

**Westernisation, Ideology and
National Identity in
20th-Century Chinese Music**

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Royal Holloway, University of London**

DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, Yiwun Ouyang, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others, this is always clearly stated.

Signed: 

Date: 19 May 2012

To my newly born baby

ABSTRACT

The twentieth century saw the spread of Western art music across the world as Western ideology and values acquired increasing dominance in the global order. How did this process occur in China, what complexities does it display and what are its distinctive features? This thesis aims to provide a detailed and coherent understanding of the Westernisation of Chinese music in the 20th century, focusing on the ever-changing relationship between music and social ideology and the rise and evolution of national identity as expressed in music.

This thesis views these issues through three crucial stages: the early period of the 20th century which witnessed the transition of Chinese society from an empire to a republic and included China's early modernisation; the era from the 1930s to 1940s comprising the Japanese intrusion and the rising of the Communist power; and the decades of economic and social reform from 1978 onwards. The thesis intertwines the concrete analysis of particular pieces of music with social context and demonstrates previously overlooked relationships between these stages. It also seeks to illustrate in the context of the appropriation of Western art music how certain concepts acquired new meanings in their translation from the European to the Chinese context, for example modernity, Marxism, colonialism, nationalism, tradition, liberalism, and so on.

Key words: 20th-century Chinese music, Westernisation, politics, national identity

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INTRODUCTION

In the past two centuries, the spread of Western art music into other regional cultures of the world has brought about the concomitant reconstruction of indigenous music traditions, initially as a consequence of aggressive Western colonialism, followed by the “soft power” influence of the art cultures of the capitalist West, and finally by the active adoption as the standard model for a wide number of art forms (initially in form but increasingly with the globalisation of social forms, in content), culminating in today’s globalised cultural standards. Albeit sharing some unavoidable similarities, the story of the appropriation of Western art music in one country or region varies from one to another depending on the specific historical, social and cultural contexts. This thesis is primarily concerned with rendering the specificity of the Chinese story. Undoubtedly it is an extremely rich and complex topic and will involve a broad approach – not least considering the complexity of issues that a whole century will encompass. But after careful consideration I decided that only a scope of such breadth could guarantee clarity and coherence. In this Introduction I will suggest some guidelines for the understanding of the plethora of facts, events and ideas presented throughout the course of this thesis, while leaving a more detailed theoretical discussion to the first chapter of the thesis’s main body entitled “The Backdrop: History, Politics and Previous Research”.

I would like to begin with an episode that encapsulates the problem. In the epilogue to the third edition of *Chinese Pre-Modern and Modern Music History*, published in 2009, Wang Yuhe, a music theorist and historian from the Central Conservatory of Music, made an assertive and defensive comment on the reception of 20th-century Chinese music as follows:

Today, the majority of [Chinese] music workers and audience are more endeared to those new pieces based upon traditional music than to the [original] traditional

music left unchanged in their original state. ... The new social life and educational system have made them accustomed to and cultivated their appreciation of these works that bear distinct Chinese cultural features while creatively employing the European-style multi-part techniques of music composition. ... They will not deny the nature of these works as “Chinese music” just because the composers made use of compositional techniques originated from Europe (which mainly refers to harmony, counterpoint, the musical forms and orchestration). ... Whether this historical fact is liked, or accepted, by those foreigners or not, the development of Chinese music culture has always been proceeding along the directions of the need and preference of the Chinese people.¹

If one ignores the somewhat xenophobic tone, Wang’s voice embodies an enduring and often reiterated opinion, sometimes seen as cliché, in the evaluation of Chinese culture. Chinese culture has been described by a range of world-famous historical and anthropological scholars (Ralph Linton,² L. S. Stavrianos,³ etc.) as having an especially strong power of appropriating and assimilating external cultures and turning them into an organic part of itself. It is also extensively held by Chinese literati and scholars that to convert “intruders” into new constituents of Chinese culture has been a sustaining tendency or recurrent phenomenon in Chinese history. This cultural process is typically exemplified by the dissemination of Buddhism in China and its “sinisation” from the first to the sixth century A.D., the dominance of and fusing with the Han majority by the Mongolian culture in the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) and similarly by the Manchu culture in the Qing Dynasty (1636-1911). It is commonly believed that in these processes the main factors of Chinese culture remain unaffected and irreplaceable, while the external cultures were reconstituted and reformed. Therefore, by asserting an absolute and unchangeable core identity, Chinese intellectuals are accustomed to the claim that their cultural identity is a continuously flowing and updating one but one that remains in its essence, the same.

To bear this viewpoint and mode of thinking in mind is essential to the understanding of the many perspectives provoked in this thesis. At the beginning of the

¹ Wang Yuhe, *Zhongguo Jinxiandai Yinyueshi (Chinese Pre-Modern and Modern Music History, 3rd ed.)*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2009, p. 360.

² Ralph Linton, *The Tree of Culture*. Knopf, 1969.

³ Leften Stavros Stavrianos, *A Global History: From Prehistory to the 21st Century (7th Edition)*. Prentice Hall, 1998.

20th century, although Chinese society had registered the impact of Western cultural intervention and its underlying structures had undergone colossal changes, China did not turn into a colony of the West as many other Asian countries did, but preserved the institutions that enabled it to prolong its own ideological and cultural veins to a rather large extent even enduring the radical revolutionary transformations of the 20th century. This fact provides an important backdrop to the understanding of the ideological “myth” of (and also provided the excuse for) China’s assimilation of foreign culture for its own political purposes throughout the various periods in the 20th century.

The Chinese study of Western art music in a widespread scale started in the last decades of the 19th century. For a long period ensuing, the music appearing in China that employed Western compositional techniques, including sonic texture and imported instruments, was called “*Xin Yinyue*”, i.e., New Music, but not “Western music” (and not to be confused with the Western notion of “New Music”, a term coined to describe late 20th century art music). This term clearly shows that this hybrid music was viewed spontaneously as a part and parcel of Chinese music culture. As viewed by many Western scholars (as will be discussed in Chapter Four), this intrusion of Western music techniques seriously undermined the indigenous tradition of Chinese music. But Chinese domestic scholars often contend that the so-called “music tradition” of China *per se* had already endured many times of transformation under specific historical contexts, most eminently during the Sui and Tang Dynasties (581 – 901 A.D.) when a lot of Central Asian instruments were introduced to the mainland China and incorporated into the mainland musical culture due to the increasing volume of foreign trade and the accompanying cultural communications with neighbouring countries.⁴ With such deeply-rooted precedents in mind, it is no wonder that modern Chinese musicians and audiences could easily justify the “Chineseness” of the

⁴ Relevant historical resources of music include Feng Wenci, *Zhongwai Yinyue Jiaoliushi (History of Music Communication between China and Foreign Countries)*. Hunan Education Press, 1998; He Ping, “*Zhongwai Wenhua Jiaoliu yu Sui Tang Yinyue Wudao de Xingsheng*” (Sino-Foreign Intercultural Communication and the Flourishing of Music and Dance during the Sui and Tang Dynasties), *Guizhou Wenshi Congkan (Guizhou Literature and History Series)*, (04) 2000; etc.

above-mentioned multi-part music obviously deploying Western influences. This thesis provides a clue to and interpretation of this sustained and evolving viewpoint throughout different periods of the 20th century.

In fact, at the moment when Western art music entered the boundary of China, it was beginning to lose its essential feature as “Western art music”. It was the case even at the beginning of the 20th century, when the old social structure and culture of China suffered the most serious and accumulated crises, and even in the hands of the most extreme and fierce advocates of Westernisation. The imported aspects of Western art music, whilst including many key elements such as polyphony, harmony and orchestration, nevertheless were missing their Western aesthetic core. Given the context of appropriation, this core had been mostly, if not completely, replaced by a set of indigenous Chinese values or spiritual interpretations based upon the cultural dominance of Confucianism. There was a multiplicity of factors that led to this condition. In part it was because of the host culture’s strong tendency of assimilation that continued to exert its function, and that one can transplant a guest cultural artifact into another culture without transplanting the cultural context itself. Second, as China began to make initial contact with Western art music, it was not through direct communication with the West, but from its near neighbour, Japan (as I will discuss in Chapter Two). And last but not least, although there did exist some persons who fully embraced the cultural core of Western art music (for example Qing Zhu (1893-1959), a highly controversial figure in the history of Chinese music criticism, who showed passionate admiration of the transcendental and rational spirit represented by Western art music), there was no better way to promote Western art music than to equip it with Chinese interpretations.

There is, however, another essential issue that is related to this thesis, that is, the political pragmatism that provided much of the context of the so-called “new music”. Soon after this music emerged in China, it had been employed as a pragmatic tool for social and ideological construction. Back in the age of Confucius, music was used for

reinforcing rituals, cultivating morale, maintaining social harmony and purifying people's minds. During the 20th century, as in many other countries and regions, music was closely engaged in the establishment of the modern nation-state, although this trend was far less prominent in the Republican period (1911-1949) than later on when the Chinese Communist Party took over the control of the country. As each round of political turbulence was accompanied by a reassessment of the ideologies concerned, susceptibility to the apportionment of social values would become a core criterion for the newly emerging musical genres in China. Musical creations were obsessed by a political-ethical binary of "good" versus "bad", or "correct" versus "incorrect", which almost constituted a habitual tendency in the assessing and conceiving of music.

This thesis seeks to reposition music as part of the dynamic process of its political and social setting, to which end I will devote much space for analysis in the chapters that follow. Regarding the specific range of music examined in this thesis, the Westernised, "elitist" together with the reformed native music genres, being the result of conservatory training and reacting directly to the varying political and ideological climate on the Chinese mainland, have received more attention than rural, ethnic or folk music which has retained its original status. Likewise, the achievement of those Chinese musicians and composers who mainly made their name overseas, although occasionally involved in the discussion for comparative reasons, has generally been excluded from the scope of this thesis. The main composers chosen for case studies (Shen Xingong, Zeng Zhimin and Li Shutong for Chapter 2, Xian Xinghai, Lü Ji and He Luting for Chapter 3, and Zhu Jian-er, Bao Yuankai and Yang Qing for Chapter 4) had all established their acclaim within the mainstream – within the framework of the typical political narratives, propaganda and criticism of modern China. I will particularly attempt to highlight the inherent logical context in which the dominant political ideology shifted and exerted a given impact on a variety of discourses of music creation and reception, so as more comprehensively to reveal the diverse ramifications of Chinese music, as it emerged in the 20th century.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKDROP: HISTORY, POLITICS AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

This chapter aims to provide a theoretical “map” for an excursion into the labyrinth of 20th-century Chinese music. Although this plenitudinous body involves numerous events, movements of thought and a plethora of representative figures, it can nevertheless be viewed as consisting of several major stages, each with its own different form of guiding ideology. It is thus necessary to figure out the most essential ideological factors playing upon the trajectory of 20th-century Chinese music and its development. Meanwhile, it will help to arrive at a clearer view of the transformation of Chinese music by locating it as one part of global music culture in the world which, during the recent centuries, experienced rapid changes taking place against a broader political and ideological backdrop.

The chapter will begin with a short bird’s-eye review of Chinese history in the 20th century along with a brief introduction to each historical stage’s influence on music. There cannot have been many countries in the world that had experienced a more drastic social transformation as China did in the same period. Of course, it cannot be denied that dramatic social change took place everywhere; however, the extent and speed of epoch shift in China was tremendous. Within decades it had transformed itself from an imperial to a republican and then to a socialist country, and in the last twenty years of the 20th century it turned again, this time to absorb capitalist marketisation in the pursuit of opening-up and economic reform. In times of social transformation, the accompanying ideological change exerted a profound impact on the evolution of culture and arts; it is this process that has given rise to the kinds of Chinese music existent today.

Other goals to be achieved in this introductory chapter include the clarification of some key ideological concepts taken in their specific Chinese setting, and a retrospective reflection on the previous research that has been done in the field of Chinese music, whether by Chinese domestic, or by Western scholars (including Chinese scholars from overseas). It is from these ongoing factors that the rationale for this thesis stems.

1.1 The Location of Chinese Modern Music in History and Politics

An overview of China in the 20th century

In the first eleven years of the 20th century China was under the reign of the last imperial dynasty, the Qing Dynasty whose monarch was the descent of the Manchu minority people who originated in northeast China. Having ruled China for over 200 years, the dynasty was now in a precarious condition. The economic and social order of the empire had been seriously impaired by the two opium wars between China and Britain that took place in the 19th century (the second one also involving France). Britain was seeking to enhance its export of opium to the empire, which had kept strict control of foreign trade for years. Both the wars ended in defeat for China, and this motivated the progressive members of the Qing court to commit to modernising the country both materially and ideologically, although their effort was much hampered by other members of the ruling stratum.

Other major wars taking place in China in the recent past included the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), a Christian-inspired civil war against the Qing Dynasty; a defensive war against Japanese invasion on the Yalu River in 1894; and the intervention by the Alliance of Eight Nations (Austria-Hungry, Britain, Germany, France, Italy, Japan,

Russia and the United States) in China to suppress the anti-foreign Boxer Rebellion. Despite successfully putting down the Taiping Rebellion, in all of the foreign interventions China suffered big defeats with a number of its coastal cities, such as Qingdao, Dalian and Hong Kong, becoming colonies of the victor countries, although the majority of the hinterland remained uncolonised. It was the time of a quick and hasty encounter with Western culture and the social basis of old China was seriously undermined. In addition to the normal resentment shown toward the Western intruders, there was also a more profound shock evoked by witnessing how progressive Western culture was in terms of its development of technology. This motivated many young people to travel to and study in Japan, a neighbouring country of China in Asia which had been very receptive to Westernisation, where they made the earliest contact with Western art music and developed a preliminary recognition of the function of Western art music in a modernising society like Japan.

Since it failed to defend against the encroachment of foreign forces and repair a society that had been ruined by incessant warfare, in 1911, the last imperial dynasty was overthrown and replaced by a new republic led by Sun Yat-sen. But the newly established Republic quickly degenerated into an autocratic regime after the death of Sun, with conflict between warlords dividing the country. It was not until 1927 that the country was reunified by Chang Kai-shek and his Nationalist Party (*Kuomintang*). By then the domestic social crisis had reached a new zenith as the result of decades of wars, especially in countryside. Another event that had a long-term effect on Chinese history was that believers in Marxism started to appear across the country (most famously, Chen Duxiu, Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai, and so on). Wishing to use Marxism to guide and reform China, they founded the Chinese Communist Party in Shanghai in 1921. The existence of the Communist Party was opposed by the Nationalist Party who disliked the class struggle provoked by the Communists, and thus it started a series of wars in order to suppress the uprisings provoked by the latter. The Communist Party then took a strategic retreat to Yan'an located in the northwest of China, where Mao Zedong formally assumed the leadership of the Communist Party.

Despite the fact that the Nationalist Party had conceived and issued some plans for using culture in general and music in particular for ideological propaganda and construction during this period, music in China was in the process of spontaneous development without being bound by governmental control. There was a very obvious tendency towards modernity shown by music in urban cities and in training in professional music institutions. By contrast, although some music practices which had originated in rural areas shifted to urban areas, the majority of traditional folk music still preserved archaic and unaffected forms. The music of the whole country took on the appearance of the juxtaposition of modernity and tradition before this pair were brought together and fused into a new national and political tool by the quickly changing political conditions.

In 1937 Japan declared total war and began the invasion to China with the aim of colonisation. This caused the various factions representing the Chinese people to unite together to fight against the common enemy, and the conflict between the two parties gave way to cooperation on the same battle line. After eight years of stubborn resistance by the indigenous population, and following the defeat of the Japanese by America, the Japanese troops finally surrendered in 1945, immediately after which a civil war broke out between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party for the overall leadership of China. Victory was won by the Communist Party in 1949 and this led to the foundation of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Nationalist Party retreated to Taiwan and established its own independent regime there. This thesis illustrates the crucial meaning of this period as an extremely decisive one in reforming and reinterpreting traditional Chinese music and the appropriation of Western art music in the service of intense political propaganda. Chapter Three suggests that the process of shaping cultural and musical practices was not only a matter of music as a recipient of political influences but also one of music as the dynamic constructor of ideologies.

The economy recovered considerably during the first decade after the foundation

of PRC under the one-party government of the Communist Party. Despite the disastrous economic policy of the “Great Leap Forward” (*Da Yue Jin*) lasting from 1957 to 1961, which embraced rapid industrialisation and caused serious instability, as well as an accompanying nationwide famine, national industry developed quickly. However, although society had acquired stability, conflict between social classes was still emphasised and class struggle remained the focus of political life. Mao Zedong wished to see a more radical socialist reform and opposed those party leaders who were concerned with giving away too much economic interest to the individual. He launched a political campaign against these “rightists” in 1957. In the mid-1960s, aiming to carry on the revolution not only in the material layer but in spiritual, Mao Zedong engineered the nationwide campaign of “Cultural Revolution” in which he called for young people to be the pioneers of this revolution. Unfortunately in many places this campaign turned into malicious factional fighting between political fractions and indiscriminate destroying of all the legacies of ancient culture. The chaos lasted for ten years from 1966 to 1976 and caused incalculable losses to the society, economy and culture of China. Music of this era, apart from inheriting and prolonging the policies originated from war time, was increasingly brought into the frame of socialist industrialisation as Chapter Three will elaborate. Political control of music reached a zenith and even deformation during the Cultural Revolution, showing hostility to almost all forms of Western art music. However, the politics of this period still offered breeding ground for some very influential musical works deliberately making use of the forms and techniques of Western art music while bearing overt political meanings.

In 1976 Mao Zedong died and the Cultural Revolution ended. It was recognised by both the Communist Party and the common people that the Cultural Revolution was a big mistake, and China was in need of the annulling of the previous policy and a new period of reforms to revitalise the country. 1978 witnessed a watershed in Chinese contemporary history when the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party introduced the policies of economic reform and opening-up to the outside world under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. The process of reform brought

vitality to the economy and led many social industries towards marketisation. Cultural and artistic practices acquired comparatively large freedoms but by no means in the same sense as would be understood by those accustomed to the degree of liberalism in the West. Marxism and revolution were no longer the major themes of political propaganda but were replaced by nationalism and modernisation. The reform movement also brought about problems such as inflation, corruption and the increasingly large gap between rich and poor. This period was a key one for China's stepping-out into the outside world, in which Western art music and its Chinese appropriations functioned as a key medium for diplomacy, promoting national image and as a symbol of economic boom. Meanwhile, music also endured the impact of marketisation and composers experienced a struggle between their individuality and collective nationalist ambitions.

Theoretical models, including the experience of music in other countries

Given such a grand historical panorama, how is it possible to locate the place of music? Here a review will be given of the various models and theoretical solutions that have been offered by previous research on music in other countries, as well as a tentative projection of these viewpoints onto the topic of this thesis.

Today, the importance of attaching social-historical concerns to music has been widely acknowledged, and the role of music as a constructive social force increasingly investigated. However, it is still worth casting a review on how this conception came to take shape and of how many school of thoughts have been involved in this process. In European music culture from the 17th to 19th century, "the concept of absolute music was so deep-rooted"⁵ that many traditional theorists and critics considered the meaning of music to reside entirely according to its internal laws and hardly able to be incorporated into any hermeneutic scheme. Both the formalist approach of the

⁵ Carl Dahlhaus, *The Idea of Absolute Music*. Trans. by Roger Lustig. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1989, p. 3.

mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century, which sees music as an organic process of logic and form, and the Schenkerian structuralism of the twentieth century which holds music “within a theoretical framework rather than noting their surface features”⁶ lock music within its own independent realm and prevent it from seeking its sense from the external world. The ground started to be broken by the approach of semiotics derived from Saussurean linguistics in the early 20th century, an analytical tool first employed by linguists and then expanded to a broad range of disciplines, such as art, architecture, folklore, literary criticism and philosophy, in the form of Structuralism. Semiotics is committed to establish a meaningful link extending from a thing’s own features to its meaning in the outside world, namely, to discover and clarify the relation between “signifier” – the form which the sign takes, and “signified” – the concept it represents.⁷ It laid down the foundation for music to be perceived as a bearer of meaning. However, the methodology of semiotics was not applied in the field of musicology until considerably later. As for music as “signs”, Raymond Monelle’s *Linguistics and Semiotics in Music* (1992) provides a model of applying the analytical methods derived from linguistics and semiotics to music. Kofi Agawu’s *Playing with Signs: Semiotic Interpretation of Classical Music* (1992) is a milestone work focusing on the interpretation of music meaning. Agawu uses the theoretical kernel “topic”: forms of associative signification consisting of both special music types, such as dances, and styles of music which include military and hunt music, fanfares, singing style, brilliant style, French overture, pastoral, Turkish music, *Sturm und Drang*, sensibility, learned style, and fantasia. Taking his departure from history, Agawu assembles a number of writings by major composers, analysts and critics from the eighteenth century to the contemporary period to prove that the notion of topic did play a central role in theoretical and aesthetic discussions and performances in the eighteenth century. Agawu states that his analysis was not made for the purpose of looking for any over-arching, neutral, or unbiased principle, but “to return the clinical dissection to a humane environment” featuring the classical period.⁸

⁶ William Drabkin, ‘Heinrich Schenker’, in *The Cambridge History of Western Music Theory*. T. Christensen. (ed.) Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 832.

⁷ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics (Revised Ed. Edition)*, McGraw-Hill Professional, 1966.

⁸ Kofi Agawu, *Playing with Signs – a Semiotic Interpretation of Classic Music*. Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton

Another intellectual trend that had inspired music research extensively and deeply since the first half of the 20th century was the thought of Marxism. In terms of methodology Marxism has guided humanities research toward the terrain of social sciences, providing a means that enables culture-oriented scholars to engage with social processes and matters.⁹ In one of its sub-traditions Marxist concepts came to be applied, first in combination with Freudian theories during the interwar period and then with semiotics and post-structuralism since the 1960s, to address mass culture and music from the standpoint of individual consciousness and consensual structure in capitalist society.¹⁰ Marxist theories of mass culture were applied well before the 1970s with the Frankfurt school, most famously in the work of Theodor Adorno. Another strand of academic Marxism consolidated in the 1970s was centered in studies of political economy, theorising culture and aesthetics as linked to class relations and structures of domination.¹¹ Beyond its intellectual and academic versions, which are usually termed “Western Marxism”, Marxism also takes a practical form in what Qureshi (2002) called “activist”, “political” or “state” Marxism. Marxism in this sense is associated with nation-wide revolutionary movements and the domination of the representatives of the proletarian class in terms of the overt programme of the political regime. More specifically, the typical context for “activist” Marxism is centered in countries and regions like the former Soviet Union, Latin America, Eastern Europe (prior to 1989) and China. Later I will further discuss the real-life practice of activist Marxism in China and the resulting Marxist scholarship of music in terms of the Chinese background. But Qureshi has already addressed the dilemma and paradox of Marxist scholarship in the “activist” context:

Contested by academic Marxists, opposed by non-Marxists, and used as negative evidence by anti-Marxists, state and revolutionary Marxism have nevertheless offered alternative applications of Marxist theory to art and music, even if these

University Press, 1991.p. 4.

⁹ Regula Burckhardt Qureshi, “Introduction: Thinking Music, Think Marx”. In Regula Burckhardt Qureshi (ed.), *Music and Marx: Ideas, Practice, Politics*. New York and London: Routledge, 2002, p. xiv.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

are intellectually constrained by their activist purpose and legitimised by arbitrarily totalising implementation.¹²

The notion that music is an autonomous art that transcends society, politics and everyday life has been formally under attack since the mid-1970s,¹³ and during the last two decades of the 20th century there was an explosion of new trends and approaches along with the eminent rising of the so-called “New Musicology” in Anglo-American academia. New Musicology presented a response to the old views and methodologies of music research just as the intellectual development of Post-Structuralism replaced the models of Structuralism. Like the theorists of Post-Structuralism, who, in general, reject the understanding of human culture in terms of some decisive meaning or overarching “order”, the New Musicology does not seek to explain music as the result of any autonomous principles or the achievement of great men. Instead it emphasises music’s social contingency, placing musical phenomena under the scrutiny of disciplines like cultural studies, sociology, feminist studies, and so on. It reveals that music, regardless to which era and region it belongs, has been a site of perpetual social-political struggle. Music is shown to have the potential to “persuade, seduce, indoctrinate, rouse, incite, or even silence” listeners in the implementation of a political agenda.¹⁴ The new musicologists also claim that musical discourses are dominated by factors like class, gender and race, which fact has promoted criticism toward the existing discourses of music history and practice, leading musicology to a consideration of broader contextual issues.

This debate between two patterns of musical scholarship – the one seeking to unveil the underlying principles of musical products, the other applying a critical reading to the social dynamic of any given musical discourse – might provide the most direct glosses for the two major competing, yet not entirely contradictory, models employed in musical study as are discussed by Tia DeNora (2000). One model tends to

¹² Ibid., pp. xvii-xviii.

¹³ Richard D. Leppert & Susan McClary, *Music and Society: the Politics of Composition, Performance, and Reception*. Cambridge University Press, 1989.

¹⁴ Annie Janeiro Randall, “Introduction”, *Music, Power, and Politics*. Taylor & Francis, 2007.

directly decode the social content of music, viewing music as a media or carrier of certain modes of perception or thought. But this model often suffers from being static and less competent in explaining the subtle and specific matters in the real world. It is also clumsy because the process of music creation is often completed under the drive of intuition or at least follows the rules of music, rather than being guided by a certain social notion. The second model, by contrast, takes music not only as a passive bearer of social content but as an active force in social life and as part of the building material of consciousness and the accompanying social structure.¹⁵ Born & Hesmondhalgh (2000) propose a similar pair of contrasting models of relating music, culture and social ideology.¹⁶ In the field of ethnomusicology, Bruno Nettl, in his monumental theoretical work published in 1983, gives summarisation of a variety of approaches followed by ethnomusicologists to reveal the relationship between music and culture from about 1950 to 1980s.¹⁷ Here although I have no space to present all of them, there will be a direct bearing on the question of which model or approach this thesis will rely on. In some passages it will encounter certain historical moments where the political and social aims of music were particularly emphasised and clarified, and where music itself was employed obviously as a propaganda tool. This kind of situation obtained in the 1940s after Mao Zedong delivered his *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* in 1942, which delivered the notion that good art must reflect revolutionary content. But in most situations music is linked with politics and society in a much more subtle way. Music serves, in the words of Born and Hesmondhalgh, as “fluid and processual dynamics”¹⁸ in the formation and consolidation of social ideologies in a larger picture. Music pushes, confirms, indicates and implies when verbal political persuasion is absent. Readers will find many examples of this latter case appearing in the post-1980 music creations in the context of social and political reform.

¹⁵ Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.3-4.

¹⁶ Georgia Born & David Hesmondhalgh (eds.), *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, University of California Press, 2000, p. 31.

¹⁷ Bruno Nettl, “Music and ‘That Complex Whole’: Music in Culture”, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Thirty-One Issues and Concepts*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005, pp. 215-31.

¹⁸ Born & Hesmondhalgh, “Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music”, *Western Music And Its Others*. University of California Press, 2000, p. 2.

Now it is necessary to discuss some theories that more directly and specifically circumscribe this thesis. The discussion will also be accompanied by a brief overview of research that has been done with the aim of describing the encounters with, and borrowing and appropriation of, Western art music by other countries and regions, as well as the evolution of concepts, ideologies and values that took place in the course of the development of the new music practices. These provide not only analytical references points for this thesis but also a point of comparison, placing China in the broad context of the world movements and transformations that took place during the past two centuries as well as invoking the distinctive features of Chinese development.

The function of music in helping create and maintain the identities and differentiation of a nation or a group is the first crucial element in this thesis, the task of which is to unveil how Western music became “Chinese” and how the old music traditions of China were reconstructed following Western models to form a new music bearing a Chinese identity. In recent years the concept of “identity” has become a key concern in a wide range of social sciences, as well as culture and art studies. Accordingly, many models, or at least suggestive angles of thought, have been offered by existing publications that attempt to explicate the relationship between music and identity construction or the role of music in the latter. Of course, the so-called identity politics is applicable to a wide range of phenomena that involve multiple categorising factors – gender, social classes, ethnicity, people with disabilities, and so on, but especially pertinent to this thesis is a consciousness of national identity that is often seen to arise when a nation is striving for, or has gained, independence politically or culturally. Commonly, this process is closely entangled with the reinvention of tradition under new historical and social conditions. According to Eric Hobsbawm, (re)invention of tradition is essentially a process of “formalisation and ritualisation characterised by making reference to the past.”¹⁹ Hobsbawm also observes that in the past 200 years the adaption of old models for a new agenda took place much more frequently than before given the unprecedentedly rapid transformation of human society, especially in

¹⁹ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 4.

the field of nation building: to cultivate a people's citizenship, to nurture their loyalty and sense of belonging to the new regime. Here, I will just raise several examples from the wealth of relevant studies to give a sense of the multiple insights hereby gained. As for musical culture in Europe, Gelbart's monograph titled *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music"* (2007), focusing on Scottish folk music, reveals this music legacy as being preserved as a remnant of the rural past for romantically inclined intellectual circles and for the reading public with modern Western civilisation, in which process a "Scottish identity" emerged and was consolidated through presenting a differentiated and primitive "other" against European civilisation. Gelbart also discusses the infatuation of antiquarian "genius" as an important intrinsic driving factor for cultivating national pride and how every European nation had discovered its own "folk" and "art" masterpieces by the mid-19th century (an issue which I will mention again in Chapter Three to compare what happened in China during the 1940s). The story that national identity played an accelerating role in the forming and development of a music genre in Europe was also in evidence in the inter-war period in Norway where a post-colonial identity was constructed through embracing French influences and expelling the long established dominance of German music (Aksnes, 2002), and in the domestic chamber music in 19th-century Britain (Bashford, 2010).

Regarding music cultures outside Europe, research into national identity seems to have engaged largely with the changing social and political environment, as well as with the shift of power that is accompanied by this process. Beneath the cases appearing in this category of research often lie the issues of ideological hegemony and resistance: music helps shape and strengthen the identity of a group, signifying differentiation, or exclusion, from the dominance of an ideology or culture. Lily Kong (1995) provides a reflection on these questions by looking at two groups of music in Singapore: the "national" songs supported by the government and the ruling elite, who aimed to inculcate a civil religion that directed favour and fervour towards the nation, and music embodying cultural resistance to state policies. In the Australia of the late 1960s, Peter Sculthorpe reacted against the British-dominated past of Australian music

through his close engagement with Balinese music. (Cook, forthcoming) Sultanova's article (2005), through surveying the past and present of music-making processes in Central Asia, explores the historical background and issues of change in music and national identity over a period starting with Russian colonisation and Bolshevik legacy in Central Asia and continuing up to the emergence of contemporary independent states, against the challenges from revolution (Iran), war (Afghanistan), regime change (Pakistan), as well as the Soviet Union's collapse and the painful process of gaining independence that accompanied it. In seeking of answer to the question "who are we" that inspired the development of new music, a new set of values were brought into life and refashioned ethnic identities across the region. Spinetti (2005) also addresses the interaction between musical styles, identity and political economy during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in Tajik popular music. Al-deen's essay (2005) on Rai music, a music genre which evolved from Orani-Algerian music and had been banned from the Algerian broadcast media because it was considered subversive by the Algerian government until the 1980s, reveals that Rai music has been actually regarded as a symbol for cynicism and has become as essential to the identity of Algerians as the blues was to African-Americans in America. In some other writings, the stories mainly focus on constructing a non-Western identity in many countries during the twentieth century. A similar story can be found in Indonesia and Japan where it reflects the confidence felt by these countries in their own musical traditions. (Cook, forthcoming) This discourse took on a sharper political edge in South Africa both during and after the age of apartheid (1948-1994), where new compositional strategies were adopted to embrace the birth of the "rainbow nation" to represent South Africa as an autonomous entity rather than a colonial entity linked to Europe. (Cook, forthcoming)

My thesis is devoted to tracing and exploring the transformative role that the seeking of national identity played in the course of the 20th century in Chinese music, whether or not political institutions playing a foremost or leading role. The second chapter will reflect on the fact that in the first decades of the century the traditional Confucian concepts of art and music were reformed to become a new mode of

appropriation for the reception of Western art music. It was almost never the result of any intention of the political authorities but essentially due to the efforts of the educated middle class. Likewise, in the symphonic music creations that appeared in the context of post-1980 social and political reform, a process that is elaborated in the fourth chapter, the direct intervention of political force is far less an active factor than that of the intellectuals who committed themselves to enhancing the overall status of China in the world. In both of these discourses politics functioned much more “backstage” than the 1930s-1940s era when the Chinese traditional folk music was made into political propaganda for Communist values and as a defense against the Japanese enemy. Regardless of reasons and form, all these activities involved the deliberate exclusion of some old practices in favour of new ones. This is particularly obvious, for example, in the 1950s large-scale reformation of folk instruments with modern industrial materials, and the innovation of the performing techniques of folk instruments after 1980 (see Chapter 3 and 4 respectively for a discussion of these two processes).

Another important route into the issue of Chinese identity in music stems from the way that China treated its minorities in the course of developing its new national culture in the 20th century. In ancient times, most minorities – Tibetans, Mongolians, Hui, Miao, Dong, Zhuang, Koreans, and so on – were politically a form of tributary state subordinate to the central imperial court. These minority groups also kept a loose connection with the Han majority culture. It appears that the formal and systematic study of minority music cultures in the last century was simultaneous with the location of the Chinese Communist Party in Yan’an during the Japanese invasion, and more accurately, after Mao Zedong openly advocated that literature and art should come from the masses, for the masses and should raise the standards of and educate the masses.²⁰ The content of education included promoting proletarian revolution among the minorities, as well as provoking their sense of belonging to the Chinese nation, so that they could actively take part in the war of national defense against the Japanese

²⁰ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art”, 1942.

enemy. An exhortation made through local music, as well as in other oral genres, proved to be more effective than the written words given the high percentage of illiterates among the local inhabitants. This was not only implemented in minority regions but also in those agrarian communities with a low educational level and regional culture with distinctive features. Chapter Three exemplifies this process through the *yangge* movement that took place in Shaanxi Province in 1940s.

After the foundation of the People's Republic of China the central leadership continued to "patronise" the minority cultures in bringing them under the rule of the PRC. This process followed-on from the notion delivered in Mao's *Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art* that the art of the masses must be developed and improved in order to better serve the masses. Being paid respect yet still perceived as "backward" and raw materials for building the new national culture, the music of minorities, as well as of other regional folk music genres of the Han majority were subject to transformation by European-style methods. When the propaganda needed proof of cultural and social progress, the products of the newly modified minority and regional folk cultures were often put on stage. The inferior status of the minority cultures caught in a paternalistic relationship is also reflected in the fact that professional musicians, as well as educated audiences, tend to "romanticise" and "essentialise" the music of minorities and less industrialised regions, seeing it as the veritable springs of exoticism and fantasy projection. One may apply the words of William Empson, the great contemporary English critic writing about the myth underlying the contemporary expressions of the pastoral genre, to these Chinese phenomena. Empson maintained that pastoral is "a beautiful relation between rich and poor [and made] ... simple people express strong feelings ... in learned and fashionable language" and that "in pastoral you take a limited life and pretend it is the full and normal one."²¹ These phenomena are explored from a number of angles in this thesis, such as through the *huiyan* activities that have lasted through the history of PRC (Chapter Three) and the creative process of the symphonic piece *Wilderness for dizi*

²¹ William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*. New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1960.

and orchestra (Chapter Four).

The ideas of colonialism and post-colonialism present the second conceptual entity that contributes to the complexity of this thesis. A great deal of research has been done from the perspective of how Western art music influenced and changed indigenous social life in the course of the encounter of colonisers and colonised. Ian Woodfield (1995), John Koegel (2001) and Grant Olwage (2007) all trace the role of Western art music as ambassador, symbol of possession and Christian converter from Hispanic Florida and California to Japan, and to the colonial city of Grahamstown in the Cape. Western art music acted as a constructive part of local social and cultural life. This was most especially the case with the religious institutions of 17th-century Cuzco in Spanish Peru, (Baker, 2003) the secular concert life of the 18th-century Calcutta, where Haydn's symphonies were heard as early as 1780s, (Woodfield, 2000) and the "Handel Festival" held in Lagos, the old capital of Nigeria (Agawu, 2003). Western art music served to replicate the mode of life of colonising country outside it and as an extension of its regimes, in the forms of local events, buildings, and the system of music education (Richards, 2001; Fletcher, 2001; Heinrich van der Mescht, 2005). As for East Asia, through giving accounts of the establishment of a Western-style military band and a small orchestra playing light music in the Meiji court, Harich-Schneider (1922) and Judith Ann Herd (2004) both illuminate how Western art music reversed Japan's original isolationism and developed the country into a Westernised nation state.

However, whether "colonialism" is the right theoretical idiom for the Chinese situation is highly debatable. The term colonialism comes from the Roman word "colonia" which means "farm" or "settlement". So colonialism can be defined as the conquest and control of other people's land and goods.²² Although colonialism has been a recurrent and widespread feature of human history, in a more specific sense it is defined by the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as the "process of European settlement and political control over the rest of the world, including America, Australia,

²² Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism (2nd Edition)*. Routledge, 2005, pp.7-8.

and parts of Africa and Asia.”²³ This is why one must be cautious in applying this term to the condition of China, because the vast majority of Chinese land was not occupied by foreigners, and, except for a few areas like Hong Kong and Macau, even most of the conquered coastal cities did not have their sovereignty fully surrendered. Instead they were diplomatically “lent” or “leased” to the intruding foreigners by the imperial government, who at the same time sent governors to manage these places. During the reign of Chang Kai-shek and the Nationalist Government the foreigners were offered concessions to stay. Although the foreigners – mostly Europeans and Westernised Japanese – did not take overall control of Chinese politics, they left an enormous influence on the culture, education and social structure of the cities where they dwelled. These places became a resource of cultural radiation as well as names representing, and models for, modernity. These cities were also the first to be in contact with European art music. The second chapter reveals that in the early decades of the 20th century, Shanghai, one of these foreign-dominated cities, was a major venue for people to be trained in and carry out the teaching and promotion of European music. Although in the Maoist period, which embraced egalitarianism, the superior status of these European-influenced cities was much less highlighted, they still shouldered the task of building the more refined forms of national art and culture. This process is exemplified in the third chapter by the establishment of Europeanised national orchestras and conservatories in places like Shanghai and Tianjin, as well as in the scrutiny of traditional folk music legacies from a European angle as exemplified in the national performances of folk musicians.

Perhaps it is the theory of Post-colonialism that provides a better fit given the absence of direct political, social and military domination of China by the West. Post-colonialism involves no takeover of territory, nor any appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation.²⁴ Instead, it makes reference to a logic of subordination

²³ Margaret Kohn, “Colonialism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/colonialism/>>.

²⁴ Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism (2nd Edition)*. Routledge, 2005, p.11.

that endures even after the former colonies gain independence.²⁵ According to Margaret Kohn (2008) this is a problematic notion in itself, since the interest in as well as the production of knowledge about the former colonies and non-European peoples is actually part of the effort of dominating them and an attempt to extend the terrain of Western epistemology. Thus post-colonial studies, despite being in essence an act of resistance, are inevitably implicated in power and domination and have limitations in their endeavour.²⁶ I will not go too far into detail by raising the tangled controversies therein. But, either under the influence of colonial or post-colonial theories, considerable attention has been given to how the approaches and values of Western art music have reconfigured indigenous music culture. This process is reflected by the effort of the Cairo Congress on Arab Music in 1930 to revive and systematise Arab music on the basis of an artistic foundation following the model of Western art music. (Fletcher, 2001) A similar story took place in Indonesia after World War II, where the foundation of Konservatori Karawitan Indonesia in Surakarta aimed to make gamelan traditions acceptable to non-Javanese and build a truly Indonesian national music. (Powers, 1980) Some authors take up the subject of how the indigenous habits of performance and listening have been changed by the penetration of Western art music. In the *tarab* culture of Arabian music practice, the intimate performance where players can interact in an improvisatory manner with their listeners was replaced by big Arab orchestras which bring together disparate instruments on a Western orchestral model and play from scores. (Racy, 1998) Likewise, in Africa and Asia, elements of traditional music culture have been reconfigured in accordance with the values of Western concert music. (Cook, forthcoming) Within the scope of this thesis, the term “Post-colonialism” makes sense mainly because the Chinese composers and musicians after the Cultural Revolution had been highly enthusiastic regarding the “refining” and reconstructing of their own traditions according to criteria taken from the other shores of the world. They had also been involved in an enthusiastic bid for their works to be ranked among the masterpieces recognised by the rest of the world (see chapter 4). It

²⁵ Margaret Kohn, “Colonialism”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/colonialism/>>.

²⁶ Ibid.

is therefore reasonable to examine the recent history of Chinese music from a post-colonial perspective.

The last perspective to be discussed here (yet far from the final one to appear in course of this thesis) is the discourse employed in the establishment of new music institutions and the conscious efforts put into the raising of national identity. From this specific angle, William Noll (1991) illuminates the gradual rise of national consciousness in the building of music institutions among Polish and Ukrainian peasants in late 19th century and early 20th century, a process which was largely due to commercial and national networks formed through wide-spread economic and political changes. In the process the adoption by the Polish of a national music was part of their activity both as a citizen and as a member of the dominant ethnic group within the state. Similarly, this thesis traces the foundation of new music institutions in China, the guiding thoughts they followed, as well as the tasks they were assigned by the political authority. These stories embodied the wish of turning an agriculture-based, regional folk music into urban-based and national music. Before 1940, the existing urban music institutions in China such as the National College of Music in Shanghai had hardly any tie with the ruling Nationalist Government and were pretty much on track for total Westernisation. As suggested by Chapter Three, the serious study of the legacy of Chinese folk music was formally and systematically launched by the music institutions founded in the Communist base at Yan'an, most eminently at the Lu Xun Art College, as well as its branches in other Communist controlled areas. After the foundation of the PRC folk artists were invited into the conservatories for the instruction of young students, and some of whom were even given teaching positions. In 1964 the China Conservatory of Music was specially founded in Beijing for the purpose of performing, studying and inheriting traditional folk music. Almost every professional music institution around the country established special faculties for study of folk music, where students were trained to collect, transcribe and arrange folk music in field works, and learned to perform and compose in a style that combined Chinese folk with the European conservatory ways. This process also imposed a huge influence on village

performers who made themselves known to the urban audiences through occasions of *huiyan*. Many of them went for further European style training in urban conservatories. Such coexistence was essentially built on a very strong nationalist drive, which combination formed the contextual dynamics for many music practices, as will be explored in Chapter 3 and 4.

Clarifying concepts and terms in the Chinese context

Apart from synthesising the multiple strands of thinking that have been mentioned above, it is equally important to clarify certain concepts and terms in their translation from the original European to the Chinese context and how they were reconciled in the interpretation of the latter. Actually, their lacunae can be easily overlooked, in which case it is essential to take note of Edward Said's warning in *Orientalism* with regard to certain kinds of European attitude toward "the Orient":

We need not look for correspondence between the language used to depict the Orient and the Orient itself, not so much because the language is inaccurate but because it is not even trying to be accurate. What it is trying to do... is at one and the same time to characterise the Orient as alien and to incorporate it schematically on a theatrical stage whose audience, manager, and actors are for Europe, and only for Europe.²⁷

Likewise, the appropriation of Western terms and concepts in Eastern lands is often accompanied with a departure from, and distortion of, the original terms as they are understood in their original context. Therefore, without a high familiarity with the Oriental – to be specific, the Chinese – mindset that is rooted in its culture and history, one could be easily lost in the labyrinth of its words and meanings.

(1) Nationalism

²⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.

The concepts of “nation” and “nationalism” have been highly bewildering ones as we can see from their use in modern political language; considerable scholarship has been expended in trying to fathom their range. In an early, “organic” and historical sense the term “nation” can be used to refer to communities tied together by common languages, land, religious faith, kings, cultures, and so forth. (Actually, to describe these communities as “nations” is a makeshift itself here, as to name a given group as a nation and present it as pre-existing is a fairly modern conceptualisation. Rather, all nations are “created”, as a wealth of critical literatures have explored.) Over the last 200 years, however, the shaping of modern nations was more subject to specific political forces rather than to natural and historical ones, from European nation-building in the nineteenth century to the post-1945 national liberation movements.²⁸ The nations formed up in this way are described as “imagined communities” rather than genuine communities by Benedict Anderson (1983) whose monograph title shares the same name. It is “imagined” because the members of a modern nation will never know most of their fellow-members, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community.²⁹ It is also imagined as having a limited boundary and an independent sovereignty, a product of the age in which the Enlightenment and the legacy of the French Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm.³⁰ The notion that the nation is the only legitimate and so the highest form of political organisation has become prevalent in the past two centuries and has given rise to the creed of nationalism, a political principle stressing that each nation is entitled to self-determination, that the political and the national unit should be congruent,³¹ and that the boundaries of the nation and those of the state should coincide.³² For some nations that have stronger political than cultural ties – such as the former Soviet Union and the current-day PRC – and actually span different languages, religions and traditions, the concept of nation is entangled

²⁸ See Andrew Heywood, “Sovereignty, the Nation and Supranationalism”, *Political Theory: An Introduction (3rd Ed.)*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p. 98.

²⁹ See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso, 1983; second edition 1991, p. 6.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Cornell University Press, 1983, p. 1.

³² Andrew Heywood, “Sovereignty, the Nation and Supranationalism”, *Political Theory: An Introduction (3rd Ed.)*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p. 97.

with that of “state”, the political entity comprising the various institutions of government, the bureaucracy, the military, police, courts, social security system and so forth.³³ In this form of nation-state people are united by common laws and are linked by citizenship rather than language, culture, territory or local-community orientated traditions.³⁴ Nationalism has taken on various dimensions: it can be reflected through loyalty or sense of belonging to one’s own nation, usually addressed as “patriotism”. Nationalism can define itself, from another angle, by the aspiration to self-government and independence. The latter case is particularly common in the struggle of developing-world countries against colonial rulers and their national identity acquired through the unifying quest for national liberation.³⁵

In order to properly understand the concepts of “nation” and “nationalism” in the Chinese context and their nexus with music creations, one could project them respectively on the dynastic, republican and PRC eras of Chinese history. – Likewise, it is necessary to mention that the Chinese word for “nation”, “state” or “country” – *guo*, or *guojia*, has special historical and cultural connotations that are largely differentiated from the sense of “nation” as employed in modern Western politics. Thus to use the term “nation” or “nationalism” here is also a makeshift. In ancient times, the concept of the Chinese “nation” was clearly formed through distinguishing between “self” and “other”. The great thinker Confucius over 2,000 years ago used the word *Hua* to address the Chinese whereas the term *Yi* was reserved for foreigners who did not accept Chinese ritual principles (*Li*). But Confucius claimed that the minorities who came to be absorbed into China could be educated in the ways of *Li* while preserving their own diversities. In *Spring and Autumn Annals (Chun Qiu)*, Confucius stated that, “if [uncivilised] minorities come to use Chinese rituals, we can deem them as Chinese.” In the 4th century BC, Mencius, the philosophical successor of Confucius, proposed to the monarch of the Liang Kingdom the idea of an integrated nation. Chapter Six of *The*

³³ Andrew Heywood, “Politics, Government and the State”, *Political Theory: An Introduction (3rd Ed.)*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, p. 75.

³⁴ Erik Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

³⁵ See Andrew Heywood, “Sovereignty, the Nation and Supranationalism”, *Political Theory: An Introduction (3rd Ed.)*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004, pp. 98-101.

Book of Mencius recorded a conversation between Mencius and King Hsiang of Liang:

Mencius went to see King Hsiang of Liang. On coming out from the interview, [Mencius] said, "Abruptly he asked me, 'How can the kingdom be settled?' I replied, 'It will be settled by being united under one sway.' 'Who can so unite it?' I replied, 'He who has no pleasure in killing men can so unite it.' "

Sue Tuohy precisely characterised this worship-based integration into the Chinese concept of nation as "homogeneity encompassing diversity."³⁶ This feature is of course not exclusive to China, but it bears a special sense in the Chinese mindset and manner of treating outside cultures. The Chinese think they are able, as well as entitled, to bring into the orbit of their culture the culture of other's, so that the original culture is always transformed and transfused with new blood. This mode of thinking was still in evidence in the behaviour of many 20th-century Chinese musicians and composers in their dealing with music from Europe and local minority cultures. Taking their attitude toward European music for example, although they identified the characteristic differences between traditional Chinese and European music (see Chapter Two), they also felt free to reinvigorate their own music by referring to the principles and existing repertoire of the borrowed forms yet still perceiving the new products as "Chinese". The last two decades of the 20th century also saw the inheritance of such a tendency on the part of the post-Cultural Revolution composers who drew on the most obvious components and technique of European music in the course of their "Chinese" creative practices (See Chapter Four).

