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Timothy Lane Brace

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MODERNIZATION AND MUSIC IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA:  
CRISIS, IDENTITY, AND THE  
POLITICS OF STYLE

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by

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The modernization of Chinese culture has been a major feature of domestic policy since the Chinese Communist Party assumed political leadership in 1949. This modernization program has had profound effects upon indigenous musical practices. But the influence is mutual, for music, as a participant in modernization efforts, becomes a location both for legitimating and for subverting governmental policies. The overdetermined process of this dialectic has produced a contemporary cultural crisis: a crisis of national identity. This dissertation draws on ethnography, historical analysis and critical theory in an attempt to understand the concrete configurations of this historically situated crisis in three different cultural domains: Peking Opera, popular music and "serious" music. It will be shown that clashes of hegemonic strategies -- struggles within the relations of power -- are in large part responsible for the crisis, and that these clashes and struggles occur in all three domains studied. However, the specific dynamic of this process differs within each domain. Each of the three central chapters of the dissertation is devoted to an analysis of the crisis in one domain. The final chapter synthesizes the analyses within the context of the Deng regime's goal of socialist construction: a socialism with Chinese characteristics.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

## Goals

China of the 1980s and 1990s is in the midst of a cultural crisis. This crisis has in fact lasted the whole of this century; but the effects of new political and economic policies implemented in the late 1970s have exacerbated -- or at least more clearly revealed the terms of -- the crisis.

Chief among these terms is a confrontation -- a **contradiction** -- between Chinese culture and the culture of the West.<sup>1</sup> This confrontation is a natural and necessary part of the process of modernization to which the Chinese political leadership has maintained a commitment for more than half a century. But the confrontation is not merely cultural (in the narrow sense of the term) -- it is political as well, for the depth of the political contradictions between a capitalist West and a Marxist China mirror (and profoundly influence) the depth of the contradictions between traditional Chinese and Western musical practices as well as the ideologies that inform, transform, and legitimate these practices.

The goal of this dissertation is to analyze contemporary musics in China as presented and represented through live music concerts, mass mediated performances, and verbal discussions that took place within the boundaries of the capital city of Beijing; and to relate these presentations and representations to the larger issues of cultural and social modernization as they manifest in the individual lives and social institutions of contemporary China. In the pursuit of these goals I

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<sup>1</sup> My use of the term "contradiction" within this dissertation should not be read as carrying pejorative connotations. Rather, it is a dialectical term connoting a specific kind of tension involving some degree of opposition, and out of which change emerges. Its place within my analyses (and within the analyses of Chinese Marxists) will become evident as the dissertation unfolds.

will engage in musical, cultural, and ideological analyses of musical events, musical forms, musical styles and the discourses surrounding these events, forms, and styles. I will also engage in analyses of contemporary Chinese political and cultural institutions as they impinge upon and help create the performative structures, musical styles, and meanings that these styles have for the people of mainland China.

This project will necessarily contain excursions into the political components involved in the production, presentation, and reception of modern Chinese musics. These elements are of considerable importance in any study of music but are especially cogent in a study of contemporary music in mainland China. There are two reasons for this: (1) the constant attempts by the Chinese Communist Party since before Liberation to control and direct musical development; and (2) an insistence by the Chinese themselves that such a connection is crucial to any understanding of modern Chinese music.<sup>2</sup> By acknowledging the impact of politics on music, therefore, I am not only engaging an element of Chinese music that has become obvious to many Western scholars doing work in China and helping to further a scholarly trend toward broadening the scope of musical analysis -- I am also following a native-inspired directive.

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<sup>2</sup> "Liberation" is the English translation of the term "jiefang" which the mainland Chinese use to refer to 1949 -- the year of the installation of the Communist government.

## Fieldwork and Methodology

### Fieldwork

Most of the data for this dissertation was gathered during two fieldwork trips to Beijing, the political capital of the People's Republic of China for over 800 years. Located in the northern part of China (just south of the Great Wall) approximately 180 kilometres northwest of the Bohai Sea and 200 kilometres south of Inner Mongolia, Beijing is by area the largest municipality in China. Its population of 9 million ranks second only to that of Shanghai.

My first fieldtrip took place from May to July 1987; the second from November 1989 to February 1990. On both occasions I was the house guest of a retired worker whose apartment is on the campus of the Central Conservatory of Music. I was allowed access to Conservatory resources (e.g., archives and library) and was relatively unrestricted in my travel inside the city of Beijing.<sup>3</sup>

The bulk of my data came from the following sources:

1. **teachers at the Central Conservatory of Music.** My hostess had developed many friendships within the Conservatory and had lived on campus for over 30 years. In addition, before I left on my first fieldtrip I had -- through a local friend from Beijing -- made contact with a professor of Chinese music history at the Conservatory who had agreed to accept me as a "special student" and to act as

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<sup>3</sup> The only restrictions on my travel were self-imposed. Since my hostess was ultimately responsible for my well-being and my behavior, I usually acceded to her requests that I stay away from certain areas (such as the famous "English Corner" which had been closed for political reasons during my visit in 1989-90). I perhaps missed some data as a result of these decisions, but I felt that protecting my hostess was of utmost importance.

my adviser for the duration of my stay. As a result of the contacts afforded me through these two persons, I was given quick and easy access to many persons within the faculty and student ranks of the two conservatories in Beijing (the Central Conservatory and the China Conservatory). The results of these interviews and discussions formed a base for my understanding of Chinese music in general, and in particular gave rise to the ideas central to the argument presented in Chapter Three;

2. **professional researchers at the Music Research Institute of the China Art Research Academy.** Through two personal contacts (one made before leaving and one made while at the Conservatory) I was able to have repeated meetings with professional music researchers at China's main music research institute, located in Beijing. Through these meetings I became aware of the changing role of music research in China and of the implications for music of some of the many contradictions inherent to the contemporary socio-political climate;

3. **professional Peking Opera performers.** Through personal contacts established before entering the field I was warmly embraced by performers and musicians of the highest rank within the professional Peking Opera community. Within the Chinese system of relationship (*guanxi*), doing a favor for a friend's friend is to do a favor for the original friend. Since I had established a friendship with a former Peking Opera musician now living in the United States, his friends treated me as their friends, and to do me a favor (e.g., openly discuss Peking Opera with me, introduce me to other performers and/or administrators, give me tickets to performances) was to make contact with their friend in America. As a result I was given access to information concerning the lives and activities of these persons -- information from which the issues discussed in Chapter One emerged;

4. **professional popular music performers.** In my wanderings around the city I met several popular music performers with whom I formed a relationship of mutual trust. These relationships deepened my understanding of the role of, the social position of, and the particular political predicament of popular musicians in contemporary Beijing, and gave rise to (or at least added depth to) many of the issues discussed in Chapter Two;

5. **various serendipitous meetings.** In the spring and summer of 1987 I was constantly being accosted by Chinese citizens (especially youth) as I made my way around town on the public transport systems (I was usually the only foreigner aboard). Many of these meetings led to lengthy and fruitful discussions about various social, political and musical topics (especially popular music). But in 1989-90 -- as a result of the demonstrations and violent events of June, 1989 -- very few Chinese youth approached me in public. There were times, however, (especially late at night and/or in uncrowded settings) when these approaches still were made. The resulting discussions were much more intensely political compared to those of two years before. The information from these meetings (of both trips) helped broaden the base from which I began to understand the relationships of Chinese youth to dominant socio-cultural (e.g., musical) and political frames and directly influenced the discussions contained throughout this dissertation concerning these relationships (especially those in Chapter Two);

6. **attendance at musical events.** During my stays I attended Peking Opera performances (each performance containing multiple scenes drawn from various operas); concerts of "serious" and/or "traditional" music at the Beijing Concert Hall and at the Central Conservatory; and live performances of popular music. In addition to the activities of the musicians and other performers, I closely

attended to the setting of the performance and activities of those present: the audience's interactions with each other and with the performers. As context is a primary determinant of meaning, and meaning a primary determinant of musical style, understanding these relationships is crucial to understanding the cultural meaning -- and musical development -- of musical genres;

7. **attending to daily electronic and written mass media.** The newspapers, music journals, and radio and television provided primary data for my analyses. All are government-run (or at least are on some level responsible to government officials); the context and content of articles and programs -- and the changes in these over time -- provided data concerning the relationship between the governing regime and the populace, and concerning struggles both within the regime and between the regime and other locations of socio-political power (e.g., the music conservatories and professional music journals).<sup>4</sup>

There are several aspects of my fieldwork that deserve special notice. The first is the degree to which personal connections established before entering the field allowed me quick access to the highest levels within the professional music community. I also believe that the degree to which people spoke frankly and openly with me was in direct relationship to the closeness of their relationship with one of my contacts. To this end I felt quite fortunate, as my contacts had long and deep friendships with many of the people with whom I talked (and the success of my project -- an admittedly "political" one -- to some degree depended upon the

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<sup>4</sup> The actual relationships between the government on the one hand and the print and electronic media on the other varies in closeness and intensity; however, the government does exert significant influence on all of these media outlets.



forthrightness of people whom I had never met). The result was that I was often confided in as one would confide to a friend.

Secondly, dividing my fieldwork into two trips afforded me the opportunity for diachronic observation. My first trip took place in the relatively open period of early 1987. The crackdown on the student demonstrations of December 1986-January 1987 had just begun and many people had not yet felt the move toward political restrictions.<sup>5</sup> Culturally the country was just coming out of a period of "searching for roots" (xungen) in which the musical domain experienced relative freedom of experimentation, both stylistically and ideologically.<sup>6</sup> But by the winter of 1989 the government had reenforced its political (via military) dominance and those within the professional musical communities were poised for a backlash in the form of a criticism campaign or a "rectification movement" with serious consequences for their professional and personal lives. Although the changes in general social, political, economic and musical environments between 1987 and 1989 do not specifically emerge as themes in this dissertation, their effects on my understanding of the importance of political context in determining Chinese musical practices cannot be overestimated. The link between power and musical style is direct. And the Chinese recognize this link.

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<sup>5</sup> For a brief description of these demonstrations and their ramifications in the political domain, see Chang 1988:255-278.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapters Two and Three for more discussion of this "xungen" phenomenon, the participation of musicians in it, and its influence upon the development of modern Chinese musical practices.

C (retired government worker): In China, music and politics cannot be separated. It has been this way since Confucius.<sup>7</sup>

Thirdly, having conducted my fieldwork entirely within the city of Beijing raises issues regarding the generalizability of my analyses -- specifically, regarding the validity of my analyses for other areas in China. The answer to this will have to await fieldwork in other areas. Beijing has a unique history and socio-political position in contemporary Chinese culture (as does every city in China). My analyses are the result of fieldwork in that one city. I am sure that many of the issues discussed in this dissertation are important issues for Chinese living outside of Beijing. I am equally sure that their involvement with these issues would be structured differently due to their own historical, socio-economic, and political contexts. Urban Chinese all over China are facing the same issues; the local dialectics differ. In this dissertation, I am interested in the structures of both the supralocal issues and of the local (Beijing) dialectics.

### Methodology

There were two research methods used in attaining data for this dissertation. The primary method was comprised of the ethnographic techniques of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing. These techniques have as their goal "to understand another way of life from the native point of view" (Spradley 1980:3).

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout this dissertation, many quotations will only be vaguely attributed. These comments came from personal discussions, and I thought it appropriate to protect the identity of my interlocutors.

To effect this it is necessary to adopt a point of view in which members of the culture one is interested in understanding are seen not as objects but as teachers.

Rather than studying people, ethnography means learning from people (ibid.).

Ethnography is an actor-centered, meaning-centered research method involving participant observation and ethnographic interviewing to which historical overviews and narrowly-defined technical descriptions (such as musicological analyses) are not irrelevant but are secondary data that corroborate or challenge the primary analysis.<sup>8</sup> This primary analysis must concern itself with "the meanings of actions and events to the people we seek to understand" (ibid. pg.5). Thus for my purposes analysis is primarily interested in the question **What meanings do the processes of musical modernization in China have for those touched by these processes?**

A secondary research method involved the analysis of written works. Those works (historical and current) written by mainland Chinese constituted primary data contexted within historical public discourse on musical issues. Scholarly works by non-Chinese (or overseas Chinese) are secondary sources of both information and analysis. This method was secondary because it was used to inform, corroborate, deepen, and sometimes challenge the analyses based on ethnographic techniques;

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<sup>8</sup> The goals, assumptions and techniques of participant observation and ethnographic interviewing -- techniques of what is called ethnography or qualitative research -- can be found in Spradley 1979 & Spradley 1980.

but the ethnographically-obtained information remained the central data upon which analytical interpretations were based.

Analyses are never "objective" in the sense of lacking a point of view. The direction of a scholar's investigations (and therefore the issues that will be attended to) are in large part determined by the interests, assumptions, and biases of that scholar. I stated that my goal was to understand the meaning of the modernization of Chinese music to contemporary Chinese. It would seem beneficial to explain the notion of meaning as I understand it and as it informs the questions asked in this dissertation (and therefore the analyses that attempt to answer these questions).

### Meaning

The term "meaning" can be a particularly vague one, for it is used in a variety of ways -- both in everyday speech and in scholarly discourse. For purposes of answering the questions asked in this dissertation, I adopted a definition of meaning that combines -- or at least actively addresses -- both private and public senses of the term. This definition draws on three traditions: social psychology (particularly the work of George Mead); the sociology of knowledge (represented by the works of Peter Berger); and hermeneutics (primarily that of Hans Georg Gadamer).

## Social Psychology

For Mead, meaning "is not an `idea' as traditionally conceived"; it is "not a psychological addition" to a social act (Mead 1934:76). Rather, it arises out of the social act itself: part of a "conversation of gestures" (ibid.,43), meaning is an "external, overt, physical, or physiological process going on in the actual field of social experience" (ibid.,78-79).

**Meaning is socially situated and produced: it occurs in the field of social action and cannot be analyzed as independent of this field.** It is not a thing nor is it merely a psychological event; it is a movement, a vector connecting the personal and the social.

## The Sociology of Knowledge

The significance of the sociology of knowledge for this definition of meaning is its insistence on social reality as both given to actors and changed by them. The world appears to the actors as a given: it is "discovered by him as an external datum." But it requires the actors' constant actualization and validation and this is carried on in interaction with others (Berger and Kellner 1970:52). Reality is therefore as much constructed as it is given; and a conception of passive man making his way through a thicket of given reality gives way to a conception of active man making his reality as he lives it -- and making it through communication with others (Hymes 1972). This attitude demands a restructuring of the questions a scholar will want to ask -- a restructuring that will involve a move away from

questions concerning how "forces" or "institutions" act on man and toward questions concerning how an actor strategically interprets the situations of his life; a move away from rules as given toward conventions as practiced --conventions that suggest strategies for dealing with them (see Geertz 1983:25).

The nature of the object of such an inquiry demands an interdisciplinary approach committed to an understanding of the dialectical relationship between the individual and society.

... sociology must be carried on in a continuous conversation with both history and philosophy or lose its proper object of inquiry. This object is society as part of a human world, made by men, inhabited by men, and, in turn, making men, in an ongoing historical process (Berger & Luckmann 1967:189).

## Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the study of interpretation. Interpretation is posited as a primary activity of an actor. Reality as given is not passively absorbed but actively encountered. Interpretation of events is a major component of this encounter. These interpretations lead to actions and further interpretations and thus participate in the ongoing construction, reproduction, and/or restructuring of reality. This is how hermeneutics fits in with the notions of meaning as socially-created and socially-experienced: hermeneutics demands actors who actively encounter reality in an effort to make sense out of it and make strategies for managing it. **My role as**

**a scholar is to study interpretation as a social act. This holds true whether the social act is an initial involvement, e.g. a music concert; a re-situated involvement, e.g. a cassette tape of music heard before; or a discussion about the initial involvement, e.g. an interview with an ethnomusicologist about a music concert previously heard. In each case the actors' participation is active, interpretive, and strategic.**

But this participation occurs in a historical and situated context that involves personal and/or institutional pressures to accept and reproduce (within the new temporal context) particular ways of doing things -- i.e., traditions. The predicament of the historically-situated person is therefore (1) that there exists a "given" with which he or she is obliged to work -- a "set of directions" actively handed to him; and (2) that he must change the "given" -- "make it his." This is true whether one is attempting to continue the tradition or to subvert it. Struggles over the continuance of traditions (e.g., musical traditions) are struggles over how to deal with the historically given contemporary situation.<sup>9</sup>

## Summary

Meaning is not to be viewed as limited to an inner, subjective, psychic state or response; it is also an objective, public meaning -- a socially constructed meaning that implies and impacts decisions through communicative actions and

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<sup>9</sup> The relationships between tradition and innovation as they impact understanding, and the determining influence of the concrete situation on both artistic expression and aesthetic response are central to the work of Hans Georg Gadamer -- work which deals primarily with a hermeneutics built upon a foundation of aesthetic understanding. See Gadamer 1989.

interactions. This meaning -- a historically-situated interpretive event -- is constantly being both reproduced and restructured: it is in this sense a resource usable by various interests in the pursuit of a variety of ends.

**Music is a social act, a performed meaning** (Geertz 1983:29) **that exists and derives its meaning from the field in which social acts take place. It is part of the conversation of gestures of a particular culture.** Its meaning "is use, or more carefully, arises from use" (Geertz 1983:118); this is why traditional musicological analytical techniques will not by themselves answer the questions I am asking. Music is not merely a communicative structure or a semiotic code to be deciphered; it is a "mode of thought" that reveals a sensibility (ibid. 99,120). This sensibility is constructed, reproduced, and changed in the field of social action. A study of the meaning of a music must anchor itself in this field.

### **The Issues**

This is an issue-oriented dissertation. That is, its main purpose is neither diachronic nor synchronic description of certain contemporary Chinese musical practices (although there is much data presented here that is new). Rather, it is to reveal -- and engage in interpretive analyses of -- the dynamic processes whose interactions have created and continue to create contemporary Chinese musical practices. These processes are not abstract forces impinging themselves on the lives of individuals. Individual (and groups of) persons use and transform social processes as well as define themselves via these processes; and processes influence



the lives and actions of individuals and are defined by their use. Individuals and social processes are dialectically linked.

**Questions concerning the effects of modernization on contemporary Chinese music and the specific ways in which these effects are prescribed and implemented as well as transformed and opposed arose as a direct result of participant observation -- that is, they were data-generated.** And while my analysis naturally brings in my own theoretical predispositions and therefore restructures the issues as presented by the Chinese, the questions and issues addressed were acknowledged by those who comprised the majority of my informants (performers and other music professionals) to be the most important questions facing Chinese music today.<sup>10</sup>

These questions concern:

1. **the relationship of musical style to modernization.** Practices of modernization have profoundly affected the style -- the sound -- of Chinese music; and Chinese scholars, politicians, and musicians have consciously attempted to control this process. Questions concerning what modern Chinese music should sound like have permeated -- and continue to permeate -- contemporary Chinese musical discourse. They are also the questions the attempted solutions to which (along with the struggles thus engendered) form the foundation of data upon which this dissertation is constructed;

2. **the relationship of musical style to political power.**

Modernization is a goal to be realized through a specific set of practices linked to a

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<sup>10</sup> This restructuring is due to the different strategies of the participants: I am writing a dissertation for an audience of Western scholars; the Chinese are working within their own situated social and political constraints. My ultimate interest is interpretive and analytical; theirs is prescriptive.

specific set of strategies; as such it is a political program. And with this connection musical style becomes intertwined with relations of power. In contemporary China musical style is not only impacted by the processes of power relations manifested in the modernization program -- it is also a resource for use in both the legitimation of and for opposition to the specific strategies that determine these relations. In other words, musical style and political power are mutually determining and can be mutually defining. Music can be used for political and ideological purposes; and ideologies can be used to serve musical ends. Both practices are highlighted in the data and analyses of the different genres studies in Chapters One, Two, and Three; but the contexts (and therefore the terms and meanings) of these practices differ with each genre;

3. **the relationship of modernization to Westernization.** The "primary contradiction" within Chinese music is that between Chinese music and Western music. The primary contradiction is defined by Maoist/Marxist theory as that polarity that is the most crucial and that therefore demands the most concentrated attention (see Mao 1977c). This formulation serves to remind us of the crucial role Western music has played in the historical development of Chinese music in the last one hundred years and that the modernization of Chinese music is at its core an attempted solution to this contradiction.<sup>11</sup> Since 1976 the Chinese

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<sup>11</sup> In the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing all students must take a two-year course in Chinese music history. The Opium War (1839-1842) serves as a dividing point between first and second year courses. Thus it is a political event involving the West (as opposed to, e.g., an internal political event such as a dynastic change) which has been chosen as a crucial line of division in Chinese music history (Cai 1991). This "Marxist paradigm" (Fairbank 1986:41) supports and reinforces the formulation of the aforementioned primary contradiction. See Kraus 1989:3-5 for a brief discussion of the impact that the results of the Opium War had on the spread of Western music in China.

Communist Party has tried to effect economic and technological modernization through the importation of Western products, techniques, and expertise while minimizing Western influence in ideological realms. It has in other words tried to effect modernization without Westernization. One of the major subtexts in this dissertation (especially in Chapters Two and Three) is the analysis of the processes and fruits of this effort in different realms of Chinese musical culture;

4. **the necessity for and the direction of musical change.** Much of the discourse surrounding the modernization of Chinese music concerns itself with the concept of musical change. Chinese musicians and music scholars (as well as the governing regime) all admit of the necessity for musical change. As a result there is resistance to the concept of musical preservation as it is often proffered by Western ethnomusicologists (and as it is practiced in Japan).<sup>12</sup> The disagreements are over what kind of change should be nurtured. The direction and mechanisms of musical development are the subjects of heated debates within Chinese musical circles. They also serve as theoretical points of crystallization for politico-aesthetic struggles for power. In this dissertation I will analyze these mechanisms and the struggles over their control in three different realms of Chinese music. I will show that they are determining factors both in the creation of the current musical crisis and in the potential success of proposed solutions;

5. **the meaning, invention, and power of musical traditions.** A musical tradition -- as a concept -- is an ideological tool for use as legitimation in a

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<sup>12</sup> This idea of preservation as a means of saving a musical tradition (and resistance to this idea) is pursued further in Chapter Three.

variety of strategies.<sup>13</sup> As a practice a musical tradition is a practical and immediate link to both past and future; it is a stabilizer. These two aspects of a tradition -- its ideological flexibility and its practical stability -- combine to explain its power. For its practical stability is related to the idea of dominance and through dominance to strategies for personal, social and political power. And its ideological flexibility means that the weight and power of the concept of the dominant (and the moral "rightness" that accompanies this concept) can be applied to a variety of practices in attempts to legitimate or delegitimize them.

Tradition is thus neither exclusively an object -- "a core of inherited culture traits whose continuity and boundedness are analogous to that of a natural object" -- nor exclusively a construct -- "an ongoing interpretation of the past" (Handler & Linnekin 1984:273,274). Rather, it exists in a field connecting the two.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, tradition (even in its practical aspects) is not simply transmitted -- it is invented (or rather reinvented). Actors in the present are continuously and selectively redefining what is and what is not traditional -- and acting on these redefinitions -- in order to serve the needs (economic, political, artistic) of the moment.<sup>15</sup> The ideological flexibility of the concept of tradition (and its moral weight) is useful in these redefinitions: the application of the term "tradition" to a

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<sup>13</sup> "Men refer to aspects of the past as tradition in grounding their present actions in some legitimating principle. In this fashion, tradition becomes an ideology ..." (Gusfield 1967:358)

<sup>14</sup> I applaud Handler and Linnekin for their attack upon over-materialistic, essentialist conceptions of tradition as "bounded entities" which despite external changes somehow manage to transmit a "core" which is unchanged (see Shils 1981:12-16). However, their denial of the material reality of tradition forces them into an extreme idealist position of positing tradition as "interpretation," "a process of thought," and a "wholly symbolic construction." Seeing tradition as a practical activity admits both of its material and ideological aspects.

<sup>15</sup> This notion of the invention of tradition is taken from Hobsbawm 1983.

set of practices transfers this weight and its connection to the past to these practices. For my purposes it is the linkage between the ideological and practical aspects of tradition that is of the greatest interest; for it is a central location for the creation of and for struggles over the meaning of modern Chinese music;

#### **6. musical aesthetics: the place of music in the life of man.**

Questions concerning musical aesthetics are central to struggles over the direction of contemporary Chinese musical practices because both traditional Chinese and Maoist/Marxist aesthetics place music squarely in the social realm. In addition, the other aesthetic philosophies that have influenced modern Chinese musical thought -- the Romanticism and Expressionism of 19th and 20th-century Western cultures -- were until after 1976 mediated by either the traditional Chinese Confucian-dominated or Maoist/Marxist aesthetic ideology (or both). These three aesthetic traditions -- Confucian, Maoist, and Western -- have clashed with each other for the last fifty years of Chinese musical history. The constantly changing configuration of these clashes is another means by which to measure the struggles over Chinese musical development and to gauge the relative strengths of the groups and individuals involved.

The Confucian tradition is the dominant intellectual and social tradition of pre-20th century China. Music is central to the aesthetics of this tradition and aesthetics is central to the traditional notion of self-cultivation as a means of attaining a full and vital life. The Confucian aesthetic tradition emphasizes both the expressive and the instrumental nature of music: expressive in that music expresses the thoughts and feelings of the performer (in such a way that these thoughts and feelings can be clearly understood by a sensitive listener) and instrumental in the

sense that music can affect the thoughts and feelings of others.<sup>16</sup> Placed in an historical ideological context emphasizing social stability there emerged a strongly didactic tradition of governing policies with regard to music. Music's instrumental nature should be controlled in such a way that it helps in cultivating socially responsible persons -- thus aiding social stability. Its expressive nature can be utilized in gauging this social stability. **The Confucian tradition's didacticism has exerted a strong influence on modern Chinese aesthetics and has in fact been absorbed by the Maoist/Marxist tradition that has attempted to supplant it.**

Maoist/Marxist aesthetics is treated in some detail in the Conclusions to this dissertation; here I will introduce some of its more salient features. First of all it is (like Confucianism) didactic in its conception of the responsibility of the government vis-a-vis musical production. Secondly it is populist in its insistence on the musician's responsibility not only to please the masses but also to draw his or her material directly from the traditions of the masses. Third, it is typically Zhdanovian in its stylistic directives due to the direct (and lasting) influence of Russian "socialist realism." Modernisms (such as atonality) are looked down upon and a descriptive style depicting the struggles of socialist construction but with an optimistic and patriotic mood is expected.<sup>17</sup> Finally, Maoist/Marxist aesthetics is committed to a reflectionist theory whereby music is seen as reflective of the conditions of people's lives. Within the context of a socialist didacticism these aspects of Maoist/Marxist aesthetics combine to demand that professional

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<sup>16</sup> See DeWoskin 1982 (especially pp. 22-23, 61, and 182) for examples from ancient Chinese texts of these powerful qualities of music.

<sup>17</sup> For an introduction to the Zhdanovian aesthetic, see Solomon 1979:235-241.

musicians reflect the "lives of the people" through a socialist realist style that draws elements from the musical traditions of the masses and transforms them into an expressive form that will influence the masses' way of thinking in a direction beneficial to the whole of society (and specifically to the goals of socialist construction and modernization).

Juxtaposed against the previous two traditions is a third that, like Marxism, has been absorbed from the West: the tradition of Western Romanticism and Expressionism.<sup>18</sup> This tradition emphasizes individualism, both with regard to production (composers and performers) and to consumption (the individual aesthetic response). In addition, it emphasizes artistic freedom (as opposed to populism) and self-expression as axiomatic in the relationship between the artist and the government and in the artist's sense of responsibility.

In the early twentieth century the Western aesthetic as a set of stylistic preferences (due to its association with modernity and its influence on several generations of Chinese intellectuals) exerted profound influence in transforming Chinese musical style. This influence still exists and constitutes a major battleground for China's musical power struggles. As a philosophy of musical meaning and as a social philosophy the Western tradition was dominated by the Confucian and Maoist/Marxist aesthetic ideologies in the early part of the century but has partially thrown off (or at least restructured) this domination since 1978. As a result, it has become an ideological challenge to the dominant Confucian/Maoist/Marxist aesthetics and a vehicle for the expression of musico-political opposition to the dominant regime.

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<sup>18</sup> See Chapter Three for a fuller discussion of this tradition and its influence on Chinese musical aesthetics.

The three traditions of musical aesthetics are three competing philosophies of musical meaning touching on production, consumption, and style.<sup>19</sup> Their struggles with each other and their pattern of absorption from each other is a fluid process that both mirrors and influences the direction of contemporary Chinese musical practices.

### **The Organization of the Dissertation**

The main chapters of this dissertation (Chapters One, Two, and Three,) are dedicated to investigating the process of modernization in three vastly different musical domains: the traditional Peking Opera, popular music, and "serious" (or "art") music. One chapter is devoted to each domain. I have chosen these three because of (1) their cultural importance not only to the people of Beijing but also to the governing regime (and in the case of Peking Opera and popular music, to the general Chinese populace), and (2) the vastly differing social and musical histories of the three domains, involving different audiences and performance traditions -- i.e., the different "meanings" of the three domains for contemporary Chinese. Each has participated in the processes of cultural, social, and economic modernization; but the dynamic of this participation differs dramatically from one domain to another.

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<sup>19</sup> These three aesthetic traditions roughly (and coincidentally) correspond to the three political traditions -- the Confucian, the revolutionary, and the (Western-influenced) democratic -- whose interactions and struggles, according to David Chang, have produced and are continuing to produce contemporary Chinese political history. See Chang 1988:237-278.



In Chapter One I analyze the traditional Peking Opera: a genre with deep roots in China's pre-communist society. I show how the treatment of this operatic tradition revealed deep contradictions within the Maoist/Marxist thought of the 1950s, the solution to which was the adoption of a reform policy that attempted simultaneously to preserve and to transform operatic practices.

As a musical style loved by the masses (and by Mao himself) Peking Opera was chosen as a key element in the propaganda campaigns of the 1950s-1970s, whose goal was to help create a new Chinese socialist populace. But ultimately, due to changes directly linked to modernization, Peking Opera faded in its importance to the general population of the city that had nourished it for 200 years and whose name it bore. Ironically, it simultaneously gained in its importance as a symbol of traditional art and its most important patronage began to come from the Chinese audience outside of Beijing and from an international audience.

The issue emerging from this shift concerns the treatment of a musical tradition seen as culturally (symbolically) important but that cannot meet the demands of a post-Cultural Revolution (i.e., post-1976) economic and political order. Governmental protection of such a tradition contradicts both Maoist/Marxist aesthetic prescriptions and the necessities of a new economism. But to allow the Peking Opera to die would be both internally and externally unpopular at a time when the existing regime is wanting both internal and external legitimation. And so the Peking Opera remains in a state of "crisis," with the government continuing to encourage reform in the hopes of building a larger audience and the performers resisting reform because it costs too much and no one comes to see it.

In Chapter Two I shift my analysis to the field of popular music. A musical form that had no legitimate place in Communist Chinese society until the late 1970s, the history of this form, its musical practices, its audience, its relationship with the government --i.e., the ways in which it participates in the modernization of Chinese culture -- form a strong contrast with the traditional Peking Opera.

The chief differences are (1) that the audience for popular music is young; (2) that popular music is a modern musical genre; and (3) that popular music is of foreign provenance. These three factors combine to give popular music a unique place in Chinese culture. **Whereas problems with the Peking Opera are problems in the modernization of a long lasting tradition, problems with popular music are in the treatment of a foreign form that is simultaneously seen as a symbol of modernity and as a threat to the political and moral order that is being subjected to modernization.**

The issues raised by an analysis of popular music in a major Chinese city coalesce around questions of identity (local, national, international). Included in these are the treatment of foreign cultural practices, problems between generations, and the relationships between expressive forms and political ideology. We will see that Chinese musicians have appropriated foreign popular music styles and Sinicized them (*minzuhua*) but that these indigenous popular styles are loaded with political power that is potentially oppositional to the governing regime. As a genre international by its nature, popular music particularly touches issues of national identity; and as a genre originating in and emanating from Western capitalist democracies, popular music embodies a political significance that is lost neither on the government nor on a young generation with little or no emotional investment in socialist revolution.

The government's chief strategy is one of incorporation. By treating popular music as a form of light entertainment the regime engages in a symbolic argument through which it hopes -- through cooptation -- to strip the more politically sharp popular music styles of their "edge." Those persons whose oppositional identities are embodied in popular music resist this incorporation through various means, ranging from symbolic violence at concerts to participation in an underground economy of recordings and performances. Their performers distance themselves from the incorporating forces through the adoption of musical tendencies at odds with the direction of these forces. In other words, they "style" their "difference."

