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Chinese Identity: Poetics of Cinema and Music in *Hero*

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As hybrid music drawing from Eastern and Western traditions, Tan Dun's work has been understood as both national—indeed at times nationalistic—and global. On the one hand, as the composer of the music for the ceremony in which Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, the Olympic games inauguration in 2008, and as a supporter of the music of Chinese ethnic minorities, it is easy to understand the national dimensions of his work. On the other hand, Tan Dun himself has claimed to be an 'international' composer for a global audience, conceiving music as a resource 'for the sake of [itself], divorced from the social codes and meanings that have been traditionally affixed to the ritualistic employment of musical instruments in China.' (Everett, 2004, p. 13) Others have seen his work in different terms. Alluding to the role played by John Cage in Tan Dun's career, John Corbett describes his work thus: 'an Asian composer in the West uses techniques devised by a Western composer inspired by Asian philosophy; the work is played for an Asian audience which hears it as an artefact of the bizarre West. Orientalism is reflected back and forth like a music-cultural *mise-en-abyme*.' (Corbett, 2000, p. 180)

Here I shall argue that in his relentless drive towards hybridity and spectacle in composition and performance, Tan Dun is the musician writing for and through the visual that best fits Chinese identity today. He consistently uses fragments of traditions from abroad that the opening up policy has now brought, and mixes them with traditional ones from China, quoting them to shape a very own and unique collage in an instance of postmodern authorship. I further contend that Tan Dun's 'visual' music for film, installation and performance, follows Gilles Deleuze's approach to the minor in that it is mainly interested 'neither in representation nor interpretation, but in experimentation.' (Verevis, 2005, p. 168)

I begin with a brief overview of Tan Dun's career, emphasizing the crucial role that hybridity and spectacle have played in it. Then, I move on to analyse the

way that Tan Dun's work in the music for the film 'Hero' (Zhang, 2002)—a film that deals with the unification of China, and in many ways representative of Tan Dun's oeuvre—can be regarded as national, but also remark upon what can be termed its cosmopolitan aspects. I end the article with concluding remarks.

Hybridity and Spectacle

Tan Dun is probably the most renowned contemporary Chinese composer. His vast oeuvre comprises opera, symphonic works, concertos, chamber, solo, organic and vocal music, as well as ensembles, oratorios, chorus, ritual music and performance, multimedia and orchestra. In addition, he has also written the music for various films, among them *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* (Li, 2000) and *Hero* (Zhang, 2002).

Born in Changsha, in Hunan, Tan Dun eventually settled in the United States, like various Chinese musicians of his generation. In 1974, when he lived in the Chinese countryside, he became interested in local folk music and regional drama. In 1976, he entered the *Hunan Peking Opera Troupe*, and in 1978 the *Central Conservatory of Music*, in Beijing, where he graduated in Composition in 1983. In his early compositions, Tan Dun used exclusively the pentatonic scale of traditional Chinese music, but at the same time he showed a remarkable capacity for innovation. For instance, his 1979 controversial symphony *Li Sao*—translated as 'Encountering Sorrow'[1] (Mittler, 1997) or 'Falling into Sadness'—based on a quintessential Chinese theme, the poetry of Qu Yuan, 'incorporated Chinese music and instruments, used polytonality and clustering sounds' (Melvin & Cai, 2004, pp. 326-327).

During the 1980s there were several exchanges between China and other countries. As a result, studies involving Western and Chinese music started to motivate new Chinese composers, among them Tan Dun, Ye Xiaogang and Qu Xiaosong, to experiment with an amalgamation of music of Chinese traditional themes and styles and new treatments borrowed from Western musical techniques. In 1984, the first concert of the so-called era of 'New Music' was held in Beijing, comprising six pieces from different composers, among them Tan Dun. While the 'New Music' movement was by then in fact far from new, having started in the 1920s, it had until then mostly entailed the Europeanization of

