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## CHAPTER 24

### CONCLUSIONS: NEW DIRECTIONS IN CHINESE MUSIC RESEARCH

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#### **Abstract**

The chapter identifies problems and prospects for Chinese music studies in the contemporary era, identifying areas that deserve further attention in developing a viable, incisive, and inclusive disciplinary future. Prospects are outlined for new research in this subject area as raised in each of the preceding chapters. Then, the issues of linguistic and disciplinary multiplicities are discussed. Proposed solutions that would help construct a shared core for Chinese music studies as a new disciplinary meeting point include greater translation from Chinese to English and other languages, enhanced attention to co-authoring, and the focusing of critical engagement around shared theoretical strengths and pressing concerns. The essay closes by detailing four such areas of existing theoretical strength that offer potential core disciplinary pillars for future work: global music history, diaspora, decolonization, and intangible cultural heritage.

**Keywords:** Chinese music studies, global music history, diaspora, language, disciplinarity

#### INTRODUCTION

From one perspective, this volume may well comprise the largest single research source on Chinese music published in English to date.<sup>1</sup> Its chapters collectively exemplify significant Chinese musical histories and contemporaneities, setting topics arising within the current boundaries of the People's Republic of China alongside those that carry resonances of that

nation but which occur elsewhere. These case studies are replete with new conceptions and analytical insights, and collectively they advance study in this area by no small dimension. Yet, and from another perspective, this book can also be understood as primarily a fresh interjection in a conversation that has been ongoing for a long while already—in the “Introduction”, Yu Hui describes the *Shijing* 詩經 as our volume’s earliest (known) predecessor. If that would have been an intimidating comparison to bring to mind while writing a chapter, it does at least infer that this conversation might be expected to go on a lot longer still, climate change, species degradation, pandemics, and human conflict permitting.

The present volume is certainly very far from being a complete orientation to China’s musical history or a systematic guide to all its principal contemporary musical realities. Instead of providing encyclopedic information on a myriad of musical traditions, genres, instruments, musicians, compositions, and music-related principles, we present new and diverse writing from leading researchers that addresses how we deal with China’s music history and with the variegated styles, traditions, and practices identified as somehow musically Chinese in the present. In line with other volumes in Oxford’s Handbook series, it is thus a book about research. Our central ambition is to advance our field by capturing the energetic, multi-disciplinary actualities of where we are now, producing a set of essays that function as a dynamic springboard that propels study onward and upward in the years to come.

We might employ the term “Chinese music studies” to describe all of the research that occurs within this broad area. But research on Chinese music is currently targeted at readerships across multiple languages and it is published in numerous, distinct disciplinary forums. In anglophone settings, there is hardly a discipline of Chinese music studies with a

recognized core of established intellectual frameworks and methodological norms; in sinophone circles, on the other hand, the subject area is claimed by several competing disciplinary visions, each with its own emphases. From this perspective, and when we talk with one another about Chinese music in either of those settings, we can sometimes feel like strangers driven together by coincidence (*ping shui xiang feng*, 萍水相逢; literally, duckweed joining up by chance). This book thus offers a rare opportunity for us to recognize shared concerns and, through doing so, work together to build a more explicit disciplinary infrastructure for Chinese music studies.

In the writing below, I discuss prospects for Chinese music studies as a discipline that will need to operate effectively across multiple languages in a world where linguistic identities are both contested and unequal. That discussion allows me to identify conditions that deserve further attention, not least the seemingly contradictory trends that simultaneously push for the paying of greater attention to insider voices and the ever-increasing role of English as a medium for international scholarly exchange. I raise thoughts on translation, theory production, co-authoring, and critical engagement, and on how these are contributory parts of a viable, incisive, and inclusive disciplinary future. I then identify some sample areas where we seem already very well prepared to form core disciplinary pillars for Chinese music studies, namely global music history, diaspora, decolonization, and intangible cultural heritage. These are not the only possibilities at play in the field as it presently stands or even just within the confines of this volume, of course. Accordingly, and prior to advancing my personal observations, I draw out themes and possibilities either implicitly or explicitly put forward by the contributor of each chapter in turn.

### THEMES RAISED IN EACH CHAPTER

Part I gathers up essays that address our ways of writing histories of Chinese music. Essays here exemplify the rich sets of archaeological, iconographic, and literary sources available to music historians in this part of the world, and address aspects of the long tradition of Chinese music theory and its sub-area of research into musical temperament. Chapters explore the ways that both histories and historical musical practices preserve and inscribe narratives about the past and project reverberations into the present and the future. Through case studies on China's important historical bell sets and the *qin* 琴 zither respectively, Yang Yuanzheng (Chapter 2) shows how archaeological discoveries demand that we rethink received historical paradigms. Yang's point could be readily generalized—the expert interpretations produced in Chinese music studies deserve to be tested through empirical study, which inevitably includes in-depth discussion with musicians, instrument builders, and other culture bearers. Yu Hui and Chen Yingshi's "Theorizing 'Natural Sound'" (Chapter 3) shares this concern, asking how we might reconsider what we learn from the textual sources provided by many generations of Chinese scholars in light of what we can discover through studying the realizations of actual musical practice. Their chapters point us toward fascinating spaces where practical and theoretical consciousnesses appear to conflict, and where new historical research can provide alternate musical possibilities for the thoughtful contemporary performer and listener.

