

## Book Review

Wong Tsz\*

**Mariana Müning, Josie-Marie Perkuhn, and Johannes Sturm, eds.**  
***The Strange Sound: Proceedings of the International Symposium on Chinese Musicology in Bonn, October 3 - 4, 2014***

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In “Religion and Music in China: Synthetic or Hybrid?” François Picard touches on the ‘pentatonic myth’ of Chinese music citing Constantin Brăiloiu, “pentatonic and modality are two different worlds, whatever number of notes a scale includes.” (p. 14) In this paper, Picard adopts the Monika protocol, named after the musicologist Monika Stern. The Monika protocol calculates the length of time of each nominal note in a repertoire through a histogram, and accordingly, tells the hierarchy of the scale in the piece. (p. 15) Picard uses this protocol in analysing several religious music pieces found in China with their syllable-distributions, ranging from Confucian ritual music and early Christian music composed by Chinese Christians to twentieth-century Buddhist songs.

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Although pentatonic structure is often observed in various forms of Chinese ritual music, it is not the defining feature of ‘Chinese’ or ‘ritual’ music. I quote: “the question raised in the beginning can be answered: ‘Chinese music’, even only ritual music, is the result of a constant reconstruction, adaptation, and renormalization. Confucian music as played at court and in the local *wenmiao* [文廟] has been in constant contact with foreign music coming from Central Asia and India, Southeast Asia, eventually Europe, and had to reconfirm, reinvent herself periodically, allegedly through rediscovery of the lost past.” (p. 51)

An earlier debate on the problem of ‘pentatonism’ can be found in Tran Van Khe’s “Is the pentatonic universal? A few reflections on pentatonism.” I quote Tran: “Personally, we have come upon the pentatonic scale in all the countries [...] on the five continents. But it exists especially in folk music while in art music or the more learned tradition, one hears more sophisticated and varied scales in which there are more than five degrees.”<sup>1</sup> Here, Tran adopts a very loose definition of pentatonic scale: ‘5-note scale,’ ‘scale of five tones,’ ‘pentaphone,’ ‘pentaphonic’ and ‘pentaphony,’ all of which mean any pentachordal structure that makes up the foundation of a song or an instrumental piece. Many pentatonic scales found in Asia do not share the same intervallic pattern, not to mention that the pentatonic scale is also found in global folklores; there are however, some distinctive features in forming a folk tune under Tran’s pentatonic model.<sup>2</sup>

One example is *Yumei ling* 玉梅令 (the short introductory piece *Jade Prune*; 1202) by Jiang Kui 姜夔 (alias Baishi daoren 白石道人, or White Stone Daoist; 1155-1209). “This piece was still strongly influenced by Tang dynasty music, itself inspired by Central Asia, with six tones of equal importance,” (p. 19) in which Picard’s histogram demonstrates an absolute dominance of ‘Re, Mi, Fa#, Sol, La, Si.’ On a side note, a detailed reconstruction of the “Songs of White Stone Taoist” 白石道人歌曲 can be found in Lau Chor Wah’s 劉楚

1 Tran Van Khe, “Is the pentatonic universal? A few reflections on pentatonism,” *The World of Music* 19.1/2(1977): 77.

2 Ibid, pp. 77-80.

華 *Gem of Ci Poetry Music: Reconstruction of Songs by Jiang Kui* 宋韻遺珍——白石道人歌曲重構。<sup>3</sup> From my own listening of Lau's reconstruction, I can find some resemblances to Picard's model, whereas Lau's recital was based on *nisongyin* 擬宋音, a contemporary imitation of the Chinese pronunciation during the Song dynasty prepared by linguist Wang Li 王力 (1900-1986), and *kunqu* 崑曲 singing (Wu Li's 吳歷 (1632-1718) *Tianyue zhengyin pu* 天樂正音譜 was also based on *kunqu*). Further studies of both Lau's and Picard's works will definitely be helpful for understanding Chinese musicology and Chinese language.