Chapter Three deals with the construction of a "serious" or "art" music tradition in China. The issues surrounding this music combine those raised by the Peking Opera and those raised by popular music, for its construction involves the modernization of an existing indigenous tradition through the modeling of and appropriation of significant features of a tradition originating in the Western capitalist democracies. Although the audience for this music is small, the ramifications of its practices are felt throughout the country due to the social influence (i.e., the power) of the music conservatories as trainers of China's class of professional musicians. And this class of musicians is socially responsible (from the point of view of the government) for the creation and propagation of a socialist music with Chinese characteristics: a music that is simultaneously Chinese and modern and that helps in the construction of a modern Chinese socialist state by reflecting the (generally optimistic) lives of the people involved in this construction. But the class of professional musicians has a historical tradition deeply influenced both by Western aesthetic ideologies and by pre-Liberation liberal democratic

political philosophies (mixed with traditional Confucian notions of the politically-active intellectual). Most of these professionals are deeply interested in and involved with the modernization of Chinese music; but their vision of what will ultimately constitute that music has been fundamentally at odds (both stylistically and politically) with the communist regime's orthodox views since Liberation -- and remains so during the era of Deng Xiaoping (1976-present).

The history of the construction of an "art" or "serious" music in the People's Republic of China since Liberation -- a history that has involved the transformation of traditional Chinese instruments and performance practices -- has been profoundly affected by the relationship between the musical intellectual community and the governing regime. This chapter clearly reveals the dialectic between developments of musical style and relations of power. The sounds of music are socially determined.

### **The Significance of This Work within the Context of Ethnomusicology**

This dissertation makes several distinct contributions to ethnomusicological work in general and to ethnomusicological work on China in particular:

1. **it extends to China the native-oriented, meaning-centered work** that has emerged within the field in the last 30 years but that up until now has been applied mostly to the music of Africa, South America, and Indonesia. Ethnomusicological work on China has been dominated by ethnomusicologists with

primarily musicological (rather than anthropological) training and interests. Native-oriented, meaning-centered work grew out of the ethnographic methods of anthropologists studying non-modernized societies with primarily oral musical traditions. It is only recently that the applications of this approach have been expanded to include musical cultures with long literate traditions. This dissertation will be one of the first to apply this method to the music of modern mainland China;

**2. it offers a way to bring the study of music as primarily a cultural phenomenon to bear on contemporary musics in urban areas with large populations.** It is in other words a contribution to urban ethnomusicology -- which in recent years has quietly emerged as a major focus of ethnomusicological work. However, most such work is focused on a single genre, a single instrument, or the music of one group, and often does not address the relationships between this genre, instrument, or group to the larger whole of which it is a part. I suggest in this dissertation an alternative method constructed around an effort to constantly relate personal and local issues to regional, national, and international ones. I will examine several musical domains (styles, performers, performances and audiences), constantly tacking back and forth between local and super-local issues. Ultimately, one can only understand one through the other: regional, national and international issues are locally redefined, but local redefinition is in relation to local understanding of super-local practices. My goals are to understand each domain in its autonomy and to understand how each impacts and is impacted by the larger cultural issues current in urban Chinese society;

**3. it extends to China the growing interest in popular music as cultural expression.** It is in the growing work on popular music that we see the most concentrated efforts being made to connect music with other cultural realms as

well as to recently emergent theoretical issues. This work is by and large being done by ethnomusicologists lacking musicological training but with a keen interest in and a training in anthropological and sociological techniques of cultural analysis. It is common for musicologists to cast a disapproving eye toward popular musics. Since the ethnomusicological work on China has been dominated by scholars with musicological training it is natural that little attention has been paid to China's popular music. Some movement is currently being made in this direction (see, for example, the Summer 1991 issue of Asian Music); but it remains a gaping hole in the ethnomusicological literature on China;

**4. it makes a contribution both to Chinese ethnomusicology and to ethnomusicology in general via culture-centered analysis of the relationship between musical style and the politics of modernization.** Ethnomusicologists who study Chinese music are on the whole unsympathetic to China's musical modernization efforts. Their reaction has generally been to ignore these efforts and to study "real" Chinese music (i.e., those traditions still surviving despite modernization or disappearing because of it).<sup>20</sup> This dissertation joins a select few recently written works that are attempting to fill this void (see Lau 1991 and Liu 1988); it is the first to analyze musical modernization as a cross-genre process and the first to make ethnographically grounded cultural and political analysis the basis for an extended research project on Chinese music.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> An exception is Han Kuo-Huang, whose work is not centrally preoccupied with but does not shy away from musical modernization (e.g., Han 1979, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> The only other book-length work on Chinese music from a cultural/political analytical approach is Richard Kraus's Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music (Kraus 1989). Kraus's book was the first major contribution to the study of Chinese musical modernization. It is not a coincidence that Kraus is not an ethnomusicologist -- he is a political scientist.

The dominant research paradigm within ethnomusicological work on China has virtually ignored popular music, music/culture connections and actor-centered (ethnographic) investigations. This dissertation -- taking as basic convictions the importance of studying popular musics, the necessity of the music/culture dialectic, and the superiority of an ethnographic approach -- begins the necessary job of filling in the gaps left by the work in the dominant paradigm, thereby deepening our understanding of the music of China and opening up new channels for investigation. There is still much work to be done. It is time to begin it.

**CHAPTER ONE**  
**THE TRADITIONAL PEKING OPERA**  
**(CHUANTONG JINGJU)**



**PART ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

"The premier considers Peking Opera to be one of the most fragrant flowers of Chinese culture and supports its development."

Politburo member Li Ruihuan  
on television newscast  
December 18th, 1989

"Give us money and we will develop."

Mr. H., professional Peking  
Opera musician

These statements about development and about money reveal the main issues facing those involved with contemporary Peking Opera: development speaks of the cultural and political issues of content, and money of the economic issue of viability. The government, the performers, and the audiences are all implicated in and involved with these issues; the issues themselves can be subsumed under the general question **What is to be the cultural location of traditional Peking Opera within contemporary mainland China?**

This chapter will focus on these issues and on this question. Using material from historical accounts, ethnographic interviews, and personal experiences, I will begin to fill a lacuna in the material in English on Peking Opera (which tends to emphasize historiographic, musicological, and dramatistic accounts) by (1) concentrating on changes (reforms) in Peking Opera practice; (2) connecting these changes to political policies; (3) grounding both changes and political policies in ethnographic data that reveals how these changes and policies have affected the lives of Peking Opera performers and audiences and how these groups of people have reacted to the changes and policies; and (4) synthesizing all of the above within the context of cultural, political, and ethnographic theory.

The result is a contribution to the literature on Peking Opera that is an ethnographic, culturally-based, politically-informed account framed around issues of political and musical reform: its practices, its theories, and its connections to the lives of those involved with it. **I will argue that traditional Peking Opera is at an important historical juncture that includes a crisis of definition brought about by the attempted modernization of the culture in general and of Peking Opera specifically.** The resolution of this crisis (or lack of resolution) will

determine both the future status of this tradition within Chinese culture and the direction of its musical practices.

### Jingju and xiju

Peking Opera (jingju) is one of over 300 operatic subgenres (xiju) performed in the People's Republic of China.<sup>22</sup> Chinese opera has been characterized as "a synthesis of stage arts: music, dance (also mime, acrobatics), and drama" (Liang 1985:230). It is generally traced back to about the 12th century, giving it a history of some 800 years. **It is essentially a folk entertainment with a high degree of popularity among the masses.** Local opera styles (difangxi) have local characteristics -- chiefly language dialects and regional musical styles -- which make each subgenre difficult to understand for someone from another area. Chinese opera has been "the most widely enjoyed artistic production in China within the past four hundred years" (Liang 1985:230).

Peking Opera is a relatively young form of Chinese opera. Its origins are found in a synthesis of several southern China opera styles that came together in Qing dynasty Beijing in the 1790s (New Grove vol.4:254-5).<sup>23</sup> It established itself as the most popular opera style with Beijing audiences despite a stormy relationship

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<sup>22</sup> One source claims that there are 368 subgenres of opera in China (Qi 1979:221). My sources usually simply said "over 300."

<sup>23</sup> The Chinese government officially dates the origin of Peking Opera at 1790, when many regional opera companies (the most important of which were from Anhui) were invited to the capitol to perform for Emperor Qian Long's 80th birthday. These companies exerted a profound influence upon the development of Peking Opera as a synthesis of regional styles (see Mackerras 1972:124).

with the imperial court (Mackerras 1975:33). Peking Opera is on one level simply one local opera among many. Nevertheless, it occupies a unique position because its popularity has a broader base than does any other regional opera form. Indeed, many other regions in China have Peking Opera troupes. This widespread popularity may partly be due to the influence of Beijing as political capital of the nation and to Peking Opera's use of mandarin -- the "national language" (thus making it understandable to those in other regions)<sup>24</sup>; but historical trends and political developments have also had much to do with its widespread popularity -- developments and trends that will become clear as this chapter progresses. Whatever the reasons, Peking opera, though one local opera among 300, is also in fact "the nearest approach to a `national' theatre in China" (New Grove vol.4:255).

Due to its popularity and its base within the political capital of China, Peking Opera has occupied (especially since Liberation) a particularly sensitive position as (1) a traditional art form serving a vast mass audience yet locally catering to an exclusively urban one; and (2) an art form which, due to its popularity and therefore influence, has been approached as a particularly effective vehicle for political programs emanating from government headquarters.

But Peking Opera has been in a state of crisis since the late 1970s. The audience has been dwindling. The young in particular have avoided this traditional art form. And in the midst of the economic reforms of the Deng era this has precipitated artistic decisions based to an unprecedented degree (since Liberation) on immediate economic considerations. The reforms instigated by Deng have resulted in organizational restructuring within the Peking Opera, including the

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<sup>24</sup> Mandarin, the national language, is essentially the Peking dialect.

emergence of a closer relationship between a troupe's income from performances and the personal income of those in the troupe. Added to this is the constant political pressure to continue the work of reforming the content of the Peking Opera art form itself -- a pressure that dates back to before Liberation. These two pressures -- economic and political -- and the contradictions between them are the main sources of the problems faced by Peking Opera workers. Both can be seen as coming from one central political directive: **modernization**.

In this chapter I will show how the modernization of Peking Opera through reform contains within it several tensions or -- as the Chinese would say -- contradictions, the resolutions of which (to paraphrase Mao) is always temporary and contributes to the next set of contradictions.<sup>25</sup> In order to achieve this, however, the concept of reform must be clarified and historically placed within the context of the period after Liberation. And the Peking Opera itself must be introduced, both as a art form and in its role as the favored mass entertainment genre. After that I will give a brief historical account of its practices in the political and cultural context of post-Liberation China. Only then can we begin to understand the cultural meaning of this genre for contemporary Chinese. And only then can we understand how the crisis in this genre participates in and embodies the deep contradictions facing Chinese society in the 1980s and 1990s.

**With regard to reform, three questions need to be asked: (1) What is meant by reform? (2) Why is reform of Peking Opera necessary? and (3) How should this be carried out?** The next two sections will set these questions in

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<sup>25</sup> This never ending dialectical process of history is one of the main points of Mao's "On Practice." See Mao 1977b and Holubnychy 1964:26-27.

historical context and explain the sources of the directions their solutions have taken.

### Jingju and Reform (gaige)

Peking Opera was born of synthesis, and has continuously absorbed elements of other art forms (especially other regional opera styles) since its emergence. For example, Mei Lanfang in the early twentieth century brought "gestures, movements, and singing styles from the kunqu performing style" into the practice of Peking Opera (Yung 1984:145).<sup>26</sup> At about that same time (known as the Republican Period in Chinese history and lasting from 1911 to 1949) a new tradition of newly composed or arranged Peking Operas emerged. Historically, composing an opera had been a joint effort by the scriptwriter and the opera performers, and had consisted of matching and/or adapting pre-existing tunes to the material of the script. But these new dramas (xinxi) represented a new tradition of **operas written by individual authors**. Though new in this sense, the stories from which these new dramas were adapted were commonly known historical plots; and the music of the new dramas "followed that of the traditional Peking Opera closely" (Mackerras 1975:65).

The reform that is the subject of this chapter consists mainly of changes in Peking Opera practices made since the 1940s. This reform has by and large been

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<sup>26</sup> Kunqu is an older form of opera, more formal and more elitist (in the sense of having strong ties to the imperial court) than Peking Opera. Peking Opera essentially replaced Kunqu as the main opera style in Beijing in the late 18th century.

politically driven, and we could thereby define it as **a centrally controlled and dictated politically-driven process involving the intentional transformation of an existing artistic practice**. But motivations for reform can also come from the performers who, in response to economic and social situations (as well as to their own aesthetic sense), see the need for and lobby for practical change -- that is, changes in practice; and from audiences who express their desires through reactions to existing artistic practices (attendance, behavior at concerts, etc.).

**Reform therefore results from a complex historical dialectic involving political, economic, social and aesthetic practices -- each with its own historical patterns and programmatic directives.**<sup>27</sup> These interact in relationships that can be seen as fluid figure/ground patterns: at any moment one might stand out at the expense of another, only to recede as another emerges.<sup>28</sup> It is important to remember that these practices (political, economic, social and aesthetic) are not autonomous forces -- the dialectic producing reform is not a dialectic of "objective" forces, but a clash of needs, preferences, and ambitions pushed by historically situated people with definite (if not always clearly-conceived) goals and greater or lesser power to realize them.

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<sup>27</sup> "Programmatic" here refers to Perinbanayagam's notion of "programs," which he developed from the works of Kenneth Burke and Alfred Schutz and which he defines as motives "shared and integrated into ongoing interactions, relationships, and patterns of activities and decidedly having the character of plans to be realized in time and moves to be initiated for consummation at a later moment" (Perinbanayagam 1985:104). This notion is an attempt to place subjective motives both within the subject and within the social field.

<sup>28</sup> The idea of figure/ground relationships comes from the work of Steven Feld, and stresses (1) the multiple determinants of a particular "moment" and (2) the fluidity of the determinants' relationships. This idea is similar in some ways to the Marxian notion of "overdetermination."



### Reform and Tradition

As instigated by the Communist Party under the leadership of Mao Zedong in the 1940s, artistic reform centered around two tasks: (1) the transformation of traditional art forms and (2) the creation of new forms. From Mao's Marxist viewpoint reform was necessary because every art form is ideological in the sense that it was born of, embodies, and expresses a worldview. Mao adopted the classic Marxist idea that being determines consciousness -- and by extension that artistic forms, as expressions of consciousness, point to forms of being. The Communist revolution was a concerted attempt to bring China into a new era: "The past epoch is gone, never to return" (Mao 1977:38-9); what sense would it make to continue to propagate the old worldview through ideological forms such as opera? Therefore reform was necessary. This reform is often seen (especially by Western ethnomusicologists) simply as the use of traditional forms for political purposes or as an attack on traditional forms. This view misunderstands the philosophical base of reform and oversimplifies its political agenda. For example, reform (as encouraged by Mao) was an attack on traditional musical forms. But it also was implemented in order to **save** these forms from the attacks of those who at that time associated all traditional Chinese cultural forms with feudalism and with Chinese cultural backwardness (Holm 1984:11). In this sense reform can be seen as a strategy for realizing an essentially conservative goal: retaining, in this case, a centuries-old operatic tradition (which thus becomes a motivation for change).

The reform of opera began in the communist-controlled areas of China well before the Liberation of 1949. Mao directed his cultural workers to "breathe new life into the old operas" and to "take them out to the whole country" (Liu 1981:517).

Mao's encouragement of the use of traditional forms not only to help spread a new communist ideology but also to continue the traditions of the Chinese cultural legacy was codified in his "Talks at the Yanan Forum on Literature and Art" of May 1942 (Mao 1977).<sup>29</sup> Mao stated the matter as revolving around the question For whom should art exist?

Literature and art for the landlord class are feudal literature and art. ... Literature for the bourgeoisie are bourgeois literature and art. ... Then literature and art exist which serve the imperialists ... which we call traitor literature and art. With us, literature and art are for the people, not for any of the above groups. ... We should take over the rich legacy and the good traditions in literature and art that have been handed down from past ages in China and foreign countries, but the aim must still be to serve the masses of the people. Nor do we refuse to utilize the literary and artistic forms of the past, but in our hands these old forms, remolded and infused with new content, also become something revolutionary in the service of the people (Mao 1977:11-12).<sup>30</sup>

These words, setting out the basis of what is known as the "mass line,"<sup>31</sup> spoke directly to many in the Party who at that time considered the use of

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<sup>29</sup> These talks, given as part of a general intraParty rectification movement in 1942, were revised by Mao in 1953 (McDougall 1984:289).

<sup>30</sup> Included in Mao's definition of "people" were workers, peasants, soldiers and urban petty bourgeoisie (Mao 1977:12).

<sup>31</sup> The "mass line" is an application of Mao's materialist dialectical emphasis on practice: "theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice and must then return

traditional forms to promote modern ideology "an artistic dead end" (Holm 1984:11) and thus favored a policy that concerned itself only with the creation of new forms. Mao's defense of the use of traditional forms for revolutionary purposes provided the legitimation these forms needed to continue to exist in both pre-Liberation and post-Liberation China. It also circumscribed the field of discourse upon which the battles over the specifics of reform would be (and are still being) fought. The need to search among the popular practical artistic traditions of the masses of Chinese people for the resources of what are to be the traditions of "New China" (xin zhongguo) and the need to politically mediate these traditions in order to transform them into revolutionary practices have formed the basis of a dialectic of artistic practice in China since the 1940s.

In addition to the reform of traditional works, Mao saw the creation of new works as an important step in the transformation of Chinese culture and society. But in accordance with the mass line, these new works also must come out of an understanding of the audience for whom the creator is writing.

China's revolutionary writers and artists, writers and artists of promise, must go among the masses; they must for a long period of time unreservedly and whole-heartedly go among the masses of workers, peasants and soldiers, go into the heat of the struggle, go to the only source, the broadest and richest source, in order to observe, experience, study and analyse all the different kinds of people, all the

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to practice" (Mao 1977b:14). Also see Mao 1977e). The application of this practice to the field of music involves (1) absorbing musical ideas from the people; (2) mediating them by removing feudal content and infusing them with revolutionary content; and (3) giving them back to the people through broadcasts and performances.

classes, all the masses, all the vivid patterns of life and struggle, all the raw materials of literature and art. Only then can they proceed to creative work. Otherwise, you will have nothing to work with and you will be a phony writer or artist... (Mao 1977:19).

Mao thus believed that whether or not specific traditional forms were to be used as source material, the creation of a socialist revolutionary art demanded from the artist a profound understanding of and involvement with the lives and struggles of the masses.

This exhortation to go among the masses is not simply a means for gathering inspiration or for getting to know one's audience; it had its basis in Mao's Marxist aesthetics. If being determines consciousness, then those who would produce the new socialist art forms must have their "being" changed in order to produce an ideologically progressive art. The professional artists in China by and large came from intellectual families, so they were politically suspect. But they were needed in the reform of Peking Opera.<sup>32</sup> It was simply not possible for these artists, if they remained divorced from the life of the masses, to produce art that embodied, expressed and encouraged the development of the masses -- and it was this development that was crucial for success in creating a new socialist China.<sup>33</sup>

These two tasks for Peking Opera workers --reforming older plays and creating new ones -- have remained central to Chinese opera policy and practice

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<sup>32</sup> The Peking Opera troupes needed the infusion of revolutionary-minded professional artists because the performers within the troupes either resisted reform or were not considered to be ideologically or artistically equipped for the task of modernization. See Chapter One, Part Two for more on this subject.

<sup>33</sup> See the Conclusions to this dissertation for a more detailed discussion of the modernization of Chinese music in the context of Marxist aesthetics.

since the 1940s. There have been shifts in strategies, definitions and priorities in the last 50 years, but the tasks, their goals, and the problems they entail have remained unchanged. The history of Peking Opera since the 1940s is the history of the practice of carrying out these tasks.

**PART TWO**  
**CHUANTONGXI, 1949-1978**

### **Chuantongxi in Context**

There have been three lines of development in Peking Opera since Liberation: traditional operas (*chuantongxi*), newly-written historical operas (*xinbian lishiju*), and modern operas (*xiandaixi*). "**Chuantongxi**" refers to the continuation and development of traditional Peking Opera: its development and performances styles are circumscribed by a particular practical tradition. "**Xinbian lishiju**" refers to the continuation of the "xinxi" tradition from pre-Liberation: a tradition in which innovation is more conspicuous and in which rational control of the opera genre is heightened. These operas are newly composed plays based on historical (imperial) material using traditional performance and staging techniques as a basis upon which to introduce new elements absorbed from outside the Peking Opera tradition. "**Xiandaixi**" refers to newly composed plays based on post-imperial (mostly revolutionary) material using performance and staging techniques that are influenced by Western opera and spoken drama; these *xiandaixi* continue certain traditional performance techniques while drastically changing others; they represent the furthest departure from pre-existing Peking Opera traditions.

Except for the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) these three lines of development have been in continuous coexistence.<sup>34</sup> Government efforts to control the relationships among them and to prioritize one or another of them have

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<sup>34</sup> There is a lack of consistency on the part of Western scholars regarding the dating of the Cultural Revolution. There is agreement on the starting date, 1966; but some place the end at 1969, and others at 1976. Although the Cultural Revolution proper was pronounced officially ended in 1969, the Chinese people include these three years with the years until the downfall of the Gang of Four (1976) as one period. I will follow the Chinese conception and, as others have done, designate the whole period from 1966-1976 as the Cultural Revolution (see McDougall 1984:292).

alternated between periods of strong involvement and periods of relative relaxation of controls. This contraction/relaxation cycle is due to the fact that of the three lines of development the traditional opera (chuantongxi) has been -- when allowed -- the most frequently performed. But due to the political program of reform discussed above, the government frequently has been dissatisfied with the state of opera performance. These times mark periods of strong involvement on the part of the government (in the form of strictures, bannings, regulations, etc.) and their goals have always been at the expense of the chuantongxi.

But this solution to the problem of opera reform becomes part of the next problem: lack of audience and performer interest in opera reform. In response to this the government relaxes its controls and the traditional opera again flourishes at the expense of reform. This seemingly inconsistent approach, which results in a wave-like or cyclical pattern of government involvement in opera reform, can be understood as a result of the dialectic view espoused by Mao and continued by the inheritors of Mao's Marxism: a problem arises as a result of a contradiction (in this case traditional opera and modern life); the solution to the contradiction (urging reform) becomes one of the elements in the next contradiction (reform and the audience's desires); and so on. Seen this way the government's policies are neither inconsistent nor cyclical; they are the results of a practical program of constant tacking to counteract the differing problems of different moments.

There is, however, another explanation: the frequent changes in policy are a result not of philosophical dialectics but of intraParty power struggles between those pushing reform and those favoring traditional opera. It is my view that both of these explanations are essentially correct in that both of the processes they describe have been operative throughout the history of New China; nevertheless one



or the other tends to be dominant at any given time. **The dominance of dialectics over power struggles is directly related to the political stability within the leadership.**

In this dissertation I will deal mainly with developments concerning the traditional Peking Opera. The other two lines of opera development -- "newly composed historical plays" (xinbian lishiju) and "modern operas" (xiandaixi) are equally important in the last 50 years of Peking Opera history. My choice to limit this exposition to the reform of chuantongxi is based on (1) the fact that this is the favored form of the mass opera audience, (2) the insights that this reform affords us vis-a-vis government policy regarding traditional art forms and the dynamics of carrying out those policies, and (3) the decision to deal fairly comprehensively with the history of one type of Peking Opera rather than touch on all three types in a more cursory manner.

### **Characteristics and Developmental Trends**

With the exception of the years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), traditional plays have dominated the Peking Opera stage since Liberation -- regardless of government pressures and policies to the contrary. Of the three lines of development in Peking Opera this one has had (and continues to have) the largest and most loyal audience.

We are ultimately concerned with the state of the traditional Peking Opera since the end of the Cultural Revolution; in order to understand this, however, it is necessary to understand its recent history. The definition of "recent" and the point

at which to begin an explanation of this traditional genre is problematic, and as this chapter's goal is not to treat the history of Peking Opera comprehensively, a decision is necessary regarding a point of departure. History gives us the convenient date of 1949 -- the date of the Communist takeover -- as a reasonable starting point since the developments since that time have occurred under the Communist regime and since the problems facing the traditional Peking Opera have been structured by and understood via the discourse dominated by this regime.

#### Characteristics, ca. 1949

We will begin with the characteristics of the traditional Peking Opera as confronted by Mao and his government at the time of the Communist victory in 1949. Having had (up to 1949) a history of over 150 years, the Peking Opera certainly had gone through a number of changes and developments prior to Liberation. These were, however, by and large slow and subtle changes involving (1) innovations on the part of certain performers (e.g., Mei Lanfang's addition of the erhu to the Peking Opera orchestra)<sup>35</sup> that would then be copied by others or (2) the continuing development of "schools" (liupai) of performers who modeled themselves after and continued to develop the performing styles of certain revered stars.<sup>36</sup> Here are some major characteristics of the dramatic art form of Peking Opera:

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<sup>35</sup> A two-stringed fiddle, lower pitched than the one resident within the Peking Opera orchestra (the jinghu). See below.

<sup>36</sup> For example, the early 20th century saw the emergence, in Peking Opera, of four such schools involving male portrayal of female characters, each school modeled and named after a famous performer (see Mackerras 1975:52).

1. **synthesis:** Peking Opera is usually described as a "comprehensive" art form; it is a synthesis of such diverse elements as "traditional Chinese music, poetry, singing, recitation, dancing, acrobatics and martial skills" (Wu 1980:2). Pantomime is often incorporated into the plays;

2. **popular historical sources:** the stories are "mainly folk in origin" (Liang 1985:230), based on "historical and semihistorical accounts, myths, legends, and fiction" (Yung 1984:144). The "historical" nature of these plays refers to the fact that they took place in imperial China: before the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. Plays set after that time are called "modern" plays. Traditionally these historical stories were well known to the audience, thus creating an important distinction between opera and (for example) spoken drama. A typical evening's presentation of traditional Peking Opera would include several of these stories, each told in one or more scenes (but rarely more than several scenes per story);

3. **kinds of plays:** Peking Opera plays are divided into two basic categories. **Wenxi** (civil plays) stress the affairs of social life; **wuxi** (military plays) stress fighting and acrobatics. Elements of these two types are often found in the same play (Latsch 1980:6);

4. **vocal roles:** the roles in Peking Opera are classified according to the age and personality of the characters:

All female roles are known as dan, which is subdivided into qing yi (the quite and gentle), hua dan (the vivacious or dissolute type), wu dan (women with martial skills), dao ma dan (sword and horse type, women skilled in fighting with weapons) and lao dan (old woman). All male roles are called sheng, which is subdivided into lao sheng

(old man), xiao sheng (young man) and wu sheng (the warrior type). The third role-type, known as jing (the painted-face), portrays either people who are frank and open-minded but rough, or those who are crafty and dangerous. ... [the fourth role-type is] Chou, a clown (Wu 1980:5-6).

The roles are distinguished by (among other things) a specific timbral quality. The role of the young male (xiaosheng), for example, combines the head and chest voice while singing and speaking; the male warrior (wusheng) uses exclusively a throat voice. Although there is commonly a pitch-level distinction among the roles as well -- the young male roles being pitched higher than the old male roles -- the Chinese emphasize the timbral differentiation over the pitch differentiation (Liang 1985:244-5);

5. **symbolism:** Peking Opera is an abstract art form in that the dress, the gestures and the face makeup are highly stylized; these elements are highly symbolic -- suggestive rather than natural. An audience knows a character's personality (and how he or she fits into the plot of the story) through his or her makeup, dress, and gestures. Color symbolism is common and highly developed. Gestural symbolism is also highly developed, and traditional Peking Opera employs little in the way of stage scenery (it would get in the way of the acrobatics and general freedom of movement).

The stage for a Chinese drama was very simple. There was a backdrop curtain, but no curtain in front. The audience could thus see any change that took place between scenes, but since there was

rarely any scenery, this was not a serious problem. The stage was, in fact, normally rather bare, with no more than a carpet, table and two chairs; sometimes there was only a carpet. The significance of the action was portrayed ... by a highly complex set of formal, symbolic gestures and portable objects. ... For instance, by carrying an oar an actor indicated that he was in a boat, and a special jumping and swaying movement showed that he was going on board. If he wished to indicate that he was riding a horse he carried a riding whip with heavy silk tassels; a formal upward kick represented mounting (Mackerras 1975:23).

The audience recognized these symbolic gestures and immediately understood their meanings: they had seen them in operas since childhood;<sup>37</sup>

6. **vocal music**: the vocal music (**changqiang**) of the traditional Peking Opera is also highly stylized and conventional. Peking Opera belongs to the type of Chinese opera known as **banqiang**, which is distinguished by the fact that its musical material is built from a stock of melodic/rhythmic motives (the other main type, called **quqiang**, is made up of a succession of tunes --rather than motives --strung together). These motives are put together using a highly codified and conventionalized system of meter and beat combinations (**ban**). The musical motives themselves come mainly from two different stocks of motives: **erhuang and xipi**. Each has its own characteristic **ban** and has rules concerning when it is to

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<sup>37</sup> For a detailed description of the traditional Peking Opera actor's gestures and dress featuring the "dan" role see Zung 1937. This author's descriptions reveal not only the symbolism but also the detailed stylization typical of traditional Peking Opera performance.

be used, which affects it will accompany and help produce, and what motivic type and **ban** should precede and follow it. Some of the musical material may come from other sources but the main portion of musical material comes from erhuang and xipi.<sup>38</sup> According to the Chinese it is this changqiang -- the vocal musical style of a Chinese opera form -- that distinguishes it from the other 300 Chinese opera subgenres. This changqiang thus serves a definitional function;

7. **instrumental music**: the instrumental music of traditional Peking Opera functions primarily to accompany the vocal music. The traditional Peking Opera orchestra is seated on one side of the stage in full view of the audience. This orchestra is divided into two groups: the **wenchang** (civic group) and the **wuchang** (military group). The wenchang consists of a core of four stringed instruments (called **si da jian**) that play in unison: the **jinghu** (two-stringed fiddle), the **erhu** (the lower-pitched two-stringed fiddle added by Mei Lanfang), the **yueqin** (a round, plucked guitar), and the **xianzi** (also called **sanxian**: a three-stringed long-necked plucked string instrument). A **suona** (conical, double-reed wind instrument) is sometimes added to the si da jian.

The most important of these instruments is the jinghu. The jinghu player leads the other players of the wenchang and develops an intimate musical relationship with the vocalists, with whom he or she works closely. The jinghu player provides heterophonic accompaniment to the vocal line -- sometimes playing in unison, other times adding passing notes or ornaments using the vocal line as a

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<sup>38</sup> For a concise yet more detailed introduction to the music of Peking Opera (in English), see Liang 1985:243-267); For a full book-length account of this music in English, see Wichmann 1991; in Chinese, see Liu 1981. The outline of the music of the traditional Peking Opera in this chapter draws chiefly from these sources, and from field interviews and personal observations.

point of reference. The jinghu also leads the orchestra in a short instrumental section both before and after an accompanied vocal section. The music of this instrumental section is taken from the same stock of motives as is the vocal music.

The other instruments of the wenchang do not have independent parts; they usually double the line of the jinghu (when the jinghu plays too quickly for the others to double, they simply outline the melodic movement).

The instruments of the wuchang are percussive instruments consisting primarily of two gongs (**luo**), a paired wooden clapper (**ban**), two drums (**guban**), and a set of small, paired cymbals known as **naoba**). The player of one of the drums is the conductor of the wenchang. These instruments are mostly used to accompany certain types of stage movements (such as entrances and exits and military marching), to help structure the actors' overall movements and gestures generally<sup>39</sup>, and to emphasize certain affective moments -- both gestural and in the vocal music itself. They may also occasionally be used to set up a "soundscape" through the imitation of natural sounds such as water or birds (Liang 1985:254);

8. **oral tradition:** the tradition of Peking Opera performance and composition is an oral tradition in that vocal roles and music were transmitted through a system of personal tutelage rather than through the study of written materials. One important element of this tradition is the lack of a composer. The musical elements of the play are traditionally put together by the musicians and the actors out of the stock of musical materials, using the conventions as they have been handed down from previous generations of musicians and actors.

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<sup>39</sup> For a fuller treatment of the relationship between percussion and stage movement, see Yao 1990.

