

Westernization and Music in China during and after the Qing Dynasty

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Before the Revolution of 1911, China was a mighty empire dominated by various Chinese ethnic groups in different time periods. In particular, the Han people of the Tang¹ and Ming Dynasty and the Man people of the Qing Dynasty² were enthusiastic in establishing and maintaining contacts with foreigners while retaining a strong political influence over the complex culture in China. When explorers, missionaries, or ambassadors travelled to the Chinese empire, they often brought fine commodities made with foreign technologies and crafts to the emperor as a sign of good faith and respect. Initially, these arts and advanced Western technologies of the late eighteenth and nineteenth century was not recognized as important academics studies by the Chinese scholars; in fact, they were only perceived as delicate artifacts³. It was not until roughly the twentieth century that some Chinese scholars then realized the importance of military powers and skilled economic trades and productions that were fostered by Western scholars, and then began to promote and study Western technologies and sciences in China⁴. In other words, after the Revolution of 1911, Western arts and technologies gained recognitions and supports by the Chinese scholars, and became dominant elements facilitating the social changes in China.

Introduction: Interactions before the Opium Wars between the East and the West

Surviving records indicate that musical interactions between China and Western nations began prior to the seventeenth century. Since Catholicism has played a major role in Western music history, early musical communications from Western nations to China often shared a similar agenda — to preach the word of the Lord to non-believers. However, when the Jesuit missionaries arrived in China before the seventeenth century, they encountered an empire with a culture that inhibited the dissemination of Catholicism: a culture supporting feudalism, multi-god faiths, and with a dominating sense of imperial pride unyielding to foreign cultures. As a result, Catholicism at the time failed to receive prominent support from the Chinese, and so was Western music. Even though the dissemination of Catholicism and Western music was unsuccessful, the Jesuit missionaries continued their religious journey to China throughout the following centuries, and one in particular, became first of the influential figures in leading cultural exchanges between the East and the West; his name was Matteo (Matthiou) Ricci⁵.

Matteo Ricci arrived in Macao in 1582, where he stayed to learn the Chinese language and to wait for permission to enter the mainland China. Between 1582 and 1601, Matteo Ricci worked

¹ Wei Chu, "The Influence of Christian Culture on the Development of Chinese Music," *Jiaoxiang: Xi'an Yinyue Xueyuan Xuebao / Jiaoxiang: Journal of Xi'an Conservatory of Music of Music* 22, no. 3 (Fall, 20003), 45.

² Kii-Ming Lo, "New Documents on the Encounter between European and Chinese Music," in *Culturas musicales del Mediterráneo y sus ramificaciones*, eds. Alfonso de Vicente Delgado and Ismael Fernández de la Cuesta, 1896–1911 (Madrid: Sociedad Española de Musicología, 1993), 1896–1898.

³ Rou Wang, "Dissemination of Western Music in China," *Yinyue Yanjiu / Music Research*, no. 2 (Summer, 1982): 92–93.

⁴ Kuo-Huang Han, "The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times," in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 7: East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*, ed. Robert Provine, 373, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998. <http://glnl.alexanderstreet.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/View/331133>

⁵ Rou Wang, "Dissemination of Western Music in China," 91.

in local areas to introduce and teach Western sciences and Catholicism to the Chinese, and he also tried to establish his court connections, such that he would have an opportunity to be introduced to the Chinese emperor. By 1601, Ricci became the most influential Western scholar in China, and was then introduced to Emperor Wan-Li. During the meeting with the emperor, Matteo Ricci was able to perform several hymns with his clavichord, and presented different types of Western invention as gift to the emperor⁶. Soon after the meeting with the emperor, Ricci was permitted to stay in Peking, and shared his knowledge of European sciences, arts and literature with locals, famous Chinese scholars, and even the emperor⁷. Aside from his academic interactions with the Chinese, Ricci often spoke of Catholicism among friends. Sensing the potential conflicts between the Chinese rituals used as memorials for their ancestors and the Catholicism prohibition against idol worshipping, Ricci was able to make allowance for this Chinese tradition and introduced a new Catholic rite developed specifically for China⁸.