Zhao Weiping's study of iconographical and literary data on two ancient foreign dance forms (Chapter 4) interrelates the theoretical and the practical in another set of ways. Zhao brings a historian's interpretative depth to these source materials, few, if any, of which were originally created to serve as scholarly source materials. He then adds an eye for telling

detail as he reconstructs the postures and movements characteristic of these historical genres. Zhao's commentary on the transformation in Han society of these dances is thereby all the more revealing of the aesthetic norms of everyday entertainment life in that period. Zhao's work fits well into the global history theme I mention below, but it can also be read as an encouragement to scholars of Chinese music to attend more comprehensively to dance, movement, and the potentials and affordances of the human body, as well as to the research produced by scholars within each of those areas.

Interdisciplinary approaches to historical materials provide a foundation for Alan Lau's essay (Chapter 5) on the analysis of song structures in *kunqu* 昆曲 opera. One of Lau's key observations is that music and language work in ways that are fluid but also contrasting. As such, songwriters and vocalists occupy a space that is dynamically imbued with expressive power. If Zhao's chapter implicitly pointed to the benefits we might accrue from working with dance and movement scholarship, Lau's chapter argues that we have much to learn from those in linguistics. The interface of music and language comes up regularly in chapters throughout this book; it's certainly a domain within which those in Chinese music studies can make even more of a contribution to global research.

Joseph Lam's essay (Chapter 6) takes a contrasting but complementary approach to the interplay of music and words. Lam's topic is the chanting and singing of song texts preserved in the historical classic, the *Shijing*. Rather than analyzing music structure though, Lam is interested in the ways that these songs bear cultural narratives and shared memories, while also serving as inspiration for personal expression. Since the song lyrics have come to us from the *Shijing*, but not the original melodies, the songs represent a continuing tradition

of creative recontextualization in new situations. Jeff Warren, writing on music and ethical responsibility, describes the situation that results and which underlies Lam's case study:

All musical experience is embodied, and points to the other bodies involved in experiencing—including listening, dancing, performing or creating—music. In other words, the experience of music provides us with a trace of others. We contact music, experience the trace of others and leave a trace of ourselves. Music is thus never completely our own.

Encounters with music involve traces of others that we must respond to. (2014: 164)

There's a rationale here for a more extensive examination within Chinese music studies of the musical ways such encounters achieve significance within both exceptional and everyday circumstances. Such an exploration could draw on a rich indigenous bibliography on morals, ethics, and aesthetics in East Asian contexts, and we might counterbalance this literature with use of ethnographic methodologies, already familiar to many of us, which lend themselves to assessment of the experiential, behavioral, and interpersonal aspects of music making across a wider range of social groups and settings than concerned many historical writers.

In Chapter 7, Yang Hon-Lun takes music historiography as her principal subject, asking what kinds of music histories are produced in Chinese contexts and how such sources variously reflect three distinct ways of accounting for the past: ideology, discourse, and memory. Yang crystallizes her discussions through detailed examination of the narratives put forward in recent music histories on Hong Kong and on the Cultural Revolution, each of which remains a sensitive subject in the Chinese state's evaluations. Yang does far more than point to how far historical accounts continue to serve those who control the primary channels of discourse; instead, she makes a powerful appeal that our role as researchers includes a responsibility to expose and challenge historical biases, including those operative in the

present moment, and she shows how we can actively safeguard memory-keeping in our studies of music.

Part I is completed by Frederick Lau's analysis of five representative moments when the institutional characteristics of modern musical system took form in China: school songs, the music conservatory, the rise of Western-style composition, musical individualism, and commercial and popular music (Chapter 8). These features (plus potential others such as reform of national musical instruments) are shared with many other nations but the nuances with which they occurred and the linkages between them are specific to the Chinese situation; thus, the account offers a unique case study in the global history of music, yet also one that's readily comparable to situations that occurred elsewhere.

Part II is given to an array of studies of significant musical genres and practices from across the sinophone world. Alan Thrasher provides an overview of the instrumentation of a set of regional music ensembles (Chapter 9). His account also offers orientation to foundational Chinese concepts of ensemble performance, many of which are shared in the groupings studied throughout the remainder of Part II. Crucial here is the insight that Chinese heterophony is a result not of a single organizational approach but of several types of variational action that all occur at once, a practice that requires both experience and imagination from the musicians in question. The essay implicitly suggests a basis for comparative study of further heterophonic groupings, including those outside the sinophone world. It also provides grounds for close analysis of the pleasure that musicians find in playing with one another, and the interplay of aesthetics and ethics as skilled executants make real-time decisions on what exactly to vary and how to make space so that the contributions of others can momentarily rise to the fore (see further, Witzleben, 1995).



Each subsequent chapter is more geographically and historically focused, and so many are also accounts of processes of change. In Chapter 10, Mercedes Dujunco focuses on recreational *Jiangnan sizhu* 江南絲竹 music in Taicang, a county-level city outside Suzhou.