Picard reminds us the multi-religious and multi-cultural faces of China, and eventually, its music. To continue the previous discussion on the multiple features in Chinese music, Li-Xing Hong 洪力行 discusses the very problem of understanding Wu Li's *Tianyue zhengyin pu*. An editor's note by Chang-Yun Han 韓昌雲 is provided in understanding the reconstruction of Wu Li's music. (pp. 83-85) Wu Li was one of the earliest Chinese Jesuits, and concerning genre, his work is categorized as sacred music. (p. 61) In the context of Catholic mass, the lyrics could further be denoted as *Ordinarium missae* and *Proprium missae*; (p. 62) yet, Hong immediately points out that it is misleading to characterize Wu Li's music as 'work for mass,' I quote: "While the general categorization as a hymn is not wrong, but does not help to describe this unique work." (pp. 61-62) It is therefore important to understand the music from its context.

On 'context', Hong's assumption of when the *Tianyue zhengyin pu* was composed is convincing—somewhere between 1688 and 1718. (p. 64) This was the time when European Catholics first made some footholds in mainland China and had already succeeded in entering the capital's Forbidden City. Wu Li at this remarkable time was one of the very first Chinese literati who had ever studied in a European university, St. Paul's College in Macau (founded in 1594). Despite the collapse of the Ming dynasty in 1644, the Jesuits enjoyed a short honeymoon period up until 1721 when Kangxi issued the imperial decree

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3 Lau Chor Wah, *Gem of Ci Poetry Music: Reconstruction of Songs by Jiang Kui* (Hong Kong: Commercial Book Press, 2016).

to ban Christianity in China, part of the incident later known as the Chinese Rites Controversy 禮儀之爭.

Bringing our attention back to Wu Li, Wu is a figure that could very much be mirrored by Matteo Ricci 利瑪竇, who composed *Xiqin quyì* 西琴曲意 — eight songs for a western keyboard instrument with Chinese lyrics. (p. 75) But unlike Ricci, Wu himself was a highly accomplished musician and was able to master *guqin* 古琴 playing; (p. 64) also, his literati training has made his *Tianyue zhengyin pu* highly appreciable. Hong contests the narrowly understood categories of Chinese singing art, namely the *yi qiang chuan ci* 以腔傳辭 (rendering words according to music) and *yi zizheng xingqiang* 依字聲行腔 (formulating music according to the prosodic pattern or words). I quote: “in the former, the music or melodic line takes primacy; in the latter, the verbal text takes precedence.” (p. 73) Together with the author’s contextualization, Hong quotes Chen Hongliang 陳宏亮 to help understanding the text of Wu Li’s songs: “words generate the prosodic pattern; words are primary, while the prosodic pattern is secondary. The prosodic pattern can vary, while the four tones and *yin-yang* 陰陽 rule of the words remain standardized.” (p. 74) After Hong’s contextualization of the *Tianyue zhengyin pu*, “despite the fact that the musical content and style for sacred cantatas and *Tianyue Zhengyin Pu* bear no direct resemblance to each other, the two are comparable in that both contain a series of musical pieces, written in an exquisite vocal style that can be used for devotional occasions.” (p. 76) Hong further fortifies this statement in his postscript: “Wu Li proposes that the sonority of the *guqin* instrument has foretold the advent of the western tradition of Christianity in China. For Wu Li, this foretelling can probably be extended to vocal music.” (p. 78)

I would like to add three points to the discussion: first, the *qin* 琴 (*guqin*) was long seen as a musical instrument of the superior person 君子, and the giving of a *qin* to another person was regarded as a gesture of superb friendship. Understanding the importance of the *qin* in Chinese culture and society, Matteo Ricci also chose a clavichord—the ‘western *qin*’ 西琴, as part of the gifts presented to the Wanli Emperor. The Jesuits then acquired remarkable