By introducing the new rite, Ricci was able to attract more Chinese to practice Catholicism; moreover, it also facilitated the learning of Western music in China through Catholicism, in both local areas and the imperial court, and this interest in Western music and Catholicism in China continued into the following dynasty, the Qing, where the a publication containing early Qing studies on both Chinese and Western music theories called律呂正義 *LuLu ZhengYi* was written and edited jointly by the Emperor Kang-Xi and Teodorico Pedrini around 1666⁹. Unfortunately, Ricci's rite for the Chinese that fostered many Chinese interests in Western music and Catholicism was not supported by other Catholic missionaries, and was forbid by Pope Clement XI in 1715, which led to the banning of Catholicism in China and its music for the next fifty-eight years¹⁰. Some Chinese Catholics were forced to carry their faith underground, while the majority of the Chinese lost interest in Catholicism, Western music, and even Western technologies and sciences.

The Downfall of the Last Dynasty

In 1773, the conflict between Catholicism and Chinese tradition was temporarily ended by the Jesuits, and practices of Catholicism and its music resumed in China¹¹. At that time, Western nations were already occupied by new changes fostered by Industrial Revolution, either social or economic. Socially, Industrial Revolution fostered a new social rank called the *bourgeoisie* in Western nations, where, with their high purchasing powers, the *bourgeoisie* increased the demand of commodities economically, as well as valuable foreign items from countries like China. As Western nations increased their imports from China, China, on the other hand, due to the lack of interest in Western sciences and technologies, did not see the necessity to increase its imports from Western nations; anything but opium.

By the early 1800s, British gained general control over the opium trading network in Asia, and began trafficking opium directly for tea near Canton: the only Chinese port available to

⁶ Rou Wang, "Dissemination of Western Music in China," 91–92.

⁷ Kii-Ming Lo, "New Documents on the Encounter between European and Chinese Music," 1897.

⁸ Ibid. , 1906.

⁹ Rou Wang, "Dissemination of Western Music in China," 93.

¹⁰ Kii-Ming Lo, "New Documents on the Encounter between European and Chinese Music," 1906.

¹¹ Ibid. , 1906.

Western merchants¹². The opium trafficking situation even aggravated when the British government publicized the opium trading right that once solely belonged to the East India Company to all of British merchants. Consequently, as more Western companies became involved in Asia opium trades, the Chinese opium demand soared to another new height. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, opium trades became “probably the largest commerce of the time in any single commodity”.¹³

Fully aware of the potential amount of opium trades in China and the consequences of using this drug, the Qing dynasty passed various regulations attempting to control and to eliminate opium trades and its usage within the empire. In 1839, China abruptly confiscated and destroyed thousands of chests of opium in Canton, and many Western merchants were banned from trafficking opium in China. Since Chinese imported mostly opium from Western nations, the banning of opium trafficking cut off Western accesses to the Chinese market. Many Western merchants suffered tremendously deficits, including the British merchants. Shortly after, the British government responded to China’s vigorous policy with her mighty naval power, declaring wars with China. These two wars were known as the First (1839–1842) and the Second (1856–1860) Opium War¹⁴. With their victories in the First and Second Opium War against China, the British government gained rights to trade freely in Shanghai and four ports along the Chinese shore, and received Hong Kong Island in the Treaty of NanJing¹⁵ (1842); furthermore, in the Treaty of Tianjing (1858), the Qing court gave the British government rights to trade at various river ports along the Yangtze River¹⁶.

Shocked by the power of British naval weaponry presented during the Opium Wars, some Chinese scholars came to believe that modernization led the British to their victories. Hoping to strengthen Chinese forces and its subjects, these scholars advocated “a series of military, institutional, and technological reforms in the provinces[,] based on Western models”.¹⁷ Began in 1861 and continued into the late 1890s, these reforms, known as the Self-Strengthening movement or Zi Qiang Yun Dong, imported various Western technologies to improve the military and economic conditions in China¹⁸. At the same time, many Christian missions and

¹² Ke-Wen Wang. “Canton System.” In *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Ke-Wen Wang, 42. New York: Garland Publishing Inc. , 1998. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=24251>

¹³ Gregory Blue. “Opium for China: The British Connection,” in *Opium regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839-1952*, eds. Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi, 34, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=112972&site=ehost-live&scope=site>

¹⁴ Ke-Wen Wang. “Lin Zexu.” In *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Ke-Wen Wang, 189–190. New York: Garland Publishing Inc. , 1998. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=24251>

¹⁵ Gregory Blue. “Opium for China: The British Connection,” 35.