She assesses the group's repertory and reflects on the ways that group members have expanded it by drawing in music from other regional traditions and through a carefully executed project led by professional composer Zhang Xiaofeng 張曉峰 in which new compositions in traditional style were introduced and memorized. As a whole, the chapter reminds us that what may look like age-old traditions can actually be quite recently established in their present formats, and the musicians involved may be actively pursuing their own pathways of evolution, development, and historical reconstruction. Dujunco's case, which she recommends as a model for similar endeavors elsewhere, hints at the huge efforts undertaken across China in intangible heritage revival and sustenance.

Du Yaxiong's writing shares a concern with understanding shifting attitudes to intangible cultural heritage, although his case addresses the folksongs of the Yugurs, a minority population found in Gansu Province (Chapter 11). Du explains that since the 1980s, many Yugur have given up a nomadic existence based on herding in favor of agricultural farming and other sedentary occupations. One consequence has been the reformation and recategorization of their singing practices; for instance, herdsmen's vocalizations used formerly to encourage mother goats to nurse their young may now be either discarded or sung instead to human audiences for entertainment, and a whole genre of "new folk song" has arisen which is also shaped toward public performance. Du describes culture as (ideally) accumulative and it is clear that the Yugurs with whom Du has worked for several decades increasingly perceive their vocal repertory as an inheritance of songs, and that they regret

having lost some of them in the dramatic social changes of the last two generations. Du's chapter points to the potential for long-term relationships between researcher and community to lead to collaborative research-led action on several levels, and this too would be a valuable component in a newly invigorated Chinese music studies.

In Chapter 12, Yu Hui recounts the fascinating case of the Jinyu Qin Society 今虞琴社, a body formed in Shanghai and Suzhou in the 1930s by musicians who wanted to conserve the *qin* and its music into a new social era. The Society's meetings provided temporary respite from a turbulent external environment but they were far more than a safe space for elite socialization around reassuringly familiar music: instead, those most active in the Society shared a nationalist and participatory outlook on the value of Chinese culture, and they encouraged new steps, such as research and broadcasting. Yu's study adds nuance to our views of modern music history in China, helping us avoid the uncritical opposition of traditionalists with either advocates of whole-scale Westernization or radical revolutionists. Such a case study again contributes to global histories of music, among other potential new directions for research.

Francesca Lawson's multimodal assessment of *jingyun dagu* 京韻大鼓 (Beijing drumsong, Chapter 13) sustains this same research aspiration of taking modernization as a topic in its own right. In her case, Lawson assesses the new realities of a prominent traditional music genre as it became mediated by recording and broadcast technologies in the mid-twentieth century. Her research informs several issues that were important in preceding chapters too, among them the interfacing of music and language and the means through which music performance and gesture combine to form meaningful expressions of both personal artistry and broader cultural identity. Her key intellectual frame of reference,

however, is provided by a turn to studies in narrative communication, derived from work on oral traditions and from that on mother-infant interactions. This diverse toolkit enables Lawson to more roundedly account for a performance that is thoroughly musical, textual, and visual, which, in fact, describes a great breadth of musical expressions worldwide, not only in Chinese-speaking parts of world.

Taiwan is of course one such site in the sinophone world and one with its own distinct historical pathways, right up to and through the modern period. Chapter 14, by Hsieh Hsiao-Mei, is the first chapter of two in this volume that focus on Taiwan, and Hsieh assesses the hybridized theatrical genre known in Taiwanese as *opela* 胡撇仔 (*hupeizai* in Mandarin).

Hsieh traces the rise of this genre from formative influences including those in traditional Chinese theater and more recent Japanese entertainments such as spoken dramas and the cross-dressing of Takarazuka Review. In the present century, intellectuals have become influential participants in the genre; its hybridized roots allow them considerable freedom to draw on diverse musical, literary, and dramatic sources in forming their own new creations.

Chapter 15 considers the history of the modern orchestra of Chinese instruments in Taiwan. Hybridity is also a key facet that author Chen Ching-Yi describes as she accounts for the *guoyue* 國樂 ensemble's reliance upon production of a dynamic "third space" for music making that was neither traditional nor Western. What's perhaps most striking is how malleable this third space was in Taiwanese musical practices, its potentials being rapidly reimagined as alienation from Chinese models gave way to fusion and importation and then to a self-conscious intensification of identifiably Taiwanese elements. The ironies of use of the "Chinese orchestra" to express Taiwanese distinction will be lost on few readers.

Wu Ben's chapter on the globalization of music for *pipa* 琵琶 completes Part II (Chapter 16). Placing his discussion in the context of the longer history of solo music for the *pipa*, Wu considers the striking number of soloists now resident in North America (and elsewhere) and the key musical trends stimulated by their presence there. In such settings, not only is the *pipa* called upon to project Chinese cultural identity, but also it is becoming reimagined as a world music instrument, and so thrust into musically diverse ensembles and partnerships that occur much less regularly in China. As Wu notes, an outcome of this is a rise of improvisatory performance skills, which relates both to norms in among the mixed musical environments within which migrant Chinese musicians are now seeking work and to the desire to pool creative agency relied upon by some composers in new music circles, where live art is valued for its collaborative and performative valencies, rather in reaction to earlier conceptualizations of performance as the dutiful recreation of fixed compositions. Wu asks the interesting question as to why *pipa* appears to have thrived in such circles more than many another Chinese instrument: is it that the instrument, as an import from Central Asia, was already multicultural when it first reached China and so its cross-cultural potential has been there for a long time already? Might it be that the *pipa* benefits from comparison with the guitar, which has become almost ubiquitous in contemporary musical ensembles, and so it's both familiar and unfamiliar to Western audiences at once? (For myself, I wonder how far the answer relates to the specific musical entrepreneurialism of the leading *pipa* players who have settled in Canada and the USA; in Western Europe, I've seen much new music featuring the *zheng* 箏 as that on the *pipa*, and that also seems a highly suitable instrument for new music in terms of its timbral possibilities and visual appeal.) Whatever the answer, Wu's question suggests the potential for a much broader cross-cultural inquiry as to why certain