Chinese music, in a process that was seen as part of the modernisation of China. After a long period during which the intellectual and cultural weakness of the nation was more and more evident, scholars considered that ideas from abroad could provide an answer to the intellectual impasse. In this context, 'Chinese forebears strove for the total westernisation of Chinese music—because at the time modernisation was equated with westernisation, and they believed that westernising Chinese music would transform it into a high musical art.' (Liu, 2010, p. 13) Later, local governments began 'to use classical music as a means of projecting a modern and progressive image' (Melvin & Cai, 2004, p. 300). However, the musicians involved in the New Music movement in the 1980s frequently regarded the process as one in which European music provided Chinese music with a renewed means for national expression, not one of Europeanization. Wang Zhenya comments:

> I have some experience where the question of national character is concerned, and when I once heard the Central Philharmonic play Tan Dun's *Li sao* [Encountering Sorrow], the depth of national style and feeling in it far surpassed the typical works of the 1950s. (Liu, 2010, p. 539)

Another view is that the hybridising process would result into a new, global kind of music. Liu Ching-chih for instance argues that

> Tan Dun, along with other overseas Chinese composers, are also agents of pluralistic cultures. This is because they are trying to express themselves through fundamentally Western media and ways of expression, while in the meantime they are establishing their individual styles in which the Chineseness has inevitably become an integral part of their compositions.' (Liu, 2010, p. 645)

In 1985, Tan Dun's concert based on the theme 'Exploration and Continuation' included a series of new works of traditional music played on instruments made by the composer himself (Jin, 2011, p. 137), and in *Man ban* (Lento, 1985) for string orchestra and in *Symphony in two movements* he experimented with new sound perspectives, mixing a 'Western orchestra playing in a style of Stravinsky with traditional Chinese drama and ballads, making particular use of percussion' (Liu, 2010, p. 526). In 1986, he continued his studies at *Columbia University* in

New York under the direction of Zhou Wenzhong who had, years earlier, studied with Edgard Varèse (Locke, 2009, p. 294) (Liu, 2010, p. 526). His opera series *Nine Songs* (1989) is a collection of poems by Qu Yuan devoted to nature, with the poems sung in both classical Chinese and contemporary English, using a small ensemble of Chinese and Western instruments.

His graduation work, a short symphony entitled *Death and Fire: Dialogue with Paul Klee* (1993) is a sort of dialogue with the painter's art, drawing from movements such as surrealism, expressionism, and cubism. It already highlighted what would later become a crucial theme in Tan Dun's work: the relationship between music and colour. For just as Klee was fascinated by the music that he found in colour, Tan Dun has been equally fascinated by the colour he finds in music. His work *Eight Memories in Watercolour* evinces this. (Tan, Tan Dun. Water Concerto, 2008)

During this period, in addition to hybridising through music, he also started incorporating Chinese rituals and philosophy into the performances, in his 'Orchestral Theatre Series'. He argued that unlike the relatively recent tradition of separating the music performer and the audience, 'the history of music as an integral part of spiritual life, as ritual, as partnership in enjoyment and spirit**,** is as old as humanity itself.' He seeks that music 'can once again become a ritual bridge between the creative and the re-creative, completing the circle of spiritual life' (Tan, Orchestral Theatre II: Re, 1992). Other aspects of Chinese philosophy that he has incorporated into his music are the principle of yin yang, in which opposites are complementary instead of oppositional, co-existing in a harmonious way. The effect of this complementariness leads to a dynamic and constructive system, in which, by interacting with each other, opposites transcend their individual limitations, although either may predominate at a given stage of the process. This duality was fundamental for the series called 'Organic music and orchestra', which consists of finding correspondences between contrasting materials such as water, ceramics, stone, and paper. The *Earth Concerto for stone and ceramic percussion and orchestra* (Tan, Earth Concerto for stone and ceramic percussion and orchestra, 2010 [2009]) draws from Gustav Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde* (The Song of the Earth), which in turn draws from the poetry of Li Po. As for paper, the *Paper*

Concerto for Paper Percussion and Orchestra (Tan, Paper Concerto, 2008 [2003]) explores the acoustic range of paper. As we shall see below, in the film 'Hero' it was water that became the privileged element of nature around which much of the music was composed.