In recent years there has been an increasing academic interest focusing on the achievements and shortcomings of the Nationalist Party's period of rule in China. Much of this research revealed that the modern and Europeanised concept of "nationalism", in its use in a Chinese context, was an ideological child of this era, but it did by no means stay unchangeable. It is agreed by a number of scholars that the founder of the Nationalist Party, Sun Yet-San, advocated a tolerant, democratic Nationalism reconciled

³⁶ Sue Tuohy, "Cultural Metaphors and Reasoning: Folklore Scholarship and Ideology in Contemporary China", *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1991), pp. 189-220.

with urban cosmopolitanism and evincing an egalitarianism of all ethnic groups.³⁷ This was projected by a representative political slogan of his, *San Min Zhuyi*, literally “Three Principles of the People”, consisting of nationalism, democracy and the people’s welfare. The next leader of the Nationalist Party, Chiang Kai-shek, drew Sun’s doctrine towards a totalitarian form of nationalism, but it appeared that Chiang failed to set up an effective connection between art and his political propaganda (the beginning of Chapter Three will discuss this). The gradual strengthening of Communism in China from the late 1920s to 1930s presented a rival and counterpart to the Nationalist Party’s policies in the communists’ orientation to the exploited working class and peasantry. Paradoxically, Mao Zedong’s leadership of the Communist Party was also for a long time committed to the independence of country. These entangled concepts will be mentioned again in the next section about Marxism and Socialism, and their co-influence on music will be given more space for discussion in Chapter Three.

The last surge of nationalism in twentieth-century China took place during its final two decades. The Communist Party leaders who had witnessed the breaches of social peace and order caused by the disturbance of the Cultural Revolution recognised that the misuse of class struggle was harmful to the people, and they needed to modify the enormous loss caused by the movement. Facing an urgent need to resume construction and find new legitimacy for its leadership, the Communist Party resorted to nationalism as a means to the regain public consensus and to accelerate economic recovery. The newly prioritised spirit of nationalism was reflected in the policies of pushing modernisation further forward and encouraging specialists of all fields to carry on new technical and cultural experiments to win honours on behalf of China in the world. Chapter Four casts light on how this ideological influence shaped the attitude of post-1980 composers toward the legacy of Chinese music.

³⁷ See Zhang Hui, “Sun Zhongshan Minzu Zhuyi de Sixiang Yuanyuan ji Xueshu Jiexi”, *Journal of Northwest University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, (01) 2006; Cui Zhihai, “Lun Sun Zhongshan Minzu Zhuyi Sixiang de Ji Ge Tedian” (On the Features of the Nationalism Thought of Sun Yat-Sen), *Shi Lin (Historical Review)*, (04)2007; etc.

(2) Marxism and Socialism

The recent influential exponent of Marxism, Gerald Cohen, sums up Marxism as a “philosophical farrago”,³⁸ suggesting that it is a highly complicated system covering an extremely wide range of topics. I will not be examining in detail any of Marxism’s considerable theoretical complexity, but will just raise the issues pertinent to this thesis, that is, outline the main stages of its reception in China and attempt to throw some light on its relation with music and its creation.

Karl Marx’s views of history are encapsulated in the theory of “Historical Materialism”. It explains the nature of a society’s ideology, including religion, art, morality and philosophical beliefs, in terms of that society’s productive force and economic structure. It is formulated by Jonathan Wolff in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)* as follows:

Revolution and epoch change is understood as the consequence of an economic structure no longer being able to continue to develop the forces of production. At this point the development of the productive forces is said to be fettered, and, according to the theory once an economic structure fetters development it will be revolutionised – “burst asunder” – and eventually replaced with an economic structure better suited to preside over the continued development of the forces of production.³⁹

Marx’s economic analysis of capitalism is based on his version of the labour theory of value, and includes the analysis of capitalist profit as the extraction of surplus value from the exploited proletariat. The analysis of history and economics come together in Marx’s prediction of the inevitable economic breakdown of capitalism, to be replaced by communism.⁴⁰

The turning of the Marxist conception of anti-Capitalist revolution into reality through the revolution of 1917, which led to the setting up of the Soviet Union in Russia, provided the earliest followers of Marxism in China with a signpost. As a matter

³⁸ Jonathan Wolff, “Karl Marx”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Fall 2008 Edition)*, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2008/entries/marx/>>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of course, the newly founded Chinese Communist Party was subject to the leadership of Comintern, the international communist organisation initiated at Moscow in 1919. However, a direct and realistic dilemma faced by Chinese communists was that, in Marx's original narration of epoch changes, it is a highly developed capitalism built upon urban industry that provides the prerequisite for socialist revolution; however, the development of capitalist industry in China was still very meager and the population and strength of urban workers were not sufficient to back up the nationwide revolution. From late 1920s to 1930s, Mao Zedong carried out a series of investigations in the countryside of Hunan, Jiangxi and Fujian, from which he drew the conclusion that Chinese revolution must launch from countryside and rely on the vast number of peasants, which was of course deviant from the orthodox Marxist teaching. Meanwhile, in practice, the Chinese communists were in discontent with the guidance of them by Comintern, which was proved to be not suitable to the Chinese reality and thus causing enormous loss and sacrifice. During the years from 1934 to 1936 the main military force of the Chinese Communist Party took a massive retreat from Jiangxi to Yan'an in Shannxi Province. In the early 1940s, Mao Zedong initiated "Yan'an Rectification Movement" (*Yan'an Zhengfeng Yundong*), in which the deviation of Chinese Communist Party from the Moscow party line was formalised and Mao's paramount leading role in the Party was consolidated. In the movement Mao labeled those faithful followers of Moscow as "dogmatists", and in the important lecture titled "Reform Our Study" (*Gaizao Women de Xuexi*), which Mao gave on the high-level cadres meeting in Yan'an in 1941, Mao satirised that some Marxist-Leninist scholars had "forgotten their own ancestors" and had "no intention of seeking truth from facts".⁴¹ The thrust of Mao's lecture was that the Chinese reception of Marxism-Leninism must be rooted in Chinese reality without being interfered in by others. In the whole Yan'an discourse the localisation of Marxism in China was associated with the strong taint of nationalist assertion, leading to the result that the intelligentsia within the Party came to revalue and utilise the legacies of their own culture as new and powerful elements for the revolutionary state culture. Chapter

⁴¹ Mao Zedong, "Reform Our Study", 1941.

Three will discuss the results of this ideological turn in the field of music.

After the foundation of PRC the influential power of socialist ideology had been mainly manifested as supervision from government in the reform of folk music. In other sections of Chapter Three are listed relevant issues such as the replacing of the traditional manufacturing materials of Chinese folk instruments with modern industrial ones, the standardisation of folk music notation and performing techniques through the nationally founded conservatories and orchestral bands, as well as the exhibition performances (*huiyan*) of various genres of folk music at all levels across the state.

It is also necessary to note that, in the last two decades of the 20th century, while negating the devastating effects of the Cultural Revolution and adopting the route of reform and opening-up to the world, Chinese politics did not in essence abolish the role of Marxism and socialist ideology. It claimed that it was on route to a form of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”. This slogan was firstly raised by Deng Xiaoping, the leader of the Chinese reform, and was formalised in 1982 at the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. It led to an unprecedented degree of liberalism and tolerance of individuality in art but the screw of political influence from the national level was never really loosened.

(3) The term “modern” in China and the West of the 20th century

It is also important to take note of the fact that the word “modern” takes quite different meaning according to whether it was employed in China or in the West in the 20th century. In the West, being “modern” in the specific context of the 20th century invokes a negation of the rationality of Enlightenment thinking, a revolt against conservative values of realism and the rejection of all traditional forms of art, architecture, religious faith, and all social life in the nascent or “classical” period of

Capitalism.⁴² In Western art music, musical modernism “emerged out of the expansion of tonality in late romanticism and the break into atonality in the early decades of the twentieth century.”⁴³ But in China during the same era, to be “modernised” means the appropriation of the traditions of the Western Enlightenment in reforming Chinese society. In the discourse of the reception of Western art music that is discussed in Chapter Two, the multi-part structure, notation and instruments of Western art music was admired as symbols of a “progressive”, rational, scientific Western modernity that was perceived as antithetical to a subjectively conceived anti-modern and “backward” culture. In the other chapters of this thesis I will continue to explore the two other crucial stages of music modernisation in China that took place in the pursuance of social and political propaganda: the appropriation of, and innovation in the field of, folk music that took place against the background of socialist construction and industrialisation from the foundation of the PRC to the mid-1970s (see Chapter Three), as well as how the post-1980s composers incorporated the romanticised elements of Chinese folk music into the construction of a nationalist modernism which seeks an equal status to works in the canon of Western classical music (see Chapter Four).

1.2 Review of Previous Research on Chinese Modern Music

Scholarship brought into consideration in this part of the chapter will be divided into two categories. First, I will cast a look at the research done by Western scholars (including those Western-based Chinese scholars) who published their works in English, and then at those by Chinese domestic writers in their own language.

Within English language scholarship on Chinese music in the 20th century, among

⁴² See Gerald Graff, “The Myth of the Postmodernist Breakthrough”, *Triquarterly*, 26 (Winter 1973), 383-417; John Barth, *The Literature of Replenishment*, 1982; George Steiner, “Topologies of Culture”, *After Babel* (3rd Ed.), 1998; Umberto Eco, “Interpreting Serials”, *The Limits of Interpretation*, Indiana University Press, 1990, 83-100.

⁴³ Born & Hesmondhalgh, “On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music”, *Western Music and Its Others*, University of California Press, 2000, p. 12.

the early writings, Alexander Tcherepnine's "Music in Modern China" (1935) provides some interesting and detailed accounts of the diverse facets of music in Chinese society of the 1930s: the hidden musical element contained in the life of the working class, the idiosyncrasies of Chinese classical music, native singing and opera, and more importantly, the growth of a music education modeled on that of the West in places like Shanghai, Tianjin and Beijing, that was influential among educated Chinese. Apart from expressing praise for and recording the appreciation that Western art music had received, Tcherepnine also discovered some problems. One important aspect of his criticism is that modernisation had taken place more abruptly in China than in Europe and America. In his own words,

The medieval forms of life, the medieval traditions and beliefs are co-existing with the modern achievements of Western culture. The stages that have preceded the present one in our evolution, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century experiences of Europe and America, have not been passed through by China.⁴⁴

According to the issues that Tcherepnine raised in this article, many Chinese music students in the earliest decades of the 20th century would take the modern achievement of Western music for granted without regard to its past development. Although feeling intense passion for such music, they were ignorant of any real Western historical and cultural context. The students were mostly attracted by accidental, external reasons, such as trying to "play a harmonium or half-broken piano during his free hours at a missionary school or church."⁴⁵ Tcherepnine's account presents a great relevance to the content of Chapter Two, which covers how Chinese school song writers in the early 20th century interpreted Western art music in a way totally in accord with local conditions and requirements and that the reception of Western art music in China in this period can be seen as taking place through a "distorting mirror".

Even during the first decades of the PRC when China and the Western world were

⁴⁴ Alexander Tcherepnine, "Music in Modern China", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (Oct., 1935), 391-400.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

separated by the Cold War, Western scholars did not totally withdraw their attempts to approach, understand and assess Chinese music and cultural policies. Alan L. Kagan (1963) focused on the relation between Chinese music and the “Hundred Flowers Movement” (*Bai Hua Qi Fang*) seven years after Mao Zedong delivered a speech to Chinese cultural workers in 1956 to encourage different schools to contend. In the face of the cultural diversity that was apparently promoted by Mao’s metaphor “Let a hundred flowers blossom; let a hundred schools of thought contend”, Kagan revealed that the flourishing garden was however strictly appropriated to political need. The government exerted strict control over the major universities, troupes and music societies. Some genres such as local operas and large scale choral works gained a quicker pace of development because they could involve the masses of the people easily. There had been several symphonic troupes presenting foreign pieces, but most of these were from Eastern Europe rather than Western Europe and America. Works in atonal or twelve-tone style were totally absent.

In the last two decades, the study of music creation and practice in China has developed interfaces with a wide variety of political- and social-ideological processes, whether focusing on historical or contemporary subjects. Some of them are case studies of certain composers and works. Peter Chang (1991) analyses Tan Dun’s string quartet “Feng-Ya-Song” (*Ballad-Hymn-Ode*), composed in 1982, as a political and ideological product of the new age: stressing technological advancement, loosening political control in industrial and agricultural production, allowing private enterprise and promoting nationalism. Chang also emphasises that Tan was attracted to the idea of “art for art’s sake” as an act of rebellion against the Maoist notion that art should serve the porcelain masses and political objectives of State.

Other research takes the form of regional studies, striving to reveal how cultural production is related to political domination in the encounter of minority-ethnic culture and majority-state culture. Helen Rees (2000), through tracing of the practice of Dongjing music of Naxi nationality in Yunnan Province throughout the imperial,

republican and PRC eras, foregrounds the important role of human agency in the history of this music tradition. Rees reveals that although the practice of Dongjing music during the Republican and communist periods has been shaped in general by constraints imposed by the state's ethnic minority policy, its contemporary revival and the concomitant changes in its function, performance context, representation and assigned meanings have come about as a result of certain decisions and choices made by key individuals at every turn in the evolution of this music into the 1990s.⁴⁶ Dunbar-Hall (2004) studies Tibetan music since Tibet was brought under the control of PRC in 1950s, drawing attention to issues like the sinicisation and patronising by the PRC of Tibetan music traditions and the annihilation of the old in favour of a new in the name of "progress". Tibetan music has also been taken to celebrate the state's unity in diversity, with Tibet being romanticised as a frivolous, carefree and an enchanting "child" of the state but deprived of any real political power. Rachel Harris (2009) portrays the many complex ways in which music plays at the nexus of political power in the northwestern region of the PRC, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, the musical and religious practices of which are traditionally closely related with other Central Asian peoples. Harris's research shows that the "classical" Uyghur musical traditions have been periodically intervened in and suppressed by the politics of the PRC in the name of "anti-illegal religious" and "anti-separatist activities" through the de-contextualisation, revision and re-presentation of the traditional musical forms in the performances of the state-sponsored song-and-dance troupes.⁴⁷

There are a number of authors who offer a variety of theoretical approaches in order to gain a panoramic view of Chinese music, whether in pursuit of a picture of the whole of the 20th century or just for a certain period. In one representative piece of research, Sue Tuohy (2001) traces the representation and transformation of Nationalism in the music of modern China, from the Folk Song Bureau of the Republic of China (ROC) to the choral pieces sang in rallies held to mobilise the nation against

⁴⁶ Dujunco, Mercedes M. "Review: *Echoes of History, Naxi Music in Modern China* by Helen Rees", *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Vol. 33 (2001), p. 170.

⁴⁷ See Rachel Harris, "National Traditions and Illegal Religious Activities amongst the Uyghurs", in Laudan Nooshin (ed.), *Music and the Play of Power in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia*, Ashgate, 2009.

foreign invaders in 1940s, from the revised folksongs in the Communist base areas to awaken the peasants to the national plight and to their own suffering, to the reception of revolutionary song “The East is Red” heard over loudspeakers by the citizens of the PRC every day in the morning in 1950s. Tuohy argues that these “random” music incidents essentially form one piece, a monumental piece composed through the discourse and practices of 20th-century musical nationalism within the organisational form of the Chinese nation. The sonic dimensions of nationalism are sometimes vernacular and traditional and at some others modern and untraditional, but they come together to encompass a vast period of time and geographical space.

Some authors seek to enrich the multi-faceted silhouette that is the adoption of Western music influence and the corresponding growth of new music genres in China by discussing their intertwining with the dominant social trends occurring within a specific time period. Andrew F. Jones’s *Yellow Music: Media Culture and Colonial Modernity in the Chinese Jazz Age* (2001) casts light on a series of music phenomena that had received scarce attention before: the emergence of Chinese popular music and the localisation of global media culture in early 20th-century China. The author addresses the issues of colonial modernity, the fusion of “decadent” American jazz and Chinese folk forms, as well as other social trends underpinning this discourse, such as the shift of gender roles, class inequality, and national salvation. David Holm (1991), Isobel Wong (1984) and Frederick Lau (1996) contribute to the understanding of music, art and ideology under the Chinese Communist Party, respectively through the studies of *yangge* folk performance in the Shaan-Gan-Ning Border Region in the 1940s, the development of songs of masses (*geming gequ*) and the invention of solo *dizi* music in post-1949 China.

In “Fusion or Fission: The Paradox and Politics of Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Music”, Frederick Lau (2004) sketches out a new manner of treating the traditional Chinese music legacy that arose in the East-and-West music interaction among the composers born in the People’s Republic of China, yet now residing in the

United States, such as Tan Dun and Chen Yi. These Chinese-American composers, according to Lau, have been striving against the “superficial Orientalisation”: unusual tuning system, pentatonic melody, static harmony, unconventional instrumental timbre and other so-called Eastern music characteristics that were used by some earlier Western modern composers to make their works distinctive. Rather,

The new wave composers have developed a musical language that is drastically different from that of their predecessors and Western counterparts. ... These composers are pursuing their own relationships to sound, instrumental technique, and underlying philosophy rather than making direct musical references to China – a tendency that is in stark contrast to earlier composers inside or outside China who directly quoted Chinese folk melodies in their music. Such a move may be interpreted as a deliberate transcendence both of an age-old practice that is Orientalist in tone, and of a desire to focus on issues of aesthetics. Chinese elements in most of the Chinese avant-garde compositions are no longer reflected in the production of soft, gentle qualities or recognisably Chinese sonic qualities. Rather, emphasis is put on a philosophical approach to aesthetics, sound, music gestures, melodic construction, and haunting effects that defies old stereotypes and is part of these new music sentiments.⁴⁸

Aside from the above research works which feature specific analytical or narrative topics, the following collections provide a more panoramic view of Chinese music in the 20th century in the styles of historians or journalists. *Popular Chinese Literature and Performing Arts in The People’s Republic of China 1949-1979* (1984) edited by Bonnie S. McDougall and *Pianos & Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (1989) by Richard Curt Kraus are two valuable collections of articles focusing on music and politics, from piano to folk opera and dance, and to revolutionary songs. Jonathan P. J. Stock’s *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China* (1996) rests upon the *erhu* player, Abing, exploring the history he lived through, music in the urban life of Abing’s environment, as well as the narratives and ideologies around him. It also provides analysis of music for relevant folk instruments and addresses issues like the making of tradition and meaning of music in China in the nationalist and communist periods. Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai’s *Rhapsody in Red:*

⁴⁸ Frederick Lau, “Fusion or Fission: The Paradox and Politics of Contemporary Chinese Avant-Garde Music”, Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau (eds.), *Locating East Asia in Western Music*, Wesleyan University Press, 2004, p. 28.

How Western Classical Music Became Chinese (2004) is in essence an entire history of the Chinese music of the 20th China spanning the time from the imperial dynasty to the new era of opening and reform, involving rich factual narrations. Frederick Lau's *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (2008) portrays a wide and rich selection of music genres and styles, along with their representation in real life, to sketch a picture of what Chinese music entails for the majority of its insiders.⁴⁹

Although the majority of these works are highly resourceful and insightful, they have mostly drawn upon the narration of what was happening in real music careers and life while sometimes tending to bypass the in-depth exploration into some key ideological conceptions as part of, and important in the understanding of, the specific context of Chinese society and music life. Some of these key conceptions – like Marxism and Nationalism – have generated a sophisticated intellectual legacy in the process of taking root in China. One should not overlook their intricacy, and it is necessary to have a balanced and overall view of their indigenous logic, phraseology as well as their affiliation with other political and cultural issues in order to understand the correspondent cultural productions.

In bringing relevant researches by Chinese mainland scholars into the trajectory of my thesis I have encountered a certain dilemma. The study of modern Chinese music history itself is still very young and has not yet developed into a full-fledged subject. Actually, it was not until the 1980s that the categorisation of music history into specific genres, regions and groups and the systematic collection of historical material started to take place. Undeniable and impressive achievement has been made in retrieving and compiling first-hand documents valuable for further research so far. Zhang Jingwei's *The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China* (1998) and Feng Changchun's *Research of Chinese Modern Music Thoughts* (2007) are two good examples which collect journal articles, book prefaces, lectures, newspapers, posters, advertisements, concert programme lists, and so on. Both works attempt to be objective and involve

⁴⁹ Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Experiencing Culture*, 2008, p. xiii.

information and ideas of all types.

As to the music history of the early decades of the 20th century, Qian Renkang (2001) seeks to link the school songs published during this era with the foreign pieces from which they were originated and analyses the proportion of countries, themes and styles of the appropriated materials. Shen Qia's biographical account of Shen Xingong (1983) and Chen Jingye's monograph on Li Shutong (2007) provide an all-around record of the life of the most important musicians of the time. Some other existing publications have covered the general historical trends reflected by the school song movement (Chen Yulan, 2006), its status in modern Chinese music and education (Yuan Shanji & Zhou Gang, 1999), its link with traditional and foreign mindsets (Li Li, 2001), its common techniques and musical features (Qian Renkang, 1992), and some close analyses of the text of the music (Yang Liucheng, 2004). On the whole, however, the studies of the music history of this period are still very scarce. They mostly focus on the accuracy and authenticity of historical materials, but are generally inadequate in terms of a critical consciousness of issues like power and the textual discourse of music reception.

Music in the period of the 1930s-1940s has evoked many more volumes of study but these are to some extent also very biased, given that this was the core period of the Communist Party's formation and of the national defensive war against the Japanese and often appears as a part of socialist and nationalist propaganda. Therefore, naturally, the majority of researches of this period have converged on the so-called "red" composers and musicians as well as the music activities taking place in those communist areas and among the "leftists" – people who supported Communism and proletarian revolution – in urban cities. So far a number of symposiums have been held on this type of composers such as He Luting, Zhang Shu, Nie Er and Lü Ji,⁵⁰ many of whom have had their complete works published. Chen Zhi'ang's *History of Music in the*

⁵⁰ Yang Heping, "Gaige Kaifang 30 Nian Zhongguo Jinxindai Yinyueshi Yanjiu" (The Modern and Contemporary Chinese Music History Research in the 30 Years since the Beginning of Reforms and Opening Up), *Renmin Yinyue (People's Music)*, (07) 2009.

Anti-Japanese War (Kangzhan Yinyue Shi, 2005) provides biographical accounts for more than 100 professional and amateur musicians. Besides, special studies have been conducted on leftist music culture in Shangdong (Chen Zhi'ang), Shanxi, Inner Mongolia, Hebei (Zhou Suzhen, 2007; Wang Yuling, 2010), Xinjiang (Zuo Hongwei, 2007), Shannxi (Zeng Gang, 2001), as well as music in the army (Wu Yunfeng and Fang Chunsheng, 2011). It was only in recent years that the Republican government's music propaganda and practices gradually gained scholars' attention (Li Li & Tan Kewen, 2005; Wang Xiaokun, 2005; Chen Huihui, 2010; Feng Lei, 2010, etc.).

In most of the above publications by Chinese mainland writers, the collection of historical materials and listing of facts, instead of an in-depth critical approach, are the major modes of writing, and they still remain the dominant methods of musicological writing in China today. In tandem with this is a tendency or habit of seeking absolute values and judgments from factual narrations, of labeling and categorising all types of music as good and bad, moral and corrupt, valuable and decadent. This is a long-standing and complicated matter, originating from the very way of thinking formed at the end of the 19th century when the previous form of Chinese society and culture were under duress. There was much violent destruction of old things and an over-hasty construction of the new. As Ming Yan shows, the flavour of music in this period did not stem from music's autonomous need for self-development, but from the very pragmatic need of reconstructing the whole society and healing its weaknesses.⁵¹ It gave rise to a binary opposition of opinions: the "conscious self-denunciation" of Chinese traditional music as Ming Yan terms it, and the indiscriminate admiration of Western art music. These two general attitudes permeate in the influential writings by Liang Qichao, Fen Hesheng and Zeng Zhimin that are mentioned in Chapter Two.

During the next couple of decades in China, attitudes toward music had taken on a much richer dimension and become somewhat more objective alongside with the establishment of professional music institutions in large cities such as Peking and

⁵¹ Ming Yan, *20Shiji Zhongguo Yinyue Piping Daolun (An Introduction to 20th-Century Chinese Music Criticism)*, Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2002, p. 153.

Shanghai. From the warlord period to the Republic government's early unification of China in 1928, there was almost no sign that the understanding of music was oriented by any unified values. The function of music as a social medium was rekindled in the early 1930s when faced with the national crisis of Japanese invasion, and music became strongly politically-oriented with the position of the CCP in Yan'an that art and literature should serve as political propaganda. This beginning has exerted a long-standing influence on the Chinese style of music writing until now. Ming Yan describes this impact as follows:

Under the drive of outside war, any opinion of music irrelevant to the war theme was expelled out of the mainstream. ... Enlightenment criticism, brought about by the [earlier] new music, in the face of the war and "saving the nation from extinction", gradually became silent. At the beginning of 1930s, the emergence of Leftist critics symbolised the rising of proletarian force on the stage of Chinese music. In terms of external study, the earlier study from the West was replaced by study from Soviet Russia, which made the proletarian voice in music criticism paramount. It not only presented a counterpart to the previously erected adoption of Western art music but gradually occupied the orthodox status while the war progressed. ... Throughout the 1940s, proletarianised music criticism rapidly spread all over the country after the delivery of Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" and became the absolute mainstream of Chinese art criticism in effect. The proletarian dominance of art criticism has proceeded since the foundation of People's Republic of China until now.⁵²

Given such strong influence, it is not unfair to say that Chinese music scholarship for more than fifty years can generally be understood as a subtext at the behest of power and ideology. Many scholars are accustomed to mapping their ways of thinking and expression in a given pre-formed stereotype of historical and political narration, and they felt somehow difficult to adopt or apply any alternatives. Although today's scholars have been exposed to diverse intellectual trends and the research atmosphere is much freer than decades ago, the customary tone does not seem to have changed much. The following excerpt about the foundation of "Chinese Left-Wing Writers' Association" at Shanghai in 1930 by Wang Yuhe (2002) would serve as a typical example of this narrative discourse:

⁵² Ibid.

With their theories and organisation, the Leftist Association raised the flag of proletarian revolution for the first time in the modern cultural history of China. Under the guidance of Marxist art theories and aiming at the liberation of the labouring masses constituted of workers and peasants, they enrolled in the proletarian-led political movement with whole-hearted enthusiasm. They offered enormous inspiration to all the progressive currents in Chinese art and culture of this period.⁵³

Such a pre-requisite national-Marxist tone can naturally be linked with what Lawrence Witzleben and Jonathan P. J. Stock have described as the pitfalls of 20th-century Chinese music research: although field work has been done everywhere and the collection of ancient notations and song and drama texts was carried out extensively alongside with voluminous theoretical annotations, all of these were mainly used for composing new pieces and musicians' own revision, whereas contextual data and informant's perspective were rarely included in music research.⁵⁴ Social and cultural issues were little referred until perhaps 1985, and the definition of an extant music culture, the introduction of its music thought, and the description of its actual musical behaviour were largely beyond the scope of musical study.⁵⁵

The pitfall of Chinese domestic music research of overlooking contextual significance also pervades a majority of writings on the music events and history of People's Republic of China. Even after 1980 as music and politics were connected less tightly and music creativity was impacted by thoughts and conceptions brought about by the new wave of music, the most pursued goal in music writing is to find out answers to questions like "what should our national music be" and whether certain genres of music are good or bad.⁵⁶ To give a standard assessment of a work, or a composer, remains a necessary task in music history and the teaching of criticism. It is

⁵³ Wang Yuhe, *Zhongguo Jinxiandai Yinyueshi (Chinese Pre-Modern and Modern Music History, 2nd ed.)*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2002, p. 217.

⁵⁴ See J. Lawrence Witzleben, "Jiangnan Sizhu Music Clubs in Shanghai: Context, Concept and Identity", *Ethnomusicology* 31 (1987), p. 257; Jonathan P. J. Stock, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China: Abing, His Music, and Its Changing Meanings*. New York: University of Rochester Press, 1996, p. 8.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ See Ming Yan, *20Shiji Zhongguo Yinyue Piping Daolun (An Introduction to 20th-Century Chinese Music Criticism)*, Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2002, Chapter 6 and 7.

an easy omission on the part of Chinese music researchers that there is almost no “safe” and “final” conclusion for any kind of music activity. Most Chinese music researchers appear to overlook that any music activity and idea is in-itself a dynamic discourse of appropriation and evolution that can be viewed in multiple dimensions. Although standard modern academic practices have not become the mainstream of Chinese musicology, some scholars have been aware of the deficiency of previous research and proposed some suggestive alternatives. Chen Lingqun is one of them. In a retrospective appreciation of modern Chinese music research he remarked that,

Current research has not fully demonstrated that the Chinese appropriation of Western music is a long historical procedure which involves the move from passive receiving and bearing to active adopting.⁵⁷

Dai Jiafang (2003) has also asked a similar question, “Why cannot our music history be multi-faceted?”⁵⁸ Another factor that should be taken into account – and which will aggravate – this imbalanced view by Chinese scholars of their modern and contemporary music history is the long-time and clear-cut dichotomy between “China” and “West” in outlining their music map of the world. Compared with the categorising of all kinds of music as “Eastern” or “Western”, they are more accustomed to the conception of “Chinese-Western”. In their mind, Chinese is all of the East, and West means only Western Europe. Although Japan and Korea may appear in some writings due to the shared cultural lineage, and Eastern Europe and Latin America have also been included in research within the scope of the socialist revolution, there have however, only rarely been any mention of and research into the music of India, the Arabic world and Africa. Without sufficient reference to the process of the encounter with Western art music in these regions, Chinese scholars often fail to realise that the controversies, struggles and debates generated hereby were not exclusive to China – which further weakens their critical ability.

⁵⁷ Chen Lingqun, “Zhongguo Jinxindai Yinyueshi Yanjiu Zai 20 Shiji” (Chinese Modern and Contemporary Music Research in the 20th Century), *Yinyue Yishu (Music Art)*, (03) 1999.

⁵⁸ Dai Jiafang, “Yong Kuanhong de Muguang Kandai Zhongguo Jinxindai Yinyueshi de Yanjiu” (A Tolerant Eyesight on Chinese Modern and Contemporary History), *Journal of Nanjing Arts Institute (Music & Performance)*, (01) 2003, pp. 46-7.

For these complex reasons, my strategy of making use of Chinese resources is to treat the majority of them, which are lacking in any critical nature, as first-hand data, regardless of their original aims and nature of writing, and I will analyze them in terms of their relationship with, or as symptomatic of, political and social process, according to my own critical perspective. This does not apply, though, to some recent articles and the PhD theses that I cite – for example, Ming Yan (2002, 2007), Cai Qiaozhong (2002) and Feng Lei (2010). These texts have emerged in recent years, and display either a high degree of criticism toward the study of Chinese music or acute observation of musical phenomena which had been overshadowed, or neglected, in the context of earlier cultural propaganda. Moreover, there remains a considerable number of resources, whether in Chinese or in English, that will be cited in the following chapters.

1.3 About This Thesis: Methodology, Choice of Materials and Structure

How will this thesis structure my understanding of the relationship between music, history and ideologies of 20th-century China while showing progress as compared with previous studies? In total, the thesis treats the spectrum of the “20th century” as consisting of several phases that are linked by historical logic, and it aims to provide a coherent understanding of a variety of apparently unrelated issues and events. In terms of methodology I combine analyses of music works, texts and discourses (either in written or spoken forms), with the occasional inclusion of interviews with key musicians (mainly in Chapter 4).

As outlined by the following three chapters, the three phases placed under scrutiny are chosen not because they are well-known (for example, the Cultural Revolution is not listed specifically), but because they bear the most uneasy and provocative coexistence of thoughts, tendencies and –isms. The three crucial stages

can be identified here in terms of time range: the early decades of the 20th century; the period of 1930s-1940s; and the era between 1980 and the end of the century. The three periods are essentially differentiated from each other in terms of their social conditions and values. However, they have made equal contribution to the cognitive formation of the conceptions of modernity, Westernisation and nationalism in music today in China.

The early decades of the 20th century witnessed the transition of China from an empire to a republic and China's initial stage of modernisation. The second chapter therefore not only seeks to sketch this change through the encounter of cultures, and the political and military collisions between China and foreign countries, but also attempts to examine the dynamics in the conceptual field given rise by this grand, yet turbulent, process of contact between China and the West, through analysing how Chinese intelligentsia understood and interpreted Western art music. It highlights the following ideas that were often overlooked before, yet are essential to the understanding of the whole discourse. First of all, this stage of history was characterised by a hasty appropriation of Western modern values and its projection onto art and music. As the question posed by Alexander Tcherepnine suggests, the co-existence of medieval forms of life, traditions and beliefs alongside the modern achievements of Western culture decided that the early embodiment of Western art music in China was deviant when taken in terms of its context of origin. Moreover, the acquisition of knowledge of such music was mainly realised through the channel of Japan, the Asian neighbour of China which had completed Westernised modernisation yet retaining strong national and feudal characteristics in culture and politics, and this led China even to stray further away from the authentic Western art music tradition. These strains, internalised in the interpretation of Western art music and the values it bears, are manifested in the musical commentaries, the pieces adapted from Western music materials and the way of music-making of this period. And, although they were formed in the early period of Chinese modernisation, they still unconsciously play an influential role today.

The third chapter about the 1930s and 1940s is introduced by a bridge referring back to the previous chapter assessing the taking-root of Western art music and the growth of music institutions in urban cities in the Republican era. Likewise, this passage does not intend to provide an all-round factual account of every aspect, but places the emphasis upon the contradiction of its detachment from politics and the real life of the vast majority of people. The ensuing content of the chapter shows how the social function of music was re-animated by the advent of war and national crisis, as well as how the fervent quest for national independence and the spread of proletarian revolution seriously challenged the making, performance and appreciation of art music. This chapter will illuminate these dynamic changes and their far-reaching influence from a number of angles and through a variety of disparate discourses. One of the major sections of this chapter highlights the renowned composer Xian Xinghai who had studied Western music in Paris and later became one of the most noted revolutionary composers of the Communist Party. This section will suggest answers to the above-posed questions by exploring several different biographies of Xian (including his autobiography) and an analysis of Xian's representative pieces of music. This chapter will also examine some key political texts of the Communist Party regarding the consolidation of nationalist feeling within the regime of the Party's social goals and how art and literature should serve these goals. It then provides multiple accounts of the projection of these political doctrines onto the notion and practices of music making in Yan'an, a major Communist base region. In another part discussion will be focused on the aftermath and continued influence of these ideologies, notions and conceptions on music activities after the foundation of the PRC. The initial decades of the PRC (from 1949 to the end of 1970s) are treated as the logical subsequence of the relation between music and politics discussed above. Following this lineage, even the period of the Cultural Revolution, which presents strong and aberrant characteristics in itself, can be interpreted as the above set of relationships in their extreme form, in which music creativity was too heavily attached to the political obsession with class or factional struggle and had its themes and ways oversimplified. Hence, although this

period lasted for a rather long time and generated notorious effects on music and cultural production, it does not bear any special sense for this thesis and thus will not be specially discussed.

The fourth chapter presents the new tendencies in high art music production brought about by the political and social climate of China's reform period since the 1980s. While conventional understandings of art music in this era often portray it as individually inspired, this chapter suggests that political influence still weighed on "mainstream" music creations, especially concerning issues like the treating of traditions, where the obsession with development was dominant. This chapter discloses a paradox: although apparently politics had withdrawn its guidance of music and art since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the development of art music creations did not grow in a political vacuum, and it was accompanied by forces based upon the dynamics of marketisation and internationalisation. Following the two introductory sections of this chapter, which respectively introduce the general political-cultural background and the condition of symphonic creations, the third section unrolls a case study that tells the stories woven around the completion and reception of a typical piece, Yang Qing's *Wilderness* for *dizi* and orchestra, and intertwines the first-hand account of the composer's own experience with technical analysis of the music itself.

Because of the magnitude of the materials and range it covers, the thesis might be susceptible to the charge of not having been able to probe into every detail. However, without a comprehensive view of the development and change taking place throughout the whole century, one will not acquire a clear, coherent and accurate understanding of its inherent logic, and this is the starting point and basic concern of this thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

SCHOOL SONGS AND THE SPREAD OF WESTERN ART MUSIC IN EARLY 20TH CENTURY CHINA

During the reign of Emperor Guangxu, an English man called Hart, who was staying in China to manage tax affairs, was very much addicted to music. He summoned young people from the areas around Beijing and trained them into two bands: an orchestral band and a brass band. ... When the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded Beijing, there were soldiers from one country who were extremely brutal and lacking in discipline, looting the palaces and destroying every civil house they encountered. In one lane at the heart of the capital, they killed everybody they found with the victim's blood splashing out onto the street. In one of the houses resided an old woman and her grandson, both of whom were too weak to make any defense. In the midst of all this misery, a piece of wind music suddenly was heard. Hearing the music, the soldiers were so thrilled that they stopped their butchering, dropped their weapons, lifted their hands as if meeting their god, and left. Thus the neighbourhood was rescued. It was then found out that the young boy had studied music with Hart, and what he played at that crucial moment was the soldiers' national anthem.

- Anonymous, "On Brass Bands in China", 1917.⁵⁹

This fin-de-siècle scene of upheaval presented the background for the spread of Western art music in Chinese society. With the earlier activities of Christian missionaries in imperial China, a clavichord had been presented to Emperor Wan Li by the Italian Jesuit priest Matteo Ricci in 1601 and Western art music had been known in imperial courts for centuries,⁶⁰ however, there was no sign of any genre of Western music in the length and breadth of the empire until the second half of the 19th century.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, "Zhongguo Junyueduitan" (On Brass Bands in China), *Dongfang Zazhi (The Oriental Magazine)*, 10 (Vol. 14), 1917. See Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 139-41.

⁶⁰ According to Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, the name of the instrument that was presented to Emperor Wan Li remains unclear, being variously referred to, by Western scholars writing in English, as a clavichord, a harpsichord, and a spinet – a confusion due to a vagueness of terms used in the published versions of Ricci's journals. See Sheila Melvin and Jindong Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*. New York: Algora Publishing, 2004, p. 45.

This was commonly termed the beginning of the “century of humiliation” with the Chinese sovereign being portrayed as trembling under foreign encroaches and its people suffering from seemingly incessant war horrors. From 1839 to 1842 and 1856 to 1860, China was twice defeated in the Anglo-Chinese Opium Wars; in 1845, China agreed to sign the Peace Treaty with France to surrender control of northern Vietnam; in 1894, the Japanese navy defeated the Chinese navy in the Battle of Yalu River; in 1900, the so-called “Allied Armies of Eight Countries”⁶¹ invaded and occupied Beijing, pillaging the city and burning the Old Summer Palace in a holocaust of fire. As indicated by the bloody episode cited above, the Chinese memory of this era is in general filled with negative images existing alongside many concepts with a variety of radical and ideological overtones: the dichotomy of self and other, Western and non-Western, the issue of Orientalism, the colonialist inventions, the role of the imperialist powers, racism, and so on – all of these issues permeated the historical narrations of this period.

This historical discourse of early 20th-century China can be seen as an episode of the larger historical process of European expansion into and taking over of other parts of the world that had been taking place since the end of the 15th century. The European colonisers permeated through North and South America, Asia, Australia and Africa, formed new communities there, and spread their traditions and values to people originally living in these lands. Compared to most countries that were totally or partly colonised, China’s encounter with Western colonialism took place relatively late, as the dates above suggest. The encounter forced Chinese people to become aware that they were not the center of the world – as one can still see in the way Chinese call their own country (*Zhong Guo* / the Middle Kingdom) – but liable to foreign invasions equipped with modern science and technology. Moreover, the same era witnessed the emergence of a modern national consciousness in China as a response to Western expansion, aggression and colonialism. Like many non-Western countries that

⁶¹ The eight countries were Austria-Hungary, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, but it was reportedly the British and French troops who played the main role in destroying and burning down of the Old Summer Palace.

experienced this collision and challenge (regardless of whether they were colonised or not), China felt an urgent need to restore its “national” strength (regardless of the fact that China was still an empire at that time), so to save its ancient civilisation and its huge population from the fate of enslavement. To modernise China with Western institutions, practices and technology thus came to be the dominant theme of this era. The reformists Li Hongzhang, Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang launched the Self-Strengthening Movement (*Yangwu Yundong*, or *Ziqiang Yundong*) in 1861, which aimed at reframing the Chinese economy, commerce and the army with imported Western ideas.

In the worldwide course of Western colonisation, Western art music functioned as a tool for building hegemony and promoting Western values and modes of life. In portraying the role of music in British expansion, Ian Woodfield refers to “the strategy of using musicians as shoreline ambassadors”.⁶² In promoting Western religion, Western instrumental music greatly facilitated the activity of Christian missionaries, helping convert numerous local inhabitants of colonies to Christianity. Western art music also exercised a great influence on the social practices and customs of people in non-Western countries. In Japan before the Meiji Era, the Satsuma rulers were fascinated by the military music emanating from a British warship that celebrated its shelling of Kagoshima in 1863,⁶³ after which Western military music and instruments such as the trumpet, transverse flute and drum were introduced to facilitate Japanese army training. Across the globe in Asia, Africa and Latin America, Western art music was performed and heard as part of urban life. Music festivals were held; concert halls, theatres and opera houses were built so as to offer a replica of life in European cities. The penetration of Western art music also challenged the traditional ways that people in these countries perceived, understood, and assessed music and the role or status of musicians. It took the form of professional music education, that is, the establishment of colonial conservatories and the unification of examination rules for musicians.⁶⁴ It

⁶² Ian Woodfield, *English Musicians in the Age of Exploration*, Stuyvesant, NY: Pendragon, 1995.

⁶³ Ury Eppstein, *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1994, pp.10-11.

⁶⁴ For more examples of the roles Western art music played in colonies’ life and culture, see Nicholas Cook, “Western Music as World Music” (forthcoming), in Philip Bohlman (ed.), *Cambridge History of World Music*.

also brought about an almost universal feeling that Western art music was superior to other kinds of music in the world. Judith Becker spoke of this existing common belief as containing three main axioms: (1) Western art music was more in accordance with natural acoustic laws and thus was better in revealing the link between man and nature and between culture and the phenomenal world; (2) Western art music was structurally more complex with the existence of tonal relationships and harmonic syntax; and (3) Western art music was more expressive, conveying a greater range of human cognition and emotion.⁶⁵ It placed the musical culture of non-Western societies in the domain of “otherness” with respect to the totalising discourse of European modernity.⁶⁶ In another sense, these issues echo the points that Edward Said raised in 1978 about the interplay between the “Occident” and the “Orient” – the latter including the Middle and Far East. A dichotomy had been deliberately created between the realities of “the East” and the romantic notion of “the Orient”. Said suggested that Occidental people created their own identity by distinguishing themselves from the Orient, whilst, at the same time, attempting to merge the Orient through political, economic and cultural imperialism. Said revealed the paradox of European thought concerning the Orient as consisting of both their own experience and that which existed outside of it. The Orient is the “Other” of the West and also an integral part of its (the Occident’s) own identity. These paradoxes are reflected in the following quotations from Said:

The Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilisations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition, the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience. Yet none of this Orient is merely imaginative. The Orient is an integral part of European material civilisation and culture. Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and even ideologically as

⁶⁵ See Judith Becker, “Is Western Art Music Superior?”, *The Music Quarterly*, Vol. 72, No. 3 (1986), pp. 341-2.

⁶⁶ In *Tradition through Modernity*, P. J. Anttonen describes four domains of knowledge onto which the cultural otherness of the non-modern has been projected: The earlier times in European history; the non- or semi-Christian social-cultural formations, belief and practices in the geographically marginal areas of Europe and its high culture; the non-Western societies, cultures and civilisations outside of Christian Europe and its extensions in North America; and human childhood, making the mental and cultural development from childhood to adulthood appear a process of modernisation. See P. J. Anttonen, *Tradition through Modernity: Postmodernism & the Nation-State in Folklore Scholarship*. Studia Fennica (Finnish Literature Society), 2005, pp. 28-9.

a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles ...⁶⁷

Related to this academic tradition, whose fortunes, transmigrations, specialisations, and transmissions are in part the subject of this study, is a more general meaning for Orientalism. Orientalism is a style of thought based upon ontological and epistemological distinction made between “the Orient” and (most of the time) “the Occident.” Thus a very large mass of writers, among whom are poets, novelists, philosophers, political theorists, economists, and imperial administrators, have accepted the basic distinction between East and West as the starting point for elaborate accounts concerning the Orient, its people, customs, “mind,” destiny, and so on.⁶⁸

Despite being depicted as the prevalent mode of thinking about the Orient by Western people, the notion of “otherness” of the Orient has also been commonly found rooted in the mind of many Oriental intellectuals devoting themselves to Westernisation in recent centuries. It was taken for granted that their societies had no choice but to reframe their own cultural legacy in order to suit the demands of “rationalism” or “progress” in order to avoid feeling eradicated or, at least, further being marginalised by the modern world.

How was the above process implemented in the case of China? Is there anything in the Chinese encounter with Western art music which placed China in a differentiated condition compared to other countries? To the second question there exists an immediate answer: given the huge spatial distance between China and Europe, and the hasty conditions under which China had to renovate its imperial culture, most of the knowledge and conceptions of modernisation were initially not imported from Europe but from its near neighbour Japan, which had already accomplished the process of industrialisation and progress in other modernisations by the turn of the 20th century. Besides being subject to an external channel of influence, the Chinese acquisition of Western art music was also vitally shaped by the cultural values of China, such as Confucianism.

⁶⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

This chapter seeks to trace the collision and mutual influence of thoughts, firstly through the “distorting lens” of Japan and then through direct contact between China and Europe, in the so-called School Song Movement that occurred in the first years of the 20th century. It will reveal how the hurried quest for modernisation affected Chinese musicians and educators in their preliminary encounter with Western art music, it will show how they appropriated the musical culture of the latter in a specific historical situation and through their own cultural filters, and it will also show what kind of symbolic and ideological purposes this genre of music served. In the first section I will briefly outline the process of the Japanese appropriation of Western art music in the 19th century in order to provide a basis for comparison, as well as giving a picture of the Chinese who were pursuing music study in Japan. This will then be followed by the main section containing detailed investigation into the reception and promotion of Western art music from theoretical, artistic and pragmatic perspectives. Finally, in the concluding section I will discuss the movement’s impact and influences.

2.1 The Japanese Model

Compared to China, the process of Japanese modernisation in the 19th century seemed more like an initiative taken, rather than a result of being impelled by the intrusion of a foreign power. As with China, Japan had been a feudal society and isolated from Western capitalist culture until 1867, when the imperial court under the rule of Shogun Tokugawa was abolished after a civil war. The Japanese reformists then took an “extreme course” of Europeanisation over a short time.⁶⁹ The upper classes soon discarded the signs of traditional Japanese life in favour of Western customs, and before long, the middle class too began to join the zest for Europeanisation.⁷⁰ This

⁶⁹ See Takatoshi Yoshida, “How Western Music Came to Japan”, *Tempo*, New Series, No. 40 (Summer, 1956), pp. 16-7.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

historical period in Japan is now known as Meiji Restoration, which sought to acquire what was seen as the best that the Occidental world offered.⁷¹

Western art music served as a part and parcel of this movement of cultural renovation. Two essential persons in this process were Shuzi Izawa, who had studied music in USA, and Luther Whiting Mason, Izawa's American teacher. Izawa was appointed the first director of the official national music investigation and research institution after he came back from America in 1879. The same year also witnessed the establishment of an organised music education system in Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music, which aimed at training performers and elementary school teachers in Western disciplines.⁷² Arriving in Japan the following year, Luther Whiting Mason helped elevate the research institution into a government-supported music school (Tokyo Academy of Music) with strict entrance requirements and high training standards.⁷³ Before long, the academy developed its own orchestra with foreign conductors to lead it.⁷⁴ The Japanese Ministry of Education⁷⁴ also recruited Western teachers to instruct subjects like harmony, orchestration, conducting, composition, piano and vocal music in the country's music schools.⁷⁵

The absorption of Western art music by Japanese society was by no means exclusive to the professional and academic strata, but permeated the realm of elementary education. In 1872, the Meiji government issued new education legislation which set music instruction as a regular school subject, stipulating that singing should be part of the elementary school curriculum.⁷⁶ In 1881 the Music Investigation Committee of Japan published the first school songbook *Shōgaku shōka-shū shohen*, containing 33 songs, 31 of which are from Western sources and 28 in Western

⁷¹ MENC: The National Association for Music Education, "Western Music in Japan", *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Jan., 1950), p. 31.

⁷² Frank B. Abdo, "Music Education in Japan", *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 6 (Feb., 1984), p. 53.

⁷³ MENC: The National Association for Music Education, "Western Music in Japan", *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Jan., 1950), p. 31.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ Zhang Qian, *Zhong Ri Yinyue Jiaoliushi – Tangdai Pian, Mingqing Pian, Xiandai Pian (History of Music Communication between China and Japan – from Ming Dynasty to Modern Time)*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1999, p. 313.

⁷⁶ Ury Eppstein, *The Beginnings of Western Music in Meiji Era Japan*. Lampeter: Edwin Mellen, 1994, p. 19.

tonality.⁷⁷ According to some scholarly viewpoints, this transplantation of Western art music was for the most part geared to practical purposes. Ury Eppstein argued that, at the turn of the 20th century, in both military and education spheres

Western music was introduced as a matter of policy on the initiative of the respective governmental authorities and by their decision, and in both it was regarded not as an art but as a means to an end that was considered desirable for pragmatic purposes: the modernisation, according to contemporary Western models, of the military and then of the educational system. In the achievement of this purpose music was valued as a factor conducive to the establishment of discipline and raising morale in the army and navy, and to the spiritual and physical health and character formation of school pupils.⁷⁸

However, one can still perceive other motivations for the Japanese learning of Western art music, in the sense that Japanese society tried comprehensively to adopt Western cultural principles with a serious attitude. According to Frank B. Abdo,

Western music, particularly that of the Germans, was considered the cultural symbol of this new enlightenment. The German system of music education was adapted for the newly named Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and music and was used exclusively until the end of World War II.⁷⁹

However, as Abdo also points out, “the process of educating in this new foreign music was at that time still a matter of imitation rather than understanding of the music itself.”⁸⁰ This imitation and overzealous pursuit of “Western” values also led to some biased opinions about music. For instance, it was believed that all music of lasting value must be adapted to harmony.⁸¹ By contrast, this led to the relative neglect of Japanese traditional music: it was not until 1930 that a selective course of traditional music was held at Tokyo Academy of Music, and not until 1950 that a traditional music faculty was set up at Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and

⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 93.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 131.

