately struck by the applicability of this description to my own primary area of research, the Korean opera form ch’anggŭk.2 I also noticed that Northeast Asia had not been mentioned, no doubt because the region was not colonised by European powers
and the touring ‘Parsi companies’ that helped spread hybrid-popular theatre outwards from its origins in India did not travel that far afield. But Korea had its own experience of colonisation, under a highly Westernised Japan, and it was largely through that experience that a country without theatres came to develop a form of drama closely matching Dr. de Bruin’s description of hybrid-popular theatre. Though this art form arose without the direct influence of the broader hybrid-popular theatre movement in South and Southeast Asia, much less of Western theatre itself, it reproduced the defining characteristics of that movement in a separate but parallel development.

Thus, in Korea too, hybrid-popular theatre arose through contact between an indigenous expressive genre and Western theatrical conventions imported by a colonial power. In that the colonial power was Japan rather than a Western country, the contact was indirect; but this was also true of the many parts of Asia whose hybrid-popular theatre forms were inspired by touring ‘Parsi companies.’ In Korea, too, the new theatre form was at first designed to meet audience demand for novelty. It aimed to exploit a newly emerging performance market through the new convention of ticket sales, which distinguished it from the earlier dependence on community and royal patronage. In parallel with this transformation of the relationship between performer and audience, it transformed an indigenous performing art into a type of melodrama. The indigenous art form was the musical storytelling genre p’ansori, and the hybrid-popular theatre style that emerged was ch’angguk, or drama with p’ansori-style singing.

In describing the origins and historical development of ch’angguk, I hope to contribute new information to the discussion of hybrid-popular theatre in Asia by presenting a genre that is little known outside its country of origin, and that will perhaps reveal striking parallels with equivalent developments elsewhere despite a lack of direct influence. The parallels may suggest generalisable patterns in the encounter between Western-style performance conventions and non-Western performing arts, while the differences will reflect the specific histories of the societies and art forms involved.

**Theatre before Theatres**

It is perhaps necessary first to explain that Korea, unlike its neighbours China and Japan, did not have a tradition of professional, indoor theatre before the twentieth century. It did have various indigenous performing arts with more or less pronounced theatrical elements, including puppet plays (kkoktugaksi), masked dance dramas (t’alch’um), improvised comical dialogues (chaedam), staged entertainments for the royal court (sandaen nori), and the ‘motley crew’ (chapsaeck) that appeared as a sideshow with farmers’ percussion bands (nongak or p’ungmul). Also, the musical storytelling genre p’ansori that was to provide the main source for the new hybrid-popular theatre was itself ‘dramatic’ insofar as the storyteller would periodically take on the identity of one of the characters and pour out that character’s emotions in song, sometimes adding mimetic movements and gestures and addressing the accompanying drummer as if he were another character in the scene. But none of these genres was the equivalent of Peking opera or kabuki in the elaboration of theatrical resources and conventions, nor did they possess the permanent, enclosed theatrical spaces that could enable those resources to accumulate. The most plausible explanation for this is probably, as p’ansori scholar Marshall Pihl suggests, that
A scene at the Underwater Palace of the Dragon King in a 1995 ch’anggŭk production at the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts (Kungnip Kugagwŏn). Photo: Jean-Marc Leenders.

since commercial activity was relatively little developed there, Korea did not have the substantial merchant class whose disposable income and leisure time made professional theatre viable in China and Japan, as indeed in the West (Pihl 1994:21).

At the top of Korea’s hierarchical social system was the royal court and aristocracy (yangban) who could afford to hire full-time performers to entertain themselves and their guests alone. Somewhat below this level of affluence, patrons could summon professional entertainers to perform occasionally in their homes. Among the common people, itinerant entertainers performed outdoors in the village square (madang), where it was impossible to control admission, and patronage was communal rather than individual. It was in the latter setting that the musical storytelling tradition of p’ansori developed, though it later acquired elite patronage and, finally, the modern middle-class support that would permit its theatrical transformation into ch’anggŭk.

In p’ansori, the storyteller uses a mixture of speech, song, and gesture to narrate and elaborate upon episodes from a small number of well-known tales, to the accompaniment of a small barrel-shaped drum, puk. While the origins of p’ansori lie hidden in the mists of oral tradition, it was clearly a well-established genre by the time the first written references to it appeared in the mid-eighteenth century. During the nineteenth century, the audience for p’ansori gradually expanded from its original base among the villagers of Chŏlla Province in the southwest, to the point where it transcended virtually all regional and social barriers within Korea. By the 1860s p’ansori was enjoyed by the most powerful man
in Korea, the Regent Taewon'gun, and generous elite patronage was attracting p'ansori singers away from Cholla Province to the capital, Seoul. This created a pool of performers experienced in declamation and dramatic projection who would form the first theatrical companies when theatres themselves eventually appeared in Seoul.

**Theatres and the new Theatre**

In 1876, King Kojong reluctantly signed a trade treaty with Japan, the first of a series of unequal treaties with the major powers that initiated Korea's gradual incorporation into the modern world order. Slowly at first but with increasing decisiveness, Western-style reforms came to many areas of Korean life through missionary activity, through the growing Japanese presence that would lead to colonisation in 1910, and through a sense among educated Koreans that they would need to learn some things from the West if only for their own protection.5

One symptom of this sweeping social change was the advent of theatres. British traveller Isabella Bird Bishop reported seeing a Japanese theatre in Seoul in 1894, but stated that there were no theatres open to Koreans (Bishop 1970 [1898]:43, 60). A few years later, however, the Seoul Electric Company, having completed its streetcar line through the city, appears to have opened a theatre of sorts near its generating station at the East Gate, where silent movies were shown as well as live performances.

American diplomat William Franklin Sands was evidently referring to this theatre when he described his own role in promoting the development of Korean drama. 'We had a very good play that night,' he writes, describing part of a wedding celebration in a rural village, 'so good that I brought it up to Seoul and installed it in a theatre, hoping to make a permanent thing of it and let it develop naturally to a native drama' (Sands 1987 [1930]:180). Sands does not reveal how this experiment turned out, but it is interesting that he expected the mere transplantation of an indigenous performing art into a theatre to be sufficient to transform that art into something that he would recognise as 'drama.' His description of the performance identifies the story as the well-known p'ansori tale of Ch'unhyang, the faithful wife, but is otherwise tantalizingly vague: 'The story is told descriptively on the stage, the actors illustrating it in pantomime accompanied by music' (ibid., p. 181). It seems clear, however, that the play lacked something essential to most Western conceptions of drama: dialogue. And we have no record that performances with dialogue were given in this theatre at least until a rather ambiguous newspaper report of 1907, by which time other important developments were afoot.6

The royal court had developed an interest in Western-style theatres, and when celebrations began to be planned for the fortieth anniversary of King Kojong's accession in 1902, a theatre seemed an appropriate symbol for the modern and progressive country that Korea aspired to be.7 A theatre called the Huidaem was built and a special office, the Hyomyulsa, was set up within the royal court to oversee its operation; performers were summoned, and foreign dignitaries were invited to attend the celebration. But while the planned festivities were beset by a series of difficulties, the Hyomyulsa quietly turned the theatre into a private commercial enterprise. Selling admission to the general public, they offered performances by court-employed kisaeng (female entertainers) and other artists including p'ansori singers, though these performers too appear to have gone little beyond
their traditional repertoire and techniques. In April 1906, a petition to the King called attention to this venal and opportunistic use of facilities provided at royal expense, and the theatre was closed down by royal decree.

Soon, however, other commercial theatres began to appear in Seoul. From 1907, the growing Japanese community was served by several theatres offering a popular Japanese interpretation of Western melodrama, known as shimpa or ‘new school’ in opposition to the ‘old school’ of kabuki. Among Koreans, too, a nascent merchant class began to provide an audience base for permanent theatres, and several Korean commercial theatres opened in 1907 and 1908. All of these employed p’ansori singers and other traditional performers, but professed the goal of ‘reforming’ traditional performing arts, and their staff must have been well aware of the more modern theatrical fare offered by their Japanese counterparts, and of the demand for novelty among their audiences.

Thus, all the essential ingredients were in place for the emergence of a hybrid-popular theatre form comparable with those which were already taking shape elsewhere in Asia. An indigenous narrative performing art (p’ansori) had been brought into commercial indoor theatres that sold tickets for admission to the general public, and a version of melodrama (shimpa) was available as a model for theatrical performance.

**The Birth of Ch’anggūk**

The catalyst that accelerated the reaction among all these elements was a man named Yi Injik (1862–1916), a writer and politician who had earlier introduced the modern novel to Korea, following Japanese models, with his **Hyŏl-ŭi nu** (Tears of Blood, 1906). While studying in Japan around the turn of the century, Yi Injik had become familiar with the popular shimpa melodramas. At that time, shimpa still bore traces of its earlier incarnation, the late nineteenth-century ‘political dramas’ (soshi geki) that were used for electioneering in the early days of Japanese democracy, and this may have led Yi Injik to see the stage as a suitable platform for his pro-Japanese political ideas.

With this in mind, in 1908 Yi Injik arranged for the re-opening of the royal theatre under the new name of Wŏn’gaksa or ‘circle theatre,’ a name referring to the shape of the building. Although the theatre had been closed two years earlier by order of King Kojong, Yi was able to re-open it without royal opposition because Kojong had been forced to abdicate under the increasingly high-handed Japanese Protectorate administration established in 1905, leaving his weak-willed son Sunjong as a puppet emperor.

Yi Injik must have realised that the p’ansori singers were the only available performers with dramatic skills that would be relevant to his objectives, while he was capable of writing in a style that would be familiar enough to them for performance in their accustomed mode of delivery, for he knew p’ansori well and had earlier translated one of the stories into Japanese. Accordingly, he wrote a novella called **Silver World** (Ŭnsegye), the first half of which was made to resemble the style of a p’ansori text so that it could be performed as a drama by a group of p’ansori singers at the Wŏn’gaksa. The story exposed the hopeless corruption (as Yi saw it) of Korea’s existing social order and thus, by implication, advocated the need for external intervention.

Borrowing another idea from shimpa, Yi Injik advertised the production as an example of sinyŏn’gūk or ‘new drama’ in contrast to the kuyŏn’gūk or ‘old drama’ of
traditional arts like p’ansori. He began instructing the p’ansori singers in the new dramatic techniques that would be needed to present Silver World on the stage. Meanwhile, to help defray expenses, the p’ansori singers performed episodes from their existing repertoire, gradually adopting the new theatrical mode of presentation that they were learning. These fundraising performances became the earliest presentations in ch’anggūk format of which any contemporary record survives.

We are fortunate enough to have a detailed account of one of these performances, written by one Major Herbert H. Austin who happened to visit the Wön’gaksa (which he called the Theatre Royal) during a week’s trip to Korea in October 1908:

Desirous of seeing Korean life in all its different aspects, we paid a visit after dinner to the Theatre Royal, close by, and derived no little entertainment from watching several acts of a Korean play, performed mainly by men and boys. The building in which it took place was one of some size, the seats in the body of the hall being raised in steps until they reached the level of the gallery or promenade, on which we had our seats in a private box on the right-hand side. There were four or five boxes on each side of the hall; those on the left, reserved for Korean ladies, being all full. Not understanding a word of the language, we were, of course, unable to fathom the plot— if there was one at all— though a gigantic paper or cardboard pumpkin, which was repeatedly being cut, seemed to be the chief cause of interest in this highly sensational drama. Most of the dialogue was chanted to the accompaniment of a drum played by a man on the stage, and from time to time supers strolled across the scene as though they regarded themselves as invisible for theatrical purposes. The music was by no means discordant, and the high falsetto voice so commonly heard in India appeared to be considered worthy of commendation in Korea, as applause occasionally broke out when a peculiarly high note had been successfully grappled with. If the end of each scene a red-and-white curtain, running along a wire, was pulled across the stage from one side, and a member of the company would come before the footlights and hold forth to the audience, whom he was apparently informing what might be expected in the scene about to follow. (Austin 1910:196-197).

Though Austin showed no awareness that he was witnessing something new to Korea, this passage is the earliest description of a ch’anggūk performance that has come to light, predating any surviving Korean source. It bears unmistakable references to both the repertoire and the singing style of p’ansori, while indicating that the performance was given by multiple singing actors in dialogue format, and that some degree of visual presentation was attempted. The reference to a ‘pumpkin, which was repeatedly being cut’ identifies the story as that of Hüğbo, one of the popular heroes of the p’ansori repertoire, and the drum that accompanies the singing is clearly the barrel drum puk that provides the sole instrumental accompaniment in p’ansori. The ‘member of the company’ who would ‘hold forth’ between the dramatised scenes is evidently the narrator or toch’ang, a device that probably arose when dialogue passages from the existing p’ansori texts were performed by two p’ansori singers taking the roles of the characters while a third was needed to deliver the passages of third-person narration. When stage scenery was added later, the narrator became a convenient device for holding the audience’s attention while the set was changed, and is still often seen in ch’anggūk today.
Dancers entertain the Dragon King and his guests at the Underwater Palace in a 1995 ch’anggūk production at the National Center for Korean Traditional Performing Arts (Kungnip Kugagwŏn). Photo: Jean-Marc Leenders.