More recently, these explorations have led Tan Dun into performances that are reminiscent of the concept on 'total art'. Supported by multi-media technology—as displayed in his operas and orchestral music—Tan Dun draws on theatrical, dance and organic elements, against a backdrop of natural scenarios. In *The Map*, (Tan, The Map, 2004 [2002]) written for cello, video, and orchestra, he experimented with the application of video to music. Documentary footage depicting the lives of Chinese ethnic minorities including the Tujia, Miao and Dong, and also musical performances by them, is played on a screen at the location where musicians are playing a concert for cello. Thus the musicians on the site interact with those from the ethnic minorities on screen, mixing live and recorded performance. The work was commissioned by the Boston Symphony Orchestra, and Yo-Yo Ma played the cello for the premier. In this way, Tan Dun's visual music, as the main protagonist of his multi-media installations, brings traditional ethnic music into dialogue with the latest technology, mirroring a process that is taking place in a wider scale all over China today. Likewise, his *Water Heavens* (Tan, Water Heavens, 2010) performance for strings, water, *Pipa* and voice, part of his 'Visual Music' series related to water, takes place in an old Chinese pavilion, based on a concept of 'Architectural Music'

> A stream of water flows in to the hall, forming a pond surrounded by the audience, creating the stage of *Water Heavens*. In this ancient house, a drop of water falls from high above through the oculus bringing out the musical dialogue of Zen music and Bach […] In *Water Heavens* music can be seen and architecture can be heard. (Tan, Water Heavens, 2010, p. Booklet)

Tan Dun himself has framed the process as a matter of fusion, in which ideological and cultural oppositions, in his words, 'melt, fuse and blend' to synthesise in one unit: '1+1=1, not 2' (Tan, 2007). He aspires to create in terms of 'not just visual and aural, not just organic and orchestra, or not just east and west,

or inside and outside, or old and new, or past and future [...] it is very tricky and difficult, and of course, it is very personal too' (Tan, 2007).

Tan Dun in Cinema

Between 1983 and 2013, Tan Dun had composed the music for 19 films, documentaries or TV programmes (IMDB), including the martial arts films *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* (Li, 2000), *Hero* (Zhang, 2002) and *The Banquet*, (Feng, 2006) which he later took as the basis for his 'Multimedia and Orchestra' series. Using as support original edited footage from the films synchronised to the music, he reversed the established hierarchy between the visual and the auditory, in which the latter usually has the supportive role. This resulted in the concerts entitled *The Martial Trilogy* (World Expo 2010 Shanghai), comprised by *Crouching Tiger Concerto for Cello and double Erhu*, *Hero Concerto for Violin and Guqin*, and *Banquet Concerto for Piano and Chorus*.

Hero[1]

Martial arts films began to be produced in Mainland China in the 1920s (Dissannayake, 2003, p. 77). Their Chinese name, *wuxia shenguai pian*, literary translates as 'martial arts—spirit films.' They have had considerable impact and influence all over the world, especially recently. To Wimal Dissannayake 'These films highlight the power, beauty and agility of the human body, while the fight sequences are most often choreographed in a way that emphasizes the poetry of movement. Increasingly, special effects are being deployed to ensure the maximum effect in underlining these movements' (Dissannayake, 2003, p. 86). Thus the emphasis when discussing them tends to focus on movement, rather than music.

Belonging to the martial arts tradition, *Hero* (Zhang, 2002) can be considered a quintessential national film also in that its topic is the very foundation of China. The score for this film comprises elements of traditional Chinese music, Western orchestration and Japanese percussion. Itzhak Perlman played some violin solos, and Tan Dun himself an ancient Chinese melody, using

[1] Zhang, Y. (Producer), & Zhang, Y. (Director). (2002). *Hero* [Motion Picture]. China.

his own violin with silk strings tuned to the Chinese pitch in an effort to convey both historical accuracy and the surreal atmosphere that sometimes pervades martial arts films (see table 1). In the process of writing the score, Tan Dun engaged the China Philharmonic Orchestra, comprising western instruments, including strings and brass; the Chinese Philharmonic Chorus, composed of 50 bass singers; the Ancient Rao Ensemble of Changsha Museum, the KODO Drummers of Japan; *guqin* player Liu Li and the soprano You Yan. The soundtrack comprises 16 pieces. The main theme, 'For the World', repeated throughout the score—sometimes in variations—is a mournful pentatonic melody played on the violin, emulating an ancient fiddle. This theme alternates with the martial epic trait, as the hard (martial) and the soft (the main theme), played out in a ying yang fashion. Sometimes, the violin's sound evokes the distinctive sound of the *erhu*; at other times, it succeeds conjuring up an ancient fiddle.[2]