instruments seem to acclimatize well to new musical and societal circumstances and what might happen to the inherited musical signifiers of Chinese identity as they become more widely regarded as features of hybridized, global music.

Part III of this volume deals with salient issues that have arisen particularly in the most recent decades. Most of the essays explicitly trace the musical consequences of intersections between what might be taken as opposing forces or perspectives. In Chapter 17, Qian Lijuan looks at the restoration of China's popular music industry in the mid-1980s, and specifically at the impact on mainstream popular music of a small number of intellectual songwriters whose individualist and self-directed humanism emerged in response to the widespread trauma of the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). In fact, and notwithstanding its ubiquity, the mainstream popular music of this era has received less attention than rock, at least among Western researchers, so this is also a reminder for us to listen carefully to these large-scale expressions: at the very least, they capture something of the spirit of the times; at the most, they propose through the emotion-shaping structures of popular song what shape that spirit should form.

Grace Wang's essay on singer Coco Lee 李玟 (Li Wen) remains in the vista of mainstream popular entertainment but looks instead at its cross-border dynamics (Chapter 18). Wang compares two moments when Lee attempted to work across borders: already an established star in Taiwan in the early 2000s, she attempted to break into the American market with material in English, but with little success; meanwhile, in 2016, Lee proved victorious in the prominent Chinese TV singing contest, *I am a Singer*, reestablishing her credibility for a new generation of Chinese listeners. The comparison reveals how the preconceptions audiences in each locale held about Lee's ethnicity intersected with their

ideas about the singer's talent and her embodied representations of gender and sexuality. The result was almost diametrically opposed conclusions on her integrity as an artist, which says at least as much about the audiences in question as it does about Lee herself. Again, what we might take as unassumingly mainstream music proves a rich ground indeed for the researcher to uncover the workings (and impasses) of intercultural values in the world around us.

In Chapter 19, Tan Shzr Ee compares not two moments of performance but two Chinese female pianists who have both found success in the wider world, Yuja Wang 王羽佳 and Zhu Xiao-Mei 朱曉玫. Tan's argument turns on the contrasting iconicities of these two women—how they present themselves visually—and on how their audiences decode the tropes each pianist embodies or overturns. Tan's chapter compares the voices of critics, mostly those outside China (for Wang) and primarily those inside it (for Zhu). Even though piano performance remains a field in which liveness is centrally important, new technologies, digital formats, and online forums mediate almost all these acts of presentation and critical evaluation, such that researching them is also an act of tracing how digital media shape our cultural lives much more generally.

The dualities of mediation and liveness also lie at the heart of Germán Gil-Curiel's essay on a prominent orchestral work by contemporary composer Tan Dun 譚盾 (Chapter 20). Interestingly, Gil-Curiel takes up the term "mediation" to reflect upon how Tan transformed the historical painting *Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖 (Along the River during the Qingming Festival) into a musical item. From this perspective, mediation is neither new nor something that occurs only through digital means—it may even be a fundamental aspect of music itself, as already suggested by Jeff Warren in the passage cited above. Finally, Gil-Curiel suggests that liveness and mediation are not binary opposites at all

but two dimensions of musical creativity and transmission that can be combined or opposed in a range of ways. This is indeed a pungent thought that will appeal to analysts of music in sinophone settings and far beyond.

Samuel Horlor, in Chapter 21, provides a similarly provocative reconsideration of the terms amateur and professional, which he illustrates through a study of the specific context of singing that occurs in numerous Chinese public squares and parks. In these settings, it is not satisfactory to identify singers as either amateur or professional. Instead, their singing displays both amateur and professional characteristics at once, and the two categories simultaneously reflect the status and ethical standing of participants, the relationships that form between vocalists and patrons, and aesthetic qualities of the music they perform. This nuanced finding is readily applicable to musical occasions across (and beyond) the sinophone world.

The final two chapters explore issues related to minority populations, but of rather different kinds. In Chapter 22, Chuen-Fung Wong focuses on the “minoritization” of Uyghur music and on the ways that the Han majority population have appropriated and processed the musical ingredients or signs of the smaller populations around them, reshaping them to invigorate their own modernist reformation of the nation’s music more generally. In certain cases, a feedback loop has then occurred, with the reformed reinventions becoming influential in minority areas in turn, thus adding new layers to the whole question of who is imitating or representing whom. Meanwhile, in Chapter 23, Tan Sooi Beng considers how musicians among the Chinese minority population in Malaysia have, at various historical moments, both crossed boundaries and retained selected markers of their Chineseness in a multicultural context. As Tan points out, this is a distinctly non-Chinese way of being Chinese, a balancing act in which transnational subjectivities evoked through musical

creation and listening nurture an inclusive future. If these two chapters apparently point in somewhat different directions, each recognizes that many of us sustain multiple cultural and national identities at once, work that is both essential, difficult, always in-progress, and highly characteristic of twenty-first century society more generally.