This early incarnation of ch’anggūk was, then, already a hybrid in that it combined the repertoire and musical style of p’ansori with a form of theatrical presentation derived from Japanese shimp’a. While we have no detailed contemporary account of the production of Yi Injik’s Silver World the following month, drama historian Yi Tuhŏn believes that it, too, seems to have been done mostly in the shimp’a style [though] at some highlights of the play, for example, the scene of the hero’s persecution, the performer who played the role of the hero probably sang in the p’ansori style.11 And this new hybrid theatre form does appear to have been popular: one of the p’ansori singers involved, Yi Tongbaek, later recalled that enthused audience members had mobbed the actor who played the hero in Silver World and hung strings of cash around his neck.12

Despite this promising beginning, however, ch’anggūk was not able to secure a firm foothold for another thirty years. Yi Injik moved on to other interests, and no one was ready to step into his shoes. With the advent of actual shimp’a dramas performed by Korean troupes, as well as foreign silent movies with live interpreters (pyŏnsa), ch’anggūk was unable to compete for novelty value. Its exponents tried to appeal to the sense of tradition instead, and began calling it kuyŏn’gūk or ‘old drama’ before it was in fact even five years old. But those who wanted something traditional could still hear p’ansori and other indigenous performing arts. Ch’anggūk could not find a niche in the ‘performance market,’ and became mainly a matter of dramatised highlights from the p’ansori stories performed with minimal theatrical equipment by struggling itinerant variety troupes.13
**Ch'angguk Fully Fledged**

In the mid-1930s, ch'angguk experienced a revival and a new growth, partly in response to a growing perception that much Korean folk culture was threatened with extinction. P'ansori was among the traditions singled out as worthy of protection, leading to the formation in 1934 of a group of p'ansori singers and other traditional musicians, the Korean Vocal Music Association (Chosön Söngak Yön'guhoe), devoted to the refinement and perpetuation of their traditions through public performance and the training of successors.14

At the same time, while theatres were presenting either Japanese-style melodramas, imported movies, or the spoken realist dramas of the West, intellectuals began to hanker for a distinctively Korean form of theatre. This helped to create the atmosphere in which drama director Pak Chin would take an interest in the traditional p'ansori stories and produce adaptations of them using p'ansori singing as background music.15 It was not long after this that a group of p'ansori singers within the Korean Vocal Music Association formed their own troupe and began to give complete ch'angguk productions of stories from the p'ansori repertoire.

As this new ch'angguk began to attract a mass audience, its exponents found that the greatest popular success lay in the brand of emotional sensationalism that is commonly known as melodrama. The parent genre, p'ansori, certainly contained episodes of intense pathos, but leavened it with humour and a happy ending, and early ch'angguk, too (with the exception of the harrowing Silver World), seems to have stressed humour and scenes of rejoicing. But the new ch'angguk of the 1930s soon moved on from dramatisations of the p'ansori repertoire to newly composed ‘historical dramas’ (sagük) based on lachrymose legends of the remote past.

This tendency reached its peak soon after liberation from Japanese rule in 1945, with the advent of all-female troupes (yǒsǒng kǔkkǔktan) which have often been accused, justly or not, of sacrificing artistry to spectacle and cheap sentiment, and bringing the genre of ch'angguk into disrepute.16 It is perhaps no coincidence that the emotional escapism of melodrama was most pronounced in ch'angguk during the grim years of the late colonial period, the Korean War, and the aftermath of both. But despite this escapist appeal, by the early 1960s, a burgeoning domestic film industry had made it difficult for any form of live entertainment to attract an audience, and ch'angguk found itself once more on the verge of extinction, together with p'ansori itself.17

**Once a Hybrid...**

Help came in 1962, when p'ansori became one of the first genres to be earmarked for government support under the new Intangible Cultural Assets legislation, while ch'angguk received encouragement from the creation of a National Ch'angguk Troupe. Five years later, a Committee for the Establishment of Ch'angguk (Ch'angguk Chōngnip Wiwŏnhoe) was set up under the auspices of the National Ch'angguk Troupe with the objective of moving ch'angguk away from its earlier pandering to popular appeal and closer to its p'ansori roots.18

The subsequent history of ch'angguk is that of an ongoing attempt to ‘invent a tradition’ of Korean opera that can mediate between these two extremes, audience appeal
and faithfulness to *p’ansori*. One phase of that history seems particularly worthy of comment in concluding this historical overview of Korea’s hybrid-popular theatre. The effort to bring *ch’anggūk* closer to *p’ansori* at first stressed the use of traditional *p’ansori* texts, music, and performance techniques as far as possible intact on the *ch’anggūk* stage. But in the 1980s, director Hŏ Kyu took this one step further and tried to recreate *p’ansori’s* traditional performance setting and performer-audience relationship within the walls of the National Theatre. By using such devices as a projecting stage and direct audience address, while keeping the stage scenery stylised and suggestive rather than illusionistic, Hŏ sought to negotiate what he called a new ‘contract’ (*yaksok*) between performers and audience that would recapture the free-and-easy interaction characteristic of the *madong* or village square in which *p’ansori* would traditionally have been performed (Song Hyejin 1987:239).

It eventually became clear, however, that audiences at the National Theatre were not comfortable with the level of active participation that was expected of them, and drama critic Sŏ Yŏnho pointed out that Hŏ’s efforts were undermined from the start by the use of a building designed for a ‘frame’ stage with a proscenium arch.¹⁹ In the 1990s, the National Ch’anggūk Troupe has largely abandoned such experiments and embraced Western realist production values.

A hundred years of commercial theatre, it seems, has produced a bourgeois economy of performance in which production is separated from consumption and the customer expects a finished product for a fixed price. *Ch’anggūk* took many things from *p’ansori*, but its relationship to its audience is still essentially that of melodrama, and Hŏ Kyu’s heroic failure reveals that there is no return from the popular to the folk, from the hybrid to the thoroughbred.

### NOTES

¹ The present article is a revised version of the paper I presented at this conference, ‘*Ch’anggūk*: A Hybrid-Popular Theatre of Korea.’

² My research and writing on *ch’anggūk* over the past seven years has been supported in part by a Dissertation Research Grant from the Joint Committee on Korean Studies of the Social Science
Killick: Ch’anggūk: a hybrid-popular musical theatre of Korea

Research Council and the American Council of Learned Societies, a Dissertation Writing Fellowship from the University of Washington, and a First Year Assistant Professor Award from The Florida State University.

An excellent overview of the Parsi companies and their influence is contained in Cohen 2001.

A detailed discussion of p’ansori and its history can be found in Pihl 1994. The treatment of ch’anggūk in this book, however, is based on unreliable secondary sources and has been superseded by more recent research, notably Paek Hyŏnmi 1997 and Killick 1998a.

A useful study of this period in Korea’s history is Cumings 1997:86-138. Less scholarly but more vivid descriptions of the transformation of various aspects of Korean life are found in Yi Kyu-tae 1970.

The newspaper report (Mansebo, May 21, 1907) is quoted in Paek Hyŏnmi 1997:46.

For a meticulous study of this theatre, see Paek Hyŏnmi 1995.

It is known from contemporary newspaper reports that the Tasshōn-ga theatre opened in June 1907, followed by the Yŏnhūngsa in December 1907 and the Kwangmudae (a new incarnation of the earlier makeshift space operated by the Seoul Electric Company) in September 1908, while the Changansa opened at some unknown time in 1907 or 1908 (Paek Hyŏnmi 1996:17-18). There is some evidence, though inconclusive, to suggest that these commercial theatres made the first experiments in the ‘dramatisation’ of p’ansori by having excerpts from existing p’ansori narratives performed in dialogue fashion by two or more singers.

The description ‘pro-Japanese’ (chinil) applied to Yi Injik and people of similar views acquired a stigma during and after the colonial years which it would be anachronistic to bring to bear on earlier periods, as is often done in the Korean literature. At the turn of the century, progressive Koreans recognised that Korea could protect its interests in the modern world-order only by reforming along lines laid down by more powerful countries. They formed factions advocating the emulation of, and collaboration with, one or another foreign power (for instance, Russia, China, or the United States), of which the Japanese-oriented faction was one. Members of all these factions believed themselves to be serving the best interests of their country rather than betraying it to the enemy. On the ‘new-school’ and ‘political’ dramas of Japan, see Bowers 1952:208-212; Ernst 1974:249-252.

The second half of the story, which deals with events much later in time, was written in Yi Injik’s usual ‘new novel’ style. It is therefore assumed that only the first half was performed as ch’anggūk, and that Yi Injik hoped it would lead audience members to purchase and read his whole novel, which was published concurrently with the production. The text of Silver World is available in a modern edition: Yi Injik 1995. Contemporary sources on the theatrical production and surrounding events are examined in depth in Paek Hyŏnmi 1997:59-82. While Paek’s book is by far the best study of the history of ch’anggūk in Korean, and I have benefited immensely from her unearthing of primary materials, the fact that she did not consult any non-Korean sources results in some differences between her account of the genre’s origins and mine.

This statement is from an interview quoted in Kim Woo-ok 1980:196 (Kim’s translation).

Yi Tongbaek was recalling the events more than thirty years later in an interview for Ch’unch’u magazine, March 1941 (quoted in Ch’oe Wŏnsik 1978:304).

This period in ch’anggūk’s history is traced through abundant contemporary sources in Paek Hyŏnmi 1997:91-198.


The only published article in English on these all-female ch’anggūk troupes is Killick 1997. They are described in Korean in the memoirs of one of their leaders (Hong Sŏngdŏk 1996:135-155) and
17 On the growth of the Korean film industry, see Lee Young-il 1988:83-142.  
18 For a detailed study of the National Ch’anggŭk Troupe and its productions, see Paek Hyŏnmi 1997:357-404.  

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SANDS, William Franklin 1987 At the Court of Korea. London: Century Hutchinson Ltd. First published 1930 as Undiplomatic Memories.


This is Dr. Laurence Picken’s valedictory volume, containing general observations on his life’s opus in reconstructing ancient Chinese music. It is the epilogue to six fascicles of stave transcriptions, from mediaeval Japanese instrumental tablatures, edited by Picken and prepared by his erstwhile Cambridge ‘pupils’, principally Rembrandt Wolpert, and Allan Maret. The first volume of the series, which provides an essential introduction to Picken’s methodology, was published by Oxford University Press in 1981. Here I will only attempt to sketch its main relevance to Picken’s contributions to the study of Chinese music, as I perceive it.

Picken’s observations and speculations on music history span longitudinally the Eurasian continent, extending latitudinally from Bali to Japan, and temporally from early Babylonia to modern times. The number and complexity of topics covered is far beyond the competence of this review to evaluate or even comprehensively summarise. I shall instead attempt to deal with core themes which have particular significance for the study of Chinese music, and its continuing evolution. Picken’s purpose was not merely theoretical. He aspired to the resurrection of authentic ancient music, of which the highpoint was probably the performance of Picken’s transcriptions, with the assistance of Noël Nickson, by the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, under Chen Yingshi in 1990.

As a natural scientist, Picken demonstrated keen interest in structural form. Thus, Picken early perceived that the bare sequences of notes, as they stand in mediaeval Japanese mouth-harmonica tablatures, constitute melodies in themselves. Yet, in ritualised Gagaku practice, these notes are merged as exotic ‘chords’. Picken further realised that a minimum tempo is required for the ear to connect sequential notes as melody. At the ‘frozen tempo’, employed by Japan’s imperial ensemble, no such connection could be audially detected. Instead, the accompanying mouth-harmonicas play phrases as simultaneous chords, while strings and woodwind insert unscripted ornamentation as fillers. The melodic profiles, attested from the revered but neglected tablatures, thus become buried in performance. The received wisdom of the players insists on placing oral tradition above written evidence.

Picken, on the other hand, concluded that the ancient tablatures preserve, not merely skeletal versions, but original melodies, still intact and playable as written. This is substantiated by historical accounts of which pieces were performed at a given ceremony, whose approximate duration is known, enabling a minimum tempo to be calculated. In addition, the physical constraints of song and dance, known to have been performed to given melodies, may help determine minimum tempo. Finally, confirmation may be obtained by tracing similar phenomena from other cultures. Picken’s underlying concern with the cross-cultural aspects of music, and its fundamentally shared principles, is illustrated by the wide-ranging topics broached in this volume. For example, Picken recapitulates
historical accounts of direct individual transmission of music from Lin Chengwu of Tang to the visitor Fujiwara Sadatoshi, his exalted Japanese pupil and son-in-law, in the ninth century. He cites Chinese dynastic records of the preceding Sui dynasty to verify adoption and adaptation by the Chinese court of a system of Sanskrit-named modes. Such evidence is necessary to counter the nationalist argument of those who would still claim immunity from universal principles, continuing to insist, even as these are eroded by modernisation, on the cultural exclusivity of their traditions.

A unifying pre-occupation of Pickens’s conceptual framework is squareness of rhythm. This is related to his interest in tetrachords, from the classical European tradition. He returns frequently to his 1956 and 1977 works on the scores of twelve ritual hymns, in two modes (Lydian fa; Mixo-Lydian sol), from the ancient ‘Book of Songs’, Poetry Classic, preserved by (Song) Zhu Xi. Pickens realised that these songs, in predominantly four-word lines, of one note per word, could be sung as lively melodies. (cf. vol. 5 p. 29 Guanji) This required abrogation of ritual conventions, such as drawing out notes, and pausing at line endings. This provided a model of musical measures of constant beat totals, matching constant four-word verse-lines, on the basis of one beat per word. Thus, words, beats and notes were correlated. He points to the hymn ending: ‘Myriad longevity without limit’ Wanshou wujiang, as a classic example of Chinese tetrachord: g-a-d-c, lacking the mediant major third.

Picken remarks that ‘the concept of the binary-beat is still today deeply embedded in Chinese ideas of rhythmic organisation.’ He came to regard Poetry Classic four-word lines, in couplet units, forming 8-beat musical measures. The 8-beat unit would offer additional possibilities of melodic phrasing, but only if the binary units are transcended. Yet Picken notes: ‘The famous baban type-tune is most simply defined in terms of ‘eight beats’, where each ‘beat’ is in fact a binary unit of two eighth-notes/qua vers (Stephen Jones, 1995, p. 145).’ (p. 264) Ba-ban, meaning ‘eight beats’, evidently defines the number of beats per measure. ‘Beat’ is comparable to bar, whether common duple time: quick whole-time; or slow four-time. It is binary only in the sense that quavers, crotchets and minims are binary. This does not define its roles in rhythmic phrasing.