¹⁶ Ke-Wen Wang. “Arrow War.” In *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Ke-Wen Wang, 15. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=24251>

¹⁷ Ke-Wen Wang. “Tongzhi Restoration,” in *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Ke-Wen Wang, 363, New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=24251>

¹⁸ Kennedy, Thomas L. , “Self-Strengthening Movement,” in *Modern China: An Encyclopedia of History, Culture, and Nationalism*, ed. Ke-Wen Wang, 301–302, New York: Garland Publishing Inc. , 1998. <http://login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/login?url=http://www.myilibrary.com?id=24251>

Western-style military institutions were built in China, and the Qing court introduced modern education system in schools, allowing Western culture and music to deepen its roots in China¹⁹.

To make Western music more appealing to Chinese audiences, Western music introduced in the late nineteenth century by the Christian missionaries was modified to match local Chinese music tastes. These Christian missionaries carefully translated Western hymns into Chinese with considerations to the Chinese meters. In some occasion, instead of providing texts translated from another language, new Chinese lyrics like “God Save Our Emperor” replaced the original words in “America.” On the other hand, Western music was used differently by the Qing court. In the Western-style military institutions in China, Chinese soldiers formed Western brass bands and performed for “drills, ceremonies and sporting events;” their repertoire incorporated not only existing Western band compositions, but also newly arranged Chinese tunes in unison. Western orchestras, however, were not introduced until the beginning of the twentieth century as a part of the modern education system reform. Meanwhile, neither Western harmonization nor Western instrument was added into new Chinese composition at the end of the nineteenth century since Western music had only been introduced as a study by the Qing court for a short period of time²⁰.

New Changes after the Wars: A Growing Sense of Nationalism

Although many Chinese scholars promoted the Self-Strengthening Movements with great expectations, defeats in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895 and the Boxer Rebellion in the 1900 led these scholars to believe that the Self-Strengthening Movement had only strengthened the empire at a surface level. These activists also concluded that, in order to rebuild China as a mighty empire, all Chinese people needed to be strengthened within, with good morals and virtues taught and practiced at a fundamental level. One activist, Fei Shi (a pseudonym) “call[ed] for the establishment of a new national music that would allow the participation of a large number of people so that a sense of solidarity could be stimulated among them” in his article *On the Reform of Music* (1903)²¹. In response to Fei Shi’s ideology, Chinese scholars began to experiment with various music forms using both Western and Chinese elements. For example, in 1908, a Chinese official, Li Ying-Geng, attempted using Western band instruments to play Chinese songs with military or imperial purpose in unison. On the other hand, activist Liang Qi-Chao alleged that, as a part of the expansion of the new Self-Strengthening campaign, Chinese children must also learn about good morals and virtues through group activities in early educations, such that they would become nationalistic, cultured Chinese citizens. As a result, a new genre of music called the “School Songs” of the new Self-Strengthening campaign, and was to be sung by students in unison in elementary or junior high school music classes²². Like the hymns and the band music used during the original Self-Strengthening Movements, the melodies of the school songs were often taken directly from existing repertoire, including Japanese or Western folk tunes, and then given new

學堂音樂 Xuetang Music

¹⁹ Han, Kuo-Huang, “The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times,” 373.

²⁰ Han, Kuo-Huang, “The Introduction of Western Music in Modern Times,” 373–375.

²¹ Isabel K. F. Wong, “Nationalism, Westernization, and Modernization,” in *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music Volume 7: East Asia: China, Japan, and Korea*, ed. Robert Provine, 379–390. New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1998. <http://gnd.alexanderstreet.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/View/331133>

²² Yu-he Wang, “The New Music of China: Its Development under the Blending of Chinese and Western Cultures Through the First Half of the 20th Century,” Part 1, *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 56.