Table 1 The 'Hero' Soundtrack[2]

Mood	Pieces	Features	Performers
Epic	Overture	Creates an atmosphere of grandiosity, thanks to the chorus, strings, brass and the majestic drums. The violin plays main theme, and when singing the melody, it prompts such feelings of sentimental nostalgia, supported by the strings	Perlman (violin) and KODO
	Warriors	KODO drums beat the rhythm in a moderately slow tempo in duple time, strongly projecting a martial character. The chorus and the brass support the whole with an imposing *tutti*.	Perlman (violin) and KODO
	At Emperor's Palace	Full orchestra, chorus drums with a signature time of 4/4	Tan Dun (violin) and KODO
	Swift Sword and Farewell, Hero	Its moderato tempo beats by strong rhythm depicts a striking epic scene. In this piece, the violin-like takes the main theme alternating with the chorus.	Tan Dun (violin) and KODO

[2] Tan, D. (Composer). (2003). Hero, A Shang Yimou Film. [D. Tan, Conductor] On *Soundtrack composed by Tan Dun*. Sony Music.

Ethereal and Flowing	At Emperor's Palace	Effect of 'liquid echoes'—or superposed flowing of sounds—added to the orchestration as a discreet backdrop. This effect gives the musical narrative a touch of unreality. Oneiric atmosphere created thanks to *Chime Bells*, seen in Qin's Palace. Played as a non-diegetic solo piece when Nameless enters the Emperor's Palace.	Tan Dun (violin) and KODO
	'Gone With Leaves'	Conveyed by the voice, with the backing of the orchestra, chorus and drums, and discreet, aquatic, painful echoes. Slow melody.	Perlman (violin) and KODO, and You Yan soprano
	Above Water	Mainly uses string instruments. The chorus sings the main theme on a backdrop of aquatic echoes, reinforced by the crystalline texture of the harp.	Liu Li (gu qin)
	Longing	The mourning fiddle is heard against the backdrop of cellos, violins and the harp. Its tempo is quite slow and soft. Western sound from the orchestra dialogues with the fiddle.	Perlman (violin)
	In the Chess Court[3]	Low tempo; develops a dialogue between the *guqin* and the violin's voice, also evoking the lost ancient fiddle. A part for *guqin* follows, developing harmonics, glissandos and portamentos, accompanied by discreet drums and strings. A sudden change imposes a more rhythmic tempo by the drums, leading through a crescendo to a triumphal finale.	Perlman, KODO drums and Liu Li (*gu qin*)

Action takes place during the reign of the King Qin Shi Huangdi, 246-221 BC, who conquered what had until then been warring states and unified them to form China. Loosely based on historical narratives, the film revolves around an encounter between a man, a swordsman called 'Nameless', and the King of Qin. The swordsman has earned the right to meet the King alone at a distance of twenty meters, as he has managed to kill three very well known would-be assassins who had been plotting an attempt on his life, and meeting the King at this safe distance was the reward. Over the course of the meeting, Nameless tells the story of how he killed each one of them, but as the narration progresses it becomes clear that there is more to the stories than meets the eye. By the end of Nameless's account, the King of Qin understands the three assassins had in fact consented to be killed, sacrificing themselves so that Nameless, who they understood was more capable than them, could earn the right to meet the King at a distance of twenty meters, and use the occasion to kill him. Just as this is about to happen however, Nameless understands, through the conversation with the King, that unless the King lives and succeeds, war and bloodshed will continue. At that point he too decides to sacrifice himself, like the assassins he had killed before had done, but this time for what he regards as the common good. He does not try to kill the King, but is sentenced to death anyway, for plotting. The film ends with a note on how this period marked the unification of China, but remains ambiguous as to who the hero of the title was.

The film has been understood in various ways: as a postmodern story that deconstructs history and represents it as a series of conflicting narratives, with truth being a matter of perspective; as a defence of absolute rule; or on the contrary, as a statement that individuals, even if they appear to be mighty kings, are ultimately constrained by circumstances, including the time and place and the social milieu they face; and many more (for an account of the various interpretations see (De La Garza, 2007).