Picken appears to acknowledge non-binary aspects, when he remarks, again of ba-ban, which: ‘exhibits both symmetrical division of the group of eight binary units into two groups of four, and asymmetrical division as three+two+three.’ He returns to 3-2-3 phrasing again on the next page, in an oblique criticism of the work of former pupil Jonathan Condit, who transcribed King Sejong’s fifteenth century Korean scores, which are explicitly ruled out in 3-2-3 grid patterns, into purely triple rhythms. Picken cautions, with almost mandarin inscrutability: ‘The possible occurrence of non-regular subdivision of a unit of eight, once widely distributed as a folk practice in East Asia, perhaps common to China, Korea and Japan, has to be born in mind.’ (pp. 75-76) Greater clarity might be obtained by the sincerely interested reader, if he were to consult this present humble reviewer’s own erstwhile treatments of these subjects. (e.g. Wells 1991-2: ‘Rhythm and Phrasing in Chinese Tune Title Lyrics (qupai)’, Asian Music, xxiii-1).

Sadly, we find scant mention of Korea elsewhere in this volume. Furthermore, eight-beat measures, of which we have noted perhaps the most salient examples, by no means characterise Chinese music in general. Indeed the concept of ‘measures’, as regularly
groups of bars ban, is itself obsolete in Chinese musical theory, and alien to most traditional musicians there, just as it may be in Europe. Still, as ‘musical line’ or ‘phrase’, its presence persists.

Support for Picken’s secular interpretation of Zhu Xi’s tunes comes from the lyric settings of contemporary poet-musician Jiang Kui (1155-1221), which also follow the basic one word per note formula, but contain lines of differing word totals. Picken rejects the standard view of Chinese musicians (and Ming Kunqu practice) which regards uneven lyric line-lengths as indicative of uneven musical line length. ‘This view on the part of Chinese observers is perhaps mistaken. The musical length of long and short song-text lines should more probably be the same.’ (p. 75) Picken thus assumes an equation between isometric measures and verse-lines, as in his 8-beat ritual scores. Here I will only caution against Picken’s failure to consider the possibility of overlap, between verse-line and musical measure.

Picken in 1966 transcribes all Jiang Kui lyric lines into 8-beat measures. Lee Hye-ku (‘Sung Dynasty Music Preserved in Korea and China’, Korean Studies, vol. 10, University of Hawaii) from Korea in 1986 transcribed certain of the songs in 6-beat measures, which Picken latterly conceded. Indeed, early Japanese and tenth century Dunhuang tablatures, as well as theorist Zhang Y’-n (1248-c.1314), all provide explicit evidence of 6-beat, as well as 4- and 8-, beat time signatures. While Picken accepted a mediaeval Chinese genre of 6-beat measures, as he acknowledged in adapting his lyric setting to my 6-beat transcription of West River Moon, from the Dunhuang pipa tablature, he continued to insist on strictly dupe phrasing throughout the setting, even when this meant splitting a dotted note. (Chime 10/11, 1997 p. 178, Fig. 2.) Picken transcribes the ‘6-beat’ liu-pai of ‘Broaching’ po (Music from the Tang Court; vol. 1, p. 65ff), as 3/2. Yet 3/2 is itself a triple rhythm.

The popular conception of Chinese thought exclusively in terms of yin-yang dualism runs deep. Interestingly Picken catches out a fellow Cambridge scientist and sinologue, the doyen Joseph Needham, at this very game. In Picken’s Envoi (p. 286), he quotes Science and Civilisation in China (1959 p. 82): ‘Sexagesimal fractions [...] never played any part in Chinese calculations [...] Chinese never contains a philologically unitary symbol for 2/3, that fraction so important in Mesopotamia.’ Picken counters, citing Lü Shi Chunqiu, 6, Yinlì, on generating the octave from a pitch-pipe by the cycle of fifths: ‘Rejecting one third of a pipe leaves us with two thirds: the Babylonian fraction. We return to arithmetic to the base 60 rather than arithmetic to the base 10. We are in the Old Babylonian world of the mid-second millennium BC. For the future, we have need to discover why the primarily sexagesimal world of Babylonian astronomy was also the world of harmonic ratio.’ So we too end, as we began, in Babel...

P.S. A personal ‘tail-sound’: I would like here to pay my small tribute to L.E.R.P. for his countless insights, inspiration and unflagging energy. Though not a ‘pupil’, I benefitted from his generosity and guidance. Despite unresolved differences over the setting, I shall always remember the warmth with which he thanked me for all the pleasure my rendering of West River Moon, with its amazing harmonic triads, had given him. Here spoke an aficionado. Wanshou wujian!

Marnix St.J. Wells

The study of music and ritual is a relatively recent trend in ethnomusicology and one that has yielded many different approaches (see introduction to Yung, Rawski & Watson 1996). Deborah Wong’s thoroughly researched book is another welcome addition to our understanding of this topic. The subject of her study is *wai* (‘to salute’) *khruu* (‘teacher’) - a Thai ritual honouring teachers of music and dance. Through the performance of this ritual, the spiritual power of the first, primordial teacher is transferred to present-day students. Only master performers, who have themselves been empowered by an earlier master, can initiate musicians and dancers as ritual performers. The *wai khruu* is thus a performance about performance. Indeed the author states in her preface that ‘The relationship between Thai ritual and performance is intimate and fundamental, and the reflexivity of ritual performance about performance is my focus in this study’ (xvii).

With that focus in mind, Wong chose to approach her study of *wai khruu* from the angle of performance theory. Wong employs the language of performance to decode action as action, by ‘addressing the construction of ritual performance and the performative in some detail’ (6), and to try to go beyond the textual framework which often underlies the practices of decoding analysis. Drawing on the performance approach that ritual is created from various kind of media – music, dance, spoken word – and how each of these media shapes ritual performance in specific ways, Wong aims to show how performative actions produce a culturally meaningful reality as opposed to simply reflecting or acting out the symbolic in ritual. This theoretical paradigm is combined with solid methodologies (extensive fieldwork, documentation, interviews, participant observation, etc) to make this musical/anthropological ethnography a stimulating study on ritual and music.

Toward the end of Chapter 1, Wong introduces the myth of the ‘Old Father’, a hermit who survived Shiva’s destruction and recreation of the universe and preserved all of Shiva’s music and dance. He became revered as the first teacher of these performing arts. In the *wai khruu* ritual, the officiant, an initiated master musician or dancer, spiritually transforms himself into a Brahmin by observing the Five or Eight Buddhist precepts. Toward the end of the ritual, the Brahmin-officiant calls the spirit of the ‘Old Father’ to enter him; this is accomplished when he dons the mask of the ‘Old Father.’ This transformation thus gives him direct power to empower other living artists. Wong interestingly puts forward emic views about the nature of the divine embodiment as seen in the officiant’s transformation to Brahmin and then to Hermit. But her preamble here, linking Western religio-anthropological theorization on the subject of spirit possession and bodily epistemologies of power, seemed unconvincing. In contrast, her return to the subject (Chapter 3) of the Teacher’s spiritual body and its link to the Buddhist concept of Merit, and to the emic discourse of knowledge and power as manifested in the officiant, is well set up and more persuasive. I will come back to this below.

In the second chapter, two contextually and socially different *wai khruu* rituals are described in great detail: preparations before the ritual itself, food offerings, ritual actions,
participant reactions, and so on. The first event, held at a Buddhist temple, is the largest *wai khruu* ceremony in Bangkok; the other was held at the Department of Music Education at Srinakharinwirot University where the author studied classical Thai music. This sets the scene of the *wai khruu* as a performance event and allows for discussion in subsequent chapters into the deeper meanings of the ritual and its media. The descriptions of these contrasting examples show how the ritual, with its threefold structure of inviting the deities, presenting them with offerings, and finally empowering and initiating participants, differs according to social status of those who attend, participants' behaviour, ambience, and experiences of spirit possession.

In Chapter 3 Wong explores the emotional and aesthetic significance of the *wai khruu* ritual through Thai indigenous concepts about knowledge. Here she returns to the subject of knowledge and power as manifested in the officiant as the Hermit. Wong turns her attention to the concepts of knowledge, teaching and Brahminism which in her view are central to the understanding of the significance of *wai khruu* ritual. She begins by recounting the traditional ties that bind a musician and his/her teacher. Traditional learning and teaching of this kind is similarly found throughout Asia. As elsewhere, the rise of a conservatory-style music education system has gradually replaced the traditional pupil-teacher relationship. Even within the new institutional teaching system, however, knowledge as power is still the key to *wai khruu* rituals; knowledge in turn implies access to spiritual efficacity, the mystic power of which is expressed via ritual means. The Hermit thus represents knowledge and power, and with these he continues to guide and empower contemporary performers. Much of the general Thai discourse about transmission of knowledge is also common to discourse about music. These elements, Wong suggests, are behind the beliefs that continue to drive Thai music and dance.

In this same chapter, Wong also points out that with the rise of institutionalised music education, young women have more freedom to play some instruments previously proscribed (although the sacred drum is still a taboo), and female students are initiated into higher levels of sacred repertoire in *wai khruu* rituals held by universities. Yet the musicians who perform professionally in *wai khruu* ceremonies are still predominantly male. While two women were initiated as officiants by their own fathers, who were highly respected master musicians and officiants, they are the exception rather than the norm. Wong takes the marginalization of the female gender in *wai khruu* rituals further in Chapter 7. Here, she describes the possession of three female dancers by the Old Father and examines the place of Thai women in Theravada Buddhism, their former importance at the royal court, and their potential as spirit mediums. In brief, this section highlights how class status, the patriarchal model established by the Thai monarchy in the early 20th century, and nation-state institutional authority continue to work strongly in Thai contemporary society to support a male-dominated *wai khruu* ritual.

Chapter 4 is (by the author's own admission) the most musicological section of this study. Wong's focus is not on the formal characteristics of the music; rather, she discusses the music in the way that Thai musicians perceive it. She addresses the questions of musical repertoire played in *wai khruu* rituals: its performative nature, categories within the repertoire, performance practice, and the different levels of the repertoire. Through her own learning process of the ritual repertoire, Wong feels she is able to give insight into
the way indigenous musicians are taught and to musical issues discussed. This chapter is perhaps the most illuminating section on ritual and music. The author's conscious effort to document emic concepts is commendable, but at times I feel she falls to take the readers further in understanding the meanings or efficacy of the music, avoiding the responsibility to provide objective analysis of the music and its meanings in ritual. Consider, for example, her discussion of the *Evening Overture*, which consists of up to twenty pieces. Wong tells us that the order of these pieces 'creates a series of performative acts strung together to form a bridge between two separate realms. It literally brings (or "invites") a series of Hindu deities and divine beings from the sacred realm down to ours...' (119). Here, she seems to suggest that the order of the pieces as they occur in performance is the agent that brings the deities to the ritual. Yet, the order of the pieces in the two *Evening Overtures* in the accompanying CD differ from each other and from the one set out in the main text (119-20). At one point, Wong's teacher explained to her that the total number of pieces and their lengths were not important: the *Overture* was equally efficacious whether played in its shortest or longest form. What was important was that all the right pieces were included (121). Does this then imply that the order of pieces is not so important after all and that what mattered was the inclusion of the 'right' pieces? Wong appears not to have questioned this, or if she did, she has failed to tell the readers. Wong also suggests that the *Evening Overture* is seen as a narrative: 'its actions describe a journey from the heavenly realm down to the human world' (120). She writes that her teacher Nikorn did not generally explain the meaning of the pieces unless she asked, although once he realized her interest, he had much to say about them. However, Wong did not elaborate further on her teacher's stated meanings, leading one to suspect that she considers them unimportant. Yet in Chapter 1 a passing quotation from a dance teacher seems to me to imply that the musical meanings helped effect the invocation or invitation of the deities. The dancer stated that the sacred piece *Phraam Khao* ('Brahmin enters') 'changes the officiant into a Brahmin and makes it possible for him to "replace" (choei) the Hermit later in the ceremony' (10).

In her conclusion to Chapter 4, Wong suggests that it is not only the sound of the sacred musical pieces but rather music in conjunction with sounded ritual texts that literally brings deities into the *wai khruu* ritual. In asking why ritual texts must be sounded and are further paired with musical sound, she finds a parallel with the Balinese *pepaosan*, a tradition of reading texts aloud in group gatherings where one person 'reads' the poetry and is shadowed by a second performer who translates or delivers a commentary on each of the poetic phrases. Wong notes that Southeast Asian poetry is generally meant for performing rather than silent reading. In Thailand in particular, she says, the potential of ritual texts 'is most fully realized when they are declaimed aloud' (132). In *wai khruu* rituals, each section of the officiant's text is paired with a particular musical piece. The pairing of text and music, in Wong's views, creates a performative whole.

In Chapter 5, Wong describes two ritual scripts written by two famous teachers. These documents show how ritual texts can be adapted by different officiants to suit contemporary needs and performance environments. As long as the basic elements of the ritual are not changed, the links with the past will not be severed. Change is further implied in efforts by institutions to canonize certain ritual texts. More issues of change are raised in the second half of Chapter 6, which examines the lineage of great *wai khruu* officiants and
the role of the monarchy. The greatest changes in the practice of wai khruu resulted from its movement out of the Thai court into more public settings with the establishment of the modern Thai state in 1932. Major and minor changes gradually followed the integration of classical dance and music into state-controlled school and university curricula. For example, a rise in student numbers means the initiation section of the ceremony now takes longer; consequently the invocation and offering sections must be shortened: the pantheon is diminished, the cosmology streamlined and musical repertoire reduced.