Chinese nationalistic text by composers who studied Western music abroad. For example, the well-known school tune in China, 送别 *songbie*, was based on John P. Ordway's *Dreaming of Home and Mother* and the text written by 李叔同³. Li Shu

Even though new Self-Strengthening reforms replaced many aspects of the old, ineffective political and educational systems, the Qing officials were unable to revive the withering image of the Qing court in its people's hearts. Sensing that the corruptions in and the political mistakes made by the Qing court were unrecoverable, numerous groups of revolution societies began to resurface and launched heavy campaigns attempting to overthrow the Qing court. In 1911, city after city began to declared independence, and, finally, the Qing dynasty came to an end in 1912. Even though a Republican government replaced the Qing court soon after the Revolution of 1911, China's political structure was still unstable and filled with uncertainties. Subsequently, Chinese educators began to examine new political theories and search for "new forms of education, language, music, and arts".²⁴

Chinese Music Composed during the World Wars

While China struggled to recover from the aftermath of the Revolution of 1911, years after, China was swept by another economic and political upheaval resulted from World War I. Even though China eventually joined the Allies during the war, at the Versailles Peace Conference, the Chinese government failed to reinstate its international position to the same level as other countries in the Allies. Moreover, instead of reclaiming the German concession in Shandong, China was pressured by other countries in the Allies to reassign the Shandong concession to Japan and gave in.²⁵ To many Chinese people, failing to reclaim Shandong and reinstate China's international position were signs of poor performances of the new Chinese government, and many found themselves disappointed in the new government and the new policies became intolerable. This frustration eventually led to a series of demonstrations and strikes in Beijing on May 4, 1919, which was known as the May Fourth Movement. After the May Fourth Movement, patriotic group demonstration became a common tool to express general interests or concerns publicly in China, and May Fourth Movement was often considered as the event that fostered the later Communist Revolution²⁶. At the demonstrations, various nationalistic slogans were used as a tool to stir protestor's emotions, and these slogans were to be chanted or sung during as a group to present a unifying request. As more demonstrations arise after the May Fourth Movement, the need of patriotic unison compositions increased; yet, most composers were heavily involved in music education reform at the time, and were unable to accommodate the demands of new compositions. To solve this problem, many activists borrowed existing Western melodies and incorporated them with various Chinese slogans²⁷. Outside of China, many abroad graduates were also enthused by the May Fourth Movement and decided to return to China to create new Chinese arts and raise new Chinese art professionals. These abroad graduates formed many new music societies that performed at various venues and published journals and teaching materials regularly. At the same time, many Chinese institutions began to establish new music

²³ Ibid., 56–57.

²⁴ Isabel K. F. Wong, "Nationalism, Westernization, and Modernization," 380.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Yu-he Wang, "The New Music of China: Its Development under the Blending of Chinese and Western Cultures Through the First Half of the 20th Century," Part 1, 59.

departments, and many foreign professors were hired to provide quality education on Western music. Sadly, the study of Chinese music at the time lacked systematic researches, and was unavailable to be offered in lectures.²⁸

Among the abroad graduates returned after the May Fourth Movements, some were eager to set Chinese poetry with Western harmonization, including school songs. Unlike the school songs written during the Self-Strengthening Movement, each school song composed during the May Fourth Movement was given a specific Chinese poetry often selected or written by the composer. This new song technique provided a deeper communication of a song between Chinese texts and its Western-style melody, and also allowed composers freely experiment with techniques such as word-painting or even leitmotif. As a result, the numbers of school songs written after the May Fourth Movement increased tremendously, which led to an increasing interest in experimenting choral compositions with the new song technique. While combining Western tonalities with Chinese poetry, composers also started to employ Chinese music elements such as the pentatonic scales in their choral compositions. In addition, Chinese composers also extended their compositions from unison singing into more complex choral styles such as mixed chorus in four-part harmony, two part harmony, and also solo with chorus.²⁹

During the 1930s to 40s, the group song genre regained popularity in anti-Japanese movements within China. This time, instead of portraying a general demand on the political system, these group songs now have lyrics aroused Chinese nationalism, and, like *The March of the Volunteers* (1935), encouraged people to stand up and fight for the freedom of China. In order to portray the war and revolution theme described by the lyrics effectively, the anti-Japanese group songs of the 1930s and 1940s often included horn calls as a part of the accompaniment.³⁰ Furthermore, composers began to compile or composed larger choral compositions, bringing the Chinese group songs tradition on stage. Like cantatas or oratorios, these larger choral compositions included movements involving solos, symphonies, and choruses; and often required a wide range of instruments. 洗星海 Xi XingHai's 黄河大合唱 *HuangHe DaHeChang* (1939) was one of the famous choral symphonic work with a strong sense of Chinese nationalism, describing the beauty and magnificent of the Yellow River.³¹

Chinese Music and Communism

In 1949, Chinese Communist Party gained political control over China, and initiated various reforms under the communist regime³². Between 1950 and 1965, China executed a policy on songs: first of all, political messages must be included in all music that people would listen to; second of all, all music must be able to be sung by both music professionals and average choirs³³. Meanwhile, because Chinese Communist Party considered group singing as an essential

²⁸ Ibid., 58–59.