### LANGUAGES

Music researchers since at least Charles Seeger have noted the challenges inherent in attempting to explain one expressive-communicative medium (music) through the terms and structures of another (language).<sup>2</sup> The inherent intangibility of musical sound as a structure or valency that unfolds through real-time only magnifies this issue. This may go some way to illuminate why music studies often achieves only a peripheral position in the wider academy, even though music researchers regularly explore issues and materials of broad societal relevance—evidenced in this volume by those chapters that explore such themes as history, identity, group-formation, gender, sexuality, and diaspora—and even though so many people around us in the academy and among the public at large are genuinely interested in music. In fact, issues relating to language provide an even more complicated context for our current work for at least two further reasons.

First, Chinese is itself very far from being a single language. Shu-mei Shih has been foundational in calling out what is at stake here. Shih notes that many languages are spoken in China but that we typically refer to “Chinese” when we actually mean only Mandarin Chinese. This apparently innocent shorthand sustains a nationalist, Han-centric project that compresses nationality, ethnicity, and language. Drawing attention away from the multiplicities of actual practice, it veils the long-standing and continuing operations of China as an imperial state in its own right.<sup>3</sup> Shih writes: “the word ‘Chinese,’ then, has been



misused to equate language with nationality and ethnicity, and official monolingualism has disregarded and suppressed linguistic heterogeneity” (2011: 715). In exploring linguistic heterogeneity, the chapters incorporated in this volume draw on sources in the classical written language of ancient treatises, the special linguistic formulations and registers of onstage singing, the habits of online discourse, and the shifting nuances of several contemporary spoken languages found both within and beyond China’s present borders.

Second, Chinese music research both benefits and suffers from its distribution across numerous languages. A search in October 2021 of the ProQuest Thesis and Dissertations database discovered 153,702 contributions to this field spread across sixteen languages, the ten most widely used being English, Chinese, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, German, Serbian, Dutch, and Afrikaans. Some important languages are missing from that list (suggesting major gaps in the database’s coverage more generally)—a similar search on the WorldCat database turned up 128,772 items, 50,613 of which are in Chinese and 41,335 in English. Among the remainder were significant numbers in Japanese, Korean, Italian, Russian, and Vietnamese alongside most of the other languages already listed.<sup>4</sup> If this diversity reflects China’s international prominence and the widespread potential audiences for research in this area, a challenge for us as researchers is that few among us can become confident readers across more than a small handful of the languages listed here. The most inspiring new discoveries and interpretations may not always circulate as widely as they deserve to be due to the challenges thrown up by this wide linguistic array.

That might look like a call for the acceleration of a process through which English has become the primary international language for scholarly communication in many fields of study, perhaps even including Chinese music studies. But English inevitably filters Chinese materials and subject positions through its own systemic and cultural norms. Moreover, the

dominance of English sustains structures that disproportionately benefit those of us who have acquired acceptable academic English and, equally, hinders the global recognition of researchers who write primarily from other linguistic perspectives. Again, this might seem an issue that will in any case be resolved over time as East Asian (and other non-anglophone) researchers increasingly train in academic English so that they can offer what Sato and Sonoda, in the context of Global Asian Studies, have called “inside-out” viewpoints (2021). However, it is not simple to separate out advanced training in scholarly English from deep inculcation into the values and norms of an anglophone-dominated academy, a step that runs against widespread moves at the present moment toward the decolonization of knowledge production.

The prospect of paying greater heed to indigenous voices is a welcome one, even while it remains vulnerable, as Shih essentially notes above, to cooption by powerful and nationalistic state forces.<sup>5</sup> It seems incumbent upon us all to use whatever agency we can deploy to ensure that clichéd and uncritical interpretations do not rise to the fore under the flag of decolonization. But while it’s easy to point accusingly as the Chinese government attempts to project influence into new spaces (as, for instance, in the recent controversy over censorship of items in the PRC-facing website for the Cambridge University Press journal *China Quarterly*, see further Wong and Kwong, 2019), and while we can expect such efforts to continue, the West is hardly beyond reproach in this regard either—it is exactly an extended history of Western exoticizations, orientalizations, misapprehensions, and strategic compartmentalizations that make collective action to level the playing field now so urgent. Nancy Yunhwa Rao provides a salient example, describing the “division of intellectual labor” she perceives in the field of North American music theory between those who study Western music and present “universalizing models and theories” and those who study non-Western

musical traditions and are treated as specialists who operate within a limited frame of reference:

First, such a division of intellectual labor allows the “theorists” to be more or less ensconced in their discipline, collecting raw data from different area studies and cultures to test or expand their universalizing models and theories, without burdening themselves to acquire the requisite knowledge about these non-Western traditions. Second, such division of intellectual labor relegates those theorists who work on non-Western music with adequate language and cultural knowledge to the roles of area-specialists, their work marginal to the discipline of music theory, and their conceptual model or analysis not “theoretical” enough to be considered a valuable contribution to the “world of music theory.” They are cultural insiders, but not theorists. (Rao, 2019: 78)