Wong offers further thoughts on change in her final chapter. The wai khruu has evolved considerably during the 20th century, yet its transformative function remains unchanged for Thai performers.

The accompanying CD, despite the lack of clarification about the order of pieces in the Evening Overture, is a much needed resource given that there is only one notated musical example in the book. It consists of 25 minutes of solo gong circle as her teacher at the university plays through the Evening Overture, then a 25-minute excerpt from an actual wai khruu ceremony. The latter is particularly enlightening, but it would have been helpful if Wong had referred us to the CD at appropriate points in the text. (The only such references are hidden away in the endnotes on pp. 299-301; they belong in the main text.) A glossary of terms, list of the ritual repertoire and descriptions of the instruments mentioned in the text are particularly helpful to readers unfamiliar with Thai classical music.

In general, the author has accomplished her aims of showing how different performative media shape a ritual in specific ways and result in a culturally meaningful reality for Thai performers. However, given that this book is part of a series of studies in ethnomusicology, and that the focus is on performance, one can’t help thinking that the ‘music’ – the actual ‘sound’ – of wai khruu could be given more consideration.

On a minor point, being a researcher of (Chinese) Buddhist music myself, I felt deceived by the book’s title. Wong did state at the outset that she did not want to delve into the religious debates about ‘animism’, Hinduism and Buddhism. Fair enough, but after all, the title of the book does promise a study of ‘Buddhist performance’, and frankly there is not very much here about Buddhism. Wong could perhaps have told us more about the Buddhist monks that she encountered, about their participation and role in wai khruu and what the ritual means to them.

Aside from these minor criticisms, all in all this study is a valuable contribution to our understanding of the power behind Thai classical music and dance and to the general study of music and ritual.

Hwee-San Tan

REFERENCES


*Echoes from Dharamsala* forms the first book-length study of non-monastic Tibetan music published in the West and is a highly significant contribution to our understanding of the reality of the lives and culture of contemporary exile Tibetans in Dharamsala, and the role of music in place and identity. It is based on the ethnographic experience of the author as a keyboard player in a Tibetan rock band, and admirably balances scholarly distance with affection for and identification with the subjects of the research. The book is sensitively written and clearly structured, and as someone who has spent a long time in Dharamsala, I found it rang very true, and also brought back many memories of this remarkable hill station in Northern India.

The book focuses on the non-Buddhist arts, which is refreshing, since previous scholarship on and interest in Tibet has largely focussed on Buddhist culture. Still more refreshing is the author’s ability to unpack the often deeply ingrained and stereotypical images held by both Westerners and Tibetans of ‘old’ or traditional Tibet, Chinese-occupied Tibet and Western culture, thus enabling us to move on to a fresh picture of exile Tibetan culture, and the struggle of exile Tibetans to not only balance the traditional and the modern, but also to negotiate the highly distinct and politically charged cultural forces that impinge on and influence their lives as refugees in Dharamsala. An engaging and lucid image of Dharamsala as the centre of a *mandala* frames the book, with Tibet, the homeland, in the North, India, exile, in the South, China, ‘the enemy’, in the East, and the West as ‘friend’, compactly illustrating this exile community as torn between and struggling with these powerfully opposed forces but at the same time, in many ways balancing and encompassing them. A parallel *mandala* similarly illustrates the different musics that converge on Dharamsala – the traditional Tibetan folk music, the sinified pop music from Tibet itself, Hindi film songs, and Western rock and pop.

After a theoretical introduction, and an introduction to the geographical setting, and the ethnic and cultural makeup of Dharamsala, the book describes the ideology, production and reception of the different musical styles found in Dharamsala: traditional Tibetan music, Indian film songs, Western rock and pop music, and the modern Tibetan pop music made in exile that fuses Western and traditional Tibetan musical elements. There then follows a chapter on the song lyrics of this modern exile Tibetan music, and one describing live performances of the various kinds of music.

These chapters present a comprehensive musical ethnology of Dharamsala, and incisive analyses of the ideological value of Western music, Hindi music, music from Tibet, and modern Tibetan exile music to exile Tibetans, and the way Tibetan exiles are drawn in conflicting ways to these musical cultures. The way Tibetans are attracted to Hindi film music, yet at the same time want to remain aloof, to retain their identity as Tibetans, or avoid disapproval from elders, is fascinating reading, summed up perfectly with the chapter heading ‘Taking refuge in (and from) India’. However, whilst Diehl’s analysis of the Tibetans’ interaction with Hindi film songs is compelling, I found some of the background on Hindi films and film songs less accurate. I would have to disagree, for example, with
the description of the plot of Hindi films as serving 'only as a filler between songs' and that 'the majority of the highly choreographed song-and-dance routines have nothing at all to do with the unfolding story' (page 127). The film director, music director (composer) and lyricist spend often extensive amounts of time in 'sittings', where the director narrates the story, and describes the emotional content and setting of the song situations in detail, precisely so that the music director and lyricist will write songs with words and music that are relevant in style and structure to the film, its story, characters, visual style and so on. The conventions of Hindi films clash to a large extent with Western ideals of a linear and psychologically motivated narrative in film making, leading to confusion regarding particularly the role of the songs in Hindi films, yet they are very much a part of not just the story of Hindi films, but their overall emotional expression. It was also unfortunate to see that the erroneous Guinness World Records entry of Lata Mangeshkar having sung 30,000 songs (page 104) is still current – she has in fact sung 'only' about 6,000!

My other main concern with the book is aspects of Diehl's account of the 'paradigm of preservation', the musical focus of which is the official government-in-exile troupe, the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts (TIPA). Diehl describes this drive to preserve and hold onto the 'here and then' instead of the 'here and now' as what is officially most valued by the government-in-exile and the refugee community. At the same time, as Diehl observes, it is something that many young Tibetans struggle with, find stultifying, and want to break out of in order to create their own music or perform other music that is a part of their modern culture and reality, such as Western rock and roll or Hindi film songs. This is to a large degree an accurate analysis of the government-in-exile line, and its problems. Yet I do feel that this case has been overstated, especially as applied to TIPA, and is also far too easily accepted. Its emphasis in this book perhaps reflects Diehl’s own fieldwork experience largely with a band independent from and in some ways in competition with TIPA (see the description of the two tents at the festival in South India page 239 and 252).

My personal impression of TIPA during several visits in the early 1990s was a place with a tremendous amount of musical energy and creativity, although it was certainly materially run down. The image of the staid, conservative performances with bored looking performers (page 73-74) is not something I can recognise as a fair representation. TIPA continues to present new traditional music and dance, learned from new arrivals from Tibet who they work closely with and who often join the institute, and from the large amount of research they carry out in settlements such as learning songs from the earliest Tibetan exiles, often as a part of the annual competition. TIPA has composed original traditional style songs, and also some of the earliest modern Tibetan or pop songs. Moreover, the public performances and recordings of TIPA are just a small proportion of the musical activity of the institute, and their influence on and contribution to the entire Tibetan exile community. My memory of TIPA students 'off duty' is that they are as likely to be involved with singing Bob Marley – I remember a performance of 'Redemption song' at a TIPA party – as Nangmas. Not only were most of the music teachers in exile trained at TIPA, as Diehl points out, but many of the new Tibetan pop singers are ex-TIPA, such as Techung and Tsering Gyurme (the Yaks are unusual in this regard).

I also wonder when reading critical reports of the Tibetan government-in-exile's attempts to preserve, what the alternative could or should be – such a drive to preserve
seems inevitable for exile Tibetans, who have witnessed or heard about the cultural revolution and now the extensive Han migration into Tibet. Furthermore, these attempts to preserve seem to me to have been highly successful, and not in the sense of just doggedly repeating the same old traditional songs. In Tibetan parties in the UK, where many Tibetans are from India and Nepal, a large proportion join in group circle dances – the dance steps having been learned at school in India or Nepal. Most exile Tibetan communities in different countries have also formed their own amateur dance troupes, and interest for the Tibetan dranyen or late is growing in Dharamsala amongst young Tibetans, and with that traditional songs and step dances. At the same time, Tibetans experiment with modern songs and styles – the ease with which Tibetan exiles mix traditional and modern songs in formal and informal performances and recordings is something I find remarkable – what Diehl describes as ‘an uneasy mix’ of traditional and modern music on recordings (page 183) seems to me to illustrate a high level of comfort with both, and an effective way of combining the old with the new, preserving and maintaining whilst at the same time creating and moving ahead. Furthermore, this experimenting with modern styles is actually encouraged or at least sanctioned by the government-in-exile in the form of TIPA’s Ah-Ka-Ma band, and through allowing the Yaks to perform in the TIPA auditorium or on official occasions like the Tibetan government’s staff picnic (page 107). Moreover, in a town the size of Dharamsala, there is not the distance between government officials and the public that there is in European countries or the US, and performers of modern music such as the Yaks tend to have friends, acquaintances and fans who work for the various government ministries.

But these are some points of criticism in what is otherwise a highly engaging and stimulating book. Echoes from Dharamsala’s account of the highly complex musical world of this Tibetan exile community and the ideologically charged issues there is a remarkable achievement, lucidly presented and elegantly written. It is particularly pleasing to see the artistic efforts of the new generation of Tibetans and their cultural reality finally being taken seriously, to see Tibetan culture examined as a changing and evolving entity, and to move on from the thorny ‘Tibet issue’ itself to a clear analysis of its effects and repercussions on modern exile Tibetan culture and identity.

Anna Morcom


For more than half a century, the Iron Curtain locked off Mongolia from the western world. Mongolian researchers could not travel abroad freely to explore the capitalist world, and western scholars were granted few opportunities to study Mongolia’s culture and society at close range. If, incidentally, Westerners did get a chance to visit Mongolia, they could work only with data formally provided by Mongolia’s communist officials. Consequently, little information on Mongolia found its way to the West, most of it coloured by state ideology
and politics. In this period, Western scholarship on Mongolian culture concentrated mainly on manuscripts collected during expeditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, and on the country’s official records of its modern socio-political history.

Mongolia’s ‘iron’ days are now widely viewed as a memory of the past, even though the country’s transformation began less than a generation ago, in the late 1980s. A definitive sign of change was the ‘Democratic Revolution’ launched by Mongolian intellectuals in the wake of the demolition of the Berlin wall and the reunion of Eastern and Western Germany in 1989. Mongolia’s borders were opened to the West in 1990.

In the last ten or twelve years, western social scientists have begun to carry out independent field research in Mongolia. Many of them already came up with important new data. Some undertook pioneer expeditions in little explored regions, filling numerous gaps in the existing knowledge about Mongolian culture. One such pioneer is the ethnomusicologist Carole Pegg, whose study on *Mongolian Music, Dance & Oral Narrative* is a major contribution to the field.

Initially a specialist in the music of East Suffolk, England, she took up the study of Mongol music cultures at the end of the 1980s. She first travelled to Inner Mongolia, in China. Later, in the early 1990s, she moved north and focussed her attention on the western regions of the Mongolian Democratic Republic. This was precisely the period of the country’s dramatic political change, and this directly influenced the outcome of her fieldwork and her overall perspective on the topic at hand: politics play a major role in Carole Pegg’s book, and they dominate much of her discussion of Mongolian performances. But *Mongolian Music, Dance & Oral Narrative* is also an important study in the realm of Asian traditional culture. It is the first document in English to discuss the splendid variety and richness of Mongolia’s performance traditions, and so far no comparable study on this topic has emerged in either German or French. Pegg offers her western readers an abundant array of new materials which she obtained in field interviews and from the study of Russian and Mongolian academic writings. The book includes a CD with attractive samples of local music as well as professionally staged ‘national’ music. The author cannot be expected to provide exhaustive coverage of all of Mongolia’s regional performance traditions but gives major attention to performances in West Mongolia, also on the CD: approximately half of the tracks feature music from (or made by musicians from) the country’s western provinces.

**Mongolian scholarship, cultural and ethnic diversity**

Both western and Mongolian scholars now have easier access to local Mongolian traditions than they had in the past. The two groups each bring their own expectations to the field. Mongolian scholars tend to be on the lookout for new approaches and methods in research. Many of them try to win the advice from western colleagues and to learn from their ‘advanced’ ways. In communist Mongolia, as elsewhere in the Soviet Union, the work of social scientists was strongly guided by party ideology and censorship. The political climate in that period sometimes underwent change, but social scientists were invariably kept in political subservience. They mostly proceeded in the style of nineteenth century scholars, assembling lots of data, writing census reports and creating clear cultural categories. Contemporary cultural life was preferably analyzed and translated in terms of
numbers and percentages. Scholarly accounts on cultural habits and traditions were written in a far from dynamic language, and the authors’ approach was usually prescriptive rather than descriptive. The clear political framework of the past no longer exists in today’s Mongolia. Local scholars need to find new guiding principles and have to re-think and sift the work that was already carried out in the past, attempting to separate the useful from the useless.

For many decades the Soviet communist authorities denied the realities of religious life and ethnic diversity in their own society: they required writers on modern Mongolia to make due reference in all their reports to the national unity and the intellectual progress which supposedly marked the country’s development. If social scientists still wanted to write about matters of religion and of ethnicity, they best reverted to the past tense to avoid problems, as most of them soon realized.

In her book, Carole Pegg challenges her Mongolian colleagues to discard the – in her view unnecessary and illusory – search for national unity, and to bridge the artificial gap between past and present. Taking the performing arts as her point of departure, she discusses ethnic diversity in pre-communist Mongol society and presents it as a part of a contemporary and on-going reality. ‘Cultural diversity in Mongolia is just very real’, she seems to be telling to her readers, ‘and do not worry, it’s essentially a positive thing’. Pegg limits her perspective to the realm of performance and discusses mainly how peoples’ historical and social identities are expressed effectively in music, dance and ritual. Unfortunately, we don’t get to hear about any possible local social-political conflicts or about discrimination amongst ethnic groups. Even if existing tribal tensions in the country seem to be minor – I have not encountered any major ethnic conflicts during my own field research in Mongolia, and no political separatist movements or ‘nationality’ organisations seem to have emerged so far – Pegg shows that she is not necessarily free of bias in her outlook on cultural and ethnic policy matters: in her book, some of the potentially disturbing political implications of ethnic and cultural diversity remain undiscussed.