⁷⁹ Frank B. Abdo, “Music Education in Japan”, *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 70, No. 6 (Feb., 1984), p. 53.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Zhang Qian, *Zhong Ri Yinyue Jiaoliushi: Tangdai Pian, Mingqing Pian, Xiandai Pian (History of Music Communication between China and Japan: from Tang Dynasty to the Modern Time)*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1999, p. 315.

Music.⁸² On the whole, it was not simply a matter of neglect; rather, it was more a process of subsumption of traditional systems of training (such as imitation of the previous generation) into modernised institutions of education due to the shift of ideology and power taking place at the time.

Anyway, the fervent study of Western art music achieved obvious social effects in Japan. It helped fortify Western modern cultural values imported along with the music, and it cultivated the sense of identity of belonging to a modern nation as the result of wide application of Western style music as tools of military and school training. This process was observed and recorded by some imperial Chinese officers who were visiting Japan. Xiang Wenrui, in *Travel Diary to the East* (1902), depicted the scene of a music class in a Japanese school, highlighting its function in conveying a patriotic and martial education:

The teacher played the big harmonium and the students sang following it. The first piece was “Song of Cannon”, followed by “Song of Tokugawa”, and then by “Song of the World of Sea”, with the textbook used being *Songs for Children* (Volume I, Collection Four). After a piece ended, the teacher would play a phrase from another song, and all the students raised their hands. The teacher then chose a student to speak out the name of the song to which this new phrase belongs. Then the procedure of playing, asking and answering was repeated, which aimed to help the students to be familiar with the music. The singing voices were very vigorous and uniform, as if having the startling power to swallow up the further continents and oceans. I was deeply moved as I had never known that young people were cultivated like this overseas.⁸³

In the following I will suggest that, whilst the early 20th-century Chinese school singing copied this mode at the initial stage, it eventually paved the way for a trend of new aesthetic and emotional consciousness rather than functioning only as a tool of the military and as a morale-lifter. However, it was such a scene, as well as many other

⁸² Sun Xuanling, “*Riben Dongjing Yishu Daxue Bangyueke de Shezhi – Riben Jindai Yinyueshi shang de Yijian Dashi*” (The Setting-up of Traditional Japanese Music Faculty in Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music), *Huangzhong* (Journal of Wuhan Conservatory of Music), (01) 2008, pp. 35-8.

⁸³ Xiang Wenrui, *Dongyou Riji* (*Travel Diary to the East*), 1902. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (*The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China: 1840-1919*). Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, p. 87.

similar ones, that gave the Chinese modernists direct inspiration. The realisation of the power of Western music in the social construction of a country with modern technology and military power gave rise to the temptation to adopt similar things in China in order to defend against its ever-encroaching enemies.

The farseeing Chinese visitors soon turned their attention to and recorded in their travel writings more technical details about Japanese school music teaching. They noted the commonly used instruments, including military band instruments (trombone, horn and drum) and keyboard instruments (harmonium), and Western staff notation (Shen Yiqing, 1900; Xiang Wenrui, 1902; Miu Quansun, 1903).⁸⁴ Miu Quansun (1903) made reference to the sources for Japanese school music as follows:

Both the music notation and the instruments were from Europe, while the lyrics and texts were concocted by domestic educationists, literati and musicians. ... According to the headmaster of a Higher Normal School, “all that is taught in music schools is Western music, with our own domestic music being relegated to an option.”⁸⁵

A record of a meeting between Huang Shaoji, the Chinese education ambassador, and the Japanese education minister (1906), shows that they talked about the “makeshift” borrowing from Western music that came before a more conscious construction of national culture through antiquarian exploration:

The Japanese education minister said, “... Our ancient music has been long abandoned. Is there any way you can guarantee that the ancient music performed today in your country are those genuine pieces derived from Han, Tang, or Song Dynasty? No, there is not. ... As for today, our ancient Japanese music is hardly employed except for military ritual purposes.” Huang Shaoji then followed, “With only ten to twenty percent remaining, it seems really hard to rejuvenate the ancient music. In this condition, I believe it is more convenient to directly make use

⁸⁴ Shen Yiqing, *Dongyou Riji (Travel Diary to the East)*, 1900; Xiang Wenrui, *Dongyou Riji (Travel Diary to the East)*, 1902; Miu Quansun, *Riben Kaocha Gongwu Youji (Business Visiting Diary in Japan)*, 1903. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 85-8.

⁸⁵ Miu Quansun, *Riben Kaocha Gongwu Youji (Business Visiting Diary in Japan)*, 1903. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, p. 88.

of foreign music.”⁸⁶

Viewed in an overall sense, such a coming into contact with Western music and the drive of learning that accompanied it certainly constituted a significant part of the larger picture of the Chinese quest for modernisation. Yet compared with the condition in Japan, music did not receive any special highlighting from Chinese rulers, and it was far from being treated as an independent faculty of knowledge with professional procedures – rather, the Chinese approach to Western art music was fragmented and casual at this time. Although under the promotion of Kang Youwei, a new educational system was established in 1898 throughout every province and county for children above seven years old and included music in the new curriculum,⁸⁷ the royal court was not prepared to set up a special institution of Western art music.

The insignificant status of music was also reflected in the growing trend of sending Chinese youth to study in Japan. The history of Chinese students in Japan began in 1896 and the number increased annually. In 1899, there were only about 200 Chinese students in Japan, whilst in 1906, the amount was increased to about 8,000.⁸⁸ Among them about 30% were funded by the imperial government, but there was almost no record of any government funded music students. (Although according to the official records of the imperial court from 1902 to 1911, there were two music students, Xin Han and Li Shutong, who received governmental sponsorship, the majors they initially studied were respectively law and fine art.) This fully proved that music study by Chinese students in Japan was not endorsed officially but mainly carried out by the Chinese literati and middle class.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, *Zhongguo Tixueshi Dongyou Fangwen Jilue (The Visiting of Chinese Education Ambassador to the East)*, 1906. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 91-2.

⁸⁷ In “*Qing kai xuexiao zhe*” (The Proposal for Opening New Schools), 1898, Kang Youwei proposed to Emperor Guangxu that Chinese education should “follow the distant model of Germany and the nearby model of Japan”, being aware that Japan had been learning from the German education system.

⁸⁸ For more information about Chinese students in Japan in the late Qing period and especially those studying music, see Zhang Qian, “*Liu Ri Zhongguo Xuesheng de Yinyue Huodong yu dui Zhongguo Yinyue Jindaihua Zuo Chu Gongxian de Riben Yiyue Jiaoyujia*” (Music Activities of Chinese Students in Japan and Japanese Music Educators Contributing to Chinese Music Modernisation), in *Zhong Ri Yinyue Jiaoliushi: Tangdai Pian, Mingqing Pian, Xiandai Pian (History of Music Communication between China and Japan: from Tang Dynasty to the Modern Time)*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1999, 276-308.

During the years between 1902 and 1909 there were many Chinese who acquired the chance of contact with Western art music in Japan; though for many this was only at a basic level or for a rather short time. For instance, Shen Xingong, famous for the songs he later wrote for school children, only dwelled in Japan for ten months. From 1902 to 1909 there were altogether 77 Chinese who studied in Tokyo Academy of Music, with their specialties spanning piano, violin, vocal music and harmonica, but hardly any pursued any formal study in subjects with a serious theoretical and historical basis such as Western music history – and even if someone did, the knowledge received might be heavily coloured by the Japanese context. In the next part I will highlight some biased, yet influential, insights respectively on Chinese and Western art music that appeared in literati criticism from the early 20th century which were derived from this short-term contact.

2.2 Western Art Music versus Chinese Music in Early 20th Century

Chinese Music Criticism

In this part I will provide a summary of the imaginary picture of “Western art music” and its traditional Chinese counterpart in the early 20th-century Chinese mind. Through listing the features that were attributed in a biased manner to these two general kinds of music, one can get a sense of the fairly radical, and sometimes ungrounded, assessment of music in this special context of modernisation.

First of all there was a sense of “enchantment” with Western art music, reflected by an episode from the Chinese sailor Zhang Deyi’s log in 1866, which described a Western art music performance he had seen:

There were eight Germans playing music, among whom six were men and two were women. One woman was playing a spoon-shaped Western instrument which was about five *chis*⁸⁹ long and with a few strings. She plucked the strings gently and slowly, making the sound quite clear and appealing to the ears. Later she swept and picked the strings alternately, with the thick strings rumbling while the fine strings tinkling, which in much sense shared the taste of “The Pipa of Xunyang”.⁹⁰ Another woman was playing a *hujia*⁹¹: a gourd-shaped, three-stringed instrument with a neck, which she played on her shoulder. A man played another kind of *hujia* of a larger size: having three strings as well, it was about seven *chis* in length and produced a very special sound like gong or drum. There was a trumpet horn coiling like a snake. Furthermore, there was a foreign flute, measuring over two *chis* and having holes throughout. Beside the holes were copper caps, which the player pressed with his fingers while blowing. When the instruments were played together, their sound grandly filled the ears, coordinating perfectly with each other all the way.⁹²

From this excerpt one can easily figure out five Western instruments – lute, violin, counter bass, French horn and flute (although the “lute” might be an early instrument of longer neck, such as theorbo, according to the size described). This excerpt offers an amazing narration of the visual and acoustic image of Western art music from an utterly Chinese point of view. It revealed a prevalent trend – yet not without necessity – to approach and interpret Western art music through the images that were familiar to Chinese minds, particularly those derived from traditional Chinese literature, such as the “Pipa of Xunyang”. This led to severe obscurity and anachronism in defining, as well as understanding, music. “*Hujia*” was originally a reed instrument of the nomadic minorities living in the northwestern area of China. Yet in the above account, it was used to denote violin and cello, which brought about similar exotic feeling. (It is also worthy to note that *hujia* was a popular poetic image in the description of exotic or frontier scenes.)

What is also reflected in the above account is the fact that the sonic impression of

⁸⁹ *Chi* is a traditional Chinese unit of length whose definition varied for many times over dynasties.

⁹⁰ “The Pipa of Xunyang”: an allusion from the famous Tang Dynasty poem “*Pipaxing*” (Song of a Pipa Player) written in 816 AD by Bai Juyi. The original verses, translated into English, are the follows: “The thick strings loudly thrummed like the pattering rain; the fine strings softly tinkled in murmuring strain.”

⁹¹ *Hujia*: a reed instrument adopted by Chinese from nomadic tribes of Central Asia in ancient times.

⁹² Zhang Deyi, *Hanghai Shuqi (Strange Tales from across the Ocean)*, 1866. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 1-2.

Western art music was “grand” and was played with “perfect coordination”. On one hand this fantasy perfectly conforms with the Confucian standard of music that music should be “perfectly beautiful and perfectly good”, which standard requires a harmonious nature both outside and inside,⁹³ as well as suggesting an ideal relation between music, audience and society; on the other hand, Western art music was mystified by Chinese reformists as carrying morality and martial spirit, which suggested that it could be used as a tool to build a strong modern nation. Strongly haunted by the latter form of music, Liang Qichao, a core late-Qing reformist, commented radically when he wrote about Chinese music:

Our China never has any lyric of real martial sense, save one or two pieces like Du Gongbu’s “Songs of the Fortified Town”,⁹⁴ and it particularly suffers from a dearth of high-spiritedness and vigorousness. This is not only a disadvantage for Chinese literature but vital to the fate of our nation nowadays.⁹⁵

Liang’s discussion shows a very blurred boundary between the literary text’s depiction of music and music itself. This was not without reason, since pre-modern Chinese popular music was highly dependent on pre-existing texts (narrative songs, operas, and so on). These popular music genres together with their narrative texts were severely criticised in the essay “On the Reform of Chinese Music” (*Zhongguo Yinyue Gailiang Shuo*) written under the pseudonym Fei Shi in 1903.⁹⁶ In this essay, the author fiercely argues that none of the Chinese pre-modern popular music genres could prove beneficial to the restoration and enhancement of national strength: *Kunqu*⁹⁷ was seclusive and escapist, *Beiqu*⁹⁸ was lunatic and obstinate, and *Qinqiang*⁹⁹

⁹³ In the Third Chapter titled “Ba Yi” from *Lunyu* (the *Analects*), Confucius praised Shao music (a kind of antique ritual music originated from Zhou dynasty) for being “perfectly beautiful and also perfectly good.” This has been held up by Confucian researchers as Confucius’s typical requirement for music. For relevant writings see Deng Dong, “Kong Zi Yinyue Meixue Sixiang de Yaodian” (The Main Points of Confucius’ Musical Aesthetics), *Journal of Shandong University of Science and Technology (Social Science Edition)*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar 2001), 17-20; Chen Sihai, “Kong Zi Yinyue Sixiang Zonglun” (A Comprehensive Introduction to Confucius’s Music Thoughts), *Journal of Xi’an Conservatory of Music*, (01) 2007, pp. 29-33.

⁹⁴ Du Gongbu is one of the courtesy names of Du Fu (712-770), the often regarded greatest of the Chinese poets.

⁹⁵ Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi Heji (Collected Works of Yinbingshi)*, Vol. 54. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 1989.

⁹⁶ Zhang Jingwei (ed.), “*Zhongguo Jindai Yinyueshi de Zhengui Wenxian: Jinian ‘Zhongguo Yinyue Gailiang Shuo’ Fabiao 100 Zhounian*” (The Valuable Literature of Chinese Modern Music History: Review of Fei Shi’s ‘On the Reform of Chinese Music’ at Its 100th Anniversary of Publication), *Yinyue Yanjiu (Music Research)*, 3 (2003), pp. 30-3.

⁹⁷ *Kunqu* is a traditional operatic genre that had predominated in China since the 14th century.

⁹⁸ *Beiqu* is one of the earliest Chinese theatrical music forms that flourished during Jin and Yuan Dynasties (1115-1368).

was either too pessimistic or too indecent.

Even Japanese music, the earlier model through which Chinese intellectuals had studied Western art music, was placed under scrutiny. In his 1912 edition of *The Collection of School Songs*, Shen Xingong, a man who devoted himself to music education in Chinese schools, expressed the hope of replacing the songs of Japanese origin in the previous editions with more genuine Western music, for the reason that

When I started to learn how to write songs, I used a lot of Japanese melodies, but recently I became tired of them and veered to European repertoires. The rhythm of Japanese music is appealing to the ears but cannot break away from a sense of limitation, whereas the linkage of harmony and melodic phrases in European music has a special dignified manner.¹⁰⁰

There is no way we could make it clear for what reason Shen's taste veered to European repertoires. Again, however, his opinion represented the trend of over-generalising the musical characteristics of a given nation. Similar over-generalisations were applied to the "scientific" appraisal of music. For instance, Fei Shi's article argues that Chinese instruments were "simply-structured" in general, and that one could not master them through a scientific approach, but had to rely on a gradually accumulated dexterity, as well as on individual spiritual experience. The difficulty of instruction was even aggravated by the lack of regulated music theory and the blurred division between music genres. Therefore the author concluded that Chinese music must be reformed so as to more closely resemble Western art music, or even to be completely replaced, in order to help with the cause of Chinese modernisation.¹⁰¹

For music historians and critics today, the overwhelming scorn expressed toward the heritage of traditional Chinese music, along with the admiration of Western art

⁹⁹ *Qinqiang* is the representative folk opera of the northwest Province of Shaanxi area.

¹⁰⁰ Shen Xingong, Preface for *Chongbian Xuexiao Changgeji* (*The Re-edited Collection of School Songs*), 1912. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (*The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China*): 1840-1919. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 161-3.

¹⁰¹ Fei Shi, "Zhongguo Yinyue Gailiang Shuo" (On the Reform of Chinese Music), 1903.

music on the basis of a series of over-generalisations, appears extreme, being a product of the ideological and social-political context of that time – the desire to totally devalue one’s own tradition is difficult for anyone to empathise with now. Nevertheless, however odd – or even ludicrous – the comments of Liang Qichao, Fei Shi and Shen Xingong appear to be now, they could be attributed to the mindset described in Said’s theory of Orientalism mentioned above: the division of a complex manifold into a binary consisting of the West and its “other”, scientific versus non-scientific, rational versus irrational, and so on. From various discourses of the time one can see how easy it was for a member of the cultural elite of China, or of any part of the “Orient” itself, to use these concepts to construct pairs of groups within given boundaries. The contrasting groups might then consist of members of one’s own culture and Western outsiders, of the “inferior” and the “superior”, or of the “indigenous” and “cosmopolitan”. Such binaries were often put in place to justify ideas that were perceived by the above-mentioned thinkers as “progress” and “modernity”. Anyway, their prejudiced passion soon led to the rapid growth of a new kind of music education in Chinese schools around the time of the collapse of the imperial dynasty, so heralding a period of spiritual enlightenment in support of new values and by offering channels for their expression provided by the appropriation of elements and expressive modes taken from Western art music. However, this process turned out to be a double-edged sword: since the defense of the nation and concomitant martial meaning took on an overwhelming role in the reception of Western art music, it laid down the tradition of using music as a pragmatic tool of social engineering while sacrificing the autonomy of music. Such a mode of thought was to be sustained for a quite long period.

2.3 The Spread of Western Art Music in China: Theory Teaching and School Songs

A historical examination of Chinese music of the 19th and early 20th century would reveal this period as one of fast development of urban folk music. Foreign dumping of agricultural products and aggravated taxation seriously impaired the rural economy and caused the shrinkage of the rural population; by contrast the growing urban population called for and led to a huge surge in urban recreational music activities. A large part of these music activities took on a theatrical or semi-theatrical form and had two generic names: *Shuo Chang* (narrative singing) and *Xi Qu* (referring to all types of staged opera, of which Peking Opera was to become an emblem). For the cultural pioneers at the turn of the century who were fascinated by the other side of the world and sought to modernise China, these music genres stood for nothing but corruption and decadence. Huang Zisheng (1905) argued that the traditional operas and narrative songs could only meet the needs of personal entertainment but were not of any benefit to the society at large;¹⁰² Chen Maozhi (1906) criticised many Chinese music performers for their lack of education and for not being able to understand the scenario sufficiently, let alone to deliver any decent emotions;¹⁰³ Chen Zhongzi (1916) concluded from his comparison between Western and Chinese music that the latter was too simple, unscientific and low on innovation;¹⁰⁴ Zheng Jinwen (1918) pointed out that Chinese music had been forsaken by the literati and there had been no progress in systematic and theoretical studies of music in recent centuries.¹⁰⁵ From the perspective of these cultural elites Chinese pre-modern music was carnal, crude and

¹⁰² Huang Zisheng, “*Jiaoyu Changge Xuyan*” (Prelude to *Educational Songs*), 1905. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 147-9.

¹⁰³ Chen Maozhi, “*Xuexiao Changge Er Ji Xu*” (Prelude to *The Second Volume of Educational Songs*), 1906. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 147-9.

¹⁰⁴ Chen Zhongzi, “*Jindai Zhongxi Yinyue zhi Bijiao guan*” (Comparison between Today’s Chinese and Western Music), 1916. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 255-61.

¹⁰⁵ Zheng Jinwen, “*Yayue Xinbian Chuji Xuyan*” (Prelude to *the Premiere Volume of Neo-Classical Music*), 1918. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 173-4.

light-hearted, whereas Western music was suitable for cultivating rational, scientific, orderly and moral minds. They yearned to build up a musical utopia within the education system with the help of Western music, all the better to revitalise China's deteriorating culture and society.

Stimulated by changes in Japanese society under the influence of Western art music and its popularisation through education, Chinese intellectuals were keen to adopt the new music for their own country. They implemented this mainly in two ways: by composing songs for school and by compiling music theory books. In the strictest sense, much of the first could not be called "composition" as it was basically just setting existing melodies to new lyrics or making some simple changes. Either way, the knowledge resource came from Japan, which imposed great force upon received conceptions. Although accompanied by many ramifications of Western art music, the music activities of Chinese intellectuals of this period were turning toward a new expressive style, which included elements of Western music repertoire but with Chinese aesthetics as its core. My analysis will focus on three key persons: Shen Xingong (1870-1947), Zeng Zhimin (1879-1929) and Li Shutong (1880-1942). All three men were studying in Shanghai and Japan: Shen Xingong attended Kobun Gakuin in Tokyo from 1902 to 1903; Zeng Zhimin started by studying law at Waseda University from 1901, but later driven by great passion to music he decided to become a full-time student of Tokyo Music College in 1903; Li Shutong travelled to Japan in 1905 to first study at Tokyo Ueno Arts School, and then specialise in piano and composition at Tokyo Music School.

Both Shen Xingong and Li Shutong were actively engaged in the creation of school songs but their methods were different. Shen's main achievement included three volumes of *School Songs Collection (Xuexiao Changgeji)*, which were published during the years from 1904 to 1907 to be used at the Elementary School Section of Nanyang College (*Nanyang Gongxue*) in Shanghai. This was enlarged to six volumes by 1912 after Shen was appointed the headmaster of the elementary school. There followed *Songs*

for Citizens (*Guomin Changgeji*) in 1913, and a final selection: *Xingong's Song Book* (*Xingong Changgeji*) of 1937. In most pieces he employed existing melodies directly, while in a small percentage he made simple changes or used his own original creations. From today's perspective it is fair to say that these works carry more referential sense for their mode of construction rather than for any real musical value. Shen Xingong's "The Gym" (Example 2.1), adapted from Yonejiro Suzuki's "Game" (Example 2.2) in 1902, is an example. It is also known as "The First Important Thing for a Man is His Courage", as the first sentence of its lyric states.

Example 2.1 "The Gym" by Shen Xingong, 1902, cited from Qiang Renkang (2001), p. 1.

男儿第一 志气高， 年纪不妨 小， 哥哥弟弟 手相招，
 来做兵队 操。 兵官拿着 指挥刀， 小兵放枪 炮。 龙旗一面
 飘飘， 铜鼓咚咚咚咚 敲。 一操再操 日日操， 操到身体
 好。 将来打仗 立功劳， 男儿志气 高。

Translation

*The first important thing for a man is his courage, despite his age.
 Young boys, wave hands to each other, and let us do military exercises.
 The general carries his sword, and the soldiers shoot guns and cannons.
 The dragon flag is flying, the brass drum beating.
 Keep doing exercise day by day until our bodies are strong.
 In the future, we will win honour in battlefield with our manly courage.*

Although this is a rather simple song both to listen to and to sing, it is worthy to note that the original piece by Yonejiro Suzuki is even simpler. Suzuki's version only has eight bars whereas Shen enlarged it into twenty-four. With the first phrase completely imitating Suzuki, Shen developed the second phrase by bringing in sixteenth notes. It is

followed by a completely new short third phrase (bars 17-20) and then returns to the first phrase in the final four bars.

Example 2.2 “Game” by Yonejiro Suzuki (with text in Chinese), cited from Qian Renkang (2001), p. 2.

1. 小小皮球圆又圆，轻巧又好玩。
 3. 年纪虽小志气高，列队做兵探。
 5. 大家拍手笑嘻嘻，来到花园里。

2. 小小铁锤真玲珑，敲着响叮当。
 4. 小小喇叭呜呜吹，军歌壮军威。
 6. 今朝遇到下雨天，出门要打伞。

Qian Renkang (2001) ascribed the structure of this song by Shen Xingong to a typical Chinese four-step rhetorical pattern *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* (*qi*: introduction or beginning, *cheng*: elucidation or development, *zhuan*: transition or turning, and *he*: summing-up or ending), which is commonly seen in prose and poetic writings. Figure 2.1 shows the *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure inherent in “The Gym”.

Figure 2.1 The *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure of “The Gym”

<i>qi</i>	<i>Cheng</i>	<i>zhuan</i>	<i>he</i>
bars 1-8	bars 9-16	bars 17-20	bars 21-24

Besides its explicit text, it is the simple syntactic structure (as shown in Fig. 2.1 above) and the entirely anhemitonic nature of the music (lacking any clear harmonic direction) that endears this song to the Chinese audience. It explains why this song became so popular at its time – “those who studied scales halfway for singing would like to sing ‘The First Important Thing for a Man is His Courage’ loudly, and those who have not fully mastered the harmonium were keen to play ‘5566553,’” as Li Shutong

recalled in an essay of 1906.¹⁰⁶

Shen Xingong's "Yellow River" (*Huang He*) of 1905 was an original composition for a poem by Yang Xizhi in 1904. It represents another form of music construction.

Example 2.3 "Yellow River" by Shen Xingong, 1905, lyric by Yang Xizhi. Cited from Qian Renkang (2001), p. 6.

The image shows a musical score for the song "Yellow River" (黄河) by Shen Xingong. The score is written in a single treble clef with a 4/4 time signature. It consists of five staves of music. The lyrics are written in Chinese characters below the notes. The lyrics are: 黄河黄河，出自昆仑山，远从蒙古地，流入长城关。古来圣贤，生此河干。独立堤上，心思旷然。长城外，河套边，黄沙白草无人烟。思得十万兵，长驱西北边，饮酒乌梁海，策马乌拉山，誓不战胜终不还。君作铙吹，观我凯旋。 The score is numbered 5, 9, 14, and 18 at the beginning of the second, third, fourth, and fifth staves respectively.

Translation

*Yellow river, originating from Kunlun Mountain,
From the faraway land of Mongolia flows to the gate of Great Wall.
All the ancient sages were born on its bank,
And now I stand on the embankment alone, letting my mind roam free.*

*Out of the Great Wall, at the side of Hetao¹⁰⁷,
There is no trace of humanity, but yellow sand and white grass.*

¹⁰⁶ Li Shutong, "Zuofei Xiaolu" (A Brief Record of the Erroneous Past), *Yinyue Xiaozazhi (The Minor Music Periodical)*, 1906. Cited from Qian Renkang, *Xuetang Yuege Kaoyuan (The Sources of Early Twentieth-Century Chinese School Songs)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2001, p. 1.

¹⁰⁷ *Hetao*: the irrigation or flood plain along the upper and middle reaches of Yellow River, nowadays a part of the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

*What if I am given one hundred thousand soldiers
And drive them long into the frontier of the northwest!
We will drink at Uriankhai¹⁰⁸ and ride horses on Wula Mountain,
And never return without victory!*

*At that time, would you play cymbal and trumpet
And watch my triumphant return?*

The first 12 bars of this piece can be roughly interpreted as an A-B-A' form, whereas the latter part of the song is open in structure, which generates a strong non-Western effect coupled with obvious rhythmic change. Although sounding a bit strange to the Western audience, the aural image has explicit cultural connotations, a logical familiarity, for Chinese listeners. Its first half features a conjunctive melody, which resembles "a flying dragon, representing the spectacular flowing of the Yellow River from Mongolia to the Great Wall" as interpreted by Qian Renkang.¹⁰⁹ While mostly remaining 4/4 in rhythm, there are triple rhythmic patterns in bars 2-4, 6-8 and 9-10 which break the monotony. When it comes to the second half, the melody starts an octave higher after the upbeat of bar 12 which gives a strong sense of tonality, representing the determination to protect the nation's integrity as suggested by the lyric. The music meaning is highly dependent upon the lyric to realise itself.

As shown by the above cases, although Shen Xingong was revered as a herald of Western art music's introduction into China, his creations did not show much of a track record of the new music. Rather, he persisted in ways that Chinese listeners were familiar with. This presented a suggestive contrast to his strong initiative toward Westernisation (Shen himself was baptised as a Christian in 1946). Qian Renkang's *The Sources of Early Twentieth-Century Chinese School Songs (Xuetang Yuege Kaoyuan, 2001)* reflects the fact that Shen Xingong deliberately increased the percentage of songs that directly employed existing Western music materials in his later editions of

¹⁰⁸ "Uriankhai" here actually refers to Tannu Uriankhai, a historical region largely identical to today's Tuva Republic of the Russian Federation.

¹⁰⁹ Qian Renkang, *Xuetang Yuege Kaoyuan (The Sources of Early Twentieth-Century Chinese School Songs)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2001, p. 7.

The Collection of School Songs. The 1904 edition only contains six Western pieces: one based on German and two on French tunes, one on African-American music, one on a Christian hymn and one directly taken from the “Bridal Chorus” in Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin*. By contrast, there are nine pieces of Western origin in the 1912 version, among which two are German and two are Scottish songs, one is an English song, one is an English country dance, two are hymnal melodies and one is by the American composer Harvey Worthington Loomis, a student of Antonin Dvorak at the National Conservatory of Music in New York. The above was by no means a serious selection from the Western art music repertoire; rather a reflection of Shen’s random encounter with Western music abroad, especially with a number of vernacular music traditions from the West. It is also fair to say that Shen did not make unadjusted use of them on many occasions – for example, in the case of the “Bridal Chorus” Shen replaced the original lyrics with the words: “Run, run! Jump, jump! Children, let’s compete and see who can win the championship!”¹¹⁰

Apart from Shen Xingong’s seemingly arbitrary generalisation that Western art music had a more “dignified manner”, which I mentioned in the last section, there are other testimonies that betrayed Shen’s insufficient understanding of Western art music. He once wrote that Japanese and Chinese performers often deliberately added embellishments to music, which was “a bad tendency”, and he suggested that Western performers would not do this,¹¹¹ probably without awareness of the elaborate sets of ornaments and embellishments employed in the Renaissance and Baroque eras to realise or complete the music. Shen inherently credited embellishment and ornamentation in music to “entertainment” or “pleasure”, whereas the school songs in his mind were for mainly for the “sterner” purposes of politics and morality.

Compared with Shen Xingong, Li Shutong – another important song writer – had a more sophisticated understanding of Western art music. At the same time he had many accomplishments in the field of Chinese culture – both in traditional and modern

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 160.

¹¹¹ Shen Xingong, “*Chongbian Xuexiao Changgeji*” (Preface to *The Re-edited Collection of School Songs*), 1912.

senses. As a versatile and literate person, Li established himself in the areas of painting, calligraphy, seal carving, music, drama and Buddhism – he was ordained as a monk in middle age and later known as Buddhist Master Hong Yi (*Hongyi Dashi*). His early education drew him deeply into the classics of Confucianism and Buddhism, which became his dominant life doctrines. He came in touch with Western culture and began to study English from the age of sixteen, in the meantime practicing the “eight-legged” essay writing, a skill traditionally demanded to pass the Chinese imperial examinations for the selection of government officials.¹¹² This training determined his strong affiliation to traditional Chinese material throughout his creative life.

In Japan Li Shutong engaged in the serious study of Western art music. At Tokyo Music School he created a musical magazine named *The Minor Music Periodical* (*Yinyue Xiaozazhi*) – only one volume was ever published, and Li worked as the author, editor and publisher. This is agreed to be the first music journal appearing in modern Chinese history.¹¹³ It included a charcoal portrait and a biography of Beethoven – the latter was written in archaic Chinese – by Li Shutong himself. It also contained three songs: “My Country” (*Wo de Guo*), “Race in Spring Suburb” (*Chunjiao Saipao*) and “Willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank” (*Sui Di Liu*).

“Willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank” is a very interesting piece. Its lyric was concocted by Li Shutong to conform to the music of “Daisy Bell” (or “A Bicycle Built for Two”, Example 2.4), a late 19th-century American popular song by British songwriter Harry Dacre. What is astonishing is the contrast between the lyrics of the two songs (Example 2.5), yet what is more astonishing is that Li did not achieve this by altering any musical factor of Dacre’s – neither the tempo, the pitch and the rhythm were any different from the original piece, nor is there any indication of change of mood.

¹¹² Cao Bula, “Lun Li Shutong de Wenhua Xingge” (The Cultural Characters of Li Shutong), *Bulletin of Hangzhou Normal College (the Social Sciences Edition)*, 1 (2004), pp. 76-80. The so-called “eight-legged essay” is named so because it is divided into eight sections: opening, amplification, preliminary exposition, initial argument, central argument, latter argument, final argument and conclusion. Being formulated around an extremely rigid and artificial model, its purpose was to test the examinee’s knowledge of the Confucian classics and the ability to insert allusions and idioms in the appropriate places.

¹¹³ Yang Heping, “Lun Li Shutong de Shengming Guiji yu Yinyue Gongxian” (Li Shutong’s Life and His Musical Contribution), *Journal of Xinghai Conservatory of Music*, 4 (Dec 2004), pp. 41-5.

Example 2.4 "Daisy Bell", words and melody by Harry Dacre, 1892.

Lively ♩=96

There is a flo- wer wi - thin my heart Dai - sy,
 We will go 'tan dem' as man and wife Dai - sy,
 I will stand by you in "wheel" or woe Dai - sy,

7
 Dai - sy, Plan - ted one day by a glan - cing dart
 Dai - sy, Ped - 'ling a - way down the road of life
 Dai - sy, You'll be the bell(e) which I'll ring you know

13
 Plan - ted by Dai - sy Bell _____ Whe - ther she loves me or
 I and my Dai - sy Bell _____ When the road's dark we can
 Sweet lit - tle Dai - sy Bell _____ You'll take the lead in each

19
 loves me not Some - times it's hard to tell _____
 both des - pise Police - men and lamps as well _____
 trip we take Then if I don't do well _____

25
 Yet I am long - ing to share the lot Of beau - ti - ful Dai - sy
 There are bright lights in the dazz - ling eyes Of beau - ti - ful Dai - sy
 I will per - mit you to use the brake My beau - ti - ful Dai - sy

31
 Bell. _____ Dai - sy, Dai - sy, give me your
 Bell. _____
 Bell. _____

38
 an - swer do _____ I'm half cra - zy

45
 all for the love of you _____ It won't be a sty - lish mar - riage _____

52
 I can't af - ford a car - riage _____ But you'll look sweet up -

59
 on the seat Of a bi - cy - cle built for two _____

Example 2.5 Lyric of “Willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank”, by Li Shutong

*West wind, you wakened up the willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank,
But the landscape is no longer the same like in the old days.*

*While the scenery is almost as melancholy as usual,
Some fragments of my past dreams sink and float.*

*It is indeed hard to look back the vicissitudes,
Let alone the pearl curtains and brocade drapes of the past.*

*Now there only remains a light smoke and a thin, crescent moon,
And the autumn of my old country, with its incomplete rivers and mountains.*

*Have you noticed? The crops in the field are drooping in front of eyes.
Am I relentless? No, my heart swells with sensibilities.*

*The blood-spitting cuckoo is crying for the Divine Land.
And the crabapple is weeping, with its complexion dimmed in autumn.*

*Deep sadness and shallow sadness are both hard to bear;
Listen, who is singing and playing music again in his back yard?*

There is no way to know what had driven Li Shutong to choose “Daisy Bell” and why he thought this song could be used for his new text. He simply imposed the sensual, poignant and nostalgic meaning of the Chinese literati onto the music, which gave the piece a strong sense of anachronism. The case of “Willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank” has a double sense. On one hand, one may argue that like Shen Xingong, Li Shutong did not make a “rational”, fully justified use of a given Western music material in spite of his experience of serious study of the latter. Again, his appropriation was not unique but was a reflection of the common lack of in-depth understanding of the Western music legacy by Chinese musicians and composers at that time. On the other hand, however, this is the very factor that made Li Shutong one of the classics of Chinese modern culture, as he launched an original expressive mode that combines Western music forms with the Chinese literati’s poetic traditions. For Li, singing was not reserved exclusively for educational purposes but was also to be complemented (if not

occasionally replaced) by an aesthetic experience. In *The Minor Music Periodical* he defined the two songs: “My Country” and “Race in Spring Suburb” as “educational songs”, whereas “Willow on the Grand Canal’s Bank” clearly did not belong to this type.

Li Shutong’s first entire collection of songs, *The Songbook of Chinese Culture* (*Guoxue Changgeji*), was published in 1905 by the Chinese Culture Society of Shanghai Zhongxin Book Company (*Shanghai Zhongxin Shuju Guoxuehui*). Among its twenty-five pieces, fifteen are rooted in Chinese classics, either literary ones like *The Book of Odes* (*Shi Jing*), *Songs of Chu* (*Chu Ci*) or musical ones (*Kunqu*). It is notable that Li persistently resorted to traditional Chinese culture in the creation of his songs, in which fact he consciously distinguished himself from Shen Xingong and other predecessors. In the introduction to *The Songbook of Chinese Culture* Li Shutong explained his motive as the follows:

Given the contemporary decadence of the classics of music and morality, what Shen Xingong and Zeng Zhimin did to introduce Western music to our scope has been very widely praised. However, looking at their works, I feel great pity for the overwhelming use of new ideas and the neglecting of all that is valuable in our ancient heritage. Thus I returned to the latter and retrieved many old forms of music and literature. For some I reserved the original tunes, and some I composed new melodies. This is how this *Songbook of Chinese Culture* was produced.¹¹⁴

Compared with Shen Xingong, Li progressed much further in the learning of Western composing theories. He is widely claimed to be a pioneer who promoted Western stave notation and reading, piano accompaniment and chorus in China.¹¹⁵ Example 2.6 is a three-part chorus composed by Li Shutong himself, which is constructed upon strict V-I harmony form (with a modulation to the dominant in bar 12 to dramatise the phrase) – perhaps a fundamental element of the Western compositional mindset in the centuries that saw Renaissance, Baroque and Classical forms developed. To this short piece Li Shutong added many dynamic indications such

¹¹⁴ Li Shutong, *Guoxue Changgeji (The Songbook of Chinese Culture)*. Shanghai: *Shanghai Zhongxin Shuju Guoxuehui* (The Chinese Culture Society of Shanghai Zhongxin Book Company), 1905.

¹¹⁵ Yang Heping, “*Lun Li Shutong de Shengming Guiji yu Yinyue Gongxian*” (Li Shutong’s Life and His Musical Contribution), *Journal of Xinghai Conservatory of Music*, 4 (Dec 2004), pp. 41-5.

as crescendo and diminuendo that may appear to be unnecessary for the trained readers of the Western music score. However, this can be seen as an expedient for Chinese learners who were not familiar with the inherent structure and logic of Western art music. Indeed the whole piece is an example of how people were receiving such music from its “outside” rather than the “inside” of the guest culture.

Example 2.6 “Spring Outing” by Li Shutong. Cited from Qian Renkang (2001), p. 14.

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The key signature is B-flat major (two flats) and the time signature is 6/8. The lyrics are in Chinese characters.

System 1:
 春 风 吹 面 薄 于 纱, 春 人 妆 束 淡 于 画,

System 2:
 5 游 春 人 在 画 中 行, 万 花 飞 舞 春 人 下。

System 3:
 9 梨 花 淡 白 菜 花 黄, 柳 花 委 地 芥 花 香, *mp*

System 4:
 13 *mf* 莺 啼 陌 上 人 归 去, 花 外 疏 钟 送 夕 阳。 *rit.*

Translation

*The spring wind blowing onto the face is softer than a veil;
And the dressing-up of tourists is more delicate than a picture.
We, the sightseers, are like roaming in a picture,
With a myriad of flowers flying and dancing in front of us.
The pear flowers are pale white, the cole flowers yellow;
The willow flowers are drooping to earth and the rice flowers fragrant.
When the warblers are heard in the field, it is time to go home,
While the sparse chimes beyond the flowers are seeing the sunset off.*

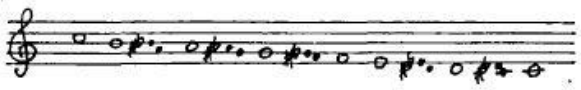
In sum, Li Shutong established a telling individual style of his own: in contrast to Shen Xingong and other peers who were exclusively concerned with the pragmatic value of songs, Li combined the sonic frame of Western art music with literary content and themes favoured by the Chinese literati. This means of expression paved new pathways for Chinese musicians of later generations and played an enlightening role in the spirit of Chinese modernisation at this time. In the concluding part of this chapter I will have reason to mention this style of composing again, and at the beginning of the next chapter we will see how this expressive style collided with another.

I will now turn to a discussion on the propagation of Western art music theories in China, a central figure in which was Zeng Zhimin. Not long after returning to Shanghai from the Tokyo Music College in 1907, Zeng Zhimin launched a summer music seminar in Shanghai and planned to run a special music school. This plan led to the organisation of a special music class among the children of the orphanage co-founded and sponsored by his father, which Zeng later developed into an orchestral band.¹¹⁶ Through these activities, Zeng became arguably the first person to systematically introduce Western music theory, singing and keyboard performance to China. This took place through his major publications: “Vocal Music and Teaching” (*Changge ji Jiaoshoufa*, 1903), “A Brief Introduction to Harmony” (*Hesheng Lueyi*, 1905), *Text-Book of Music Grammar* (*Yuedian Jiaokeshu*, 1904) and *A Complete Textbook of Music* (*Yinyue Quanshu*, 1905). As indicated by Zeng’s introduction to *Text-Book of Music*

¹¹⁶ Chen Lingqun, “*Cong Xin Pilu de Zeng Zhimin Shiliao Shuoqi*” (Some New Historical Resources on Zeng Zhimin), *Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music*, (01) 2009.

Grammar, this book was originally by a scholar from the University of Oxford and translated by Yonejiro Suzuki later into Japanese, and then Zeng translated it from Japanese to Chinese.¹¹⁷ To the original content of this book Zeng Zhimin added a table (Figure 2.2) that brought together the Western scale notes (on staff and in letter names), Western solfège syllables, the simplified Chinese *Gongche* notation,¹¹⁸ the original *Gongche* notation, the Chinese pentatonic notes, and the Chinese chromatic scale (*Shi Er Lü*).

Figure 2.2 A comparative table of Western and Chinese notes by Zeng Zhimin, 1904. Transcribed by Wang Zhenya (1990), p. 65.

西旧字																
西律字	C B B^b A^{\sharp} A G^{\sharp} G F^{\sharp} F E E^b D^{\sharp} D C^b C															
西俗字	f' m' r' d' t' ta' l' se' s' sa' f' m' ma' re' r' ra' de' d' t', I, S,															
僧道字				六	川	一	人	三	、	フ	L					
俗字	上	乙	五	六	凡	工	尺	上	乙	四	合	凡	工	尺		
文字	少角	少商	少宫	变宫	羽	徵	变徵	角	商	宫		太羽	太徵			
十二律字				半黄钟	应钟	无射	南吕	夷则	林钟	蕤宾	仲吕	姑洗	夹钟	太簇	大吕	黄钟

In these theoretical works Zeng instilled a radically “scientific” attitude toward music. In Zeng’s era, the influence of Western notions of science and democracy were so strong that they were seen as gateways to the modern world. Science and democracy were also the core words of the May 4th Movement of 1919, a momentous

¹¹⁷ Zeng Zhimin, *Text-Book of Music Grammar*, 1904. Cited from Wang Zhenya, “Xiyang Yueli Shuru Tanyuan” (The Import of Western Music Theories Input In China), *Yinyue Yanjiu (Music Research)*, 4 (1990), pp. 58-66.

¹¹⁸ *Gongche* notation, or *Gongchepu*, is a traditional way of writing sheet music in ancient China. It uses Chinese characters to represent musical notes.

event heralding modern culture and dismissing the old values and practices in China. As a modern reformist himself Zeng Zhimin rooted his ideas of music theory deeply in this “scientific” passion. In the essay “On Music Education”, Zeng blamed those Chinese song writers who enjoyed altering the notes or changing the division of phrases of a foreign song without fully understanding the original musical grammar and rules. He suggested that one should not attach a different lyric randomly to an original tune, such as “to write an autumn moon verse for the melody of British national anthem”, nor should one be permitted to “change the key of ‘La Marseillaise’ from G to C”.¹¹⁹ These arguments, which appear to be over rigid today, were probably due to Zeng’s belief that if music was a kind of science, then it should have its own strictly regulated definitions.¹²⁰

But these “basic tenets” actually included hardly any newly-imported ideas from the West if we examine them carefully. Instead, what one can find in them is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese notions of art. When Zeng Zhimin talked about music, he repeatedly referred to the concepts of “*Xing*” (form) and “*Shen*” (spirit or air), which constitute a basic dichotomy of almost all genres of Chinese arts. *Xing* and *Shen* are dependent upon each other, merge into each other, and cannot be separated from each other. Chinese traditional music is a comprehensive entity combining the outer morphological or formal factors (melody, rhythm, meter, tempo, harmony, polyphony, form, register, colour, dynamics, and so on) and the inner ones (spirit, thoughts, meaning, etc.).¹²¹ Accordingly Zeng’s “scientific” arguments had a solid Chinese basis: he worried that if any rhythm, cadence or note was changed, the “spirit” might flow away.¹²² This binary division of the musical sign is, of course, interestingly parallel to the 19th-century Western dichotomy of “form” and “content” or the more recent

¹¹⁹ Zeng Zhimin, “*Yinyue Jiaoyulun*” (On Music Education), *Xinmin Congbao* (New Citizen Journal), 14 & 20 (1904). Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 193-207.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Bao Minzhen, “*Cong Xingshen Xitong Kan Zhongguo Yinyue Fengge*” (The Study of Chinese Music Style through the *Xing-Shen* System), *Bulletin of Shenyang Conservatory of Music*, 10 (1991), pp. 3-6 & p. 24.

¹²² Zeng Zhimin, “*Yinyue Jiaoyulun*” (On Music Education), *Xinmin Congbao* (New Citizen Journal), 14 & 20 (1904). Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 193-207.

semiotic categories of “signifier” and “signified”,¹²³ or “means of expression” and “content of expression”;¹²⁴ Western and Chinese thoughts can be interpreted as overlapping here but bring in different cultural consequences and ramifications, resulting in different meanings or connotations. Furthermore, Zeng Zhimin’s opposition to changing the key of a piece – which is actually very common in practical Western performance – provokes the issue of artistic emulation that covers Chinese art over a 3,000-year period, from the Zhou Dynasty (1100-256 BC) to the present day. The prevalence of emulation was thought to be a consequence of the dominance of Confucianism philosophically and politically, as it pays tribute to the past by recreating objects and styles of antiquity.¹²⁵ Indeed, these statements by Zeng Zhimin can be seen as being not so much a result of believing in Western ideologies as faith in his own culture.

Likewise, despite his “Westernised” and “scientific” attitude toward music theories, Zeng’s conception of music’s social function fell into the frame of Confucianism as the way of bringing back into the Chinese cultural orbit the ultimate questions of where the value of music lies, what music means to society and spiritual life. In Zeng Zhimin’s opinion music is the foundation and necessity of a culture. “A country without music is not a civilised country, and a person who does not know music is not a civilised person.”¹²⁶ This actually echoes with Confucius’s claim that music can educate citizens,¹²⁷ but by modern times music had definitely failed to meet this need in China. Proper music education in school, as Zeng deemed necessary, would help to correct the two perverse tendencies that were prevalent among young Chinese people. Music could be either used to “temper” those who have had their animation depleted from excessive study, or to “nurture” those who have deviated from serious study and

¹²³ Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics (Revised Ed.)*, McGraw-Hill Professional, 1966.

¹²⁴ Louis Hjelmslev, *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language (Revised Ed.)*, University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

¹²⁵ Catherine Maudsley (ed.), *Art and Imitation in China*, University of Washington Press, 2007.

¹²⁶ Zeng Zhimin, “Yinyue Jiaoyulun” (On Music Education), *Xinmin Congbao (New Citizen Journal)*, 14 & 20 (1904). Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 193-207.

¹²⁷ In *Yue Ji (The Classic of Music)*, Confucius said, “Knowing music is almost equal to knowing the rites.” *The Classic of Music* is often referred to as the sixth “Chinese classic text” but was lost by the time of the Han Dynasty. A few traces remain and can be found in other ancient Chinese classics like *Zuo Zhuan* or *Li Ji (The Book of Rites)*.

become intoxicated by entertainments. In the social stripe, Zeng linked music and diplomacy interestingly yet boldly, assuming that music could help develop perfect courtesy and finesse which would enable diplomats to achieve their goals. And he followed the popular idea of his era that music could serve as the best companion for military training and army life. To conclude, Zeng believed there was an urgent need to set up an integrated and effective system of school education in order to accelerate the whole country's process of renovation.

The above could be seen as a microcosm of Western art music's appropriation in China, a process which was filled with what would be seen by Western music experts as anachronism, misappropriation and imagination according to the special socio-historical context. The perception of Western art music was mainly built out of a quest for modernisation and national self-strengthening, upon an initiative and appropriation from the Chinese side for local ends, rather than on an academic, scientific or "genuine" understanding of Western art music itself. Under the disguise of fiercely overthrowing the values of the old culture, of a Nietzschean "transvaluation of all values",¹²⁸ music practices were still unconsciously shaped by the notions and standards of that culture. In the concluding segment of this chapter, I will give a further retrospective summary of these currents.