Trends and Issues, 1949-78

In the decision to keep -- but develop -- the traditional Peking Opera, the Chinese Communist government (led by Mao) committed itself to the simultaneous continuance of and transformation of the most important and most widely loved pre-revolutionary art form of the Chinese masses. All of the problems concerning Peking Opera are the results of this dual commitment, which arises from tensions (contradictions) among several aspects of Mao's Marxism. These include: (1) that in the absence of a real proletariat the most progressive "class" in China is the masses: workers, peasants, and soldiers; (2) that the transformation of society involves a Party-led break with the past rather than a "peaceful evolution"; and (3) that ideology is embodied within expressive forms. Together these led to the conclusion that the pre-revolutionary expressive forms of the masses (such as Peking Opera) were simultaneously progressive and regressive: that they contained both elements of revolutionary ideology (having come from and reflecting the thinking of the masses) and elements of feudal ideology (having arisen during pre-revolutionary times).<sup>40</sup> The task of the opera workers should be to separate the feudal elements from the progressive ones, discarding or transforming the former and retaining the latter.

Even as the Communists assumed power they turned their attention to organizing a comprehensive policy regarding this task and to systematizing its implementation. In November of 1948 an editorial in People's Daily (the main

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<sup>40</sup> The Chinese authorities consistently refer to pre-revolutionary China (especially imperial China) as "feudal." This is meant not so much as an accurate description of the relations of production as it is a term of derision toward pre-revolutionary eras.



Party newspaper) called for a planned, step-by-step approach to the introduction of reform vis-a-vis old operas (Liu 1989:86). A committee was set up for "the specific purpose of revising old pieces to conform with Communist doctrine" (Mackerras 1975:165). After the Communists assumed full political and military power in 1949 it became obvious that there were severe discrepancies from region to region concerning the practices of performing traditional drama (Liu 1965:20-21). To combat this situation, "a complex hierarchy of committees was set up all over China to guide the work of assessing, revising and editing dramas" (Mackerras 1975:166, Liu 1965:21-22).<sup>41</sup> Debates emerged over the policy of banning traditional plays (operas) due to their feudal elements.

Some Party leaders, in view of the popularity of traditional Peking opera among the people, called for a return to the classic drama. They considered the classic Peking opera a cultural heritage. On the other hand, the more radical elements of the Party condemned the traditional opera as part of the feudal past containing elements harmful to the new society (Chu & Cheng 1978:77).

In April of 1951 Mao stepped in and, in a synthetic move aimed at satisfying both sides of the opera controversy, restructured government policy on opera via the new slogan "**Let a hundred flowers bloom; weed through the old to let the new emerge**" ("Baihua qifang, tuichen chuxin"). This policy stressed both the creation of new revolutionary operas (to satisfy the radical elements in the Party) and the

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<sup>41</sup> See Wang 1991:73 for a partial listing (in Chinese) of some of these organizations.

continuation of traditional practices (mediated by the Party's reform procedures). In order to effect this new policy, professionals were sent to work with opera companies to help in the drive toward reform (Liu 1989a:55). Research institutes were set up in cities all over China to study and oversee this development. Part of what was known as the "3 Reforms" (Jiang 1989:141), these institutes were part of **an attempt to systematize opera reform through incorporating its management into the existing political hierarchy.**<sup>42</sup> In this way it was hoped that the Party could more effectively control both the creation of new works and the continued performance of traditional ones.

In October and November of 1952 **The First National Opera Convention** (Di yijie quanguo xiqu guanmo da hui) was held in Beijing in order to assess the revitalization and reform work of the past year. Some 1,800 people attended and there were 100 performances of 23 types of opera (Liu 1965:22, Liu 1989:86). It is clear that this convention was intended both to acclaim the revitalization efforts and to encourage the work of reform (Mackerras 1975: 196-7). New regulations were implemented to tighten up the organization of opera reform and to help propagate the 100 Flowers policy.

This policy as implemented and carried out by the Party reformers in these middle years of the 1950s did not result in the formation of a healthy operatic institution. Attendance at operas fell sharply; veteran actors often saw their roles diminished or discarded. And there were few new plays being written to take the

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<sup>42</sup> The Three Reforms (San gai) were: reform people, reform opera, reform the system (Jiang 1988:141).

place of those banned. "Most of the old playwrights did not dare to write any more until the Party's position was clarified" (Liu 1965:25).<sup>43</sup>

It is not that opera workers were not interested in helping the reformation of their art. In the flush of the early 50s the excitement and optimism generated by the new society was strong.

A (former Peking Opera musician): At that time everyone wanted to help build the new society. Everyone wanted to help in anyway they could. They believed in the government and what it was doing to make life better. The opera workers were no different; they wanted to help too.

The problems faced by the opera workers and the government reformers in the early and middle 1950s are the same problems faced in the 1980s and 1990s, and involved three interrelated issues:

1. **content**: starting from the given that art and politics are inseparable, the problem is one of separating "regressive" or "feudal" elements of traditional Peking Opera plays from those elements that are "progressive" or "revolutionary";

2. **audience**: despite their readiness to embrace the revolution and the reformation of Chinese society, the audience for traditional Peking Opera was just that: an audience for traditional Peking Opera. This audience was dedicated to the traditional opera and thus resisted all but the most subtle changes. In this pull of

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<sup>43</sup> For example, an earlier attempt at the creation of a "Peking opera dance drama," with music by Liu Jidian, although containing several innovations (especially with regard to musical composition), was performed only 3 or 4 times and then criticized as too "pacifist" (heping zhuyi) (Liu 1989a:55).

tradition we see the importance of genre definition in the identity of an artistic form and in the identity of its audience;

B (former Peking Opera musician): Some of the changes were alright, but sometimes people didn't like the changes. They said you cannot change this or it will not be Peking Opera. To be Peking Opera it has to do certain things. If you want to change it, go ahead, but it will not be Peking Opera and I will not go to see it.

The identity of the Peking Opera to its audience included certain parameters which, if reformed beyond a certain point, constituted not genre reform but genre destruction. This audience simply did not believe that the destruction of their favorite expressive form was a necessary part of the construction of a New China;

3. **performance traditions:** most Peking Opera performers had endured years and years of difficult apprenticeship and hard-won professional experience; though their enthusiasm at this time was also high, the prospect of radical change of their art form was frightening to them.

C (retired cultural worker): They had spent years perfecting their style. There was an audience for what they could do. How could this be changed without hurting their art? They had spent their lives learning this art; now they were told they had to change or they would not be allowed to perform at all.

Most of the performers resisted the more radical reforms. No matter that the reforms were necessary from a political standpoint (which the performers understood) -- the stripping of a certain line or verse or section from a play might throw an artist's conception of his or her role into complete disarray.

Many veteran actors feared the impact of these reforms and therefore resisted them.

There were others, however (led by the specialists who had entered the opera companies to instigate reform), who worked long and hard for the reform of Peking Opera -- with little experience to draw from. The opera scholar He Wei, writing in 1954, describes a "significant attempt" to adapt to Peking opera a historical opera entitled "Liu yinji" that was originally from a different local opera subgenre (Sichuan opera). The effort to preserve features of the original Sichuan style within the context of Peking opera caused many difficulties and contradictions. A decision was made by those in control of the planning and composing of the opera (including the composer Wang Yaoqing and the main performer Ye Shenglan) that the process of selecting melodies for the opera would not proceed along the traditional lines. These involved choosing from a pool of melodies (*qudiao*) based on traditional rules regarding what type of melody should follow another type of melody and what type of melody was appropriate for this particular moment in the play given the plot and musical development up to that point. Such selection (as has been discussed) was based on convention and typification and was guided by a strict set of rules and regulations. The composers for this play described this technique as "putting in whatever you like" and denounced it as simply a method to "save time." In its place they suggested a method based not on traditional conventions but on the emotional and ideological needs of the characters and the plot.

... choosing melodies is a process of selection. This process should be based on the character, on the plot. That is to say: as an expression of the character's thoughts and feelings. This is the basic spirit of "Liu yinji" (He 1985:256).

Liu applauds this opera for its willingness to break old conventions. Among the innovations he discusses are: the introduction of melodic types from outside of Peking opera (such as kunqu opera melodies) and those from folk music and regional instrumental styles; the introduction of newly-composed melodies; and the addition of instruments not normally used in Peking opera -- especially low-voiced stringed instruments such as the (bowed) zhongyin erhu and diyin erhu and the (plucked) daruan. Liu describes the introduction of these instruments into the Peking opera instrumental ensemble as an "innovative attempt" that "enriches the sound of the ensemble" (Liu 1985:307). This statement reveals Liu as typical of most of the modernizers in Chinese music of this century in that (1) he felt that the traditional Peking Opera orchestra needed enriching and that (2) this enrichment should involve the addition of lower-voiced instruments, the traditional omission of which constituted a "lack" (quedian) in this orchestra.<sup>44</sup>

In another attempt at innovation from about the same time a Peking opera adapted from a local Mongolian opera called "The Three Mountains" ("San zuoshan") emerged in 1956. The composer called this piece "the first experimental

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<sup>44</sup> See Chapter Three for more discussion of the musical aesthetics of China's musical modernizers and its relationships to Western musical aesthetics and traditional Chinese aesthetics.

opera program" (Liu 1989a:56). Among the innovations were: the introduction of Western instruments into the Peking opera orchestra (including low string instruments and some woodwinds) producing a "mixed orchestra with Peking opera instruments as the main ones"; and new accompanimental techniques. Among the problems tackled Liu specifically mentioned those regarding the use of background music, choral music, interludes, and the move toward more use of the vernacular in the vocal music.

Most performers and audiences, however, preferred hearing the well-known traditional plays in their known versions. It is noteworthy that these attempts at Peking Opera innovation did not involve traditional Peking Opera plays but instead adapted into Peking Opera style plays outside the tradition of Peking Opera performance. In this sense it was a reform through addition rather than through substitution -- i.e., it did not occur at the expense of a traditional play.

In response to the continued resistance to opera reform (and its attendant reduction in audience), the Party -- at a **National Conference of Drama Workers in 1956** -- relaxed its position and decided to reconsider many of the banned plays for editing and performance (Liu 1965:25). This freer approach led to an explosion in the performances of traditional plays and was part of what is known as the **Hundred Flowers** movement: a short-lived movement that included a general -- though limited -- liberalization of government control over expressive forms. The relaxation of restrictions ended in 1957 when the government, stinging with criticism from the intellectuals who finally felt free to speak out, closed the

Hundred Flowers movement and then began the **Anti-rightist Campaign**.<sup>45</sup> The degree to which traditional plays again dominated the opera stage also disturbed the government and it reacted accordingly. Previously banned operas again disappeared (Mackerras 1975:168).

In 1958 a new policy emerged in conjunction with the introduction of the government's Second Five Year Plan. This plan centered around a policy called the **Great Leap Forward** (dayuejin), which called for the people of China to achieve socialism by "exerting our utmost efforts and pressing ahead consistently to achieve greater, faster, better and more economical results" (GD 1958:33) so that the country can make "one forward leap after another and complete the great work of socialist construction" (GD 1958:64). A key to this leap would be the simultaneous development of different aspects of the Chinese economy so that all attention would not be paid to one industry or type of development. In addition, this Great Leap needed the help of a "technical and cultural revolution" in order to fulfill and complete the "socialist revolution" (GD 1958:6). This policy came to be known as "**walking on two legs.**"

With regard to art (and specifically to opera) new emphasis was placed on the creation of modern revolutionary dramas. Nevertheless, traditional plays would

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<sup>45</sup> The Hundred Flowers movement closed with the anti-rightist campaign of 1957. In this campaign, the government, reacting to criticism, conducted a "rectification" campaign to silence "rightists" (youpai) who "stubbornly oppose socialism and the leadership of the Communist Party" (Deng 1957:14). The Party, clearly unnerved by the criticism unleashed during the Hundred Flowers movement, launched a scathing attack on its critics, labelling them "rightists" and "revisionists" (see BR 1/3:8-11 & 1/5:12-15).

There was great suffering inflicted upon many intellectuals in the arts at that time; while doing my fieldwork, it was common, when speaking with Chinese musicians about other intellectuals, to be told that their lives had been very difficult, for they had been labeled "rightists" in the 1950s. For intellectuals in China, this was clearly one of the worst of times.



also be allowed. In effect there should be a "leap forward" in the performance of both new plays and traditional ones. This policy, an attempt to answer the questions concerning problems of popularization versus raising the consciousness of the audience -- questions raised by Mao in the Yanan Talks -- was the operative version of "walking on two legs."

Opera troupes were instructed to split their repertoires between the two forms. 'Walking on two legs' represented a compromise: the traditional opera would supposedly draw the audience into the theater, while the new operas would continue to relay their 'correct' political messages (Yung 1984:146).

Walking on two legs legitimized the continuance of the performance of traditional opera while still emphasizing the need for new plays. The method of legitimation was to link this policy to Mao's Yanan Talks:

Back in 1942, in his talks at the Yanan forum on art and literature, Chairman Mao Tse-tung stressed the importance of walking on two legs -- popularization and raising the [artistic] level (BR 1/20/59:3).

The Great Leap Forward met with severe problems and by 1960 "the Chinese economy as a whole went into a period of acute depression" (Barnett 1969:178). The ideological pressure it had brought into the field of opera with regard to the "leap forward" in new plays lost its strength and "opera troupes began

to favor the obviously more popular traditional plays over the newly written ones" (Yung 1984:147).<sup>46</sup>

These years saw an emphasis on a "broad road" with regard to the reform of opera; seen as a revitalization of the Hundred Flowers movement (Chu & Cheng 1978:79), this policy was known as "**san bing ju**" ("put forth three simultaneously") and stressed the coexistence of traditional plays, newly written historical plays, and modern revolutionary plays (Jiang 1989:141).<sup>47</sup> Also in these years the first group of graduates emerged from the Beijing Peking Opera School (founded in 1952). This marked an important moment in the institutionalization of Peking opera. It was heralded as an example of how post-Liberation China, led by the Communist Party, was improving the lives of and opportunities for artists and making their future secure.<sup>48</sup>

Again -- given relatively free rein -- the traditional plays dominated the stage. This satisfied most of the performers and their audience but frustrated and infuriated the reformers and radicals. In 1963 a new struggle emerged between those who wanted to place more stress on revolutionary themes in drama -- severely restricting or virtually eliminating all traditional plays -- and those who wanted to continue walking on two legs. Mao pointed out that in many forms of art "very

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<sup>46</sup> Statistics suggest that from 1960 to 1962 in Beijing, between 83% and 100% of all plays produced were traditional (MacKerras 1975:168).

<sup>47</sup> Along with the development of these three strands of Chinese opera, there evolved a kind of Sinicized Western opera style. There was much debate about the relative merits of these types in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Colin Mackerras suggests that the Sinicized Western opera style (geju) was relatively ignored when compared to the other 3 styles (MacKerras 1975:201-202). The development of geju as a form of modern Chinese opera (see BR 6/15/62:18) will not be dealt with in this dissertation.

<sup>48</sup> See BR 8/4/59:20 and Mackerras 1972 and 1975:192-195 for a description of actors' lives before Liberation and the efforts of the government to reform the traditions which gave rise to this lifestyle.

little had been achieved so far in socialist transformation" (BR 7/15/66:17). A rectification movement followed. As part of this movement a campaign led by Mao's wife **Jiang Qing** (Chiang Ch'ing) began against traditional forms of drama. Peking Opera was the first to be attacked (Yung 1984:147). All plays involving ghosts were completely banned (Liu 1965:29); the press leveled criticism at plays with heroes who displayed Confucian virtues (Mackerras 1975:169). In an attempt to foster the creation of more revolutionary operas the government sponsored a **Festival of Peking Opera on Contemporary Themes in June and July of 1964**. Twenty-eight Peking opera troupes were to present thirty-seven pieces in a festival that was to open "a new, revolutionary page in the history of Peking opera" (BR 6/12/64:3).

The success of this festival marked **the ascendance of Jiang Qing** into a position of authority with regard to the development of drama. In a speech at the Festival she emphasized the need to give special attention to the creation of revolutionary dramas. She did not rule out the performance of (reformed) traditional plays but urged the opera workers to "stress operas on revolutionary contemporary themes that reflect real life in the fifteen years since the founding of the People's Republic and which create images of contemporary revolutionary heroes on our operatic stage" (Chiang 1968:3).

It is inconceivable that, in our socialist country led by the Communist Party, the dominant position on the stage is not occupied by the workers, peasants and soldiers, who are the real creators of history and the true masters of our country. ... Theatres are places in which to educate the people, but at present the stage is dominated by

emperors, princes, generals, ministers, scholars and beauties -- by feudal and bourgeois stuff. ... We should place the emphasis on creating artistic images of advanced revolutionaries so as to educate and inspire the people and lead them forward (ibid.:1-6).

Jiang Qing pointed out that although the festival was successful there were still differing points of view regarding the reform of Peking opera. She attacked those who resisted the reform of opera and who saw such reform as a destruction of an artistic tradition.

Peking opera on revolutionary themes has now been staged. But do we all look at it in the same way? I don't think we can say so just yet. ... The grain we eat is grown by the peasants, the clothes we wear and the houses we live in are all made by the workers, and the People's Liberation Army stands guard at the fronts of national defense for us and yet we do not portray them on the stage. May I ask which class stand you artists do take? And where is the artists' 'conscience' you always talk about? (ibid.:1-2).

Finally, Jiang asserted that creating positive images of revolutionary heroes "is our foremost task" (ibid.:3). Exalting the positive characteristics of advanced revolutionaries should be the main purpose for producing plays with contemporary revolutionary themes (ibid.:6).

After the Festival of 1964 there was "much debate about the future direction of Peking opera" (Qiao 1987). The younger people liked the changes taking place.

But many of the older generation -- especially "Peking opera lovers" -- resented the changes and wanted their old art back (Xu 1991).

In an article written for the 1964 Festival, He Wei summarized the dilemma facing the reform of Peking opera. Stating that the most characteristic feature of any opera form is its vocal style (*changqiang*), He continued:

... with regard to traditional *changqiang*, there exists a dual quality: it is a rich means of expressions with a highly developed artistic technique; however, it does not suit the life, thoughts and feelings of today's people (He 1985:402).

But we must not simply put aside this rich expressive form, He says, and start anew; for that would not be Peking opera -- it would be a different art form altogether. He says that opera reform should center around mostly subtle changes in *changqiang* and also in the instrumental music -- changes that work to "overturn the limitations of traditional *changqiang* and to set a trend of synthesis in motion." Specifically, He suggests (echoing the thoughts of Liu Jidian from the mid-50s) that composers get rid of "dead patterns" in traditional operatic compositional formulas; that faster and more agitated rhythms be introduced "in order to suit the life rhythms of a revolutionary people"; to draw from the different characteristics of the different traditional roles in Peking opera to create a revolutionary character; to bring in musical forms from other operas and other Chinese musical traditions such as folksongs and instrumental musics. He advises that many of these changes be introduced slowly and in a subtle way "so that, even though they have great significance, they will hardly be perceived by the average audience." This last

statement is an obvious reference to the fact that the audience did not like the idea of having the changqiang reformed, as that was (as has been stated) the defining feature of Peking Opera -- without its traditional changqiang it would not be Peking Opera.

In the end the performance conventions, music, and content were not radically changed at that time. Colin Mackerras outlines some of the changes that were made:

The reformers eradicated numerous phrases in the dialogue and sung sections which seemed to them reactionary. Any passage which showed a popular hero in a humiliating position was deleted, since the heroic character prefers death to submission. Sentences showing a sympathetic person as superstitious, or even religious, were removed and replaced by others endowing him with a more progressive outlook. In many cases the plot was altered to show monks or other reactionary people in a bad light, and to bring out the courage of the hero more sharply. ... facial masks should remain in use. ... Traditional stage mannerisms and costumes were also, for the most part, retained. ... [the conference] also confirmed the practice of using scenery and curtains for some pieces and supported an earlier decision to seat the orchestra in the wings instead of on the stage (Mackerras 1975:166-7).

These reforms left the musical portion of the opera relatively untouched: traditional instruments were kept (but moved offstage) and traditional musical forms were left intact (ibid:205-6).

The momentum, however, lay in the direction of continued, increased, and more radical reform: 1964 and 1965 saw the beginnings of the preparation for the upcoming **Cultural Revolution**. Jiang Qing's power increased, reform was spurred, and resistance came increasingly under attack. Many historical plays were being denounced in the press, with the result that fewer and fewer of them were staged (Yung 1984:147). Jiang Qing was appointed "adviser on cultural work to the Chinese People's Liberation Army" and the Party Central Committee incorporated the No.1 Peking Opera Company of Peking into the People's Liberation Army. This effectively gave Jiang control over Peking Opera (BR 12/9/66:5). At a November 1966 rally for art and literature workers she delivered a speech continuing her fierce attack upon those who resisted the revolution of art and literature. Talking of the situation before she took control, she explained why such an attack had become necessary.

... under the fine pretext of "rediscovering tradition," many works were written portraying emperors, kings, generals, and prime ministers, scholars and beauties. There was great talk throughout the literary and art world about "famous plays," "foreign plays" and "ancient plays" and it went out of its way to present them. The atmosphere was choked with emphasis on the ancient as against the contemporary, with worship of the foreign and scorn for the Chinese, with praise for the dead and contempt for the living. I began to feel

that if our literature and art could not correspond to the socialist economic base, they would inevitably wreck it (BR 12/9/66:7).

Under such an attack from someone who had attained absolute power with regard to Peking Opera, traditional plays and those who supported them simply could not survive. By the end of the 1966 traditional plays had completely disappeared from urban stages and had virtually disappeared throughout the country.

This banning of the performance of traditional plays -- intended as a death blow -- resulted instead in a 10-year coma. For in the fall of 1976 Mao died; shortly after this, in a power move amid the confusion of the moment, Mao's hand-picked successor Hua Guofeng arrested Jiang Qing and three cohorts, Yao Wenyuan, Wang Hongwen and Zhang Chunqiao -- since that time known as the "**Gang of Four**" ("siren ban") -- and stripped them of their power. **The Cultural Revolution was over.** The Gang of Four's programs were quickly discredited -- the Gang was labeled both "extreme leftists" and "extreme rightists" by various accusers -- and a cloud of controversy hung over the reform of Peking Opera.

Immediately after the arrest of the Gang of Four the government under Hua Guofeng began and encouraged an extended period of criticism of the Gang and their followers in an attempt to purge the political and cultural structures of their influence. Hua said that the "major task" for 1977 was to "develop, continue and deepen the great mass movement to criticize the Gang of Four" (RMXJ 1977/1:3).

**One way to plainly and obviously make a statement against the Gang and their policies was to resurrect and restage operas banned by Jiang Qing.**



The New Year's celebration of 1977 was a chance to celebrate the "liberation" of the art workers that resulted from the downfall of the Gang of Four.

In the two short months since the downfall of the Gang of Four, the great army of cultural workers have worked day in and day out to create and arrange many art programs rich and lively in content in form ... in Beijing alone, this New Year's saw 59 performances of various art forms. And all over the country, different places produced many rich and varied performances. With regard to opera, many pieces ... suppressed or destroyed by the Gang of Four shone forth their vitality (RMXJ 1977/1:4).

Simultaneous with the ongoing and deepening criticism of the Gang of Four, the Party leaders were attempting to set China's future on a new course that would take them as far away as possible from the ideological in-fighting of the Cultural Revolution and its resultant destruction -- both of individual's lives and of the people's confidence in the leadership of the Party. In December of 1976 Hua Guofeng "made it clear that **from now on China's priorities would be economic, and that consequently revolutionary ideology would take a back seat**" (Mackerras 1981:39).<sup>49</sup> Hua outlined a policy based on the concept of "**Four Modernizations**" ("si ge xiandaihua", or "sihua"): the modernization of agriculture, of industry, of national defense, and of science and technology. Clearly economic modernization would now take the lead in determining the Party's political and

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<sup>49</sup> Emphasis mine.

cultural policies. To this end it was necessary to stabilize the country politically and to restore order after the chaos of the Cultural Revolution. One move in this direction was the reinstatement of those who had been purged in the last few years for advocating economic modernization over ideological warfare.

**In 1977 half of the Central Committee members were those who had been recently reinstated after being persecuted during the Cultural Revolution.** The most important beneficiary of this reinstatement was the twice-purged **Deng Xiaoping**, a champion (along with Zhou Enlai) since 1975 of economic modernization and political stability. Deng was restored to his previously held government posts of Vice-Chairman of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee, Vice-Premier of the State Council and Chief of the General Staff of the Chinese PLA. **The modernizers were in control, and Deng was on his way to the pinnacle of political power.**

With the solidification of the accession to power of Deng Xiaoping at the **Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Central Committee in December of 1978**, the government's emphasis on continuing class struggle -- the central theme of the Cultural Revolution -- was dropped as "unsuitable for a socialist society." A reemphasis on modernization emerged and, in an effort to downplay the role of political ideology in this reemphasis, it was decided that truth was to be grasped through "the guiding principle of emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts" (BR 8/30/82:19).<sup>50</sup> Specifically for the arts community this involved a

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<sup>50</sup> For a detailed overview of the political events of 1976-1978 leading to and culminating in Deng's accession to power and the shift toward the prioritization of economic modernization over class revolution, see Brugger 1981 (especially pp.194-223).

recommitment to Mao's pre-Cultural Revolution ideas concerning the arts (especially as contained in the Yanan Talks of 1942); the adoption of "serving socialist modernization" as the basic task of art and literature; and the liberation of artists' works from the dogma of Cultural Revolution political policy.

The interpretations of this "emancipation of the mind" on the part of those in the Peking Opera community revealed the desires of both the audience and of the performers to return to traditional performance style and content, for there was -- beginning in 1978 -- a virtual flood of traditional opera performances on the stages of Beijing. Deng had never liked the developments of Peking Opera during the Cultural Revolution and reportedly had never patronized a performance of the Jiang Qing-controlled Peking Opera during that period (CNA 1038, 4/23/76:1); his preference for more traditional opera was well known. The traditional opera flourished, and audiences flocked to the theatres.

A (former Peking Opera musician): After the Gang of Four, everybody wanted to see traditional operas again. They had gone ten years without seeing them. Soon about 70% of the plays being performed were traditional plays performed in a completely tradition way. Many young people had only heard about them but had never seen them. They wanted to know what they were like. The audiences were full for a while.

The audiences at that time were made up of several categories: real opera lovers (called "piaoyou" --"ticket friend"); those who liked to go to the opera once in a while but had been denied the opportunity for a decade; and the youth (under

20), who had never seen operas (or did not remember seeing them) and went mostly out of curiosity. For all of these groups attendance at these traditional plays also involved a political dimension -- a ritual enactment of freedom from the bonds imposed on Chinese culture during the Cultural Revolution.

C (retired cultural worker): Having these plays in the theaters again was like a breath of fresh air; no, it was better than that: for the air was not only fresh, it also contained the sweet fragrance of the past -- of life before the terrible bitterness of the Cultural Revolution.

The "sweetness" of this "fresh air" lasted only a couple of years. **By 1980 audiences were gradually getting smaller and smaller for all opera performances, including traditional ones.**

B (former Peking Opera musician): After a couple of years the excitement of seeing these plays again died down. People were satisfied.

A (former Peking Opera musician): People even stopped going to the famous plays. Only the opera lovers kept going. And there were not enough of them.

Of the three categories of audience listed above only the opera lovers kept patronizing the theatre. Those who had in the past gone occasionally and had recently gone frequently reverted to their older patterns of occasional attendance;

the youth had their curiosity satisfied and then turned to other forms of entertainment. For most of them the traditional Peking Opera was a foreign form of art to which they simply could not relate. And besides, there were new blasts of "fresh air" coming in as a result of the late 1970s reorientation of government policy vis-a-vis the outside (specifically Western) world. Opera now had to compete with television, foreign films, and foreign popular musics for its audience.

**PART THREE**  
**TRADITIONAL PEKING OPERA IN THE "NEW ERA"**

## **Politics, Economics, and Opera: Crisis Within a Modern Socialist State**

Since 1979 traditional Peking Opera has been in a state of **crisis**. This crisis (weiji) is openly acknowledged within the opera community. It is a result of modernization. In this section, I will examine the crisis, its multiple relationships to modernization, and possible solutions put forth by the Chinese themselves.

First I will introduce two concepts that must be taken into account in any analysis of contemporary arts in China. The first is **political** and has been a driving force in the history of Peking Opera since Liberation: it is simply that **music and politics are intimately connected**. In China this means both that the government sees itself as actively directing the developments in the art fields and that those in the art fields must constantly deal with pressure from the government to follow its directives. The directives themselves arise out of an interface between specific situations (such as sagging industrial development, the importation of foreign expressive art forms, and/or growing political dissent) and a specific revolutionary tradition of dealing with these demands -- a tradition which, grounded in a Marxism/Leninism mediated through (and legitimated by) the words of Mao, supplies both the means of dealing with specific situations as they arise and the justifications for using these means.

The second concept that must be taken into account is **economic**: in late 1982 all segments of Chinese society (including opera troupes) began to undergo an economic restructuring that stripped away part of the government subsidization that was known as the "iron rice bowl." With regard to Peking Opera this meant that the income of those working in the opera became to some degree tied to the income

generated by their work --generally through live performances. This economism is new to Communist China and its interactions with the political element described above are chiefly responsible for the crisis in Peking Opera.

I will analyze three groups of people who have interests and roles in this crisis: the government, the audience, and the opera performers. The differences and the interrelationships among these groups (when seen in their intersections with the political and economic elements described above) set up the fluid tensions (contradictions) the temporary solutions to which determine the situation for -- and will determine the future of -- the traditional Peking Opera.

1. The **government**: of the three kinds of Peking Opera supported under the policy of "san bing ju" (traditional plays, newly-written historical plays, and modern plays) the traditional plays are clearly the least justified in view of the government's ideological commitments. Even the "mass line," which ostensibly legitimates the mass audience's aesthetic tastes, demands that the government mediate the masses' expressive practices and direct a gradual but constant raising of the level of mass tastes. With this in mind it should come as no surprise that the government has since 1978 continually emphasized the need to reform Peking Opera -- or, as is more frequently heard, to "develop" it.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The substitution of the word "develop" (fazhan) for "reform" (gaige), although not complete, reflects a subtle shift away from a revolutionary model of politically-inspired reconstruction and toward a more organic model of change as natural and inevitable. This shift puts pressure for change in traditional opera on safer ground by (1) distancing this pressure from the disruption caused by the extremist ideologies of intervention which held sway during the Cultural Revolution; (2) anchoring it in a concept of tradition which includes change as endemic and necessary for survival, and (3) through the use of an evolutionary metaphor (to "develop"), connecting change in the traditional opera to the positive associations of modernization as it is used in other cultural (especially industrial and financial) realms: development = modernization = higher standard of living = better life for all Chinese. See Chapter Three for a fuller discussion of the concept of fazhan.



The ideological heritage that manifests itself in these constant urgings to "develop" the traditional Peking Opera has two aspects: the substantive and the legitimative -- that is, the content and its justifications. The content is grounded in a traditional Chinese-Marxist hybridization that involves (1) traditional notions concerning music's expressive and instrumental functions mediated by (2) Marxist/Leninist/Maoist theories concerning the dialectical relationship between art and consciousness and the responsibility of the government in policing the expressive nature of music and in directing its instrumental capabilities. The former (i.e., #1 above) refers to an intellectual tradition rooted in Confucianism that states that music (unconsciously) expresses feelings and thoughts -- i.e., a consciousness; and that music can influence the way people feel and think and therefore their consciousness. The latter (#2) simply means that the Communist leadership under the influence of Mao has adopted these traditional notions, rephrased them in Marxist terms, and stressed their educational/propagandistic possibilities. Given this tradition of thought it is perfectly understandable why the government cannot simply leave the traditional theatre alone: its content, embodying pre-revolutionary ideology, is in contradiction to the demands of the era.

From the point of view of the relationship between the economic base and opera as an art of the superstructure, as well as the relationship between art and politics, art and philosophy, art and law, art and ethics, art and religion, etc., opera's content is most unsuited to socialism. It's contradictions with Marxist historical materialism are blatant. It is the art form most incompatible with socialist

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politics, law, and ethics. And as the era develops, these contradictions and this incompatibility must become more serious and more acute (Jiang 1985:8).

Thus opera not only does not contribute to but also can effectively subvert the government's revolutionary and educational/propagandistic programs. Reform is not simply recommended -- it is vital.

Legitimation for reform comes not only from the ideological heritage explained above and from classical Marxist explanations such as the one just quoted but also from the reappearance of slogans taken from Mao's speeches. The slogan that has been, since 1978, most frequently used to legitimate and give impetus to opera "development" is Mao's "weed through the old to bring forth the new" ("**tuichen chuxin**") which (as we will recall) emerged in the early 50s. This connection to pre-Cultural Revolution Mao and to pre-Cultural Revolution opera has powerful associations for those urging reform in the 1980s, for (1) Mao's pre-Cultural Revolution slogans and speeches are still the canon from which spring the legitimations for artistic practices; and (2) the seventeen year period after Liberation and before the Cultural Revolution (1949-66) -- the period in which this slogan emerged -- is being idealized as a "golden time" ("huangjin jijie") for the development of Chinese opera: a period in which opera development was "on the right track" only to be halted and destroyed by the Cultural Revolution (Jiang 1989:141). "Weed through the old to bring forth the new" thus enacts a connection to an earlier idealized period when -- ostensibly -- the government, the opera workers, and the audiences all wanted and were involved in the reform of traditional opera and progress was great. The unstated (and unexamined) result is

the idea that through the adoption of the ideology and practice of that period the "golden era" can live again.