In her post-script she describes a lecture given in Cambridge for a predominant Mongolian audience, in which she pleads for recognition of Mongolia’s rich diversity. Her listeners pull worried faces at the prospect of the country’s unity falling apart: the continuing economic crisis and political instability in the country do invoke the possible spectre of Mongolia falling apart or culminating in chaos. Pegg comforts her audience, stating that ‘a nation can be unified without being culturally or socially homogeneous’. Well, how can we be sure that it will work in the case of Mongolia? Pegg conveniently overlooks possible obstacles for safeguarding the country’s economy and political stability. Most Mongolians tend to look at this rather differently. Under Soviet rule they were taught to downplay ethnic, social and cultural diversity, and to believe in a national unity that was largely enforced and artificial. Now that they are allowed to face the full patchwork quilt of tribal, regional and local aspirations, they are understandably worried that things might turn for the worse.

From diversity to uniformity and vice versa
Mongolian, Music, Dance & Oral Narrative is organized in four parts. The first three parts cover a broad range of performance traditions anchored in the pre-communist past. Many
of these traditions are still practised in Mongolia today. The remainder of the book largely deals with the ‘nationally’ inspired performances created, with political aims in mind, during the Soviet communist decades.

In part one, Pegg presents various instrumental, vocal and dance repertoires, and places them in a regional, socio-political and historical context. Part two focuses specifically on performances with religious or spiritual contents, and part three on performances for (other) purposes of socializing, including those which refer directly to calendar time and domestic life, or which have to do with sports, games or hunting. Co-included in this third section are gender-related performances, weddings, funerals, and official celebrations. The fourth and last section of the book covers a rather different realm, that of the ‘national’ performances of the Soviet era. The concluding chapter addresses the contemporary upsurge of pre-communist culture, manifest in already existing performance genres, but also in new ones.

*Mongolian Music, Dance and Oral Narrative* covers a wide scope of performance activities, taking the notion of ‘performance’ beyond the sheer realm of artists and public entertainment. Not only dancing, singing, or making music, but also the ritual proclamation of proverbs, or the quirky sounds made during hunting (of which the accompanying CD, unfortunately, does not provide examples) are termed performances. All these performances are mutually enhancing, all of them add to the reader’s picture of how the lives and living environments of Mongolian people actually structure their musical sounds, their poetry and their (ritually or artistically perceived) bodily movements.

The author writes not about ‘traditions’ but consistently about ‘performances’, a conscious choice. Inspired by Bourdieu’s ‘Habitus’ and ‘generating principles’, and by the writings of Goffman, she explains that her perspective is based on a ‘dynamic comprehension of culture’, in which each person forms a vital and individual link between past and present. In post-modern fashion, she views the various chapters of her book as ‘performances’ in their own right, i.e. as multi-interpretable representations of complex phenomena. Readers can select from her reports what they like, depending on their own interests and individuality. The reports in turn describe events which reflect such individuality and multiple-interpretability on the part of the Mongolians and their culture. Pegg has decided for this approach on the basis of Strathern’s ideas on ‘multiple’ or ‘partial identities’, which postulate identity as the outcome of rational and conscious choice: we chose whom we want to be, and what we like best to associate ourselves with.

My overall appreciation of Pegg’s work notwithstanding, I do not perceive the organization and categorization of her material as either very dynamic or wholly convincing. She leaves no room for historical constraints on the ‘rational’ choices of the people whom she writes about, although qualities like, for example, literacy are not simply available on command in a culture like Mongolia’s. She also does not place the transformation of the performances which she writes about in an historical framework: we are presented with timeless faculties of either religious or spiritual performances, as if the diversity and daily reality of pre-communist culture and that of today’s Mongolia are a seamless continuum. She contrasts the ‘diversity’ of pre-communist times and the ‘uniformity’ of the communists’ national performances so squarely that it seems as if no correspondence took place between those two worlds – hardly a fair assessment. Finally,
the boundaries she draws between the various kinds and genres of performance and their related cultural backdrops are in my view not always helpful.

Religious and spiritual performances
Pegg distinguishes three religions in Mongolia: folk religion, Buddhism, and shamanism. In this she follows Walther Heissig, a prominent scholar, historian, linguist and specialist on Mongol culture, who has categorized Mongol religions accordingly in his book *The Religions of Mongolia*, (1970). Heissig arrived at his picture mainly on the basis of Buddhist manuscripts. Whether or not because of Heissig, Pegg overlooks or ignores Islam, the religion of the Khazakh people living in Mongolia, and also that of the Mongol Hoton-nationality in Uvs province. Heissig’s notion of ‘folk religion’ may suggest a unity of practices where in fact a multitude of unrelated events and traditions are lumped together. Heissig appended the label to such practices as fortune telling by wandering bards with clear Buddhist aspirations, but without any formal authority granted to them by the Buddhist church. Pegg uses the same term for various ritual practices without a clear status. While I was in Mongolia I repeatedly discussed such ‘vague’ rituals with local people. Some Mongolians explained them to me as expressions of man’s respect for nature, others tended to relate them to shamanism, still others claimed that they were linked to Buddhism or Mongol-Buddhism. Urban Mongolians may simply call these practices ‘tradition’ or ‘traditional knowledge’. Many involve aspects of religiosity. The borders between all these different realms – Buddhist and shaman, private and institutionalized – are more permeable and negotiable than Pegg seems ready to acknowledge.

She discusses religious activity and experience exclusively in the framework of ritual and ceremony, in part two of her book: as if spirituality and religiosity could not play a role in the ‘national’ performances of the communist era. Pegg paints the story of the national performances as an effort to meet official political aims, as a part of a grand move from the spiritual towards the intellectual. There is actually no proof that Mongol religious and spiritual notions are automatically annulled when official secular institutions take over the public domain, nor any reason to believe that such notions cannot find alternative outlets in the new forms and rules, which are rituals and ceremonies in their own right. Or is it a priori impossible to trace any strands of religious thinking in the musical decision-making of Soviet-era composers, or in the way the cultural organisers of that period arranged the national curriculum and the national ceremonies? If non-institutionalised ‘folk’ practices, too, abound with Mongol religiosity, the sacred realm of the communists’ national culture can hardly be expected to be free from it.

Communist cultural policies
The author pays limited attention to cultural policies initiated under Soviet Communism, and seems to ignore their on-going effects. In Pegg’s view, the national music performances produced ‘sounds manufactured by a Soviet-influenced, hard-line totalitarian State’, a state that ‘attempted to create a homogenous national identity.’ Though the ultimate aim of the communists was unity, they did acknowledge, and even celebrate, the ‘colourful’ diversity of Mongolia’s ethnic minorities. This may seem paradoxical, but praising ethnic qualities was one way for them to rally local people’s support for the common cause. Indeed, much
of the country’s present social cohesion and people’s current awareness of cultural diversity – which Pegg shows so much faith in – is a direct consequence of Soviet era policies. It remains a challenge for western researchers to detect different shades of meaning in the cultural history of the Soviet years. Pegg prefers to celebrate all the possible links with the pre-communist past, and arrives at a less differentiated picture of today’s hybrid reality.

She does not really address the ways in which performing practices in the Soviet communist past were institutionalized and reshaped. State-run organizations ensured that local and ‘national’ performance events took place alongside one another, so that they could interact. Festivals for amateurs as well as for the ‘talented in the art’ were organized in the capital city at regular times, bringing together local and urban performers from different parts of the country. In turn, regional stages were transformed into ‘national’ platforms, where locals would share the attention of the public with artists trained in the capital city who brought along their ‘national style’. Evidently, local performers were influenced by what they saw and heard. The ‘talented in the art’ in turn inspired composers, choreographers and writers in the capital city. Medals were handed out to the amateurs as signs of appreciation and encouragement. All this strengthened the participants’ sense of being part of a common nation, while stimulating artists at the same time to display and emphasize their local identities in performance.

Literacy is another formative factor. It certainly affected the performance culture and, more generally, the lives of Mongolian people beyond ‘rational choice’. After all, people don’t need to be able to read and write in order to experience its effects. A lot of traditional knowledge began to be transferred in written rather than in oral form via social institutions which emerged in the communist period. In the 1960s, the study of Mongol traditions and nationalities became a key focus of (urban) Mongolian artists and social scientists. The continuing work of Mongolian composers, the many changes that took place in the national music curriculum, and the impressive amount of social and cultural research that has been carried out since all attest to a firmly sustained interest in Mongol traditions. The country’s national state library is filled to the brim with writings and documents on virtually every region and every local tradition. All these activities have contributed – and they still contribute – to an increased sense of local and national identity among both literate and less literate Mongolians.

In my own research on music and dance in western Mongolia, I noticed that people often and freely consulted local academic specialists to learn more about their own cultural heritages, or to win advice on how they might revive lost traditions or do things better in future. Each district has its own designated anthropologist. The officially established categorizations of Mongol traditions are likely to gradually seep into the imagination and memories of local herdsmen, either through direct contact with scholars or otherwise. Today, Mongolia can boast of a national organization of shamans. Before in time, shamanist practices were isolated local events, which might share certain features but which were not necessarily viewed as part of a wider (let alone national) network. Exactly what can be called ‘shamanist’ about these events remains a bone of contention among scholars, but meanwhile the word has found its way into the reality of these rituals.

Ordinary Mongolians and scholars alike now have to live with this new reality, which is so evidently coloured by the scholarship of the communist years. Yet another
example of this is the assumed relationship between music and dance movements of various nationalities and the natural environments in which the performers live. As Pegg shows, Soviet period researchers tended to make much of this correlation between body movements and geographical landscape, which they believed pointed at a universal tendency, but which supposedly found a perfect expression in the different regional arts within Mongolia. Regardless of what actual value we may attach to this theory, the fact is that local performers and ritualists in different parts of Mongolia now almost mechanically attempt to live up to the theory, as I witnessed myself when attending work on a film documentary on Biilgee dance.

Notwithstanding my criticisms, I believe that Carole Pegg has done an absolutely great job in collecting and assembling so much new and valuable material in her book, and that her study is a substantial and most welcome addition to the field. It’s just a pity that the author makes the impression as if Mongolians have not been aware at all of the degree of cultural diversity that she highlights in *Music, Dance & Oral Narrative*. But her emphasis on that diversity is also refreshing, springing from her refusal to go along with the fixed cultural identities delineated by Mongolian official scholarship. She celebrates the diversity as a positive fact, and in examining it, offers a cultural analytical contribution to the important discussion on how to avoid ethnic tensions in the future and to maintain the much-needed unity in Mongolia. It is probably true that a nation can be unified without being culturally or socially homogenous. It still leaves open to question what the exact historical, political and economical pre-requirements are which can make such a union successful, and lasting. What is the cement that we put our trust in? Perhaps an answer is needed before scholars can really initiate any new cultural analytical approaches in this realm.

All the same, I look forward with great curiosity to the reception of Carole Pegg’s book in Mongolia. It will be interesting to see whether it will be used in turn by locals as a ‘guide-book’ for the revival of local traditions, and will inspire people to trust more their own inherited ideas, and pay less attention to what academics write. If so, the author has given birth to yet another intriguing paradox!

Maya-Mathea van Staden


The oft-debated issue of musical authenticity is back on the discussion board again, with Helen Rees’ latest book, *Echoes Of History: Naxi Music In Modern China*. Rather than fuss over the Ifs and Buts of what was there ‘first,’ she has cleverly leap-frogged polemics about cultural origins to look at the process of change itself in musical activity in Lijiang, Yunnan, from the early 20th-century. The scene is systematically and very clearly set out with conscientious and carefully-documented templates of cultural and historical background in Chapters 1–4, including brilliant nomenclature of musical activity in Chapter 4. A helicopter view thus established, proper discussion of Dongjing secular and ritual music
in Lijiang, which is what the book really is about (as opposed to all-inclusive analyses of all forms of Naxi Musics) is embarked upon. At the heart of this discussion is the curious problem of why Dongjing Music sounds suspiciously like the Han Chinese sizhu (Silk And Bamboo) genre. The answer is sought out in a clear, stage-by-stage evaluation process that looks at the chronology of Dongjing activity through different periods of history. That it was almost certainly not an originally ‘native’ form to Naxi minority culture – whatever the loaded value of the term ‘origin’ may be – is made clear.

This is demonstrated through reports, anecdotes and oral accounts of Dongjing Music having been ‘imported’ from 16th C Han ‘classical’ sources. But more interestingly, Dongjing’s ‘Han’ roots are also explored as a case of cultural deconstruction and reconstruction. Rees negotiates, for the reader, how the values of Dongjing Music have shifted through changing political, religious, technological and cultural climates to become many different things. Eventually, it is ‘othered’ as a ‘time-capsuled’ antiquarian art form in the name of tourist-preservation.

Her concluding Chapter 9 aptly sums up the passive as well as active roles Dongjing Music has ironically tread in the different grounds of ‘exalted ritual music, refined secular entertainment, funeral music, tool of patriotic and political propaganda, object of musicological interest, emblem of place and ethnicity, and an economic asset in the socialist market economy and tourist trade.’ As she sets out rightly in her penultimate Chapter 8 on Representation And Ethnicity, much of this evaluation of Dongjing Music is as much an issue of perception (as seen from the backseat of historical objectivity or otherwise). But the vivid writing and descriptions of activity – laced with amusing anecdotes that demonstrate points or concepts about everything from demographics of participation to the impact of socialist policy on ‘ritual,’ ‘religious’ and ‘minority culture’ lend a sense of ‘active presence’ to the reader.