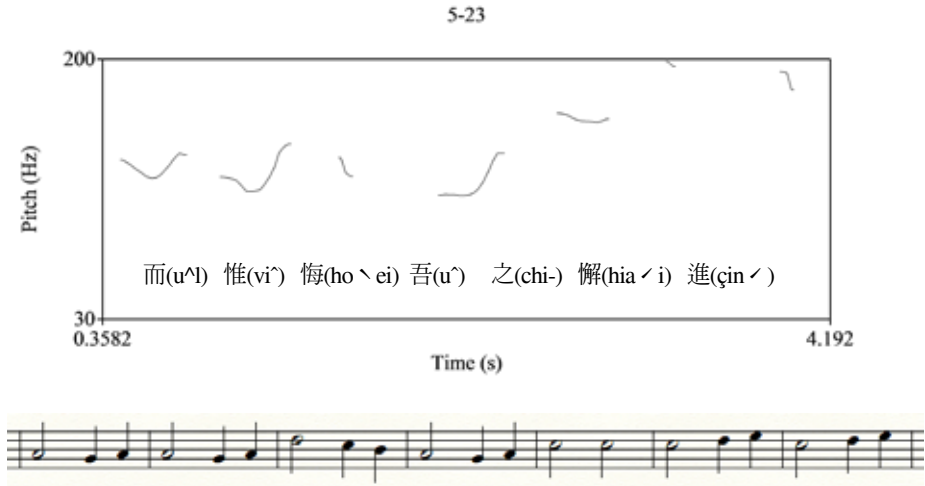
diplomatic success. Second was the Jesuits' effort in utilizing European musical knowledge in learning the Chinese language. I concur with Hong that the reconstruction of Matteo Ricci's *Xiqin quyi* is difficult due to the dearth of historical documents, (p. 75) but is not entirely impossible as I have very recently reconstructed Ricci's *Xiqin quyi* in my Ph.D. thesis. Together with the recently discovered evidence of how musical notations were used in a letter written by Sabatino de Ursis dated August 23, 1608 and the Jesuits' Chinese dictionary *Xi ru er mu zi* 西儒耳目資, the reconstruction can at least be based on the lyrics and eventually may reflect the sound of late Ming Guanhua 官話—the official speech of the Chinese language 400 years ago.<sup>4</sup>



Source : Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu (ARSI) Jap— Sin 14-II: 316v

Based on Sabatino de Ursis's letter, a tonal reconstruction of Ricci's lyrics was made to examine the actual viability of adopting this music-to-Chinese system in mastering the Guanhua sound. The actual recording was made with the phonetics provided in *Xi ru er mu zi*. Here is one example from the song "Regretting of an old age without virtue" 悔老無德, line 23:

4 Wang Tsz, "Matteo Ricci's *Xiqin Quyi*: A Jesuit's Expert Musicking in Ming China" (Ph.D. diss., University of Göttingen, 2017).



As shown from the graphs, the phonetic pattern shares a remarkable resemblance to Ursis's illustration, which may partially verify the Jesuits' Chinese learning process. Although this reconstruction is not an equivalence to the actual Guanhua speech, nor the actual eight songs, it sheds light on understanding the Jesuits' learning and speaking of the Chinese language. Last but not least, the Chinese language had already gained significant recognition in the Catholic world by the 17<sup>th</sup> century—in 1614. Chinese was accepted by the Papal as the language of Catholic masses, and the China mission was also detached from Japan as an independent Vice-province in thanks to Nicolas Trigault's (1577-1628) efforts. At almost the same time, a 'Chinese' Ratio Studiorum (Plan of Studies)<sup>5</sup>—the Jesuit college's general education plan that was tailor-made for the China mission—was being developed in Macau emphasising the teaching of Chinese language and culture to the new Jesuits.<sup>6</sup>

5 There is the original Ratio Studiorum (1599), but later there are different adaptations for different missions. The Chinese version was one of the earliest.

6 Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579-1724* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007). In particular, "A Ratio Studiorum for China," pp. 255-263.

A somewhat different topic is the ‘accidental’ musicologist Wang Guanqi 王光祈 (1892-1936), who was most notable for his edition of *The History of Chinese Music* 中國音樂史 (1934). First, Hong-yu Gong 宮宏宇 summarizes Wang’s contributions within the context of the twentieth-century European-Chinese musical encounter: Wang was a pioneer of Western music in China, a transmitter of the Berlin School of musical theories and methods, and an explicator of Chinese music to the German public. (p. 112) Zhao Chonghua 趙崇華 further contributes to the discussion on Wang’s role at this particular time, when Wang may have embraced a Confucian approach in utilizing music as a means of cultivation for the Chinese populace.

If we are to put Wang Guanqi back into the context of contemporary Chinese musicology, it is not difficult to spot a gap after the fall of the Qing dynasty and before the formation of the People’s Republic of China; during this gap, Wang was indeed one of the notable Chinese musicologists with others being mentioned such as Xiao Youmei 蕭友梅 (1884-1940), Yang Zhongzi 楊仲子 (1885-1962), Wu Bochao 吳伯超 (1903-1949), and Huang Zi 黃自 (1904-1938). (p. 127) They all played a weighty role at this time, which makes the author’s claim that “contemporary music education in China began in the 1950s” (p. 127) questionable.