It thus can be seen that for the government (and for those who want their voices to be heard through government-controlled media such as music journals) reform of the traditional Peking Opera (as the most widely known and admired form of traditional opera) is not an option -- it is a mandate. No matter what their personal preferences (and there is evidence that Mao, as Deng, much preferred the traditional Peking Opera), those in the government involved in cultural work are bound by a tradition deeply woven within the ideology of the ruling Party to see reform of the traditional Peking Opera as necessary to the goals of national modernization and ultimately to the emergence of China as an international political and economic force. In a classic case of the political control of discourse --those in power deciding whose voice is to be heard and what must be said if one wants to have his voice heard -- the professional music journals in China reflect this mandate for reform and development, mentioning traditional performances of Peking opera - - which constitute about 70% of the fare -- rarely (and then only to complain about them):

B (former Peking Opera musician): The journals simply do not talk about completely traditional performances of Peking Opera. All they say is develop, develop.

C (retired cultural worker): It is a very simple matter: if a scholar wanted to say "leave the traditional theater alone" he would be criticized and his article would not be published.

2. The **audience**: as the 1980s progressed the crisis within the traditional Peking Opera began to revolve more and more around the problem of the audience. The problem is, simply put, that the audience is too small. I attended approximately 20 Peking Opera performances in the summer of 1987 and the winter of 1989-90; few of these performances played to theaters even half full (the theaters' capacities averaged about 1000). The problem of the dwindling audience can be traced back to the early days after Liberation. At that time, however, it was linked to distaste on the part of the traditional Peking Opera audience for the "tampering" the government was pressing on Peking Opera practices. In addition, since the Open Door Policy a new problem has emerged: the inability of the Peking Opera to attract Chinese youth.

This new problem has two aspects: political and economic. The government wants Peking Opera to be one of the many art forms whose duty it is to "reflect the times" through reform of content and performance style. One of the reasons the government wants Peking Opera to do this is so that the youth of China will patronize Peking Opera rather than the more "decadent" imported expressive forms such as popular music and foreign films. The government's goal is to update traditional Peking Opera through reform and development to the point that it will be attractive to the youth, thus enriching their lives through contact with a traditional Chinese artistic genre (and thereby lessening the influence of the foreign imported genres). Also there is recognition that a vital, developing form must constantly attract new audiences; an expressive form that plays solely to an aging audience has a dubious future.

The economic aspect of traditional Peking Opera's inability to draw a new audience has been exacerbated by the economic reforms instituted by Deng's government since the late 1970s. These tie a portion of an opera worker's salary to income from ticket sales for performances. Before the economic reforms salaries were fixed, completely independent of performance income. By the early 1980s up to 30% of an opera worker's monthly income became dependent on monies from ticket sales (BR 4/4/83:27). But with a small audience these monies were negligible. Most performances, due to expenses, lost money. Therefore the lack of ability to develop a larger audience added a financial aspect to the crisis of Peking Opera.

The lack of youth audience is seen as central to the problems surrounding the contemporary traditional Peking Opera. The official press and professional journals frequently address this problem. The most common reasons for the lack of enthusiasm on the part of the youth toward the traditional Peking Opera are (1) that these youth were denied access to this art form during the Cultural Revolution and thus are unfamiliar with it (Lu 1984:7); (2) that the reforms of the content of Peking Opera have not gone far enough to attract the youth audience (Liang 1985a:37); and (3) that the traditional opera faces competition from many other expressive forms (films, popular music concerts, television) (Wang 1986:73) -- forms that more easily and readily adapt themselves to the conditions of modern life (Dang 1985:9). The suggestions for solutions to these problems include (1) educating the youth regarding the traditions of Peking Opera so that it will not seem so strange to them (Lu 1984:7, Wang 1986:73, CR 9/87:20); (2) continuing and deepening the reforms of the traditional Peking Opera in order to bring it closer to the lives of the modern

Chinese youth (XQYJ 1986/1:44, Liang 1985:37);<sup>52</sup> and (3) improving the quality of performance and management of Peking Opera so that it can compete with other forms for the attention (and entertainment dollar) of the youth audience (CD 1/5/83:5).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the traditional Peking Opera has faced a profound dilemma regarding audience. What audience it has had is loyal in its patronage; but this loyalty has been to traditional performance style. This audience, made up mostly of middle-aged to elderly workers, resists anything more than the most subtle and gradual reform. The audience that the opera wants to develop (especially the youth) finds the traditional performance style with its complex conventions only understood by connoisseurs (i.e., the "piaoyou") uninteresting. If Peking Opera reforms it will risk losing the audience it has, with no guarantee of attracting a new one; if it doesn't reform its future is bleak. The dilemma of the traditional Peking Opera's relationship with the youth audience is symbolic of the audience problem as a whole: reform is risky but considered absolutely necessary.

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<sup>52</sup> The most notable experiment in this regard is the recent incorporation of popular music elements (including electric instruments) into traditional Peking Opera performance. This trend, which involved one of the best known Peking Opera performers (Li Weikang), was known as **qinggehua** ("making it like popular songs"), was relatively short-lived (happening mostly in 1986) and received mixed reviews. Some called it a new advance, others said it was a dead end (He 1987:152-3). The scholars and performers I talked with said it was the most interesting innovation of late, that much of the audience liked it, and that, as it was being imitated in other local opera forms, it held some promise of bringing a new audience to Chinese opera. However, with regard to Peking Opera in particular, it has not (yet) proved to be of more than passing interest, and has passed into that category of innovation reserved for interesting possibilities that for one reason or another (usually political and/or economic) must remain only possibilities.

Contemporary youth do not like to see or hear opera; if we miss [the chance to develop] this young audience our opera will die (Li 1982:33).

E (scholar): Today's youth feel that the traditional opera is too slow. They don't understand it and it bores them. The rhythm of the era is faster.

3. The **opera performers**: the situation for traditional Peking Opera performers can be analyzed by discussing the effects of two types of needs experienced by these performers. These are (1) artistic and (2) economic. I will describe the relevance of each separately and then describe how they interact in the creation of (and in reaction to) the current crisis.

The artistic needs of the performers centers around a need to perform that for which they have spent years training; in this sense the artistic need has largely a conservative effect. Just as in the reform of the 1950s, reform in the 1980s can be threatening to those who have dedicated their lives to learning the intricacies of traditional Peking Opera performance practices. In addition there is an artistic need to play to an audience who appreciates one's art. The audience that most appreciates the profundity and complexity of traditional Peking Opera performance is made up of the "piaoyou": the Peking Opera lovers who are loyal in patronage and resistant to reform. The Peking Opera performer enjoys a special relationship with his/her audience the expression of which is structured more intimately than are

similar expressions in the West.<sup>53</sup> The maintenance of the loyalties of this audience is important to the traditional performer and further works against the introduction of all but the most subtle and gradual changes.

The economic needs of the performers also tend to have a conservative effect upon changes in performance practice. A greater concern in the 80s than in previous decades, economic considerations have led to a situation in which performers have not been willing to incorporate administratively-directed reforms (which involve more work because of the changes to traditional performance practices) in order to conform to dictates that would result in a smaller audience (because they are likely to resent the changes). In other words reform costs money, which must be recouped from performance income, which is not forthcoming because the audience for traditional Peking Opera doesn't want reform and will not pay to see it. It is, ultimately, not worth the financial risk.

Not to reform however is to run a political risk. Faced with this dilemma the answer is to do nothing. The city of Beijing, with a population of around ten million, boasts (at any given time) between 14 and 17 Peking Opera troupes. But it is not unusual for several months to pass between performances in this city of its own opera. The only performances that are financially rewarding are outside of Beijing, in tours to other parts of the country or outside the country itself: to Hong Kong, Japan, or the West.

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<sup>53</sup> At the end of a performance, the Peking Opera fans in the audience crowd up to the edge of the stage to applaud the actors. The actors walk out almost to the edge of the stage, so that they are standing about 5 feet away from (and about three feet above) their fans. The two groups look directly at each other, while the fans applaud and/or shout their appreciation (Hao!) and the actors smile warmly and applaud back to the fans. This can last several minutes before dying out; the effect is one of the passing, between the two groups, of mutual affection, support, and genuine warmth.



F (professional Peking Opera musician): There are too many troupes in Beijing. The quality is too low. And if you do "tuichen chuxin" no one will come to see it, and it is hard work to reform. Doing traditional performances is easy. The money comes from doing traditional plays out of town. The attitude is simple: if there is an audience, we'll do it; no audience, we don't do it. But you have to be careful: you cannot play to the market too much or the government will criticize you. They want you to do reform.

The crisis in the traditional Peking Opera has resulted from the interaction of the artistic and economic needs of the performers (with each other, with the needs of the audiences, and with the political pressures from the government). The tendency of performance tradition to favor slow, subtle change over more radical reform coupled with the patronizing audience's similar desires (and the performers needs --both artistic and economic -- to attend to those desires) results in resistance to reform on the part of the performers. Playing to small audiences in Beijing and to full ones in other cities and in foreign countries means (1) that the traditional Peking Opera performers get mixed signals about the social value of their art and (2) that the only way to make extra money performing is to go on tour. Those who go on tour do make good money for the short duration of the tour; those who do not go must resign themselves to occasional (financially unrewarding) performances in front of small audiences.

Faced with this scenario many performers have resigned themselves to the reality of rare performances and to the need to pursue other kinds of work for financial supplement.

A (former Peking Opera musician): He just doesn't care about performing anymore. He just sits at home and collects his salary. It is not worth the extra effort to do performances. He gets no more money for it.

T.B. Does he get as much salary as he did before the reform?

A: Probably about the same, but the prices have gone up on everything.

T.B. So what does he do?

A: He is a good painter. He paints or draws some things and sells them.

T.B. Is this O.K. with the management?

A: (laughs) Probably not, but they don't know what they are doing.

All they ever say is "reform, reform!" Everyone just ignores them.

The crisis in Peking Opera is an impasse resulting from the interactions of and contradictions among (1) governmental pressures to reform; (2) changes in economic policy; (3) an audience comprised of and characterized by a schism between those not interested in reformed Peking Opera and those not interested in Peking Opera at all; and (4) performers in possession of a long, proud, and highly

developed performance tradition in which is institutionalized a practice of slow, subtle, gradual change -- instituted by and therefore connected with the individual creativity of the artist -- and also in possession of an intimate relationship with a loyal audience that sees this kind of change as part of the tradition.

B (former Peking Opera musician): Reform [tuichen chuxin] involves more work. But there is no audience and therefore no money. It is sort of like moving into an apartment instead of building a new house. It is much easier just to move into what is already there. But the government wants you to tuichen chuxin. But they also want you to get money from the audience. But there is no audience for tuichen chuxin!

F (professional Peking Opera musician): The bottom line is, there is the political desire for reform but no money for it. Before, there were resources for reform. During the Cultural Revolution there was money for whatever we wanted to do. Now they still want us to reform but we have to get the money from somewhere else. Where? The audience has no money either!

### **On the Future: Pluralism, Protectionism, and Preservationism**

Having contexted, detailed, and analyzed (from various perspectives) the crisis of the traditional Peking Opera in contemporary Beijing, I now turn to questions concerning its future. As this crisis is a generally recognized phenomenon, those whose work involves the Peking Opera hold strong opinions concerning what should be done to rescue it. The government and its spokesmen continue to call for reform through "tuichen chuxin" and blame the crisis of Peking Opera on (1) lazy or ill-prepared performers not committed enough to reform; (2) lack of concerted educational work within the schools; and/or (3) the corrupting influence of "bourgeois liberalism" from the West. In the following section I have abstracted data from interviews with Peking Opera performers, composers and critics who believe that a more firm governmental promotion of "tuichen chuxin" will not solve the problem. Instead they suggest that the future of the traditional Peking Opera lies not with reform of the opera itself but with reform of governmental policy and of the place of Peking Opera in Chinese culture.

As the traditional Peking Opera struggles to find a place within the expressive culture of contemporary China it is in danger of withering away as its audience ages and the preference for more "modern" expressive forms increases. Cognizant (since the late 1970s) of developments regarding traditional forms in other countries, professional musicians, critics, and opera performers see a future in which the traditional Peking Opera -- if it is to survive -- must be protected or preserved in some way through clear government policy.

G (music researcher): Economic development and the Open Policy have helped to destroy the traditional culture. This is not necessarily bad. Each kind of expressive form has to find its own place in the New China. But we need a strong state policy. Up to now the policy has not been clear.

Other people with whom I spoke argued with the idea that the state policy has not been clear, saying that the policy has been clear but has not been implemented consistently and its implications for everyone involved with the traditional opera have not been seriously enough considered.

H (Peking Opera composer): The government policy has been very clear and consistent: reform! reform! But they do not understand the difficulties involved in this; reform is difficult, expensive, and what rewards do we get? More money? No! Exhaustion and an empty theatre, that's what we get! So the management urges reform, and those of us who might like to reform lose interest eventually and give up. The management cannot make us do anything by themselves and the government is too busy with other problems to help them.

Given the desire for a clearly stated and consistently implemented policy, what would be the nature of such a policy? Two basic ideas have emerged: one concerns the difference between the concepts of **protection (baohu)** and

**preservation (baocun)**; the other projects pluralism as the Chinese cultural goal, within which the traditional Peking Opera would have a secure place.

Protecting the traditional Peking Opera (baohu) would involve creating a "safe place" for it to exist and develop outside of political and economic interference -- out of reach of the changing winds of government strictures and of the flux of economic pressures. Its place as part of the contemporary culture of Modern China would rest on its status as one of China's most highly-developed, sophisticated and (not unimportantly) internationally appreciated artistic legacies. The model presented for this type of protection is the classical music tradition of India.

Preserving (baocun) would also involve creating a safe place for the existence of traditional Peking Opera but it further implies arresting the development of this art form and preserving it as an example of China's artistic past for a small number of aficionados, for special occasions, and for study. This would amount to the traditional Peking Opera's "relegation, as it were, to a museum" (Nettl 1978:131) and would involve a significantly different location of this form within contemporary Chinese culture. The model for this type of protection is the court music of Japan.

Generally the Chinese favor protection over preservation. This is due to two features of modern Chinese musical thinking: (1) the idea that change is endemic to tradition and is a sign of vitality; and (2) the belief that a modern Chinese musical identity must not abandon Chinese traditions (especially one so well-known as Peking Opera) but must bring them into the modern world.

The latter concept comes directly from Mao's writings on musical traditions, especially the Yanan Talks. It also verifies the traditional Chinese concept of

history as one that relies heavily on the past as a determinant of the present -- a tradition that is reproduced through the canonization of Mao's works as the guides to present and future programs. To relegate the traditional Peking Opera to a "museum" of arrested development would be to posit the irrelevance of the past to the contemporary culture of China and to subvert the modernization programs of Mao and his recent successor Deng -- programs that rely heavily on the concept of Chinese historical, political and cultural uniqueness.

The former concept is also a mixture of traditional and modern ideologies, with the traditional notion of constant cyclical change being replaced by the Maoist/Marxist notion of constant linear development -- i.e., improvement -- through a dialectic between existing art forms and the constantly changing objective conditions of life. Constant change is thus seen as a vital feature of a musical tradition; to stop change is to kill the tradition.

I (Peking opera singer): If the Peking Opera is preserved it will die.

It will be of merely historical interest, like a monument. But it will not be alive.

In order to further legitimate the idea that change is endemic to a living tradition the history of Peking Opera is told in such a way as to emphasize those moments that feature such change. Indeed, Peking Opera's origins -- it is claimed -- are bound up in such a moment.

J (music historian) Peking Opera began as a form of absorption, being the local combination of two different forms from different

locations. It has absorbed from other sources for all of its history. It was born of syncretism. Absorbing and changing is in its nature.

The negative model regarding treatment of traditional drama is Japan where -- according to the Chinese (and using Nettl's terminology) -- the traditional musical dramas have been "museumized."

F (professional Peking Opera musician): In Japan they preserve [baocun] their old drama. People go to see it to understand what old Japan was like. But it is not alive -- it has not developed. Peking Opera has developed with the times, and this makes it better. We must protect it [baohu], not preserve it; it must continue to develop.

The organic metaphor of Peking Opera as being "alive" is meant quite literally and reproduces the Chinese commitment to change as vital and essential.

Whether the traditional Peking Opera is protected or preserved, it must stand beside many other expressive forms in contemporary China. Thus, a frequently heard appeal is to pluralization (**duoyanghua**), which refers to the desire to encourage the development of a myriad of expressive forms side by side. Gaining its legitimation from Mao's Hundred Flowers slogan -- and as part of the ideology of modernization -- duoyanghua simultaneously acknowledges the lesser role traditional Peking Opera will play in the future of Chinese culture as it appeals for its continued existence.<sup>54</sup> The encouragement of the pluralization of expressive forms acknowledges the existence of different taste groups, each with its own

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<sup>54</sup> For a legitimation of duoyanghua based on an ideology of modernization see Chapter Three.



favorite expressive forms, and thus admits the abdication of the role of the traditional opera as the central expressive form of the Chinese masses (at least in the cities). At the same time it argues for the continued existence of this form through the legitimation of its (admittedly small) audience's needs next to the needs of other audiences. Traditional Peking Opera is to become one form among many, each with its own audience and its own performance traditions.

A (former Peking Opera musician): Back in the 1930s and 1940s the opera was the main means of entertainment for the people. Now there is television, popular music, films, radio. Peking Opera must compete with these for people's money.

F (professional Peking Opera musician): The best future would be like it is in Hong Kong, where many different types of music flourish together side by side, each with its own audience.

K (businessman): All forms of music should be allowed, even if the audience is small. I especially would not like to see Peking Opera disappear just because its audience is dwindling. This form should be saved: it is part of our history.

For popular music and film a large audience guarantees their continued existence for economic reasons; their problems, when they arise, are political. For the traditional Peking Opera, complete release into a cultural economy based on market forces would spell doom: it simply could not continue to exist if such

existence depended upon economic solvency. Thus -- it is argued -- Peking Opera is a special form that needs governmental protection in order to survive the "flood" of expressive forms (especially foreign ones) since the late 1970s.

The traditional Peking Opera's role as the most nationally-known subgenre of the favorite genre of mass entertainment for the majority of Chinese is a thing of the past. Battered by Maoist proscriptions, continuous pressure from reformists, and the shock of the Open Door Policy and its economic modernization, the best that it can hope for is to survive as one expressive form among many; and even that is not secure.

**PART FOUR**  
**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:**  
**FOUR PROBLEMS FOR CONTEMPORARY**  
**TRADITIONAL PEKING OPERA**

## **The Contradictions of Modernization**

We can deepen our understanding of the current situation vis-a-vis Peking Opera by seeing it as a result of the interactions among several tensions or contradictions. Cultural practices embody responses to or temporary solutions to these contradictions that then change the form of the contradiction, which then elicits a change of practice, etc. etc.. Viewing situations this way forces us to see them as processes involving a multitude of ongoing and constantly changing influences and interactions and helps to avoid the lazy scholarly sins of oversimplification and determinism. To this end we must tack between macro and micro levels -- seeing practice in the light of more overarching structures (thus increasing our understanding of them by allowing us to connect them to other practices) yet noting that the overarching structures are fluid (due to the influence of practice).

The major contradictions which, taken together, shed the most light on the current crisis in Peking Opera are those between (1) politics and economics; (2) traditional cultural practices and modernization; and (3) China and the West. These contradictions are not necessarily oppositional -- they are dialectical. That is, they should not be seen as opposite poles in a struggle for the ascendent position but as mutually influencing programs for action (or the sources of programs for action) the practices of which may at any given time receive unequal priority from various groups of people.

The interactions of these contradictions give rise to specific "problems" (wenti), and the way in which these problems are dealt with affects the interactions of the contradictions, until new problems arise (or other problems become more

urgent). Among the most important problems for contemporary traditional Peking Opera are: (1) the problem of the audience; (2) the problem of the performers' artistic traditions; (3) the problem of socialist revolution; and (4) the problem of economic modernization. Seeing the contradictions and cultural tensions from the point of view of each of these problems -- and from the point of views of those whose lives they touch -- gives us "multiple takes" that shed light on different areas and, taken together, give us a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the current situation with regard to the traditional Peking Opera than do the more traditional approaches that favor a single perspective (e.g., history, political science, modernization theory, musicology). In the interest of such a comprehensive understanding and of pulling together and summarizing the issues addressed in this chapter I will address each of these problems individually.

### The Problem of the Audience

The problem of the audience for traditional Peking Opera is based in generational and class differences and began before the Cultural Revolution. The constant government pressure to reform and the infusion of intellectuals (professional composers and writers, etc.) into the opera troupes in the early 50s in order to realize this goal resulted in profound interference with traditional performance styles, roles, and plots. The working class and less educated audience for the traditional Peking Opera did not like the changes and did not think them necessary.

C (retired cultural worker): The people at that time did not think it necessary to change the Peking Opera in order to have a new society. "Leave our opera alone" they said, "Why do you have to change the opera?" They did not think it counterrevolutionary to have kings and ghosts on stage. And they did not like the changes once they were made. They [the government] took away their favorite plays and replaced them with something not so good. So they [the audience] simply quite going.

B (former Peking Opera musician): The younger writers and composers wanted to reform, and the younger performers, too. The professional workers who came in led the reform movement, but what they did was not so high quality. Everything was too rushed. And the older audience didn't want the changes anyway.

The composer Liu Jidian, writing in 1989, says that in the 1950s the experiments in the reform of Peking Opera were all in all not very successful. He attributes this to a "rushed atmosphere" stemming from the political drive for reform and "not a deep enough understanding of the science of new and traditional musics" (Liu 1989a:58).

In other words the situation was such that traditional operas were reformed (or eliminated) under government command and through the agency of **intellectuals coming into the opera troupes from outside the tradition**. These professionals, without a firm grasp of traditional opera styles, were nonetheless

pressured into quick reform measures in order to conform to government edicts. The result may have been "valuable experience" but it did not satisfy the needs of the performers nor those of the audience.

The situation concerning the traditional Peking Opera in the 15 years since the Cultural Revolution is also based in generational and class differences, but has taken on added dimensions due to the effects of the Cultural Revolution itself and due to the effects of the Open Door Policy. As a result of the Cultural Revolution ban on traditional opera performance a whole generation of youth was raised without exposure to this art form.

L (chemistry professor): The Chinese youth of today do not like Peking Opera because they never heard it in their childhood. It sounds strange to them, indeed it **is** strange to them, something exotic, not theirs.

Peking Opera is simply not a tradition that touches the experience of the younger generation in China. It is not a part of what ties them to being Chinese. The tradition of Peking Opera was broken in their childhood by the Cultural Revolution ban. Their concepts of modern China do not include Peking Opera except as an exotic spectacle for old people.

(from field notes, 6/10/87): I sat in a small park, wrapped in the coolness of a Beijing spring evening, listening to the elderly men and women taking turns singing Peking Opera arias to the accompaniment of a lone jinghu. Other elderly men and women

listened attentively, some closing their eyes and tapping the beat with a blissful look on their faces. A teenage boy approached on his bike, stopped very close to me, and listened quietly. He wore the ubiquitous dark green pants and work shirt, both dirty from obviously manual labor. After a few moments he whispered to himself: "qiguai" ("strange"), and pedaled away.

In addition to the lack of an experiential connection to the traditional Peking Opera in the lives of Chinese youth there are the problems caused by the Open Door Policy implemented in the late 1970s. As time goes on a higher and higher percentage of the lives of those between 16 and 25 will have taken place in these years. The problems of the Cultural Revolution will, for them, recede. But the effects of the Open Door Policy on their attitudes toward the traditional arts has been equally profound. The root of this problem is in the renewed openness toward foreign (and especially Western) culture for reasons of economic and technological modernization. The result for the youth of China is that foreign expressive art forms have literally flooded the mainland via the mass media since the late 1970s. Popular music imported from Taiwan and Hong Kong (syncretisms of pre-Liberation mainland popular styles and more recent Western popular music styles) quickly became the favored art forms of urban mainland youth of all classes at that time.<sup>55</sup> Western classical music reentered the mainland and reestablished itself as dominant in the institutions of higher education.<sup>56</sup> The lure of foreign exoticism --

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<sup>55</sup> This phenomena and these forms are the subject of Chapter Two of this dissertation.

<sup>56</sup> This reemergence and its effects upon the development of a modern Chinese "art music" are the subjects of Chapter Three of this dissertation.



especially that connected in some way to the West --combined with disgust over the musical restrictions of the Cultural Revolution and (ironically) lingering influence of the Cultural Revolution regarding traditional art forms turned youth away from the traditional Peking Opera.

The immersion in styles of music so different from traditional forms has led to the feelings of "strangeness" attributed to the traditional Peking Opera as expressed by the young man above. Popular music -- which permeates films, television shows and television commercials, and is easily disseminated through cassettes -- and Western classical music --taught in the conservatories and a staple of radio broadcasts -- are these people's musical traditions. Traditional Peking Opera is exotic and strange. Its style is simply not of their world.

It is not only the youth who have been profoundly affected by the Open Door Policy and its economic restructuring. The effects of inflation on the discretionary income of the urban working class Chinese (the main audience for traditional Peking Opera) and the effects of the mass media have conspired to lessen the audience for traditional opera in two ways:

1. the ticket price runs about 3 yuan, roughly the same as for other "art" performances (such as the symphony) and for popular music performances. This averages about 3% of an urban worker's monthly salary. Even with partially state-subsidized housing and food costs the recent inflation rates and government-mandated price adjustments (part of economic modernization) would make regular attendance at opera performances prohibitive for most working class people in Beijing. In addition, this ticket price is roughly 10 times the price for a film ticket and about the same as the price for a cassette at a store (and double the price for a cassette in a street market). As these (plus the live popular music concerts) are

favored by youth, we can see that the traditional Peking Opera is at a great disadvantage when compared to the cinema, and has no price advantage over popular music concerts and popular music cassette tapes;

2. the mass media is a considerably cheaper vehicle for the enjoyment of the traditional Peking Opera. Broadcasts of traditional opera performances appear daily on television and form a considerable portion of daily and nightly broadcasts over the state-controlled radio. Combined with the ready availability and affordability of cassettes of traditional opera these mass media offer extremely cheap alternatives to a night at the live theatre. The frequency of television and radio broadcasts of traditional opera and the ease of repetition afforded by cassette tapes combine with a faltering economy and tightening personal budgets to force more people away from the theatre, exacerbating its problems.

In addition to the youth and the working class, the intellectuals also have been drawn away from the traditional opera. Older intellectuals, heirs to the May Fourth Movement of 1919, often view the traditional Peking Opera as old-fashioned and "feudal": China's cultural forms are simply not as advanced as those of the West.<sup>57</sup> These intellectuals were socialized into an adoration of Western science and culture as the most advanced in the world and into a derogatory stance toward China's traditional culture as backward, feudal and incapable of reform; it is this kind of intellectual that Mao addressed (and argued with) in the Yanan Talks of

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<sup>57</sup> The May 4th Movement, a series of angry, student-led demonstrations and boycotts aimed at the Chinese government, the Japanese government, and the Western democracies, is seen as a watershed in Chinese history -- a "dividing line between tradition and modernity" (Grieder 1970:213). It is, to modern Communists, the point at which "A brand new cultural force came into being in China, ... the communist world outlook and theory of social revolution" (Mao 1977a:61).

1942. But for many the conviction is still that Western science, technology and culture are simply more advanced than the traditions of China.

M (physics professor): Take the violin for example. Compared to the erhu it is more scientific. It has a greater range and a more expressive sound. Its technique is also superior, more scientific. This is an instrument far advanced compared to the erhu. Its sound is more advanced, too; the frequencies are fuller. This is good; it is more scientific. And the music it plays: symphonies, concertos, variations. These are highly developed forms -- scientifically understood and developed music. Erhus are too limited; they are backward instruments. And their music is simple.

Besides the obvious scientism in these statements (which will be dealt with in Chapter Three), what emerges is a conviction that Western music is simply better than Chinese music -- a more advanced form of expressive art. This conviction is shared by many younger intellectuals, such as students of Western music in Chinese conservatories.

N (undergraduate piano student): I don't like Chinese music much. It sounds very scratchy. The singing in Peking Opera hurts my ears and the music is not very interesting and has a scratchy quality. Western music is more profound, more complex, and more soothing. I almost never listen to Chinese music except for some popular songs sometimes -- and even then I prefer Western popular songs.

The problem can be seen as one of conflicting traditions and their views of Chinese identity and direction: the revolutionary tradition has treated the traditional culture as a hindrance to modernization and therefore to advanced civilization.<sup>58</sup> The colonial (Western) tradition shared this view. The institutions of the colonial tradition (schools, conservatories, the mass media) that began the work of disseminating the "superior" music of the West to the urban populace of mainland China before Liberation have continued this work under the aegis of revolutionary socialist modernization. The result is that for a growing number of Chinese the Peking Opera sounds strange and represents China past. They are not interested in it; the future lies elsewhere.

#### The Audience: Solutions Offered

Solutions offered to the audience problem vis-a-vis the traditional Peking Opera involve two government-inspired programs: reform of the opera and education of the youth. We have already spoken of the pressures from the government and from professional scholars for operatic reform. Most of the artistic reform in Peking Opera has involved the other two styles of the "san bing ju": the newly-written historical plays and the modern plays. Neither of these, however, has proven to be successful with audiences, and the costs of reform outstrip the costs of

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<sup>58</sup> For an overview (written in the mid-1980s) of the issues focused on in the debates over the relationship between traditional Chinese culture and modernization, see Wang 1987.

performing traditional plays.<sup>59</sup> So as a result of economic necessities and the artists and loyal audience's aversion to government-mandated reform, the traditional Peking Opera still dominates in terms of performances; whatever reform takes place is the result of a kind of artistic negotiation between the artists and their loyal audience -- just as it was before Liberation.

But due to the lack of audience at performances in Beijing, the high number of troupes (about 15) practicing Peking Opera in Beijing, and the large number of people traditionally needed to perform many plays (over 100), performances in that city have virtually ceased on a regular basis. Touring to other cities and/or countries, however, has proved financially successful and has spurred reform in the direction of restructuring the troupes themselves so that smaller contingents of performers (30-50) can be extracted from a troupe for the purpose of national or international touring. This leaner structuring is financially successful for those who participate but it means less work for the many opera workers who are left behind and fewer opportunities for younger performers, as it is usually the well-known performers (because of their box-office drawing power and seniority within the troupe) who get these tours.

This window of opportunity for financial gain through touring also acts against the forces of reform. Audiences in other cities and in the countryside are interested in seeing the troupes from Beijing perform because this audience believes

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<sup>59</sup> The young don't like the new historical plays or the modern plays because they carry forward too much of the style of traditional opera; the older opera lovers don't like these because they change too much of this traditional style. Despite government encouragement, except for those professionally engaged in the traditions of the opera and a few others intrigued by the appearances of these operas, there is no audience for them.

that the Beijing troupes are the best. And what they come to see is traditional opera done in the traditional way.

A (former Peking Opera musician): The people in Tianjin or in other cities will pay to see the troupes from Beijing because they think that these are the best at Peking Opera. They have local companies, too, but they think that this is "real" (zhengzhengde) Peking Opera. The performers in the Beijing troupes are the most famous, too, so the audience wants to see them whenever they can. These same troupes have no audience anymore in Beijing but whenever they travel the theatre sells out. The people come to see the traditional Peking Opera at its best; they pay their money to see it. They are not interested in seeing reformed opera. Beijing Opera is famous as the highest form of Chinese opera. This is what they want to see. They can see new opera, reformed opera, somewhere else.

Despite this the pressure for reform is constant. Touring occasionally to packed houses in other cities is not seen as the answer to the problems of the traditional Peking Opera; what is needed is a larger, regular audience in Beijing. And with regard to the performance traditions, reform is still seen as a necessary step toward this goal (see Jiang 1988; Ju 1988).

The other solution to the problem of the audience commonly heard from intellectuals and from government sources is to gradually increase the appreciation for Peking Opera through education. This can come in the form of amateur

societies devoted to the popularization of Peking Opera (see CD 12/14/83:5), from the formation of Peking Opera clubs at universities (see BR 1/20/86:25), through lectures at schools and universities (Wang 1986:73), or through exposure in primary schools to Peking Opera style. The assumption of this approach is that Peking Opera, because of its long history of development and sophisticated, complex symbolic style, is not understood by the majority of youth; guided exposure will increase understanding, and appreciation will follow.