This kind of structural inequity is reinforced by, and reinforces, the linguistic divisions already mentioned. In this volume, Yu Hui and I offered greater editorial support to those who take up a particularly heavy burden when asked to write in English (and we asked authors to emplace their subjects’ names, music titles, and similar data in the language those people would habitually employ directly within their chapters). The volume you see now thus takes a small new step toward linguistic polyvocality when compared to edited collections of the preceding decade or so that in so many other respects offer very significant inspiration to us here. The richly thematic *China and the West: Music, Representation, and Reception* (Yang and Saffle, 2017), for example, includes several chapters from authors with native-level proficiency in Chinese, but each such author already works in an English-speaking institutional context and has a lengthy CV of publications in English already. The same is true for the valuable collection *Gender in Chinese Music* (Harris, Pease, and Tan, 2013), which includes just one chapter from a researcher who actually works in China (alongside

further Chinese voices featured in interview excerpts interwoven between the main chapters). A third set of essays that broke new ground in yet another set of ways, *Lives in Chinese Music* (Rees, 2009), similarly has just one chapter co-authored by a writer based in China (and he too is heard mostly through interview extracts).

Apart from working to include more contributors who work primarily in the sinophone contexts of the PRC or Taiwan, we encouraged each contributor to theorize, emplacing their new contribution within what they perceived as the most relevant contexts of prior learning (which might be in Chinese, English, other languages, or a combination of all these, as appropriate to their topic). It is worth adding that we do not assume that theory building is necessarily a higher contribution than the provision of studies that address gaps in our collective knowledge. Nor do we believe that more theorizing *per se* will necessarily open the minds of those who currently cannot imagine that the study of music in China raises questions for potential application elsewhere in the world. (Nor even do studies of music in China need to be validated by how applicable they are globally). Instead, by recognizing that all our contributors have the right to advance new theoretical interpretations of whatever kind best suits their respective topics, we aim to model a future that is intellectually heterogenous and democratically capacious.

Such a future must extend well beyond the dualities of “inside-out” and “outside-in”, as identified by Sato and Sonoda above. The work of Shih Shu-mei has already been mentioned. Other thinkers who can help us structure Chinese music studies to better recognize the various linguistic and subject positions we individually and collectively embody, include such diverse writers as Stuart Hall (with his sense of postcolonial identity as ruptured, discontinuous, hybridized, and always under construction; 1990), and Lila Abu-Lughod (who notes the special position of “halfies”—researchers “whose national or cultural

identity is mixed by virtue of migration, overseas education, or parentage”; 1991: 466). The sinophone world is at least as interesting as the Caribbean or Arabic worlds, and not identical to either. It warrants further theorization by those with adept and imaginative minds.

A final cluster of implications that arise from thinking about multiplicities of linguistic actuality concerns the overlapping practices of translation, co-authoring, and critical engagement. Notwithstanding incidents like the *China Quarterly* affair, the sinophone sphere may already be leading the world in practices of translation. Examples include the direct translating of pathbreaking research sources into Chinese (as exemplified in Cao Benye and Luo Qin’s large collection of English-language papers on numerous ethnomusicological topics, 2019) and also varied efforts at cultural translation: Guo Shuhui’s bilingual introduction to Chinese traditional music in *Sounding China* (2019) is one recent example, while music recording and touring projects such as Yandong Grand Singers’ *Everyone Listen Close* (2019) can be thought of as a second type of translation work. Those of us who work primarily in English could do more to follow the lead offered by our Chinese peers and reciprocate with our own efforts at attentive cross-cultural listening and reading. There is also enough practice already undertaken to form a basis for in-depth discussions—led by Chinese scholars—of what is lost or found, gained, transformed, or recentered through differently directed acts of translation. Such discussions could inform all of us who work across and between linguistic communities, and not only in relation to music or on China-related topics.

While translation is thriving (though unevenly distributed), co- and other forms of multi-authored work remain rare in our field. With the understandable exceptions of interview transcripts and the sharing of editorial workload, solo-authored contributions dominate each of the multi-authored volumes already cited, other recent collaborative volumes (such as Clark, Pang, and Tsai, 2016; Thrasher, 2016; Tsai, Ho, and Jian, 2020; or

Guy 2021), and the tables of contents of all our major journals, as well as this volume itself. Where co-authoring occurs in music-related research at present it often arises from a team comprising tutor and graduate student and so may represent the combining of two researchers' perspectives onto a shared topic. Broader collaborations, by contrast, have the potential to cover wider topics and develop authoritative comparisons and interdisciplinary perspectives across a larger scale. Incidentally, such collaborative work also matches the group-based production of so much music and its distribution across wide spaces in the contemporary world, allowing for new fusions of voices and expertise to appear. James Farrer and Andrew Field's account of dance, drink, and socializing in nocturnal Shanghai (2015) exemplifies the rich benefits of such co-authoring.