For example, take Xiao Youmei alone, who is known as the father of contemporary music education in China. Xiao and Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) had already founded the National Conservatory of Music 國立音樂院 (now known as the Shanghai Conservatory of Music 上海音樂學院) in 1927. And not to mention that during 1920-1927, Xiao was actively engaged in music education in Beijing (Peking); he reformed the Peking University Institute of Music 北京大學附設音樂傳習所 and established the Peking Girl’s Normal University Music Department 北京女子師範大學音樂系, the Peking National Specialist Arts School Music Department 北京國立藝術專門學校音樂系, and the Peking Reform Association for String and Bamboo Instruments 北京國樂改進社. Xiao’s efforts in music education continued even until his very last days.

While the National Conservatory of Music was bombarded by the Japanese army during WWII, with great personal sacrifice, Xiao and Huang Zi strived to sustain the operation of the conservatory in the Shanghai French Concession. Both Xiao and Huang passed away before the war ended.<sup>7</sup> To do justice to history, efforts in music education in contemporary China prior to 1949 are worth our attention.

The author's statement "education in China was isolated ever since the 1950s, and did not open up until 30 years later" (p. 128) is correspondingly problematic. In fact, Russian influence on China's music education began early since the establishment of the National Conservatory of Music and continued after the founding of the Central Conservatory of Music 中央音樂學院 in 1950. Russian pianists, such as Shienoff (dates unknown; he taught at the Shanghai Conservatory from 1954 to 1956), Aram Taturian (1915-1974), and Tatyana Kravchenko (1916-2003), were invited by the new Chinese government to teach at the Central Conservatory and the Shanghai Conservatory during the mid-1950s. The arrival of Russian experts brought the direct influence of Russian pianism to new China.<sup>8</sup> Notable Chinese musicians such as Ni Hongjin 倪洪進, Lin Yingrong 林應榮, Cao Chengjun 曹承筠, and Li Minduo 李民鐸 had all studied in Soviet Russia. The composer of *Red Detachment of Women* 紅色娘子軍, Wu Zuqiang 吳祖強, studied composition at the Moscow State Tchaikovsky Conservatory from 1953-1958.<sup>9</sup> The music education in new China was in many ways a continuation of the previous government's efforts, and Soviet influence has been indisputably rooted in new China's music education and musicology.

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7 Liu Ching-chih 劉靖之, *A Critical History of New Music in China*, translated by Caroline Mason, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2010). In particular, "New Music in the May Fourth Period (1919-1977)," pp. 79-188.

8 Chin Lin, "Piano teaching philosophies and influences on pianism at the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing, China" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 2002).

9 Li Xiaoying 李曉瑩 and Zhang Qingyun 張青雲, "The influence of Soviet Russian Music in China's Music Culture during the First Half of the 20th Century" 20世紀上半葉蘇俄音樂對中國音樂文化的影響, *Russian, Central Asian & East European Studies* 俄羅斯中亞東歐研究 (2011.5): 76-80.



Moving to a more recent context of multi-cultural music in China, Frank Kouwenhoven offers a close-up narrative of Tan Dun 譚盾, perhaps one of the most important composers of our time. The musical sorcerer, as Kouwenhoven puts it, possesses three main significant characteristics: Tan Dun has ears for unusual sounds, he redefines music as theatre, and his music is a reflection of his conspicuous eclecticism. (pp. 151-152) Despite all of the controversies that have evolved from the composer's many different compositions, "Tan remains a vital, mysterious and extremely persuasive voice in contemporary music, a worshipper of nature who promotes naivety, directness, the scent of the earth and of primitive, tribal life. His music is a continuous exploration of spatial and timbral contrast, with a dominant role for percussion and is frequently infused with ritual elements—shouts, whispers, frantic movements or slow, mysterious dance rhythm, or ghost-like drum-beats." (p. 164)