More important for my purposes here however is the way it has also been understood as a remarkable film that is at the same time Chinese as regards genre—*wuxia*, or traditional martial arts—, plot, actors and crew, but also global in its aesthetic features and its approach to issues of national identity, not least through music. 'Hero' seems to have taken on the 'modernisation' of China

alluded to above, by renewing culturally and aesthetically both the film industry and music, as national and also global heritage. In 'Hero' we can hear all the features of Tan Dun's compositional style that have become his hallmark described above, namely hybridity in terms of music and philosophical traditions, and artistic boundary crossings, but also a personal search and a desire to focus on universal themes. In the paragraphs that follow I show how these play out in one of the main scenes, where Nameless kills the first assassin and music has a central role.

At the Chess Court

Music and Time

Starts: 06:41
Ends: 14:52

This is a compelling scene in which psychic and diegetic time mix, bound by the time of the music. The protagonist Nameless is telling the King of Qin how he defeated the first assassin, in a flashback. He found the assassin at a chess court, he says, as the assassin 'had a reputation of loving both chess and music', arts that in China were often enjoyed together, and attended frequently. An elderly, blind musician plays a *guqin* while guests play chess. At a first stage, the seven elite guards from the Qin Court, who had been trailing the assassin for days, confront him at the Chess Court and try to arrest him. The assassin defeats them, but just as he is about to leave the Chess Court—at the same time as the musician is wrapping up his instrument to leave as well—Nameless arrives. A preliminary short encounter between the swordsmen takes place. Next, Nameless asks the guqin player: 'Sir, would you be kind enough to play us another piece?' and he adds: 'martial arts and music share the same principles. Both wrestle with complex chords and rare melodies.' The musician returns to his seat and starts improvising a piece. At that point, music takes centre-stage (Fig 1), and the combat scene becomes a kind of dance.



Fig. 1 At that point, music takes centre stage

The opponents then close their eyes. Nameless observes: 'We stood facing each other for a long time. Neither of us made a move while our combat unfolded in the depths of our minds', and the fight goes on until all of the *guqin* strings suddenly burst. This internalisation of space is visually highlighted on the screen by means of a change in the saturation, temperature and tint of the images. This psychic space corresponds to the *guqin* player. Black and white is used to indicate the psychic time, alternating shots in which the blind musician plays in colour, to switch to the time of the story.

In line with other Asian narratives discussed on this volume, blindness is an important feature of the musician, who is in this way 'looking inwards', evoking a realm of subjectivity. It is this interior perception, heightened by his blindness, which allows him to pluck and strum the strings of his instrument to match the swordsmen movements. The swordsmen in this respect echo the musician as they close their eyes to see the battle unfolding in their minds, all the more evoking a sense of their relation to music. And in martial arts, the apprentice must develop the ability to fight applying the scheme's techniques with their eyes closed. It may be for this reason that, when describing his Martial Arts Trilogy, Tan Dun associated it with ballet: 'The Trilogy features three different films as one opera or ballet in three acts' (Tan, Martial Arts Trilogy). Rhythmic properties are ascribed 'in the same sense to both music and bodily or human movement, and that sense is a musical one. Producing music is not more primitive or basic than moving rhythmically, or dancing' (Hamilton, 2007, p.

127). In fact, it is thanks to music the subversion of that reality, conceived as a space-time continuum, takes place. When the very first notes are plucked and some chords and ascending and descending arpeggios are strummed, a powerful energy starts moving in a synchronised and harmonious rhythm. Then the encounter becomes flowing music, like the drops of rain we are shown on screen. The speed of motion of the martial artists mirrors the slow tempo of that music; the passage of time in that timeless dimension is measured by the slow tempo of the music. The balance is broken when one of the opponents collapses and dies. Drops of rain become drops of sorrow (tears), and then drops of blood, binding the cycle of human life to nature. And while this cycle also alludes to a traditional characteristic of narratives of national identity, founded on the 'god of the lineage' and 'the god of the land' (Smith, 1991), with the blood dripping to enter the earth becoming nature, it is also possible to understand it as alluding to death as a common, universal concern.