What perhaps is lacking here – as the musico-technical vs social-anthro divide in Ethnomusicology goes these days – are commentaries and analyses of Dongjing Music itself. To be sure, this is partly made up for by supplying varied tracks on the atmospheric, accompanying CD to Rees’ book itself. However, actual references to melodic patterns, sequences, structure, texture, heterophony etc – aspects which have been analysed in say, the works of Thresher and Witzleben in the the field of Sizhu, could have added greater value to this book.

Another quibble is that as much as a third of the book is only prefatory – though informative – to the key issues of the changing and active roles of Dongjing Music in Naxi culture. The heart of her work is only directly discussed and analysed in an in-depth manner from Chapter 5 onwards, and later, in the valuable and meaty concluding Chapters 7–9.

These are, however, incidental matters that do not detract from the meaty research and astute cultural analyses which make the book an enjoyable, highly-digestible and very informative read. For those who may grab a copy of it for scholarly pursuit or just out of simple curiosity, there is much to learn from and learn with.

Tan Shzh Ee

As part of its attractive series of slim volumes *Images of Asia* (also including Colin Mackerras’ *Peking opera*), Oxford UP has added a book on Chinese instruments to those on Korean and Japanese instruments. This too makes a useful short guide.

Alan Thrasher, main contributor on Chinese instruments for both 1980 and 2000 editions of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* as well as the 1984 *Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments*, continues to adapt his work in light of Chinese finds and research, giving credit to several major recent Chinese compilations such as the *Zhongguo yinyue wenwu daxi*. While acknowledging the diversity of the instruments of the ethnic minorities, he wisely limits himself to the instruments of the Han Chinese majority. He is also wise to relegate 20th-century developments to a brief postscript. His final sentence observes, “Exciting and intoxicating as this new music is [I say, steady on now!], it is unfortunate that, for Western (and even urban Chinese) audiences, this tradition is usually the only ‘Chinese music’ they ever hear.” (p. 91).

It might have been worth mentioning the instrumental volume of the massive *Anthology (Zhongguo minzu minjian qiyuequ jicheng)*, which are revealing a vast amount of instrumental music hitherto unknown outside its own locality. With our (quite young) emphasis on common-practice instruments in living traditions, it might have been useful for the readership of such a guide to cite a few CDs. The book is well illustrated with 24 colour plates (slightly more posed than I might hope), line drawings, and even a couple of music examples.

Chapter 1 The Ancient Heritage, introduces the treasure trove of excavated instruments and the “eight-tone” classification system. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the *qin* zither, most numinous of Chinese instruments, with ample literary, artistic, and historical dimensions as well as a lively minority of living devotees.

Chapter 3 discusses common-practice instruments in historic perspective, describing the successive import and assimilation of instruments from Central Asia as well as ensembles from Tang and Song dynasties and the later imperial period. Chapters 4 (Sizhu) and 5 (Chuida) go on to outline the two broad living genres commonly discussed, roughly string chamber ensembles (best known in southeastern China) and outdoor wind ensembles.

A striking first impression is given by the cover, which appears to show a blue *pipa*, horizontally held – roll over Nigel Kennedy. Was OUP’s illustrations editor feeling hyper-active? Some tedious minor quibbles: I feel we have to understand, and insert, an “and” between the elements “silk-bamboo” or “blowing-drumming”; I’m not sure the *pipa* and the *xiao* are quite so ubiquitous in *sizhu* ensembles; we should perhaps translate *bili* as double-reed pipe (not reed pipe, nor even double reed pipe – though the *shuangguan*, alas, would become a “double double-reed pipe!”); *Baban* should not be called a *qupai*. The text goes some way to compensating for a general bias towards southeastern *sizhu* instruments, with sections on *sheng-guan* ensembles and shawm bands, though the *sizhu* sections are written with greater authority. I am happy to be able to suggest that he may be
unduly gloomy about transmission (“most practitioners belong to the older generation” p. 90) – which is far from true for the single most common type of instrumental music, the shawm band, always driven by the need to make a livelihood.

Highly recommended for a cogent short introduction in English.

Stephen Jones


Many years ago I watched movies set in Beijing intrigued to what sounded like faint, distant whistles as hawkers sold their wares in old winding alleys. I only learnt later that these faint sounds were pigeons with whistles attached to their tails. The author of this charming little book, Wang Shixiang, a well-known expert on Chinese furniture, lacquerware, and gourds, continues to write on a vast number of topics in his mid eighties. Divided into five small chapters, with a foreword and a conclusion, the book is not intended to be a cultural history of pigeon whistles in China or a case study of pigeon whistle associations in Beijing.

The earliest textual sources on pigeon whistles (geshan) are found in the standard history of the Song where they were used in military operations. During a military campaign in the northern Song to quash the kingdom of Western Xia in the northwest, pigeons with whistles attached to their tails ultimately guided Xia troops to surround and annihilate the Song general and his army. The pigeons were released from large silver-guilded lacquer boxes found along a roadside by the Song general’s commander-in-chief Ren Fu.

Pigeon whistles became widespread by the southern Song dynasty (1127-1278 A.D), but it is not until the late Qing that we find detailed accounts of pigeon whistles in the imperial capital. In the Yanjing Suishiji by Fucha Dunchong, written during the reign of the Emperor Guangxu (1875-1904), it is recorded: ‘When it is time to release pigeons from captivity, bamboo whistles must be attached to their tails. These whistles are called gourd or hulu (gourd) or shaozi. The sweet, melodious sounds permeate the heavens when the pigeons encircle the sky and make you feel happy and content’. In the early 20th century, foreign observers were also writing on the subject. In June 1913 an article ‘Chinese Pigeon Whistles’ appeared in National Geographic and in 1938 H.P. Hoose published his book Peking Pigeons and Pigeon Flutes.

Types of pigeon whistles and how the whistles are attached are discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. There are two distinct types of whistles – those consisting of bamboo tubes placed side by side and tubes attached to a gourd. The bamboo tubular whistles have two, three or five tubes arranged in a row of ascending height. Some of these bamboo tubular whistles are also raised on a platform. They are extremely light, each weighing only a few grams and are tied to the tails of young pigeons (pigeons usually have twelve quills in their tails) with fine copper wire or good quality cotton or silk thread. In Beijing slang this is referred to as ‘sewing on the tail’ (feng shaoyi). When the pigeons fly in a flock (either long distance flights referred to as ‘straight flying’ zou tangzi, or flocks flying in circles above residential apartments and houses, referred to as ‘encircling the flock’, feipan), wind flows through
the apertures tuned to various pitches. ‘As the flock soar and swoop, they meet the wind’s resistance at different angles, and thus produce pitches that distinctly change in tone and volume’ (p. 16). One of the most well-known collectors of pigeon whistles, Wang Xixian (1899-1986), owned a pair of gourds with three-partitioned slits that could produce the shang, gong and jiao pitches from the left, centre and right chambers respectively.

As a child, Yang raised crickets, trained falcons to catch rabbits and dogs to catch badgers. He especially loved flying pigeons because it was a pastime he could pursue all year long, not restricted by the change of seasons. Wang bought hundreds of gourds on which he engraved designs with a hot needle and also engraved designs on pigeon whistles. Yang’s enthusiasm for his subject shines throughout the book. The book adds to a growing number of recent publications that recapture and explore ‘traditional’ hobbies, customs and street scenes in the capital. Who exactly raises pigeons in Beijing and how do we explain their persistence? Wang does not venture into this territory at all, but their continuity might be more cultural than material and reminds us that hobbies, customs and habits accumulated in daily life are perhaps the last to vanish by the trends of change.

Peter Micic


Qian Renkang’s illuminating and marvelously detailed study on the origins of school songs should immediately establish itself as a key text in the field. Divided into eleven chapters, the book contains 392 school songs with a preface and a 22-page appendix with 10 school songs with piano accompaniment.

In late 19th century China, reformers emphasized the political and social relevance of culture that could promote various goals and reform China through the creation of a modern culture. Fiction, drama, poetry and songs provided a template for diagnosing the ills of the imperial dynasty, offering disparate solutions to ‘save the nation’ as foreign powers were ready to ‘carve up China like a melon’ and the empire appeared to move ever closer to extinction. School songs became an important vehicle to express a number of national concerns at the time, such as resisting foreign aggression, saving the nation, reforming society to issues of morality, filial piety and women’s rights. Many songwriters had received elementary music training in Japan and returned with a number of songs that had been incorporated into the Japanese education system in the wake of the Meiji Restoration. These songs taken from Japanese school songbooks were in turn introduced into the modern Chinese school curriculum at the beginning of the twentieth century.

As Qian’s study illustrates, school songwriters drew upon a vast number of musical sources. These included foreign tunes from Germany, America, Italy and Britain (many of which were originally taken from Japanese primary songbooks), Christian hymns, Chinese traditional folk and instrumental tunes and song and text composed by a school song songwriter. The bulk of many early school songs involved setting a text to a pre-existing melody, known as tianci (lit: ‘to fill in words or text’). This compositional process has a long history in China, and school song songwriters freely used pre-existing melodies in
their compositions. What was considered original was not very significant because the work was seen primarily as a social and political symbol, and not as a work of art. School song songwriters did not compose these songs 'to seek fame or fortune', writes Qian. 'When the publication of a song appeared, there was invariably no mention of a name; when school song anthologies were published there was often no mention of the songwriter or composer. Neither considered this to be an infringement of their work' (p. 6). Among the extant repertoire of about four hundred compositions, many school songs are variants of each other. Tunes could be borrowed from Western or 'traditional', 'folk' Chinese music sources and introduced into the repertory at any time. Tunes could be used again and again by setting them to different texts. Over time, some tunes proved more popular than others. 'Sakura', 'God Save the King' and 'La Marseillaise', as three examples, never gained wide currency, but 'Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star' appeared in at least ten school song anthologies between 1905-1939 (p. 169) and 'Old Lang Syne' which has appeared under numerous names in Chinese – and is still widely used in school songbooks in China today – appeared in some sixteen school song compilations between 1905-1935 (p. 189).

Many school song songwriters aligned themselves with one another in writing simple, comprehensible didactic texts in the vernacular and setting them to suitably soul-stirring melodies. However, among disparate voices, the choice of text was anything but prescribed. Li Shutong, one of the three most notable songwriters of the time, not only chose to write in the vernacular, but also chose classical poems setting them to tunes that resembled ritual music rather than patriotic marching songs. Like many other school song songwriters, Li made use of a vast range of musical sources available to him and wrote songs that helped to forge ideological bonds among his contemporaries. But Li also incorporated ancient themes as well as modern ideas into the texts of his songs. Such texts would have been less accessible and more restricted at the level of consumption because they would only be understood by a small educated minority and would therefore be at odds with the majority of school songs that sought to reach out to larger audiences, Li’s 'Mourning our Ancestral Land' (1905) for example, proved that a traditional form like the pentasyllabic verse imbued with historical allusions could serve as a medium for expressing modern ideas.

Qian's book eloquently illustrates that with these school songs – both original compositions and texts set to pre-existing melodies – the modern genre of Chinese song appeared. These songs were in many respects, the harbinger of songs of the masses and revolutionary songs. The book will be invaluable to anyone interested in the history of popular songs in early twentieth century China. It demonstrates the enduring presence of tianci as a compositional device, widely used not only in Chinese traditional narrative music and in songs of the masses but in pop and rock music as well.

Peter Micic


Xiao Mei, former co-director of the Music Research Institute, Academy of Fine Arts Beijing, leaves no doubt in the reader’s mind of her chosen profession, or to be more
accurate, a vocation that seems to have chosen her. Her relationship to fieldwork is endlessly developing and unfolding, a living process that is anything but static or fixed. She approaches each fieldwork trip as if it were her first, infusing it with a quality of awe and wonder. The moment or instant when this gels is particularly potent each time she enters a village and individuals or communities articulate complex and contradictory relationships through sonic gesture. ‘It is like I am awaiting a baptism, and at that precise moment my raison d’etre in this life has been decreed by fate.’ (p.30).

Based on extensive fieldwork and ethnographic research, the seven chapters of this book cover a number of China’s nationalities including the Naxi, Mosuo (Yunnan province) the Ewenki and Oroqen (Heilongjiang province), the Miao (Guizhou province) and the Li and Miao nationalities (Hainan province). In many of the chapters, we need only peruse a few pages before an array of characters have been established and the interactions with the author begin to constitute the material of a short story. Take, for example, the final chapter ‘Three Days in Nangaoluo’ (pp. 264-282). We begin with a brief description of the village Nangaoluo, located in Hebei province (several hours from Beijing) and a reference to a number of visiting Chinese musicologists, including ‘a foreigner from London’ (Stephen Jones), and before you know it we are listening to stories of a ninety-three old Chinese catholic who lost seven of her family members during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900, two photos discovered by Jones in a small town in Italy of missionary activities in the village (one of a church, the other, of a priest and the villagers performing music), to what constitutes ‘change’ among the music associations in the village (from four perspectives: the musicians themselves, the author, her colleagues and Jones) to the idea of having students from the capital come to the village to learn and study their music.

These stories or ‘jottings’ (biji), as the title of the book indicates, present invaluable information on the musical values, musical genres, socio-political, linguistic and cultural history of each area or location documented. Xiao offers interpretations based not only on her own knowledge, experience and sensitivity, but informed by a number of theoretical models inspired by anthropologists such as Bronislaw Malinowski and Clifford Geertz, as the first chapter amply illustrates. Some may take Xiao to task for not engaging more thoroughly in theoretical and conceptual issues, but her balance between a theory-inspired rather than a theory-driven approach strikes me as an especially healthy one.