Kouwenhoven reminds us, instead of thinking of Tan Dun as 'China's' composer, he is a 'modern' (or post-modern) composer. (p. 150) Embracing modernity, or simply stated, finding "new musical language," (p. 154) is of course nothing exclusive in Tan Dun's compositions. For example, Shostalovich's neoclassicism, influenced by Stravinsky, eventually affected Toru Takemitsu. Furthermore, Takemitsu also received a vague amount of influence from John Cage, who gravitated towards Japanese Buddhism, the Chinese *I-Ching*, and the art of Zen. Here are just a few names that are in line with Tan Dun's artistic empiricism. As much as trans-cultural elements are implanted in every artist, Tan Dun is also trained from both Chinese and American conservatories, and therefore, he is in many ways skillful enough to merge different elements together in his compositions. To provide two more recent examples of Tan Dun's innovative works, he composed Internet Symphony No. 1 in 2009 originally for the YouTube Symphony Orchestra and was involved in the Music in Summer Air (MISA) concert in 2017 with the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra. Tan Dun cooperated with the Mongolian rock band Hanggai 杭蓋, renowned in China for their endeavors of merging Mongolian throat singing and

folk music with punk rock elements; they premiered together ‘Rock Symphony’ at MISA 2017.

Kouwenhoven carefully describes Tan Dun as China’s music sorcerer, but not as a ‘Chinese’ composer, ‘Chinese’ that it could both refer to Chinese ethnicities/nationality or to China-originated music bound to its geographical borders. “After a period of cultural liberalization and openness to the outside world, the People’s Republic presently appears to be turning inward again, as it is raising its native cultural treasures and traditional values to the level of sacred truths and ideal models for emulation.” (p. 172) The undertone of this statement is that Tan Dun as a musician may have enjoyed a much greater room for political maneuvering when compared to many other notable Chinese artists, and what Tan Dun really represents may be subject to how the Chinese Dream 中國夢 is to be interpreted by the nation’s government and its people.

Nevertheless, if any discussions on ‘Chinese’ music or ‘Chinese music’ are to be carried on beyond our time, let us not forget the importance of preserving the knowledge of music and all of its concerning information. Huang Chun-Zen 黃均人 summarizes the collection of two notable musicologists, Alois Osterwalder and Shih Wei-Liang 史惟亮. “From OS (Osterwalder-Shih) archive, we can clearly see that Shih Wei-Liang had two sides: he was a youth returning from abroad, imbued with fervor to give back to his motherland, and he wanted to carry out ACE’s (China-Europe Association) mission to promote cultural exchange between East and West with Osterwalder’s support [...] The folksong collection movement has long been regarded as the catalyst of Taiwanization in music. The aim of this ‘Taiwanization’ (*Taiwan bentuhua yundong* 臺灣本土化運動, also ‘Taiwanese localization movement’) was to emphasize the importance of a separate Taiwanese culture, society, economy, and even nationality, aside from mainland China.” (p. 186)

Although little is discussed on how this ‘Taiwanization’ movement was stimulated by the Osterwalder-Shih’s ethnomusicological collection, how local folklores have become the essence of a ‘Taiwanese’ identity may be noteworthy

for further research. ‘Taiwan,’ for instance, exists long before the Nationalist government’s retreat and has embraced multi-cultural influences from its various rulers and inhabitants throughout the centuries. To describe Osterwalder-Shih’s efforts, one term that Huang sensibly avoided was ‘non-communist’; although the reason seems evident, this should not be any means to overlook what happened on the ‘other’ sides—a detailed discussion can be found in Werner Meißner’s *Die DDR und China 1945-1990: Politik—Wirtschaft—Kultur. Eine Quellensammlung*.<sup>10</sup> As Huang indicates, due to political conditions, especially the Cultural Revolution, the Osterwalder-Shih’s ethnomusicological collection is one of a handful of efforts in preserving Chinese, if not Taiwanese, music without intervention. If mutual understanding is made possible, reconciliation could one day be possible as well.

So what have we learnt from these discussions? If we are to sum-up the previously discussed subjects, much is discussed regarding the segmented and unsegmented of musicians and musicologists; let us not forget that ‘writing about’ music is as important as writing or performing music. For how music touches people may differ, and how people react to it also differs. Similarly, by considering the liberty artists enjoy and should enjoy, let us not consider Chinese music and Chinese musicology as exclusive terms, but an illustration of how people dwell and tangle in China in response to cultural and political changes, and how these changes entangle the people in China. At a time where ideology still predominates in many discussions, a Chinese perspective in understanding the complexity of ‘Chinese music’ is perhaps far from being firmly established.

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10 Werner Meißner, *Die DDR und China 1945-1990: Politik—Wirtschaft—Kultur. Eine Quellensammlung* (Berlin : Akademie Verlag, 1995).