Many kinds of engaged, critical work involve thinking and writing across (perceived) borders and questioning assumed habits and norms. Such labor is especially available to those of us who occupy positions between linguistic or scholarly communities and whose positions allows us the relative freedom to speak out on certain matters. In a passage that's originally about diasporic citizens but that resonate for many of us who research Chinese musical culture, Stuart Hall identifies the ways that some of us might bring strategic unsettlement to established scholarly assumptions and conventions:

They are people who belong to more than one world, speak more than one language (literally and metaphorically), inhabit more than one identity, have more than one home; who have learned to negotiate and translate between cultures, and who, because they are irrevocably the product of several interlocking histories and cultures, have learned to live with, and indeed to speak from difference. They speak from the "in-between" of different cultures, always unsettling the assumptions of one culture from the perspective of another, and thus finding

ways of being both the same as and at the same time different from the others amongst whom they live. (1995:206).

Of course, we will need to approach any such unsettlements ethically and humanely. If Chinese music studies might be more collaborative, as I've just suggested, it also needs to be a forum where we can broach disagreement and tolerate uncertainty and divergent interpretations. The spaces between are full of new dialogic opportunities and rich in potential for the production and sharing of larger understandings.

#### **DISCIPLINES AND NEW THEORETICAL DIRECTIONS**

Just as our subject is approached from diverse linguistic positions, research on Chinese music contributes to numerous academic disciplines, from theater studies to sociology, from political science to music theory, and from Asian studies to linguistics and to ethnomusicology. This breadth very well reflects the pronounced resonance of our fundamental topic: music (or perhaps better “people making music”, to adopt Jeff Titon’s impactful formulation, 1989) articulates numerous dimensions of Chinese society, today as in the historical past. Even within the immediate area of Chinese music studies itself there are quite distinct sets of intellectual affiliation—Shen Qia explores several of these in his history of ethnomusicology in China (1999), referring, among others, to the contrasting disciplinary perspectives of folk music research (*minjian yinyue yanjiu*), Chinese traditional music theory (*minzu yinyue lilun*), Chinese musicology (*Zhongguo yinyuexue*), and Chinese traditional musicology (*Zhongguo chuantong yinyuexue*).<sup>6</sup> It follows, then, that researchers within each discipline will frame their respective contributions in Chinese music research in multifarious ways, drawing on diverse approaches, discrete theoretical models and priorities, and potentially quite divergent core literatures.<sup>7</sup> In some cases,<sup>7</sup> music may not even be a central

subject so much as one topic among several others. Audiences for research in Chinese music studies are equally broadly spread and by no means all looking for the same kinds of material.

Preparation of this volume reinforced for me the observation that even authors dedicated enough to contribute chapters to such a project as this may share little proximity to one another in terms of intellectual framework or key references. Chinese music studies needs to embrace this set of frameworks and approaches, acting as a space where we expect to find not only those who already think like we do but also new interlocutors and fresh inspirations. But I think we might additionally encourage and support one another by taking up some of the best ideas that have emerged *within* Chinese music studies, re-applying them in our own work so that we can collectively develop core theoretical directions, even if we still mostly deploy them in our work to strategically inspire, or unsettle, readers from outside this immediate area. Here are some contexts where Chinese music studies may already offer a distinctive “laboratory” for the development of work of wide potential relevance:

- i. global histories of music. Scholars in the Western world are increasingly aware that there would be significant benefits in pursuing global histories of music, but so far we have often struggled to realize such histories effectively, not least because most Western music historians only train in European languages and music. Thomas Irvine’s account of the sound of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century “Sino-Western encounter” that occurred as the Western powers sent missions to Qing dynasty China (2020), for instance, deals with its topic only via European sources, which inevitably leaves much of the sonic encounter and the subject positions surrounding it unexamined. With their linguistic training, sinophone music historians could do a more comprehensive job resulting in a more equitable global history of the encounter, not simply an account of Europeans overseas.



ii. diaspora, transnationalism, and their ends. We already have a particularly stimulating set of publications on Chinese music in North America (for example, Zheng, 2010; Wang, 2015; Rao, 2017). As the PRC continues to rise in global stature, new attention, and renewed scrutiny, will fall upon populations identified as Chinese, and research in these communities will acquire new resonances as a result. This work is rich in insights into the intersections between music, race, memory, class, gender, migration, erasure, and belonging. Studies like those just mentioned deserve not only to be admired, but widely emulated and extended to other locales where people of Chinese origins now reside. Their theoretical intuitions could inspire researchers of music in many further transcultural settings worldwide. Some of this work additionally develops questions about identity, nation, and personhood that would be very applicable to “home” locales where such notions are often taken very much for granted.

iii. decolonizing music scholarship. The sinophone world is one of the world’s major sites of empire and of expansive, multi-ethnic settlement and displacement. It also comprises a collection of territories which have themselves been subject to waves of migration and colonization by imperial forces of Northern, Eastern, and Western origins, and where the postcolonial is very much a work-in-progress. All this means that models emerging from study of locations colonized by the European powers can cope only thinly with the sets of subject position that occur across sinophone locales. This is especially the case in relation to music in China and related societies. Power, opportunity, and status distributions intersect with, bypass, and become overwritten by those found in the wider world in a pattern that’s quite distinct from that of, say, African American musics or even the music of India and its widespread global diaspora (see further, Tan, 2021). We need to develop alternate paradigms that help explain what’s at stake for whom in all of this.