2.4 Conclusions: Towards a Comprehensive Understanding of the "School Songs Movement"

The "Utopia" of Western art music

The poignant and sweeping criticism leveled against Chinese music and

¹²⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Antichrist*, 1895.

whole-hearted support for Western music inevitably run the risk of setting Chinese and Western music up as polar opposites. It might have gone unnoticed (or been ignored) that Western opera had also been commercialised, since the late 18th century, to cater for the taste of the middle classes who were beginning to share power with the aristocracy. This reflected the fact that historical research in any serious sense was not the priority of the period. Instead, the Chinese cultural experimenters were rather seeking to use the technical vocabularies borrowed from the West and to help build an idealised society, a music-inspired utopia, to use the technical vocabularies from the West together with Confucian values to restore the national spirit. This attitude resonated with the mode of reading and interpreting history suggested by Nietzsche in the 1874 essay “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life”, in which Nietzsche attacked the prevailing view of knowledge as an end in itself and placed the requirements of life as of primary concern in the mode of writing of history. “Antiquarian history” was not required by the needs of current history, rather an “interested” form of history was put into play answering the needs of the moment (or the epoch).¹²⁹ The Nietzschean approach to history was associated by Foucault with structuralism. In “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, Foucault writes:

Nietzsche’s version of historical sense is explicit in its perspective and acknowledges its system of injustice. Its perception is slanted, being a deliberate appraisal, affirmation, or negation; it reaches the lingering and poisonous traces in order to prescribe the best antidote. It is not given to a discreet effacement before the objects it observes and does not submit itself to their processes; nor does it seek laws, since it gives equal weight to its own sight and to its objects. ...¹³⁰

The school songs of early 20th century China, as a response to the social change and as a part of the modernisation of Chinese education, exposed China unprecedentedly and directly to “Western music” in its broadest sense. The repertory of such music in geographical terms included Western countries such as Germany, France, Britain, America, Italy, Spain, Russia, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Denmark,

¹²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, “On the Use and Abuse of History for Life” (*Vom Nutzen und Nachteil der Historie für das Leben*), in *Untimely Meditations (Unzeitgemässe Betrachtungen)*, 1873-1876.

¹³⁰ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. See Paul Rabinow (ed.) *Foucault Reader*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984, p. 90.

Norway, and in temporal terms spanned from the fifteenth century to the twentieth. As to the types and genres of the music, the school song writers not only employed materials from the works of Handel, Haydn, Beethoven, Weber, Wagner, Brahms, Verdi, Rossini and Dvorak, but also from the vernacular repertoire, the folk tunes and the sacred hymns of the above countries.¹³¹ Despite the fact that information about the original pieces was often unclear, this appropriation did help establish a familiarity with the Western musical sound, the underlying laws of scales, keys, modes and harmony. The piano and accordion became popularised during this period as the dominant instruments for accompaniment. The work of Christian missionaries also constituted an important force in pushing this movement forward as China was increasingly involved with foreign trade and the colonisation that was taking place in some areas. Hymn tunes were commonly available and they helped enrich the resources available for the melodies of school songs.

This intense respect for European music sometimes appeared quite radical. In his introduction to the Chinese translation of *Pedagogy of Primary School Singing (Xiaoxue Changge Jiaoshoufa)* by the Japanese music educator Arata Seijiro, Shen Xingong wrote that he looked forward to Western music replacing Chinese traditional music all over the country. “The day will be not so far when every family would discard *guchin*, *guzheng* and *sanxian*, and teach children with the organ and other Western instruments.”¹³²

However, it is far too simplistic to assert that this preliminary localising procedure of Western art music in China was a process that conquered all before it: given the traditional Chinese ideologies that strongly oriented and underpinned it, the disguise of

¹³¹ According to Qian Renkang's *Xuetang Yuege Kaoyuan* (2001), most appropriated works by the school song composers are folk song arrangements and invented folk songs. Qian did the research mainly through comparing the original folk song version (if available), the adapted version by a Western composer and the Chinese school song version. Some of them were imported from Japan to China, in which case the Japanese version is also included as a part of comparison. However, as most school song composers did not keep any note of the resources they were relying on, resemblance remains the only proof for making analogy in Qian's compilation.

¹³² Arata Seijiro, *Pedagogy of Primary School Singing*, 1903. Translated by Shen Xingong as *Xiaoxue Changge Jiaoshoufa* in 1905. See Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 218-9.

a radical pursuit of Westernisation was just a means to an end, a glove on the hand, even as those who wore the glove forgot the body their hand was attached to. This made the discourse of school songs something quite paradoxical, a situation which will be revealed by the following analysis.

Back to Confucianism

During the Meiji Restoration the song pieces used in school education were categorised as “Westernised music” and were distinguished from Japanese traditional music.¹³³ The major aim of school singing activity in Japan was to cultivate modern citizenship and martial spirit, especially during the Sino-Japanese war of 1894 and the Russo-Japanese War from 1904 to 1905.¹³⁴ As I have already said, at the very beginning the Chinese musicians did not have many chances to make contact with the real Western music. Although they were enchanted by the “Westernised” Japanese music at first hearing, they discovered that the Western music they received from the “distorting mirror” of Japan was very different from its Western prototypes. In 1905 Zeng Zhimin published his translation of a very intriguing work *Japanese Music Is Not True Music* (the original author remains unclear, perhaps being Westerner in Japan). And in another essay “On Brass Bands in China” from *The Oriental Magazine* (1917), the author, who noted the influence of each major European country upon the sounds of the newly-emerging Chinese brass bands, commented that the performances under Japanese tuition suffered from “lack of spirit or soul, with occasional mistakes in harmony or score copying. Some bands do not even use staff score.”¹³⁵ Some of these criticisms were certainly biased or beside the point, as a brass band is of course entitled to play from memory or according to notation based upon number. These criticisms,

¹³³ See Zhang Qian. *Zhong Ri Yinyue Jiaoliushi – Tangdai Pian, Mingqing Pian, Xiandai Pian (History of Music Communication between China and Japan – from Ming Dynasty to the Modern Time)*, The Modern Volume, Chapter 2. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1999.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Anonymous, “Zhongguo Junyueduitan” (On Brass Bands in China), *Dongfang Zazhi (The Oriental Magazine)*, 10 (Vol. 14), 1917. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 139-41.

however, were still based on the criterion of whether or not music could be used to cultivate martial courage.

This enthusiastic embrace of imagined “Western” standards was soon drawn into – if not completely absorbed by – a whole new style of interpretation, the core of which was traditional Chinese Confucianism. It is perhaps Zeng Zhimin who provides the most typical example here. His proposal of using the new Westernised music to correct perversities of individual character (as was mentioned in the previous part) resonated with the Confucian teaching that good music must be oriented to producing virtues, and so must be balanced and able to adjust the listener’s temper, as evident in Confucius’s representative statement that such music must be “expressive of enjoyment without being licentious, and of grief without being hurtfully excessive.”¹³⁶ What is more, Zeng also referred to music’s social function as “to maintain the morality of a nation, to enhance the happiness of a family, and to adjust the temperament of an individual.”¹³⁷ These functions are definitely on the scale of Confucius’ hierarchical linking of self-cultivation, family and national governing in another classic of Confucianism, the *Great Learning*:

When things are investigated, knowledge is extended.
When knowledge is extended, the will becomes sincere.
When the will is sincere, the mind is correct.
When the mind is correct, the self is cultivated.
When the self is cultivated, the clan is harmonised.
When the clan is harmonised, the country is well governed.
When the country is well governed, there will be peace throughout the land.
From the king down to the common people, all must regard the cultivation
of the self as the most essential thing.¹³⁸

¹³⁶ From Confucius, “*Ba Yi*”, *The Analects*. This commentary is about “*Guan Ju*”, the opening poem in the ancient anthology *Shi Jing*. It is also commonly regarded as Confucius’s standard for good music. See Chen Sihai, “*Kong Zi Yinyue Sixiang Zonglun*” (A Comprehensive Introduction to Confucius’s Music Thoughts), *Journal of Xi’an Conservatory of Music*, (01) 2007, 29-33.

¹³⁷ Zeng Zhimin, “*Yinyue Jiaoyulun*” (On Music Education), *Xinmin Congbao (New Citizen Journal)*, 14 & 20 (1904). Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919*. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 193-207.

¹³⁸ *Daxue (The Great Learning)* is the first of the four books which were selected by Zhu Xi during the Song Dynasty as a foundational introduction of Confucianism. It is highly influential in both classical and modern Chinese thought. English translation by A. Charles Muller, 1990.

Chinese musicians were somehow aware of such a mixture of thoughts. Zeng Zhimin perceived the discrepancies between the Western music style and the new lyrics, and he admitted that it was “makeshift” to adapt the political lyrics to the unaltered Western pieces.¹³⁹ Western music was then taken not so much an art standing on its own but as a tool for rejuvenating the nation at the moment of crisis. Although by this time music had not yet acquired much social and political power, it did help cultivate the mind of the social elites who were to become the real helmsmen of modern China’s fate. An anecdote that makes the point is that, during the Sixth National Congress of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, in 1996, the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin sang a school song, “Evening Song” (*Xi Ge*), that he had learned during his childhood.¹⁴⁰

Li Shutong: a turning point

It was perhaps Li Shutong who brought about the real turning point in the whole school songs movement. He did this by not simply following the tide of radical Westernisation and pragmatic orientation in this music creativity, but by sticking to his own cultural legacy and exploring the aesthetic value of school songs. Not only did he intend to cultivate a “pure and beautiful spirit”, as indicated in the preface of *The Minor Music Periodical*,¹⁴¹ but he had always been devoted to seeking a special formal beauty which combined the tone, rhythm and cultural conceptions of Chinese poetic language with the form of Western music, whether composed by himself following the rules of harmony or borrowed from Western composers’ own works. Compared with the overflowing patriotism and martial spirit on show in many school songs, Li Shutong’s style was much more in resonance with the calm, restrained and graceful

¹³⁹ Zeng Zhimin, “Yinyue Jiaoyulun” (On Music Education), *Xinmin Congbao* (New Citizen Journal), 14 & 20 (1904). Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 193-207.

¹⁴⁰ Qian Renkang, *Xuetang Yuege Kaoyuan*, 2001, p. 37.

¹⁴¹ Li Shutong, “Preface”, *Yinyue Xiaozazhi*, 1906. Cited from Zhang Jingwei (ed.), *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Shiliao Huibian* (The Historical Materials of Music in Pre-Modern China): 1840-1919. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1998, pp. 222-3.

part of Chinese culture.

It may be right to say that Chinese musicians at this time still had only a weak grasp of Western music. It was the huge and comprehensive system of Western music theories, works and instruments that they were facing; whereas during the last few centuries in China, music had been treated as low culture and music theory had developed very little. Whether in the field of music criticism, creation or education, music had not acquired an independent status but was dependent upon and interpreted in conjunction with other things such as literature.

Nevertheless, this was a crucial period for music in enabling it to regain its status as a form of high culture in China. Music critics continually referred to Confucius' celebration of music and its serious appeal to rulers and literati of the earlier dynasties in contrast to the "philistinism" they identified in popular and folk Chinese music. They cast their eye upon music in Western society, the study and practice of which had been led toward a form of science, and they used similar "scientific" rules to examine Chinese music, with the aspiration that music in China would soon follow the same route. The major aftermath of the school songs movement was that it laid down a solid foundation for Chinese modern music education. Western music theories were applied and Western musical instruments were played, and the curricula for different school levels were set. They led to the turning of a new page of music creations in the following decades.

CHAPTER THREE

MUSIC COMPOSITION, PERFORMANCE AND POLITICAL IDEOLOGY, 1930S - 1940S

3.1 A Period of Transition: From Enlightenment to Revolution and the War of National Defense

Without the Opium War, we might have been able to gradually merge Western and Chinese music styles. But this war brought a sudden and ruthless awakening. There was simply no time to let things develop at their own pace.

– Liu Ching-chih, Research Fellow of the Centre of Asian Studies
at Hong Kong University¹⁴²

In the course of an interview with Barbara Mittler, Liu Ching-chih made the above comment on what he perceived as the role of historical accidents on the developing route of Chinese music from the Opium War to the turn of the 20th century. However, it is fairer to say that history is full of such accidents. Seemingly, similar “accidents” occurred in the following decades too: the 1930s and 1940s witnessed some essential historical events such as the invasion of Japan, the consolidation of the Chinese Communist Party in Yan’an, its taking over of the whole nation’s governance and the exile of the Nationalist Party whose rule in China lasted for twenty-one years.

¹⁴² Barbara Mittler, “C. C. Liu on New Music in China”, *New Music in China and The C. C. Liu Collection* at the University of Hong Kong, Edited and compiled by Helen Woo in association with Chan Hing-yan and Georg Predota, Hong Kong University Press, 2005, p. 10.

In an article written in 1959, Fritz Bose observed that the invasion of European art music had overwhelmed Asian folk music “to such extent that national music has often been extensively undermined or completely obliterated.”¹⁴³ In particular, he mentioned that China had been susceptible to the influence of Western music because its indigenous art music tradition had for generations been becoming extinct.¹⁴⁴ According to Bose, the Europeanisation of music culture in Asian countries existed at its strongest among uneducated people who did not have their own artistic tradition properly guarded, whereas it was at its weakest among intellectuals who defended against the colonising incursions and influences of the West, and it was under the latter’s efforts that new national styles amalgamating Eastern and Western elements had arisen.¹⁴⁵ Although what Bose said about Chinese art music tradition was mostly true, in China, however, the condition from the late 1910s to early 1930s took a trajectory that was somewhat contrary to his argument. With Westernised music remaining the major music model accepted by educated people, traditional music (except for those for the palaces or courts and for the intellectuals of the elite) continued to develop on its own in countryside and among the working class in urban areas, where it occasionally merged with the factors of Western pop and entertainment music .

As was mentioned in the last chapter, although the introduction of Western music theories, materials and techniques into Chinese society during the school song movement was rather rushed, this movement still opened the doors for the middle class and the educated members of the population in the major urban cities and helped them to access new musical techniques and forms – taking Western ideas as the model, this process enabled them to express their spirit and emotions in a non-traditional way. This, along with the changes that took place in language and literature placing the demotic on linguistic centre-stage,¹⁴⁶ brought about a new

¹⁴³ Fritz Bose, “Western Influences in Modern Asian Music”, *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, Vol. 11 (1959), p. 47.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁴⁶ The May 4th Movement of 1919 discarded *Wenyan*, the archaic language of the upper class and officials, in favour of universal usage of common Chinese spoken by the lower classes on a daily basis.

cultural tendency which was in many ways similar to the Age of Enlightenment in Europe during the 1700s. It also laid the foundation for a rather Westernised music education system which was relatively ignorant of Chinese indigenous traditional and folk music practices. In Beijing, there was the Music Institute of Peking University (*Beida Yinyue Chuanxisuo*), an organisation set up by Cai Yuanpei and Xiao Youmei in 1919 to promote Western music and offer relevant training to the general public. In 1927 The Music Institute of Peking University was moved to Shanghai and renamed National Music College. In both of the institutions, students were mostly instilled with Western music theories and practices, whereas scarce attention was paid toward Chinese traditional music and the music of different ethnic groups – let alone to the relevant field work that ought to have been the core of such research. It was not only in the above professional music institutions, but also in some social and amateur music organisations – such as the Western Music Society of Beijing Normal University founded in 1926 – an obvious indifference toward traditional Chinese music was dominant.¹⁴⁷ In the 1999 biography of Lü Ji, the later honorary president of PRC's National Musicians Association, the author Li Yedao summarises and comments on this phenomenon as follows:

The music education that Lü Ji received in this period [from 1924 to around 1927, in the Hunan Provincial First Normal College (*Hunan Shengli Diyi Shifan*)] was mostly Westernised. ... In this period there existed a prevalent and bizarre phenomenon: under [the influence of] popular or mainstream opinions, young students were not studying the imported Western music from a Chinese perspective but they rather “discovered” Chinese music after learning Western music.¹⁴⁸

Another instance may better exemplify the imbalanced attitude that existed toward Western music and the Chinese people's own musical legacy. In 1931, the Russian born pianist Alexander Tcherepnin, during his visit to China, held a contest in Shanghai to recruit “Chinese flavoured” piano pieces in order to promote them in Europe. In this contest, He Luting's “Buffalo Boy's Flute” (*Mutong Duandi*) gained the

¹⁴⁷ Feng Changchun, *Zhongguo Jindai Yinyue Sichao Yanjiu* (Research of Chinese Modern Music Thoughts). Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 2007, p. 171.

¹⁴⁸ Li Yedao. “Lü Ji Pingzhuān” (The Biography of Lü Ji), Part I, *Yinyue Yanjiu* (Music Research), (01) 1999, p. 17.

first prize. The significance of this case in reflecting the above-mentioned point is two-fold: the effort to promote “Chinese music” was not exercised by a Chinese person but by a European (and we are here not taking into account the latter’s marketing purpose); and the creation of this piece itself was not derived from any serious field work or research into traditional Chinese folk music – as suggested by a letter written to He Luting by his former art school teacher Qiu Wangxiang in 1966. Rather, He Luting just composed the piece relying on memory of the folk music of the Hunan region.¹⁴⁹

In the meantime, in the vast countryside of China, folk music activities were still alive and flourishing. Many regional folk operas and narrative singing genres merged with each other in such a way that there developed some highly synthetic genres such as Peking Opera. In the realm of instrumental music, a larger variety of new performing styles, schools and societies appeared, all manifesting stylistic changes and expanded into new locations. While a major part of these musical activities still remained in the countryside, where it continued to play its traditional role (such as serving ritual occasions), nevertheless, due to the rapid development of the urban economy and of commerce, it was the case that numerous folk musicians moved to the cities. Their performance was welcomed by urban audiences and they instinctively began to incorporate modern urban – even Western – factors. For example, when traditional Cantonese music was performed in drinking houses, its performance was augmented by Western music instruments such as electric guitar, saxophone and banjo.¹⁵⁰

As Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) noted, it was the engagement of political institutions that was often a decisive factor in the process of formalisation and re-invention of “tradition”.¹⁵¹ Given that the surviving elements of Chinese traditional music did not readily amalgamate with the Western model to form a new national standard at this stage, one might ask whether the Chinese Nationalist Party – the ruling

¹⁴⁹ Shi Zhongxing, *He Luting Zhuan (The Biography of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000, p. 236.

¹⁵⁰ For the folk music activities from 1840 to 1940s, see Wang Yuhe, “*Yapian Zhanzheng hou Zhongguo Chuantong Yinyue de Xin Fazhan*” (The New Development of Chinese Traditional Music after the Opium War), *Zhongguo Jinxindai Yinyueshi (Chinese Pre-Modern and Modern Music History, 3rd ed.)* Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 2009.

¹⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm & Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 7.

political party of China from 1928 to 1949 – played an effective role in carrying out a cultural policy in accordance to its political doctrine. In fact, the answer to this question still remains an enigma even today and could easily lead to disparate conclusions, a result of the relatively scanty research in China on this topic so far due to ideological and historical reasons.

The earliest monograph in Chinese that especially focuses on the cultural policy of the Nationalist government is probably Ni Wei's *The "Imagined" Nation and Governmental Control: The Art Policies and Literature Movements of the Nanjing Government 1928-1948* (*Minzu Xiangxiang yu Guojia Shiming: 1928 Nian – 1948 Nian Nanjing Zhengfu de Wenyi Zhengce Ji Wenxue Yundong*) published in 2003. Although this work is mainly about literary creativity as influenced by the art policies of the Nationalist government, yet it contains almost no reference to music, it does suggest the following points that are valuable from the point of view of this research: although Chiang Kai-shek (known in contemporary Mandarin as Jiang Jieshi), the leader of the Nationalist Party, was very much inclined toward building a modern national state which was ruled by one-party totalitarianism, and that during his tenure policies were made concerning literary and artistic production which was required to promote the Nationalist Party's major political slogan "Three Principles of the People" (Nationalism, Democracy and People's Welfare), research, however, has revealed that Chiang's cultural policy in reality suffered from being at worst empty and at best ambiguous.¹⁵² Apart from several literature journals, specially launched for the reiteration of such political notions, there was hardly any measure taken on retrieving the legacy of traditional music except for some vague discussion about "rearranging existing musical works, improving existing instruments, rewarding new music creations, regulating social music, promoting music education and so on."¹⁵³

¹⁵² Ni Wei, *Minzu Xiangxiang yu Guojia Shiming: 1928 Nian – 1948 Nian Nanjing Zhengfu de Wenyi Zhengce Ji Wenxue Yundong* (*The "Imagined" Nation and Governmental Control: The Art Policies and Literature Movements of Nanjing Government 1928-1948*), Shanghai Educational Publishing House, 2003.

¹⁵³ Quoted from a 1937 record of "music issues conference" presided by Chen Guofu, the director of National Government Cultural Projects Committee. See Gong Yuzhi & al. (Eds.), *The Entire Book of 20th Century China* (Volume 8, Book 2). Beijing: *Xianzhuang Shuju* (Thread Binding Publishing House), 2002, p. 2369.

By contrast, Feng Lei's recent PhD thesis on the music institutions of the "Assistant Capital" of the Nationalist government during the Anti-Japanese War, Chongqing, provides a wealth of factual details about the development of music as part of the city's modernisation and as a tool to facilitate the government's plans for national construction. The idea and deliberate application of "education via music" was an important part in this ideological discourse, under the guidance of which some important musical organisations and institutions, such as the Musical Education Committee (*Yinyue Jiaoyu Weiyuanhui*), the National Ritual Music Institute (*Guoli Liyue Guan*) and the National Music Institute at Qingmuguan, Chongqing, were founded. Feng's thesis puts on record the existence of a variety of new and flourishing music genres and societies in Chongqing, including

two music institutes, five music departments in higher education institutions, three orchestras, more than ten entirely structured military bands, a more than one hundred strong chorus consisting of university staff and five traditional music bands belonging to assorted radio stations.¹⁵⁴

More importantly, Feng's thesis reveals that all of the above three institutions (the Musical Education Committee, the National Ritual Music Institute and the National Music Institute at Qingmuguan) made plans to study, compile descriptions of, and utilise traditional Chinese music. These plans were according to Chiang kai-shek's aspiration to achieve a consolidated nation-state with a unified ideology. In a 1943 meeting of the Musical Education Committee, the committee member Pan Gongzhan raised the point that instrument making in minority music should be accompanied with unified standards, so that it could accelerate "complete unification of the Orient with the help of musical force."¹⁵⁵ Another committee member Zhang Beihai proposed that the compilation of ethnic folk music could help extend the nation's boundary, retrieve the Chinese government's administration in colonies like Taiwan, and make the consciousness of the nation-state develop among minority peoples.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁴ Feng Lei, *Peidu Chongqing Sange Yinyue Jiaoyu Jigou zhi Yanjiu (The Study of the Three Educational Organisations of Music in "Assistant Capital" Chongqing)*. Phd thesis, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2010, p. 8.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 28-9.

Although Feng's thesis provides compelling evidence that the Nationalist Party was willing to revive traditional Chinese music and to incorporate it as part of its own political culture, oddly enough, nothing is ever mentioned by him on the achievement of these policies, activities and plans in practice. Actually, not only is the record of such achievement scarcely found in any contemporary Chinese music literature, but one can hardly identify any formal publication about traditional Chinese music in the time period and environment described above as the result of this political ideology and its administration. Thus it presents a real enigma for us: did the reconstruction of music tradition by the Nationalist government remain only as empty talk? This could have been due to the shortage of funds, the tough environment caused by the war, or that the musical personnel and university leaders simply did not carry out the plans effectively. – In a word, we could probably safely draw the conclusion that the Nationalist government did not play a particularly constructive role on traditional Chinese music, or, in fact, that it led this music nowhere.

Whatever effort was made, in the eyes of many people nowadays (whose viewpoint inevitably also includes the result of later political propaganda in the PRC), both the cultural and political administration of the Nationalist Party have retained an image of failure. The continuous decadence of the domestic economy aggravated the conflict between the classes, thus providing space for the increasing circulation and advocacy of the Chinese Communist Party's policies. In Bonnie S. McDougall's words,

Attempts at reform by the Nationalist (*Guomindang*) government in the thirties served only to prove the inadequacy of its gradualist, piecemeal, and authoritarian measures. The radicalisation of the educated youth over this period was reflected in a turn to the left in literature, and many of the most respected writers openly advocated a Marxist or Communist discipline.¹⁵⁷

Over the 1930s, The Communist Party hoped to make art a means to attract the

¹⁵⁷ Bonnie S. McDougall, *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" – A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1980, p. 9.

public's attention to the exploitation by the upper social class of the lower and so to provoke sympathy toward the new proletarian masses of the cities as well as the deprived peasants of the countryside. In 1930 the Chinese Left-Wing Writers' Association (*Zhongguo Zuoyi Zuojiā Lianmeng*) was founded under Communist leadership in Shanghai as an instrument of uniting the urban intellectuals who were sympathetic to proletarian revolution. The Left-Wing Writers' Association soon developed branch organisations specialising in music and drama, namely, the Beiping Left-Wing Musicians' Association (*Beiping Zuoyi Yinyuejia Lianmeng*), the Sino-Soviet Russian Music Academy (*Zhongsu Yinyue Xuehui*) and the Left-Wing Dramatists' Association Music Group (*Zuoyi Xijujia Lianmeng Yinyue Xiaozu*). Most of these societies' productions consisted of songs, those composed for films and stage dramas being especially favoured because of their direct and rapid access to the public. The association members actively sought to spend time among peasants and workers so better to study their life and emotions.

In 1931, with Japan's occupation of Manchuria – the historical name of Northeast China – and with its intention of taking possession of the entire mainland, the domestic political environment of China seemed to deteriorate even more. Although an agreement was signed in 1933 between the two political parties for a cooperative defense against the Japanese, the confidence awarded to the Communist Party both from ordinary citizens and from intellectuals enhanced drastically due to its aspiration of building a completely new society free from all taint with the prevalent corruptions.

Therefore, on one hand, the pressure of invasion spurred people to adopt a unified approach which would surpass the trend of individuality associated with the previous period of cultural and political enlightenment. This process was reflected in the writings of the music composer Zhang Mei in 1937:

“We need singing at this time but it should not be “La tua Santuzza Piange Timplora!” from *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Instead we need: ‘Arise! All who refuse

to be slaves!”¹⁵⁸

On the other hand, after the Communist Party moved its base to Yan’an in December 1936, it soon started to carry out new social experiments, which attracted supporters from all over the country, thus placing the young Communist Party’s regime in need of a new and strong, ideological and cultural, instrument to unify its supporters’ beliefs.

So far I have dwelt upon the necessary general background information of the period. In the rest of this chapter, I will explore the fact that, whereas native folk music had not been effectively employed as a nationalist instrument under the rule of Nationalist Party, it did, however, attract the attention of the Communist Party who used it as a resource to build a brand-new national culture on the basis of its own political beliefs and doctrines. In this process politics played a sustained and integrated role – otherwise, the status of music in China would quite likely have been similar to that in Japan. Although Western music had long been a pervasive influence in Japan, it had rarely made any contact with its traditional national music and the blending of the two legacies had been hardly perceptible, only becoming visible in recent decades.¹⁵⁹

More specifically, I will make detailed reference to the process by which, under the regime of the Chinese Communist Party, the received traditional music practices of the Chinese people were endowed with new value, were modified, ritualised and institutionalised for the purpose of constructing a new national culture. Firstly I will start with a role model of this period, Xian Xinghai, a composer whose life and creative career is an encapsulation of the dynamic historical course that fused proletarian revolution and nationalist patriotism – two things that the Chinese Communist Party endeavoured to combine at that time. I will proceed by comparing various biographies of Xian composed in different periods together with a technical approach to his major

¹⁵⁸ Zhang Mei, “*Gechang Yishu de Fuxing*” (The Revival of Singing Art), *Yinyue Jiaoyu (Music Education)*, 5: 4 (1937), p. 15.

¹⁵⁹ Fritz Bose, “Western Influences in Modern Asian Music”, *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, Vol. 11 (1959), p. 48.

works. Then in the sections that follow I will take a close look at a set of core political literature written by Mao Zedong in Yan'an and then at the music activities carried out on this basis, during which I will also discuss the discrepancy between Marxism-Leninism and Maoism issued as political policies and as a source of inspiration for composers to work into their pieces. I will also mention how the technical and ideological influence of this period has held its sway over musical creations that emerged after the foundation of the People's Republic of China.

3.2 A Role Model – Xian Xinghai: His Life, Creativity and Reception

Pay condolence for Xian Xinghai – the people's musician.

– The inscription that Mao Zedong bestowed on Xian at the time of the latter's funeral of October 1945, in Yan'an.

Some of the standard histories on New Chinese Music, especially those written in the PRC ... usually read like a two-men story, Nie Er (1912-35) and Xian Xinghai (1905-45).

– Barbara Mittler, "Making the Road", *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China since 1949*, p. 12.

Since the 1980s, concentration on the agency and role of "individuals" in the study of non-Western music culture have taken on a grander momentum than before, as opposed to the prevalent habit of painting a broad picture of musical activity in a specific culture or society and to render its accepted norms. Musicologists of this school are compelled to find out how individuals experience, maintain and construct

music historically.¹⁶⁰ Over nearly seventy years, Xian has remained an iconic name, not only for his contemporaries, but for the entirety of the PRC's musical memory. His *Yellow River Cantata* has been performed on many important occasions, and a music conservatory in Canton and a piano brand were named after him. In the propaganda of the PRC, Xian was the "People's Musician" (*Renmin Yinyuejia*), the one who had had the chance to establish himself in the West yet remained faithful to his nation, devoted to rendering the "national spirit", and an enthusiastic and unreserved revolutionary filled with sympathy toward the deprived masses. How did Xian come to be the role model of Chinese music, despite the fact that he was not the best of musicians in any technical sense? What was it that the Chinese Communists found in Xian's life, his personal character, as well as his musical works? What are the exact factors that they came to rely on and promote in the course of the formulation of a programme for a national culture?

In all the Western (English) literature about Xian Xinghai, Richard Curt Kraus's "The Ambiguous Legacy of Composer Xian Xinghai", in *Piano and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (1989), and Hon-lun Yang's "The Making of a National Musical Icon: Xian Xinghai and His *Yellow River Cantata*" in Annie J. Randall (ed.), *Music, Power and Politics* (2004), are the two best-known and most cited works. Kraus's article provides a comprehensive and detailed picture of Xian's life: his family background and formative period. From this article we also read of Xian's initial study of music in southern China and then in Beijing, his continued study in Europe, his career in Shanghai and the political centre of the Nationalist Party, Wuhan, his transformation into a Yan'an composer within the Communist Party's regime and his last stage of life spent in Soviet Russia.¹⁶¹ As Kraus observes, Xian's populism was exaggerated in the PRC and his cosmopolitanism diminished, which was part of a sanctifying process on the part of the Communist Party

¹⁶⁰ Jonathan, P. J. Stock, *Musical Creativity in Twentieth-Century China*. University of Rochester Press, 1996, pp. 1-3; Helen Ree, *Lives in Chinese Music*. University of Illinois Press, 2009, pp. 1-3.

¹⁶¹ Richard Curt Kraus, "The Ambiguous Legacy of Composer Xian Xinghai", *Piano & Politics: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggles over Western Music*. Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 40-69.

designed to bestow iconic power and status upon the composer and his work.¹⁶² Choosing not to cover as many details of Xian's personal life, by contrast, Hon-lun Yang's study compares three versions of the *Yellow River Cantata*: Xian's two original versions (respectively composed in Yan'an and Moscow) and the one recomposed collectively by members of the Central Philharmonic and officially adopted in the PRC.¹⁶³ In the following part of this chapter I will also return to discuss the re-adaptation of the *Cantata* and how it was incorporated into the dominant socialist ideology.

What about the situation of literature about Xian in China? Although many articles just appear to be repeated praises and paeans of admiration following the prevailing tone of propaganda, many of them do, however, contain meaningful information or even adopt a critical attitude. I would like to mention the three articles or books of a biographical nature that I consider to be the most important; these also provide the main resources for Kraus's account of Xian Xinghai. They include an autobiography by Xian himself, written in the form of a long letter during his residence in Yan'an, entitled *Wo Xuexi Yinyue de Jingguo* ("My Course of Musical Study"),¹⁶⁴ and another two biographies about Xian by Ma Ke and Qin Qiming, compiled or written, respectively, in the 1960s and the 1980s.¹⁶⁵ Also to be cited and discussed in this thesis, are resources generated in different periods and for different purposes – some are memorial articles written by Xian's contemporaries, musicians and critics in Yan'an, and others are critical reflections on the nature, techniques, ideological and aesthetic values of Xian's works made after the foundation of the PRC. Based on these resources I will attempt to provide fresh angles and cast new light on some details that have been neglected in answering the questions posed at the beginning of this section. Despite the existence of a multitude of informative and critical writings of Xian, the ultimate contribution of this section may lie in the observation of the changing reception of Xian that underpins

¹⁶² Hon-lun Yang, "The Making of a National Musical Icon: Xian Xinghai and His *Yellow River Cantata*". In Annie J. Randall (ed.), *Music, Power and Politics*, Routledge, 2004.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Xian Xinghai, "*Wo Xuexi Yinyue de Jingguo*" (My Course of Musical Study), 1940. In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, pp. 3-22.

¹⁶⁵ See Richard Curt Kraus, "Notes", p. 225; Ma Ke, *Xian Xinghai Zhuan (The Biography of Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: The People's Publishing House, 1980; Qin Qiming, *Xian Xinghai*. Wuhan: Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 1980.

his three different versions of biography in Chinese. At the same time, it provides special insight into Xian's legacy both in positive and negative sense by finding the relevance of Xian's personal creativity to later music events, beliefs and trends and beliefs in the more than sixty years' history of the PRC.

In fact, the three biographies, mentioned above, already include three distinctive ways of interpreting the figure and works of Xian Xinghai. "My Course of Musical Study" was first published in a 1949 commemorative symposium: *People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai* edited by Mao Ziliang. One year before writing this letter, Xian had already become a member of the Communist Party, and seemed to find the political atmosphere of Yan'an agreeable. Thus this letter sticks to the typical tone of the Communist Party in Yan'an, highlighting his earlier struggle with poverty and his proximity to the working class. This letter also features intensely patriotic emotions, especially in depicting his life studying in Paris. In Mao Ziliang's symposium there are other memorialising articles by Yan'an composers (Ma Ke, Sun Shen), musicians (Ma Sicong, Xiang Yu, Zhen Bowei), music critic (Li Ling¹⁶⁶) and writers (Guo Moruo, He Qifang), and so forth.

Whereas the 1949 symposium was published at the eve of the foundation of the PRC and thus shows obvious traces of the time of warfare, Ma Ke's biography of Xian Xinghai was a "posthumous manuscript" written before the Cultural Revolution and was much more inclined to reflect the changing atmosphere of art and culture that occurred during the first decade of the PRC. By contrast, Qin Qiming's biography of Xian in 1980 avoided the discourse of class conflict that was prominent in Ma Ke's version. Instead Qin heightened the status of Chinese traditional culture; such as Xian's schooling in the classics of Confucius and ancient poetry – something never appeared in Ma Ke's biography.

About Xian's early life here are some generally agreed facts: born in Macau in 1905,

¹⁶⁶ Li Ling is known as Li Lüyong in this symposium.

Xian Xinghai was by parentage a Cantonese from Guangdong. His father was a sailor who died early, leaving him and his mother to maintain their survival by washing clothes for sailors, though they were also supported by Xian's grandfather. Shortly after his grandfather passed away, forcing them to move to Singapore in search of a living. With regard to Xian's family background, Kraus pointed out that Xian was marginal to Chinese culture in three ways: he was a boat person, he had no father, and he was an overseas Chinese (first being a Macanese and then a Singaporean).¹⁶⁷ He was estranged from the agricultural culture of the vast hinterland of China, where people earning their living on the sea had a traditionally lower status. As Ma Ke put in the 1960s Xian's biography, "they were seen by the 'dignified' people on the land as inborn mean slaves."¹⁶⁸ To these another essential point must be added: Xian's mother language was Cantonese – he was not good at speaking Mandarin, the *lingua franca* of the Chinese hinterland, yet later when working in Yan'an he studied it assiduously. Li Ling, a Yan'an musician and critic, recalled that

As a Cantonese, Xinghai did not speak good Mandarin, but because of that very reason he placed more emphasis on the standard tone [of Mandarin]. Whenever he got hold of a new lyric, he would read it out loud until he had mastered it and invite others to correct him on those tones of which he was not certain. In this way he achieved a great success in combining words and tunes.¹⁶⁹

Significantly, Xian Xinghai has been admired and celebrated for giving up his marginalised identity for that of a supporter of a unified nationhood. Meanwhile, growing up in such a family of course involved much struggle with poverty and hardship, a fact which endeared Xian to the labouring classes. The first set of experiences won him much acclaim in Yan'an; while the second meant that his fame persisted through the difficult stage after the foundation of the PRC that featured a zest for class struggle and the assertion of the dominant status of the proletariat, since he

¹⁶⁷ Richard Curt Kraus, *Piano & Politics: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggles over Western Music*. Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 41.

¹⁶⁸ Ma Ke, *Xian Xinghai Zhuan (The Biography of Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: The People's Publishing House, 1980, p. 2.

¹⁶⁹ Li Lüyong (the former name of Li Ling), "Xinghai de Chuangzuo Daolu" (The Creative Path of Xinghai). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 194.

was always presented as firmly rooted in the working class.

In “My Course of Musical Study”, Xian scarcely referred to how he made the earliest contact with Western music; maybe because he thought it was irrelevant, or perhaps he was simply too cautious to mention it in the environment of Yan’an. The fact has been confirmed, however, that Xian was educated in a free school run by the Christian Youth Union of Lingnan University after he and his mother returned to Canton from Singapore in 1918. In the school he studied piano and clarinet and came into contact with Western church music. This period of study in a colonial school and Christian atmosphere was portrayed by Ma Ke with some exaggeration in his 1960s biography, written in the typical style of revolutionary literature of the period. Besides a detailed account of the bullying of Xian by religious foreigners because of his poverty, Ma Ke particularly emphasised the following event: a music teacher who had studied in Germany told Xian that music was stratified into three levels: dance and march music were in the lowest level as they only reflected the most basic movement of body and were “most linked to reality”; on the middle level is vocal music – arias, lyrical pieces and operas – which exist between reality and the spirit; while it is on the most advanced level that one finds “absolute” music, i.e., Western instrumental music, since “it has the most freedom, is least restricted by the objective world and most fully reveals the spiritual world.”¹⁷⁰ There is no concrete evidence as to the truth of this story or anecdote, and it was quite possibly derived from Ma Ke’s imagination. Into this anecdote Ma obviously projected his own ideological taste which was subject to the prevailing atmosphere of Cultural Revolution – the artistic tastes of Capitalist and Proletariat were deliberately claimed to exist at two extreme poles as a proof of the existence of class conflict – as were their respective embrace of “Idealism” and “Materialism”, the famous dichotomy dominating the Marxist philosophical schema. According to his prescribed identity, a Capitalist musician (the music teacher) was “due to” express his “decadent” pursuit of absolute music and the subjective side of spirit in the face of a son of a poor labourers’ family.

¹⁷⁰ Ma Ke, *Xian Xinghai Zhuan (The Biography of Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: The People’s Publishing House, 1980, p. 24.

So it was that, in the view of the auto-biographical “letter”, without sufficient awareness of both his own music tradition and a real sense of the political environment, Xian felt the need for the elitist pursuit of more knowledge of Western art music. In 1926, with financial help from friends, Xian Xinghai travelled to Beijing and studied in the Music Institute of Peking University (*Beida Yinyue Chuanxisuo*) led by Xiao Youmei, where Xian became even more eager to make his technique more “internalised”.¹⁷¹ Xian came to know the violinist Ma Sicong, who introduced Xian to his own teacher Paul Oberdoeffler from the Paris Conservatoire, and so Xian departed for Paris in 1929. In Paris he studied with several French music masters – violin with Oberdoeffler, harmony, counterpoint and fugue with Noël Gaillon, composition with Vincent D’Indy, Guy de Lioncourt and Paul Dukas, and conducting with Marcel Labey. Xian became the first Chinese person to attend the advanced composition course at the Paris Conservatoire.¹⁷²

During his initial time in Paris, Xian had deeply admired the academic approach to composition with its precise and highly technical principles. It is commonly believed that Xian’s most important tutors were Paul Dukas, a great “Impressionist” composer who was famous for his complex skills, and Vincent D’Indy, a devoted student of César Franck and a profound admirer of the standards of German symphonic music. Xian took eight months to complete a sonata. He might have received some influence from musical Impressionism, but he was not as particularly enchanted by the avant-garde music then found in Paris which used Oriental oddities as one source of inspiration, as by those composers who evinced the most consolidated classical skills.

As his time in Paris passed, however, Xian Xinghai gradually deviated from such a purely academic stance, and his composition became more driven by emotional and instinctive forces derived from real life, while the technical aspects of composition took

¹⁷¹ Xian Xinghai, “*Wo Xuexi Yinyue de Jingguo*” (My Course of Musical Study), 1940. In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People’s Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 4.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

a back seat. What changed Xian's attitude primarily was his own economic hardship and stress-filled life. Without enough money to support himself, Xian was forced to survive by undertaking a variety of low-paid jobs which were often gruelling and unpleasant, such as waiter in a restaurant, barber's assistant, telephone guard and errand boy. Xian recorded this period of miserable life: "I was always unemployed and hungry, and felt helpless as there was nobody I could seek help from. Whenever I did find a job my time for studies usually became too limited."¹⁷³ Sometimes he had to practice the violin in the kitchen of restaurants during evenings and nights, and several times he fainted and collapsed on the street due to hunger and fatigue. In his desperation he received help from people as poor as himself: "A poor Russian couple who definitely understood the pain of labourers used their very limited income to buy food for me."¹⁷⁴ Because of such generosity his sympathy for poor people grew enormously and he felt himself to be more firmly rooted in this stratum of society. One result of this was that he joined the International Workers Association in Paris.

Another hugely influential factor on Xian's composition was his anxiety over the fate of China. In Paris Xian heard about the flood along the Yangtze River which destroyed crops and caused many people to migrate from their ancestral lands and end up struggling for life in the big cities – which were the foundation of the Communist movement in China. But what upset him most was the concession of north eastern China to Japan in 1931. In the following year, while watching the French national holiday parade as he loved to do every year, Xian "burst into tears".¹⁷⁵

Xian Xinghai's trio for soprano, piano and clarinet entitled "Wind" was a work composed at this turning point. It gained appreciation from Prokofiev and was broadcast on the radio across Paris. Although its score is missing now, Xian accounted his experience and feelings occurring through composition as follows:

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 5.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

When I was feeling complete despair about my life and living in a shabby room on the seventh floor with broken windows and door ... It was a windy winter night and I could not sleep because I did not even have a simple cotton duvet. I lit an oil lamp and practiced composition, but the strong wind blew my lamp out for many times, making me very sad. Hearing the howling of the wind, all the bitterness and misfortune of my own life and my motherland swelled in my heart and I could not help incorporating all these feelings into my work.¹⁷⁶

In “My Course of Musical Study” Xian also criticised the apathy of the Nationalist government toward his music. For example, while in Paris, Xian had hoped to get funding from the Chinese Nationalist government. He made several applications for assistance but was always ignored. This could be seen as a proof that the Nationalists were not fully aware of the value of music as a nationalist tool. Xian noted that:

One year an officer from the Chinese Nationalist government who visited Paris invited me to be his translator. I took this chance to ask him to help me get financial support to study military band music in Germany. In Paris, this officer delivered much propaganda about the need for Chinese to resist Japanese aggression, but ironically he refused to help me.¹⁷⁷

In 1935 Xian graduated from the Paris Conservatoire and left France. Soon after, he settled down in Shanghai and started to compose works that aimed to provoke patriotic feelings amongst his countrymen. These works include “Song for Sports” (*Yundonghui Ge*), which was written for the film *Hero of the Times* (*Shishi Yingxiong*), “We Shall Defend” (*Women Yao Dikang*), “Song for Fighters” (*Zhan Ge*) and “March for Rescuing the Country” (*Jiuguo Jinxingqu*). These works were published by the Baidai Record Company and became bestsellers at the time, and Xian was soon appointed by the Xinhua Film Company in Shanghai to write film music. Although Xian could have continued to write patriotic pieces in Xinhua Film Company, he encountered opposition from the Nationalist government, who did not like anything which highlighted the plight of the lower classes or might inspire revolution. Hence he found that he could not write rousing or powerful music, such as marches, and instead had to limit himself to more gentle or, conversely, more tragic sentiments. Due to this repression being

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 9.

exerted via his employers, he resigned from his position at the Xinhua Film Company and struck out on his own, working as a freelance composer and music teacher. He taught singing to a diverse range of organisations and people, including workers, peasants and students, and he wrote music for revolutionary dramas and films. From these activities he gradually developed a consistent composition style. He described the process of consolidating such a style as follows:

I liked to approach students and in particular workers and peasants ... I gained new strengths from their emotions of pleasure and anger, their labour and fighting against repression. Although my understanding of them was still not enough, my works became much more substantial than what I had done in Paris. My composition in Paris had lacked consistent style and been just a mixture of Impressionist skills with a Chinese flavour. I was happy to find rich resources for the inspiration for my compositions, namely, the feelings of the exploited and repressed. I was more confident that I could use my own strengths to contribute to rescuing my country from danger and collapse.¹⁷⁸

In 1937 Xian joined a drama troupe led by the drama director Hong Shen, and they travelled throughout the interior and promoted the policy of defense against Japanese aggression. In the winter they reached Hubei Province in middle of China where Xian visited a coal mine and witnessed the tough life and appalling working conditions of the miners. He taught them choral music and composed a song called “Heavy Labour” (*Qi Zhong Jiang*) – a reference to workers who lifted and carried heavy loads, such as sacks of coal. When the troupe reached Wuhan, the capital of Hubei Province and the seat of the Chinese Nationalist government, Xian continued writing patriotic and revolutionary works, but government restrictions and censorship were felt more strongly. After only a few months Xian was invited by Zhang Shu to work in the Political Department of the Nationalist Military Committee. Xian believed that he might be able to promote his ideas to officials more successfully, but he soon found that the office environment was even more restrictive than anything he had previously experienced, and he was soon marginalised by the other staff. Gradually he became disappointed and yearned for a different environment in which he could express his feelings and

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 14.

create music according to his own wishes.

At this time of discouragement Xian thought of Yan'an. He had heard the name of this place from the 1937 declaration of anti-Japanese cooperation between the Nationalist and Communist parties, but he had paid little attention to it. However, in Wuhan he had often seen advertisements recruiting intellectuals to work in Yan'an schools and universities. He also met people coming back from Yan'an occasionally and was impressed by their studious and enthusiastic manner. This made him wonder if Yan'an could provide him with the environment he was seeking. At around the same time he received a letter from Lu Xun Art College at Yan'an with the signatures of all the teachers and students of the Music Department who sincerely invited him to come and teach at their college. Xian enquired whether he would have the freedom to leave if he desired to do so: an answer came confirming that he would indeed be free to come and go as he pleased. Thus he made up his mind to travel to Yan'an in the winter of 1938, one year after arriving in Wuhan.

Xian developed a sense of the new start as he entered Yan'an. Located on the Loess Plateau (known in China as the *Huangtu* Plateau) along the middle reaches of the Yellow River, Yan'an presented a totally different scene from what Xian had been familiar with in southern China. Almost half of the city was built on the sides of mountains and the *yaodong* – a room or dwelling carved out of the soft soil of the hillside, usually with a brick or stone facade having windows and a door – was the main style of housing. Millet was the main daily food instead of rice, which Xian had never experienced. The people in Yan'an lived a very simple life and devoted most of their time to working and studying. It was the place where Mao Zedong really took possession of the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

Xian happily devoted himself to the life and environment of Yan'an, to many things of which he had originally been a stranger – the arid and windy northern climate, the coarse food, the *yaodong*, and the agricultural labour that everyone was obliged to

undertake. This labour was an encapsulation of the life of the Chinese agricultural population, the majority of Chinese people, and the group in which the Communist Party invested its theories and practice. As Xian Xinghai gradually merged into this life style, he found himself more and more akin to the ways of the Communist Party.

To Xian's surprise he did not encounter a lack of resources for music study because of support for Yan'an by Soviet Russia. Xian required thousands of music scores from around the world, and these were soon posted to him from Soviet contacts. By contrast, musical equipment was very poor. There was not even a single piano in Yan'an, and the only instruments to hand were portable Western items such as violins and accordions, together with various Chinese instruments. So Xian started to study the characteristics of Chinese instruments in order to use them to accompany songs and write instrumental music for them. In Yan'an Xian Xinghai acted as music instructor for several institutions – the North Shannxi Public School, the Resist Japan Military and Political University, the China Women's University, Lu Xun Art College, and so on. He was also appointed as head of Department of Music at Lu Xun Art College in May 1939.

The only thing that had ever affected Xian Xinghai was that, in Yan'an, artists were required to attend political meetings each week. Xian had not been totally in agreement with this requirement as he thought this would sacrifice his time for composition. Soon he changed his opinion and admitted that the direction of art posed by the Communist Party's authority was "suggestive" to him. He even made a plan for studying social science. Xian described his strengthened understanding of the mass of the people's feeling as one benefit of studying social science oriented by Marxism:

I gradually generated interest in it, discovering that many questions that cannot be solved by music are actually answered by social science. ... I will raise just one example: why the voice of workers and peasants are more powerful and why their feelings are healthier? For this question, in the past I simply thought it was because they were suffering. Even I was not satisfied with this answer. Thus my absorption of their voice and mood into my own work seemed superficial. Now I know that since labourers are the ones being depressed and exploited, they have to shake off their chains and to free themselves to avoid debility and extinction.