Of these three means, the last would obviously touch the most people in the shortest amount of time. But China has a severe lack of qualified music teachers for its primary and secondary schools and a lack of funds to devote to the training and development of these teachers (Wu 1986:120-121, Zhao 1988:89). These problems are becoming increasingly acute, as it is thought that without exposure to the traditional Peking Opera through the educational process the youth of China -- not familiar with its style -- will reject it and it will die out (Li 1982:33).

### The Performers and their Traditions

The three contradictions of modernization in contemporary China have conspired to produce a situation in which Peking Opera's traditional artistic practices must change in order to survive as a vital tradition; yet this change is as much a threat to the life of Peking Opera as is stagnation. Political pressure to change is constant. Economic pressures are themselves contradictory: refusing reform guarantees a small Beijing audience and a financial loss at the box office; enacting reform may lead to a larger audience for a few performances (due to the

interest of some youth and of music professionals) but the financial costs and extra work of reform so outstrip those of performing unreformed plays that reform leads to even bigger financial loss. And the money to support the opera during the stage of transition necessary to institute consistent reforms and build an audience for them has so far not been forthcoming from the government. So the performers by and large ignore the urgings to reform. This exacts a psychological price.

F (professional Peking Opera musician): You can get into trouble by refusing to reform. Political trouble. This can be big trouble. But most of the time the cadres don't really care whether you reform or not; they just need to tell you to reform because that is what they are supposed to do. Right now money is the big problem; we are supposed to reform, but we are also supposed to make money. Since we can't do both it is better to lose less money, so we ignore the orders to reform. Or better yet, we don't perform at all, so we don't lose any money. In this situation we are very unhappy. We want to perform; we want to continue our rich traditions; we want to make our contribution to a modern Chinese society. But we cannot. It makes us sad, scared, and angry.

Since an artistic form depends upon the existence of an audience, the flood of new forms such as popular music that has come in from foreign countries (especially the West) since the late 1970s has provided keen competition for the traditional Peking Opera. These are so different in style from the traditional opera and so permeate the popular culture on mainland China that they are threatening to



make the traditional opera culturally irrelevant (except as a remnant of the past) to the mass urban audience. So it is in its clash with Western cultural forms that the traditional Peking Opera may see its final defeat as a major mass art form. But it is also from this clash that an impetus for revitalization emerges -- on a smaller level and with certain stipulations, including a call for the cessation of reform and a strong ambivalence about change itself. This is the aforementioned question of preservation (baocun) versus protection (baohu). Both admit of an adversary relationship between the traditional Peking Opera and modernization -- an admission that spells the defeat of 40 years of government policy regarding Peking Opera.

Performers are ambivalent about this development: they want the greater sense of security that a well-established cultural position would give them and they don't like the present situation in which the government tries to tell them how to perform (and the threat this poses to their performance traditions). But they also feel a need to be part of a live, changing tradition.

I (Peking Opera singer): We must continue to strive to change the traditions to suit the tastes of the time. We must attract a larger audience if we are to survive as a tradition. We appreciate the audiences abroad, but this is Peking Opera: we need to be based on a Beijing audience, be part of Beijing culture. I don't want to be part of an art form which is frozen in time, put on a shelf, and then brought out for display in front of foreign dignitaries, foreign musicologists, or foreign audiences in the interests of "cultural exchange." This is not tradition; it is ossification.

There is an ideological tradition in China dating back to the early 20th century that sees the traditional practices of Peking Opera as antithetical to modernization. This ideological tradition lies with the government and the intelligentsia. When combined with the general intellectual tradition in which these groups see themselves as responsible for the artistic practices of their culture, the result is often an active antipathy towards traditional practices. The introduction of economic modernization as a main theme of the era in the late 1970s has so far somewhat softened (at least in practice) the urgency of this antithesis. But as long as the government holds to its reform ideology the continued existence of traditional Peking Opera practice rests on shaky ground.

### The Traditional Peking Opera and Socialist Revolution

The key to understanding the relationship between the traditional Peking Opera and the governing political ideology since 1949 is to understand the importance of the fact that this political ideology is a **revolutionary** ideology. This proposition contains serious ramifications for the process of handling a pre-revolutionary art form such as the Peking Opera. We will examine these ramifications, but first we must remind ourselves of the bases upon which this key idea rests -- that is, why it is that the government's seeing itself as heir to a continuing revolutionary tradition leads it to treat the traditional opera in a certain (predetermined) way. After that we will see how this treatment may be in the process of shifting because of recent developments.

One of the main bases for the concern of Chinese revolutionary thought for the possibly negative influences of the traditional Peking Opera upon the Chinese mass audience comes from traditional Chinese notions concerning the relationship between music and feeling, or music and being -- notions that have been taken up and developed by Chinese Marxists since Mao Zedong. Briefly, these notions center around the concept of mutual influence. Music serves a dual function in society as both a means of expressing feelings and a means of influencing feelings - - that is, music has both an expressive and an instrumental aspect. Simply put, the Confucian tradition believed that feelings arose in the person as a result of contact with the objective (outside) world. Music arises as a result of these feelings. Thus, music arises in response to the objective world and expresses the person's feelings about that world. This is music's **expressive** function.

When the human mind is affected by things, it reacts in one way or another. This reaction produces emotions. Emotions are expressed by sounds. When sounds are regularized and take certain forms, they then become music. Therefore, music is inseparable from human feelings, which are the basis of music; the essence of music is to express the feelings of man (Jiang 1986:137).

But music, once produced, is also part of the objective world and its performance arouses feelings in listeners. This is music's **instrumental** nature. And here we introduce another of the keys to understanding the revolutionary attitude towards the traditional Peking Opera: the traditional role of the government as responsible for keeping social harmony. Given this role and music's potential

power for disharmony through the arousal of "inappropriate" feelings, it seemed natural to the Confucian governments that music should be regulated -- in effect, censored (Higgins 1980:443). The wrong kinds of music would arouse dangerous feelings on the part of the populace and this would threaten social harmony. So music needs to be regulated and controlled by the state. In this way the instrumental nature of music is put in the service of moral and social education (Jiang 1986:140-1).

What we need to take from this brief introduction to Confucian aesthetics is the recognition of a tradition that says (1) music expresses feelings, (2) music arouses feelings, (3) the criteria for judging music should revolve around considerations of social harmony -- the social effects of the music, (4) it is the duty of the government to oversee these criteria and thereby to control the social effects, and (5) music's highest function is as a form of education: it is "of fundamental importance in forming a man's moral character" (Jiang 1986:144).

Given these points it can be seen that the Chinese government is continuing the Confucian tradition by seeing itself as responsible for overseeing musical production for the good of Chinese society at large --and more directly inheriting the early 20th century revolutionary tradition that itself absorbed the Confucian tradition (Chu 1990:128). But this does not explain the antagonistic attitude towards traditional opera that seems to increase the more "revolutionary" one's thinking becomes.

## Revolution as Break with the Past

Revolution is the opposite of peaceful evolution. It is a decided and definite split with the past. Evolution involves a sense of "natural" development; revolution involves a rationally-controlled and implemented, irreparable scission. Part of this scission involves the overthrowing of pre-revolutionary practices. With regard to the arts it can be seen that, given the aforementioned relationship between feelings and music, pre-revolutionary forms such as traditional opera would potentially subvert the revolutionary programs. These traditional forms, being expressions of the feelings of pre-revolutionary times, become in performance objects that arouse feelings in contemporary audiences. The government wants revolutionary feelings, not pre-revolutionary ones. So pre-revolutionary Peking Opera is subversive and must be removed from the stage. This is indeed what many in the Communist Party were arguing for in the 1940s. What is remarkable for its negation of this line of thought is Mao's insistence that pre-revolutionary art forms, though they contain certain elements dangerous to a revolutionary society, nonetheless must not be done away with -- they are reformable into forms that can serve the Chinese revolution. This highly pragmatic move on Mao's part (he understood the political necessity at that time of listening to the needs of the masses), codified in the Yanan Talks, has been central to the arts programs of the governing body since Liberation and has been the grounds upon which the wars over the fate of traditional Peking Opera practices have been waged.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> I am suggesting here that Mao's defense of traditional art forms in the face of attacks from certain of the revolutionaries at Yanan was a pragmatic move, considering his need to garner peasant support; there is certainly another aspect to this defense, which is Mao's personal love for traditional Chinese art. He was an

There are two reasons for the continuing wars over the reform of Peking Opera. One is simply that the government-inspired and directed reform has failed to take hold with the populace. The only times that non-traditional Peking Opera has dominated the stage have been times of the complete banning of traditional opera -- such as happened during the Cultural Revolution. But there is another, more philosophical reason that also contributes to the necessity for ongoing struggles on the part of the government with traditional Peking Opera practice: the idea (coming from Mao) that **revolution is a continuous process** (Starr 1973:8). This is a result of Mao's political dialectics (and of the central place of contradiction within this dialectics), which insists that opposition to the main revolutionary development is constantly being renewed and reproduced and therefore must be constantly struggled against. Traditional Peking Opera, even if it were to become successfully reformed, would need continuous reform to remain a positive force in Chinese society. It is in the nature of dialectic to stress process over product; it is a process with an "essentially inconclusive" nature (Adler 1927:243). And it is in the nature of a political process that stresses continuous revolution to need the continuous reference of counter-revolutionary practices against which it can struggle (Chu 1990:262-3); traditional Peking Opera practice is in this sense a dangerous Other that has the power to subvert the revolution and thus subvert socialism, modernization, and the government's desires for the future of Chinese society.

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accomplished poet in the ancient style, and my sources indicate (and historical evidence corroborates) his deep appreciation for the traditional Peking Opera.

## Revolution as Tradition: a clash of cultures

A revolution does not merely present itself as a radical break with the past, it also establishes itself as a venerated tradition (Chu 1990:26).

The process of decision-making and political practice vis-a-vis the traditional Peking Opera is informed by a particular set of dialectics involving three traditions (or three cultures): (1) the traditional (pre-revolutionary) culture; (2) the revolutionary culture; and (3) the culture of the West (as seen through Chinese eyes). Changes in attitudes or in treatment of the traditional opera -- the processes of its development since 1949 -- are the results of the interactions among these three cultural traditions.

The revolutionary culture is posited by the government as the dominant culture in mainland China. This idea is disseminated via the mass media and celebrated through festivals, films, concerts, television shows, etc.(Chu 1990:26). Symbolic representations of this dominance are crucial as legitimating forces. They are mythical enactments of an identity posited as the correct identity of the nation. It is through these means (and the myths they enact) that the most powerful arguments are put forward for the just reign of the dominant groups.

As the central and dominant culture, the revolutionary tradition, generated by the "will and labor to signify, to produce and manipulate the symbolizing artifacts" (Chu 1990:254) clashes with the traditional pre-revolutionary culture -- also generated by the same production and manipulation of symbolizing artifacts. Each culture generates, manipulates, and reproduces its traditions/myths as a

"strategy of power" (ibid:254) whose goal is nothing less than control of reality. The revolutionary culture, as the tradition in control, treats the pre-revolutionary culture as a kind of counterculture with which it must do battle (Starr 1973:11); but it is a special kind of counterculture, for it predates the revolutionary culture, and the revolutionary culture was based on and grew out of the prerevolutionary culture. Thus organically connected, the mythic representations of pre-revolutionary China are simultaneously (1) tremendously threatening to those of the "new order"; (2) the basis from which the new myths must emerge, and (3) the major reference point for definition of the new myths. These two cultures engage in a dialectical relationship -- a rhetoric of symbols -- that affects and influences the development of each.

As a simple and clear example, remember that the Peking Opera was at first considered an enemy to the revolution (the desire for clear break with the past); but Mao stepped in and because of (1) the power and popularity of this form with the masses (the power of the prerevolutionary culture among those whose support the revolution must have to succeed) and (2) his own appreciation for the form (the direct influence of the prerevolutionary culture on those generating the revolutionary tradition) insisted that this traditional art form must not be abandoned. Thus we can see the influence of the prerevolutionary culture on the revolutionary one. Nevertheless, Mao did insist that the traditional Peking Opera, if it was to be allowed to continue, had to be reformed -- and that this reform must be controlled by the government. This reflects the power relationships of the time; and the institutions of reform themselves show the influence of the revolutionary culture on the practices of the pre-revolutionary tradition.

The history of policies regarding the traditional Peking Opera and the history of its practices are the creations of the ongoing dialectic between the



prerevolutionary culture and the revolutionary one. But there has been (since the late 1970s) another culture with which the revolutionary culture has had to deal: the Western culture, which has entered China in full force as a result of the Open Door Policy of Deng Xiaoping.

There are three specific results of the dialectic between Western culture and the revolutionary culture for the traditional Peking Opera. One has to do the economic restructuring that has been taking place since the late 1970s -- and will be dealt with in the next section. The other two work against each other: one progressive (encouraging reform) and the other conservative (encouraging preservation or protection of traditional practices). The latter is the result of conservative tendencies on the part of Western scholars and musicians towards China's musical traditions. These scholars generally condemn reform; Western audiences, under the influence of these scholars, want to see "the real thing." These views and the static and/or naive notions of tradition that give rise to them, combined with the neo-imperialistic desire (combined with shame) to maintain the "purity" of the Other, conspire to encourage those involved in the traditional Peking Opera to maintain their traditions and spurn reform.<sup>61</sup> That foreigners encourage the continuation of the traditional Peking Opera gives pride to those involved in its performance and also has its influence on the government, for it provides China with a kind of international cultural capital that it can use for nationalistic purposes involving both internal (its own self-concept) and external (its position in the international community) needs.

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<sup>61</sup> Western notions of tradition and the art object are addressed vis-a-vis Chinese notions of same in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

Simultaneously with this conserving influence, however, there is developing a greater awareness on the part of Chinese musicians of contemporary musical traditions and techniques in the West. The influence of these contemporary Western trends works to encourage those in the government and in the professional music circles who press reform of traditional Peking Opera by giving more impetus to the idea that the modernization of Chinese culture means leaving its prerevolutionary (and therefore premodern) culture behind.

Thus, the dialectic with Western culture works simultaneously to spur the reform of the traditional Peking Opera and to subvert it. In the next section we will see how another aspect of the move toward modernization has shifted the relationships of all of the dialectics involved in the process of this artistic practice, and we will consider the profound consequences of these shifts.

#### Economic Modernization: the Final Blow

The move toward economic modernization will provide perhaps the most powerful cause for a profound change in the government's treatment of traditional Peking Opera. In previous sections of this chapter I discussed the reasons for this economic restructuring and its effects -- both on performance practices and on the structuring of the opera troupes. Here I want merely to emphasize the crucial impact of this economic restructuring when combined with the other social, economic, and political factors I have discussed.

One way to do this is to see the social space within which the practices of traditional Peking Opera move as walled in in all directions -- with the directive to begin linking opera workers' income to income from performances as providing the final wall surrounding the space. To fill out the metaphor we can view the other walls as (1) the government directive for reform; (2) the dwindling audience, and (3) lack of monetary support for both reform (thus hoping to enlarge the audience by making the opera more palatable to the youth) and for education (thus enlarging the audience through familiarity with and understanding of traditional practices). Faced with these three conditions, the move toward economic independence (called the "responsibility system") is proving devastating to Peking Opera performance (of all three types).

It is, however, politically unacceptable (at this time) for traditional Peking Opera to be allowed simply to fade away. Peking Opera as an art form is too important a symbol to the Chinese people of the rich traditions of Chinese art for the government (which has encouraged this identification) to be burdened with having this form die while under its control. Although some of the official rhetoric aims at the eventual elimination of traditional Peking Opera in favor of reformed versions (e.g., Xu 1985) there is at this time virtually no audience for the reformed Peking opera (newly-written historical plays and modern plays) either. And more radical reform, in which opera companies would be cut off from government subsidy entirely, would put thousands of highly trained workers (including artists who had spent years training in the government-run Peking Opera Institute) completely without a source of income. The resulting scramble to reassemble a few smaller, more efficient troupes that could survive economically through lessened competition for local audiences, a greater concentration of the higher-skilled artists,

and the availability of overseas touring might save Peking Opera and remove the financial burden it places on the government, but it would devastate the lives of many people (and their families) who have dedicated their lives to this art form. The government is at this time simply not willing to take this step.

Nor is it willing (or able) to pour more money into the development of the opera -- development which would come either through reform or through audience enlargement. So the economic and political necessities of the moment result in a stand-off in which no one is satisfied: the government wants political reform and economic independence from the opera; the opera workers are seeing their salaries reduced (due to the responsibility system and to inflation, which ran at 19% in 1989) to the point that they must look for other sources of income and cannot afford to spend their time in the hard work of reform or in the daily demands of performance preparations.

F (professional Peking Opera musician): I simply don't care if we perform or not. It is not more money for me. The salary I get stays the same whether I perform or not but it is not enough; it barely feeds us. I cannot afford to give my daughter some of the things a father likes to give to his child. So I have to do other things to make money, sell some things on the street corners. If I spend my time preparing for performances, we don't have enough money. If I spend my time on the street corners, we have more money but I do not do opera. I have played Peking Opera for more than 25 years. It is what I have devoted my life to. It is what I do best. We are all very unhappy now.

O (Peking Opera singer): If we have a chance at some touring there is good money in that. But the opportunities do not come very often; it is not enough to sustain us. Some of us want to reform; we work hard to reform. But we need help from the government. We need money and we need help to educate the audience as to what we are doing and why. But they do not help; they cannot help. So we perform on tour and we perform for special occasions. But that is all.

The reference here to "special occasions" points to the emergence of an essentially **two-level performance model** in the city of Beijing vis-a-vis its traditional opera. On one level is the normal regular performance opportunities, both in the city and outside of it (i.e., touring). The second level consists of performance opportunities at festivals and other special occasions. Some of these are regular annual events (the Spring Festival, New Year's Festival); some are regular but not annual (meetings and conferences on opera, anniversaries of political, social, or artistic importance); and some are irregular (visits of foreign dignitaries, tributes to political or artistic figures).

The first level of the performance model has virtually ceased to exist. Its disappearance signals the end of the social position of the traditional Peking Opera as the central and most important art form for the mass audience in Beijing.

The situations on the second level are for the most part the sole conditions under which local performances occur. These events witness a flurry of performances spaced in a period of a few weeks or less. Preparations for these

performances occupy most of the rehearsal time of opera workers. These events are likely to be followed by months of no local performances whatsoever, as the workers prepare for the next scheduled festival or anniversary (or, if one is lucky, for a tour).

The reason for the success of the second level of the performance model is simple: government support and pressure. These special events are politically useful in the government's constant need to reinforce its legitimacy; conferences, festivals and anniversaries in which the "richness" and "glory" of traditional Chinese art is displayed lends legitimacy to the regime under whose patronage such forms continue to thrive. Through these events the revolutionary tradition (in this case as protector of China's rich cultural heritage) is narrated and reproduced (Chu 1990:26). Although the government prefers to (and does) support the performance of reformed opera during these events, it also supports the performance of traditional opera. In this way it can present itself as both progressive and protective -- revolutionary, yet helping to preserve and develop (and therefore heirs to) China's great and long cultural history.

### Final Comments

In this chapter I have outlined and analyzed the main elements in the current crisis involving the practices of the traditional Peking Opera, synthesizing historical, theoretical and ethnographic approaches into an explanation of how it is that this crisis came about and what it means to those involved in its production (the

opera workers), its regulation (the government), and its consumption (the audience). Seeing this situation as the complex result of sets of contradictions and then approaching it from different angles in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding helps to avoid reductionism and linear causality -- both of which offer interpretations that are too simplistic.

By seeing the history of Peking Opera and its current crisis as ongoing processes defined and determined by a series of interconnecting dialectics each of which is fluid I have reduced the complexity of such processes for analytical purposes (by limiting my dialectics and by naming them). And by emphasizing that the fluidity of these dialectics is not due to abstract "forces" but is instead the result of people engaged in social practices embedded in relationships of power and in struggles for personal identity and fulfillment I have kept my theoretical analyses from becoming a means of ignoring the individual and social lives of real people. The contribution of this chapter to existing work on Peking Opera is due to this simultaneous theoretical/ethnographic approach and the hermeneutic base from which it rises. Complexity is acknowledged but not surrendered to.

The traditional Peking Opera is subtly shifting from a social position as the favored form of everyday entertainment for the masses to a position as a showcase of traditional art to be occasionally savored -- i.e., it is receding from the everyday into the exceptional. This shifting, mediated by the dominance of the economic considerations of the 1980s and early 1990s, is welcomed neither by the government nor by scholars and audience. But it is not a movement by choice. It is a movement for survival.

In the next chapter I will analyze the musical genre that has replaced Peking opera as the favored entertainment form of the Beijing audience (especially the youth) -- popular music. I will show that this genre is a major player in the cultural crisis brought on by modernization and that the contradictions inherent in contemporary Peking Opera also inform popular music. But the configuration of these contradictions and the ways in which they interact both with each other and with popular music practices differ considerably. We now enter a domain in which the music and ideology of the West (both in its material existence and in its construction on the part of the Chinese) play a more obvious role.



**CHAPTER TWO**  
**POPULAR MUSIC (TONGSU YINYUE)**

**PART ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**

## Introduction

From the point of view of many professional music scholars as well as many within the government, popular music represents a serious and critical challenge to the healthy development of Chinese culture in general and of Chinese music in particular. That popular music is considered to be such a problem stems in part from a conviction that it is of low artistic value. But it is also fueled by a realization that the popularization of youth music styles -- styles tainted by their connections with Western bourgeois capitalist cultures -- is stealing audiences away from more traditional genres.<sup>62</sup>

The government is seen both as the cause of this problem and as the source of its solution. I was told by scholars that the government has ignored its responsibility to offer a coherent and comprehensive policy on music. Music education in the schools has been ignored and the government has failed to take a consistent stand regarding what is and what is not acceptable for dissemination over the mass media. As a result, music educators feel frustrated and abandoned in their attempts to champion traditional musics to the Chinese people. These scholars and educators consider popular music to be morally decadent and aesthetically empty,

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<sup>62</sup> In a recent (late 1988) survey conducted in Beijing, 952 respondents of various ages, professions and levels of education (though weighted toward students from high schools, universities, and research institutes) were given eight kinds of music to choose from and asked to list the three to which they most enjoyed listening. The eight kinds of music were: popular music, dance music, symphonic music, foreign solo instrumental music, Chinese folk songs, Chinese opera, Chinese solo instrumental music, and choral music. Popular music topped the respondents' listings with 738 entries as one of the three favorite kinds of music; Chinese folk songs were entered 347 times, and Chinese opera 149 times. See Yang 1991:42.

and the inability of traditional musics to enlist the government's help in competing with these degenerative forms is cause for grave concern.

On the other hand, popular music has been, in the 1980s, increasingly embraced by the population at large, especially the youth. For them it has symbolized, given occasion for, and contributed to the expression of feelings for a new, optimistic time -- a time marked (until the late 1980s) by the opening of economic policies, new international relationships, and a sense of hope concerning the political future. It has become part of the everyday reality of millions of Chinese youth, many of whom do not remember a time without it. It has in fact become an integral part of their view of what Chinese culture is.

Popular music in mainland China is one of the areas in which the contradictions of modern Chinese society are most prominently displayed and most consciously recognized. It has been described as "the most complicated phenomenon of the contemporary Chinese musical world" (Liang 1990:55). The goal of this chapter will be to explain why this is so.

Such an explanation will involve analysis of the connections between popular music and a growing youth culture, between popular music and Western culture, between popular music and economic modernization, and between modern popular music and the "vulgar" music (*huangse yinyue*) of the Republican Period (1911-1949). All of these connections will be engaged in order to understand the space occupied by this music in contemporary urban China and the controversies surrounding its position, its development, and its future.

The chapter will begin with a definition of the study object. I will introduce the terms the Chinese consider roughly equivalent to our term "popular music". In Part Two I will outline three representative styles and analyze the historical

emergence and development of each with regard to its interactions with issues of modernization.<sup>63</sup>

These issues, though multiple and complicated, will be clustered around notions of **identity** -- in other words concepts of personal, local, regional, national and international identity will serve as organizing foci in order to give my analysis of the interactions of modernization issues a common grounding. This cluster of issues will be continuously related to the practices, traditions, and developments of musical style. This will enable us to see how other social practices enmeshed with issues of modernization (e.g., contemporary political and economic practices) create tensions (contradictions) within popular music practices (the solutions to which create change) and vice versa.

In Part Three I will deconstruct a particular popular music concert in order to illustrate how issues of modernization and musical style come together in the production of a meaningful event and how the people who attended this event inserted themselves in various ways (and with various intentions) within the contradictions of the event. The result was a "rhetoric of symbols" through which struggles for musical meaning (and identity) were enacted.

Finally, in Part Four I will discuss the emergence of profound generational differences (a generation gap) in China and how popular music participates in those issues of identity and modernization based in these generational differences.

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<sup>63</sup> It is not my intention to attempt a comprehensive historical outline and survey of this music, even though there is a lack of such a project in English. Chinese scholarship on the history and development of its popular musics is only beginning to emerge. For important steps in this direction, see Liang 1988, Zeng 1988, Liang 1990.

The study of the popular music of China is only beginning to emerge as an area of concern for Western music scholars. And it is significant that of the work done by Western music scholars on Chinese popular music, very little is by ethnomusicologists. Western ethnomusicologists specializing in Chinese music have had to date little interest in this most vital and controversial genre. This glaring omission in the work of practically all Western scholars of Chinese music has produced a deep hole in our understanding of modern Chinese musical practices, aesthetics, and experiences. It is hoped that this trend will not continue; it is symbolic of the alienation of Western ethnomusicologists (through a form of "orientalism") from the significant musical lives of millions of Chinese. I present this chapter in the hopes that it will contribute to a reversal of this trend.

### Definitions

The term "popular music" is notoriously vague in Western usage; the Chinese terminology shares this vagueness but has a different cast to it. I am not interested in entering the debate over what constitutes popular music<sup>64</sup>; therefore I have not tried to find a definition for popular music and then studied the musics that fit. Rather, in my engagement with Chinese music in general I became aware of a certain realm of music that, due to its strong connections to the youth culture and to

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<sup>64</sup> For discussions of the term "popular music," its definitions, and the implications of these definitions, see Hall & Whannel 1965; Blacking 1981; Browne 1983; Shepherd 1985; Manuel 1988; Middleton 1990 (esp. pp.1-7), and Robinson, Buck & Cuthbert 1991:10-12). For definitions specifically dealing with China, see Manuel 1988 and Hamm 1991.

"foreign" musical styles, most obviously revealed certain of the contradictions brought on by the Communist Party-led modernization of Chinese society (i.e., those mentioned above). Or -- in the terminology of Mao's Marxism/Leninism -- these styles exhibit the central contradictions within certain aspects of music in contemporary China and are thus crucial in determining which way its practices will develop.

In China three terms are used to designate popular music styles: liuxing yinyue, tong-su yinyue, and qingyinyue. The distinctions among these three terms is a source of debate within Chinese intellectual circles. The first two are used interchangeably to refer to the kind of music that is the subject of this chapter; the third is more commonly used to refer to (1) light Western classical pieces such as Strauss waltzes; or (2) Chinese folk or traditional pieces played with accompaniments typical of Western popular music styles (e.g., the use of electronic instruments and Western popular dance rhythms). There is also a historical element to this discussion over terminology: liuxing yinyue was the term of choice for popular musics during the 1930s and 1940s; qingyinyue was commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s. The term tong-su yinyue emerged in the 1980s as an attempt to distinguish 1980s popular styles from those of earlier periods (Liang 1991).<sup>65</sup> All three terms refer to musics that themselves refer strongly to Western musics in their stylistic practices; their genesis and development are thus intimately associated with issues of modernization. The first two are the terms of choice for urban Chinese youth when speaking about their music.

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<sup>65</sup> My thanks also to Andrew Jones for his comments which contributed to my understanding of the differences among these various terms.

This chapter will analyze three styles within the domain of music popular with these youth: Gangtaiyue, Xibeifeng, and Yaogunyue. These are the three most important styles of popular music on the mainland since the close of the Cultural Revolution. Their emergences have signified (respectively) the opening of China to foreign musical forms, the creation of an indigenous popular form that transcends mere imitation of foreign forms, and the emergence of a new style that, serving as a music of political resistance, most threatens governmental attempts at hegemony over the production of popular music meaning.



**PART TWO**  
**THREE REPRESENTATIVE STYLES**  
**OF POPULAR MUSIC IN CHINA**

## Gangtaiyue<sup>66</sup>

Gangtaiyue has remained the dominant style of popular music on mainland China almost continuously since the late 1970s. This dominance was threatened in the mid 1980s, during the height of Xibefeng popularity (see below), but has been reestablished in the last two or three years (1988-91). In this section I will introduce this style and discuss the implications of its dominance within the Chinese popular music field.

As a result of the Open Door Policy of 1978 mainland Chinese were able, for the first time in over ten years, to listen to "foreign" popular music. Under the restrictions imposed by the "Gang of Four" all musical production and dissemination had been confined to the Revolutionary Operas (and arrangements of the music from these operas for various musical and/or vocal ensembles), revolutionary mass songs, and harmonized arrangements of certain folk tunes (for vocalist and instrumental ensemble or for chorus). Foreign music of any kind was officially condemned as decadent and foreign popular styles especially so. Pre-Liberation popular Chinese music had also been banned, carrying as it did the strong connotations of vulgarity and humiliation associated with the semicolonial period of the early twentieth century.<sup>67</sup>

The first popular music to be widely disseminated on the mainland was from Hong Kong and Taiwan. This music, known as Gangtaiyue, typically had the following characteristics: smooth flowing melodies, usually without direct or

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<sup>66</sup> Gangtaiyue is a term generated from the Chinese terms for Hong Kong (**xianggang**), **Taiwan**, and music (**yinyue**).

<sup>67</sup> For a brief description of the social and political conditions in this period (and their effects upon the Chinese people), see Fairbank 1986:177-180.

obvious relationship with traditional Chinese melodic construction; a type of vocal production that was described to me as the "middle way" (a term carrying a positive connotation) between Western full, ringing vocal style and the more nasal, pinched and higher pitched Chinese folksong style; lyrics emphasizing feelings of love between young men and young women; a relatively high level of technical sophistication from the standpoint of studio production; and an easy dance beat background (provided by the instruments most commonly used in Western popular music) that Americans might commonly associate with "light" disco-inspired dance music or with the popular music style commonly known as "easy-listening." Performers in the Gangtai style normally did not (and do not) write their own music or lyrics: the pieces are generally professionally written.

Gangtaiyue was initially promulgated, as the Chinese say, "half openly" (bangongkai). This term is used to describe an action or process whose political acceptability is not yet known. In other words the government had not taken a stand for or against the active dissemination of this new music style (or if it had it was not being enforced consistently or with much vigor). Its importation and spread therefore at first advanced slowly and cautiously. The method of dissemination was usually hand-to-hand, involving the borrowing and copying of cassettes brought into the mainland by foreigners, Chinese travelers returning home, and visiting overseas Chinese. It is significant to note that its early dissemination was not via state-controlled radio or television:

P (female vocal music student): Gangtai popular music was the first to enter the mainland. At first it was spread "half-openly." It did not appear on radio programs, but people borrowed cassettes from

friends or visitors and copied them. I would go to my friend's house and if I heard some music I liked, I would borrow the tape and copy it.

T.B.: It wasn't on the radio?

P: No (laughter), I never listened to the radio. It only had folk songs. I only used the cassette part.

The quick embracing by the mainland audience of this music from Hong Kong and Taiwan was consistently explained to me as tied to the audiences' relief from the stifling artistic atmosphere of the years immediately prior to 1978.<sup>68</sup>

C (retired government worker, male, 65 years old): After the repressive cultural policies of the Cultural Revolution and the Gang of Four, this music seemed a wondrous breath of fresh air. The people were tired of hearing the same things over and over. They wanted something new and different and this was new and different.

Statements of this kind could be used to support or to criticize the Gangtai popular music style; they could express excitement over the Open Door Policy and the resultant influx of foreign ideas and expressive forms, or they could represent a rationalization for how the Chinese people (especially the "culture-starved" youth)

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<sup>68</sup> This reasoning is echoed in the official music press. See, for example, Zeng 1988:47 and Shu & Zeng 1988:15-16.

could have found such (in the speaker's opinion) aesthetically vapid music appealing.<sup>69</sup> Either way the rapid spreading of this imported style is seen as a reaction against the restrictions of the musical policies of the Cultural Revolution.