iv. intangible cultural heritage and applied research. The PRC and Taiwan have become significant locations for programs of intangible cultural heritage preservation and promotion. (Orientational essays for the PRC are Rees, 2012 and Zhang, 2015; Wang, 2012 provides a case study from Taiwan.) These milieus are particularly rich sites for investigation for a number of reasons, including the sheer amount of public attention they can generate and the development in China over several decades of an intricate structure of state-run supports at all ranks from the local to the county or city, to the province, and at national level. In some cases, cultural heritage is being reshaped by the gaze of the tourist industry or by state authorities hypersensitive to the expression of systems of belief that haven't been officially endorsed and concerned over cultural identity projections among minority populations that might counteract the state's broader policies of assimilation and homogenization. Researchers familiar with this vivid array of programs are well placed to assess both the transformative impacts over time of intangible cultural heritage programs and structures, and also to move into applied research focusing on the areas that the culture bearers themselves see as most urgently in need of attention. It is not far-fetched to imagine this sphere of research internationally being led by researchers with experience in sinophone settings.

## CONCLUSIONS

Many other spaces beyond those sketched above provide possibilities for new research explorations that relate to music in, from, or associated with China. Practice research might be one such. Not only is participatory learning of musical performance already widely established among ethnomusicologists and other music researchers but also sinophone contexts include an ample set of traditions where musicians create new artistic work that itself embodies and translates new understandings (see further, McKerrell, 2021). Such a

venue is also an excellent space for collaborative work, as also discussed above. There are additionally numerous genres that are not well represented in this volume, and some that are not well covered in Chinese music studies more generally, and which deserve greater attention.

It may seem overly modest (or self-serving) to close a large and inevitably weighty volume on Chinese music research by saying that the world needs more such research. Nevertheless, it is clear that the sinophone world is immensely complex, and music remains a key to understanding many of this sphere's historical self-constructions and its variegated contemporary values and embodiments. Notwithstanding the complexities of the world around us, it is urgent that we find the time, the stances, the inspirations, and the collaborations necessary to produce such research and thereby contribute to more balanced understandings of people making music in, from, and associated with China.

## GLOSSARY

*guoyue* 國樂, music for modernized folk ensemble or Chinese orchestra

*Jiangnan sizhu* 江南絲竹, (Jiangnan silk and bamboo), instrumental ensemble genre

Jinyu qinshe 今虞琴社, *Guqin* Society of Today's Yushan 虞山 School

*jingju* 京劇, traditional opera genre

*jingyun dagu* 京韻大鼓, tradition ballad-singing genre

*kunqu* 崑曲, traditional opera genre

Lee, Coco 李玟 (Li Wen), popular music singer (b. 1975)

*opela* 胡撇仔, hybridized music theater genre in Taiwan (pronounced *hupeizai* in Mandarin)

*pipa* 琵琶, pear-shaped lute

*ping shui xiang feng* 萍水相逢, duckweed joining up by chance (idiom)

*qin* 琴, seven-stringed zither

*Qingming shanghe tu* 清明上河圖, “Along the River during the Qingming Festival”, painting

by Zhang Zeduan 張擇端 (1085–1145)

*Shijing* 詩經, song collection compiled by Confucius (551–479 BCE)

Tan Dun 譚盾, composer (b. 1957)

Yuja Wang 王羽佳 (Wang Yujia), pianist (b. 1987)

Zhang Xiaofeng 張曉峰, composer (b. 1931)

*zheng* 箏, zither

Zhu Xiao-Mei 朱曉玫 (Zhu Xiaomei), pianist (b. 1949)

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The only exception may be the China entries in the East Asia volume of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music* (Provine, Tokumaru, and Witzleben, 2002) which may equate a larger total word count, although also one divided over many different topics and themes.

<sup>2</sup> Zbikowski, 1999 provides a valuable summary of the history of Seeger’s lifelong engagement with this topic. Key publications by Seeger himself include Seeger, 1977a and 1977b. Speech and music are not always at odds, of course, as Seeger also noted; Lawson, 2020 offers an example with a Chinese focus of prospects for new research at this very interface.

<sup>3</sup> Certain groups outside China are, of course, also happy to sustain the suspicion that migrants of Han ethnicity retain allegiance to the Chinese state even after multiple generations in their present homes.

<sup>4</sup> Search for “Chinese music” in ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I and in WorldCat, October 5, 2021. Both these databases are managed in the English-speaking world, and likely feature disproportionately more results in English than in other languages.

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<sup>5</sup> It is also not an entirely new one in the East Asian context, as Yu Hui reminds us through his discussion of Liang Shuming's "Easternization" (see Chapter 12).

<sup>6</sup> Yang Mu provides valuable critical reflection on these same trends (2003).

<sup>7</sup> Nor do those of us with closely similar disciplinary affiliations necessarily all think alike; compare two recent bibliographies of Chinese music research prepared for Oxford Bibliographies Online, one as the China section of the Music listing, the other as the Chinese music section of the Chinese studies listing (Lam, 2017; Stock, 2018).