Thus their rebellion was struggling for survival. Their voice stands for life, as well as for the future strength of life. Additionally, workers are deprived of all and without any savings, and their wives and daughters are also enslaved by factory owners. Living such a life, there is no selfishness in their brain (since there is nothing belonging to themselves). Thus they are altruists. Their rebellion is not only for themselves but is beneficial for others. ... Thus the thoughts of labourers are really the most haughty, for most people and the most righteous. They do not want deceit, indecency, selfishness, conspiracy, suspicion and cruelty, and so their emotions are healthy. Due to the above reasons, they are the best in uniting themselves and uniting all kinds of repressed people, thus their voice and feelings are filled with love, friendliness, sincerity and honesty. Furthermore, they are determined to be the owners of the new world and turn this world into one of great harmony, thus their courage is great and their strength is massive.¹⁷⁹

Xian Xinghai's creative life in Yan'an presented a useful model for a political authority like the Chinese Communist Party because he turned away from the notion of "art for art's sake" and accepted political principles as underlying and guiding art creation. According to Xian Xinghai's list of completed works at the end of Qin Qiming's biography, during the six years that Xian spent in Paris (1929-1935) he only generated nine works, whereas during the two years in Yan'an (1938-1940) he had 71 in total, most of which were short solo songs, unison songs and two-part chorus with clear themes, which were easy to learn for common people. Although his Parisian tutors might have instructed him in the technique of weaving harmonic structure into exquisite Impressionist pictures, in Yan'an, Xian totally gave up this route. Instead, almost all his works in Yan'an are of a simple tonal structure, following the intonation patterns of everyday Chinese language and avoiding complex changes in rhythm.

In Yan'an Xian Xinghai almost stopped writing pure instrumental music, since compared to instrumental music, singing achieved much faster results in terms of practical educational needs such as unifying the troops, to the extent that "many people in the liberated areas judged whether a troop belonged to their own by whether they could sing."¹⁸⁰ Among Xian's vocal works written in Yan'an, *The Production Cantata (Shengchan Dahechang)* and *Yellow River Cantata (Huanghe*

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., p. 21.

¹⁸⁰ Lü Ji, "Jiefangqu de Yinyue" (Music of Liberation Areas), in *Lun Yinyue Wei Gongnongbing Fuwu (Music's Service of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers)*, *Yinyue Chubanshe*, 1965, p. 11.

Dahechang) were the most complex in music genre as compared to others and made more use of the compositional skills found in Western art music. For me, the *Cantata* not only served as a national but also as a revolutionary music icon and it perfectly matched the political and artistic principles of Yan'an.

Yellow River Cantata is a vocal suite containing seven pieces of different genres. The seven pieces are: (1) Four-part chorus "Song of the Yellow River Boatmen" (*Huanghe Chuanfu Qu*); (2) Tenor solo "Ode to the Yellow River" (*Huanghe Song*); (3) Two-part chorus for soprano and alto "Ballad of the Yellow Waters" (*Huangshui Yao*); (4) Duet for men's voices "Dialogue Song by the Yellow River" (*Hebian Duikouqu*); (5) Soprano solo "Lament to the Yellow River" (*Huanghe Yuan*); (6) Four-part chorus "Defending the Yellow River" (*Baowei Huanghe*); (7) Four-part chorus "Shout Aloud, Yellow River!" (*Nuhou Ba, Huanghe!*).

The beginning piece of the *Cantata*, "The Song of Yellow River Boatmen" (*Huanghe Chuanfu Qu*) is a 4-part chorus depicting boatmen struggling with the torrents in order to cross the Yellow River. Its text, by the poet Guang Weiran, is as follows:

The Song of the Yellow River Boatmen¹⁸¹

[Recitation] *Friends! Have you seen the Yellow River?
Have you crossed the Yellow River?
Do you remember scenes of the boatmen
Risking their lives to battle the perilous waves?
If you have forgotten, then listen!*

[Chorus] *Hai-yo! Row!
Row! Forge ahead! Hai-yo!
Stormy Clouds veil the sky!
Surging waves as high as mountains!
Cold winds slap our faces!
Surfs crash into the boat!
Fellow boatmen, keep a lookout!
Helmsmen, hold firm!*

¹⁸¹ The translation text is from Xiangtang Hong, *Performing the Yellow River Cantata*. DMA dissertation, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2009.

*Stay alert, do not slack off!
Fight for your lives, do not be afraid!
Hai! Row!*

*Do not fear the mountainous waves!
Boating on the Yellow River is like fighting at the front,
Unite and forge ahead! Hai! Row!
Row, forge ahead! Hai-yo! Hahaha!*

*The shore is in our view,
Now we have reached the shore.
Hearts, calm down, catch a breath.
Soon, we will again risk our lives fighting those raging waves!
Hai-yo! Row! Hey!*

Due to the shortage of instruments in Yan'an, in the premiere, the accompanying band used metal food containers and spoons along with big cymbals and drums as percussion, and they generated "an effect that was like the mountain's roaring and a tsunami that could shake the earth."¹⁸² The first part of the chorus features a repeated melodic pattern swinging back and forth between I and V, which creates a bright, heroic and "masculine" feeling as in Western music in a major tonality through its reinforcement of the tonic-dominant relation. Nevertheless, superimposed on I and V are major second intervals (I – ii – I, V – vi – V). From a harmonic point of view they only function as embellishments, but they are symbolic of the pentatonic scale and familiar to Chinese ears. The first part is simple in harmony and consistent with the I-V tonal relation. (Example 3.1)

Example 3.1 "The Song of the Yellow River Boatmen" (4-part chorus and piano): the first seven bars featuring the I-V tonal relation. *Yellow River Cantata*, Zhejiang Literature and Art Press, 2005.

¹⁸² Qin Qiming, *Xian Xinghai*. Wuhan: Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 1980, p. 141.

Allegro con brio

The image displays a musical score for 'The Song of the Yellow River Boatmen'. At the top, it is marked 'Allegro con brio'. The score is divided into several parts: Piano (P.), Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), Bass (B.), and Piano (P.). The piano part features a strong, rhythmic accompaniment with dynamic markings like *f* and *ff*. The vocal parts are written in 3/4 time and include Chinese lyrics. The lyrics for the Soprano, Alto, Tenor, and Bass parts are: '划哟划哟划哟!' and '冲上前!'. The piano part includes a melodic line with dynamic markings like *ff* and *f*, and a bass line with a steady rhythm. The score is marked with '4' at the beginning of the vocal parts, indicating the start of a section.

The I-V alternation also powerfully reinforces the meaning of the text. I represents a leading boatman and V acts as the others following, imitating and responding to him. This effect is particularly eminent in bars 11 to 27 where the leading voice, a tenor solo, and the chorus forms an I – V dialogue. (Example 3.2) A dialogue between phrases is also a popular form of Chinese folk music.¹⁸³

Example 3.2 “The Song of the Yellow River Boatmen”: the I-V dialogue between the tenor solo and the chorus. *Yellow River Cantata*,

¹⁸³ See Li Jiti, *Zhongguo Yinyue Jiegou Fenxi Gailun (Introduction to Chinese Music Structure)*. Beijing: Central Conservatory of Music Press, 2004.

Meno mosso

T.Solo *f* 乌 云 哪, 波 涛 哪,

S. *f*

A. *f* 遮 满 天! 高 如 山!

T. *f*

B. *f*

Meno mosso

mf

冷 风 哪, 浪 花 哪!

扑 上 脸! 打 进 船;

From bar 32 to 39, the I-V phrase is expanded to IIVV. The persistence of the dual pattern keeps the music in a very intense and close-woven state until bar 61 where the music enters a new section. Although this section does employ Western harmonic

principles, the main notes in the harmonic relationship are usually not presented simultaneously but become part of the melodic lines occurring in sequence. Thus it is harmony hidden in melody, or, it is Western music principles presented in disguise of a form that can be easily accepted by Chinese ears.

The middle section of “The Song of Yellow River Boatmen” features a *Qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure.¹⁸⁴ (Example 3.3) As was mentioned in Chapter Two, this structure is a popular pattern in Chinese poetic and literary form. *Qi*: introduction or beginning, *cheng*: elucidation or development, *zhuan*: transition or turning, and *he*: summing-up or ending. This pattern can be also seen in Chinese music. As Yang Runqing sets out in his monograph *The Melodic Forms of Chinese Folk Song*: logically the *Qi-cheng-zhuan-he* form of musical structure “leads the music from integrity to contrast and then a return to integrity.”¹⁸⁵ In “The Song of Yellow River Boatmen”, one can find this pattern eminent in the *andantino* part starting from bar 61. In contrast to the previous breath-taking passage representing the wrestling match between man and nature, as the lyric shows, the boatmen now have successfully reached the bank and it is time for them to relax. This is a short section lasting for only 8 bars – with the vocal part lasting only for 4 bars before the recapitulation. Beyond presenting a strong contrast to the first section in tempo and rhythm, it differs from the latter structurally by employing *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* – while its first and second phrase are almost identical, the third phrase gives an obvious “turn” and the last phrase resembles the shape of the first two phrases, leading the music to a great sense of stability before it returns to the intense and dramatic recapitulation made up mainly of eighth notes and sixteenth notes. Hence, from beginning to end, it bears a superficial resemblance to the ABA form that is common to all music history. However, in essence, Xian kept utilising the forms that common Chinese people were familiar with.

Example 3.3 The *qi-cheng-zhuan-he* structure in the middle section of “The

¹⁸⁴ See Section 1.3. Zheng Zhimin adapted a Japanese school song to *Qi – cheng-zhuan-he* form.

¹⁸⁵ Yang Ruiqing, *Zhongguo Mingde Xuanlü Xingtai (The Melodic Forms of Chinese Folk Song)*, Shanghai: Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2002, p. 27.

Song of Yellow River Boatmen". *Yellow River Cantata*, Zhejiang Literature and Art Press, 2005.

qi *cheng*

Andantino *mp*

我们看见了河岸, 我们登上了河岸,

Andantino *mp*

zhan *he*

心哪安一安, 气哪喘一喘。

rit.

rit.

The second piece of the *Cantata* entitled “Ode to the Yellow River” (*Huanghe Song*), as its title indicates, easily suggests the feeling of a Western “ode”. In China’s own music legacy, ode, or *song*, existed in the ancient Chinese palace or court culture and as ritual music paying homage to ancestors. Nevertheless, as this music had been obliterated for several centuries, Xian could hardly find any corresponding genre in the available repertoire of Chinese music. According to the biography by Qin Qiming, Xian “could not free himself from the influence of European sacred mass music” at first, but he decided that he could not render Chinese people and their spirit with such music, so he looked to recorded folk songs and operatic music with the hope of “creating an ode to our time and a fighting spirit in a Chinese national style.”¹⁸⁶ In part, Xian found his inspiration from some high and extensive tunes in *Kunqu* (a traditional opera that had predominated since the 14th century), which approached the style of ode as it appeared in his imagination – he then created the music on the basis of his discovery. By this Xian found a model for the adaption of existing traditional music material into a cultural conduit for the mindset and ideology of the Communist Party and its leaders.

Also worth mentioning are the following two pieces: “Dialogue Song by the Yellow River” (*Hebian Duikouqu*) and “Lament to the Yellow River” (*Huanghe Yuan*). These pieces also reflect Xian’s attempt to appropriate and localise various genres of Western art music. While “Ode to the Yellow River” resembles an aria, *Hebian Duikouqu* is like a recitative and *Huanghe Yuan* an arioso, both being arranged from prosaic folk tunes. *Hebian Duikouqu* describes a conversation between two persons respectively from Shanxi – a province in the lower reaches of the Yellow River – and north eastern China, both exiled from their homeland because of the Japanese invasion. Thus its music incorporates tunes from both regions. *Huanghe Yuan* imitates the “crying tune” that appears in many local folk opera genres and the folk songs of north western region of China. (Examples 3.4 and 3.5) As was mentioned, Xian was a Cantonese and not originally familiar with the language and culture of the hinterland of China, but he

¹⁸⁶ Qin Qiming, *Xian Xinghai*. Wuhan: Changjiang Literature and Art Publishing House, 1980, p. 137.

made a great effort to learn this language and its music culture in order to guarantee that his works would serve to unify his audience.

Example 3.4 A typical “crying tune” that appears in a north-western folksong, cited from Zhang Zhibin (2005).



(Translation: I, your wife, am deserted at home, suffering and miserable.)

Example 3.5 “Lament to the Yellow River” (*Huanghe Yuan*), bars 1-20. *Yellow River Cantata*, Zhejiang Literature and Art Press, 2005.

*(Translation: Oh Wind, do not howl!
Oh Clouds, do not hide! ...)*

Lento affettuoso

The image displays a musical score for a section of the 'Yellow River Cantata'. It consists of four systems of music, each with a vocal line and a piano accompaniment. The tempo is marked 'Lento affettuoso'. The key signature is one flat (B-flat) and the time signature is 3/4. The piano accompaniment features a steady bass line and chords in the right hand. The vocal line includes the following lyrics in Chinese: '风啊, 你不要呼喊! 云啊, 你不要躲闪!'. Dynamic markings include *mp*, *mf*, and *p*. Measure numbers 6, 11, and 15 are indicated at the start of their respective systems.

Due to the lack of Western instruments in Yan'an, Xian adapted many parts of the *Cantata* for Chinese instruments. For example, *Hebian Duikouqu* can be accompanied by *sanxian* and *erhu*.¹⁸⁷ The orchestra for the premiere of the *Yellow River Cantata*

¹⁸⁷ Xian Xinghai, "Wo Zenyang Xie 'Huanghe'" (How Did I Write the *Yellow River Cantata*). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai* (*People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai*). Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 39.

consisted of only two or three violins and twenty-odd Chinese ethnic musical instruments. The rest were products of innovation: diesel barrels for bass strings and washbasins for percussion. Many Communist leaders including Mao Zedong were present during the premiere and it proved a huge success. In another important piece completed in Yan'an, *Production Cantata*, Xian made the populist features more distinctive. The largest part of the accompanying instruments are of Chinese folk origin – drum, *dizi*, *erhu* and *sanxian*.

In November 1940, Xian Xinghai travelled from Yan'an to Moscow with a commission to participate in a film music project. As the war between Germany and Soviet Russia went on, keeping contact with China became increasingly difficult. Detached from the environment and requirements of Yan'an and returning to the cultural environment of Europe, Xian started to seriously engage with the local art traditions and began composing instrumental music. Beyond the orchestration of the accompaniment of *Yellow River Cantata*, he wrote a set of symphonic works including *The National Liberation Symphony* and *Chinese Rhapsody*. Xian died of pneumonia in Moscow in 1945.

Xian Xinghai's influence on Chinese music after 1940 is far-reaching and is regarded as having exceeded any aesthetic level his own music may have reached. Judged exclusively from a technical perspective, Xian might not be regarded as a first-class musician and composer. His senior fellow, Ma Sicong, at the Paris Conservatoire recalled that Xian Xinghai "was not endowed with acute hearing and flexible fingers", and that "His piano pieces were very strenuous and did not have the effect of piano music. Obviously, he did not understand the technique of piano. But he had daring courage, rustic power and earnest emotions."¹⁸⁸ A critical view of Xian's musical and political legacy has been given by Western (including overseas Chinese) and Chinese domestic academia. As Ming Yan argued at his commemorative article at the 100th anniversary of Xian Xinghai's birth, the reception and propagation of Xian Xinghai's

¹⁸⁸ Ma Sicong, "Yi Xian Xinghai" (The Memory of Xian Xinghai). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 232.

music, when taken from an ideological viewpoint, has, during the past 60 years in China, seriously outpaced those judgment concerned only with his technological level of achievement.¹⁸⁹ Xian's turning away from the "art for art's sake" manner of composition that he received during his studies in cosmopolitan cities like Canton, Beijing and Paris, towards a creation with the intention of awakening the people and unifying the whole nation – as well as his adherence to the "rustic power" of the majority of the people and their musical language – are central to Xian's deification and to his elevation to a revolutionary and patriotic role model.

Although Xian Xinghai's ideologically enhanced status has somewhat overshadowed his technical influence, the latter should not be entirely overlooked. His attention to and utilisation of musical language of the masses together with his ability to use counterpoint points to a compromise between Western art music tastes and a Chinese fondness of melody. This combination was actually a part of the musical point of view shared by many musicians in Yan'an (I will provide a more detailed discussion of this issue in what follows). Additionally, it is worth raising two points that are specifically related to Xian's compositional practice. First, many of Xian's works in Yan'an were finished in haste in order to fulfill prescribed political or military tasks, often without sufficient regard to detail and quality – an extreme example was the *Production Cantata* that was completed in only one day. Such a deficiency was sometimes read as his merit, especially during the first decades after the foundation of the PRC when musical creativity was subordinate to a firm-handed government supervision. The cultural authorities loved to see a booming number of new musical works as one of the fruits of social reconstruction. Furthermore, the coarse quality seemed to carry the effect of a music nearer to the people – whereas refinement to some extent suggested a turning away from the latter and often became the target of persecution.

The second point, which is also Xian's chief limitation, lies in the distinguished

¹⁸⁹ Ming Yan. "Xianxue' Yanjiu Jiazi Lu – Xian Xinghai Yanjiu 60 Nian Niaoan" (Review of Xian Xinghai Research for the Past 60 Years), *Yinyue Tansuo*, (01) 2007, pp. 53-62 & (02) 2007, pp. 20-25.

tendency towards a musical “realism” in his pieces during and after his sojourn in Yan’an. (I will return to and further elaborate on this point in the forthcoming section on “Legacy and Aftermath” of Yan’an musical activities.) Whereas in Yan’an he had mainly implemented this musical style by incorporating concrete scenes of life and labour as programme music, in Moscow, Xian sought to establish a more direct correspondence between realistic images or political events and musical expression. In 1956, under the circumstance of the “Hundred Flowers Movement” which aimed to instigate the flourishing of arts, Wang Lisan, Liu Shiren and Jiang Zuxin, three young students from Shanghai Conservatory of Music, proposed a bold criticism of this method by analysing some of Xian’s symphonic works composed in Moscow.¹⁹⁰ According to their analysis, Xian sometimes used musical “labels” to try to convey messages pointing to reality, or convey political meaning, or cited fragments of other music in order to provide a clue to the music’s content, but in some cases he failed to confirm their semantic status before their musical (formal) development and transformation, thus undermining the unity of the entire music structure and making his ideas ambiguous. He even tried to outline a series of historical events, such as the signing of the US- and UK-Soviet treaties and the formation of so-called “Second Battle Line”, with music methods, which made his work “sound like a political treatise.”¹⁹¹ This over inclination to politics evacuated music of any independent musical means of expression.

The most representative of Xian’s works, *Yellow River Cantata*, continued to receive a special reception in the changing cultural and political circumstance both before and after the foundation of the PRC. The original version completed by Xian Xinghai in Yan’an in 1939 was limited to a small Chinese orchestra and was mainly intended for amateur musicians due to the circumstances of the war; and so it was deemed inadequate for properly rendering the national image in the following years.¹⁹² This

¹⁹⁰ Wang Lisan, Liu Shiren & Jiang Zuxin, “Lun Dui Xinghai Tongzhi Yixie Jiaoxiangyue Zuopin de Pingjia Wenti” (Assessment of Some Symphonic Works of Comrade Xinghai), *People’s Music*, (04) 1957. Cited from Ming Yan. “‘Xianxue’ Yanjiu Jiazi Lu – Xian Xinghai Yanjiu 60 Nian Niaoakan (Review of Xian Xinghai Research for the Past 60 Years), *Yinyue Tansuo*, (01) 2007, pp. 53-62 & (02) 2007, pp. 20-25.

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Xiangtang Hong, *Performing the Yellow River Cantata*.

opinion was also held by Xian himself. When he was in Moscow he did the first revision of the *Cantata*, adding an overture and lengthening seven of the eight original movements.¹⁹³ The most significant change manifested through the Moscow version is that it is totally re-scored for a standard Western-style symphony orchestra and involves much more complex instrumentation. For example, the *dizi* (bamboo flute) part in the original Yan'an version is substituted by one piccolo, two Western flutes, two oboes, one English horn, one bass clarinet, two bassoons, one double bassoon, four horns, one trumpet, one trombone, one tuba, one harp, one timpani, one snare drum and one triangle.¹⁹⁴ As recorded by Hon-lun Yang, with this new instrumentation Xian intended to make the overall sonic effect more "intricate" and "stately" in the *Cantata* so as to better match the heroic image of the Chinese people in the war of national defense.¹⁹⁵ The basic idea and new orchestration of the Moscow version was accepted by the majority of musicians after the foundation of the PRC and became the basis for another two major adaptations: one in 1955 by Li Huanzhi and the other in 1975 by the Central Philharmonic Orchestra and its conductor Yan Liangkun.¹⁹⁶

Another influential cultural event that needs to be noted is that, in 1960s, China's central cultural authority required the arrangement of the *Yellow River Cantata* into a piano concerto in order to prove that an "aristocratic" Western instrument like piano, together with the apparent complexity of Western art music forms, could be used for building a proletarian culture. The final product, *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, arranged by Yin Chengzong in collaboration with Chu Wanghua and another seven musicians, incorporated several pieces of the original cantata into the texture of a single movement of the piano concerto, thus adding to the complexity of its musical form. In this concerto there also appeared distinctive motives quoted from popular proletarian revolutionary songs such as "The East is Red" and "L'Internationale" in service of the state's ideology in 1960s.¹⁹⁷ (Example 3.6)

¹⁹³ Ibid., p. 51. This is also discussed in detail in Hon-lun Yang, "The making of a national musical icon: Xian Xinghai and his *Yellow River Cantata*", 2004.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., pp. 43-44.

¹⁹⁵ Hon-lun Yang, "The making of a national musical icon: Xian Xinghai and his *Yellow River Cantata*", 2004.

¹⁹⁶ Xiangtang Hong, *Performing the Yellow River Cantata*, pp. 51-2.

¹⁹⁷ For detailed music analysis of *Yellow River Piano Concerto*, see Zhang Tingting, "Gangqin Xiezouqu 'Huanghe' zhi

Example 3.6 *Yellow River Piano Concerto, the 4th Movement, bars 24-29, which incorporates a phrase from “L’Internationale”. People’s Music Publishing House, 2001.*

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwinds (Flute, Oboe, Clarinet, Bassoon) and strings (Violins, Viola, Violoncello, Contrabass) play a melodic line with various dynamics and articulations. The brass (Cor Anglais, Trumpet, Trombone) provides harmonic support with sustained chords. The timpani plays a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes. The piano part features a complex texture with a steady bass line and a more active upper register. The score includes dynamic markings such as *ff*, *p*, and *mp*, and a tempo change to *allargando* at the end of the excerpt.

yanjiu: *yu ‘Huanghe Dahechang’ de Guanxi he Qushi yu Yanzou (Yellow River Piano Concerto: Its Form, Performance and Relation with Yellow River Cantata)*, Huang He Zhi Sheng, (04) 2009, pp. 98-100.

Anyway, one still cannot fully make sense of the entire discourse and legacy of Xian Xinghai without a proper understanding of a series of key political writings by Mao Zedong at the turn of 1940s. Although much research taken from a musical perspective did bear in mind the political scope and so made reference to these writings, some of these approaches to the analysis of cultural and music phenomena have been curbed by a peripheral and one-sided understanding of these politically influential texts to varying degrees. Thus in the following section I intend to provide a close reading, defining Mao as in continuity with the lineage of other Marxist leaders and outline his political advocacy that guided the activities of musicians and artists.

3.3 Situating Yan'an: A Close Reading of Mao Zedong's Political Writings and His Blueprint for a Proletarian State Culture in the 1940s

The Long March had "made" Mao, as a man who joined ideas with action. It had put him on the brink of being China's most promising political leader. And it had provided him with a steeled team who were to stand together with him virtually until the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

...

The stroke of political genius in Mao's leadership of the Long March was his vision that CCP's chief task should henceforth be to spearhead national resistance to the Japanese assault. Such a cause brought all the elements of "Maoism" into an interrelated whole. It suggested the northwest as destination. It filled the vacuum of the CCP's raison d'être after the miserable collapse of the Jiangxi base. It unlocked the Communists from a cage of sectarianism, and made them patriots in the eyes of millions of Chinese who did not know Marx from the moon.

Mao got to the top of the CCP not purely through organisational skill, nor in any way by Moscow's blessing, nor yet by evolving a fresh application of Marxism. He rose by being single-minded and ruthless, and because he put some simple psychological and social truths into action.

Within the Chinese Communist Party, although Mao Zedong had consolidated his leadership in the military sense during the long strategic move from Jiangxi to Shannxi in the 1930s, it was not until the building of the Communist base in Yan'an that Mao became the ideological guide of the Party in any real sense. In furtherance of this goal, Mao published a series of articles at the turn of 1940s, of which the most important ones were “On New Democracy” (*Xinminzhu Zhuyilun*, 1940), “Reform our study” (*Gaizao Women de Xuexi*, 1941) and “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art” (*Zai Yan'an Wenyi Zuotanhui shang de Jianghua*, 1942).

Among the three articles, “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art” (abbreviated as *Yan'an Talk* hereafter) has most frequently been placed under scrutiny by scholars and critics dealing with artistic and cultural matters. Since many of the reviews were done after 1950, some authors did not fully bear in mind the original context, the war of national defense against the Japanese which was at its toughest point at the early 1940s, which situation provided the pretext for this article. Instead, most commonly discussed is the message it carries regarding Socialism, mass culture and state ideology. For example, Peter Dunbar-Hall's 2004 publication, *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, identified two fundamental concepts expounded by *Yan'an Talk*: (a) All art must serve Socialism and the Socialist state; (b) Literature and art are from the masses, for the masses and should raise the standards of and educate the masses.¹⁹⁹ Such linking of the *Yan'an Talk* article only with the mechanisms of control and process of de-personalisation of “activist” Socialism or Communism, whilst being understandable given the ideological dominance of these systems of thought, nevertheless ignores the other political overtones presented in the article; this oversight is somewhat shared by T. A. Hsia (1963), A. Perris (1985) and some other English-language authors.

¹⁹⁸ Ross Terrill, *Mao: a Biography*. Stanford University Press, 1999, p. 165.

¹⁹⁹ Peter Dunbar-Hall, *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, pp. 13-14.

By contrast, Bonnie S. McDougall (1980) offers a relatively all-round view of this literature, situating Mao Zedong more accurately both in the lineages of Chinese political leaders since the May 4th Movement and in the history of the major Marxist successors worldwide. Unlike the majority of Chinese modern thinkers and writers who were deeply influenced by Western theories of literature and society (including Marxism), Mao, as McDougall points out, “remained close to Chinese traditional patterns of thought and avoided the often mechanical or narrowly literal interpretations that were the hallmark of Western schools current in China in the early twentieth century.”²⁰⁰ To a great extent, Mao developed his understanding not so much from any existing literary theories as from his own experience of being a poet. Chang Wenbin (2007) comprehensively comments on Mao’s duple personalities as both a poet and a politician and the interactive effect of these two identities on Mao’s political career:

The personality as a poet won Mao a privilege on [his construction of] cultural politics. The poet’s rich imagination cultivated his undaunted spirit when facing any enemy and difficulties. Meanwhile, the political career provided him with unparalleled source materials for his poetic creation. ... However, when the poet’s genius and imagination did not perfectly fit the logic of historical development, calamity was caused inevitably.²⁰¹

Furthermore, what Mao said regarding Western schools of thought was more to do with Leninism and the Soviet Union than with European Marxism.²⁰² On one hand, Mao insisted using art as a political tool to control the country and unify the people; on the other, he required Chinese culture to retain its own styles, characters and identities. One can trace these thoughts back to “On New Democracy” and “Reform Our Study”. There is significant overlap in the three articles by Mao.

“On New Democracy” was a speech made on the First Meeting of

²⁰⁰ McDougall, Bonnie S. *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" – A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1980, p. 3.

²⁰¹ Chang Wenbin, “Mao Zedong Shiren Qizhi yu Zhengzhijia Shijian de Hudong” (Interaction between Mao Zedong’s Poetic Genius and Political Practice”), *Mao Zedong Sixiang Yanjiu*, (05) 2007, pp. 33-5.

²⁰² See *ibid.*, p. 8 and p. 19.

Shannxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region Cultural Association in 1940. In this speech Mao called for Chinese revolution to evolve from a democratic to a socialist one, in which “the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia and the other sections of the petty bourgeoisie undoubtedly constitute the basic forces determining China’s fate.”²⁰³ For the proletarian-based state in his blueprint, Mao proposed his blueprint for the future state culture, which was encapsulated as “a national, scientific and mass culture”.

a) “A national culture”:

New-democratic culture is national. It opposes imperialist oppression and upholds the dignity and independence of the Chinese nation. It belongs to our own nation and bears our own national characteristics. It links up with the socialist and new-democratic cultures of all other nations and they are related in such a way that they can absorb something from each other and help each other to develop, together forming a new world culture; ... To nourish her own culture China needs to assimilate a good deal of foreign progressive culture, ... However, we should not gulp any of this foreign material down uncritically, but must treat it as we do our food - first chewing it, then submitting it to the working of the stomach and intestines with their juices and secretions, and separating it into nutriment to be absorbed and waste matter to be discarded – before it can nourish us. To advocate “wholesale Westernisation” is wrong. China has suffered a great deal from the mechanical absorption of foreign material.²⁰⁴

Although Mao emphasised socialism and the supremacy of the proletarian class as regarding the political nature of the state, the primary concern to which he attached most importance was an independent national culture. Being a son of a peasant and mainly nurtured by Chinese traditional knowledge in his youth, Mao was differentiated from his peers who grew up through the May Fourth Movement in that he always kept a distance to foreign knowledge. In Mao’s words, before the May 4th Movement of 1919, “the so-called modern schools or new learning or Western learning of that time concentrated mainly on the natural sciences and bourgeois social and political theories, which were needed by the representatives of the bourgeoisie.”²⁰⁵ He looked down

²⁰³ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy”, 1940. All translations of Mao’s works are from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1961.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy”, 1940.

upon the over admiration of Western ways by the Chinese intelligentsia and nascent Chinese bourgeoisie and claimed that China could never achieve real independence in their hands. Mao also showed great resentment at the suppression of the Comintern led by Stalin and his attempt to dominate the Chinese Communist Party. For this Mao made an even more bitter satire in “Reform Our Study”, referring to Western knowledge and teaching through the metaphors of “Ancient Greece” and “imperial envoys”:

There are many Marxist-Leninist scholars who cannot open their mouths without citing ancient Greece; but as for their own ancestors – sorry, they have been forgotten.

...

They have no intention of seeking truth from facts, but only a desire to curry favour by claptrap. They are flashy without substance, brittle without solidity. They are always right, they are the Number One authority under Heaven, “imperial envoys” who rush everywhere. Such is the style of work of some comrades in our ranks.²⁰⁶

“Ancient Greece” was a metaphor for Western knowledge and teaching, and “imperial envoys” stood for people who advocated them uncritically. Thereby Mao argued that China had suffered a great deal from the mechanical absorption of foreign material, and it was the time for a critical and optional adoption. By this Mao presented a rather obvious signal to the intelligentsia in the ranks of the Party – after taking a long path following foreign ways since the May Fourth Movement, it was necessary for them to take a turnaround back to their own cultural heritage.

As for “foreign progressive culture”, Mao was not opposed to it. Instead of giving any further details about what kind of foreign culture could be defined as progressive, however, he simply stated what it was used for, that is, to nourish and revive Chinese culture and to repair the national dignity that had been damaged since the Opium War. This attitude toward foreign culture was not without precedents in China. About half a century prior to this speech, the Qing Dynasty reformist Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909)

²⁰⁶ Mao Zedong, “Reform Our Study”, 1941.

wrote an essay entitled *Exhortation to Study (Quanxue Pian)*, which contains the important idea that Chinese learning is for fundamental principles, and Western learning for practical application:

To master Western knowledge is necessary if we want to strengthen China and preserve the Chinese classics today. Nevertheless, we must use Chinese teachings to lay down the foundation and acquire a correct taste [before studying from the West]. Otherwise, a strong person will become cause of calamity and a weak one will become a slave, which is even worse than total ignorance of Western knowledge.²⁰⁷

The Chinese learning should be taken as the inner essence whereas the Western knowledge the outside application; Chinese learning is for cultivation of heart and mind whereas Western knowledge for dealing with daily affairs.²⁰⁸

Similarly, the modern writer Lu Xun (1881-1936) published an article “Fetchtism” (*Nalai Zhuyi*), a term he coined, meaning to fetch foreign cultural legacies to nurture Chinese culture. “Without ‘fetching’ [from other cultures],” wrote Lu Xun, “our people will not be new people; without ‘fetching’, our literature and art will not be new literature and art.”²⁰⁹ Thus compared to other points made by Mao in this speech and bearing his strong personal mark, this argument regarding foreign culture sounds rather ambiguous and less original. On the basis of this argument there resulted two ways of reading or action. On one hand, foreign progressive culture was continuously drawn on to reform traditional ways. As was stated in *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, the nationwide movement of cultural reform “developed into an obsessive desire to give birth to a new order by annihilating the old in the name of ‘progress’.”²¹⁰ Even today, “the state ideology of today’s China retains a relentlessly ‘progress’-oriented outlook and party documents and speeches by party members, constantly call for ‘development’ and the discarding of ‘dross’ in the arts.”²¹¹ On the other hand, when the modern, the new and the Western were seen to be in

²⁰⁷ Zhang Zhidong, *Quanxue Pian (Exhortation to Study)*, Inner Part, Chapter 7.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., Outer Part, Chapter 13.

²⁰⁹ Lu Xun, “*Nalai Zhuyi*” (Fetchtism), 1934.

²¹⁰ Peter Dunbar-Hall, *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, 2004, p. 18.

²¹¹ Ibid.

accordance with the interests of the Chinese bourgeoisie, they were seen as being as flabby as the latter and deserving criticism, if not being totally overthrown – this second mode of reading or action may be read as having an excuse for the abhorrence toward technical expertise and learning manifested during the Cultural Revolution which led to the punishment of artists who placed “too” much concern on technical training. One of these was He Luting, the former president of Shanghai Conservatory of Music from 1949 to 1984. This trend naturally diminished when the Cultural Revolution came to its end.

b) “A scientific culture”:

New-democratic culture is scientific. Opposed as it is to all feudal and superstitious ideas, it stands for seeking truth from facts, for objective truth and for the unity of theory and practice. ... A splendid old culture was created during the long period of Chinese feudal society. To study the development of this old culture, to reject its feudal dross and assimilate its democratic essence is a necessary condition for developing our new national culture and increasing our national self-confidence, but we should never swallow anything and everything uncritically.²¹²

Although being addressed as “scientific culture”, this statement does not place much emphasis on the technical aspects of science as on the reform and reutilisation of what Mao called as a feudal and superstitious culture, and this resulted in the well-known Communist Party cultural slogan “Absorb the essence, discard the dross.” – To some extent, it also encapsulates the conflict between the felt desire for modern and Western culture and the need to make it conform to an overarching ideology. Artists were not expected, nor allowed, to exceed the boundary set up by statesmen and escape to the “independent kingdom” belonging to their own. This odd contradiction will be found for more than one time exemplified in the rest of this chapter.

c) “A mass culture”:

²¹² Mao Zedong, “On New Democracy”, 1940.

New-democratic culture belongs to the broad masses and is therefore democratic. It should serve the toiling masses of workers and peasants who make up more than 90 per cent of the nation's population and should gradually become their very own. ... A revolutionary cultural worker who is not close to the people is a commander without an army, whose fire-power cannot bring the enemy down.²¹³

To the idea that art should function as a “fire-power” for the revolutionary cause and that Chinese culture should be mass-oriented, Mao offered a substantial and heavy supplement with his 1942 *Yan'an Talk*, which heralded the Yan'an Rectification Movement (1942-1944), a political campaign aiming to establish solidarity among the artists who had travelled to Yan'an in terms of supporting the revolution and substituting the prevalent spirits of the May Fourth Culture present in their minds with those of communist Culture. The *Talk* consisted of two parts, which were respectively delivered on the 2nd and 23rd of May, 1942, the opening and closing days of the forum. In its first part, defining “the people for whom our works of literature and art are produced,” Mao made it clear that: “[In our revolutionary base areas] the audience for works of literature and art consists of workers, peasants, soldiers and revolutionary cadres.”²¹⁴ However, in the second part of the Talk, Mao expanded this range so as to bring in the urban petty bourgeoisie and the “petty bourgeois intellectuals”, both of whom being “our allies in the revolution and capable of long-term cooperation with us.”²¹⁵ Such considerations were definitely based on the fact that an ally was needed in defending against the Japanese, the common national enemy. In practice, however, Mao did not conceal his sharp criticism against his “allies” – the urban petty bourgeoisie and their intellectuals (that is, those who might have provided any intellectual opposition or competition to his domination of the Party). Many Yan'an artists had belonged to the ranks of such a “class”. Mao criticised them for sticking too closely to the bourgeoisie and keeping a distance from the masses:

Many comrades concern themselves with studying the petty-bourgeois intellectuals and analysing their psychology, and they concentrate on portraying these intellectuals and excusing or defending their shortcomings, instead of

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Mao Zedong, “Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art”, 1942.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

guiding the intellectuals to join with them in getting closer to the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, taking part in the practical struggles of the masses, portraying and educating the masses. Coming from the petty bourgeoisie and being themselves intellectuals, many comrades seek friends only among intellectuals and concentrate on studying and describing them. ... Often they show heartfelt sympathy for intellectuals of petty-bourgeois origin, to the extent of sympathising with or even praising their shortcomings. On the other hand, these comrades seldom come into contact with the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, do not understand or study them, do not have intimate friends among them and are not good at portraying them; when they do depict them, the clothes are the clothes of working people but the faces are those of petty-bourgeois intellectuals. In certain respects they are fond of the workers, peasants and soldiers and the cadres stemming from them; but there are times when they do not like them and there are some respects in which they do not like them: they do not like their feelings or their manner or their nascent literature and art (the wall newspapers, murals, folk songs, folk tales, etc.). At times they are fond of these things too, but that is when they are hunting for novelty, for something with which to embellish their own works, or even for certain backward features.²¹⁶

As was perceived by some critics (B. S. McDougall, 1980; Dunbar-Hall, 2004), though Mao demanded artists to study from the masses and follow their aesthetic criteria, he still claimed that there existed a distance between professional artistic production and the “nascent” art generated and enjoyed by the masses themselves. Folk art was not true art but provided the raw material for art, over which the cultural sections of governmental authorities had some kind of “paternalist” as well as supervising obligation to develop more complex and skillful works. Afterwards, Mao proposed the second essential question: “should we devote ourselves to raising (art) standards, or should we devote ourselves to popularisation?”²¹⁷ Based on a pragmatic consideration, Mao gave more encouragement to the latter, since

Popular works are simpler and plainer, and therefore more readily accepted by the broad masses of the people today. Works of a higher quality, being more polished, are more difficult to produce and in general do not circulate so easily and quickly among the masses at present. The problem facing the workers, peasants and soldiers is this: ... they are eagerly demanding enlightenment, education and works of literature and art which meet their urgent needs and which are easy to absorb, in order to heighten their enthusiasm in struggle and confidence in victory,

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

strengthen their unity and fight the enemy with one heart and one mind.²¹⁸

As long as artists were in compliance with these “fundamental policies”, as Mao indicated at the end of *Yan’an Talk*,²¹⁹ there was not to be a strict regulation over the genres, forms and methods used by artists to create. The latter were encouraged to explore the possibility of rendering their art to suit the needs of the fast changing circumstance of warfare. On the stage of Yan’an, works upholding proletarian revolution were performed alongside those calling for national independence; some thriving hybrids combined Western art genres such as opera with pure forms of folk culture such as *yangge* (rice sprout song); in the classroom of the Music Department of Yan’an Lu Xun Art College, a seminar titled “Free Composition” was held to urge the students to break the traditional norms.²²⁰ Specifically, in the musical domain, since Mao Zedong was not a musician himself and did not give any concrete instruction about how musicians should behave, the translation of Mao’s theoretical model into real-life music practices in Yan’an took on a colourful and diversified look.

3.4 Music Advocacy and Practices in Yan’an: the Retrieval and Reconstruction of Traditions

Yan’an attracted numerous intellectuals, like Xian, from all over the country. These intellectuals came in support of the Communist Party and assumed administrative and educational jobs in its regime. Among them were musicians who had received systematic Westernised training either inside China or abroad. Among Yan’an musicians there were other famous names like Lü Ji, He Luting and Li Delun, all of whom had been students of the National Music College in Shanghai. Under their efforts, the

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., the last paragraph.

²²⁰ See Li Yedao, “Lü Ji Pingzhuan” (The Biography of Lü Ji), 1937-1949 (I), *Yinyue Yanjiu (Music Research)*, (04) 1996, p. 34.

course in music in Yan'an grew rapidly. The major Yan'an institutions, such as the North Shannxi Public School (*Shanbei Gongxue*), the Resist Japan Military and Political University (*Kangri Junzheng Daxue*) and the China Women's University (*Zhongguo Nüzi Daxue*), all offered a consistent music education. The Yan'an Lu Xun Art College began to develop its branches in other provinces like Shanxi (1939), Hebei (1939) and Jiangsu (1940), and an orchestral band was formally founded in Yan'an in 1946.

There was massive enthusiasm for studying the legacy of folk music and turning it into a key feature of Yan'an's political legacy. Since Yan'an was the centre of Communism in China at the time, and people who were either sympathetic to Communist ideas or eager to join the revolutionary cause converged here from far and wide, Yan'an was almost a small utopia and a microcosm of the diverse ethnic groups that existed all over East Asia. Xian Xinghai noted that:

Here one could encounter people from almost all the minority groups in China, such as Mongolian and Muslim Hui people from the north, Tibetans from the west, Miao from the south, and even foreigners from India and Vietnam. Thereby it was easy to hear all kinds of folk songs and note them down.²²¹

According to Lü Ji's "Music in the Liberated Areas" (*Jiefangqu de Yinyue*), the systematic recording and collection of works of folk music was launched in 1939,²²² initially by Yan'an Lu Xun Art College and then also by its branches in other regions of China. By the early 1950s, there had been a number of published collections of folk music which covered a diversity of areas and genres, for instance, *Northeast Folk Songs* (*Dongbei Minge Xuan*, 1948), *Folk Songs of Hebei* (*Hebei Minjian Gequ Xuan*, 1951), *Eastern Inner-Mongolian Folk Songs* (*Dongmeng Minge Xuan*, 1952), and *The Selection of Narrative Singing Pieces* (*Shuochang Yinyue Xuanji*, 1953).

In 1941, Lü Ji published *The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research* (*Zhongguo*

²²¹ Xian Xinghai, "Wo Xuexi Yinyue de Jingguo" (My Course of Musical Study), 1940.

²²² Lü Ji, "Jiefangqu de Yinyue" (Music in the Liberated Areas), from *Lü Ji Wenxuan* (*The Selected Works of Lü Ji*), Volume I, Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 121-38.

Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang) for Lu Xun Art College's Folk Music Society.²²³ It was a theoretical work representative of the time which provided a guide to musicians on how to treat the folk music tradition. This degree of theoretical speculation was in no sense exclusive to Lü Ji. In fact, the music activities carried out in Yan'an resulted in the establishment of a number of commonly accepted conceptual patterns concerning the rebuilding of Chinese music tradition, its combining with the elements and techniques of Western art music and the developing of new nationalist forms. Hereafter I will give a summary of the general principles established in Yan'an:

– **Extract the “universal musical features” of the whole Chinese nation.** Yan'an musicians expressed the desire to create a form of music which could break through the regional boundaries, in order to better represent and be accepted by the majority of the nation. It was derived from the consideration that the enormous diversity of Chinese regional music cultures would be an obstacle to pushing unified ideologies throughout the nation. For instance, Xian Xinghai made a statement that in China “each folk music style has a strong regional colour ... and so can hardly be accepted as the main style [representing the entire nation].”²²⁴ If a type of music with certain regional characteristics could not be appreciated by people of other areas, the meaning that the music bears would fail to be understood. On the contrary, a professionally made music, deliberately making use of music factors common to all regions, could strengthen cohesion amongst the various people and consolidate their common identity. As Lü Ji made clear at the beginning of *The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research*, the aim of the *Outline* lies in the combination of two programmes: “to find out some prevalent principles of Chinese folk music ... and to provide references for constructing the new music of modern China.”²²⁵

But do “universal” musical features really exist? We can find some tentative

²²³ Lü Ji, *Zhongguo Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang (The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research)*, 1941, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan (The Selected Works of Lü Ji)*, Volume I. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 50-60.

²²⁴ Xian Xinghai, “*Mingye yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue*” (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 24.

²²⁵ Lü Ji, *Zhongguo Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang (The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research)*, 1941, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan (The Selected Works of Lü Ji)*, Volume I. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 50-60.

arguments to this effect in some published essays by Yan'an musicians, yet these arguments can be seen not so much as the conclusion of a tested music theory, as the result of politically expedient claims. For instance, Xian Xinghai used the argument that Chinese tune were mostly “melodious and peaceful”, the speed mostly “moderato or lento”, and he also referred to the percussion instruments as a relatively independent system with special expressive power in many regional music genres, and he thereby implied that composers could make use of percussion as a means to gain emotional resonance from people, as “Chinese people will all sense its moving power.”²²⁶ However, given the objective existence of a massive diversity of cultural and music practices across the different regions of China, such attempt to find universal characters soon gave way to its opposite, i.e., to take the richness and multiplicity of regional and tribal folk music as a representation of the national “genius”.

– **Highlight, as well as celebrate, the profundity and creativity of folk music culture.** Yan'an musicians paid due reverence to Chinese folk music (or at least to the decontextualised elements of it that they appropriated), ascribing those elements that are in discord with the principles, habits and criteria of Western art music to the “genius”, “creativity” and “originality” of the masses. Although, in this point, they seemed to be in disagreement with Mao Zedong's general characterisation of the folk art as “nascent” (as discussed in the section above), yet, they echoed Mao's powerful call to seek for nationalist characteristics in culture and art, as well as showing a Maoist style of reaction to the view that Western art music was more complex and superior when compared with the music of Oriental peoples.

It is worth noting that, although carried out under a similar ideology of proletarian revolution, this process as it occurred in China was quite different from what happened in Soviet Russia in the first half of the 20th century under Lenin and Stalin. It is recorded that Russian classical music, folk music and early 20th-century contemporary music all thrived between 1920, the year when the Russian civil war ended with the victory of

²²⁶ Xian Xinghai, “*Mingge yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue*” (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949.

the Bolshevistic “Reds” and the anti-Bolshevik forces were disbanded, to 1932, when the Communist Party issued guidance on the reformation of literary and artistic organisations and replaced all of them with unions containing a communist faction.²²⁷ Moreover, the re-emergence of pre-Revolutionary music was also associated with “a lessening of revolutionary militancy, a relaxation of ideological tensions [and] a greater permissiveness in matters of musical taste and style,”²²⁸ in which the pre-Revolutionary cultural achievements were defended as the legitimate inheritance of the proletariat.²²⁹ After 1932, Russian music underwent much stricter centralisation and cultural control, with an extensive national political evaluation of folk music.²³⁰ The conception of a “national” norm of folk music was strengthened from the late 1930s under the leadership of Stalin, with the appearance of the concepts and practice of national music, national ensembles, national schools and national compositional styles and techniques.²³¹ However, instead of paying homage to the originality of folk music at the first place, the Russian use of folk music was much more concerned with bringing it to higher standard. The “backward” characteristics of folk music were to be advanced to such an extent that folk music would no longer be regarded as backward or crude by the standards of bourgeois culture; in this way class differences would be bridged and the music of the bourgeoisie would not be victorious, with the result that the music culture of the whole nation could be brought under unified Soviet rules.²³²

By contrast, beginning with a very different point of departure, the Yan’an frenzied appropriation of folk music and demand for a creativity based upon selective borrowing from its repertoire is very reminiscent of the 19th-century movement of national romanticism in Europe, which involved the language, folklore, religions and customs of those born within the “nation” in its most restricted sense. It, to a larger

²²⁷ Anna Ferenc, “Music in the Socialist State”, in Neil Edmunds (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004, pp. 8-18.

²²⁸ B. Schwarz, *Music and Musical Life in Soviet Russia, 1917-1981* (Enlarged Edition), 1983, p. 42, quoted in Anna Ferenc, “Music in the Socialist State”, p. 8.

²²⁹ Anna Ferenc, “Music in the Socialist State”, p. 9.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²³¹ Andy Nercessian, “National Identity, Cultural Policy and the Soviet Folk Ensemble in Armenia”, in Neil Edmunds (ed.), *Soviet Music and Society under Lenin and Stalin*. London & New York: Routledge, 2004, p. 152.