Chapter 3 ‘Fieldwork Recordings and Folk Music Files’ particularly captured my interest because of its focus on the process of sound and video recording as a means of documenting and preserving folk music heritages. Xiao has done extensive archival work in China and also collaborated with Dietrich Schüller, Director of the Phonogrammarchiv at the Austrian Academy of Sciences on numerous occasions. During a trip to the Phonogrammarchiv in 2000, Xiao discovered scores of recordings of Mongolian music made by the Finnish philologist Gustaf John Ramstedt (1873-1950) in Ulaan Baatar in November 1909. Xiao was less interested in the recordings made by Ramstedt than his method and approach in documenting his fieldwork trip which she then uses as a basis of comparison with fieldwork approaches and methodologies used by the Music Research Institute (pp. 89-94).

Xiao’s own transition back into the sprawling metropolis of Beijing, adjusting back to ‘normal’ urban life, her immediate observations of Han Chinese as if they were now the
subject of her fieldwork, her idea of journeys as a source of nourishment for the soul and when she is tugged back by a longing for ‘home’ might have been profitably addressed in a final chapter.

The stories contained in this book start from snapshots of people’s lives through to the musical rituals that govern their daily existence. They are stories that begin in the field and never really leave it. Xiao has written a highly readable and engaging text that says as much about the richness and diversity of China’s living musical traditions as about her own relationship to fieldwork.

Peter Micic


For the past seven years, Zhang Zhentao has conducted extensive fieldwork on music associations in Hebei province and studied the temperament and development of the instruments used in these ensembles. This book concentrates on how the ritual activities of these music associations function within the socio-economic fabric of these rural villages.

Numerous wind and percussion music ensembles developed in rural areas of Hebei during the Ming and Qing dynasties, collectively called music associations (yinyuehui). These associations are amateur music organizations that play an important role in ritual activities in the villages. One of their main functions is to perform at funerals, especially fang yankou, a Buddhist salvation ritual for the deceased. When someone dies in the village, the family, having contributed a donation to the music associations during the lunar New Year period, will perform at the funeral for ‘free.’ The symbiotic relationships between individual members of the village community, the clan and patrons alike are examined and explored by the author, but they are fascinating and complex issues that would require numerous in-depth studies.

The book is divided into nine chapters. Chapter One provides a comprehensive background to the make up of these associations which includes the distribution of these associations in Hebei province, education systems in rural communities and the passing on of these musical traditions and practices to the younger generation. Those whose task it is to teach these traditions are called music masters (yueshi) or ‘masters or respected teachers who pass down traditions and practices’ (lao chuanshi or shichuan) while the young music apprentices are referred to ‘as those who study matters or things’ (xueshide). As Zhang points out ‘things’ or ‘matters’ in this context refers to social customs and etiquette and has the extended meaning of the whole gamut of knowledge required in the study of these musical traditions and their attendant rituals’ (p. 28).

Chapter Two examines these music masters and their respective branches of propagation. Chapter Three discusses these association vis-à-vis economic sustainability; chapter four looks at culture spaces or sites where music associations perform and practice; chapter five compares music associations and other types wind and percussion ensembles
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(chuidaban); chapter six, the function of music within funeral rituals; chapter seven, folk beliefs and music; chapter eight, the function of music during in festivals and sacrificial rite ceremonies; and chapter nine, the repertoire of the music associations and their scores. Zhang has collected some eighty hand-written scores from various associations in the region (p. 377). His research reveals that there is a direct link between the tradition and music practices of these village music associations and Buddhist, Taoist and court traditions.

It is a pity such a detailed and thoroughly researched book does not have an accompanied CD or that the author has provided no musical examples. This aside, the book will remain a major reference for anyone researching music associations in Hebei province for many years to come.

Wu Fan


This book is part of a series of books on the history of Chinese art in the twentieth century published by the Hunan Fine Arts Press. The book is as much a musical narrative of the People’s Republic of China since the 1950s to the end of the twentieth century, as a coffee table book replete with over four hundred photographs of who’s who in the Chinese music world.

The author does not simply chronicle major musical events in the People’s Republic, but provides a critical gaze at the last fifty-one years of music making. For example, in discussing dance and music productions during the Cultural Revolution, Ju notes that works that explicitly served a propagandist function in accordance with Maoist prescriptions such as The East is Red (Dongfang Hong) and Ode to the Tempest (Fenglei Song) required ‘an increase in the [cultural] labour force.’ These lavish and extravagant productions ‘became a serious problem in Chinese literary and art circles in the 1960s. It also created an adverse and unhealthy precedent for those frequent gala evening performances (dawanhui) since the early 1980s, appearing under a number of different names, but similar in their extravagances and waste of human and financial resources.’ (p. 89).

The book contains a wealth of photographs appearing on every page of the text, excluding the chronology of major musical events in the appendix. The photographs alone provide an excellent visual history of music in the last fifty years. Unfortunately, some readers will require a magnifying glass to read the captions under the photos. While many music genres are well documented, the author has neglected to include newly developed music in recent years such as electronic music and music used in the multi-media.

These shortcomings aside, the book provides an excellent reference for anyone researching Chinese music since the founding of the People’s Republic and should find a wide audience among scholars and the general reader alike.

Xie Sui
This is one of the most important books on music archaeology in China to be published in recent years. Divided into ten chapters, the bulk of the text provides a comprehensive overview of musical relics from the Neolithic Period to China’s last imperial dynasty. But the book is a lot more than simply an assemblage of musical artifacts. Wang provides an excellent introduction to defining the discipline as a branch of archaeology in Chapter One, discussing among other things, the recording of music history found in Chinese textual sources and popular myths and legends, the significance of music archaeology to Chinese music history, developments and trends in the field since the early twentieth century and the excavation of musical artifacts since the late 1970s. These include a unitary ensemble of 65 bells excavated from the tomb of the Marquis Yi of Zeng in September 1977, seven-hole bone flutes excavated from Jiha sites in Wuyang county, Henan province in May 1986 dating back at least 8,000 years and bianzhong bells excavated from a Han tomb in Luozhuang village in June 1999. Chapter Nine covers a number of important issues related to music archaeological fieldwork while the final tenth chapter is a collection of major writings by the author on a number of music artifacts.

In short, Wang’s book is the first systematic and theoretical work on music archaeology in China. It will be an invaluable reference for scholars as well as any serious student of music archaeology at both the undergraduate and post-graduate level.

Wang Qinglei


Building on her masterful study The Oral Tradition of Yangzhou Storytelling (Curzon Press, 1996), Vibeke Børdahl has now collaborated with photographer Jette Ross to produce a splendid and elaborate study, complete with texts, of a living tradition of Chinese storytelling found in one particular city in southern China, Yangzhou, where living narrative performance traditions continue to flourish.

The book opens with a lengthy discussion designed to acquaint the reader with the ancient tradition of Chinese verbal art as well as the particular richness of the Yangzhou tradition itself. Nearly every page of the one-hundred page introductory section is replete with photographs (taken during performance), reproductions of Chinese art relevant to the stories, photographs of performance venues and ritual implements, and diagrams of the storytellers’ genealogies. Key words, special diction from the stories themselves, and other illustrative headings are provided throughout, in the accompanying margin, in Chinese and English, in order to provide orientation amidst the labyrinth of material. Børdahl, whose early linguistic work in Chinese dialectology and many years of fieldwork among storytellers in Yangzhou, is in a particularly unique position to explicate the classic topoi of performance-centered research: the local community and the storytellers'
milieu, performance context, transmission, the role of master-student relationship, and the performance event itself. The view afforded by Børdahl’s unprecedented access to material spanning thirty years of transmission opens a particularly rich diachronic view.

In the second chapter, Børdahl provides life histories of the seven storytellers whose tales form the centerpiece of the book. One can, in effect, turn back and forth from the biographies to the tales themselves, and can then refer to the countless illustrations and photographs of the tellers and venues, in order to thicken the context of the performance-centered texts which she provides. Thanks to an innovative and reader-friendly formatting of images and text, the storytellers’ personae emerge in vivid and unpredictable ways.

In the third chapter, “Three Sagas of Yangzhou Storytelling,” the reader will find excerpts transcribed from each of the three most celebrated Chinese story cycles, “Water Margin,” “Three Kingdoms,” and “Journey to the West.” The stories are given first in precise English translation, and are followed by the Chinese original, each of which Børdahl herself painstakingly transcribed from individual performances. In one case, Børdahl even provided two versions, separated by thirty years, of the same introductory episode, “Wu Song Fights the Tiger,” the one told by the father, Wang Shaotang (the founder of the Wang School of Water Margin tradition), the other told by his student and son, Wang Xiaotang – in order that the reader see for herself the degree of fixity and variation at play in one of the most famous episodes in this cycle.

The attention to detail lavished by the authors and publisher on this volume have rendered it something of an event in the world of Chinese folklore publications, and should place it among the most progressive and smartly laid-out textualization projects produced in recent memory. The hallmark of the project’s methodology may well be the fact that the authors were able to include five of the seven stories in the book on an accompanying VCD. In addition to this footage, the VCD also includes an introduction to the town of Yangzhou and scenes from the storyteller’s milieu. Whether a teacher of a course in living oral narrative genres or a specialist in Chinese verbal art, one would be hard pressed to ask for a more thoughtfully or skillfully rendered work.

Aaron Phillip Tate
Hugo’s Window on the World of Chinese Zheng

The Art of Zheng Music, and The Treasury of Zheng Music, two on-going series of CDs, from HRP 704-2 onwards. Published by Hugo Records in Hong Kong and in Mainland China. For details: Aik Yew-goh, Hugo Productions, No. 4, 5/F, Kinglet Industrial Bldg., 21-23 Shing Wan Road, Taiwai, New Territories, Hong Kong. Phone +852.2602 4066; fax: +852.2602 4078. E-mail: hugo@hugocd.com, website: www.hugocd.com

Since the late 1980s, Hugo Productions (HK) Ltd. has released over a dozen titles of zheng music in two landmark collections: The Treasury of Zheng Music, produced in Hong Kong, and The Art of Zheng Music, produced in Mainland China. Performed by prominent musicians from all the major styles, these recordings provide an extensive overview of the traditional and contemporary zheng repertoire. Unlike most zheng albums released in China, the liner notes in these series are written in both Chinese and English, allowing for greater accessibility by scholars and those interested in comparing and contextualizing zheng music. Notwithstanding the fact that there are many errors, omissions and inconsistencies in the translations, the documentation accompanying the CDs is a major step ahead (in comparison with previous recordings of zheng) and the two series provide a very thorough and eminently musical impression of the state of zheng music in China today.

The zheng, a plucked half-tube zither, plays an important role in Chinese music history. The earliest known written reference to the zheng dates from more than two thousand years ago (Shiji, 'Record of History', 237 BC), and it was subsequently mentioned in numerous historical documents and classical poems. The zheng was used as a solo instrument, as well as an ensemble instrument in both early court and folk ensembles, but as these traditions are believed to have descended orally, due to the lack of any surviving scores, little is known about the repertoire or sound of the zheng in these ensembles. Throughout the centuries, the zheng became the parent instrument of the Asian zither family as it spread from China to a number of adjacent countries giving birth to the Japanese koto, the Korean kayagum and the Vietnamese dan tranh.

The CDs released by Hugo are all 24-bit digital recordings, yet there seems to be a philosophical difference between these recordings and Western recording techniques, which stress a close warm sound, free of extraneous noise. By Western standards, many of the Hugo recordings are marred by extraneous sounds and project a rather distant sound image. Luckily, the musical performances are often very engaging and sufficiently entertaining to divert the listener’s attention from such perceived technical shortcomings. Let me divide my further comments on these series into traditional music and contemporary music, respectively.
**Four major traditional styles**

The four major traditional zheng styles are Chaozhou and Hakka from southern China (both located in Guangdong province), and Shandong and Henan from northern China. Each style or ‘school’ has its own distinctive repertoire, but all of them also share a number of features; they all include a substantial number of pieces in the beiban (‘eight-beat’) melodic structure of Chinese traditional instrumental music. The performers featured are traditionally trained and highly respected representatives of the four styles, but I think that they are generally influenced – like so many of their colleagues in China – by modern musical trends: virtuosic techniques and speed are stressed over the traditional expressiveness and classical essence of the music.

One notable exception to this is Yang Xiuming’s superb playing on the CD Buddhist Chant (Qian Sheng Fo, The Treasury of Zheng Music, Vol. 6, HRP 753-2), one of the two representative albums of Chaozhou music. This disc is a true celebration of Yang’s powerful playing and soulful interpretation of Chaozhou zheng music.

Chaozhou zheng music is generally viewed as more complex than other zheng styles. It features highly embellished melodies, frequent grace notes, subtle pitch variations in note endings, distinctive modes with slightly raised fourths (4↑) or flattened sevenths (7↓), and modal shifts. Buddhist Chant contains some of the most treasured pieces from the Chaozhou repertoire, such as Zhaojun’s Grievance and Liu Yao Jin, both in the huowu (‘lively five’) mode, the most complex mode of Chaozhou music.

Yang Xiuming is a highly acclaimed artist, who stands out among contemporary zheng players thanks to his distinctive combination of highly developed techniques supported by a true depth of expression. His interpretation of Buddhist Chant (the title track) exhibits a sophistication, sense of timelessness and spaciousness not heard in other renditions, resulting from his deep understanding of Buddhism and of the essence of traditional Chinese music. In this piece, Yang creates a peaceful meditative atmosphere supported by a superb sense of musical control, creativity, and individuality. The other Chaozhou CD, Jackdown Gambol Water (Hanya Xishui – The Treasury of Zheng Music, Vol. 5, HRP 735-2), performed by Lin Maogen, is quite agreeable, but does not match the authenticity, virtuosity and expressiveness of Buddhist Chant.