Music and the Dao

The first point to note is the role of water, both visually and audibly, and as the main structure for and source of music in this scene and later in the film—and indeed subsequently in the career of Tan Dun's. (Tan, Tan Dun. Water Concerto, 2008) It is a rainy evening and the rhythmic sound of the rain falling down can be heard throughout. At times, we see drops of rain form a water curtain. Water also incessantly drips from the various pavilions' roofs, often in a slow motion that increases the drama, and it flows from a tank where the chessboard pieces are kept. Gaston Bachelard has referred to the effect conveyed by depictions of water such as this with words that evoke synaesthesia. To him, drops 'twinkle and make flicker the light and the mirror of water. When we seen them, we *hear* them quivering.' (Bachelard, 1978, pp. 254, emphasis in the original) It would seem Tan Dun took this effect into consideration when designing the soundscape for 'Hero'. The warriors' swords also at times act as percussion instruments on water, as do the legs of Nameless stepping on stones in puddles (Figure 2). The battle does, quite literally become music, or is rendered in terms of music.



Fig 2. Swords become percussion instruments on water

Nature, as in Tan Dun's many pieces of 'organic music', becomes the main music instrument. These effects are conveyed through long sequences of scales and arpeggios spread from the bottom upwards, or from the top backwards, whose flowing effects evoke a waterfall or a cascade. Furthermore, moments of silence are also crucial to enhance the sounds that follow, and this is sometimes achieved on the film by the silent contemplation of water. As Bachelard contends, water 'is a model of calm and silence […] water lives like a great materialised silence' (Bachelard, 1978, p. 258). This is certainly the case in 'Hero'.

Water has an important symbolism in Daoism. Indeed the very expression, *the flowing of the Dao* refers to its movement, like a stream, in a natural and spontaneous way and in all directions. Also as a *nourishing source*, which refers to the capacity of water to be beneficial to all things and all people, nourishing them and keeping them alive (Moeller, 2004, p. 37). Moreover, water is associated with two of the seminal aesthetic traditions in China: painting and writing calligraphy**,** valued as an art form in its own right. As for the former, not only is water a basic ingredient in painting, but also a subject matter, given 'the priority accorded to landscape painting in Chinese art' (Clarke, 2010, p. 14). And its importance in calligraphy is highlighted in the plot of 'Hero', since Nameless understands he must let the King of Qin live precisely at the point when the meaning of two characters becomes clear through the conversation with him. They were written by the second would-be assassin that Nameless kills at the moment of dying, with a calligraphy that had gained fame as an epitome of art—thus it was an aesthetic achievement too. Nameless understands their meaning,

often translated into English as 'Our Motherland', when the encounter with the King reveals it to be 'China' as opposed to the former warring states.

Second is the instrument the blind musician plays, a *guqin*. While the *guqin* can produce a rhythmic, hard and dry texture using staccato, it can also create very soft textures by means of harmonics, vibratos, glissandos, portamentos and arpeggios when rubbing the strings, similar to the Western harp—traditionally associated with specific textures borrowed from water and air as well, making either flowing sounds (plucked strings) or ethereal sounds (rubbed strings). The *guqin* is able to shape such atmospheres as soft and whispered wind, or the flowing of crystalline and murmured water. Invented during the Zhou Dynasty, the *guqin*'s capacity of changing its texture so dramatically corresponds to the yin yang alternation of the course of things and events. As it is one of the traditional musical instruments that is most identified with Chinese identity, the *guqin* plays a very important role in this scene, in which music is so central. For a long time, it was considered as a self-development instrument that focuses on the performer's inner self, reflecting it like a mirror (Jin, 2011, p. 54). Thus, again we have the ambiguity between the focus on national identity on the one hand, and the focus on the individual on the other. Like humanity, the individual is often also considered the unit in theories that posit the universality of values, in opposition to communities.