With increased importation and dissemination in the early 1980s, local song and dance troupes on the mainland found that they could fill their theatres if their performers "covered" these Gangtai songs.<sup>70</sup> The professional music world recognized the existence of a "popular singing style" (tongsu changfa) alongside the Western style (meisheng) and Chinese folkstyle (minzu minjian). Many trained singers from conservatories joined the local art troupes and began singing covers of (or locally and professionally written imitations of) the Gangtai songs; others experimented with adapting folksong melodies to the general Gangtaiyue aesthetic.<sup>71</sup> These art troupes began competing with each other in the production of local singing "stars" (gexing yanyuan); those troupes who were the most successful reaped tremendous economic benefits (Cheng 1988:4).

With the imitation of the Gangtaiyue and the experiments combining Gangtaiyue with folksong melodies came the beginning of mainland composition in contemporary popular style. For the first half of the 1980s this emergence was quite controversial because of the associations between (1) Gangtaiyue and Pre-Liberation "vulgar" music (huangseyue), and (2) Gangtaiyue and the "bourgeois

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<sup>69</sup> "[With regard to the influx of Gangtaiyue], it can be said that a hungry person is not choosy (ji bu ze shi)" (Yang 1989:32).

<sup>70</sup> "Covered" in this instance meant to imitate as closely as possible within the limits of the resources available.

<sup>71</sup> This particular kind of combination of traditional vocal genres and popular ones - - folksong melodies (adapted), folksong vocal production, and popular music instruments and accompanimental style --has continued to exist on the margins of the mainstream Gangtaiyue-dominated popular music industry. See BR 30/48 (11/30/87):12-13.

liberalism" of Western culture. There was severe criticism of the rise of indigenous popular music as a reappearance of huangseyue on the one hand, and of the importation of Gangtaiyue as an example of "corruption by decadent ideas from abroad" on the other. This criticism reached a height during the anti-bourgeois liberalism campaign of 1983 during which the population was urged to "resist corruption by decadent ideas from abroad and never permit the bourgeois way of life to spread in our country" (Deng 1985:3). During these years those involved with popular music could not publicly address these issues and most music theorists did not dare engage popular music styles in their work (Yang 1989:33).

Despite the cold attitude from the government and the hands-off approach of many music scholars, the popularity of Gangtaiyue with the masses continued unabated. And due to Deng's commitment to economic modernization and the Open Door Policy, little was done to try to limit the spread of either the Gangtai style or its mainland imitations, as both were proving to be helpful to the economy of China's music industry and beneficial as symbols of China's openness to the outside world (thus lending legitimacy to the Deng regime). This exposes one of the central contradictions within the field of popular music: the tension between economic necessity and political correctness; or, cast a slightly different way, between the necessity of maintaining openness (due to its resultant economic and technological benefits and to links to the ideology of modernization) and the political risks engendered (from the influx of potentially disruptive and/or oppositional ideas and practices). This contradiction has persisted and efforts to solve it have provided some of the driving forces behind changes in popular music practices.

In general, beginning from the late 1970s, Gangtaiyue has remained the dominant style of youth popular music in mainland China. I would now like to emphasize one effect of this dominance: it **circumscribes in a particular way the Chinese conception of what popular music "is"** -- and what it "ought" to sound like.

#### On the Construction of the "Popular": Stylistic and Political Implications

As the dominant style of popular music, **Gangtaiyue has become the standard by which popular music in China is defined.** Its stylistic parameters (vocal delivery, melodic construction, harmonic accompaniment, instrumentation) have become not one possible style among many, but **constitutive of the notion of popular music itself.**<sup>72</sup> This notion carries with it strong internationalistic elements: it is felt that the Gangtai style owes much to international styles of popular music, especially those of the West. This feeling is reproduced and reinforced by the stylistic parameters of the small amount of Western popular music that is allowed over government-run radio, music that most Americans would call "easy listening."<sup>73</sup> Smooth-flowing, melodic, professionally produced in technologically advanced studios, this Western music conspires with the Gangtai style -- with which it shares these stylistic features -- to reproduce a conception of what popular music

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<sup>72</sup> I first came across this idea in the work of Simon Frith. "... popular music is popular not because it reflects something, or authentically articulates some sort of popular taste or experience, but because it creates our understanding of what popularity is" (Frith 1987:137).

<sup>73</sup> See Hamm 1991:22 and **BR** 31/21 (5/23/88):36-37) for a description of this music and the program on which it is carried.

"ought" to sound like. This "ought" is thought of as typical of and standard for international popular musics, and becomes simultaneously a powerful creative force behind mainland Chinese conceptions of popular music and a limiting factor with regard to values, and therefore decisions, concerning definitions of and uses for this music.

Chinese popular music's participation in and reproduction of this standard connects the Chinese audience with an international one. This connection is put to various uses in various agendas. For some it is a source of concern, for it is seen as reproducing the oppression of unequal international relations. This feeling is found in statements of frustrated and defiant nationalism:

Q (male worker, 28): This is not our music. We need our own music which arises from our own spirit. ... We are tired of being musically colonized.

For others this connection carries more positive meanings, meanings that can be used in the service of an internationalistic, outward-reaching worldview. For example, many people told me that the mainland Chinese audience prefers Hong Kong or Taiwan singers to mainland singers -- even if the mainland singers sing in the Gangtai style.

R (male university student, 25): Here on the mainland the psychology of the people is such that they would rather hear Hong Kong singers than mainland singers. ... I can tell a mainland singer from a Hong Kong or Taiwanese singer at once. ... If Taiwanese and



mainland singers are both available, people will prefer the Taiwanese singer. If there is a movie or a television show with American, Taiwanese, or Hong Kong songs, people will flock to see it.

In marking a preference for Hong Kong and Taiwanese performers over mainland performers the mainland audience is making an aesthetic/political choice. One element of this choice is that it is basically internationalistic in nature: it enacts, reinforces, and reproduces a connection to, and a yearning for, a world outside the boundaries of the mainland. This music -- especially as performed by singers from Taiwan and Hong Kong -- expresses and enacts a particular relationship between Chinese and Western cultures -- a relationship that more and more mainland Chinese (especially youth) want for themselves and for their country.

S (male graduate student in music): Since the Open Door the most important influence is from Hong Kong: it is close, it is Chinese, and its relation to the West is long and deep.

In summary, the Gangtai style is considered to be a successful example of a modern Chinese musical style: it is an international style (having come from Hong Kong and Taiwan) yet it is felt to be Chinese; it is modern in that it is assumed to participate in the latest international popular music trends yet it maintains a Chinese identity through the use of the Chinese language, through occasional use of Chinese folksong melodic traits and traditional instruments, and simply from the fact that it comes from two countries with essentially Chinese cultures. **It is thus seen as**

**having dealt successfully with the two demands of Chinese modernization: to be modern and to maintain "Chineseness."**

In the last few years the popularity of Gangtaiyue has come to be accepted by the scholarly community and the government. Although the situation that made it threatening to these groups in the early 1980s has not changed considerably, its popularity with the masses and its economic value to the music industry make it difficult to oppose and even more difficult to legitimately abolish. Also, the Deng era's emphasis on economic and technological modernization has resulted in a political atmosphere not conducive to the ideological reform of economically successful expressive forms. This is not to say that no work is being done (or that no one is worried) about the influence of Gangtaiyue on China's musical culture, but that such work (and worry) does not have the consistent and committed attention of those highest in the government.

What work is being done is part of a gradual rationalization of the popular music industry through (1) control over the structure, frequency and location of performances of popular music; and (2) professionalization of popular music performance and composition. Through the former the government is attempting to control the meaning of Gangtaiyue as well as that of the other forms of popular music in an effort to contain its "negative social effects." This attempt will be described and analyzed in Part Three of this chapter. It is through the latter that a more direct and active effort at controlling the potential negative influences of Gangtaiyue can be produced. By urging the gradual professionalization of popular music performance and composition the government and the scholarly community in music hope to either (1) raise the standards of indigenous composed Gangtai-style pieces in order to limit their negative influence through higher standards of

musical art and content that will draw the mainland audience away from the imported styles, or -- better yet -- (2) throw off the Gangtai style altogether through the creation of a more appropriate popular style.

During the mid-1980s it was thought that this "throwing off of the Gangtai style" was being achieved (Liang 1990:54). And this brings us to the second important style in contemporary Chinese popular music.

### **Xibeifeng (Northwest Wind)**

In the years 1986-1989 a new style emerged, became widely disseminated and popularized, and then began to decline. This style was hailed by many Chinese as an indigenous alternative to imported popular music forms. The emergence of this style was part of a general mid-80s cultural movement sometimes referred to as "seeking roots" (xungen) with parallel movements in music, literature and film. The "seeking roots" phenomenon was a manifestation of the contradictions inherent in Chinese culture in the 1980s, exacerbated by the fact that a new flood of "various foreign disciplines and new ways of thinking" was washing over the mainland (Yang 1989:33). In popular music, "seeking roots" was also influenced by a new wave of popular songs imported from Taiwan that reflected upon the nature of being Chinese in the modern world (Liang 1990:53)<sup>74</sup>.

At this time, generally thought of as a highly creative and active time for the arts in China (due in large part to a slacking off of political pressure towards the arts

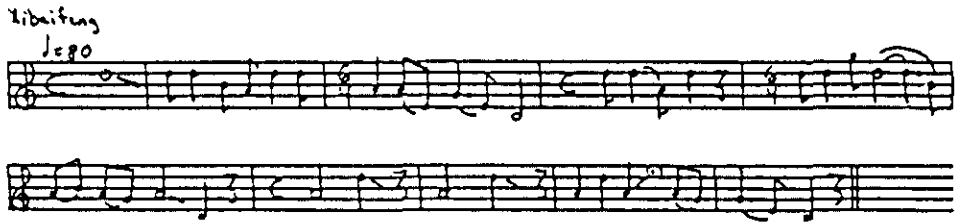
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<sup>74</sup> An example of this is Hou Dejian's "Descendants of the Dragon" (Long de chuanren).

on the part of the government), there was much experimentation taking place in the area of integrating popular music styles with more traditional folk or art music. The emergence of a "new wave" (xinchao) of composers in the world of "serious" music composition who did not shun popular music -- composers keenly aware of the contradictions and challenges of writing modern Chinese "art music" -- helped to "transform ... one-sided views concerning popular music" (Yang 1989:33) and give impetus to this experimentation.

Beginning in 1986, several new popular styles emerged, each based on the folk song style of a different region of the country. The one that achieved the most widespread popularity is known as Xibeifeng: generally translated as "Northwest Wind" or "Northwest Style." This music adapted folksong melodies of the "Northwest Area" (mainly the provinces of Gansu and Shaanxi) -- or imitations of these melodies -- to the dominant accompanimental style as defined by (1) the music from Hong Kong and Taiwan and (2) the mid-80s craze for American disco music. In other words Xibeifeng still referred strongly to the dominant popular practices in its own stylistic constitution. Nevertheless, there are within this style several important elements that serve to distinguish it from Gangtaiyue: melodic construction, instrumentation, lyrics, and vocal production. Each of these will be treated separately.

With regard to **melodic construction**, Xibeifeng is distinguishable from Gangtaiyue in its frequent use of leaps of intervals of a fourth or a fifth -- intervals seldom found in the smooth stepwise melodies of Gangtaiyue. As examples, here are two brief excerpts, first from a Gangtai piece and then from Xibeifeng. The differences in the intervals used (and therefore the shape of the melody) should be obvious.



With regard to instrumentation, the difference between Xibeifeng and Gangtaiyue is in the frequent use, in Xibeifeng, of traditional Chinese instruments. While these are occasionally found in Gangtaiyue they are a staple of Xibeifeng instrumentation. The favored instruments are the *erhu* (two-stringed fiddle) and the *suona* (cone-shaped reed), two important traditional instruments in the folk musics of northern China. The technique of instrumentation in Xibeifeng is based upon Gangtaiyue and American disco styles; the traditional instruments are used as soloists playing over the normal electronic and acoustic Western instruments

(electric guitars, drums, synthesizers) that form the base of the Gangtai and disco-defined popular music style. Often the traditional instruments are highlighted early in the piece (e.g., in the introduction before the vocalist enters) in order to "place" the piece as connected to "folk" culture. Though played within an ensemble of electronic popular music instruments and only used at certain points in the piece, the distinct timbre of these instruments marks these pieces as a style distinct from all other styles of popular music in China and adds an affective component that powerfully marks this popular music as Chinese.

U (male composer of Xibeifeng songs, 28): I put these Chinese instruments in my music because I want certain feelings there, and these instruments bring these feelings where others wouldn't.

The "feelings" alluded to here have to do with Chinese identity and its enactment, development, and reproduction through musical style. This issue will be dealt with in Part Four of this chapter. Let us continue with the other elements that distinguish Xibeifeng from Gangtaiyue, the first of which is **lyrical**.

Gangtaiyue lyrics most often deal with boy-girl relationships and the feelings of love gained and love lost. Here is an example:

### **Shifou (If)**

This time will I really leave you?

This time will I not again burst into tears?

This time will I turn my head as soon as I go,

Traveling down that never ending road?  
 This time will I really leave you?  
 Have the tears dried up and can no longer flow?  
 If the words I have spoken are all true,  
 My feelings sink into the lonely depths;  
 How many times will this struggle take place in my heart?  
 I only want to retrace my steps.  
 How many times must I hold the tears back,  
 and try to tell myself that I don't really care?<sup>75</sup>

Xibeifeng lyrics, by contrast, typically emphasize feelings of love and/or homesickness for one's rural home village rather than feelings engendered by a love relationship between two people. This is an expression of the "roots seeking" element of Xibeifeng.

**"My Beloved Hometown" (Wo relian de guxiang)**

My hometown isn't at all pretty,  
 Low thatched cottages and bitter water,  
 A small stream that often runs dry,  
 reluctant to leave the little village.

On a stretch of exhausted earth,

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<sup>75</sup> "Shifou" (If), words and music by Luo Dayou. My translation. Performed by Su Rui on Su Rui, Feidie changpian (UFO Records) UC-8302.

Harvesting our meager hopes,  
Planting year after year,  
Generation after generation.

Hometown, oh my hometown,  
Whose earth I can't kiss enough,  
Whose well water I can't love enough,  
I have to use dedication and sweat  
to turn you into fertile earth and good water,  
fertile earth and good water.

Barren earth that never lets us rest,  
Bitter well water that never goes dry,  
The men weary of bending their back for you,  
The women of furrowing their brows for you.

Thatched cottages that can't leave,  
Bitter well water supporting us,  
Planting year after year,  
Generation after generation.

Hometown, oh my hometown,  
Whose earth I can't kiss enough,  
Whose well water I can't love enough,  
I have to use dedication and sweat



to turn you into fertile earth and good water,  
 fertile earth and good water.<sup>76</sup>

In some of the early Xibeifeng pieces the "roots seeking" led not so much to a sense of love and longing for one's hometown village (which could be interpreted as a kind of patriotism) but to a sense of alienation, loss and dissatisfaction (which could be interpreted as a kind of social criticism). This piece, written and performed by a young male musician named Cui Jian, is considered one of the earliest Xibeifeng pieces. Couched in the context of the pain of a love relationship are lyrics frequently interpreted as a more general expression of disaffected youth.

**"Yi Wu Suo You" (I Have Nothing)**

I used to endlessly ask  
 When will you go with me?  
 But you always laughed at me.  
 I have nothing.

I want to give you my dreams  
 And there is my freedom  
 But you always laugh at me.  
 I have nothing.

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<sup>76</sup> Assorted artists. Huangtu gaopo (Hills of Yellow Earth). Tianjin: Tianjin Audio-Visual Company DF-1209, 1988. Vocals: Tian Zhen. Music: Xi Peidong. Lyrics: Xu Peidong and Guang Zheng. My translation.

Oh ... when will you go with me?

Oh ... when will you go with me?

The ground still passes under my feet;

The deep water still flows.

But you always laugh at me.

I have nothing.

Why haven't you laughed enough?

Why do I always have dreams?

It is hard to face you;

I forever have nothing.

Oh ... when will you go with me?

Oh ... when will you go with me?

The ground still passes under my feet;

The deep water still flows.

But you always laugh at me.

I have nothing.

I tell you, I have waited a long time.

I'll tell you my last request:

I want to grab your two hands;

So that you will go with me now.

Your hands are trembling

Your tears are flowing

Can it be that you are now telling me

That you love me?

I have nothing.<sup>77</sup>

There is a particular strategy of interpretation that recasts the setting of this piece from that of a boy talking to his girlfriend to that of a youthful generation talking to the nation as a whole. The Chinese title in fact contains no subject and can therefore be translated as "We Have Nothing." This move puts us in the realm of social criticism, a realm in which many of the Xibeifeng pieces (especially the earliest ones) were perceived as moving (Jin 1989:5).

The final element that distinguishes Xibeifeng from Gangtaiyue is the **vocal production**, which emphasizes a rough, course vocal delivery seen as imitative of the folk song styles of the Xibei (northwest) area. This production marks these pieces as connected to folksong style in general and to Xibei folksong style in particular, and represents the reemergence of a musical element that had been selected out as inappropriate -- in other words rejected -- by the forces guiding the development of popular music in mainland China.<sup>78</sup> This musical element when

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<sup>77</sup> My translation. Original words copyright Cui Jian, China Tourist Audio-Visual Publishers, 1989.

<sup>78</sup> These forces are dominated by a combination of influences from outside the country, namely from Hong Kong and Taiwan, and internally-generated, politically-motivated developments of governmental instigation.

combined with the characteristic accompaniments of Gangtaiyue and American disco created a music that, for many people, deeply touched issues of personal, local, regional and national identity -- issues intimately involved in the processes, practices, ideologies, and concepts of modernization.

### Xibeifeng as Modern Chinese Popular Music Style

I was told many times that the rise of Xibeifeng resulted from the need for an indigenous form of popular music. The rise of this indigenous style thus represented a significant break with the recent importation of popular music styles.

As one man emphasized:

Xibeifeng is Chinese pop music, the other forms are not -- they are foreign styles.

A young professional electric guitarist claimed that Xibeifeng

represents Chinese music. Xibeifeng speaks directly of the realities of life in mainland China.

Another man, a professional instrumentalist with a Peking Opera troupe, explained further:

The melodies of Xibefeng come from the people of China, the lyrics speak of the hardships of daily life in China, and the vocal style also is of the people.

These statements perform and refer to an affective response that, when brought to language, shows Xibefeng as touching issues of mainland Chinese identity. The fact that this linguistic form is chosen is a result of the contemporary historical situation: one in which musical (and cultural in general) colonization is part of everyday life. These statements perform a symbolic gesture that combines differentiation (mainland Chinese culture versus other Chinese cultures and versus non-Chinese cultures) and inclusion (the speaker is affirming his membership in the mainland Chinese community) and thus speak to issues of **personal and national identity**.

But in Beijing, Xibefeng arouses feelings of **local and regional identity** as well. In China there is a conscious differentiation between Northern culture and Southern culture. This distinction is most often the first to be made in any national cultural typology. The flowing melodies and smooth rhythms of Gangtaiyue fit easily into the parameters of the Southern musical aesthetic and thus mark this style as a Southern musical style. The use of frequent large leaps in the melodies of Xibefeng and the way these leaps are emphasized rhythmically marks this style as a kind of Northern music and presents it as a resource for the arousal of feelings of regional identity.

T (professional electric guitarist in Beijing; male, 25): The experience (ganshouxiang) of the two musics is not the same. Southern popular music has been influenced by southern traditional music; its experience is gentle (rouhe), delicate (xi). Northern music has been influenced mostly by the opera styles of the northern area. This style is rough and coarse (cu). It is very blunt. It is the style of the North. It is our style, so we want this style in our music. Xibeifeng gives us a popular music which embodies our style of life.

Further, Xibeifeng is seen as originating in Beijing itself, thus adding issues of **local identity**, as Beijing is the cultural capital of Northern China.

T: Most of the important work with Xibeifeng has been done here in Beijing. Now it is popular other places, but it is basically a Beijing style. It arises from life here.

In these two quotes there is obvious identification with and pride in a genre that is simultaneously (1) locally produced, (2) locally and regionally grounded, (3) nationally popular, and (4) modern. **Multiple issues of modern Chinese identity are thus (temporarily) solved through the emergence and popularity of a musical style.**

Another illustration of the use of Xibeifeng as a resource for use in issues of identity is the claim -- which I heard frequently -- that "Xibeifeng is very popular in Hong Kong." This claim effectively reverses the flow of musical and cultural influence and is an example of the use of a popular music style for the furthering

both of **nationalistic feelings and internationalistic aspirations**. This kind of statement was spoken with obvious pride, revealing not only nationalistic sentiment but also the respect accorded Hong Kong as "window to the world." Success with the Hong Kong audience, in other words, suggests international acceptance. In the era of the Open Door Policy international acceptance is a major goal and a chief source of national, regional, local, and personal pride.

Concepts of the "self" can only exist within a context of concepts of the "other": they are mutually defining and mutually influencing. The nationalistic gesture that surrounds and is performed by the emergence and popularization of Xibefeng simultaneously effects difference (Chinese music not other countries' musics) and inclusion (Chinese music as music-in-the-world).<sup>79</sup> Its combination of indigenous melodic and vocal elements (and lyrics specifically describing local life) and accompanimental styles that refer to other Chinese (Gangtaiyue) and non-Chinese (disco) musical traits marks this as an indigenous music that enacts and reproduces -- with an obvious "Chinese" stamp -- the parameters seen as constitutive of the dominant international popular music style. The message, vis-a-vis modernization, is simple but powerful: we are us (i.e., different from you) but we can do what you do (i.e., we deserve equal status). **The popularization of Xibefeng was a celebration of a modern China.**

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<sup>79</sup> We can see that this is an acting out of the necessary elements needed to join the Western-dominated and controlled international political and economic situation: first, define yourselves as unified and as distinct from all others; second, join the others. The former is necessary for self-definition and demands the cultivation of difference; the latter is necessary for a variety of reasons (self-definition, self-esteem, and political and economic survival) and demands the adoption of certain parameters imposed from without.

### The Fall of Xibefeng

By 1989 Gangtaiyue had begun to reassert its position of dominance over Xibefeng and other popular music styles. Reconstructing the reasons for its demise is a difficult task, especially for one who does not share the historian's faith in causality and historical determinism. I will list what I think are two main elements in this development, taken mostly from my discussions with Chinese intellectuals and workers.

1. The government felt threatened by the wave of Xibefeng popularity and criticized it:

C (retired government worker): In 1987, I think, the government began to criticize Xibefeng as 'not conducive to modernization'. They of course are not comfortable with popular music of any kind.

T.B.: But many people saw this style as China's answer to imported styles.

C: The government did not like it. They saw this style not as Chinese but as feudal.

Here the government's response, rather than focusing on the Chineseness of the melodic and vocal production, instead attacked Xibefeng style as a reemergence of a residual element of feudal folkstyle -- a reemergence that they



saw as antithetical to modernization. This kind of criticism viewed Xibefeng's tendency to express a longing for the rural homeland as politically regressive -- as lacking a "modern feeling for our crisis and our responsibility toward it" (Duan 1989:30).

In addition, the government, in its renewed efforts (following the student unrest of late 1986) at ideological work through combatting "bourgeois liberalization," viewed all popular music styles as suspect -- and a style that sometimes embodied social criticism through its lyrical content as especially so.<sup>80</sup>

In short, the "identity" that Xibefeng embodied was not the one the government wanted for China. A return to rough folk vocal delivery is not "finding roots," it is a reversion to a pre-modern style; lyrics that idealize the hardships of rural life do not serve the demands of modernization and progressive thinking; and expressions of discontent with modern life in China -- couched within a musical style that powerfully references popular musics from capitalist democracies -- threaten social order and unity with ideas of bourgeois liberalization (and therefore also do not serve the demands of modernization).

2. Over-commercialization and a tendency toward imitation stalled its development and started its demise.

Many intellectuals (both privately and in published articles) cited this reason as a main one for Xibefeng's decline in popularity by 1989.

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<sup>80</sup> See Zhao 1987 for an English translation of a speech by then Premier Zhao Ziyang, in which the last section (especially pp. 37-47) deal with the urgency of combatting bourgeois liberalization, with specific references to (1) student unrest and (2) artists. Also see CR 36/5 (5/87):24-27 for an editorial concerning bourgeois liberalization and its role in the student turmoil.

G (music researcher): Everyone jumped on the bandwagon. The first composers were creating something new; the others were simply imitators. The first composers were committed, sincere in their efforts; the followers were just chasing money.

... Xibefeng did not move toward a high and deep level of development; instead, a lot of imitations appeared, almost all of which lacked the earthy flavor and charm of the originals (Liang 1990:54).

Embedded in these comments are criticisms not only of Xibefeng's practitioners but also of the tendency toward commercialization (and its destruction of expressive forms) which is a danger of economic modernization and which is seen as (1) endemic to capitalist societies, (2) part of bourgeois liberalization, and (3) especially manifested in Western (and Western-influenced) popular music styles.

For these reasons (and undoubtedly for others as well) Xibefeng has been declining in popularity over the past several years. It is still popular with a small segment of the audience, and many song troupes employ one singer who specializes in Xibefeng (as opposed to 3 or more who specialize in Gangtaiyue). But the continued existence and limited popularity of Xibefeng rests not on its disco and Gangtaiyue inspired past but on its close relationship to the third style of popular music -- to which we now turn.

### **Yaogun yinyue (Rock and Roll Music)**

Another style emerged simultaneously with Xibefeng and was confused with Xibefeng for several years. In the last two or three years, however, as Xibefeng has declined, this other style has become recognized as distinct from Xibefeng. It is called yaogun yinyue, which is a translation into Chinese of the English "rock and roll music."

This form represents a much more direct challenge to the dominant musical parameters of Hong Kong/Taiwan style. There are two patterns to the practice of this form. Both have strongly oppositional elements, musically and politically. One involves clandestine weekly yaogun parties held in restaurants or at hotels, with the location changing weekly, and advertizing achieved mainly by word of mouth. The music, presented live, features local bands presenting covers of songs by Western rock bands (e.g., Led Zeppelin) and original material in the same style. These parties are occasionally closed down by the authorities.

V (male worker, early 20s): We go to these concerts often.

T.B.: Could you get into trouble?

V: Maybe. The government doesn't recognize these bands or this music. They think it is dangerous -- bourgeois.

T.B. Do you think it is dangerous?

W (fellow worker, male, early 20s): No. It is not dangerous. We just like it. It makes us move. It is loud and raucous, and that is how we feel.

One can understand the ruling regime's suspicion of a music that makes young people feel "loud and raucous." Because of the constant need to move the location of these parties in order to keep them from being closed (and the fact that the songs that these bands cover are not available in music stores but must be copied personally from tapes brought into the country by students or tourists) this practice has remained a limited, "underground" one. The parties draw about 100 people each week.

The second pattern of practice for yaogun yinyue revolves around the music of one particular composer/performer who was, in his words, "mistaken for a Xibeifeng performer."<sup>81</sup> His name is Cui Jian and he is the most widely known performer of Yaogunyue.

### Cui Jian, Yaogunyue, and the politics of genre

Cui Jian lives in Beijing and was trained "since the age of fourteen" as a Western classical trumpet player. He formerly made his living playing with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra. He started writing Rock and Roll songs "in 1986" and first appeared as a popular music performer on television later that same year,

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<sup>81</sup> The quotes attributed to Cui Jian in this section were taken from an interview with him in Beijing on 2/25/90.

singing "Yi wu suo you" (see lyrics above) at the National Symposium of Popular Songs. This performance "caused a sensation. ... music theorists and critics could not stop talking about it" (Chen 1988:30). In the summer of 1989 Cui Jian released an album of completely original material.<sup>82</sup> It is his name that is on the lips of the people of Beijing when they speak of Chinese Rock and Roll. In the following section I will discuss Cui Jian's music, its meaning to different groups of people, and how this meaning is manifested in social practice.

Stylistically, Cui Jian's music presents the following characteristics: pinched, rough vocal style; a foregrounding of rhythmic elements, both in the accompaniment (which borrows heavily from Western rock music) and in the melody; a melodic construction which is taken to be closely related to northern folk song melodic construction; lyrics often interpreted as politically oppositional in content; and occasional use of traditional Chinese instruments such as the suona, the dizi (a transverse flute made of bamboo), and the guzheng (a zither).

We can see that, given these features, Cui Jian's music shares several stylistic characteristics with Xibefeng. And in fact many Chinese associate Cui Jian's music with Xibefeng: as the previous section described, I was repeatedly told that the piece "Yi wu suo you" (I Have Nothing) was the first Xibefeng piece; and several professional popular music performers who, when pressed, admitted of differences between Yaogun and Xibefeng, consistently conflated these two styles during informal conversation.

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<sup>82</sup> Xin changzheng lushang de yaogun yinyue (Rock and Roll on the New Long March). Beijing: Zhongguo luyou shengxiang chubanshe (China Tourism Audio-Visual Publishers) BJZ 01, 1989.

Cui Jian himself, however, strongly denied this association. He told me that any similarity between his music and Xibefeng was simply "coincidence" and described his music as pure "Yaogun yinyue," or Rock `n Roll.

We will see that these **differences in genre definition are actually enactments of ideological commitment: social acts that perform, define, and distinguish identities**. They are acts of placement: of the music within a larger universe of music and of the self within the field of social relations. The creation of these genre boundaries refers Xibefeng and Yaogunyue both to each other and to the dominant Gangtaiyue in ways that serve to produce or reproduce particular (musical and social) relationships. These vary according to the ideological needs of the creator.

For example, viewing Yaogunyue as akin to Xibefeng presents both as essentially indigenous styles and stresses the internal generation of both styles as a reaction to a dominant style imported from outside the country. Genre boundaries are in this case drawn in order to establish a difference between mainland and foreign styles and to serve the needs of national/ethnic identity (e.g., independence, modernization, national/ethnic pride).

Some people, however, including Cui Jian himself, stress the differences between Yaogunyue and Xibefeng. This move allies Xibefeng with Gangtaiyue and isolates Yaogunyue as marginal. In this case genres are aligned in order to differentiate one marginal style from two styles seen as representing mainstream popular entertainment music. This alignment especially serves the needs of an ideology in opposition to the mainstream music industry.

X (young male university student): Yaogunyue and Xibefeng are different. Xibefeng has become a kind of fad in popular music. It was good when it started, but now it has been swallowed up in commercialism. It is now a commercial kind of music, like Gangtaiyue. Yaogunyue is different. It is not commercial.

Yaogunyue has emerged as a marginal style, marked as different by virtue of its oppositional possibilities (both stylistically and lyrically). And it is in this margin -- where it practices its expressive difference -- that Yaogunyue finds its political power.

#### Yaogun yinyue as Political Opposition

Cui Jian's audience is made up mainly of intellectuals and young male workers. Intellectuals, responding to the lyrical content, see this music as a form of thinly-veiled political criticism -- criticism of life in modern China in general and of the current government and its policies in particular. Cui Jian, for his part, downplays the political connotations in his music.

I have no interest in politics. Perhaps my music can be seen as protest music ... but culture is a large ocean upon which politics is but a small boat. I do not want to limit myself to the boat -- the ocean is so vast.

The fact that Cui Jian de-emphasizes the importance of the socially or politically critical lyrics in his pieces is irrelevant to the intellectuals in his audience.

A (former Peking Opera worker, early 40s): He does not have to say anything... (she points to a copy of Cui Jian's cassette) ... it is all in there. Just listen to it and you will see.

For the workers in Cui Jian's audience the attraction stems not only from its oppositional lyric content, but also -- and perhaps mainly -- from its aggressive sound. For many of them the figure of Cui Jian has taken on heroic proportions: he is a young male, he speaks out boldly, he appears unafraid of governmental suppression, and his style is forthright, not overly sophisticated, and uncompromising. Here is a translation of the lyrics of another of his songs:

**"Cong tou zai lai" (Start Over Again)**

My feet touch the earth, my head touches the sky,

I pretend that I am the only one in the world.

I press myself tightly against the wall,

I pretend that on these shoulders there is no head.

Oh, oh, oh, .....

I'm not willing to leave, I'm not willing to be,

I'm not willing to live too honestly .

I would like to leave, I would like to be,



I want, after I die, to start all over again.

The clouds from the cigarettes, the ocean of wine,

Pour into my empty heart.

I get better and better at talking nonsense,

I get better and better at remaining silent.

I get better and better at pretending that

I know nothing.

Oh, oh, oh, .....

It's difficult to leave, it's difficult to be,

It's difficult to live too honestly .

I would like to leave, I would like to be,

I want, after I die, to start all over again.

Looking all around, looking at everyone,

Looking at myself at the start of the golden road,<sup>83</sup>

I'm not aware of fear, I'm not aware of shame,

I'm also not aware of whether I want to know.

Oh, oh, oh, .....<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The "golden road" is an allusion to socialism.