²³² *Ibid.*, p. 153.

extent, resembled “the desire to claim musical artefacts as part of an indigenous national culture” in the case of the enshrining of minstrels and bards in Scotland, in the period of 1760-1800, as revealed in the study of Matthew Gelbart.²³³ Whilst the latter half of the 18th century in Europe was “an era of attention to the workings of different kind of human minds, and different individual minds”²³⁴, a similar fascination with human creativity, in the first half of the 20th century, was geared to building up national consciousness in non-European and colonial countries outside Europe. Just as in the case of the British “antiquarian frenzy” toward their folk literature, which Gelbart claimed as being kindled by Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, so Xian Xinghai paid homage to the historical and cultural foundations of Chinese folk music in terms of its affective profundity:

China is a great nation in the world. It has a time-honoured history of over 4,000 years long, vast land and an enormous population. It is a nation where civilisation developed the earliest, and where politics and society have endured the most complex vicissitudes, deserving most attention in the world history. [Given these foundations,] Chinese folk songs are endowed with distinctive characteristics and features.²³⁵

In celebrating Chinese folk music’s abundance, Xian proudly stated that “there exist extremely abundant melodic patterns in Chinese folk songs,” and that, “The folk songs of China are the most plentiful and passionate in the world, and have more interest than those of any other country.”²³⁶ As for its originality, even He Luting, who always emphasised the importance of learning Western musical techniques, claimed that “Beautiful folk songs to be compared with those formulated compositions is just like comparing a fairy maiden with a toad.”²³⁷ Lü Ji proposed that musicians “should not only study the universal patterns of folk music, but also need to pay particular

²³³ See Matthew Gelbart, “Genius versus art in the creative process: ‘national’ and ‘cultivated’ music as categories, 1760-1800”, *The Invention of “Folk Music” and “Art Music”: Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner*. Cambridge University Press, 2007.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

²³⁵ Xian Xinghai, “*Mingye yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue*” (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People’s Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 23.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²³⁷ See Xie Tianji, “*He Luting Qianqi Chuangzuo Tezheng ji qi Lishi Yiyi*” (The Characteristics of He Luting’s Early Music Works and Their Historical Significance), in Jiang Ruizhi (ed.), *Lun He Luting*. Shanghai Music Publishing House, 1995, p. 104.

attention to their specialty.”²³⁸ Whilst looking down upon some composed works that were derived from the imitation of others and left people with a monotonous impression, Lü suggested that folk music art carries more creativity and variety. Furthermore, Lü argued that the standards of Western art music should not be made the only criteria for assessing the quality of Chinese music,²³⁹ which reminds one of Mao’s abhorrence toward “ancient Greece” and “imperial envoys”.

The above notions of “originality”, “creativity” and “profundity” were embodied and represented by concrete music elements of Chinese folk music that were placed under the scrutiny of Yan’an musicians, who also used them to nurture their own compositional practice. The first type of these elements is scale or mode. Often brought into discussion were the tones found to be existing beyond or along the pentatonic scale, which had commonly been believed to be the dominant scale in Chinese music. Xian Xinghai mentioned that there exists a complex system of such tones in the music of Guangxi;²⁴⁰ Lü Ji suggested that in many Chinese regional folk tunes, the *fa* (fourth tone in the diatonic scale) is about 1/4 whole tone higher than that in the usual diatonic scale, whilst the *si* (seventh tone in the diatonic scale) is 1/4 whole tone lower. Various hexa- and hepta-tonic scales were also discussed. This exploration was sustained after the foundation of the PRC, marked by He Luting’s summary article “The Scales and Modes in Chinese Folk Music” (*Zhongguo Yinjie ji Minzu Diaoshi Wenti*) published on *Wen Hui Daily*, an influential newspaper, in 1961.²⁴¹

Another such category of “idiosyncratic” elements concerned rhythm, as presented by Lü Ji in several of his publications. In *The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research* Lü cited Zhou Dafeng’s summary about the special three-beat rhythm in *Yueju* Opera: instead of the common heavy-light-light beat pattern, the rhythm in *Yueju*

²³⁸ Lü Ji, *Zhongguo Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang* (*The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research*), 1941, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan* (*The Selected Works of Lü Ji*), Volume I. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 54-5.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

²⁴⁰ Xian Xinghai, “*Mingye yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue*” (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai* (*People’s Song Writer: Xian Xinghai*). Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 25.

²⁴¹ He Luting, “*Zhongguo Yinjie ji Minzu Diaoshi Wenti*” (The Scales and Modes in Chinese Folk Music), *Wen Hui Daily*, 6 December, 1961.

Opera usually appears to be heavy-light-heavy. In another special study, “The Rhythmic Forms of Folk Music”, Lü showed how “the clever folk musicians” would weave rhythmic patterns into the fabric of texts in a flexible way, thus proving the pieces to be products of creative invention instead of monotonous imitation.²⁴²

In practical composition, the form and syntax of Chinese folk music were also believed to offer the creative model but not the “nascent” resources for professional music creativity. For instance, He Luting’s 1931 award-winning piano piece, “Buffalo Boy’s Flute”, was originally a professional and conservatoire-based creation without direct reference to any specific folk genre. Rather it was derived from the composer’s past and his general memory of what constituted Chinese folk music; as He’s diary suggests:

Someone would argue that “Buffalo Boy’s Flute” is a folk song of this [region] or that [region]. Actually it does not belong to any region, yet it is in an authentic Chinese folk style. This could be called a “creation” but no creation falls from the heavens. When you know so many folk songs, a folk style will automatically flow from your piece.²⁴³

Yet in later critical discourses (Jian Er, 1995; Xie Tianji, 1995; etc.) the same piece was taken for granted as being indebted to a special syntactic pattern called *jujushuang* (double sentences) as found in instrumental folk music, which means that two repeated phrases form a couplet. (Example 3.7)

Example 3.7 The “Jujushuang” pattern in “Buffalo Boy’s Flute”: bars 1-8. He Luting *Quanji* (The Complete Works of He Luting), Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000.

²⁴² Lü Ji, “*Mingde Jiepai Xingshi*” (The Rhythmic Forms of Folk Music), 1942, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan* (The Selected Works of Lü Ji), Volume I. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 61-70.

²⁴³ See Xie Tianji. “*He Luting Qianqi Chuangzuo Tezheng ji qi Lishi Yiyi*” (The Characteristics of He Luting’s Early Music Works and Their Historical Significance), in Jiang Ruizhi (ed.), *Lun He Luting*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 1995, p. 107.

The image shows a musical score for a piece titled "Commodo". It is written in 2/4 time and consists of two systems of music. The first system is marked with dynamics *mp* and *mf* and contains two phrases labeled 'a'. The second system is marked with dynamics *f* and *p* and contains two phrases labeled 'b'. The score includes various musical ornaments such as triplets, slurs, and fingerings (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 5). The notation is in a grand staff with a treble and bass clef.

– “Improve” traditional music with harmony, counterpoint and more complex forms. Although the idea of improvement was commonly advocated and widely accepted among Yan’an musicians, it was in practice an extremely debatable claim with multiple grounds – this may not be totally attributed to Mao Zedong’s policies on culture and art because Mao was not an expert of music. Mao did not show much concern with the technical aspects of music despite calling for a scientific national culture in “On New Democracy”, and he actually preferred “popularisation” of arts much to the “enhancing” of their standards. Rather, any improvement was the result of the intellectuals’ quest for modernisation since the end of the 19th century and so a continuing legacy of enlightenment brought about by the May 4th Movement, especially in the case of musicians who accepted an integrated European-style training within China or abroad. Despite admitting the creative assets of Chinese music mentioned above, they still perceived Western art music as superior and more sophisticated in terms of its diversified form, complex structure and expressive power due to its employment of tonal and harmonic progressions. Based on this evolutionist drive, Xian Xinghai suggested that it was necessary “to enrich and modernise folk songs with counterpoint, to develop chorus, duet and rondo forms besides monophonic form, and to use them to break the monotonous and planar tradition of Chinese music.”²⁴⁴

²⁴⁴ Xian Xinghai, “Mingye yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue” (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), 141

Nevertheless, Xian's understanding of "enhancing" traditional Chinese music was fairly preliminary and neutral – probably because he only stayed in Yan'an for a couple of years before travelling to Soviet Russia where he died. Perhaps more worthy of attention are Lü Ji and He Luting, who may be read as representing two opposing poles of this process of appropriation, rediscovery and fusion. Lü Ji was a steady "proletarian" musician and he insisted that the emotions of the masses, together with a realistic representation of their revolutionary struggle, were more important as compositional guidelines than composing techniques themselves. He lashed out against those musicians of petty-bourgeoisie origin who were "detached from the masses and from practical life, closing their doors to raise their technique."²⁴⁵

Among those who became the target of Lü's criticism, He Luting was a representative figure in that he advocated a radical degree of improvement. He Luting enrolled in Shanghai Music College in 1931, where he studied composition with Huang Zi and piano with the Russian pianist Boris Zakharov. As a true "disciple" of the enlightenment brought about in (and through) music during the preceding decades, He Luting heartily embraced the symmetry, rationality and resulting emotional beauty of Western musical form and harmony. For him, this never changed, even when politics became the overarching factor, as it did for many other artists. The period of Japanese aggression saw a rising tide of professional and amateur musicians, who composed new songs calling for unity and patriotism, and many critics (including Lü Ji) praised this movement without reservation. However, some of the composers had hardly received any formal musical training and He Luting expressed his worry that many of these works were crude and lacking in proper formal technique.²⁴⁶ Even for a very short

Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai). Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949. Here Xian did not clearly distinguish the concept of formal structure (rondo) from those of vertical parts texture, and even for the latter he blurred their boundary (duet and chorus), but by chorus he might refer to four-part chorus as opposed to duet.

²⁴⁵ Lü Ji, "Jiefangqu de Yinyue" (The Music of Liberated Areas), in *Lun Yinyue Wei Gongnongbing Fuwu (Music's Service of Workers, Peasants and Soldiers)*, *Yinyue Chubanshe*, 1965.

²⁴⁶ He Luting, "Kangzhan zhong de Yinyuejia" (Chinese Musicians in Anti-Japanese War), 1939. See *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji (He Luting's Selected Writings on Music)*, Zhao Weiqing (ed.), Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, pp. 13-5.

work, such as the 1938 song piece “Song of Guerrillas” (*Youjidui Ge*), which is only sixteen bars long, He Luting managed to infuse some fine compositional techniques and musical creativity, one of the results of which was that the whole song mimics the rhythm of a marching drum. Furthermore, He Luting managed to break the monotone by flexibly combining fourth notes, eighth notes, sixteenth notes and their dotted notes so as to form “the brave, swift, witty and dynamic image of the guerrilla fighters.”²⁴⁷ (Example 3.8)

Example 3.8 “Song of Guerrillas” by He Luting, bars 1-6. *He Luting Quanji (The Complete Works of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000.



我们 都是 神 枪 手， 每 一 颗 子 弹 消 灭 一 个 敌 人； 我 们
 3
 都 是 飞 行 军， 哪 怕 那 山 高 水 又 深。 在 密 密 的 树 林 里， 到 处 都

Translation

*All of us are sharpshooters, using every single bullet to kill an enemy;
 All of us are air force men, not to fear any high mountain and deep river.
 ...*

He Luting continued the pursuit of high musical standards in Yan’an, perhaps without sufficient regard to the subtle changes of political atmosphere taking place around him. With the publication of “Reform Our Study” and the beginning of the Rectification Movement, Yan’an’s cultural leaders actually held a disapproving attitude (or at least felt some distance) toward technical issues as they were read as a symbol of “Western culture”. By contrast, they were in favour of the style of the masses. Yet He

²⁴⁷ Jian Er, “*He Luting Gequ de Yishu Tese*” (The Artistic Features of He Luting’s Songs), in Jiang Ruizhi (ed.), *Lun He Luting*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 1995, p. 171.

Luting still stuck to the former path with enthusiasm. He distributed Ebenezer Prout's *Harmony: its Theory and Practice*, which was translated by himself while attending Shanghai Music College, and trained an orchestral band.²⁴⁸ He Luting was passionate in his call for a significant "heightening" of Chinese musical traditions with the addition of Western art music forms and styles, which he claimed should constitute a "valuable" and distinctive national culture of the new socialist China. The following are some representative extracts from his writings on these matters:

There are music treasures everywhere in China. ... However, it is not enough to exploit the treasure mine merely with Chinese native and local methods. ... We must, as the first step, carry out a detailed study of those advanced Western music theories and techniques, of various schools from the classical to the modern periods. ... And then we can discuss how to build up a basement for [the new] theories of Chinese music, how to create the harmony, counterpoint and form that specially belong to the new China.²⁴⁹

[The newly created folk-style pieces under the policy of "popularisation"] will not be the whole, but at the best can be seen as a part, of the music of new China. In this grand era, we shall be able to work out some more sophisticated and larger scaled works, such as symphonies, other orchestral music and opera. ... We shall not confine our musicians and composers to one single level just because common people could not accept [the advanced works] at this moment.²⁵⁰

After 1949, the year of the foundation of PRC, He Luting continued to make similar statements, for example:

[To improve] orchestral bands is a direction that requests our endeavour.²⁵¹

We need to develop sophisticated grand operas, of which music is the dominant expressive means.²⁵²

²⁴⁸ Shi Zhongxing, *He Luting Zhuan (The Biography of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000.

²⁴⁹ He Luting, "Kangzhan Yinyue de Licheng ji Yinyue de Minzu Xingshi" (The Progress of Anti-Japanese Music and the National Music Forms), 1940. In Zhao Weiqing (ed.) *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji (He Luting's Selected Writings on Music)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, p. 18.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁵¹ He Luting. "Minzu Yinyue Wenti: Yi Jiu Wu Liu Nian Jiu Yue zai Zhongguo Yinyuejia Xiehui Di Er Ci Lishihui Kuoda Huiyi shang de Fayan" (Some Questions about National Music: a Presentation on the Second Enlarged Meeting of Chinese Musicians' Association Council), 1956. In Zhao Weiqing (ed.), *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji (He Luting's Selected Writings on Music)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, p. 92.

²⁵² He Luting. "Xin Geju Wenti" (About New Operas), 1962. In Zhao Weiqing (ed.) *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji*

He Luting also exhibited an elitist attitude in his manner of treating the legacy of Chinese folk music and in his attitude to his own creations. Not only did he engineer a rigorous, organic connection between the parts and perfect arrangement of music according to the mood and content of the verbal text in every single short piece,²⁵³ but also he devoted great deal of effort in developing a special Chinese way of organising harmony and counterpoint. It is fair to say that He Luting was swaying to and fro between established standards of Western art music and Chinese musical aesthetics, habits and tactics handed down through generations, which he then forged together through his own genius. He Luting's instrumental works always highlight linear melodic beauty and avoid using heavily textured chordal harmony. The modulations between phrases and subparts often seem "abrupt" from the viewpoint of Western composition, but is well-accommodated within a clear and logical pentatonic palette. These features are manifest both in the piano piece "Buffalo Boy's Flute" (Example 3.9) and in the Mongolian style symphonic work *Senjidema* which was written for the orchestral band in Yan'an in 1940s. (Example 3.10)

Example 3.9 "Buffalo Boy's Flute", bars 21-32. *He Luting Quanji (The Complete Works of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000. In bar 26, the key changes from tonic (C) to dominant (G), but instead of changing the key through the use of the new leading tone to the new tonic, G (the old dominant), as in traditional Western-style composition, He Luting simply reiterates the colour of the dominant through a chord on G at the end of bar 25. The logic of Chinese music may interpret this better than the Western model: rather than interpreting the first part as constructed on C major, we may read the part immediately before the key

(*He Luting's Selected Writings on Music*). Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, p. 111.

²⁵³ Shi Zhongxing's biography of He Luting tells the story of his strict demand of music creation and techniques in Yan'an, and He Luting himself repeatedly mentioned these principles for composition in several of his writings. See Shi Zhongxing, *He Luting Zhuan (The Biography of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000, Chapter 16; He Luting, "Yinyue Yishu zhong Xiancun Zhu Wenti de Shangque" (Discussion on Some Existing Problems of Musical Art), 1949. In Zhao Weiqing (ed.) *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji (He Luting's Selected Writings on Music)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, p. 27; "Lun Yinyue de Chuangzuo yu Piping" (About Music Creation and Criticism), 1954. In Zhao Weiqing (ed.), *He Luting Yinyue Lunwen Xuanji (He Luting's Selected Writings on Music)*. Shanghai: Shanghai Literature and Art Publishing House, 1981, p. 49; etc.

change as being built on the *Zhi* mode on G. (*Zhi* is the name of the fourth note of the Chinese pentatonic scale, and the scale of *Zhi* mode on G is G A C D E.)

Example 3.10 *Senjidema*, bars 1-13. *He Luting Quanji (The Complete Works of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000. At the beginning, the characteristic colours of the oboe and clarinet parts help to highlight the note A, the fifth of the scale of D major. Bars 9-13 feature the consecutive appearance of the same motive first on the fifth (A) and then on the first (D) of the D major scale, respectively carried out by the French horn in C and the violins in D. Without extra modulation, these methods help keep the music simple and clear while at the same time suggesting a set of variations.

Adagio tranquillo

5

Flauto Piccolo

Flauto

Oboe Solo

2 Clarinet B \flat

Fagotto

2 Corni(F)

Trombe(A)

Trombone

Violini I *div.*

Violini II

Viola

Violon

Contrabassi

mp *f* *pp* *pp* *pp*

10

The musical score is arranged in three systems. The first system includes Piccolo, Flute, Oboe, Bass Clarinet, and Bassoon. The second system includes Cor Anglais, Trumpet, and Trombone. The third system includes Violin I, Violin II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The key signature is two sharps (D major or F# minor). The score shows various dynamics such as *mp* and *f*, and articulation like *unis.* and accents. The Piccolo part is mostly rests. The Flute and Oboe parts have a melodic line in the first two measures. The Cor Anglais, Trumpet, and Trombone parts enter in measure 10 with a *f* dynamic. The Violin I and II parts have a melodic line starting in measure 10. The Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass parts have a bass line starting in measure 10.

In sum, it is apparent that the enriching of Chinese folk music with Western forms and techniques in Yan'an was not a simple process, rather much was tentative and even contained controversies. Indeed, the contradictions by no means ended with the early

decades of the PRC. These contradictions even led to the formation of two opposite poles during the Cultural Revolution – something I will return to in the section “Legacy and Aftermath”.

– **Endow old music with new meanings.** This is almost self-explanatory, especially since music had been widely used as a tool of propaganda containing explicit revolutionary themes even from the early 1930s, when the base area of the CCP and the Red Army was in Jiangxi.²⁵⁴ Alongside the attention to folk music in Yan’an, many traditional forms were also used to convey political messages relying on the original popularity of the said forms among the target people.

Yang’ge (the rice sprout song) was a typical musical genre of this kind. Being enjoyed and performed by people in many regions of China – most often in northern parts – this song has a recorded history of many centuries going back to the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279),²⁵⁵ and it is a multi-faceted performance genre, involving a variety of techniques of dancing, singing and drum playing. In Shanxi Province, after the Chinese Communist Party began to establish its base area in Yan’an, systematic study was focused on the performance form of the local *yangge* and a great deal of new *yangges* were designed to reflect the many changes and events occurring during the local revolutions; this was known as the “New *Yangge* Movement”.²⁵⁶ Later on, a more sophisticated new genre, consciously bringing in more musical factors and integrating operatic techniques, called *yangge* drama, was developed. *Yangge* drama covered a wide range of topics: from peasants’ mutual assistance in agricultural production to the breaking of superstition, from initiating education for illiterates to raising issues concerning sanitation and hygiene, and including a campaign against

²⁵⁴ See Long Wenwu & Zhou Pingyuan, “*Cong Gannan Minge dao Shanbei Yangge: Lun Suqu-Yan’an Wenyi Xingtai Jiangou de Neizai Liliu ji Dangdai Yiyi*” (From the Folk Songs of Southern Jiangxi to the Rice Sprout Songs of Northern Shaanxi: the Structuralisation and Contemporary Significance of the Art of Soviet Area and Yan’an), *Journal of Nanchang University (the Social Science and Humanities Edition)*, 5 (2009), pp. 138-43.

²⁵⁵ See Lü Ji, “*Tan Yangge, Yaogu ji Huagu*” (About the Rice Sprout Song, Waist Drum and Flower Drum), 1945, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan (The Selected Works of Lü Ji)*, Volume I. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 75-85.

²⁵⁶ See Long Wenwu & Zhou Pingyuan, “*Cong Gannan Minge dao Shanbei Yangge: Lun Suqu-Yan’an Wenyi Xingtai Jiangou de Neizai Liliu ji Dangdai Yiyi*” (From the Folk Songs of Southern Jiangxi to the Rice Sprout Songs of Northern Shaanxi: the Structuralisation and Contemporary Significance of the Art of Soviet Area and Yan’an), *Journal of Nanchang University (the Social Science and Humanities Edition)*, 5 (2009), pp. 138-43.

arranged marriage.²⁵⁷ Some representative examples included *Brother and Sister Cultivating Waste Land* (*Xiong Mei Kai Huang*), *Husband and Wife Learn to Read* (*Fu Qi Shi Zi*). The most successful and well-known *yangge* drama was perhaps *The White-Haired Girl* (*Bai Mao Nü*). It was regarded as the zenith of rural operatic creativity and became one of the art classics of the Chinese revolution, being adapted into ballet and film after the foundation of the PRC. During the Cultural Revolution the ballet version even became one of the so-called “Eight Model Plays”.

To set old music to new content also referred to the process of reforming the “feudal dross” of music, as Mao Zedong described it in “On New Democracy” (see Section 3.3). “Feudal dross” denotes religion, rites and anything else associated with superstition and so in discord with the atheist principles of Marxism. In *The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research* Lü Ji specially mentioned that this music should not be ignored because it was part and parcel of public life. Musicians should study the most valuable musical parts, but “distinguish the music itself from superstition and religion.”²⁵⁸ Furthermore, in a somewhat “scientific” or rationalist tone of voice, Lü predicted that “after improving people’s lives, [and levels of] thinking and culture, they will stop believing in religion or in superstitions.”²⁵⁹

There are still many other aspects that could be shown in the discourse that combined music, revolution and the construction of a new national culture in 1940s Yan’an. However, I deem it more meaningful to reveal them through their consequences during the following period rather than confining insight to an analysis of the aspects in isolation. The various relationships obtaining between the theoretical origins and the results they brought about in reality has been overlooked and so not sufficiently researched in previous academic writings. They together form the following section titled “Legacy and Aftermath”.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Lü Ji, *Zhongguo Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang* (*The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research*), 1941, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan* (*The Selected Works of Lü Ji*), Volume I. Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1988, p. 57.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

3.5 Legacy and Aftermath

In the following section I would like to show how, after the Chinese Communist Party took control over the whole country, the musical principles that were conceived in Yan'an and other Communist bases then acquired legitimacy nationwide and were put into action under systematic supervision of government bodies in the context of socialist industrialisation. My discussion will focus on the time from 1950 to the eve of the Cultural Revolution, as this period most directly and faithfully promulgated the legacy of Yan'an. Indeed, the Cultural Revolution that followed can be seen as a kind of mutation: the result of one (Mao's) faction overwhelming all others in the ideological and political system of the Chinese Communist Party, as a consequence of which the vitality of the nation's artistic creation was seriously harmed. After 1980 the rising of individuality and the importation of new ideas reformed and rejuvenated the mainstream of music creativity, although the old policies still continued to exist and wield their influence.

– **The first and foremost legacy of Yan'an was the extensive renovation of traditional music instruments and their performance techniques from 1950 on.** This process was not only associated with the earlier dogma of “a scientific culture”, but was also an echo of the boom of industrial construction in a socialist context since 1950. The reform of the construction and capabilities of instruments was greeted with an equal passion to that of other technological achievements in industry. The principles followed in updating the instruments was also Westernised, as it was in other industrial fields, with the result that instruments became more “refined”, “exquisite” and able to perform with wider pitch ranges and increased volume of sound (for example by adding more holes to the *dizi* and more strings to the *zheng*). Some instruments were redesigned in a way similar to those of Western art music, so that they could more easily carry out modulation and perform in the standard twelve-tone equal

temperament. For instance, the traditional bamboo *dizi* was equipped with metal keys in order to achieve this.²⁶⁰ Moreover, technicians also replaced some of the traditional materials used in the making of the instruments, with new, modern and industrial materials – such as using metal strings to replace silk ones. In 1958, the PRC’s Ministry of Light Industry issued a nationwide survey of Chinese traditional instruments with the involvement of Beijing National Instruments Factory and Beijing Musical Instruments Institute, which signified a large-scale national engagement in the industrialisation of traditional music.²⁶¹

The standardised, conservatory-style methods of training gradually spilled over into Chinese traditional music. This process occurred not only in the conservatories and music schools across the nation, but also in those newly founded professional troupes and ensembles featuring Chinese traditional music, such as the Shanghai Chinese Orchestra (*Shanghai Minzu Yuetuan*), the Chinese Instrumental Band belonging to Central Ensemble of Songs and Dances (*Zhongyang Gewutuan Minzu Guanxian Yuedui*), China Broadcasting Traditional Orchestra (*Zhongyang Guangbo Minzu Yuetuan*) and China Central National Orchestra (*Zhongyang Minzu Yuetuan*).²⁶² Despite the fact that a great deal of these institutions still regularly invited folk musicians to exhibit their original performance styles, the formal training sessions, without exception, stuck to the Western methods. Indeed, many instruments were shorn of their old temperaments to be replaced with the equal temperament system; performers were universally trained as soloists, so disregarding the traditional habits and roles undertaken in the older style of ensemble. The above mentioned national orchestras also developed new seating plans similar to Western orchestral bands suitable for large-scale symphonies set to Chinese traditional instruments (Figure 3.1). In terms of performance capacity the Chinese national orchestras aspired to achieve complete parity with a Western-style orchestra. Sometimes the realisation of this aspiration took

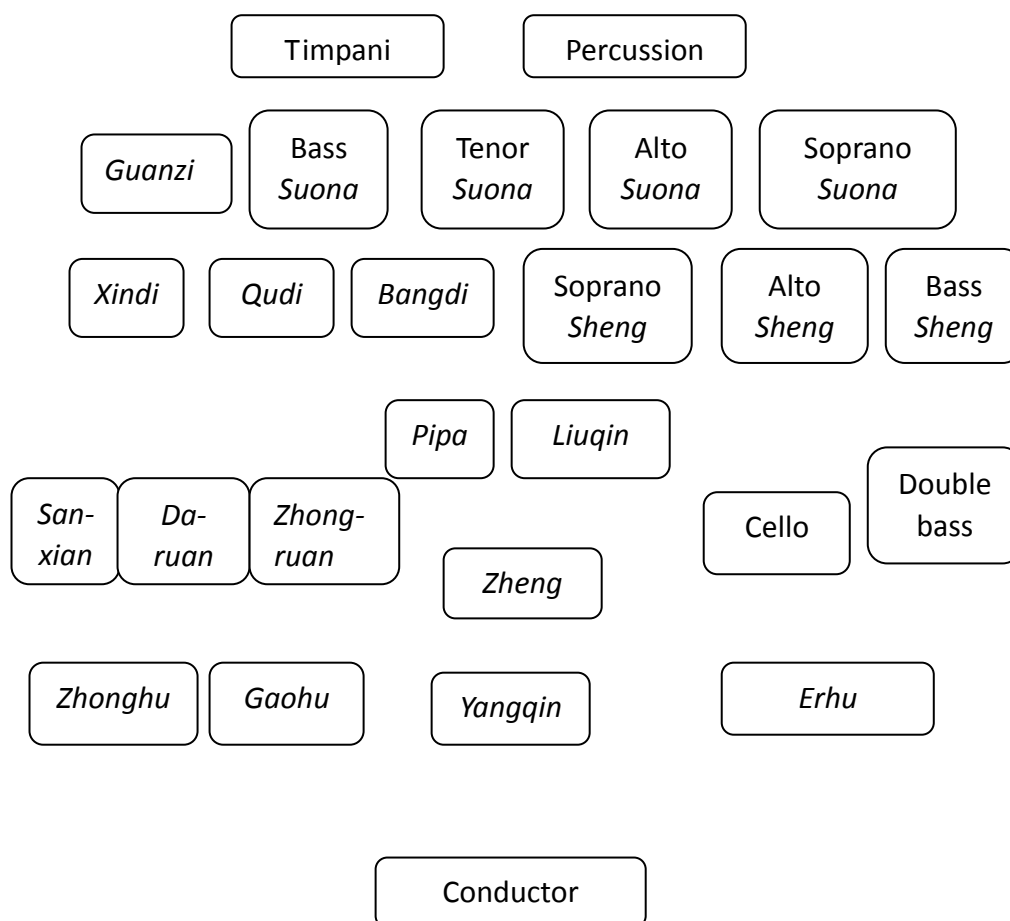
²⁶⁰ For more information about technical renovation of Chinese traditional instruments since 1950, see Zhao Yanchen, “*Dui Woguo Sishi duo Nian lai Yueqi Gaige Xianzhuang de Sikao*” (Reflection on Instrumental Reform for over 40 Years in Our Country), *Yiyue Xuexi yu Sikao (Music Studies and Research)*, (01) 1995, pp. 12-5.

²⁶¹ See Tan Wenlin, *1950 Nian yilai de “Zheng Gailiang” Xianxiang Yanjiu (The Renovation of Zheng since 1950)*. Master’s thesis, Wuhan Conservatory of Music, 2005.

²⁶² *Ibid.*

the form of arranging Western art music pieces for a Chinese national orchestra, an influential example of which was Peng Xiuwen’s arrangement of Mussorgsky’s *Pictures at an Exhibition* in 1983. Nowadays, this kind of adapted pieces is not difficult to find in those concerts held by Chinese national orchestras.

Figure 3.1 A typical seating arrangement of a Chinese national orchestra today



Another manifestation of the governmental regulation of traditional music in the same era was through the officially organised “*Huiyan*” (collective shows by folk musicians). In the 1950s, the central government organised The Nationwide Opera Show (*Quanguo Xiqu Guanmo Yanchu Dahui*, 1952), The Ethnic Music and Dance Show (*Quanguo Minzu Minjian Yinyue Wudao Huiyan*, 1953), and a National Music Week (1956). In the words of Zhang Zhentao, the national *huiyan* was “a large-scale allocation

of regional cultural resources under the command of central government”.²⁶³ Similar forms of *huiyuan* were even more frequently carried out on provincial and municipal levels in order to dispatch the most capable performers at these events to the central national stage. After first being exhibited on these official occasions, folk music then entered into the scope of professional study, where the conditions of its reproduction and survival passed into the hands of the music conservatories and official troupes, rather than in those of the original rural musicians themselves. Meanwhile, the folk musicians’ status became as elevated as that of urban artists and the resulting “folk music” became a part and parcel of mainstream culture. Zhang Zhentao comments that

Huiyuan enhanced the social status of folk artists, giving them eminent honours and turning them into celebrities. ... Their performances were recorded and broadcasted, their music being noted and printed and their images being photographed and posted. The so-called “barnstormers” and “trumpeters” who had been despised before 1949 now acquired their new names: people’s artists, singers or performers, alongside the hosts of the new People’s Republic’s stage repertoire. They, alongside the *huiyuan* itself, formed an entity that was in compliance with the political background of the new regime.²⁶⁴

– **A “materialist” and realist tradition in music creativity.** This particular piece of ideology had a definitely “foreign” origin. The realistic tradition in music can find its roots in 19th-century aesthetics as an antidote to both Romanticism and the early 20th-century appearance of Expressionism. But nowadays it is more widely regarded to have originated with Marxism and Communism – the notion of Socialist Realism had been adopted as the official doctrine of the Soviet Russia since the 1930s.²⁶⁵ In a joint conference of Soviet composers, musicologists and operatic producers held in 1937, Stalin delivered a speech emphasising that a realist musical language bearing the imprint of its national origins was to be adopted and a new breed of hero was to be

²⁶³ Zhang Zhentao, “*Minjian Wenyi Huiyuan de Lishi Fansi*” (Rethinking of Folk Art *Huiyuan* from a Historical Perspective). *Zhongyang Yinyue Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music)*, (03) 2008, pp. 32-7.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²⁶⁵ Christopher Norris, “Social Realism.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 6 Feb. 2012 <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45326>.

drawn from contemporary Soviet life.²⁶⁶ Yet for many Western commentators, the notion of Socialist Realism was paradoxical, since it espoused revolutionary aims in the social-political sphere while adopting a conservative canon of aesthetic values with regard to cultural production.²⁶⁷ Socialist Realism gained momentum in China from its birth in the Yan'an period. In his 1941 essay, Lü Ji commented that after the October Revolution of 1917, Russian music

established a brand-new style of its own, ... renewed its understanding of music all over the world and works of many writers in the style of Realism of old Russia. Most importantly, it created a new music science constructed on Marxism and Leninism ... and [consolidated] new training methods and the Realist tradition in performance.²⁶⁸

What does this “Realist tradition” exactly mean? Lü Ji’s article hinted that the Marxist pattern of thinking tends to ascribe recognisable, referential “content” and “meaning” to the artistic standpoint of the working class, and an over concern with form to the decadence of Capitalism, as embodied by Debussy and Ravel’s Impressionism, as well as by other schools of 20th-century Western modern music. Lü Ji noted that

While European and American music gradually departed from reality and entered into the extreme of indecipherable, novel, art-for-art’s-sake formalism, or degenerated into the pursuit of sensual incitement, the socialist music of Soviet Russia launched a new path which sought connection with the vast masses of the labouring people. They sang odes to labour, to struggle, to the leaders of the masses and the heroes of Socialist construction, to the splendid new course of human revolution and its victory. In this sense they founded the new musical style of “Socialist content with national form”.²⁶⁹

What Lü Ji summarised as “Socialist content with national form” was taken by

²⁶⁶ Marina Frolova-Walker, “Nationalist in Form, Socialist in Content’: National-Building in the Soviet Republics”, *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, pp. 331-71.

²⁶⁷ Christopher Norris, “Social Realism.” *Grove Music Online. Oxford Music Online*. 6 Feb. 2012 <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/45326>.

²⁶⁸ Lü Ji, “*Shiyue Geming hou Sulian Yinyue dui yu Zhongguo Yinyue de Yingxiang*” (The Influence of Soviet Russian Music on Chinese Music), from *Lü Ji Wenxuan (The Selected Works of Lü Ji)*, Volume I, Beijing: People’s Music Publishing House, 1988, pp. 41-5.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Chinese political theorists and practitioners as a reference to the construction of its own national identity in music. For a long period since 1950, Chinese instrumental music creation had been focused on portraying the common people, their labour, the homeland and the change of life brought about by socialist reform, much of which was mixed with the themes of propaganda. This style was prominent in many representative pieces, whether for Western or Chinese traditional instruments, such as *Fanshen de Rizhi* (*The Day of Liberation* for Chinese orchestra, by Zhu Jian'er, 1952, adapted later by Chu Wanghua into piano solo), *San Men Xia Capriccio* (*erhu* concerto by Liu Wenjin, 1960), *Zhan Taifeng* (*Fight the Typhoon*, *zheng* solo by Wang Changyuan, 1965) and *Beijing Xi Xun Chuan Bianzhai* (*Beijing Tidings* for orchestra, by Zheng Lu and Ma Hongye, 1976).

In other instrumental works of the 1950s and 1960s: *Neimeng Minge Zhuti Xiaoqu Qi Shou* (*Seven Inner-Mongolian Themed Piano Pieces* by Sang Tong), *Tianshan de Chuntian* (*The Spring of Tianshan Mountain*, rubab solo by Wusi Manjiang), *Sai Ma* (*Horse Racing*, *erhu* solo by Huang Haihui), etc., the Realist tradition could also be viewed as a consequence of the attention to the material life surrounding original folk music performances, or in other words, the result of musicians going among the common people to study their ways. This principle had been proclaimed by Lü Ji in 1941, one year prior to the publication of Mao Zedong's *Yan'an Talk*:

In order to research the folk music of every ethnic group, we must first understand the social conditions where the folk music had taken form ... including the political, economic, cultural and other aspects ... and especially the scene of folk music performance among the people.²⁷⁰

As a formally proposed document of cultural policy, the *Yan'an Talk* strongly emphasised and encouraged "going among the masses":

China's revolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and

²⁷⁰ Lü Ji, *Zhongguo Minjian Yinyue Yanjiu Tigang* (*The Outline for Chinese Folk Music Research*), 1941, from *Lü Ji Wenxuan* (*The Selected Works of Lü Ji*), Volume I. Beijing: People's Music Publishing House, 1988, p. 52.

whole-heartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work.²⁷¹

Xian Xinghai's arguments concerning the relationship of folk song and Chinese new music, published in 1949, reiterated the tone of Mao's article, showing that Mao's policy was consistently retained and relied upon:

Musicians should go deeply into folk life and try their best to collect folk songs of all the provinces and regions. Musicians should live with folk people, engage in musical and cultural entertainment with them, study their life style, record their melodies and lyrics accurately with proper notation methods and use a tape recorder to collect their original sounds.²⁷²

This over emphasis of Realism in music led to a serious scarcity of instrumental music that stood on its own form to create meaning, rather than through directly reflecting reality. Besides, it also brought about a fierce controversy over the understanding of Western art music with its elaborated "form", especially Debussy's impressionist music, which led to a particularly notorious political event on the eve of the Cultural Revolution. I will return to this issue later in this section.

Last but not least, in terms of the music that reflects the life of ethnic minorities of China I would like to mention a critical insight that chimes with the discussion taking place here. As suggested by Dunbar-Hall (2004), minority-themed music is often joyous and full of fantasy, which may be taken to mean that its role is to celebrate the prosperity of minority society and culture under the patronage and benevolence of the PRC's central government. However, the minorities do not really have any power, but their supposedly "exotic" manners of life, costumes, singing and dancing as apparently integrated into their music indicates that they are frivolous and was the "carefree and

²⁷¹ Mao Zedong, "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art", 1942.

²⁷² Xian Xinghai, "Mingge yu Zhongguo Xinxing Yinyue" (Folk Song and Chinese New Music). In Mao Ziliang (ed.), *Renmin Geshou Xian Xinghai (People's Song Writer: Xian Xinghai)*. Beijing: Sdxjoint Publishing Company, 1949, p. 27.

enchancing children” of the state so sharing in its unified ideology.²⁷³ Thus behind the implementation of the notion of “socialist realism”, there are, more essentially, the questions and issues of control and assimilation.

– **With regard to compositional techniques, during the 1950s and 1960s, Chinese music composition placed great emphasis on developing special harmonic means based upon the Chinese indigenous modality.** This effort was typified by a series of published theoretical works, perhaps the most representative one of which was *Han Ethnic Modes and Harmony (Hanzu Diaoshi jiqi Hesheng)* by Li Yinghai in 1958. Although the main modes that were subject to exploration (pentatonicism and septa-tonicism) are widespread in other parts of the world, Li’s work argued that these modes were an irreplaceable national cultural legacy by tracing back the ideological and historical contexts in which they had developed, the embodiment and variations of these modes and the resulting diverse styles in regional music. However, it was perhaps the “style”, or “flavour”, or the mode of thinking, argued by Li Yinghai, that was really “national” or unusual, rather than the modes *per se*. Consequently Li proposed a series of means that both fit into Western harmonic rules while not effacing or affecting the basic musical flavour, such as the avoiding of the third note of a triad (because the third note is more likely to lead to the tones that do not appear in a pentatonic scale and thus sully the “pureness” of the music) as also the application of the sixth chord. Li also discussed the special forms of modulation that might break the restriction of Western harmonic rules, but that perfectly fit into the logic of Chinese modality. The ideological basis for this theoretical work was seldom formally mentioned, but it is clearly reminiscent of the prevalent use of modality in the rising of European nationalist styles in the first half of the 20th century as a means of resisting the Austro-Hungarian tonal tradition associated with transnational imperial hegemonies. Likewise, Li’s approach, based upon the use of modal harmony, could be made to carry a variety of political meanings (which may be likened to the range of feelings evoked by the national flag) and so could function as a tool for freeing Chinese music and culture from Western

²⁷³ For the “carefree and enchanting children” metaphor, see Peter Dunbar-Hall, *Unity and Discord: Music and Politics in Contemporary Tibet*, 2004, p. 29.

tonality, or doctrines, and for establishing its own style. These meanings are evident in an interview with Li Yinghai in 2008, where he mentioned his piano pieces adapted from Chinese folk songs: “[these pieces] are meant to instill a mother language of music for children who learn piano all over the country.”²⁷⁴

Example 3.11 “*Gan Shengling*” (Herding the Flock), voice from folk song of Shannxi Province, piano accompaniment by Li Yinghai, bars 5-8, cited from Peng Yongjun (2005). The vocal part is both in *yu* mode on A (the pentatonic scale of which is A B D E F#) and in D from the perspective of tonality. This segment of piano accompaniment only makes use of two notes, A and E, and omits all the harmonic notes that would be dissonant with the notes of the pentatonic set, thus making the pattern of the accompaniment remain concise, easy to identify and rather pleasing to the ears. The harmonic triads listed below indicate the notes that are respectively deleted and retained.

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

Voice: A D B F E

In conclusion, I would argue that the above listed facts and phenomena were the

²⁷⁴ Chen Yong, “Ji Yu Li Yinghai Xiansheng de Yici Fangtan” (An Interview with Mr. Li Yinghai), *Chinese Music*, (01) 2008, pp. 160-61 & p. 180.

logical extension of the ideological proposals of Yan'an. But this line underwent significant internal change: if in the early 1950s this ideological ground still sought a balance between (or was blurred by) the pursuit of national unification and the ruling of the proletariat over other classes, in the following years the significance of the latter position continually arose to break the balance. In 1953 Mao Zedong published a revised version of "Talks at the Yan'an Forum on Literature and Art". In this updated version instead of encouraging artists to generate more polished and skillful works, he discarded this "elitist" opinion and proposed a higher level of appreciation of popular culture.²⁷⁵ In 1955 China formally declared that it had finished the process of "socialist reform" and had evolved from the former "new democratic" regime into a socialist state, which meant that the status of proletarian culture must be even higher than in the past. In the documented "Talk to Music Workers" by Mao Zedong in 1956 (which may well be the only piece of Mao's work directly related to music), people can still find expressions in favour of European art music, such as "We must acknowledge that in respect of modern culture the standards of the West are higher than ours," and "The ordering and development of Chinese music must depend on you who study Western-style music, just as the ordering and development of Chinese medicine depends on Western-style doctors."²⁷⁶ But the following years saw a continually growing antipathy towards the promotion of European music and, indeed, any music creativity based on European ideals. In 1963, the literary critic and politician Yao Wen Yuan published an article titled "Please Behold This 'Novel' and 'Special' Insight" (*Qing Kan Yizhong Xinying er Duda de Jianjie*) on the influential newspaper *Wen Hui Daily*, in which Yao took Debussy's *Monsieur Croche* (translated into Chinese by Zhang Yuhe and published by People's Music Publishing House in 1963), as the target of criticism. Yao denounced the latter as "showing no sympathy for the feelings of the labouring people", as being "detached from the masses and society" and "the highest value of which is to help dispel the boredom of aristocrats".²⁷⁷ These strongly biased

²⁷⁵ See Bonnie S. McDoudall *Mao Zedong's "Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art" – A Translation of the 1943 Text with Commentary*. Center for Chinese Studies, the University of Michigan, 1980, p. 9.

²⁷⁶ Mao Zedong, "Talk to Music Workers", 1956. In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1961.

²⁷⁷ See Shi Zhongxing, *He Luting Zhuan (The Biography of He Luting)*, Shanghai Music Publishing House, 2000, Chapter 22 (pp. 209-19).

opinions led to a fierce response from He Luting, the principal of Shanghai Conservatory of Music, who then wrote an essay in defense of Debussy. However, He Luting's counter-move soon provoked political attack, with himself being labeled as a "rightist" and later even put into prison for his "anti-Party" insistence.²⁷⁸ This event was a radical reflection of how the political and cultural ideals of Yan'an led to an extreme.

Even in such a harsh political climate, however, Chinese music creations dating from the mid-1960s to the end of the Cultural Revolution did not ever completely stop the pursuit of the refinement of technique, which was in practice actually yet another form of Western influence. In R. C. Kraus's words, "As the high tide of Maoism swept across China, the European classics were silenced, yet the Westernisation of music gained new momentum."²⁷⁹ Rather, the supremacy of the "proletarian" position generally took the form of sensible music symbols. This process is clearly shown in the adaption of the once-symbolic *Yellow River Cantata* by Xian Xinghai into the new *Yellow River Piano Concerto* in 1969. The adapted concerto features a neater arrangement of form and a more complex texture as compared with the original cantata, and in its fourth movement the motifs from the famous revolutionary songs "The East and Red" and L'Internationale – which are respectively symbols for spreading proletarian revolution in China and all over the world – stand out very clearly.²⁸⁰ In sum, despite the general populist attitude that saturated the music creations of this period, when one steps back and takes a look at the period as a whole, the pursuit of a refined, European-style compositional technique was not only still in evidence, but also seen to be determinedly moving forward, eventually to be incorporated into a powerful national-socialist ideology coloured by the pursuit of industrialisation.

²⁷⁸ Ibid., Chapter 22-28.

²⁷⁹ Richard Curt Kraus, "Science versus Revolution in the Modernisation of Music", in *Piano & Politics: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggles over Western Music*. Oxford University Press, 1989, p. 100.

²⁸⁰ For an overall comparative study between the forms of Xian Xinghai's *Yellow River Cantata* and the later piano concerto, see Zhang Tingting, "Gangqin Xiezouqu "Huanghe" zhi Yanjiu – yu "Huanghe Dahechang" de Guanxi he Qushi yu Yanzou" (The Relation between *Yellow River Cantata* and *Yellow River Piano Concerto*: Form and Performance), *Huang He Zhi Sheng*, (04) 2009, pp. 98-100.

CHAPTER FOUR

SYMPHONIC CREATIONS: MUSIC AFTER 1980

4.1 Western Art Music and the New Era

After a “honeymoon” with Western art music in the early period of the PRC (and noting the fact that the use of this music was selected according to the cultural and artistic criteria of socialism), China entered a “dark age” that lasted for ten years – that is, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). It resulted from the Communist Party leader Mao Zedong’s resolution of pushing the socialist revolution fiercely forward, especially on a spiritual and ideological level, even at the price of a stable economy and society for China. For this Mao called for “a great revolution that touches people to their very souls”.²⁸¹ During this decade, almost all forms of Western music were banned from the public life, although many technical and technological elements associated with this type of music were still preserved and manipulated in the construction of high art music needed by political propaganda – an eminent case is Yin Chengzong’s *Yellow River Piano Concerto* (mentioned in Section 3.2). The piano became an innovative accompanying instrument in modernised Peking Opera works that offered the history of proletarian heroes, while genres like orchestra and ballet were employed to tell revolutionary stories.

Internationally, China was separated from the Western world as part of the cold war global wide, but by the early 1970s China’s situation was changing on the international front. China’s relationship with the Soviet Union had remained tense throughout the 1960s and showed no signs of improving. As a result, even while

²⁸¹ C. Mackerras, P. Taneja & G. Young, *China since 1978 (2nd Ed.)*, pp. 5-6.

government propaganda retained a general anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, the leadership began to seek ways to improve the nation's relationship with the West.²⁸² Premier Zhou Enlai was an enthusiast for the idea of using Western art music for diplomatic purposes. He suggested that Li Delun, the conductor of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra, perform Beethoven for the American guests who made an official state visit to China in February 1972. After this visit, a number of individual foreign musicians and Western art music orchestral groups were invited to perform in China and were introduced on radio during the last few years of the Cultural Revolution. Although the promotion of their activities was under strict control and encountered objections from Jiang Qing and other Cultural Revolution bureaucrats,²⁸³ it expressed China's wish to use Western art music as a bridge to the outside world.

As the Cultural Revolution drew to an end, economic recovery and reform gradually replaced fanaticism to become the new social norm, and China was ready to expose itself to the impact of foreign cultures, as well as to reconstruct its own culture in a more modern and international frame. In this process Western art music anew became a symbol of modernisation because of its now long-established symbolic meaning of refined technique and Western modernity. In the words of Li Delun, "If there weren't [Western] classical music, there wouldn't be modernity."²⁸⁴ The number of children studying piano and violin boomed year on year (although the number of learners of other Western instruments remained much smaller). In many cities new opera houses, concert halls and theatres were built as visible proofs of the given city's new economic and cultural development, and at the same time these cities started to form their own orchestras. In all these processes the notions of "development" and "modernity" represented the major drives underlying the political U-turn and guiding people's activities.

Whereas the increasing number of music students can be viewed as the

²⁸² S. Melvin & J. Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*, p. 265.

²⁸³ See "Classical Music Diplomacy", in S. Melvin & J. Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*, pp. 265-72.

²⁸⁴ S. Melvin & J. Cai, *Rhapsody in Red: How Western Classical Music Became Chinese*, p. 300.

“foundation” of the pursuit of Western art music in China, and the building of concert halls is the external and material representation of this process, the creation of symphonies – one of the most sophisticated forms of Western art music – could be seen as the very “soul” of this discourse and the achievements that have been made through it. Therefore, this chapter will focus on the symphonic creations of the era from 1980 to the end of the century – and with a great deal of reference to the new millennium, making reference to the aspects of this creation which were driven by a variety of dynamics, all either directly or indirectly related to politics. The case study of Section 4.4 will describe a whole “package” of factors that circumscribed and shaped the creation and reception of a typical piece combining a traditional Chinese instrument and Western style orchestra. This history will span the time from the Cultural Revolution to the turn of the century and show the impact of a series of colossal political and social changes.