Third, a predominant theme of the occurrence at the chess court is life and death, understood from a Daoist philosophical perspective of time as the rhythm of nature. Indeed, at the chess house where Nameless and the assassin meet, one of them must die. The *Zhuangzi*—an ancient collection of Chinese fables and anecdotes, and a foundational text of Daoism—often compares the categories of wakefulness and dream to life and death, both states considered natural and equally valuable. The Dao concedes an equal validity and authenticity to all segments of a process of change, unlike incarnation, in which 'change dissolves a thing and puts something else in its place' (Moeller, 2004, p. 83). In the course of change, only change prevails. This concept may be understood as an ontology of process as compared to, in terms of the metaphysical tradition of the West, an ontology of substance. In accordance to Daoism, impermanence of beings and things is integrated into an encompassing

duration. The Daoist conception of time is a continuous flow consisting 'of mutually replacing temporal "nows"' (Moeller, 2004, p. 98). In Western philosophy, it was precisely Deleuze that famously made the idea of process and becoming central to philosophy. However, it was Bachelard's philosophy of the instant—which largely informed Delueze—coinciding with Daoist conceptions of time as a 'perpetual flowing process' that brought music into the equation. According to Bachelard, as 'time has only one reality, that of the instant', the world is regulated 'by a musical measure imposed by the cadence of instants' (Bachelard, 1992, p. 46). Furthermore, Bachelard claims that if duration is not homogenous, it might be felt only through instants. Amplified by slow motion, all events in the Chess Court—the rain, the music, the abandoned chessboard, the fight and death—unfold in a sequence of simultaneous and ephemeral instants. In other words, cinematically, the slow motion allows the sequences to subvert conventional time and space, creating a remarkable timeless, oneiric atmosphere, to highlight a collective ritual of synchronised dance, bound by music.

Rhythm as a fundamental component of the passage of time is also enshrined in the *Book of Changes* (*I Ching*): 'One Yin, one Yang: that is called Dao, or: One time Yin and one time Yang—this is called the rhythm of the Dao' (Moeller, 2004, p. 106). According to this perspective, yin yang is the keystone that structures the rhythm of all natural phenomena. This general concept of nature means that the Dao is the regulator of nature as a rhythmic process. The perennial course of nature, being constituted by complementary elements such as night and day, darkness and brightness and so on, flows rhythmically. Indeed, although water is associated to a continuous fluid, while rhythm is a strong, regular and repeated movement or sound, in the internalised encounter the distinct rhythm martial artists follow when exchanging blows and kicks dissolves into perfectly synchronised movements that flow. Furthermore, rhythm in the chess court sets out movement—at times in slow motion—in such a way that all elements gather together in order to create a unity, or a 'perfect scenario', the fourth and last Daoist principle I want to argue the music of this scene conveys.

To Daoist aesthetics, an accomplished work of art can create a perfect scenario when it surpasses reality. How the work of art was made and its effects

are the overriding concerns. This principle is illustrated with the legend of Wu Daozi's landscape painting, said to have been such a masterpiece, that upon completion the painter himself entered it and disappeared inside, in front of the emperor's very eyes. In short, art at this level is not just an imitation of reality, but itself real in its own way. Applying these principles to the scene at the chess court, the three accomplished artists—or dreamers—close their eyes to create a perfect scenario that surpasses reality. Being a shared, internalised experience, only happening in their minds, the reality gap between the actual act and its maker vanishes. Their art—music, martial art—is as real as the artists. Artists and their art become the same dreaming substance. In Western psychology, this is similar to the concept of 'flow' put forward by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, (Csíkszentmihályi, 2009) characterised by complete absorption in what one is doing, and often exemplified by the experience of accomplished musicians. However, in the film this perfect scenario, ephemeral as an instant, is over when its harmonious balance is broken. The perfect scenario is broken by the act of suppressing the other, signalled here by the broken strings that suddenly announce the end of the balance, as an event of contingency. Beyond the nationalist aspects, the music in this scene also evokes a melancholy inherent to the human condition, here symbolised by death.

Music and Pattern

In addition to the various ways in which the Chinese philosophy of Dao informs the way that music is employed in this crucial scene, there are other frameworks for interpretation that also highlight the role of music. Here I turn to Rudolph Arnheim's contention that the artistic endeavour is about enabling perception to discover underlying structure, in what has been termed a sort of gestalt. As put by Patrick Keating, 'a successful artwork has a form that will allow the perceiver to see a certain pattern' (Keating, 2011, p. 143). I would argue the pattern that the scene at the chess court invites audiences to discover is based on music, for it is one of correspondences, as if in echo chamber. The first correspondence is that between martial arts and chess, both games of strategic skills that involve having the capacity or intelligence to vanquish the enemy. The confrontation between Nameless and the assassin is mirrored by the chessboard, which occupies a full