<sup>84</sup> My translation. Original words copyright Cui Jian, China Tourist Audio-Visual Publishers, 1989.

Although there is certainly room for individual interpretation of these lyrics (and other translations might differ at certain points), it is not difficult to understand how some people would see them as socially and politically critical. An obvious question then poses itself: if Cui Jian's music is interpreted as politically oppositional, why is his music allowed? Tolerance of dissent traditionally has not been one of the features of Chinese government and is generally viewed by the present regime as a threat to their modernization programs and to the legitimacy of their rule. So why is Cui Jian's cassette distributed? Why has he not been silenced, jailed, or worse? Why does the government put up with him?

The answers to these questions involve analysis of the conditions in the dialectic between economics and politics -- a dialectic the contradictions within which determine government policy and that have contributed heavily to the unstable character of life in China since the late 1970s.

Cui Jian's music is very much liked by a large number of people. The government is certainly concerned over the dissemination and popularity of this music. But silencing one so well-known is not easy, especially at a time when the government is trying to regain a semblance of trust in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident. Viewed from this angle, the government's lack of credibility with the population acts as a counterweight to its institutionalized dominance vis-a-vis cultural industries. It is afraid of any backlash that might result from dealing harshly with Cui Jian, and so its tolerance (or lack of movement) is greater than it might be under different conditions.

Also, the government, which is in financial difficulty, benefits from Cui Jian's popularity (for example, he raised over a million Chinese dollars this past February in a benefit concert given in the name of the Asian Games). So in this

sense, Cui Jian's popularity in an age of economic stress gives him a kind of power he might not otherwise have if (1) he were not so popular or (2) the economic conditions of the country were not in crisis.

In short, although Cui Jian must be careful with regard to direct challenges to the current regime, his fame has created a certain amount of space within which he can work and in which he has a certain amount of power. In the economic and political conditions of the late 1980s and early 1990s this power mitigates (but does not completely eliminate) government movement against his work. The existence of his space is in constant danger and its size is in constant negotiation. There exists a kind of mutual control --dynamic, fluid, tense, and unstable.

#### Yaogunyue: Ideology and Musical Style

Cui Jian told me that he thought his album sounded overly produced -- and that he would like his next recording to be of a live performance:

For these pieces, there was too much work in the studio, too much adding of too many things. The sound is too produced, too clean. Live recordings are more honest. That is what I want to do next time.

This resistance to an over-produced sound is an enactment of what Cui Jian sees as a Rock and Roll ideology (yaogun siwei):

My way of thinking is the same as that of Rock and Roll in the West. It is the Rock and Roll way of thinking.

This ideology (as interpreted and practiced by Cui Jian) defines and places itself partially through opposition to the mainstream music industry: an opposition that occurs on at least three fronts concerning three tendencies within the mainstream music industry: (1) the professionalization (through specialization) of music; (2) the view of music as industrialized product -- the mechanization of expressive sound, in which the record or tape is the final goal and the ultimate product rather than the live concert (Mumford 1973, Frith 1987:56); and (3) the function of popular music as light entertainment, appropriating and incorporating any emergent styles or performers into its program.<sup>85</sup>

Regarding the **professionalization** of music through specialization, Cui Jian resists the mainstream music industry's tendency towards a division of labor that separates performers, composers, lyricists, and producers.

F (professional Peking Opera musician, male, early 40s): Cui Jian is the only one in China who writes his own material: he writes the music, he writes the words, he performs it. No one else does that.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> It may certainly be argued that this ideology is no longer operative within the Rock and Roll music of the West. Whether or not this is the case is irrelevant to my program. It is Cui Jian's interpretation and practice of this ideology which guides his work. For him it is real -- and powerful.

<sup>86</sup> The truth of this statement, regarding Cui Jian's being the only performer to write his own music and lyrics, is irrelevant here. The point is to notice the statement as an establishing of "difference" (Bourdieu 1984) -- of granting Cui Jian a distinction which separates him from others.

The professionalization and specialization within the popular music industry is a means by which the ruling regime hopes to control the music that the industry produces. By encouraging the involvement of conservatory-trained composers and performers the regime hopes to "raise the quality" of this music.<sup>87</sup> More important, perhaps, would be the government's enhanced capabilities of controlling this music through the institutionalization of its production: if all of the performers and composers were conservatory trained and worked in government-sanctioned and licensed art troupes, the government's ability to control the quality, the production, and dissemination of this music would be enhanced.

Cui Jian is not officially recognized by the government. He does not work in an art troupe. He writes his own music, words, and arrangements, and performs them himself. In short, he works outside the limits of political legitimation. This gives him certain freedoms, but at the cost of having to constantly negotiate his artistic existence.

T (professional popular music instrumentalist, male, 25): The government does not recognize Cui Jian and his band ...(laughs) But they do not want recognition. They do not want to have to do what the government says. So it is very hard for him. He has to be very careful. Sometimes he cannot perform for a while. But he doesn't

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<sup>87</sup> Take, for example, the National Popular Music Conference held in November of 1987, at which the "legitimate existence" of popular music "was not the main interest. Rather, the interest was in what kind of development [popular music] should have." There was an appeal for "attention to be paid to the development of qualified personnel, in order to raise the quality" of the music and the performers in the popular music troupes (*Zhongguo Yinyue Nianjian* 1988:380-1).

want to play the government's game. He says it is better to struggle and have some freedoms.

Cui Jian's rejection of the government's "game" is an artistic/political move that legitimates itself by reference to a "Rock and Roll ideology." This reference allows him to oppose governmental programs concerning professionalization and institutionalization of popular music and musicians without having to present himself as blatantly anti-government. He can describe his actions as artistic rather than political (this is simply the way Rock and Roll artists do things). For his audience, of course, this way of doing things is blatantly (and gloriously) anti-government.

With regard to the **industrialization** of popular music, Cui Jian's opposition comes in the form of a growing preference for live rather than studio-produced sounds. As previously suggested, this movement has taken place after the release of his album and is a result of reflections on the album. Cui Jian of course relies on the mass media industry for recordings and their dissemination. And the mass media industry is one of the chief means through which the government attempts to control popular music content, production, and dissemination. Cui Jian attempts to evade the government's programs while still using the mass media (and its reach) by (1) using private studios instead of government-run studios; (2) bringing producers in from other countries<sup>88</sup>; and (3) trying to move his sound so that it will not sound so "produced" next time. The first two are means by which Cui Jian can minimize governmental intervention in his work; the last performs the "rock and roll

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<sup>88</sup> He told me that his next album would hopefully be produced and released by a company from Hong Kong.

ideology" by rejecting the studio-manipulated sound construction typical of other popular styles in favor of the more "honest" sound that would result from a recording of a live performance.

The third mainstream tendency that Cui Jian resists is that of defining popular musics as a kind of **light entertainment**. This again references Cui Jian's notion of Rock and Roll ideology and helps to explain the genre boundaries he draws between Yaogunyue on the one hand and Xibeifeng/Gangtaiyue on the other. Rock and Roll is seen as a kind of self-expressive music with a deep "consciousness" (yishi) and a deep "feelingful sensitivity" (ganjue) delivered in a highly vernacularized style (Jin 1988:17). This kind of music will not shy away from direct criticism of social and/or political conditions and therefore is held to be independent of (and oppositional to) mainstream institutionalized popular music insofar as the latter is presented as part of an industry whose purpose is the dissemination of "light entertainment."<sup>89</sup>

Cui Jian's appropriation of "Rock and Roll ideology" takes this ideology and lifts it out of its Western context. Further, this appropriation expands the meaning of Rock and Roll ideology by making it into a transnational ideology in that it is not restricted to a particular culture or part of the world (the West). Instead it is tied to a particular musical genre (Rock and Roll). This ties Cui Jian to an (imagined) international community and reveals Yaogunyue as an alternative both to traditional Chinese music and to Gangtaiyue. In Yaogunyue the ideological dictates of Rock

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<sup>89</sup> The nature of "light entertainment," its place within the Chinese sociopolitical order, and its relationship to oppositional musics such as Yaogunyue will be discussed later in this chapter.

and Roll become embodied within the music itself: the musical style is the objectification of the ideology.

Since June 1989 the government has become increasingly bold in its dealings with Cui Jian. Information is difficult to secure and verify, but rumors are flying thick and fast about government attempts to silence him without completely alienating his audience. Several of his concerts have been canceled (e.g., see NYT 11/24/90:6). I am told that he has been allowed to perform but not to advertise his performances. Some say he may go to Taiwan. An anecdote related to me by a Beijing friend who works in the music industry will help illustrate the sometimes subtle means by which Cui Jian's voice has been limited.

I was working on contracting Cui Jian for a national conference of entrepreneurs which took place this October (1989). This was just after his album had been released, and it was selling out in stores from Beijing to Hong Kong. Later on, I got a call from CCTV (the government-owned central television service). They said that they were very interested in giving extensive coverage through national television broadcasts to the conference, which would be good for those entrepreneurs taking part, and for commercial interests in China in general. But they said they would not cover the conference if Cui Jian performed there. ... Cui Jian did not perform at this conference.



If we take the political and economic elements of the relationship between Cui Jian and the regime as contradictions in dialectical relationship, it appears that - beginning in 1987 and accelerating in 1989 --the political element of this relationship began to dominate the economic element. In other words, it appears that the emergence and strengthening of Cui Jian and his music as symbols giving strength to a rebellious youth and an oppositional educated class became a more important element in the phenomenon of Cui Jian than did the possible economic benefits to the music industry from sales of his recordings and income from his live performances. Further, it appears that the contradiction between the political thought around (and in) the music of Cui Jian and the political thought of the regime has become, in the eyes of the regime, the central contradiction vis-a-vis this performer and therefore (in the interests of maintaining power) the one that must be addressed.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> As of June 1992, Cui Jian is still not allowed to give major performances to large audiences. His small scale performances (especially in and around the Beijing international hotels) are tolerated, as are his occasional trips to Hong Kong for audio and video recording. His videos have become staples for MTV Asia (Billboard 5/2/92). Needless to say, they are not shown in mainland China. His second album, entitled Solution (Jiejue) and released in 1991, was produced by an American, contained one live cut and was overall much less studio produced and therefore rougher in sound than the previous effort.

**PART THREE**  
**MUSIC AS RHETORIC**

## **Selected Issues**

In the previous sections I outlined the emergence and development of three styles of popular music found in urban mainland China and related each to issues particularly well illustrated by these styles. In this section I will address some additional issues that are more clearly seen as involving all three styles simultaneously. These issues include the political, didactic, and entertainment roles of music, the meaning of these roles for different groups of people, and the ways in which these meanings are performed and/or struggled over.

## **Performance as Argument**

The Chinese government, through its influence over the structure of popular music presentations, is attempting to control the way this music is experienced by -- and therefore its meaning for -- the music audience. Through symbolic juxtaposition of various musical styles within the context of a musical event, and through the routinization (and therefore the ritualization) of this event, an argument is presented concerning the place of this music in Chinese society and in the personal lives of the audience.

Through the structure of the musical presentation, a symbolic argument is constructed and presented as to what popular music should be and how it should be experienced. The argument itself entails combining various expressive forms into one entertainment context -- a context that has been set up (and ritualized through

routinization) to be interpreted and experienced a certain way. By so doing, an "intrinsic relationship" among the various expressive forms presented and between the expressive forms and the context is communicated to the audience. This argument, if accepted by the audience, produces profound effects upon the way in which they will interpret the event.<sup>91</sup> The government's goal -- a goal born of both Confucian and Marxist didacticism -- is to produce a communality vis-a-vis the role, cultural meanings, and power of popular music styles. This communality, which ultimately serves the purpose of the political legitimacy needs of the governing regime (and thereby aids their drive toward modernization), can be achieved without consensus regarding specific musical meanings to individuals (Kertzer 1988:67-69). It is achieved via (1) the physical relationships among the audience members, between the audience and the symbols, and among the symbols themselves; and (2) the ritualization of the event itself: the continual repetition of its structure and its context.

As an example, I will deconstruct a performance of popular music by a local professional music and dance troupe: the Central Song and Dance Troupe of Beijing. This type of performance occurs regularly in Beijing (several per week). Thus it can be considered part of the normal terrain of musical events in this city -- an accepted part of Beijing musical life. But in view of China's current cultural crisis and the leadership's ambivalence toward popular music, the question becomes How is this particular type of performance -- and the music contained within it -- legitimated? That is, given the ambivalent attitude on the part of the regime towards popular music, and given that popular music performances via this kind of structure

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<sup>91</sup> For a lucid explication of the semiotics of expressive events as a kind of cultural communication system, see Leach 1976.

are common in contemporary Beijing, how are the potentially negative effects of this music managed? How does the government try to control the context, reception, and therefore the meaning of this music vis-a-vis the audience? Is there "noise" in this process, and if so, where does it come from?<sup>92</sup>

### Situation and the Encoding of Meaning

The concert I attended took place in December 1989 at Xidan Theatre (just west of Tiananmen Square) in central Beijing. The concert was advertised as an evening of "popular and folk songs and dances featuring the latest popular songs, and comedy." Advertisements on placards outside the theatre and in the newspaper placed the concert within a particular tradition of professional popular music performance in which singers (all with the same backup band) alternated with dance groups and comedy duos (xiangsheng), providing a kind of variety-show atmosphere of rotating entertainment forms. The advertisements also listed the performers, the backup band, the emcee, the date and time of performance, and the ticket price.

All of this information is of course of practical value for anyone interested in attending such an event; but it does something else, too: it sets up a context for interpretation for the event itself. It says that this will not be a concert of music only -- it will include dance and comedy; that it will be held in a cinema theatre that holds about 500-700 people -- not in a large outside stadium or in a big ballroom

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<sup>92</sup> The concept of noise as used here comes from the work of Jacques Attali. See Attali 1985.

with a large dance floor; and that it will be a concert produced by a professional song and dance troupe featuring performers singing covers of popular tunes. In addition, if one was familiar with the names of the singers performing in this concert, one would also know ahead of time what musical styles were to be performed; but even without such knowledge the other items of information would set up certain expectations as to musical style.

In this case the above items contexted this performance by suggesting certain facts about the performance situation:

1. the audience will most likely be multi-generational. The inclusion of folk songs, dance groups and comedy teams suggests this, as the audience for these forms -- unlike the audience for "the latest popular songs" -- does not come mainly from youth (and in the case of folk songs and dances does not generally include youth);

2. the performance location -- in a cinema usually used for showing films -- suggests that the audience will sit in even rows facing the stage. There is no extra space for people to stand up, dance, or in general move around. A certain physical passivity is therefore expected.;

3. the accompanying music will be provided live (not, as is sometimes the case, via tape). Furthermore the same band will accompany each singer; and

4. the singers will sing "covers" -- that is, the music will be the professional singers' versions of popular or folk songs. Some of these performers are locally known, having established a reputation as singers and/or having had recordings published; they do not, however, write the songs they sing.β

### Rhetorical Argument Through Symbolic Juxtaposition

Of the nine songs on the program for that night, three were in Gangtai style. Among the other styles of song represented in this program, one was an American popular song (sung in English) that fit quite easily into Gangtai stylistic parameters; two were traditional folksongs; one was Xibeifeng; and two were Yaogunyue (Rock and Roll). The songs on the program formed a frame for the evening's entertainment into which were interspersed dances and comedy routines. Each singer sang one or two songs then left the stage.<sup>93</sup> Each singer also seemed to specialize in a particular style: one female singer sang two love ballads from Taiwan; the next sang two rather upbeat, dance-like tunes, one of which was in English; another sang two traditional Chinese folksongs. The lone male singer sang two songs: the first was Xibeifeng; the second was Yaogunyue.

From this distribution we can see that an attempt was made to represent -- fairly equally -- four musical styles: Gangtaiyue, Xibeifeng, Folksong (minge), and Yaogunyue. Nevertheless the dominance of the Gangtai style since the early 1980s (and the fact that it was the first popular music style to emerge as a result of the Open Door Policy) has meant (as discussed above) that the legitimization of other styles has had to take place through a lens that sees Gangtai as the norm by which all other popular styles are measured. The audience for Gangtaiyue -- though centered in the younger generation -- is not strictly limited to that generation. This helps in its legitimization, as it does not divide the audience: its "taste group" is fairly

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<sup>93</sup> A similar description of a popular music concert, with slight variations, is given in an article by Paul Friedlander that focuses on the relationship between China's musical "productive forces" (specifically, the mass media and studio technology) and the recent proliferation of Rock and Roll (Friedlander 1990:70).

broad. The government does not want to divide the popular culture audience by taste groups and especially not by generations: unity of mass audience is the goal; autonomous groups breed divisiveness and dissent.

One important feature that tended to lend a unity to the overall style of the program was the use of one accompanying band for all of the songs on the program. This band consisted of six young professional performers (all male) collectively known as the Xiandai ren yuedui (The Modern Man Band) playing on instruments typical of Western popular bands: electric guitars, keyboards, and drums.<sup>94</sup>

The use of one band to accompany all of the songs on the program lent a consistency of accompanimental style that tended to minimize what might otherwise have been more obvious stylistic differences if, say, prerecorded tapes had been used or if each singer had had his or her own band for accompaniment. Having the same musicians accompany each piece provided a kind of bridge between differing styles -- a bridge without which the concert would have had a greater variety of stylistic presentation. This sameness of accompaniment worked to unite the various styles so that they could be seen as **variants of a single genre** rather than different, perhaps competing, genres -- with different, perhaps oppositional, audiences. The message is simple: **a unity of musical style mirrors (and helps create) the desired unity of audience**. If both can be achieved the control of each is made easier and the cultural programs that the government sees as a necessary part of the modernization of China are more easily implemented.

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<sup>94</sup> Although recordings (and some performances) of Chinese popular musics occasionally incorporate traditional Chinese instruments into the accompanimental arrangements, there was no such use of traditional instruments in this event. A member of the band told me that the reason traditional instruments are not included in the Xiandai ren Band is economic.



### Rupture: the Limits of Hegemony

In this concert, however, the Xibeifeng piece, the Yaogun pieces, and the traditional folksongs proved disruptive to the structure of the event and to the government's goal of audience unity. Incorporation of these styles into the dominant Gangtai aesthetic practices has been relatively unsuccessful in that they have not taken a place alongside the Gangtai style as broadly-based, legitimated popular musics accepted by a unified mass audience. In fact, incorporating these styles into a popular music concert intended for a unified mass audience in this instance did not strengthen but instead threatened the unity of that audience. For example, many people who like the smooth vocals of Gangtai style do not like the "howling and screaming" (dahan dajiao) vocal production typical of Xibeifeng. So in this particular concert, which featured only one Xibeifeng piece, its inclusion in the program worked against the goal of a unified, multigenerational audience by separating out a small segment of the audience as an autonomous "taste group" -- a group consisting of about 20 young males who identified themselves and further "violated" the unity of the audience by yelling "Hao!" ("good!" or "Yea!") for a few seconds at the close of the piece. This exuberant show of appreciation had not greeted the Gangtaiyue performances. During the outburst, many in the audience looked disapprovingly at this group of young men and there was a general feeling of discomfort throughout the audience for a few seconds before the beginning of the next piece.

The inclusion of a Xibeifeng piece in this program is due both to its popularity with a certain audience and to the power it wields as an indigenous form --affectively vis-a-vis issues of identity and politically vis-a-vis the government's

concern that a certain percentage of works on a program be "native" works -- but ultimately it proved subversive to governmental strategies, for the reaction to it on the part of its fans worked against audience unity.

Another rupture of unity came with the performance of (and the audience response to) two traditional folksongs. There are two aspects of this rupture. Both have to do with contradictions inherent in modernization. The first concerns vocal style. Folksong vocal style in China is characterized by a pinched, nasal tone, and frequently uses wide vibrato --qualities quite different from those of Gangtaiyue (open throat, chest voice, limited vibrato). To some in the audience this pinched quality is simply ugly. Its contrast to the smoothness of Gangtai style is striking. Its inclusion in the program references the government's goals concerning the definition of the "popular," among which is that this definition include those elements of past indigenous expressive practice that embody the "national character" -- the Chinese "essence." Of course, these practices must be modernized (for the "national character" must be a modern one) and in the course of modernizing the folksongs and folksingers the government has professionalized and institutionalized them, as well: the singers who perform folksongs on the stage and through other mass media are in general professionally trained at music conservatories. Thus modernization takes place through selection (only certain folksongs are modernized); through incorporating folksong study and folksinging training into the professional world of the music conservatory (thus controlling its production and direction); and through an attempt to incorporate folksongs and folksinging into a developing, Gangtaiyue-dominated mass popular music style

(thus assuring that this mass style includes elements adopted -- through government-controlled mediation -- from the music of "the folk").<sup>95</sup>

The second element of these folksong performances that ruptured the attempted unifying structure of the event as a whole was their being accompanied by the same electric popular music instruments that accompanied all of the other songs on the program --i.e., an attempt at stylistic unification.

Ultimately the inclusion of folksongs within the context of a popular music-dominated performance -- a political necessity linked to the didactic philosophy of the regime and its implications for music --alienated rather than united the audience. The performer of these pieces, although musically quite competent (obviously well-trained) was not warmly received by the audience. There was nothing especially different about the accompaniment -- it was merely an electric version of the standard accompaniments to pieces that I had heard many times over the radio. Nevertheless I noticed a lot of people looking bored, fidgeting, or appearing disgusted, and the applause following her performances was the least enthusiastic of the night.<sup>96</sup> I spoke with several younger members of the audience (i.e., students or

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<sup>95</sup> The regime's treatment of folksongs -- in this case, the insertion of modernized folksongs into the context of a popular music concert -- reflects their co-optation of folksong traditions. In other words, they see themselves as having taken over the guardianship of these traditions. This is illustrative of the regime's attitude toward China's cultural traditions as a whole. It is an attitude we saw revealed in Chapter One with regard to Peking Opera, and we will see it again in Chapter Three with regard to instrumental "serious music."

<sup>96</sup> Although there are dangers to inferring a level of enjoyment from a level of applause from a Chinese audience -- the applause seems mostly polite as opposed to enthusiastic, even at obviously well-received traditional or classical concerts -- I believe that, when combined with the other forms of overt expression which I have mentioned, my understanding of the applause as indicative of relative levels of personal enjoyment is correct. In other words, although I do not believe that the merely light applause to the Gangtai pieces meant that they were not appreciated (perhaps deeply), the strong reactions to the Yaogun pieces definitely revealed

workers in their late teens or early 20s) immediately following the concert; they said that they did not appreciate having to sit through these pieces.

People didn't go there to hear this kind of piece. We are tired of being made to listen to folksongs. We went to hear the music we like: popular songs from Taiwan -- not tired old songs about the glories of rural life.

Even some of those who generally like folksongs didn't appreciate that it was injected into this kind of performance situation. One middle-aged man said:

This kind of piece doesn't sound good in this setting. They ruin it by playing it with electric instruments. Why do they do that? It doesn't sound good that way. If they want to sing folksongs, they should do it right.

In this case the political and didactic directive to include "traditional" folksongs with each performance of popular music worked against the kind of stylistic cohesion that otherwise might have been achieved. Of course, it is considered in the interests of the State to foster love of traditional folksongs among the people, so it is understandable why such a political directive exists. What becomes apparent, however, is that the movement toward one political goal (the encouragement of this audience's acceptance of traditional folksong as popular

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strong affective meanings, and the lack of applause coupled with the bored looks during the folksongs signaled lack of appreciation.

music) subverted the movement toward another (stylistic -- and therefore audience - - cohesion). This contradiction ruptured the structure of the event and momentarily laid bare the instrumental/didactic goals of the government and the contradictions between this and the audience's desire for entertainment.<sup>97</sup>

**The strongest ruptures in this musical event, however, occurred with the two performances of Yaogunyue.** The first opened the concert.

This piece was performed by the backup band without any of the professional singers and was obviously intended to serve as an introduction: it was after this piece that the emcee emerged and declared the start of the concert. This introductory number was an uptempo piece based on a four-chord progression (VI-III-v-i, or B-flat, F, a, d) repeated over and over for the entire piece: two four-beat bars per chord. But it isn't the harmonic progression, tempo or harmonic rhythm that gave this piece its Rock and Roll feel --and its impact. It was the high volume at which it was played, the fact that it was sung by a member of the band and not a professional singing specialist, and the frequent loud, searing lead-guitar solos (using Western hard-rock style<sup>98</sup>) that marked this piece as different from the other pieces on the program. This piece was not exclusively instrumental, but obviously featured the instruments at the expense of the lyrics -- which were few and also

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<sup>97</sup> The adoption of folksongs to popular music accompaniment is one of the many musical "experiments" being tried in Chinese music today, in an attempt at dual legitimation of the popular and the folk. It is, however, not one of the most popular experiments. As I was told, "the older people don't like it because it sounds too popular; the young don't like it because it sounds too old-fashioned."

<sup>98</sup> This guitarist later showed me a book on how to play "heavy metal" guitar, from which he had learned much of what he knows about playing lead guitar. This book, in English, had been brought to him by a friend who had bought it in Hong Kong.

largely unintelligible due to the volume of the instruments. The piece excited and/or agitated much of the audience. They obviously did not expect the concert to begin this way. Some of them seemed shocked by what they were hearing. Some covered their ears, revealing that they thought it was too loud; some tried to continue the conversations they had been engaged in before the band started to play, shooting hard looks at the stage for their inability to do so. After the piece ended some of the audience clapped unenthusiastically; some didn't clap at all; and a group of 30 or so young male workers sitting at the back of the theatre whistled and yelled "Hao!".

The strong reaction to this piece was not to be repeated to this extent with any other piece in the program. The Gangtai pieces, as I have mentioned, received only light applause, and no shouting or whistling. The only other piece that aroused a strong overt reaction was a cover of a Cui Jian piece called "Cong tou zai lai," which means "Start Over Again From the Beginning" (see translation above). This piece, with its reggae-inspired rhythm guitar accompaniment and its rough, strongly-delivered male vocals, is also thought of as Yaogunyue. After this piece the same group of 30 young males sitting in the back yelled "Hao!," whistled, and clapped loudly for about ten seconds.

#### Incorporation, Legitimation, and Refusal

The performances of Yaogunyue in this concert represented the infusion into a mainstream popular music venue of a style of music not typically associated with mainstream popular music. Including Yaogunyue is an attempt at legitimation and

incorporation that -- if successful -- would spread this music to a larger audience, simultaneously stripping it of its oppositional political power and of its age, class and gender-specific nature.<sup>99</sup> Both of these goals are obviously high on the political agenda of the current regime -- a regime that must see this music and the feelings it arouses within certain segments of the population (i.e., its instrumental power) as a threat to the hegemonic goals of the Party. The incessant appeals for unity and stability that come through the government-controlled mass media -- a unity and a stability that are considered necessary for national modernization -- and the banning of both the underground Rock and Roll performances and some of Cui Jian's appearances reveal both the seriousness with which the government views the power of such divisive forces in the political situation and their willingness to act to defuse this power.

The above information allows us to see that within the political economy of these presentations of popular music (and remember that these types of presentations are the most common presentations of live popular music in contemporary Beijing) the legitimation of popular music involves ritualizing it within the context of leisure entertainment. This "mainstreaming" of popular music styles simultaneously legitimates its existence as a valid form of mass music and curtails its power to be anything else. The programming of popular music styles within a rotating variety-show format (complete with smooth-talking emcee) is an argument through symbolic juxtaposition (and, given the frequency of these concerts, through repeated ritual) that youth popular music is but one of many kinds of acceptable and enjoyable mass entertainment forms. Further, the presentation by

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<sup>99</sup> These kinds of legitimation/incorporation moves have been described as "ritualized attempts to tie the periphery to the center" (Kertzer 1988:23).

professional musicians helps in the institutionalization of popular music, and this involves a redefinition into a place located within a particular political hierarchy -- a place from which this music can be more easily monitored and controlled. Finally, this programming and the physical setting of the performance location mitigate against the kind of expressive, communal experience known by the Chinese to accompany many popular music concerts in the West, especially Rock and Roll concerts (Zheng 1988:42), and, given the history of popular musics in the West and their relationships to youth politics, it is in the political interests of the Chinese government to minimize and/or eliminate this kind of development vis-a-vis Chinese popular music.

We can see that the move to legitimate popular music and the way in which this is done are consistent with governmental dictates regarding correct musical practice. Its development and performance is not left to chance: it is the government's job to be aware of the expressive nature of this music and to manage its instrumental capabilities, handing it back to the masses in a way which they will enjoy and yet which is not threatening to the government's agendas. Also, the placing of this music within a program that includes folk songs and dances and a long-respected comedic tradition (Link 1984) serves the interest of a modern Chinese identity by suggesting that this new, modern musical expressive form belongs beside and is compatible with older, more traditional forms.

Music, however, is a symbol whose power outstrips the power of the government to contain it -- and popular music is simultaneously being used to help create, affectively bind, and publicly express a community of dissent -- a community that wants its music legitimated but that refuses to allow its music to become part of the government's argument. The physical and vocal gestures from



the Yaogun fans were the performance of difference: the simultaneous announcement of (1) a refusal at incorporation and (2) a demand for legitimation. That the demand for legitimation involves a refusal of the government's demand of incorporation (as the price of legitimation) places Yaogunyue as a site of intense struggle. This struggle -- enacted through symbols -- is ultimately a struggle over reality and a place in it, over a worldview and a world-experience -- and over control of the self.<sup>100</sup>

In this section I have shown that the presentation of a musical event is on one level a musical argument. This argument is enacted through the musical symbols themselves as well as through the symbolic gestures and ritualizations -- the contexts of interpretation -- that surround and interact with the musical symbols. The argument is informed by questions concerning the nature of music, its effects and uses -- and is ultimately prescriptive. I chose for analysis several aspects of one musical presentation -- indirect messages (Jenne 1984:25-31) -- that have a direct bearing on issues germane to Chinese popular music: as a form of leisure activity, as a form of mass education, and in the struggle for and reproduction of hegemony. These aspects included not only the contexts of interpretation mentioned above, but also musically stylistic elements received as sensual percepts and as messages about the nature of popular music. In this case these stylistic elements were potent presentational enactments of a musical ideology whose goals include minimizing difference by incorporating variety into a higher unified stylistic scaffold.

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<sup>100</sup>The term "refusal" is taken from and developed by Hebdige (see Hebdige 1979).

Nevertheless, during this performance there were, within the structure of the event, manifestations of two forces working to create "noise" that threatened the ostensible status of the event as entertainment: namely, the government-controlled forces of didacticism and the emergent forces of political and cultural opposition. **These three uses of music -- as leisure entertainment, as didactic tool, and as empowerment --constitute a dialectic informing the stylistic practices and creative interpretations of popular music in contemporary mainland China.** It is in the government's interests to attempt a well-controlled unity among these three uses; it is in the interests of various others to refuse, reject, or violate this attempt.

**PART FOUR**  
**POPULAR MUSIC AND GENERATIONAL CONFLICT**

**Daigou (generation gap)**

With the accession to power of the reformers (led by Deng Xiaoping) in the late 1970s, economic considerations were thrust ahead of political ones in determining Party policy, at least temporarily. Part of this thrust involved a turn away from the Maoist vision of class conflict as the main contradiction within Chinese society. Although it would not be accurate to say that class is no longer a determining factor in political factions and divisions it can be argued that, in the 1980s, generation rather than class became the main dividing line concerning political views (Moody 1988:192).

As a conclusion to this chapter I will argue that popular music is an expression of identity and political ideology that is generation-based. This generational component works both to solidify and to give power to the younger generation's sense of self and their sense of their place in the world. It also works, however, to further the alienation of this generation from older generations and from the government and to give the older generations and the government reason to distrust (and sometimes to actively oppose) the goals, desires, and social practices of the youth.

There are several subdivisions that can be made along generational lines among the youth in China (depending on where the line is drawn concerning "youth"). The political upheavals of the last 40 years (and especially of the last 25 years) have resulted in profoundly differing experiences between those in their early thirties (who were educated during the Cultural Revolution) and those in their early twenties or teens (and educated under the Open Door Policy). But they share a distrust of bureaucracy and a growing cynicism toward the Party.

Two decades of political conflict have left urban young people alienated and cynical. They have watched one political faction after another come to power and vigorously promote certain policies, only to be toppled by a new group that promotes its own vision and castigates that of its predecessor. (Gold 1981:54).

Although the decade of the 80s on the surface appears less politically volatile, in fact the in-fighting between reformers and "cultural conservatives" is as intense as ever and has shown itself in constant rectification campaigns within the Party and in public displays such as the repression of the student movements in 1987 and 1989. The result of this is an increasingly hardened cynicism toward the government, toward the Party, and toward the possibility of modernization and the higher standard of living it would hopefully bring.

X (male university student, mid-20s): The government is totally corrupt. China will go nowhere while they are in power. I just want to get out.