4.2 “The Second Tide of Modernisation”: the New Social and Political Context for Chinese Music Creations

The last twenty years of the 20th century in China broke from earlier decades in almost every facet of social life. This period saw the nation placed in the hand of its new and soon-to-be iconic leader, Deng Xiaoping, along with his famous slogan of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”. It witnessed the contention between old and new notions and principles and the triumph of the latter: whether China should unanimously stick to the principles of Mao Zedong or inherit them selectively; whether the national economy should stay within the “orthodox” Socialist mode with the state government planning and controlling everything, or a majority of services and products should be pushed to market; whether the nation should continue being isolated from

the capitalist world or should open-up to the West.

Many Chinese domestic scholars in the domains of sociology and history would like to use the phrase “the second tide of modernisation”, or something similar, to differentiate this period from the processes of Westernisation which took place from the late 19th century up until the eve of the foundation of the PRC.²⁸⁵ The latter period was not only characterised by the import and spread of Western modern science and techniques but also witnessed the preliminary appropriation of a modern Western-style social and political system; that is, the substitution of an empire with a republic. Yet although Western science and technology were widely adopted and the newly established republican government did take a series of measures to modernise and Westernise society in the domains of economy, law and finance,²⁸⁶ most people, including many political leaders, were not ready to completely accept the values and spirit of Western capitalist culture: “The modernisation of China occurred due to a fierce impetus from the outside, without a parallel internal drive for enlightenment [in the ways of capitalist culture].”²⁸⁷ This blocked China from becoming completely Westernised. Also the process of modernisation led by the republican government was seriously interrupted by the Japanese invasion and the war that followed.²⁸⁸

So far, a lot of debate has been focused on whether the socialist period from 1949

²⁸⁵ In China, there have been two different explanatory systems for the concept of the “second tide of modernisation” since the 1990s. The first system, casting a look at the history of the whole world, defines the second tide of modernisation as worldwide (or more precisely, mainly within developed countries) and as the process of replacing a traditional industrial economy with a knowledge and information-based one. The new tide of modernisation also features a higher level of marketisation, globalisation, democracy and creativity. Representative works of this aspect include He Congqi’s *Di Er Ci Xiandaihua – Renlei Wenming Jincheng de Qishi (The Secondary Modernisation: Inspirations of the Civilising Process of Human Beings)*, Beijing: Higher Education Press, 1999; *Xiandaihua Kexue: Guojia Fada de Kexue Yuanli (Modernisation Science: Principles of National Advance)*, Beijing: Science Press, 2010. The second system makes an internal reference to Chinese history from the late 19th century to the present, labeling the Westernisation from the late 19th century to the eve of the foundation of the PRC as the first tide of Chinese modernisation whereas the period commencing from 1978 is described as the second wave, the latter being characterised by the one-party leadership of the CCP which claimed to remain a socialist regime. It is believed that the second modernisation of China has some overlap with that in the West with regard to the Chinese contribution to the development of the knowledge and information economy, but there is still serious concern that marketisation and democracy in China have so far not developed to a comparable level.

²⁸⁶ See Li Jingxuan, “*Shi Xi 20 Shiji Shang Ban Ye Zhongguo Xiandaihua de Liang Ge Fazhan Fangxiang*” (Two Development Trends of Chinese Modernisation in the First Half of the 20th Century), *Journal of Guangxi University For Nationalities (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, Vol. 29, No. 2, Mar 2007, pp. 151-55.

²⁸⁷ Yang Hongyu & Du Yanhua, “*Lun Zhongguo Xiandaihua Daolu de Zhuanhuan*” (The Veerings of Chinese Modernisation Path), *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences)*, (06) 2005, p. 46.

²⁸⁸ Li Jingxuan, “*Shi Xi 20 Shiji Shang Ban Ye Zhongguo Xiandaihua de Liang Ge Fazhan Fangxiang*”, p. 152.

to the end of Cultural Revolution led by Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party was also a key stage of Chinese modernisation. For me this question has a positive answer, because first of all, in the scheme of Marxist theory, Socialism is a higher form of modernisation than Capitalism in itself, with greater productive force and more converged capital. As suggested in *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible.²⁸⁹

In fact, the socialist modernisation of China from 1950s to the early 1970s was a copy of the highly centralised economy of the Soviet Union (which was still the case even after the Sino-Soviet split in 1960). Yet scholars like Wu Zhongmin does not perceive it as a proper period of socialist modernisation, since the task of increasing productive potential often gave way to the supremacy of class struggle and the bringing about of collectivisation as the most apparent features of socialism.²⁹⁰

In 1978 China entered a new stage of modernisation as the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party introduced the policies of economic reform and opening to the outside world under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping. The slogan, “Socialism with Chinese characteristics,” indicates that China still claimed itself to be within the system of socialism as guided by a form of Marxism, with the central government still undertaking the task of supervising social life and taking responsibility for economy planning. But it revised the traditional socialist programme, for example, by bringing marketisation into its new version of socialism. In the period that followed, China also became more “modernised” in terms of its extensive industrialisation and gradual involvement in the process of globalisation, as also in its tolerance of freer thoughts in intellectual and cultural life. The Thirteenth National

²⁸⁹ Karl Marx & Frederick Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Vol. II. “Proletarians and Communists”.

²⁹⁰ See Wu Zhongmin, “*Zhongguo Xiandaihua de Jiben Zoushi ji Wenti – dui 1978 Nian Yilai Zhongguo Xiandaihua Jincheng de Hongguan Kaocha*” (The Trends and Questions of Chinese Modernisation: a Macro-observation of Chinese Modernisation since 1978), *Shehui Kexue Zhanxian (Social Science Front Bimonthly)*, (02) 1993, pp. 14-20.

Congress of Communist Party of China in 1987 made the liberation of ideas its central point, with the result that an editorial that appeared in the *Workers' Daily (Gongren Ribao)* soon after stated that: "Intellectual freedom is everyone's naturally-given right, the most basic and minimal of all human freedoms."²⁹¹ But China was by no means stepping toward a completely Western form of liberalism. Instead, the degree of liberty was not to be left to itself as a spontaneous tendency, but remain under the supervision of the political authority.

It is dangerous, therefore, to overlook both the scale and the depth of political guidance in the intellectual and cultural life of post-1980 China. "Modernisation" became a word very frequently seen in propaganda (I will later enlarge on this in relation to culture and art). Moreover, under the Party authority's promotion, the concept of modernisation penetrated intellectual thinking in a large scale, especially in re-constructing 20th-century Chinese history. Below is the account by Yu Heping, an influential scholar of Chinese modernisation, about the Chinese historical scholars' new obsession of "modernisation" after 1980. Although this was only an activity among intellectuals, it was hard to imagine that it could have been carried out without the permission and even impetus of the political authority:

Before the 1980s, the principal lines of modern historical research in the Chinese mainland had been concerned with issues like "class struggle" and "anti-Imperialism". But after 1980 the motif of modernisation gradually permeated it and became increasingly pre-eminent. ... For almost every significant event or stage of Chinese history, such as the Opium War and the foundation of PRC, we have held special academic conferences in which the focus is upon modernisation. ... Many existing research topics also tended to combine with the issue of modernisation so as to generate a new area of studies.²⁹²

What is particularly worthy of attention is that this discourse of modernisation was heavily intertwined with the new discourse of nationalism, the combination of which

²⁹¹ C. Mackerras, P. Taneja & G. Young, *China since 1978 (2nd Ed.)*, p. 34.

²⁹² Yu Heping, "Zhongguo Xiandaihua Yanjiu de Jieshi Tixi he Neirong Jiegou – You Bianxie <Zhongguo Xiandaihua Licheng> er Xiang Dao de Ji Dian Tihui" (The Interpretative Scheme of Chinese Modernisation Research: A Few Thoughts upon the Compilation of *The Path of Chinese Modernisation*), *Guangdong Social Sciences*, (02) 2003, pp. 159-60.

bore paradoxical and multiple meanings. On one hand, as the CCP decided to break away from the extreme concern with class struggle and started to take economic construction as its primary task, it encountered the danger of losing the original legitimacy suggested by the name of the “Communist Party”. Thus it faced the imperative to find a new legitimacy, that is, to lead its people to build a more prosperous, modernised and stronger nation. On the other hand and paradoxically, the CCP needed to retain or rebuild a national identity by distinguishing the Chinese social system from that of the West and claiming that China was still sticking to the route mapped by Marxism and Socialism – although the typical definitions provided by these ideologies had been hugely revised in the application to the new Chinese situation, thus generating the process of so-called “socialist modernisation”. Anyway, China needed this strong nationalist agenda to preserve its cultural identity under the circumstances of globalisation and the impact of foreign cultures (I will elaborate this point later with regard to the Chinese interpretation of contemporary Western philosophical concepts such as postmodernism). The above is only a quick sketch of the issues surrounding Chinese modernisation after 1980 and regrettably I am not able to explore its every facet in more detail. But as will be seen below, the concept of “modernisation” and the importance attached to it in this period helps us to approach the artistic and musical creations of this era.

The beginning of the post-1980 age was marked by the loosening of official political restrictions on art. In 1979, Deng Xiaoping said, in a speech delivered to the Fourth National Art Workers’ Conference, that the government must not interfere as to “how” and “what” artists create nor guide the latter with any administrative orders.²⁹³ Deng’s voice created space for burgeoning new forms and ideas of art and allowed in fresh air for critical reevaluation of the past. The previously unanimous principle that art must be subordinate to political objectives was challenged and re-discussed, and interest in the achievements of Western modern art and in its accompanying theories was passionately rekindled. However, the Socialist route was by no means discarded.

²⁹³ Ming Yan, *Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Yinyue Piping Daolun (Introduction of 20th-Century Chinese Music Criticism)*. People’s Music Publishing House, 2002, p.316.

Although critics, artists and musicians admitted that extreme “Leftism” had been harmful and that artistic creativity had been too tightly confined, they still supported the basic ideas of the former proletarian leaders on art as expressed in Mao Zedong’s “Yan’an Talk” and other occasions. Now, these ideas acquired a new version. Deng Xiaoping, the leader of Chinese reform and modernisation, proposed in the same speech that the art of the new age should head toward the new goal of modernisation.²⁹⁴ A response from music circles was then published in *The People’s Music* journal by its “special commentator”, claiming that Chinese music should continue to facilitate the new course of Socialist modernisation:

Since 1979, the emphasis of the whole Party and the whole state’s work has shifted to the construction of Socialist modernisation. How should our music art adapt to this historical change? This is a new subject that our music workers should seriously study and think about and endeavour to solve through practice.²⁹⁵

An early version of the “modernisation” motto in 1980s constituted four parts: the modernisation of industry, agriculture, science and national defense, of which the core is science and technology. The philosophy professor from Huazhong University of Science and Technology, Ouyang Kang, views this statement to be an ill-considered understanding of “modernisation”.²⁹⁶ In another article he concretised the notion of modernisation into six “-isations”: Rationalisation, Industrialisation, Marketisation, Urbanisation, Democratisation and Legislation.²⁹⁷ Obviously, the modernisation policy that China adopted at this stage was rather inward-looking and pragmatic. Instead of seeking a rational, balanced and comprehensive understanding of the musical legacy both of China and of other regions of the world, there is instead a motivation to seek technological advancement. Although politics had apparently stopped its direct interference with music (and as many new ideas and expressive means began to thrive), the former still covertly influenced the manner in which

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 323.

²⁹⁵ “Weida de Zhuanbian he Yinyue Yishu de Xin Ketu” (The Great Change and New Subject for Music Art), *People’s Music*, (02)1979.

²⁹⁶ Ouyang Kang, “Globalisation and the Contemporary Development of Marxist Philosophy: Precondition, Problem Domain and Research Outline”, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Dec., 2006), p. 648.

²⁹⁷ Ouyang Kang, “Xiandaihua de Weicheng Jiqi Chaoyue” (The Fortress Besieged of Modernisation and Its Transcendence), *Qishi Xuekan (Seeking Truth)*, (1) 2003, pp.39-43.

people treat and assess the value of the components of music, not least in its role as the pivot in constructing a new national identity.

“The Great Resurgence”: the new goal of China in the new millennium

Now, it is necessary to extend our narrative slightly into the new millennium in order to address a political slogan issued at its beginning (but which was closely related to events in the previous century). After enduring about twenty years “*tao guang yang hui*” (hiding one’s capacities and biding one’s time), the guiding national and diplomatic policy of Deng Xiaoping’s period, the first decade of the new century witnessed the rising confidence of Chinese national power together with the ambition to play a more significant role on the world stage. On 31st May, 2002, the former Chinese president Jiang Zemin proposed one of the most influential political mottos of his tenure: “To realise the Chinese nation’s great resurgence under the scheme of socialism of Chinese characteristics.” Jiang’s motto carries multiple connotations; Rong Changhai and Zhang Chunxin from Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences have provided an overall analysis of these meanings in their 2004 article.²⁹⁸ According to Rong and Zhang, the external factors of “the great resurgence” consist of “further enhancement of China’s international status, an increase of the influential strength of China in the world and an improvement of China’s surrounding circumstances”. This slogan thus signifies a pursuit for being accepted and acclaimed both politically and culturally. After growing into one of the major economic forces in the world, China now seeks an equal status in culture. From modernisation to “the great resurgence”, the political class has stopped its overt guidance of culture and art and the pressure to use culture for narrowly propagandistic purposes has been lifted, but politics continues to influence culture and art in a more structural manner. This has been noticeable in mindsets and theories on two fronts: those related to tradition and those to Western contemporary thought.

²⁹⁸ Rong Changhai & Zhang Chunxin, “*Guanyu Zhonghua Minzu Weida Fuxing de Jige Went*” (Some Issues Regarding “the Great Resurgence of the Chinese Nation”), *Lilun yu Xiandaihua (Theory and Modernisation)*, (03) 2004.

The debate over music tradition under the new political background: is development more important than continuity?

There has long existed a disagreement between Chinese and Western music circles in regard to the question of whether tradition has been or is being preserved or destroyed in China. The anxiety of Western scholars that China's traditional music might be in danger of disappearing under the cultural ideology and policy of the CCP can be traced back to the Maoist era. Alan L. Kagan (1963), examining the so-called "Hundred Flowers Movement" that took place from the 1950s to encourage competition between different artistic schools, argued that the "flourishing garden" was in fact strictly appropriated to political need. The major troupes and music societies were subject to the strict control of the government and only those genres such as local operas and large scale choral works, which could easily involve the mass of the people, advanced rapidly.²⁹⁹ Some retrospective articles written after the Cultural Revolution made similar points. For example, Frederick Lau (1996) points out that the intensely politicised environment gave rise to new ideas about music culture that fused with, and at times even replaced, the traditional ones.³⁰⁰ Rachel Harris (2005) reveals the transformation of folk music, being defined as a local, context-based, unwritten musical tradition, into a tangible commodity, through the study of the iconic "folk song king of the northwest", Wang Luobin.³⁰¹ Conversely, a number of Western musicians visiting China expressed a positive attitude toward the effort made to preserve and revive traditional music that they saw in the PRC.³⁰² As was noted by Frederick Page (1963), by following the strict Marxist line and the precepts laid down by Mao Zedong that art was for the people, the state enabled the utilisation of music resources that had been in the private hands of well-to-do or aristocratic families: he

²⁹⁹ Alan L. Kagan, "Music and the Hundred Flowers Movement", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (Oct. 1963), pp. 417-30.

³⁰⁰ Frederick Lau, "Forever Red: The Invention of Solo *Dizi* music in post-1949 China", *British Journal of Ethnomusicology*, Vol. 5 (1996), pp. 113-31.

³⁰¹ Rachel Harris, "Wang Luobin: Folk Song King of the Northwest or Song Thief? Copyright, Representation, and Chinese Folk Songs", *Modern China*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (Jul., 2005), pp. 381-408.

³⁰² For this kind of writings, see Frederick Page, "Music in China", *The Musical Times*, Vol. 104, No. 1443 (May, 1963), pp. 331-32; James A Mason, "MENC in China", *Music Educators Journal*, Vol. 66, No. 3 (Nov., 1979), pp. 52-7; etc.

cited the examples of the deciphering of early *qin* music and the conversion of a large house belonging to an English merchant into a children's play centre.³⁰³

It was not until 1980 that Chinese musicians themselves got involved in the debate as the result of acquiring more chances of communication with the West. In 1980, Fang Kun published an article in *People's Music* journal recording the visiting performance of the Chinese National Music Ensemble of Chinese Central Conservatory of Music in the second Oriental Music Festival held by the University of Durham.³⁰⁴ In this article he noted some questions raised by Western musicologists about the way that the Chinese ensemble interpreted and rendered Chinese traditional music. The Western musicologists argued that the ensemble had no right to claim themselves as the representatives of traditional Chinese music, since the way they performed the *pipa* solo piece "The Conqueror Unarms" (*Ba Wang Xie Jia*) was rhythmically "intense and complex". In their view Chinese traditional music was generally slow so that the appearance of such a rhythmic innovation must be due to Western influence. Apart from this partial censure which is somehow due to the insufficient understanding of the traditional repertoire of *pipa*,³⁰⁵ the Western music scholars watching the ensemble's performance also criticised in general the fact that some modern pieces based on traditional materials presented by the ensemble were not really traditional music and had absorbed a large amount of Western influence (such as the A-B-A form), which affected the authenticity of the performance and so of the tradition it was supposed to represent.

Such criticisms were not isolated, representing for a view that the only way to save traditional music culture is to preserve it in a museum or to build an invisible wall around it. This position seems to be more commonly held by Western

³⁰³ Frederick Page, "Music in China", 1963.

³⁰⁴ Fang Kun, "Guanyu Zhongguo Minzu Yinyue Chuantong de Yici Taolun – Zhongyang Yinyue Xueyuan Minyuetuan zai Yingguo Dulun Dongfang Yinyuejie" (A Discussion on Chinese National Music Tradition – The Chinese National Music Ensemble of Chinese Central Conservatory of Music in Durham Oriental Music Festival), *People's Music*, (01)1980, pp. 38-40.

³⁰⁵ There are quite a lot of pieces with complex and rapid rhythms in the traditional *pipa* repertoire. *Wu Qu* (military tune, or strong melody) is an important component of *pipa* music and is often very dramatic and complex in its use of rhythmic change. *Ba Wang Xie Jia* is one of the *Wu Qu* pieces.

ethnomusicologists. For example, F. Kouwenhoven and A. Schimmelpenninck, the hosts of CHIME (European Foundation for Chinese Music Research), express their concerns as follows:

To change music traditions and make a new direction for music is not our task, nor should such an attempt be put under the banner of “preservation”. If the performers have never played on stage, we should not make a stage for them. If by tradition they are not used to accepting payment, we do not need to pay them money. If the performers usually only play their music on ritual occasions, in temple fairs and in other religious events, we should not try to convert them into professional artists.³⁰⁶

...

If we promote local opera and narrative-singing, we are actually promoting the “historical textbook” of millions of Chinese people, a book where the shared identities of Chinese people converge. What we need to do is to approach local performers and audiences, as well as to learn their needs and culture, but not try to redefine culture according to our intention.³⁰⁷

What made Kouwenhoven and Schimmelpenninck worried is that the cultural authority of the Chinese government would fail to realise the importance of maintaining the continuity of traditional music culture. Instead, the economic goal and the drive for modernisation would prompt them to extract the “progressive” elements of the music while neglecting, or discarding, the others. For instance, the authorities often dislike or have no interest in all and any forms of ritual music as these forms are seen as standing for superstition and so denote the backwardness of the past. Some traditional folk music genres such as *hua'er* in Qinghai Province, a love song sung in dialogue form in eastern Qinghai and southern Gansu on temple festivals, are converted into stage performances by professional singers and assessed by their singing technique, whereas those assets that are of true value to the song genre, such as the witty lyric and the habit of improvisation, are inclined to be placed in subsidiary or unimportant positions.

³⁰⁶ F. Kouwenhoven & A. Schimmelpenninck, “Folk Music in China, Not ‘Preservation’ But ‘Continuation’”, *Musicology in China*, (03) 2003. This article is published in Chinese translation edition, and the text quoted here is translated back into English.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

How did the Chinese themselves view, and deal with, the issue of music tradition in the new era after the Cultural Revolution? Undoubtedly, the value and importance of tradition were sufficiently appreciated both by political leaders and by musicians. In May 1979, the National Music Committee of Chinese Musicians' Association (*Zhongguo Yinyuejia Xiehui Minzu Yinyue Weiyuanhui*) held a meeting on a plan to collect and compile traditional Chinese music in the future.³⁰⁸ As had been previously done in the 1940s (see Section 3.4), in the same year (1979), the Chinese Ministry of Culture launched a project which involved the publication of four new volumes of traditional Chinese music, respectively consisting of folk songs, instrumental music, narrative singing and local operas.³⁰⁹ This embracing of tradition can be seen as, above all, a U-turn directed against the extreme denunciation of tradition during the Cultural Revolution. On the other hand, cultural and political leaders needed this rediscovery of tradition to promote the notions and spirits suitable for the new epoch. Now let us return to Fang Kun's article. In response to the criticism from the audience, the Chinese performers presented their way of defining "traditional music". First of all, it must be "excellent" and valuable – Fang explained the criterion for excellence as "having a public foundation". Secondly, it must have lasting life and be able to influence music of later generations. If a type of music is forlorn and "discarded by the people" as Fang put, then it is of no value to Chinese musicians. In this article Fang Kun reiterated that the former cultural principles of "Make the past serve the present, make foreign things serve China" and "Absorb the essence and discard the dross" still made sense in the new age. While in the past these principles had been targeted toward building a new society, they were now, in Fang's time, employed to accelerate modernisation and construct new national confidence in the cultural arena. Fang expressed such a hope in his article as follows:

³⁰⁸ Feng Hui, "Jicheng Minzu Yinyue Yichan de Zhongyao Cuoshi – Zhongguo Yinxie Minzu Yinyue Weiyuanhui Juxing Huiyi Taolun Souji Zhengli Minzu Yinyue Yichan Wenti" (Meeting Held by the National Music Committee of Chinese Musicians' Association on the Collection and Compilation of National Music Legacy), *People's Music*, (07) 1979, p. 36.

³⁰⁹ Feng Guangyu, "Zhongguo Baocun Chuantong Yinyue de Zhongyao Cuoshi: Jianshu Zhongguo Yinyue Jicheng de Bianji Fangfa" (Important Measures of Preserving Traditional Music in China: Editing Methodologies for the Collection of Traditional Chinese Music), *Journal of Sichuan Conservatory of Music*, (01) 1992, p.3.

Our generation should have the aspiration and broad mindedness to inherit the excellent cultural legacy of the whole mankind, never mind whether it is Eastern or Western, ancient or modern, so to nurture our Chinese culture without making an exception for music. The ultimate goal of “make foreign things serve China” is to develop our Chinese music.³¹⁰

Such ideas went beyond the modernisation theme of the early 1980s, representing a cultural aspiration regarding the “Great Resurgence” that was to have taken place in the new century. It is also worth mentioning that a similar way of thinking appeared in the form of the craze of applying for “intangible cultural legacy” (*fei wuzhi wenhua yichan*) title of various grades and the flourishing of the so-called “original ecology music” (*yuanshengtai yinyue*) movement in the last decade; the latter denoting music performed by village-based performers in their home dialect, minus any modernising accretions or stage adaptations, all as far as possible in the original local context.³¹¹ Despite the apparent reverence of traditional performers and their “original” forms claimed by this kind of work, Yu Bing (2009) reveals that the lionisation of “original ecology music” is not so much a real embrace of tradition as a drive to make profit and to improve the tourist attractions of a given region. On many occasions “original ecology music” is only a disguise for a number of commercialised music genres.³¹² Helen Rees (2010) also questions the sudden lionisation of this kind of music in the light of the fact that the original, unmodernised forms were actually disliked during the 1980s and 1990s in educated urban musician circles, and suggests that many performances sold as “original ecology music” were plainly not what they were advertised to be.³¹³

At the same time, it should be noted that in recent years, the methods employed

³¹⁰ Fang Kun, “Guanyu Zhongguo Minzu Yinyue Chuantong de Yici Taolun – Zhongyang Yinyue Xueyuan Minyuetuan zai Yingguo Dulun Dongfang Yinyuejie” (A Discussion on Chinese National Music Tradition – The Chinese National Music Ensemble of Chinese Central Conservatory of Music in Durham Oriental Music Festival), *People’s Music*, (01)1980, p.40.

³¹¹ Helen Rees, “Original Ecology Folksongs in Theory and Practice”, in *the 15th International Meeting of CHIME (The European Foundation for Chinese Music Research)*, 24-27 November, 2010.

³¹² Yu Bing, “Dui Yinyue Yinchuan/Yuanshengtai Baohu de Sikao” (Thoughts on the Protection of Intangible Music Legacy and Original Ecology Music), *Musicology in China*, (01) 2009, pp. 103-5.

³¹³ Helen Rees, “Original Ecology Folksongs in Theory and Practice”, 2010.

in the treatment of music traditions in China have been updated and have been the source of much debate. In fact, there have been a handful of scholars who have advocated the necessity for absolute and faithful preservation and of paying homage to tradition. Jiang Ming, the former president of Shanghai Conservatory of Music, published an article in 2006 claiming that it is harmful to use “polished” forms to substitute for works from the original tradition – even in the case of those “bad” traditions related to religious and sexual content.³¹⁴ In the same year, the Advanced Forum of Inheritance and Development of Chinese Traditional Music (*Zhongguo Minzu Yinyue de Chuancheng yu Fazhan Gaoceng Luntan*) recorded a debate between the supporters of development and those placing more emphasis on tradition. The musicologist Tian Qing has questioned the assertion that development is always indiscriminately applauded and rarely opposed in China. Despite the critical voices that emerge from time to time, however, the number of formal academic publications on this issue is still relatively low and confined to a rather limited circle. What is more, this argument can hardly become a part of mainstream mode of thought given that Chinese society is changing fast and that the old social contexts for music can hardly be retained in practice. Thus, what has most deeply influenced the thinking of urban symphonic composers is the notion of “development”, the resolution to the problem of finding ways to give traditional Chinese music a future in the modern metropolis. In the following sections I will elaborate on the impact of this mindset on the creations of symphonic music.

Treating “raw materials” from rural and minority music cultures in the new social-political circumstances

Social change after 1980 updated the ways that “raw materials” from rural and minority music cultures were conceived and dealt with, as compared to Mao’s era. Gradual penetration of modern urban culture and exposure to Western and popular

³¹⁴ Jiang Ming, “*Guanyu Minzu Yinyue Yichan Baohu Wenti de Jidian Xiangfa*” (Some Thoughts on the Protection of National Music Legacy), *Yinyue Yanjiu*, June 2006, Vol. 2, pp. 7-8.

music forms – also symbols of modernity – pushed the traditional forms to the point of being ignored. This was further aggravated by the shrinkage of the agricultural class – the material, social or community basis of traditional music performance – brought about by breakneck urbanisation. Local governments, as a result, have been seeking ways to “revive” aboriginal music genres and make them adapt to the taste of the younger generation brought up in modern urban cities. This also involved producing economic benefit by converting the “raw” music creativity and performance of rural communities into commercial and popularised tourist attractions – turning them into the bearers of exoticism.

While “raw materials” from rural and minority music cultures continued to play a role in constructing educational and political propaganda, just as they did in the pre-“Reform-and-Opening-Up” period, they have turned increasingly to instrumentalism in order to express the composers’ ego, their individuality and personal inner world. In tandem with this process was the embrace, as well as extensive deployment of, the modern compositional means of Western instrumental music as a manifestation of technical development. I shall return to discuss these issues in the following sections related to symphonic creation and traditional instrument reform.

Many of the new compositional works relying on rural and minority music legacies were, or at least were propagandised to be, booming alongside the nationwide campaign of *Xibu Da Kaifa* (Develop-the-West) starting in 2000. This campaign aims to offer preferential policies to the western regions of China so as to spur faster development on this land and to narrow the gap between China’s western and the eastern regions – in the latter the Reform and Opening-up policy had been implemented earlier and more thoroughly. The so-called “western regions” encompass the following provinces and regions: Gansu, Guizhou, Qinghai, Shaanxi, Sichuan, Yunnan, as well as the five minority autonomous regions – Inner Mongolia, Ningxia, Guangxi, Tibet and Xinjiang, all of which have a large percentage of rural and minority

population. Control and utilisation of raw music materials of these areas have been consequently incorporated into the long-term process of “innercolonialism” of subcultures by Han culture (in a socialist way). In major minority regions, such as Xinjiang, Tibet and Yunnan, westernised orchestras were organised officially, and given intense training, to present on the *huiyan* occasions in order to show how the cultural and artistic level of these regions have been “enhanced”.³¹⁵ A lot of events were consciously or tacitly organised as emblematic of new turns in politics. In Yunnan, a special ethnic music show was presented in the Chuxiong Yi Autonomous Prefecture on the eve of the 12th National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party of 2002. This show was believed to “involve a number of unique, although imperfect, instruments, and make these instruments, which had been originally simple, coarse, and monotonous in their expressive ability, step onto the refined stage at the provincial level in the form of an ensemble, just as professional musicians do.”³¹⁶ In Guizhou, the commission (at national bidding) of a representative song composition that was desired to “earn Guizhou ethnic culture popularity and fame across the country”, was held to echo the central government’s officially approved strategy to accelerate the economic development of this province.³¹⁷ Despite the forms that these events apparently took, inherent in all of them are the discourse of minority music cultures being compressed, “essentialised” and generally taken advantage of, in order to meet certain political goals.

Another form of Nationalism: the Chinese appropriation of Postmodernism

³¹⁵ For further information see Du Yaxiong, “*Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Shaoshu Minzu Yinyue Fazhan zhi Huigu*” (A Review on the Development of Minorities Music During the 20th Century), *Yunnan Yishu Xueyuan Xuebao (Journal of Yunnan Arts Institute)*, (02) 2000, pp. 5-11; Tong Laga, “*Shaoshu Minzu Yinyue 60 Nian: Chuancheng yu Fazhan*” (60 Years of Minorities Music: Inheritance and Development), *Zhongguo Minzu Bao (China Ethnic News)*, 18 September 2009; Yin Zhuoma, “*Zou Xiang Xueyu Gaoyuan de Minzu zhi Sheng: Xizang Aiyue Yuetuan Shouci Canjia ‘Zhongguo Jiaoxiangyue zhi Chun’ Zhanyan Ceji*” (A National Voice in Snowland: the First Participation by Tibetan Philharmonic Orchestra in “The Spring of Chinese Symphonic Music”), *Xizang Yishu Yanjiu (Tibetan Art Research)*, (03) 2010, pp. 80-6.

³¹⁶ Qian Kangning, “*Zhizhuo de Tuohuangzhe: Ting Na Shaocheng Yunnan Minzu Jiaoxiangyue Zuopin Yinyuehui*” (A Persistent Pioneer: Na Shaocheng’s Yunnan Ethnic Music Works Concert), *Yunling Gesheng (China Yunnan Music)*, (06) 2004.

³¹⁷ Du Zaijiang, “*Wo Sheng Qidong ‘Qi Ge Yi’ Minzu Wenhua Gongzuo*”, *Guizhou Minzu Bao*, 27 February 2012.

Meanwhile, as Chinese composers and musicologists became increasingly exposed to Western contemporary thought over the last ten years of the 20th century, a new representation of Nationalism emerged from out of their engagement with Postmodernism.

Since the 1980s, effort has been increasingly paid to exploring and revitalising the old cultural legacies of China, many of which had been treated as taboos during the earlier revolutionary era. This rediscovery has been coupled with a tendency to pay attention to, as well as to imitate the tone, manner and expression of Western thoughts with the aim of creating a dialogue of equals with the civilisation that the latter stands for. Concepts such as “postmodernism” (*Hou Xiandai Zhuyi*) and “deconstruction” (*Jiegou Zhuyi*) became popular, but not necessarily carrying the same meaning that they do in their original contexts. Rather employed in the context of a modernising China, they have generated new connotations for Chinese intellectuals and been appropriated by a new trend of nationalism. This mindset is eminent in the following passage by Wang Yuechuan, a professor of aesthetics from Peking University:

Postmodernist culture is characterised by its tolerance, plurality, acceptance of marginality, anti-foundationalism, and fondness of differentiation. ... Postmodernism is geared toward dissolving centrality, order and authority. ... No authority has the right to a monopoly of control over the processes of intelligent exploration and spiritual freedom, and no idea or school of thought can be taken as an absolute authority while ignoring the existence of others. ... If we say, the task of [Chinese] scholars and artists of the beginning of the 20th century was to open a window for Western knowledge to come in, then, the task for us at the end of the 20th century is to open the door to let the Chinese cultural spirit step to the world, to let its voice heard in the new global layout ... where any “ultimate” and “authorised” assertions will give place to open and attentive conversations.³¹⁸

This comment is, however, somewhat contradictory in that it perceives the “Chinese cultural spirit” as a unitary entity, an idea which is in itself against the pluralist and decentered description of “postmodern culture”. To take the descriptive (and

³¹⁸ Wang Yuechuan, “*Zhongguo Wenhua Zhuanxing zhong de Yishu Shenmei Dingwei*” (The Position of Art and Aesthetics in the Transforming Chinese Culture), *Chinese Music*, (4) 1994.

prescriptive) insights of postmodernism in the appraisal of late 20th-century culture as applying only to the West and to ignore these insights when dealing with one's own cultural formation (reaffirming centrality and dominance) is quite a contortion of the postmodernist view and is a variant of the classic Chinese nationalist agenda. The calling for "tolerance", "plurality" and "open conversations" can but be translated into the desire to enhance China's global power through gaining its culture wider attention and acclaim. For this goal, Chinese composers have endeavoured to endow their music with more philosophical meanings, promoting a profound, metaphysical understanding of the cultural spirit underlying it. In the following sections I will suggest how the creation of Chinese symphonies in the new era, as well as the relative criticism and comments, were indebted to this notion.

The purpose of this chapter is to reveal the process of reconstructing "high culture", of restoring national confidence and of enhancing the nation's global power, through the symphonic creations of the period from around 1980 until the end of the 20th century. It will also reflect the tendency of veering away from the CCP's earlier cultural policy of sticking to the majority's level of appreciation and taste, in seeking the above goal. It will also draw our attention to some affiliated issues such as the impact on art music of the process of marketisation.

4.3 A Bird's-Eye View of Chinese Symphonic Creations after 1980

The symphony, as a highly mature form of Western art music, had experienced a "honeymoon" with Chinese composers during the first decades of PRC. It needs to be accentuated that what are referred to as "symphonies" here actually include those "hybrids" of common types of Western orchestra with Chinese traditional instruments, as well as those purely consisting of Chinese instruments – the "Chinese national

orchestra” that was discussed in the previous chapter. From 1980 on, the rapidly changing political and social environment has allowed Chinese composers to apply various new concepts and methods. In exploring the symphonic creations of this period, the rise of individualism, as cause and effect of technical innovation, has probably caught the attention of most critics, since it appeared to be the most immediate and visible concomitant of greater freedom in the political and cultural sphere. However in this thesis matters will be perceived from another angle: not accentuating the music’s detachment from political ideology but casting a light on their inherent connections in new ways. Basing myself on this consideration I am going to suggest three main trends in the creative discourse of symphonies of this period: individualisation, marketisation and internationalisation. It is also necessary to point out that, for those Chinese composers travelling to or staying in Western countries or the surrounding regions of China such as Hong Kong or Singapore, the consciousness of individuality or the striving for international acclaim are more structural or spontaneous and stand by themselves; whereas, on the Chinese mainland, these attitudes and values never really break away from the influence of politics.

– **Individualisation.** Post-1980 Chinese symphonic composers have largely distinguished themselves from the former generation in that their works are no longer the unanimous reflection of the realistic “collective” life, or serve as the Party’s propaganda tool (in carrying very obvious revolutionary motives, contents and elements). Rather, they have much more freely been able to render their individual thoughts and values, their philosophical and emotional experiences about life and the world. Different from the earlier symphonic works that often have a distinct narrative or educational role, the meaning of the works are often vague and open to interpretation. These musical works have taken on more “abstract” forms in which the expressive force of the instruments is put in the first place and outmodes the demand for presenting a clear, identifiable and educational theme.

Zhu Jian-er has been a titan in this tide of exploration. Born in 1922, Zhu used to

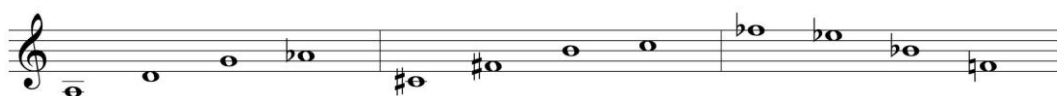
study piano and composition as a teenager in Shanghai. He acted as conductor in the band of the East China region of the New Fourth Army (a unit of the National Revolutionary Army of the Republic of China established in 1937) and was professional composer for film companies in Shanghai and Beijing. In 1955 Zhu travelled to Moscow in order to further study composition at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory of Music, and after returning to China he was appointed as composer-in-residence for the Shanghai Experimental Opera House (*Shanghai Shiyan Gejuyuan*) and the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. As a typical intellectual of his generation, who experienced the revolutionary period and the “orthodox” Socialism of the 1950s, and who was inflicted-upon and confused by the suppression of art in the Cultural Revolution, Zhu’s will and inspiration for creation reached a zenith due to the freer environment after 1980. The rich outcome became a venerable symbol of the relative freedom of this era. He produced his first symphony at the age of 60, and another nine in the following 22 years, plus many other symphonic genres like tone poems, fantasies and concertos written for a Western style orchestra together with Chinese traditional instruments.

The ten symphonies by Zhu Jian-er are intense embodiments of Zhu’s individual taste and characteristics. Cai Qiaozhong’s doctoral thesis (2002) carries out an all-round research into these achievements, showing Zhu Jian-er as a highly explorative modern composer whose works are “extremely complicated and full of variety”.³¹⁹ Throughout his thesis Cai discusses Zhu’s creative employment of twentieth-century compositional techniques, including numerical rhythm, potential tonality, aleatory music and microtonal music. In terms of formal layout Cai also identifies a variety of forms: modified structure, marginal structure, free structure and spanning structure, etc. But what really caught Cai’s attention is the characteristic tone sets or series designed by Zhu which are not only found to be the backbone of the motifs generated, but also as providing the fundamental elements for the whole symphony. The basic principles for these series, according to Cai, were derived from classic twelve-note serialism and J. M. Hauer’s theory of the hexachord. In addition, Cai argues that the various elements of

³¹⁹ Cai Qiaozhong, *Tan Lu Zhe de Qiusuo – Zhu Jian-er Jiaoxiangqu Chuangzuo Yanjiu (The Exploration of a Pathfinder: Researches of the Symphonies of Zhu Jian-er)*. Phd thesis, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2002, p. 10.

these series are of multiple origins. While some of them are inspired by Chinese musical and linguistic cultures (such as the intonation of ancient poems and operatic singing), some others spring out from Zhu’s inner world and reflect his personal speculation about the world around him, not least Chinese modern history and society. For example, in Zhu’s Symphony No. 1 completed in 1986 – a work with the theme of the Cultural Revolution according to the composer himself,³²⁰ Zhu creates a distinctive 4-tone set (Example 4.1). The successive intervals of a fourth between the first three tones can be still be interpreted as being influenced by the customary melodic progression of Chinese traditional music. Cai Qiaozhong perceives the last note, a minor second from the third one, a metaphor for an “extremely obstinate and unyielding” personality, being strongly linked to the composer’s own identity.³²¹ In another analytical thesis, the minor second interval is believed to signify a character that is “sharp, undaunted by any difficulties or adversities.”³²² While the whole piece narrates a common historical memory, it is fair to say that Zhu’s individuality stands out clearly.

Example 4.1 The basic tone row extracted from Zhu Jian-er’s Symphony No. 1, set in prime, transposition and retrograde forms, cited from Cai Qiaozhong (2002).



Another strong manifestation of Zhu Jian-er’s individuality may be found in his “name motif”, C-B-Bb-Eb-G-A, that permeates Zhu’s Symphony No. 8. This motif simulates the intonation of the Chinese intonation of his name (Example 4.2). When the motif first appears in the symphony, it is marked with *sforzando* and *fff* to maximise

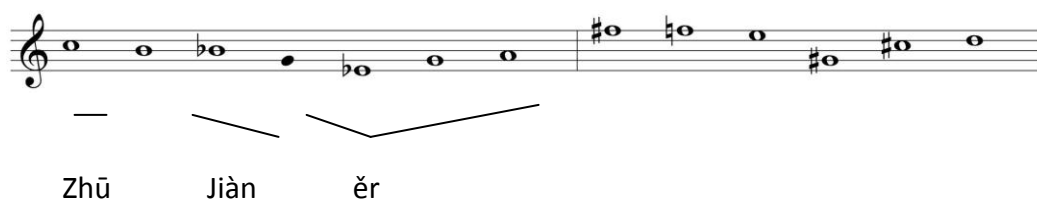
³²⁰ See Wu Zuqiang et al., “*Diyi Jiaoxiangqu Zuotanhui Fayan Zhaiyao*” (Zhu Jian-er’s Symphony No. 1 Forum Summary). *Journal of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music*, (02) 1987, pp. 29-35 & 23.

³²¹ Cai Qiaozhong, *Tan Lu Zhe de Qiusuo – Zhu Jian-er Jiaoxiangqu Chuangzuo Yanjiu* (*The Exploration of a Pathfinder: Researches of the Symphonies of Zhu Jian-er*). Phd thesis, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2002, p. 22.

³²² Dai Shuibing, *Zhu Jian-er Diyi Jiaoxiangqu de Yanjiu* (*A Study on Zhu Jian-er’s Symphony No. 1*), Master’s thesis, Southwest University, 2010.

its impression and dramatic effect.³²³ Formerly, composers in China had not been encouraged to highlight their own name or personal creativity in music pieces, and thus many of their works had been mistaken as a kind of “people’s creation” or had the composer’s name remain secondary or even unclear. In around 1960 Zhu Jian-er wrote a famous revolutionary song: *Sing a Mountain Song for the Party (Chang Zhi Shangge Gei Dang Ting)*, but even now some media authorities, let alone the general public, have often identified the composer’s name wrongly, despite the fact that both its melody and lyric are still commonly known.³²⁴ These examples reveal the consciousness for expressing the “ego” of the composer as, to a large degree, heightened, in contrast to the prior practice of simply dedicating all their works and efforts to a common public course or political agenda.

Example 4.2 The “name motif” of Zhu Jian-er’s Symphony No. 8, in prime and transposition (with variation) forms, transcribed by Cai Qiaozhong (2002).



Cai Qiaozhong attributes Zhu Jian-er’s symphonic creation after 1980 to a psychological background of “revival of the self” after the spiritual suppression by the Cultural Revolution.³²⁵ The emancipation of thought opened the way to a gigantic enthusiasm for composition in new ways and threw up names like Wang Xilin, Gao Weijie, Tan Dun, Guo Wenjing, Qu Xiaosong, Chen Yi, Xu Shuya and many others. In

³²³ Liang Lei, “Xunzhao Geren yu Minzu de Shengyin: Zhu Jian-er Jiaoxiangyue Zuopin de Tezheng” (Finding the Voices of Individual and the Nation: The Features of Zhu Jian-er’s Symphonic Works), *People’s Music*, (01) 2005, p. 24.

³²⁴ For example, in January 2010 the journal *Dang’an Chunqiu (Memories and Archives)* published an article named “Lei Feng Zhaopian Shi Zenyang Pai Chu Lai De” (How Photographs for Lei Feng Were Made). It makes reference to the song *Chang Zhi Shangge Gei Dang Ting* but mentions both its lyric writer and composer erroneously. A reader then discovered the error and sent a correction letter, which was published in the next volume of the journal.

³²⁵ See Cai Qiaozhong, *Tan Lu Zhe de Qiusuo – Zhu Jian-er Jiaoxiangyue Chuangzuo Yanjiu (The Exploration of a Pathfinder: Researches of the Symphonies of Zhu Jian-er)*. Phd thesis, Shanghai Conservatory of Music, 2002, pp. 365-68.

terms of formal structure they often broke away from the clear “narrative” structure that is built on realistic sequence but felt free to “skip from one space to another.”³²⁶ In many works they weaken the image of motifs but put other more abstract music features – such as timbre and orchestration – at the first place, thus depriving the music of any specific meaning, let alone any educational sense. Many composers found their inspiration in elements from history and culture, many elements of which had been denounced and turned into taboos during the revolutionary period, but avoided faithfully representing these elements in the original forms and styles. For the post-1980 composers, traditional Chinese instruments and genres – whether *banhu*, *guqin* or any school of operatic singing – are more frequently appropriated as bearers of the philosophical inquiries and explorations in their inner heart, or to be bridges between the past and modernity.

In practice, Cai’s approach to Zhu Jian-er’s symphonies, exemplified by the type of judgmental tone he employed, was by no means restricted to Cai himself, but was a commonplace among Chinese musicologists in the appraisal of symphonic composers of the Chinese mainland after 1980. For these composers, their personal styles and creativity would receive more acclaim when they were believed to be rooted in the soil of the national culture. This attitude is most evident in a handful of articles, published in mainstream music journals like *People’s Music*, concerning the works of seasoned mainland composers, such as Fang Kejie, Bao Yuankai, Jin Xiang, Xu Zhenmin, and so on.³²⁷ Interestingly, those Chinese musicians or critics based overseas would also adopt this kind of tone, when they needed to publish articles in domestic academic journals of China. For example, Liang Lei, who teaches at the University of California at

³²⁶ See Li Xi’an, “*Xiandai Yinyue Sichao Duihualu – Li Xi’an, Qu Xiaosong, Ye Xiaogang, Tan Dun*” (The Dialogues about Modern Music Trends: Li Xi’an, Qu Xiaosong, Ye Xiaogang and Tan Dun), *People’s Music*, (16) 1986.

³²⁷ These articles include Yang Yang, “*Wei Fazhan Zhongguo de Minzu Jiaoxiangyue er Nuli: Cong Fang Kejie Jiaoxiangyue Zuopin Yinyuehui Suo Xiang Dao De*” (Make Efforts to Develop Chinese National Symphonies: Thoughts on Fang Kejie’s Symphonic Works Concerts), *People’s Music*, (02) 2007, pp. 36-7; Zhang Meng, “*Zhigen Bentu, Jishen Shijie: Ji “Yanhuang Fengqing” Shouyan 15 Zhounian Yinyuehui, Yantaohui*” (Taking Root in Chinese Music Leads to Success in the World: Notes on the Concert and Seminar Marking the 15th Anniversary of the Premier of *Yanhuang Fengqing*), *People’s Music*, (03) 2007, pp. 22-3 & 97-8; Zhao Dongmei, “*Xianming de Gexing, Shenke de Sixiang: Jin Xiang Jiaoxiang Zuopin Yinyuehui Guangan*” (Special Personality and Deep Thoughts: Impressions of Jin Xiang’s Symphonic Works Concert), *Chinese Music*, (02) 2009, pp. 259-60 & 266; Xia Ran, “*Xu Zhenmin Jiaoxiangqu Zuopin Yantaohui Zongshu*” (Overview of Xu Zhenmin’s Symphonic Works Symposium), *People’s Music*, (07) 2010, pp. 12-13; etc.

San Diego, talks about Zhu Jian-er's symphonic works as merging "the individual and nation's voices".³²⁸ In these cases the composers were revered as establishment figures and cultural heroes, with secure bases in official institutions and with their works having many opportunities to be performed. Conversely, those who were "only" concerned in displaying their own individuality and who seemed scarcely to display any tie with their "mother" culture – for example Tan Dun, Qu Xiaosong, Ye Xiaogang and Xu Shuya – were simply treated as "way-out" avant-garde figures. At least before 1985, they encountered more criticism than acclaim, so that many of them seemed to be "expelled" and chose to establish themselves abroad.³²⁹

To conclude, although the individually-based trend of symphonic creation did not entirely ignore criticism from the mainland, it soon took on its own momentum. On one side, although not being as easily acceptable to a common audience, nor to the cultural authorities as to the preceding generation, composers after 1980 were much more concerned about rendering their own distinctive characters through their music. On the other hand, they also listened to the summons of the cultural market and the tide of globalisation.

– **Marketisation.** 1992 was a pivotal year for Chinese economy and society, since in this year, Deng Xiaoping, who had resigned from Chinese politics but was still influential, visited several special economic zones in Guangdong Province. The visit was famously known as the "Southern Inspection Tour", from where Deng delivered important speeches on the acceleration and strengthening of economic reform in Chinese society. Thus the period from this year to 1997, when the Chinese Communist Party's 15th National Congress was held, was characterised by more extensive marketisation as well as more rapid economic growth.³³⁰ More state-sponsored

³²⁸ Liang Lei, "Xunzhao Geren yu Minzu de Shengyin: Zhu Jian-er Jiaoxiangyue Zuopin de Tezheng" (Finding the Voices of Individual and the Nation: The Features of Zhu Jian-er's Symphonic Works), *People's Music*, (01) 2005, pp. 23-7.

³²⁹ See Shi Chengzi, "Ping Xinchao Jiaoxiangyue" (Comments on New Symphonies), *Music Study*, September 1996, Vol. 3, pp. 18-29.