screen shot at the beginning. In both cases, two men are facing each other in combat[4]. And in both cases, movement is elicited rhythmically. The music in turn, as I argued above, echoes the images, while the rain echoes tears, which echo blood. The scene at the chess court is thus an echo chamber in which the gestalt that Arnheim alluded to is easily grasped from the structure created by the forms, but also, importantly, the sounds and music. In Tan Dun's music, John Cage once said, 'the east and the west come together as our one home' (O'Mahony, 2000). Equally, I would say, it invites eastern and western philosophies and theories of art for its interpretation, and can bring the two in dialogue as well.

Concluding Remarks

I started this chapter arguing that the work of Tan Dun can be understood as a suitable metaphor for Chinese identity in the present context of globalization, as the music he has composed, including his music for film, is mainly characterized by a conscious attempt to use hybridity as a means to both reaffirm tradition and to innovate. The crucial issue is that, unlike the cultural hybridity that has long been the outcome of colonization or Western domination, that has taken several hundred years and that in fact in some places has become the national culture—such as in the Americas—there is agency in the experimental music of Tan Dun.

Deleuze argued his concept of a minor cinema in opposition to the major. The latter, he characterised as a machinery whose massive proportions, and cultural and commercial global predominance depend on the continuous production and promotion of films for mass consumption. The former, produced in search for a national consciousness, has a capacity to associate what is political and what is private (Deleuze, 2009, p. 209). He also commented on the position of the author or intellectual public figure that can only fracture the status quo imposed by the colonisers 'by going over to the coloniser's side, even if only aesthetically, through artistic influences' (Deleuze, 2009, p. 213). While the meaning of 'Hero' and its political stance are far from clear and have been the subject of much debate, there is broad agreement that it takes up the conventions of both martial arts and Hollywood blockbusters, and that it was an attempt to, as it were, 'speak a cinematic language', not least through music, that would open up global distribution circuits.

Be that as it may, I have shown that Tan Dun's work systematically explores the rich possibilities of merging Eastern and Western music traditions, philosophies and conventions, while also crossing the boundaries of artistic domains, leading to an aesthetic as well as a cultural cross-fertilisation. In the composer's own words:

> I have always sought to cross boundaries, disciplines and bring different genres together. The tradition of martial arts was created from Chinese opera in the 19th century. To me, the opera tradition is an ancient form of cinema and cinema is the opera of the future. (Tan, Martial Arts Trilogy)

To account for the boundary-crossing media and art such as that displayed in Tan Dun's, Jacques Rancière has proposed three different paradigms. First, as quoted above, Friedrich Nietzsche—and then Wagner's—idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* or total artwork, in which art would ultimately become life. Second, the view that hybridisation of artistic means is a logical outcome of the postmodern condition, characterised by eclecticism and the levelling off of hitherto entrenched hierarchies. And last, the idea that the various mixtures imply translations from one medium into another, as encountering the work(s) of art and making meaning is an active process: 'an emancipated community is a community of narrators and translators.' (Ranciere, 2011, p. 21) I would argue Tan Dun has systematically taken this role of 'translator' when it comes to music, the visual arts, China and The West.

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Notes

[1] This is the translation used by Barbara Mittler, who contends that 'Encountering Sorrow' is ascribed to Qu Yuan (340-278 BC), 'a scholar famous

for his dedicated (and unrewarded) remonstrations to his emperor, who eventually commits suicide' (Mittler, 1997, p. 120).

[2] This sound has the following features: no vibrato or a discreet vibrato; technically, it uses portamentos (the process of gliding from one note to another through all intermediate pitches) and glissandos. Its timbre is rather opaque, grave and gloomy.

[3] Although the soundtrack CD includes a piece entitled 'In the Chess Court', played by Perlman (violin), KODO and Liu Li (*guqin*), it is totally different from the one played on the film, which was an improvisation.

[4] Chinese chess or *Xiànqí* was patterned after the array of troops in the Warring States era (Li,). The game may have been developed by General Han Xin in 203 BC in relation to the strategies of the art of war. In ancient China, chess players were usually accompanied by *guqin* music.