The Han people, known as Hakka to the Western world, moved from central China down to eastern Guangdong province over a thousand years ago. The Hakka or Han zheng music is also known as Handiao (‘tunes of the Han Chinese’) or Zhongzhou gudiao (‘ancient tunes from central China’). Han music is generally described in China as a refined and elegant style that reflects Confucian philosophy. In the late 19th century, the players
of most zheng styles in China began to use steel strings, which were louder and more durable than the traditional silk strings. In the last thirty years, many Conservatory trained musicians have adopted steel strings wound with nylon, which are still stronger and allow for the greater dynamics required in modern compositions. By contrast, the Hakka style has retained the use of ordinary steel strings, which allows for long resonance and subtleties of expression. Rao Ning-xin’s performances on the album Lotus (Chu Shui Lion, The Treasury of Zheng Music Vol.1, HRP 704-2) are very refined, with light embellishments and a clean technique. The uncontested highlight of this CD is ‘Rainy Night on Banana Panel’ with its subtle dynamics and rich tone colours.

The Shandong style is bold and earthy, with wide-ranging dynamics and large, almost exaggerated gestures. Han Tinggui performs powerfully on Book Rhytme (Shu Yun, The Treasury of Zheng Music Vol. 4, Hugo HRP 734-2), yet for all the grandeur of this music there seems to be a distinct lack of emotional expression. There is also a clear effort to modernize the music: the performer adds a (superfluous and exaggerated) new introduction and new ending to High Mountain and Flowing Water. Yet, in a way, these additions are in line with the aesthetics of Shandong music.

The Henan zheng style is centred in the historical city of Kaifeng and its surrounding area, once a major cultural centre of the Han Chinese people. Henan music is distinguished by prominent descending pitch bends, combined with a wide vibrato and a tremolo produced by the right thumb. The resulting music is stylistically very interesting and seldom heard on zheng recordings available in the West. The two albums of Henan zheng music are good examples of the variety that the entire zheng series brings to the listener. The Henan zheng (like the Han zheng) uses steel strings. The two CDs of Henan music, Lodging in a Garden (Luo Yuan, The Art of Zheng Music, HRP 7168-2), and High Mountain Flowing Water (Gaoshan Liushui, The Treasury of Zheng Music Vol.3, HRP 733-2), feature the two pre-eminent performers of the Henan zheng school, Li Bian and Cao Guifen, daughters of the renowned zheng master Cao Dongfu. Unfortunately, these two CDs are almost identical in repertoire; both include representative pieces of the Henan style, such as The Wild Goose Hunt, as well as Cao Dongfu’s 1956 composition Happy Lantern Festival. More variety in the selection of the pieces would have been welcome, providing listeners with more opportunities to acquaint themselves with this unique style.

Contemporary zheng music
Contemporary composition in China still seems to retain influences from the ideologies of the Cultural Revolution, which impedes musical expression and exploration. Most of the compositions in this series clearly use 18th and 19th Century Western orchestral gestures, with little influence from 20th century musical ideas from other cultures. Most of these works tend to be simplistic in structure, rhythmically square, disjointed, with few transitions or developments, and uncohesive. Perhaps this is due to an overemphasis on virtuoso techniques and flashy gestures, at the cost of musical expressiveness.

If Chinese composers were to take note of the compositional elements and structures found in ancient qin music, this might well provide them with more inspiration and a better sense of direction in creating modern Chinese music – a kind of music that retains the soul of Chinese traditional music, and amounts to more than just a copy of a Western model.
Ironically, while most of the contemporary works presented in this series are actually based on traditional folk tunes, they sound more Western than Chinese. *Rise Step by Step (Bu Bu Gao, HRP 7165-2)*, performed by the Zheng Ensemble of the Shanghai Music Conservatory is an example of such Westernized arrangements of Chinese folk tunes. The album is played by a zheng quartet who, while coming from one of China's top music schools, sounds sadly shallow and at times almost like a parody.

Fortunately this series does present one composer who writes original works, which maintain the richness, depth and spirit of ancient Chinese music, while exploring contemporary aesthetics. Female composer Xu Xiaolin's compositions, written in the period from the 1980s to the 1990s, feature on *Ode to Guizhou (Qian Zhong Fu, The Art of Zheng Music, HRP 7164-2*, performed by Qiu Ji) and are exceptional. Xu deliberately avoids the most common Chinese contemporary compositional methods for zheng, and the resulting music is fresh and exciting. Her compositions are characterized by freedom in phrasing, a wide dynamic range, rhythmic complexity, and a truly creative sense of harmony. Although the pieces sound very 'modern' by Chinese and Western standards alike, they still remain close to traditional Chinese musical philosophy and aesthetics.

The soloist, Qiu Qi, is one of China's top zheng performers, with a highly developed technique and a genuine understanding of music. Yet I'm convinced that if she wished, she could still find a deeper and more philosophical expression that would bring out more of the reflective qualities of her music. Perhaps with more experience and the study of other instruments and music, such as qin, koto and kayageum, she could be outstanding. The pieces *The Goddess of Mountain (Shan Mei)* and *Ode to Guizhou (Qian Zhong Fu)* are particularly good examples of her artistic skills. I can recommend this album unreservedly to people who are fond of contemporary music and who have demanding musical tastes!

*Fantasy*, composed by Wang Jian-Min, and performed by Dai Qi, is perhaps the most interesting work on *Scenery of the Ancient Capital (Chang'an Bajing, The Art of Zheng Music, HRP 7167-2)*. Dai Qi is the strongest performer on this album that also features Luo Xiaoci and Qi Yao. Dai's playing in *Fantasy* is very expressive and dynamic, providing us with an excellent interpretation of this work. Although the piece is based on folk melodies from southwestern China, it is far more than just a suite of tunes; for example, it includes a very creative 'percussive' section.

In spite of all the critical remarks I have made, Hugo must be given full marks for releasing such an extensive and interesting series of zheng CDs. Through the series we can obtain a good understanding of the present state of zheng music in China. Some recordings, performers and compositions in the series are truly outstanding. Hopefully Hugo will continue its quest for the best artists, both new and established, and further extend this series in the future. This is definitely a precious set for any zheng aficionado, scholar or student, and it ought to be found on the library shelves of any institution, which fosters an interest in Chinese music.

Han Mei
Beyond the Moon and Tidal (Original Music Sound Track) composed and adapted by Wen Loong-Hsing. 2 CDs, total time 72'28". B. Sounds, BS 10001-2, Taipei 2000.

Beyond the Moon and Tidal is a work for musical theatre, composed by Wen Loong-Hsing (b.1944). It incorporates artistic forms such as theatre, dance and music, with the aim to interact with a variety of cultural art forms. The CD propagates ‘world music’ as Wen’s musical outlook for a new era, as he aspires to promote dialogues among different musical cultures worldwide. Wen believes that ‘cultural encounters’ will play an important role in the new century, and that world music will be a popular trend for composers in searching for inspiration.

In contrast to Wen’s other recent compositions, the present work amply explores Chinese traditional idioms, albeit in combination with a great many other idioms. The ensemble of Beyond the Moon and Tidal includes guitar, bass, keyboard, frame drum, harmonica, accordion, violin, erhu, female singer, vibraphone and other percussion instruments, as well as toy sounds. Wen employs a great diversity of familiar cultural musical materials to create music that is entertaining and easily appreciated by the audience. The overall result is that of an old picture in sounds that evokes a great many reminiscences.

The CD does not only incorporate music and sounds collected by Wen on his many travels, but also sounds of plants recorded in collaboration with a German botanist years ago. In Wen’s view, plants are more knowledgeable than human beings about the Earth as a natural environment, since they have existed longer than humans and, as natural resources, help to sustain all organic life: plants have their own expressive sounds; they have moods and emotions; they can ‘speak’ and ‘sing’, says Wen. The composer incorporated plant sounds in his music to make people more aware of the presence of life outside the direct human sphere.

Wen used two specific types of music to create overall cohesion in his world musical materials, namely frame drumming and wordless female chanting. Frame drummer Glen Velez and female sonic artist Liu Sola collaborate intensely in Beyond the Moon and Tidal, and contribute significantly to Wen’s music.

Beyond the Moon and Tidal subtly blends Western, Chinese and World musical traditions. In the composer’s view these are different branches from the trunk of a tree – the trunk being frame drumming and female chanting. Each branch further evolves and diversifies, leading to such diverse elements as pop, jazz, classical, folk, percussive, sonic arts, Taiwanese opera, Tang dynasty melodies, native Amazon songs, sound resources of plants, gypsy music, and overtone singing.

Beyond the Moon and Tidal consists of seven parts, which each part focusing on specific cultural/musical materials. For example, Part I is titled The image and complexion of paper. The music creates an ancient and remote atmosphere, and features melodical materials from the Tang dynasty, sung by a female voice, to a background of lyrical pop.

The soft and relaxed atmosphere of part I is abruptly exchanged for an out-of-tune erhu which plays a ‘crying melody’ from Gezi Xi street opera in Part II (The dance, sigh, and duet of the wood). Other musical elements which feature here are gypsy songs, native Amazon songs, and jazz. Some listeners may find this musical melting pot too eclectic, but
those sufficiently familiar with Taiwanese culture would probably recognize it as a musical picture of Taiwan, where everything can co-exist without confrontation.

Part III (Dialogue and duet) is a light intermezzo which combines Latin jazz-pop with classical folk music. The titles used in Part IV almost speak for themselves: Rhyming effect, The sound of the breath and drum, The symphony of vibrated objects, and Void reverberation. Here, frame drum artist Glen Velez comes to the fore, initially to the accompaniment of a light jazz ensemble, later in different settings. Part V, with prominent contributions by Liu Sola, continues to explore sonic possibilities in sections titled The ultimatum of tonal axis, Mutation, and The vigorous explosion before the Zero exponent. At one point the music unexpectedly switches to a Taiwanese village feast, with the unique piercing sounds of suona accompanied by gong and drum ensemble.

Part VI (with the sections Between the being and non-being, Expression of the recorder, and Excursion of assorted notes) features (amongst many other things) ‘plant music’, folk musical improvisations, a tranquil xiao (bamboo flute) solo and a section of story singing by Liu Sola, culminating in the line ‘Life: it is not easy!’ Part VII, which concludes the work, is again built of different sections, including a ‘Polyphonic thunder storm’ in which electronic pop competes with the sounds of a thunderstorm.

Although the music may hold popular appeal, it addresses a serious issue: that of the direction of the future (musical) arts. The composer critically examines the variability and combinatorial potential of many different musical elements, from ancient to modern. In accordance with the Chinese proverb ‘similarity within dissimilarity, dissimilarity within similarity,’ Wen argues that there need not be any opposition or conflict between musical genres or instruments. The concept of ‘world music’ invites mutual interaction and understanding between different cultures, and the theme of Wen’s music is a celebration of — and incentive to celebrate — the diversity of all cultures.

Mon-Shan Chen


This album offers an encounter of Arabic and Chinese lute and blends the light and piercing sounds of pipa with the darker, more subdued colours of Arabic ud. Liu Fang and Farhan Sabbagh are both fine masters of their instruments, as becomes clear in the exuberant solo pieces on this album. Liu Fang excels in the lively and extrovert ‘Dragon Boat Festival’, and Farhan Sabbagh evokes the mediterranean twilight world of North-African refinement versus Andalusian fire in ‘Al Ud al andalus’. It’s a nice idea to juxtapose two princely members of the lute family which are geographically so far apart, yet historically related, but the album is hardly an attempt to bring out the historical musical kinship between the two lutes. It does not pretend to lay bare how the great 18th or 19th century solo tradition of Chinese pipa music had its earliest roots in lute playing of Central Asian origin from ten centuries earlier. The disc is more in the manner of a chance meeting between two fine musicians from widely different countries who cursively explore each other’s contrasting
backgrounds (and seem to enjoy it well enough). In the long opening track ‘Maulbroon’ (co-featuring percussionist Patrick Graham), Liu Fang mostly limits her *pipa* contribution to ostinato figurations Arabic style. In ‘Homs’ she carefully copies the Arabic melody heard on the *ud*. Farhan Sabbagh is ready to try out Chinese melodical turns in ‘Shepherd Maid’, or to reduce his presence to a drone or a Western-type bass part, but it always seems to be ‘either / or’: the two musical worlds of these musicians are too far apart to allow for more substantial blends. Sabbagh sometimes plays along as a distinguished percussionist, and Liu Fang adds a few tracks on the *zheng* (Chinese zither, her second instrument, well done though not as exciting as her *pipa* playing).

Frank Kouwenhoven


There is a small but active circle of *qin* connoisseurs in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It centres around Chen Wen, a student of the late Sun Yuqin of Taiwan. She is originally from Taiwan, where she has in the past produced a number of CDs by other *qin* players, for example Wu Zhao (*Memories of an Old Friend*, Chenxi Wenhua Shiyue Youxian Gongsi CT-9401, 1994); this is the first recording she has published of her own work. The title, *Xian Wai zhi Yin* (Music from Beyond the Strings) recalls the famous poem by Tao Qian in which he expresses his view that he does not even need the strings to appreciate the music of his *qin*.

There are ten pieces on the album, all of them well-loved pieces from the core repertoire. *Gui Qu Lai Ci* is not so often recorded, and the present performance is exquisite. Her playing style is said to be very close to that of her illustrious teacher, and certainly has the delicacy, expressiveness and attention to fine detail one expects of a master player. *Changmen Yuan* is as redolent with the anguish of Empress Chen Ajiao in her banishment to the Changmen palace as *Liang Xiao Yin* is with the calm of a peaceful evening when all is right with the world.

The quality of the recording is excellent, definitely among the best this reviewer has heard. The clear, concise and informative English notes are a refreshing change from the broken English often seen on such recordings, and do much to enhance the value of this CD and make it stand out from the many commercial recordings of *qin* music now being made.

All in all this is a very fine album, and it is much to be hoped that Chen Wen will record more in the future.

Julian Joseph
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