²⁹ Ibid., 60–61.

³⁰ Yu-He Wang, “The New Music of China: Its Development under the Blending of Chinese and Western Cultures Through the First Half of the 20th Century.” Part 2. *Journal of the Central Conservatory of Music*, no. 3 (Fall, 1995): 74–76.

³¹ Ibid., 79–80.

³² Yu-He Wang, “Contemporary Chinese Choral Music,” *Yinyue Yanjiu / Music Research*, no. 2 (Summer, 1989): 48.

³³ Ibid., 52.

art in daily life, the numbers of professional choirs in China increased to a new height. As a result, in 1955, the Chinese government organized a national choral conducting workshop to ensure the skills of conductors at a high level. In addition to the new policy on songs, the types of poetry available for compositions were also limited under the communist regime. Music composed after 1950 were usually set with texts that praised the Red Army of its heroic acts, the great leader, Mao, or the natural beauty of China; songs like *紅領巾之歌* of the Red Scarf, *紅軍哥哥回來了* *The Red Army Brother Comes Back*, and *毛主席，我們心中的太陽* *Red Sun in Our Hearts* were great choral examples that strictly followed the policy on songs and poetries.³⁴ Between 1966 and 1976, China underwent a serious revolution known as the Cultural Revolution. During the Cultural Revolution, all music forms except renditions of *語錄歌* *of (Mao's) Quotation* and *造反歌* *the Song of Rebellion* were considered mediums that aided the spreading of old thinking and capitalism ideologies. A musicologist, 汪流和, described music education and music compositions during the Cultural Revolution were “hindered and degenerated”.³⁵

Chinese Music after the Cultural Revolution

In 1979, William Ermev received an invitation from the Chinese government to a choir tour within China; he and his choir became the first American college ensemble to perform in People's Republic of China. In his report on his tour in China, Ermev gave international readers some truthful descriptions on music and music education in China. For example, under Marxist ideology of full employment in a society, the China government organized a large number of professional choirs in various cities with music graduates as conductors, accompanists, and choristers³⁶. Other than attending regular rehearsals, each chorister would participate in two forty-five minute lessons each week to study with a professional voice teacher³⁷, which enhanced the quality of the singers and allowed these professional choirs to perform incredible high quality concerts. Interestingly, during Ermev's conversations with the faculty members at the Central Conservatory in Beijing and Shanghai Conservatory, he learnt that many of the musicians of the 1970s had studied music in Russia in the 1950s and early 1960s. Along with his observation on the performances given by professional Chinese choirs, Ermev concluded that Chinese choral singing had been greatly affected by the Russian practice of the dark vowels and the bright tone of the traditional Chinese singing³⁸. He also noticed that, school choirs other than university choirs, on the other hand, were optional in the after-school program, and, therefore, were more recreational than trained. However, the repertoire performed by both school choirs and professional choirs all contained political messages that had been approved by the Chinese government.³⁹

³⁴ Ibid., 48–50.

³⁵ Ibid., 52–53.

³⁶ William Ermev, “The Choral Scene in China 1979: An Observation,” *Choral Journal* 20, n. 4 (December, 1979): 5.

³⁷ Ibid., 7.

³⁸ Ibid., 4–7.

³⁹ Ibid., 5.

Conclusion

From a subject of interest in the Ming dynasty to a medium that contained political messages in modern China, the role of Western music changed drastically throughout the Chinese history. Especially, in the twentieth century, Western music played an important role in numerous cultural and political reforms as school songs, group songs and large choral compositions. To the Chinese activists of the Self-Strengthening Movement and the May Fourth Movement, Western music was not only a tool that could carry out political means, but also a subject that would strengthen Chinese people to build a stronger empire or nation. Nearly a century after the Self-Strengthening Movement and the May Fourth Movement, Western music is still valued by the Chinese government, and one can even say that Western tonalities have become a major part of the Chinese music culture.

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