³³⁰ See C. Mackerras, P Taneja & G Young, *China since 1978 (2nd Ed.)*. South Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Limited, 1998, chapter 6.

institutions – including those in the sectors of education and hygiene – were now pushed into the market and made responsible for their own profits. Art troupes and music bands were also exposed to the same conditions. During the 1990s many central and regional orchestral bands were economically reconstructed and stopped getting financial support from government.

In 1996, the Chinese Ministry of Culture implemented a large-scale “structural adjustment” among its directly controlled performance units.³³¹ In this adjustment, the former Central Symphony Orchestra (*Zhongyang Yuetuan*) was reconstructed as and renamed China National Symphonic Orchestra (*Zhongguo Jiaoxiang Yuetuan*). The original leadership by the Communist Party Committee was replaced by that of the art director (the first one being Chen Zuohuang, who also acted as the orchestra’s legal representative). This put an end to the history of the orchestra as an organ of state but made it function like a corporation, which is equipped with special marketing and management personnel. There were no more life-time guarantees for the positions of the orchestra’s performers. Instead, every new member was appointed through open selection and competition and needed to sign a periodical employment contract with the orchestra, which lasted for a limited number of years.

In the area of composition, the marketisation tide broke the usual circumstance where the creations and performance of symphonic works were mainly carried out as a response to officially organised contests or as music commissioned for national festivals and occasions such as the National Day, the Foundation Day of Chinese Communist Party and the handover of Hong Kong from the UK to China.³³² Instead, the orchestral bands, and even individual performers, started to hunt for appropriate composers to create the “right” works for them. In either case, the composers were paid with high financial rewards and the whole process often involved business sponsorship by

³³¹ Jiao Liying & Tao Xingqiang, “*Zhongguo Jiaoxiang Yuetuan de Tizhi Gaige*” (The Structural Reform of China National Symphonic Orchestra), *The People’s Republic of China Yearbook* (1996), pp. 904-6.

³³² Cai Qiaozhong, “*Zhengji’ yu ‘Weiyue’ Shuang Guan Qi Xia de Zhongguo Jiaoxiangyue Chuangzuo – 1999 Nian Zhongguo Jiaoxiangyue Chuangzuo Zongshu* (“Recruiting” and “Entrusting” as Two Major Lines of Chinese Symphonic Creations in 1999), *The Annual of Chinese Music* (2000), Beijing: Music Institute, Chinese National Academy of Arts, 2000, pp. 165-82.

domestic or foreign enterprises. This process largely stimulated the growth of symphonic works by composers from different backgrounds, superseding the condition that only composers in the Chinese mainland had chances to submit their works. The cooperation between a specific performer and composer often highlights a certain kind of instrument and extends the feasibility of fusing traditional Chinese instruments with the Western orchestra. The case study in Section 4.4 will provide an interesting example of how such cooperation in marketing impacted the procedure of creation and finally shaped the whole symphonic work.

– **Internationalisation.** Examination of the development of symphonic creations in China from 1980 to the end of 20th century shows that it was heavily driven by the aspiration of enhancing the status of Chinese culture and art in the world. It was a by-product of strengthening the notion of nationalism across the Chinese society, an attempt by the Chinese Communist Party to revive its legitimacy as the adherence to Marxism-Leninism declined after the Cultural Revolution.³³³ It was facilitated by the above mentioned tendency of marketisation, as the orchestras under business management were able to more flexibly and frequently organise “performance seasons” in a more international environment; the cooperation of conductors, performers and recording companies from foreign countries enabled the works to reach out to a much broader audience.

Despite the fact that in the process of opening to the outside world, composers increasingly broke away from the older administrative mode under a centrally planned economy, the dominance of state and the ideology of nationalism in artistic conception by no means waned. Deeming their music a tool for raising the country’s “soft power”, composers were eager to see their works acclaimed by audiences of the West and taken to be as valuable as the existing Western music canon. For this purpose they took a rather scrupulous and selective use of the elements inherited from the legacy of traditional Chinese music. The following excerpt from a TV interview precisely reflects

³³³ See C. Mackerras, P Taneja & G Young, *China since 1978 (2nd Ed.)*. South Melbourne: Addison Wesley Longman Australia Pty Limited, 1998, p. 54.

such an ambition for a presence on the so-called “world stage”. The interview was done by China Central Television in 2007 with Bao Yuankai on the premiere of his *Beijing Opera Symphony (Jingju Jiaoxiangqu)*. In the interview Bao commented:

The repertoire of Chinese traditional music is so immense that it is hard to learn all of it even at the price of exhausting your life, so one must choose its most essential part, and it is especially important to let it enter real life. Of course, the folk song sung by a shepherd boy is also a form of real life, but it is so in a completely different sense to the conception of a world stage, the “real life” world stage. This cannot be realised without the labour of composers, for which I believe a persistent notion is the confidence of the nation. I am certain that the Chinese music tradition will become a treasure of the world music repository through the taking of proper forms.³³⁴

The reference that Bao Yuankai made to the selective use of traditional Chinese music and to entering the “world stage” not only indicates a strong wish to be modern and globalised, but, in another sense, it reminds people of the cultural motto of “Absorbing the Essence, Discarding the Dross” of Mao Zedong’s time. However, whereas in Mao’s period the reconstructed culture was to serve class struggle and revolution and the building of an egalitarian state, Bao’s words shows a departure from – if not a subversion of – Mao’s idea by denying the shepherd boy from the scope of “real life”, an indication of the widening class gaps resulted from the economic reform.

In conclusion to this section: symphonic creations had been extraordinarily re-vitalised in China from 1980 until the end of the 20th century alongside the political and social freedoms engendered by the Reform and Opening-up Policy. The rising of individual styles, the openness to the market and to the outside world in the process of symphonic creation undoubtedly echoed the main themes of the time. Yet, the apparent freedom did not shift very far away from the influence of State and politics, but was profoundly imbedded in it. In many contexts, the output of the composers was not only a manifestation of their own individual creativity, but a symbol of the prevailing political culture and the influence of the State. The following case study will

³³⁴ This is from the interview with Bao Yuankai by the “Music Life” column, China Central Television, 4 February 2007.

be a synthetic reflection of all these through looking at a discourse of the creation, performance, and reception of one single piece by a Chinese mainland composer.

4.4 A Case Study: Yang Qing's *Wilderness* for *Dizi* and Orchestra

Yang Qing's *Wilderness (Cang)* for *dizi* (Chinese transverse flute) and orchestra was composed in 1991. It was premiered in 1992 by Zhang Weiliang and the Chinese Central Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Tan Lihua. In China of the early 1990s, the appearance of this piece offered a "new" and modern impression because of its adoption of an atonal idiom. It was also one of the earliest attempts in mainland China to apply such a method of composition to Chinese traditional instruments. At the same time, as claimed by the composer himself, this work draws largely upon the indigenous musical language of the Hunan area of China. The composer had lived in this province for eight years and the music language was one with which he was deeply enchanted.

In discussing the merging of Western art music with other musical traditions, especially those from Oriental cultures, one must take note of the fact that this process occurred at various particular times in Western compositional history, such that each musical product bears special historical and social connotations. The operas that flourished from the 18th to the early 20th century set in such places as Turkey, Persia, Egypt, India and China (Bizet's *Les Pêcheurs de Perles*, Verdi's *Aida*, Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* and *Turandot*, etc.) echoed the imperial exploits and colonial expansion of the Western powers.³³⁵ From the 19th century on, improved methods of transport and communications and increased colonisation of the non-Western world made it possible for Western musicians to experience (directly and indirectly) different peoples and

³³⁵ Ralph P. Locke, "Orientalism", *Grove Music Online*. *Oxford Music Online*. 16 Dec 2011.
<http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/grove/music/40604>.

cultures. This increased contact made more opportunities to create “exotic” music, which became a fashion and enabled composers to evolve new styles and languages. Since then many prominent composers in the Western tradition, such as Debussy, Berlioz, Poulenc and Stravinsky, have made free use of music idioms, tunes, rhythmic features, techniques and instruments from other music traditions of the world, but their intention was mostly oriented to enriching their own music with little intention to evoke the cultures from which the exotic factors originated.³³⁶ This practice has more particularly been condemned for being saturated with Eurocentric fantasies and misunderstandings, and even denounced as kleptomania at its worst.³³⁷

In the previous chapters I have already discussed the combination of Western art music techniques with indigenous Chinese music traditions from an earlier period, and I have pointed out the fact that from 1940s to the end of the 1970s, this combination had mostly drawn on the classical and romantic idioms of Western art music; whereas those eminent figures of Western art music history who appeared as more “modern”, such as Debussy, had been condemned for representing the decadence of Western capitalism (see Chapter 3). What kind of particular indication did it bear then, when Chinese composers, after 1980, came to embrace such “modern” compositional means? For me it was above all a reflection of the Chinese choice of opening itself up to the Western culture and of preparing to become a part of the competition of cultures on the world stage. Thus composers chose to rely on this form not because they truly embraced this culture, but because it stood for Western “advancement”, and to learn to master it was couched as a matter of national honour. For this purpose the musicians could by no means remain faithful and conservative successors of their own traditions. Rather, the then current political environment bestowed on them the right to be the new “monarch”, the manipulators of tradition, exerting on the latter their own interpretation and ways of polishing, so as to make it more adaptable for an educated cosmopolitan audience.

³³⁶ Jeffrey Dean, “exoticism”, *The Oxford Companion to Music*. Ed. Alison Latham. *Oxford Music Online*. 16 Dec 2011. <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/subscriber/article/opr/t114/e2373>.

³³⁷ Barbara Mittler, “Making the Road”, *Dangerous Tunes: The Politics of Chinese Music in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People’s Republic of China since 1949*, p. 19.

I choose Yang Qing's *Wilderness* as the case study for this chapter because almost every issue in which this piece is involved – from the process of its conception and production to its successful reception, from its musical, aesthetic elements to its ideological constituents, and from the composer's personal past to his aspirations for the future as expressed in this piece of music – is deeply and often provocatively interrelated with the cultural politics and ideological currents of the period. This case study will include the proceedings of a face-to-face interview with Yang Qing (which will serve as the main resource for most of the information in this section), an analysis of the piece itself, reviews of the relevant commentaries and articles and a brief introduction to the history and reformed use of the key instrument, the *dizi*. Taking together these elements will not only reveal how the coming into shape of this particular piece was subject to the influence of political changes – such as the process of marketisation, the pursuit of greater liberty and the intensely presented agenda of nationalism – but will also suggest the curious role that Western art music, especially Western modern art music, played in this process. While ostensibly being deployed as a bearer of national honour, this kind of music had actually come to represent the culture of the elite and so ran the risk of deviating from the taste of the general public.

On the whole, what is revealed in this case study can be understood as a part of the larger story of music, politics and social development as described in the previous sections. What is manifested is how the essential forms and characteristics of Western art music assumed such a symbolic significance so as to become a key player, an important expressive media, in the cultural politics and aspirations of the new era. It shows how a Chinese composer was able to interpret and exploit the fundamental similarities and affinities between modern Western art music and traditional Chinese music (although the latter was often the consequence of biased – or one might say “creative” – individual understanding, refining or appropriation) and to transfer an old, indigenous and simpler musical tradition into a more “sophisticated” music (in sense of an art culture and of a complex genre) to win this tradition more acclaim from the

other side of the world, where such “sophistication” is valued and instituted at a high level. It shows that this process of creation and appropriation had been taken as a “hook” on which to hang the composers’ ideal in terms of heightening the status of Chinese culture in the world (and of course the particular political power it was supposed to represent). Furthermore, it testifies how a composer’s individuality was hailed and celebrated when it was believed to sprout from a national culture and its traditions.

The composer’s past: from the Hunan countryside to two urban conservatories

From 1970 to the end of the Cultural Revolution and in the following two years (1977-1978), Yang Qing acted as a violinist at the Revolution Committee’s art troupe at Hengyang, a county at the southern part of Hunan Province. In this environment Yang was detached from the influence of Western culture, except perhaps for the Western instrument he played, the violin – which had not been banned even during the Cultural Revolution (as was mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). During this time Yang had abundant experience of local folk songs and of local methods of dramatic performance. These formed the basis of his knowledge of music.

As Yang recalled, he was deeply enchanted not only by the music, but by the local life and people of Hunan. For him, Hunan was a place with an extremely colourful culture which combines folk and *wenren* (literate) traditions. On the characters of people in Hunan, Yang commented that,

They are straightforward and easily irritated. On the other hand, they are extremely humorous and optimistic. Hunan women are as tender as water. They are pure, honest, and upright. You can make lifelong friends with the people there. This is my personal understanding of Hunan and I always feel an impulse to express this and make it known to all over the world.

Yang Qing preserves this memory as an idealised collective image of the rural

people he was endeared to and this image is also part of the nationalism he wants to promote. One can easily identify, from this style of narration, the obvious flavours of the political and ideological currents that preceded and reached their frenzied apogee during the Cultural Revolution: the notion of perceiving “the people” and “the masses” as a valorised yet primitive source of artistic creations can be traced back to the 1942 Yan’an Forum on Literature and Art (see Chapter 3). After the foundation of the PRC, a unified paternalism encompassed all of its sub-regions, especially rural areas and minority regions, and the prevalent trend was one of passing regional and minority cultures to the “refining” and “improving” hand of professional artists; all of these exerted a deep influence on the minds of young people like Yang.

After the Cultural Revolution ended and when higher education all over the country started to revive, Yang became a composition student of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music at the age of 25. A cosmopolitan city of East Asia, Shanghai was never estranged from the influence of the Western world and its modern culture even during the revolutionary times. Immediately after the late 1970s the Shanghai Conservatory of Music had held many lectures about modern Western music. Having suffered from “long bout of depression and a hunger for knowledge” caused by the Cultural Revolution, Yang and his companions all felt prey to a heavy pressure and a great responsibility. “Western music was like a magnificent mountain in front of us. How could we gradually climb up to the same height and produce equally great music of our own?” Such a question Yang keeps to himself. Like many of his peers who had just stepped out from the artistic and cultural scarcity engendered by the Cultural Revolution, Yang was eager to create something to celebrate the advent of the new era as well as the resurgence of his country, to incorporate his attachment to the old agriculture-based society and its cultural products and to fulfill his aspirations in terms of a modern, urban and increasingly globalised culture.

After graduation Yang was assigned as a teacher to the China Conservatory at Beijing in the early 1980s. This conservatory was founded in 1964 by the former

Chinese premier Zhou Enlai, especially for the study, performance and promotion of traditional Chinese music as a core constituent of a socialist national culture. Although it was closed during the Cultural Revolution and not re-open until 1982, the older generation of its staff still perceived the preservation, extension and appropriation of tradition as their more important “political role” and were reluctant to attempt anything new or modern for a long time. Yang felt lost at the beginning since there was a big gap between this institution and the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, where he was earlier trained. In the China Conservatory, he could hardly even find a piano, let alone other Western orchestral instruments. He was allocated a very small flat and paid with a fairly meager wage. These factors taken together once dampened his spirit and blurred his view of the future.

It is of no wonder that in such an environment Yang and other young staff of the China Conservatory were hungry for some change, and it was they who took the initiative in making a breakthrough. Zhang Weiliang, a *dizi* performer living next door to Yang and one of Yang’s friends, was one of them. Being eager to make his own fame through holding some innovative concerts, he often beseeched Yang Qing to write new pieces for him combining European music and Chinese traditional instruments in modern style. In 1984, Yang wrote the first piece of this kind for chamber band and *chiba* (a southern Chinese vertical flute) for Zhang Weiliang to perform at the Northern China Music Festival. This piece was disliked by the judging committee for being “too noisy” and “not a typical of product of the China Conservatory”, but another visiting group from Shanghai insisted that this was an excellent work, created by “a real conservatory-trained composer.” Upon their insistence, this piece was allowed to be presented at the festival and proved to be the first success of their cooperation.

Stories surrounding the creation of *Wilderness*

In the 1980s there was still a lot of criticism toward modern symphonic music in China from cultural authorities in the government and from the elder and more conservative generations. Tan Dun's string quartet *Feng-Ya-Song*, which received the second prize at the Dresden International Weber Chamber Music Composition Competition in 1983, encountered both acclaim and objection on the Chinese mainland with the second attitude slightly gaining the upper hand. However, the situation showed a vital change in the early 1990s. The 1989 student demonstration in Tian'anmen Square and the notorious finale of this event led to a widespread abhorrence of political and administrative regulation. Leaders of music conservatories also loosened their requirements from and control of their composers. In academic and intellectual and artistic circles it became a popular trend to challenge the existing regime, or at least to explore something new. Meanwhile, it was also the time when music creations in China became increasingly open to the market. The major orchestras, which had been run as a business concern, were open to collaboration with any groups or individuals who were willing to provide financial sponsorship in order to try new innovative forms of music. However, for these Europeanised orchestras, to work with performers of Chinese traditional instruments was somewhat like condescending or even showing pity to the latter by offering more "intricate" performance of the orchestras.

In 1991, Zhang Weiliang, the young *dizi* performer, decided to organise a concert for himself, which combined the *dizi* and a Westernised orchestra. He managed to raise a fund of 300,000 RMB (equal to about 30,000 GBP) to pay the Central Philharmonic Orchestra for performing together with him at the concert, and he found a number of composers to help him, including Yang Qing, Gao Weijie and Shi Wanchun. Zhang did not ask for a specific form or style, but he requested the newly created works to fully reflect his performance capacity, that is, to play three octaves with a flute of six finger holes, whereas common *dizi* players at the time could only do two octaves plus one extra tone. It proved to be a major breakthrough in the performance of the *dizi*, and the success of Yang's work actually led to another upsurge of innovative *dizi* techniques

which I will mention later.

Yang Qing felt a new chance had been offered to him to retrieve the music language he had been endeared to at the Shanghai Conservatory of Music. He decided to rely on the music language of chromatic tones that he had learned to deploy in writing for Western instruments, and spent a lot of time working with Zhang Weiliang in order to find out what kind of arrangement of chromatic tones would make the latter feel the most comfortable, either through the control of fingers or breath.

According to the interview with Yang, the major inspiration for this work came from a previous short trip to the Changling area of Hengyang County in southern Hunan, where Yang and some other musicians performed for the workers of a storage reservoir. Following is Yang's account of how he was inspired to create this piece, from which one might be able to identify influences ranging from European romanticism, and the idealised, "pure" peasants' life as was commonly found in Communist-style narratives, to continuation of the Chinese literati's romanticisation of nature:

There, three very high mountains are covered by dense forest. When we were climbing up one of the mountains and felt extremely tired, I heard some axmen chopping trees faraway, accompanying themselves with loud singing. I was amazed by their voices and the musicality contained therein. This scene has attained the force of a myth in my mind for a long time – in a secluded environment without any disturbances, a singing voice suddenly bursts out with great vitality. It not only lasted for a few seconds, but, it went on consistently in which one axman's voice following and echoing another's. It spurred me on to think of the differing forms of life of human beings. We felt pestered by the tiresome journey, so how was it that could they remain so carefree, so vigorous and so at harmony with nature? I can never forget the spiritual aspect of this scene, and it was the origin of my work's title – "Wilderness", an image encompassing the wild, green mountain and its vivid and robust human life. It also made me reflect on all the confusions and difficulties that I had endured in this period of my life.

The solo instrument in *Wilderness*: the *dizi*, its past and present

In China, the *dizi* is a popular wind instrument with a long documented history. Traditionally, the techniques used in performing the *dizi* are divided into two distinct schools: the northern school and the southern school, which are differentiated from each other by their styles of tone production and ways of embellishing melodies. The southern style features mellow tone quality and lyric playing, which is commonly found in the classical operas such as *Kunqu* and *Jiangnan Sizhu*. The northern school, by contrast, is characterised by fast and rhythmic playing, a higher pitch and a more piercing and shrill tone quality, often accompanied by techniques such as glissando, tremolando, flutter tonguing and fast tonguing.³³⁸

In spite of its long history and rich performance tradition, before 1950, the *dizi* had mostly played a relatively minor role as an accompanying instrument in Chinese folk ensembles and operas. *Dizi* solos started to emerge on stage after 1950, along with government-sponsored standardisation of its technique and scores, as well as the compilation and arrangement of the traditional *dizi* repertoire.³³⁹ Since the 1960s there has been a process of massive technical reform and innovation with the aim of improving the performance capacity of the *dizi*, including the exploration of new materials for making the instrument, the expansion of its pitch range and the development of new breathing and finger skills. In the case of performers who sought special effects, extremely large or small sizes of *dizi* were used. In tandem with this technical progress there are also the increasingly varied and heightened roles that *dizi* plays in a variety of music genres; one may single out the concerto for *dizi* and Western orchestra as a particularly popular one. Works employing twelve-tone and chromatic tone languages also appeared after 1990.³⁴⁰ In many Chinese contemporary musical documents, these are all spoken of with pride and seen as the achievement of the PRC's cultural policy of developing traditional Chinese music.

³³⁸ Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. New York & Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008, 44.

³³⁹ Mao Yungang, "Xin Zhongguo Dizi Yishu Fazhan Shuping" (A Review on the Development of *Dizi* in New China), *Wenyi Zhengming (Contention of Arts)*, (12) 2010, pp. 143-6.

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

An early attempt at employing the *dizi* to play in a chromatic musical framework, *Wilderness* provides Chinese *dizi* players with a veritable treasure-house of techniques used in order to adapt this traditional instrument to the playing of modern European-style orchestral pieces. In this particular piece, the performer of the *dizi* is on many occasions required to precisely cover half of the finger-hole in order to render semitones. The pitch range of the *dizi* is expanded from two octaves into three octaves, which presents the *dizi* performer with a considerable challenge. At the premiere of *Wilderness* what Zhang Weiliang used was only an old style six-hole *dizi*, which was the only existing form of *dizi* at that time. Later, when Dai Ya, from Central Conservatory of China, performed this work, he used a new flute of eight finger holes invented by himself, thus making the performance much easier. For present-day *dizi* performers, this work is not a challenge at all. “Without the initiative taken by *Wilderness*,” Yang Qing said, “one could hardly imagine any technical innovation happened to the *dizi*. It could only remain within tonality. If you wanted to change the key, you had to change to another *dizi*, and thus had to carry a whole set of them, whereas at present a *dizi* performer needs only to carry one or two.”

From the last chapter one may infer that the massive activity involved in the standardisation of folk music in the 1950s was part of the colossal effort of Socialist cultural construction, and that the appropriation of traditional culture was mainly geared for the purposes of educating the people and of enriching the people’s cultural life, following the artistic criteria of socialism. Also to be coped with was the task of industrialisation. By comparison, in the era after 1980, the *dizi* was more often the instrument of choice due to its suitability for incorporation with Western style orchestras that were able to perform more “modern” and Western-style pieces. Thus in the hands of many enthusiastic reformists the *dizi* was equipped for a more “modern competence”, for example, the ability to play intensive and consecutive semitones (or in temperament), to modulate freely, and to play in a wider pitch range.³⁴¹ The accuracy and quality of the sound of the *dizi* was also improved according to the

³⁴¹ Tan Weiyu, “*Tan Dizi Gailiang zhong de Jicheng yu Fazhan Wenti*” (Questions of Inheritance and Development in *Dizi* Reform), *Yue Qi (Instruments)*, (06) 1984, pp. 5-6.

standards of instrument manufacturing in Western art music. These measures were not altogether accepted by all the *dizi* performers and researchers, since sometimes their implementation would affect the authenticity of received traditions.³⁴² However, they exhibited a clear trend in terms of bestowing a traditional instrument with an enlarged cosmopolitan audience so as to fulfill the Chinese aspiration to acquire not only economic but also cultural eminence in the world.³⁴³

An analysis of *Wilderness*

During my interview Yang Qing confessed that what he was writing was “Chinese native music”, despite whether he chose to use Western or Chinese instruments. For him (and probably for the majority of Chinese mainland composers), to use Western instruments would by no means curb his ability to express Chinese emotions or values. Rather, “Western” musical rules and instruments seemed to transcend their historical and cultural boundary and become the equivalent of a universal value in the mind of Chinese composers: something more resembling the case of the WTO or the Olympic rules that everyone would be equally entitled to follow. Yang also hoped his music would “speak a language that can touch and move people all over the world” and so be separated from simple entertainment (as indeed from a putatively purely “local product”). Again, this kind of mindset directly paralleled the growth of Chinese national strength and its eagerness to become one of the greatest powers in the world. The following analysis will show how the composer fused local or national music traits with the techniques of Western art music that he felt naturally “entitled” to deploy in the course of composition.

Yang Qing is not willing to define *Wilderness* as a “twelve-tone work”, as it only rarely manifests a recurring tone set, but a series of key notes are essential in

³⁴² Ibid.

³⁴³ For more details about the technical reform and adaption of *dizi* after the foundation of PRC, see Chang Zheng, “*Jian Shu Jian Guo Yilai Zhongguo Zhudi de Fazhan yu Gailiang*” (A Brief Introduction on the Development and Reform of the Chinese *Dizi* after the Foundation of PRC), *Chinese Music*, (02) 2009, pp. 192-4.

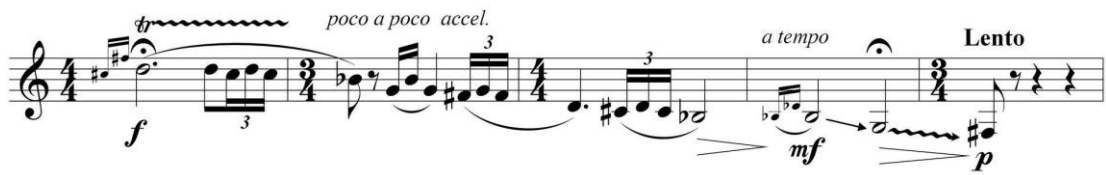
constructing the foreground of the whole work. Yang explained that these were extracted from the local music of the Hunan region, with which Yang had already been familiar, even before entering the Shanghai Conservatory of Music – music of which he had already collected several volumes of record by 1978. *Wilderness* just provided him with a chance to “get deeply inside” these concrete music materials and to turn them into more abstract and “sophisticated” forms. As noted by Yang himself,

I had known the music for so long by this time and had written a number of smaller pieces with these very materials, but it was only at this point that I was driven by multiple impulses to extract its very core. If I had only chosen to remain in the concrete and superficial ground of such music, this work should not be as influential as it is now.

According to Yang, the tones that function as the backbone of the themes of *Wilderness* can neither be accommodated by the frame of Western tonality, nor completely by the Chinese pentatonic system understood in the usual sense. Yang identifies two minor seconds, G#-A and D#-E, as the most definitive intervals of the music language in *Wilderness*, and they can also be seen as the result of heightening the VII and iv of an A minor scale by a half tone.

Yang stated that, although the interval of G#-A would also give a hint of Russian flavour, when the two progressions were heard in succession or with only a short distance between each other, they would, nevertheless, express the feeling of Hunan music exclusively and unambiguously. Further, the whole piece is constructed upon five core notes, G#, A, C, D#, E, that encompass the above two pairs. From the five notes are derived patterns like A-G#-E, C-D#-E, E-D#-C, A-C-D#, G#-A-C, A-C-D#-E and A-C-G#-A, each of which being able to form an independent motif to push the music onward, while locking the music firmly within its characteristic track. The first chord and the first main theme heard on the *dizi* both clearly present this relationship (Example 4.3), though moving the main notes a major second lower.

Example 4.3 The first main theme on the *dizi* in *Wilderness* (bars 4-8).

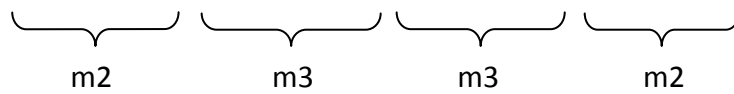


Notes in Yang’s Hunan music model:

G# A C D# E

Notes in the first main theme of *dizi*:

F# G Bb C# D



Wilderness can be roughly seen as a piece in ternary form, although its first and third part are not identical – or even nearly so – to each other. The whole work is not tonal, nor is there any change of key from the beginning to the middle part and from the middle to the final. Instead, they are in every sense differentiated from each other through a contrast of texture and orchestration, and associated by the innate progressive force of the music. The first theme resembles a pentatonic G *Yu* scale (G Bb C D F), yet the two minor seconds straying away from the scale conveys a strong sense of instability, as well as an intense exotic colouring that could be hardly expected to “resolve” into any normative scale form. The theme is then repeated by the string group an octave higher, and from bar 13 it transforms into a lasting arpeggio curve on the viola constructed on the basis of thirds.

Bars 1-19 highlight the colour of a minor second intensively. From bar 19 a new theme played by the *dizi* based on F *Yu* scale (F Ab Bb C Eb) emerges (Example 4.4). Apart from a minor third, this motif also features a perfect fifth. After going up to the highest point, it moves downward in the form of a zigzag back to Bb below middle C. Soon after, other orchestral instruments start to bring new keys into the music’s texture. In bar 25 the oboe begins to perform on C# *Yu* (C# E F# G# B) while the *dizi* continues

to stay on F *Yu* from bar 27 after a couple of bars silence. In the meantime, the harp repeatedly performs a series of notes: E# F# A# B F#. This passage contains notes from both C# *Yu* and F *Yu*, thus alleviating the contrast between the two keys. It is followed by a passage of F# *Yu* on the flute from bar 30 to 36, and the bridging on the violas from bar 30 on, which leads to the participation of the whole orchestra during bars 33-36. By now, F# has replaced G to become the core note of the piece before a *dizi* solo, commencing at bar 37, restates the dominant status of G.

Example 4.4 *Dizi* theme in *Wilderness*, bars 19-20. People's Music Publishing House, 2007.



On one hand, throughout this opening section Yang Qing leaves the *dizi* performer playing in the *ad libitum* style, by which means Yang gives enormous freedom to the latter in rendering details such as trills and glissandos, and in controlling the speed. On the other hand, Yang Qing exhausts the technical possibilities of what a *dizi* player could achieve in the early 1990s. During bars 44-45, the *dizi* slides from the G under middle C to the Eb three octaves higher in one moment, something almost never found in any previous works for the *dizi*. This adds to the difficulty of performance greatly, implying a strong desire to make the whole piece more “advanced” and suitable for modern audiences.

The middle part of *Wilderness* lasts from bar 46 to 113. In contrast to the first part, it is characterised by a fast tempo. Here Yang Qing inherits the custom of many Chinese national musicians when adapting the legacy of traditional music during the 1960s and 1970s, in which the standardised three-part form of slow-fast-slow is often adopted.³⁴⁴ The first half of this section is dominated by the polyphony between the string group

³⁴⁴ Frederick Lau, *Music in China: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture*. Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 43.

and the *dizi*. While the former is kept within an orderly 4/4 rhythmic scheme and a fast tempo, the *dizi* preserves its *ad libitum* style. The rhythm of the *dizi* contains dramatic variations, such as a note lasting for almost two bars being followed by a short and rapid triplet (bars 52-54). It resembles a special device called *Jin La Man Chang* that often appears in Chinese traditional opera, which means that

The string instruments play fast while the singing remains at a slow tempo. ... Through continually and interactively pulling and pushing the bow, *banhu* [a string instrument] will firmly follow the voice of singer and reiterate the main notes of the singing voice. Generally speaking, the speed at which the bow of the *banhu* is moved decides the rhythm of *Jin La Man Chang*, whereas the singing voice can have considerable flexibility and freedom within the rhythmic range.³⁴⁵

Actually, the contrasts between the string group and the *dizi* are by no means limited to the comparison between fast and slow, regular and capricious. Viewed as a whole, the melodic progression of the string voices takes a linear and stepping form, whereas the *dizi* often jumps by a fifth, a seventh or even an octave (for instances, respectively see bar 62-63, 64-65 and 52). Bars 94-113, participated in by the whole orchestra, show dissonance and disorder. In this passage, the composer uses the tamburo to simulate a special percussion rhythm taken from Peking Opera – *Ji Ji Feng* (literally meaning “rapid wind”) which is commonly applied to military marching or fighting scenes and to creating an intensely fierce atmosphere. According to Nancy Yunhwa Rao’s research (2007), in the music of some Chinese contemporary composers, the use of such classical percussion rhythms has taken on more flexible and varied forms and become signifiers of contradiction, tension, agony and anticipation.³⁴⁶ By contrast, throughout this segment, the *dizi* remains completely silent.

Hurriedly and unanticipated, the final part of *Wilderness* commences from the last

³⁴⁵ Feng Lei, “*Jiqiao Yao Jing Jiezhou Wen, Zhengti Xietiao Xinlu Ming – Tan Hebei Bangzi de ‘Jin La Man Chang’ yu ‘Yao Er San’ de Banzou*” (Refine the Technique and Stabilize the Rhythm; Coordinate the Whole and Keep a Clear Mind: The Accompaniment Styles of “*Jin La Man Chang*” and “*Yao Er San*” in *Hebei Bangzi*), *Da Wutai*, (03) 2009, p. 42.

³⁴⁶ Nancy Yunhwa Rao, “The Tradition of *Luogu Dianzi* (Percussion Classics) and Its Signification in Contemporary Music”, in Edward Green & Lei Liang (eds.), *China and West – The Birth of a New Music, Contemporary Music Review*, Volume 26, Issue 5 & 6, October 2007.

beat of bar 113 (after the final chord of the previous section ends on the first quaver of the same bar). The *dizi* motif appears again, but in the inverted form of the motif as it appears in the first part. This leads to a long and breath-taking solo passage on the *dizi* showcasing a variety of special finger and breathing skills.

The reception and influence of *Wilderness*

Wilderness gained great success in China after its premiere for its combination of distinctly “modern” and “national” features. In 1993 it won an award in the National Orchestral Pieces Contest, and in 1998 it was designated the compulsory piece in the *dizi* section of the annual Chinese Instruments Concerto Contest held in Taiwan, with participants from mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Actually, by 1998 *Wilderness* had already become a popular piece in the *dizi* repertoire. It was widely taught in the national music department of many Chinese conservatories and even became part of the compulsory test for entry into the master’s degree level of *dizi* performance in some Chinese conservatories. In fact, although this piece is obviously constructed upon Western compositional techniques, many commentators regard it as “Chinese” and interpret it in Chinese ways, associating it with the emotions and images that often appear in traditional Chinese art and poetics. The following examples were offered by Yang himself during our interview:

[In the prelude] When the *dizi* recedes and the orchestral theme appears, the melodic line progresses from a high pitch to a low pitch resembling a long breath, and its unrestrained emotion renders a feeling of “*Ming Yue Chu Tian Shan, Cang Mang Yun Hai Jian.*”³⁴⁷ (Translation: The bright moon lifts from the Mountain of Heaven / in an infinite haze of cloud sea, by Li Bai, 701-762)

The middle section of the piece starts with the tremolo of string music in low pitch and it sounds rather wild and unrestrained. The first and second violins, as well as the viola, together form an intense rolling passage of music tones. With the intrusion of the powerful vertical chords by the brass group, the regularity of

³⁴⁷ This review is offered by Yang Qing himself and the publication information is unclear.

rhythm is broken by the irregular downbeat from time to time, and it seems to portray a thrilling scene of “*Shan Yu Yu Lai Feng Man Lou*”.³⁴⁸ (Translation: The wind sweeping through the tower heralds a rising storm in the mountain, by Xu Hun, 9th century)

These metaphoric, yet concrete images have helped to bring *Wilderness* nearer to the Chinese audience. This effect also adds to Yang’s own pleasure, and he seems rather satisfied to see his works to be taken as a sophisticated representation of Chinese cultural development in the new era. In 1998 Yang composed a tone poem for the Hong Kong Chinese Orchestra named *Xiao Xiang Feng Qing* (*The Scene of Xiang River*), the style of which is very similar to *Wilderness*. After its premiere, the local newspaper remarked that, “He is a master of orchestration. One can see all kinds of light and shadow flashing and flowing in his music.” Yang is very proud of this comment. Actually, Yang’s aspiration goes much further. His ideal for music is of a combination of rich personal experience and of a profound sensibility toward a particular music material, which the composer can then render with his or her accumulated skill and control. In 1990s Yang adapted an ancient score excavated from the *Dunhuang* caves, in which he highlights the light flowing tune of the *xun* (a globular Chinese vessel flute made from clay or other ceramics) and the sliding tone of the *pipa*. In the course of the interview, Yang proudly recalled that when this piece was put on in Hong Kong

There were American audiences who were amazed by the sonic possibilities that Chinese instruments are able to explore and which are seldom heard in the West. Although some sounds are somewhat unfamiliar to Western ears, the piece was believed by many in the American audience to be strikingly beautiful and as exemplifying an utterly modern work.

There seems to be little information on the reception and influence of this piece, but it is fair to argue that such patterns of thinking and expression are typical and that they extensively permeated the musical reception and comments of symphonies created in the post-1980 era. From the professional and virtuoso circles to amateurs and commentators, this attitude was adopted almost unanimously toward the criteria

³⁴⁸ Ibid.

of “good” symphonic works, and strongly echoed the zeal for modernisation and for the improvement of the status of Chinese culture in an overall sense.

4.5 Conclusion

Western art music again served as a bridge between China’s past and present, between its domestic population and the outside world, which had been separated from it by the political “iron curtain”. As the hectic campaigns of the Cultural Revolution drew to an end in the mid-1970s, Western art music was taken as a new cultural symbol for, as well as a value bearer of, the political theme of modernisation, and came to represent even grander ideological goals. The development of the economy spurred the growth of the material “hardware” of Western art music, such as the building of concert halls and theatres in every major city. The increasing number of people learning Western art music instruments created a solid social environment, as well as the material basis, for the flourishing of symphonic creations, through which the essential political-ideological tides of the new period were intensively provoked and manifested.

Compared to the earlier modernisation movements that appeared in China during the 20th century, the post-Cultural Revolution course of modernisation featured a much greater appeal to intellectual freedom, which provided a much wider space for composers to exploit and so to exhibit their personal creativity, and it was endowed with even more vitality as market reform deepened in the artistic and cultural arena. This creativity, however, was not expected to be detached from the soil of the national culture, not did it step toward a completely Westernised liberalism. Rather, it was subject to the overall management and supervision by all levels of government and

was intentionally geared to link up with issues like national pride and the revival of the past glorious status of China in the world, which the Party government chose to stick to in order to maintain its authority and legitimation after the Cultural Revolution (and even more so since the 1990s). Hence, the creativity of composers was not seen as a purely “individual” matter, but as a new fruit of the national culture. When Chinese composers were believed to demonstrate the received legacy of the national music tradition, through the aesthetic values or emotions evoked in their works, it was more likely that they would win recognition from the authorities; whereas those who failed or avoided this manner of composition were liable to be condemned as, at best, shallow, and at worst, “perverse”, avant-garde figures.

After experiencing the devaluing and degradation of knowledge brought about by the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese musical intelligentsia felt a general hunger for knowledge and intellectual creativity in order to make up for the time that had been lost in that bitter decade. Their devotion echoed the country’s need to rebuild a national culture that had been severely damaged by the Cultural Revolution, in such a way as to match its new aspirations and progressive pace of development. This culture was to pay respect anew to the ancient legacy that had been denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Equally, it called for a conversation of equals with the culture and values of the West, and was eager to become an admired and influential culture in the world in such a way that its status can match its increasing economic clout. These factors encouraged Chinese composers to devote themselves to their creative work with a strong sense of enthusiasm and commitment.

Many of these Chinese composers had had the experience of living in rural areas from an early age or when taking part in campaigns during the Cultural Revolution. Thus they were not a bit estranged from the old mode of traditional life in the countryside and its musical aspects. But, as urban intellectuals, they were still “outsiders” to the rural life and culture around them which they perceived from a typically romanticised and exoticised point of view – as well as through the filter of

other ideological baggage. Later, getting the chance of receiving higher education in a formal conservatory and with the assumption that they would continue their career in urban centers, they were able to get approach to the newest forms and ideas of Western modern art music. They actively took both of the above as the treasure houses and experimental fields for their appropriation and creativity, but sometimes without fully appreciating the historical contexts and practices of the material they were using. They would easily sacrifice the authenticity of traditional Chinese music in favour of creating a new and modern work, or conversely hold an essentialist opinion about a music tradition or the circumstances where this tradition took place. They also took for granted that they would be the hosts of the world of European art music, not viewing the latter as a legacy from a different culture but a prevalent universal, and so “received” existing order. On this dynamic stage they vigorously exhibited their creative power, paying much more attention to the new rather than to the old, being proud to prove to the world that they too were distinguished and could also be real masters of culture and art. Like the skyscrapers rising all over Chinese cities, their symphonic creations served as a silhouette, a shadow picture of the economic, social, political, as well as psychological-emotional changes of the last two decades of the 20th century in China.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS OF THE THESIS

15th February, 2012. The writing of this thesis is nearly approaching an end. On this very day, the Xinhua News Agency – the official press agency of the PRC – released *The Planning Outline for Cultural Development and Reform during China's 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015)* (*Guojia "Shi Er Wu" Shiqi Wenhua Gaige Fazhan Guihua Gangyao*). The *Outline* calls for “taking a new historical departure to deepen the reform of the Chinese cultural system, and to push the development and flourishing of Socialist culture further.”³⁴⁹ This document was announced as the official approval and promotion of a decision made by the 6th Plenary Conference of the 17th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party back to 2011, which aimed at turning China into a global cultural power. This policy entails a series of concrete measures, such as the governmental fostering of a range of key music and art genres – in the former case mostly focusing on the “grand” tradition (reformed and with increasingly less resemblance to their original models, such as Peking Opera and *Kunqu*) together with Westernised genres such as symphonic music – and the export of more cultural works, including music, books, films, etc., to the international market to win greater recognition on the global cultural stage.

This new direction in Chinese cultural policy has instigated a new surge of music creation in all the regions of China and has given rise to the numerous news reports, symposiums and *huiyan* – a kind of government-sponsored artistic show aimed at discovering and selecting the “most excellent” musical products, the tradition of which can be traced back to the early years of PRC (as discussed in Chapter Three). An observer or visitor from outside might be startled by the strong, centralised will

³⁴⁹ *Guojia "Shi Er Wu" Shiqi Wenhua Gaige Fazhan Guihua Gangyao (The Planning Outline for Cultural Development and Reform during China's 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015))*. 12 April 2012. http://news.xinhuanet.com/politics/2012-02/16/c_111529579.htm

radiating from the highest stratum of Chinese political life and the extent to which it has been implemented on all regional levels; one might question the real value and true level of creativity of these products in such a strongly political-coloured setting, even bearing some resemblance to the economic “Great Leap Forward” movement in the 1950s (which in practice led to tremendous loss and tragedy);³⁵⁰ one might be concerned about how many stereotypical Chinese music traditions have been reconstituted in order to cope with the needs of political propaganda and have accordingly been drawn away from their relation to real life. Nevertheless, it is not my desire here to seek answers to these questions, but I am intending to find a tie between this real-life Chinese story that is taking place at present and what happened during the previous century: the present shadow is one cast by the light of the past. In the last century China endured several distinct phases of change. To draw attention to their logical interaction and fuse them altogether in the light of their mutual functions in the shaping of musical conceptions and practices today is precisely the task of this thesis and where the future research should continue to head.

The early decades of the 20th century – or more precisely, the turning of the late 19th to the early 20th century – was characterised by fierce collisions between China and the Western (and Japanese) colonisers in the realm of politics and rushed encounters in the sphere of culture. Although China was not converted into a Western colony in any complete sense, with neither the ruling class, the intellectuals nor the mass public being prepared to accept total Westernisation, China was nevertheless exposed to the full impact of Western power in terms of influence both material and metaphysical, which gave rise to an inner drive to reform Chinese society guided by Western values and institutions, particularly those linked with modernity. Due to its spatial proximity to China, Japan, instead of Europe *per se*, served as the earliest resource for relevant new ideas and provided a model for using these ideas to reconstruct an Oriental feudal society. The study and imitation of Western music gained

³⁵⁰ The Great Leap Forward (*Da Yue Jin*) refers to a nationwide economic and social campaign of the PRC lasting from 1958 to 1961. It featured rapid, and even zealous, industrialisation and collectivisation aiming at transforming China from an agrarian to a modern industrialised society in a short period.

their momentum as part of the larger story of urgent social reform. The examination of such music was, inevitably, saturated with local pragmatic concerns, and the misconceptions of its traditions was further aggravated by the scarcity of sufficient in-depth understanding of Western music in its original cultural and social context. Afterwards, as Western music gradually permeated the life of intellectuals in China (but not yet that of the mass public), it fused with the traditional Chinese Confucian understanding of the social function of music: that music is to be deployed in cultivating a person's proper temperament, to maintain a harmonious social structure, as well as according with the established aesthetic signs and patterns in traditional Chinese art and poetics. As a result, the Chinese absorption of Western music was locked firmly onto a pragmatic path, including the spurring-on of Chinese musicians to find a path and establish a style for themselves – itself a process further driven (or excused) by the desire of strengthening the nation. The pioneers who first tried to combine Western techniques and Chinese aesthetic assets were revered and embraced as milestones of cultural history, and speculation on the significance of the cultural difference between Chinese and Western societies generated in the course of this process, taken alongside the new expressive means provided by the newly forged music hybrids, cultivated the spirit of a generation who became the helmsmen of China's fate in the later part of the 20th century. All of these are included in the scope of Chapter Two.

Chapter Three – the longest chapter and the core of the thesis – examines a crucial stage in Chinese politics and history in the 20th century, including relevant musical practices; namely, the growth of the influence of the Chinese Communist Party and the process of its taking control of the whole country. In discussing musical art as a tool for the establishment and consolidation of the CCP's ideological doctrines, this chapter avoids telling a story on a simple plane, instead suggesting multiple historical dimensions – including sophisticated links with the preceding era and the course of what later ensued. Although in the first decades of the 20th century, much of the theory and practice of music was connected with political ideology, music was not brought

under definitive government control in the Republican regime. This situation was altered with the emergence and development of the Communist Party, especially during and after the war of national defense against the Japanese invasion. The way that the Communist Party treated music and other genres of art gained resonance with the many musicians sympathetic with the nation's fate and that of the proletarian class (as is shown in Xian Xinghai's life story); these doctrines were standardised in Mao Zedong's *Talks at the Yan'an Conference on Literature and Art* (1942), which regulated the purpose of art, as well as the form and spirit it should pursue. This chapter particularly emphasised the fact that, beyond the basic and definitive doctrine of "orientation towards the proletariat", the music practices under CCP control also had a strong nationalist colouring due to the special historical context of the war. This chapter displays the dissemination of relevant ideas and modes of practices onto the field of music both during wartime and during the time after the foundation of the PRC. It includes a discussion of concepts such as the endowing of old material with new contents, of the use of established compositional theories in harmony and orchestration, etc., and of music activities such as *huiyan*. Most of the patterns of thoughts and practices generated at that time still obtain today and in fact still constitute the main way music production is oriented towards the demands of new political goals in the present – such as the 2012 edict mentioned at the beginning of this summary.

Chapter Four finds the last two decades of the 20th century to be a somewhat paradoxical entity in that it presented both a significant turning away from the previous period, while still retaining many of the latter's ideological cores in new forms. This era featured an extensive re-orientation toward a market economy, a significantly increased degree of intellectual freedom and the process of opening-up to the outside world. In its essence, these changes occurred not so much as a spontaneous process, but as the result of deliberate policy, in the process of which the political authority still preserved a strong regulative hand in the arts in guiding them in their newly developing directions. This is exemplified in the cases of the reconstruction of

orchestral bands and the different attitudes taken toward composers who exhibited a “personal style” in symphonic creation. It is evident that in all these discourses, nationalism superseded the former touchstone of class struggle and rigid socialist principles to become the key word of the dominant ideology and so providing the underpinning guidelines for composers and musicians. The latter were enthusiastic to win recognition on the international stage, for the aim of which they perceived themselves as the masters of tradition and felt free to alter it at will. They felt there was a blurred boundary between their own music legacy and that of Western art music and aspired to be a part of the latter’s canon and performance repertoire. This last point is perhaps most pertinent to the current situation as mentioned above and one can easily see that the current state of play is a synthetic result proceeding from the influence of various prior historical periods.

In summarising the writing strategy employed for this thesis, I have been trying to shun the popular strategy that has been adopted by many Anglo-American writers in dealing with Chinese modern and contemporary music, that is, a journalistic or story-telling style of writing. Instead, the stance that has been taken in the writing of this thesis could be described as “in between” Structuralism and Post-structuralism: Structuralism looks for the decisive and underlying meaning or overarching order of a social discourse, whereas Post-structuralism pays more attention to peripheral and dynamic factors in the shaping of meaning through the forms of context, reception and appropriation. By “in between” I do not intend to interpret all music-making as the ideological off-spring of politics, but this thesis has tried to show that politics is often more influential and penetrating than people imagine. Furthermore, because of the typical top-down hierarchy permeating the Chinese political and social regime, this thesis has chosen to spread the discussion along the same top-down line, covering three strata: the “pure” political stratum; the administrative strata of the music field; and the realm of practical music making. One can find this mode of analysis, which is also a narrative structure or expositional principle, most eminently reflected in chapters Three and Four where it shows clearly how political doctrines generated

different modes of action.

The thesis may also serve as a narrative model for the study of music in a complex society – so applying not only to China but also to other countries and cultures worldwide. No change was made by a single “impulse” or any arbitrary factor, but in many senses resulted from continually transforming and evolving driving forces – something resembling “*taichi* boxing”, a time-honoured Chinese martial art featuring agreeable and gentle transition between movements. With no doubt, there are still many questions waiting to be solved with regard to the specificity and complexity of the music-society interaction in China and I hope future research will lead us to further insights.

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