T.B. What about your responsibilities to help your country?

X: Don't talk to me about responsibilities. I've seen good people thrown in jail for being responsible. Nowadays, being responsible means taking care of yourself -- and that's all it means.

In early 1987 it was not difficult to find young people who would speak favorably of the Party and what it had achieved. It was not difficult to find those who thought socialism was the correct road for China and who admitted that, for all its problems, the Party had definitely improved the standard of living for most Chinese. But in 1989, after the Tiananmen Incident involving the killing by soldiers of striking and protesting students and workers it seems that the government has lost all credibility. I could not find one young person in three months time who spoke favorably of the government. Most comments were more typically like the following:

Z (male worker, mid-20s, university graduate): We all hate the government. The government is corrupt. They are all liars. Socialism cannot work. The moment the first bullet hit the first student in Tiananmen Square was the moment the government died. Now we are only waiting for the body to finish rotting, so we can throw it away.

For these youth, popular music not only presents occasions for experiencing community with others of their generation, but also represents (1) a link to the outside world, and/or (2) a means of expressing their discontent. Fans of Gangtaiyue, increasingly preferring this style to Xibeifeng (and preferring Hong Kong and Taiwan singers to mainland singers), see this style as definitive of modern Chinese music and their appreciation connects them to the Chinese communities who (1) live free from the control of the Communist Party and (2) have largely attained the kind of modernization and higher standards of living

desired by mainland Chinese. Fans of Yaogunyue find in its brashness and boldness expressions of their own frustrations of feeling hemmed in by the political and cultural traditions in China and connect themselves with a rebellious and independent political ideology that they see as part of the "Rock and Roll lifestyle."

The fans of both of these styles may be separated by a musical aesthetic but they are joined by frustrations with the status quo in mainland politics and culture. They are tired of waiting for things to get better. And when they say something about it, things get worse.

Z (25-year old male worker, university graduate): We say "Life is too hard" (huode tai leile). We work six days a week, and are too tired to do anything on our one day off each week. We want change, but when we ask for it, we are suppressed. We like Americans because they say what they want, they let you say what you want and they always seem to find time to have fun.

Many young people feel that the element of fun is missing in their lives. Tired of the vicissitudes of the Party line, constantly urged to devote themselves to their country's modernization and to socialism, they simply no longer believe in the system that needs their help.

A (former Peking Opera worker and Red Guard, 40-year-old female): It is like a religion. As long as everyone believes, it will be alright. You can get anyone to do anything as long as they believe. When they no longer believe in the system, when it is no longer true

for them, then they just don't care anymore. No one believes today. Not even Party members. And certainly not the younger generation.

As a result of this lack of trust in the Party, in its ability to modernize the country, and in socialism, the youth in China have become either politically apathetic or politically oppositional to the governing regime. The former are dangerous for their lack of commitment to socialist construction, for which they are sorely needed. The latter are dangerous for their open and outspoken opposition to the Party's leadership and for their willingness to entertain notions concerning possible alternative types of government for China.<sup>101</sup>

For these youth, popular music simultaneously expresses their frustrations and represents an alternative. Its connections with an international community acts as a lifeline extending across political boundaries, with which they can (temporarily) touch a world that is not their own but in which they want to be participants.

AA (male businessman, 40 years old): Young people today have an international attitude. They have been overseas, or have friends who have been overseas, or just have heard about it from someone. Also the Open Door brought in so many things. It is impossible nowadays to ignore international trends. The youth of today want to be a part of these trends.

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<sup>101</sup> For an expanded discussion of these issues, along with results of surveys within China concerning the levels of political involvement of Chinese youth in the 1980s, see Hooper 1985.



If the youth seem apathetic, it is because they no longer trust that political commitment will lead to the kind of society they want. Having fun and partying to popular music is in this sense an act of opposition. It is a refusal to participate in the perpetuation of a lie. Partying to specifically Yaogunyue focuses the oppositional component; and support of Cui Jian and his music is undeniably and obviously political. This is why the government is so interested in controlling the experience of popular music through the kind of symbolic juxtaposition discussed in Part Three. It wants to feed popular music experience into its program of molding committed, loyal socialist youth. Having fun without regard for "social effect" (shehui xiaoguo) --fun without a didactic element -- is considered hedonism; hedonism is a result of bourgeois liberalism; and bourgeois liberalism is a profound threat to advanced socialist culture -- and to the power of the ruling regime.

### **Contradictions and the Power of Symbols**

Ironically the youth's turn toward foreign (particularly American) cultural symbols to act as focal points for their sense of community and their sense of identity (from personal to international) has the potential for alienating them from those in the older generations who might share their ultimate political and social ambitions. In particular, **Yaogunyue and the social gestures surrounding it (yelling, dancing, etc.) serve to simultaneously bond an oppositional community and alienate it not only from the regime, but from mainstream society as well.**

The actions of the Xibeifeng and Yaogunyue fans at the concert described in Part Three (the standing and yelling after the piece) constituted a kind of symbolic violence that disturbed and confused the perceptions and expectations of the audience -- perceptions and expectations that had been prepared by the context of interpretation set up by the pre-event advertisements as well as by the structure of the event itself. This audience did not stop to consider the political nature of the act nor to ponder its meaning in relation to their own social and political outlook: it only felt it as a violation of the event -- as an attack upon their own musical experience. As a result it elicited icy stares, looks of wonder, and other signs of discomfort and/or disapproval.

These outbursts on part of the Yaogun fans shattered the illusion of unity sought by the government. Their actions represented a Refusal -- in this case consisting of a rejection of incorporation and of mass unity. The price of this Refusal is alienation, both from the government and from the masses -- an alienation that ultimately compromises this group's goal of legitimacy.

This reveals one of the contradictions in the dynamics of subcultures, especially those within strongly centralized governments whose power reaches far into the community: the subculture needs some power, some legitimation in order to construct a space in which to move; but legitimation comes from acceptance -- and acceptance is usually accompanied by incorporation, which involves loss of power. The Chinese government does not usually leave the margins alone. The Yaogun fans displayed power through concerted, ritualized vocal and gestural acts that denied and challenged the concerted, ritualized acts not only of the performers but also of the rest of the audience, as that audience more or less embodied and performed (actively or passively) the musical argument that the event put forward.

This alienation from the mass audience simultaneously empowers the subculture youth and limits that power, for many of the symbols used -- in this case Rock and Roll music and the physical expressions attending it -- in the youth's rhetoric of opposition offend much of the mass audience, thus limiting the chances that such opposition will spread into that audience. **The youth opposition, wrapped in its own symbols, is in a sense trapped by them as well.**

The events in Tiananmen Square before the massacre of June 4th, 1989 provide us with a parallel. The embracing (by the students in the Square) of such Western symbols as the Statue of Liberty --reincarnated as "The Goddess of Democracy" -- created empathy in America but served to alienate the students from many on the mainland to whom these symbols meant nothing. The symbols powerfully bonded the students to each other and enacted an imagined community with the Western democracies; they simultaneously stripped the students from Chinese tradition and from the large majority of the population that lives within that tradition.

Before the Tiananmen massacre, the students who mobilized themselves against the current regime didn't at first invoke Western ideas of democracy or freedom. They talked about the public accountability of the government; they talked about corruption of the government; they focused their attention on the inability of the government to develop itself as the leader of the land. That's one of the reasons why not only the citizens of Beijing but government officials, too, and members of the security police were moved. The students used a language which is very deeply rooted in Chinese

consciousness. They are not representing their own interests. They are really the voice of the people. ...

The tragedy in China now is this: the students, overwhelmed by the irresponsibility and insensitivity of the regime ... have become totally westernized. In so doing, ... they gave some powerful weapons to their adversaries, because even the workers, the peasants, couldn't fully appreciate what the students were striving for. But they could hear the inauthentic but still persuasive "politicized Confucian voice" of obedience, duty, commitment to the goal of socialism, and so forth. (Tu 1990:114-115).

If in the process of movement of a dialectical unity -- the social weaving or "social intertexture" (Shue 1988:27) -- polarities are created and thus become contradictions, sides are taken; oppositional communities emerge; the social or political fabric is torn; and alienation results. The task for the student democracy movement, if it wants to avoid this alienation, is to find "as a defining characteristic of the mode of protest of the students" a "fruitful interaction ... between liberal democratic ideas on the one hand and the indigenous resources in Confucian culture" (Tu 1990:115). The task for Yaogunyue performers and audiences is similar. The quest for legitimacy is in constant dialogue both with the governing regime and with existing social and musical practices (both indigenous and foreign). The goal is a place within the musical space of modern China; but it must be a place where potency is retained.

## Summary of Chapter Two

In this chapter I have shown that popular music is a major player in contemporary struggles -- social, political, economic -- taking place in mainland China. After outlining the three main styles of music most popular with Chinese youth I analyzed each vis-a-vis issues of modernization and creation of a modern Chinese identity. We saw that the Gangtai style is and has been dominant since the late 1970s; that in the mid-80s, indigenous forms of popular music not merely imitative of the Gangtai style emerged, combining residual indigenous musical traits (folksong style vocal production and melodic construction) with more recent Western popular (with Xibeifeng) or Rock and Roll (with Yaogunyue) musical elements; and that each of these styles in its own way presents challenges to the hegemonic strategies of the governing regime --i.e., its social, cultural, economic, and political goals.

Further, I have suggested that the (government-controlled) presentation of popular music is a kind of rhetorical argument conducted through the manipulation of symbols through which the government hopes to control the oppositional potential of popular music by controlling its interpretation (and therefore its effects).

Finally, I have shown the intimate connection between popular music and the "problem of the youth" (qingnian de wenti) as a result of the vastly differing social experiences of different generations of Chinese. The profound changes in governmental policies over the last 40 years have produced a generation gap vis-a-vis these social experiences, along with a sense of political apathy among the young and old alike. This gap makes intergenerational communication difficult, especially

between the higher levels of the Party (made up mostly of octogenarians) and students in their teens and twenties, as the invested symbols for each generation differ.

Popular music is the favored musical form of those millions of youth with whom the government must place its future. This music, whether listened to for "mere" entertainment purposes, or as a clear embodiment of anti-government sentiment, plays an important role in the construction and experience of these people's lives. It is powerfully invested with their sense of identity, their sense of their future, and their feelings about the present. And it is a sensitive barometer of the affective volatility that characterizes the lives of these youth in contemporary China.

Students of China -- most of whom have ignored this genre -- continue to ignore it at their peril.

**CHAPTER THREE**  
**"SERIOUS" MUSIC (YANSU YINYUE)**

**PART ONE**  
**INTRODUCTION**



When I say that we should study western techniques, I do not mean that we should imitate them or refashion Chinese music to make it accord with western models. I think a knowledge of western technique, theory and experiences should help us to seek out our own pattern of development, and to build up the necessary theories so that we can create forms suitable to our purposes (He 1957:381).

To completely throw off the fetters of the western model, and insist on traveling our own road -- this is still the task of our national instrumental music composers (Liang 1990b:19).

Since Liberation (and especially since the late 1970s) the Chinese have attempted to construct a tradition of concert music which could take its place alongside those of the West (and Russia). This phenomenon, arising from the conviction that the "central contradiction" within the contemporary Chinese music situation is that between Chinese music and Western music, has had profound effects upon China's previous musical practices -- effects at once destructive and creative -- and has raised serious and complicated issues regarding the role of music in Chinese society. These issues, centering around various prescriptions for Chinese musical development, are both political and artistic and -- perhaps more importantly -- invoke the relationship between the two.

In this chapter I will focus primarily on that part of the new tradition which concerns "professional instrumental music" (*zhuanye qiyue*). My main areas of concern will be the following:

1. the analysis of and implications of debates within the Chinese scholarly community as to the nature of a musical tradition;
2. the historical changes to previous practices regarding instrumental construction, performance techniques, training and settings, ensemble constitution and musical composition -- and the relationship of these changes to issues of modernization;
3. the historical development of this music and its most important composers, performers and compositions; and
4. the contradictions between rival (prescriptive) conceptions concerning the nature of music in general -- and of modern Chinese music in particular and the implications of this rivalry for contemporary Chinese musical practices (and the livelihood of those involved with them).

My intent is not to give an exhaustive historical outline of these areas; rather, I will draw data from each of them so as to deepen my analysis of the issues underlying contemporary developments in Chinese music and the importance of these issues to Chinese culture as a whole. As in the previous two chapters, the data will serve as a springboard toward addressing issues of modernization as they touch the lives of certain groups of people: in this case professional musicians and music scholars and researchers.

The audience for Chinese serious music is small and comprises mostly intellectuals (of all ages). For this reason the analysis in this chapter, compared to those of the preceding two chapters, will reveal more about the relationship between the Party and China's intellectual community -- especially those in this community who work professionally in the field of music (and who therefore work for the State). I will show that for the Communist Party, serious music represents (1) an important symbol for a modern China trying to make a place alongside the advanced societies of the world (i.e., the West and Russia); (2) a potent source of legitimacy for the Party and its modernization goals; and (3) the constant threat that the intellectual community will develop expressive practices which can subvert -- and therefore destroy -- the Party's legitimacy (and therefore its power).

For many of the intellectuals involved with this music, continuing its practice and development forces them into a "dangerous game of [mutual] cooptation" with the Party through which they try "to advance their own interests and to transform the establishment from within" (Israel 1986:xii).<sup>102</sup> I will show that

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<sup>102</sup> The debates filling the pages of official journals are testaments to the ebb and flow of this "dangerous game" -- barometers for measuring the degree of establishment transformation and/or the backlash from the attempts.

developments in the issues analyzed in this chapter all refer to and are partially determined by this relationship -- a power dialogue -- between intellectuals and the Party, and that (therefore) the ongoing struggles over these issues will profoundly affect -- both politically and musically -- the future of Chinese culture.<sup>103</sup>

**The issues addressed in this chapter are of great importance to the Chinese musical community -- and to the government. Nevertheless they have been ignored by Western ethnomusicologists studying the music of China.** The data and analyses here, therefore, not only begin to fill a lacuna in the Western literature on Chinese music but also (and perhaps more importantly) present for the first time the points of view of various groups of people involved in the musical, social, and political processes at work in the creation, production, and reproduction of contemporary Chinese music.

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<sup>103</sup> For an analysis of the stormy relationship between the Communist Party and the Chinese intellectual community from the 1930s through the 1950s, see Chen 1980.

**PART TWO**  
**TRADITIONAL MUSIC AND MUSIC TRADITIONS**

## Introduction

The concept of tradition exists in a dialectical semantic field created by two poles: ideology and practice. It is through the ideological pole that the constructed and/or reconstructed aspect of the concept of tradition is apparent; it is through the practical pole (musical practice) that a tradition objectively manifests its connection to the past. Both poles are necessary constituents of any conception of tradition: the connection to the past is necessary as a legitimation of ideologically-informed prescriptions for social practices; the ideological (re)construction is necessary in order to make past practices serve present goals.

In modern China the construction of a tradition of professional serious music has mandated (1) that much of the materials for this tradition must be obviously and overtly connected to previous indigenous musical traditions; and (2) that these materials, before becoming part of the new tradition, must be reconstructed in accordance with present ideological prescriptions. The goal of these mandates is to ensure that this newly constructed tradition is seen as a **positive** and **necessary** development -- a modernization -- of previous indigenous practices.

The connection thus implied between present and past practices has become since the early 1980s the subject of debates within the official musical circles of mainland China. Let us turn briefly to these debates so that we can understand better the terms -- and boundaries -- of the discourse.

### **The Tradition Debates**

In the summer of 1979 (soon after the implementation of the Open Door Policy) the Chinese music educator Fang Kun led a delegation of young performers from the Central Conservatory in Beijing to England to participate in the second Durham Oriental Music Festival as part of a tour covering England, Ireland, and Iraq. The Conservatory's "national music ensemble" (minzu yuetuan) performed twice at the Festival. As the festival progressed the Chinese delegation -- described as "anxious to make as many contacts as possible with musicians and scholars from the rest of the world" (Provine 1982:1) -- invited comments and criticisms concerning their performances. The expressions of "incredible criticism and doubt" on the part of the Western scholars concerning the Chinese ensemble's handling of traditional instrumental music led to a "discussion session" in which Mr. Fang -- convinced that the Western scholars "did not entirely understand the circumstances surrounding Chinese music and its development" -- attempted to clarify the Chinese position on traditional music (Fang 1982:4).

Upon his return to China Mr. Fang wrote an article which was published in the official journal of the Chinese Musicians' Association, Renmin yinyue (People's Music) in January of 1980.<sup>104</sup> The appearance of this article containing Western scholars' reservations concerning the Chinese musical establishment's treatment of its instrumental musical traditions and Fang Kun's response to those reservations set off a heated debate within Chinese musical circles over the concept of musical

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<sup>104</sup> Fang 1982 is an English translation of the original article, which appeared in Renmin yinyue (People's Music) 1980/1:38-40.

tradition, the nature of a musical tradition, and the relationship between musical traditions and modernization.

### On the Changeability of Tradition

As discussed in Chapter One, both Maoist and non-Maoist Chinese thought view tradition as essentially a dynamic, constantly changing process. Sources of change can come from internal or external causes. External causes would include contact with other cultures; internal causes would include changes in social conditions (such as revolutions). Both are acceptable causes of change in traditional social practices.

Mao emphasized the internal conditions of the country as determining social change. Changes in social practices are primarily due to internal causes, and only secondarily to external ones.

The metaphysical or vulgar evolutionist world outlook sees things as isolated, static and one-sided. ... They search in an over-simplified way outside a thing for the causes of its development ... the world outlook of materialist dialectics holds that in order to understand the development of a thing we should study it internally and in its relations with other things... The fundamental cause of the development of a thing is not external but internal... [Materialist dialectics holds that] external causes are the condition of change and



internal causes are the basis of change, and that **external causes become operative through internal causes** (Mao 1977c:25-26).<sup>105</sup>

Thus the direction of change in social practices is due not to external influences but rather to internal reactions to external influences -- internal reactions which are the result of internal conditions of the society.

This view -- which has had a profound influence on the thinking of modern Chinese intellectuals -- has led to three important ideas: (1) that change is endemic to social practices; (2) that contact with and influences from foreign cultures should not be feared; and (3) that it is the internal conditions of the society which will determine whether these contacts and influences produce healthy social development.

By and large, these three ideas are accepted by contemporary Chinese intellectuals. The relative emphasis placed on each separates these intellectuals into two main groups: leftists (the inheritors of the Maoist ideology) and "kaifangde" (translated literally as "open" and used to describe those who oppose the leftists). Both sides use these concepts in their struggles for power, for a social space within which to work, and in the service of their own individual career goals.

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<sup>105</sup> My emphasis. This declaration of the primacy of internal over external causes is basic to dialectical materialism as developed by Marx, Engels, and Lenin. See Cornforth 1968:43.

### Substantive Debates and Political Agendas

The debates within Chinese musical circles over the "question of Chinese traditional music" are ostensibly concerned with the nature and definition of musical traditions. But they are also -- and more importantly -- debates over the specific direction Maoist-led modernization has taken Chinese musical practices and therefore over the validity of Maoist musical thought itself. As such, they are significant expressions of (and have become symbols for) power struggles within the artistic community -- power struggles affecting both personal lives and musical developments. Neither side of any given debate at any moment is ultimately interested in the "nature" of tradition, but rather in advancing its own prescriptions for the treatment of past musics and the directions of future developments.

Fang Kun opened the debates with the suggestion that a musical tradition, in order to deserve the name, should fulfill three conditions:

... first, it should have come down from earlier people; second, it should be of outstanding quality ...; third, it should influence later music (Fang 1982:4).

This constitutes a classic statement of the leftist (zuopai) approach to musical traditions, an approach clearly and directly connected to Maoism. The first criterion establishes the necessity of connecting with the past. The second states the necessity of selecting out of the music of the past that which is of "outstanding quality"; this emphasizes the conscious selection of some works over others. The

third criterion reflects the insistence that a tradition be vital and continuing in order to deserve the name "traditional."

Embedded in these criteria is the Maoist "mass line" approach to the continuation and improvement of existing social practices. The conscious contact with the past through selection of its outstanding works for continuation both establishes existing practices as the basis for future ones and posits a selection process whereby only certain of these practices continue and others are discarded. Further, the criterion of "influencing later music" emphasizes the efficacy of these practices vis-a-vis influencing the direction of musical change.

What is not explicitly stated in this formulation but is in fact implied within it is that (1) it is the Party that should determine what is of "outstanding quality" (using both aesthetic and political criteria); and that (2) the efficacy of current musical practices vis-a-vis influencing future ones is a function of the current practices' ability to reflect the life of the society at this time: in other words it is a function (in contemporary terms) of modernization.<sup>106</sup>

There were many who expressed disagreement with Fang Kun's criteria for defining musical traditions. These criticisms were also simultaneously addressing musical and political issues. Scholars not aligning themselves with leftist policies -- scholars generally referred to as "kaifangde" resisted the second and third of Fang's criteria: those concerning "outstanding quality" and the influencing of future musics.

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<sup>106</sup> Actually, in Fang Kun's article he states that it is the "masses" (qunzhong) which will decide what is of outstanding quality. This merely pushes the argument back one step, for then we must ask the relationship between the Party and the masses. And we know from experience that the answer from the Party will be that there is essentially no difference, so that whatever the Party decides is by definition what the masses decide.

"Traditional music" should be something which has been passed down from history; it has an objective existence. There is no need to take notice of whether it has outstanding quality [in order to decide whether it is traditional or not] (Ai 1982:151).

D (professor in Chinese music): Who is to say what is good and what is bad? It is surely not for one person to say this is good and that is bad. It is not a question of what is good or bad but what you want to study. ... It is alright to decide not to pass on or study certain elements of a music tradition but **those elements are still part of the music tradition.**

These strategies for contradicting the leftist position took the form of appeals to "objectivity" (keguan). They concealed objections to leftist-inspired and Party-enforced restrictions on what is allowable for study and for propagation by invoking the positive value Marxist/Maoist thought places on scientific approaches to society (and therefore on having an objective viewpoint).

Another element in the leftist line is its populism: only that music which is enjoyed by the masses should be passed on as the musical tradition --only that music enjoyed by the masses can be considered of "outstanding quality."

... "outstanding quality" must be understood as having a definite foundation among the masses (Fang 1982a:4).

Objections to this complained that this is too limited a view of musical traditions.

D: Traditional music includes three kinds of music: folk music (minjian yinyue), religious music (zongjiao yinyue), and court music (gongting yinyue). Marxism has thrown out religious music and court music.

This statement suggests that limiting the music to be propagated as traditional music to that which is loved by the masses (folk music) is -- again -- not objective.

This strategy of appealing to "objectivity" obtains its edge by markedly opposing Marxism to science. Here Marxism -- by ignoring the "objective existence" of certain aspects of musical traditions -- is revealed as being too "subjective" and therefore unscientific.

... "traditional music" has an objective existence; this cannot be changed by an act of people's will or by certain artificial, subjective standards [of analysis] (Ai 1982:154).

The accusation that leftism is subjective constitutes a subtle but profound attack upon its legitimacy as authoritative vis-a-vis the analysis and direction of musical practices.

Further, the claim that a musical tradition has an objective existence emphasizes that it is in a sense "found" rather than "constructed"; and therefore that

it -- through this objective existence -- has an element which **transcends the manipulations of men with political agendas.**

### Discourse Control in Strategies of Power

The move to objectify tradition is a strategy to move the discussion away from definitions of tradition and toward questions of treatment, thereby broadening the field of discourse. This strategy admits of the selectivity of traditional propagation and attempts to move this part of the discourse to the overt plane of discussion; its proponents are not interested in questions concerning what is and what is not traditional (this has "objective" reality and therefore is not open to debate). Rather, they want to engage in broad discussion about how to handle China's musics: what should be done with the music of China's past, its present and its future?

The leftist position, on the other hand, by admitting only certain musics as part of the Chinese tradition, attempts to control discussions of musical directions and propagation by limiting the discourse through its own definitional strategy. If certain elements are not part of the tradition there is no debate surrounding (and therefore no legitimate opposition to) their discontinuance. The only valid music to be propagated is that which fits the definition.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Chinese philosophy has long been concerned with the relationship between names and the practical implications of these names. This tradition, known as the "rectification of names," dates back to Confucius, and was considered by him to be a necessary step toward an orderly society (Fung 1948:41).

Term definition is therefore one of the spaces over which these different strategies struggle, and tradition is revealed as a "strategy of power" with significant ramifications for the direction of Chinese musical practices and the lives of those engaged in these practices (Chu 1990:254). The opponents in these debates understand the power of the concept of tradition to "ratify the present" -- that is, to lend legitimacy to their agendas and to set the conditions for future development (Williams 1977: 115-116).

### **The Responsibility Toward Musical Traditions: On Preservation, Protection, and Development**

Both leftist and kaifangde positions admit of the link that traditions effect between the present and the past. Therefore whatever definition of traditional music is adopted, there emerges a fundamental question: **How should musical traditions -- present and past -- be treated?** The historical/cultural context in which this question is asked explains its emergence -- a context in which there is an increasing flow of Western cultural practices into China and in which both leftists and kaifangde see the intellectual community (and the government) as responsible for overseeing the development of Chinese cultural practices.

In Chapter One I introduced the concepts of preservation (baocun) and protection (baohu) as used in competing ideologies vis-a-vis the treatment of the traditional Peking Opera. Here I want to develop these ideas further, analyzing the relationship between preservation and protection vis-a-vis musical traditions in

general. I will also ground this relationship in the context of the aforementioned competing ideologies -- each of which sees musical development as necessary to the modernization of Chinese artistic practices.

### Preservation vs. Protection

As previously described, **preservation (baocun)** refers to a procedure in which a musical tradition's development is simultaneously arrested and protected from disintegration -- in effect it is museumized. Under this procedure -- the Chinese cite the treatment of Gagaku in Japan as an example -- the government supports the existence of troupes who specialize in performing those music traditions which are either (1) no longer performed (e.g., performances of works that had been lost or discarded) or (2) in danger of ceasing performance (usually because of a lack of audience). The preservation of these traditions saves them from extinction. But the cost is the admission that they are no longer a vital part of the musical world. The significance of this cost cannot be underestimated; it is at the core of struggles over the future of Chinese music. I will return to it later.

**Protection (baohu)** refers to procedures aimed at protecting a musical practice while still allowing its continuing development. In this case -- the Chinese cite the treatment of traditional musics in India as an example -- the government supports the continuing musical development and performance of those practices which (again, due to dwindling audience) otherwise might cease to exist.



The protection of these traditions also saves them from extinction -- but again at the cost of admitting that they are no longer valuable to most of the population.

Both preservation and protection refer, on one level, to economic factors intimately tied to modernization. The economic rectification of the 1980s mandated that musical troupes take on more of the financial burden for their own performances. Income from performances has become more crucial in each troupe's attempt to balance its budget. Preservation and protection are two methods for limiting the potentially negative cultural effects from the new burdens of local economic independence as China begins its moves toward a market economy.<sup>108</sup>

**The key to the struggle between preservationists and protectionists concerns the idea of "development" (fazhan).** This term, as used by the Chinese when referring to musical practices, is subtle and multi-layered and deserves some explanation.

### Fazhan

The Chinese term fazhan (usually translated as "development" or "to develop") contains three layers of meaning. First, it refers to the necessity of change in any living social practice. Music, as a social expression, must change as

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<sup>108</sup> Recently, musical performance organizations have begun to solicit business support as a means of offsetting revenue losses from performances. It is still too early to tell whether this will develop into a widespread phenomenon. If it does, it will provide an alternative to governmental support for both preservation and protection procedures.

lives in a society change. This meaning of fazhan therefore delivers a temporal and organic connotation: music -- to be alive -- must change through time.

Another level of meaning emphasizes the evolutionary tendency of Marxist thought. This usage of fazhan stresses that music must continue to raise its quality to a higher and higher level. Only in this way can it continue to be a valuable expression for a Marxist society which is similarly evolving toward a higher level.

A third level of meaning reveals that fazhan involves a revitalization. This usage contends that the development of Chinese music includes a rejuvenation -- a making-more-vibrant -- and therefore implies that the musical situation in previous years was less than ideal. Fazhan is a way out of the crisis confronting modern Chinese music.

The subtleties in the various meanings of this term and their implications when applied to musical practices have been overlooked by most Western ethnomusicologists working on Chinese music. This failing has probably contributed to their lack of support for the "development" of Chinese music.<sup>109</sup>

Unless it develops (fazhan), Chinese music will die. ... Western scholars do not understand this (Liang 1990a).

From the above multi-layered definition of fazhan it can be seen how this concept is a part of the overall drive toward the modernization of China and therefore why it is an important concept to those involved with Chinese music. As this chapter progresses I will show how "developed" Chinese music is used as a

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<sup>109</sup> My thanks to Cai Liangyu for her thoughtful (and patient) explanations of the complexities of this term during my conversations with her.

powerful symbol for modernization -- aimed at both internal and external audiences. Here I want to further explain the relationships of development to the ideologies of preservation(ism) and protection(ism). These relationships are an important key to understanding music in contemporary China and have not been addressed in any depth by Western scholars of Chinese music. What we will discover is that development is central to both ideologies but that each stresses different connotations of the term.

### Preservation and Development

For leftists the value of preservation is twofold: first, it lies in the collection of musical materials (especially folk materials) for use in modern musical compositions. Thus the value of these musical materials is as compositional resources for use in the continuing development of Chinese music. By using these materials modern Chinese composers can be sure that their music sounds "Chinese." Second, preservation serves as a means of constructing a "musical museum" for both internal and external consumption. Through this Chinese and foreigners alike can -- through special performances -- be reminded of China's "long and glorious history" (which the Communist Party has inherited and is continuing).<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> An example of the implementation of this idea is the recent performance of "The Spell of Antiquity, a grand performance embodying the typical music and dances of the imperial courts of eight Chinese dynasties." This performance is described as one of Beijing's "ongoing tourist attractions" where "visitors can obtain a deeper understanding of the unique and rich cultural heritage of China" (BR 8/19-25/91:40-41).

For kaifangde the goal is a larger, more pluralistic space in which to work. This often involves the advocacy of a separation of "traditional" and "developed" musics. Wary of the hidden agenda in leftist assertions that traditions should constantly evolve, they lobby for the acknowledgment of two streams of Chinese music: "traditional" music (music of the past and folk and regional music of the present) and "newly-composed music" (the professional, serious art music which is the focus of this chapter).

... presently, there are some problems vis-a-vis the maintenance and preservation of traditional musics which need attention. The separation of maintenance and preservation on the one hand and development on the other is confused; this lack of clarity has a bad influence upon the work of preserving traditional music (Li 1982:96).

The separation argued for here would allow for the continuing development of modern Chinese art music while simultaneously supporting the preservation of the musics from which art music draws. In this way kaifangde hope to head off what they see as leftist destruction (through totalizing tendencies) of the variety of Chinese music -- past and present -- in the interest of development.

In addition, such a separation would allow more legitimacy to those music workers (theorists, historians, folklorists) who value traditional music as an end in

itself. It would allow them to pursue more "objectively comparative" musical studies.<sup>111</sup>

G (professional music researcher): Before 1980 we were not free to study traditional and folk musics as we wanted. Everything was done in order to gather resources for composers. This was the only value placed in what we did. They did not care about understanding the music and where it came from, what place it occupied in its society, etc.; they just wanted us to collect melodies and bring them back. ... Things are better since the Open Door; but we still struggle for the freedom to do what we want.

### Protection and Development

Development is a key concept within the ideology of protectionism; whereas preservationism tends to leave things as they are found, protectionism places emphasis on the need to maintain musical traditions as "living" traditions. Within this idea is the notion that to be a living tradition a musical tradition must have relevance in the lives of its modern audience: it must "reflect" modern Chinese life. The leftists are wary of preservationism for any reason other than the storing of source material and/or intellectual curiosity. Especially with regard to musics

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<sup>111</sup> This term is from a conversation with D, a professional music teacher and researcher. Notice the emphasis on the necessity for "objectivity" and the implication, discussed earlier, that Maoist tendencies are not objective.

reflecting the social life of the pre-Communist era -- such as the court music of imperial times (yayue) -- concessions to kaifangde (and their arguments concerning the "objectivity" of musical traditions) must stop short of propagation of this music to the populace.

[pieces from the dynastic periods] should be preserved to the best of our ability, so that people can better understand past traditions. For example, court music (yayue) should be preserved, but only in a [musical] museum. If you want to learn something about this music, you can go there and listen to it, **but there is no reason for it to be performed very often** (RMYY 1982/12:7).<sup>112</sup>

Leftist arguments against the propagation of musics which no longer reflect the lives of the people -- e.g., those traditions "selected out" in the course of Chinese musical history -- are couched in populist terms which use the aforementioned definitional strategies to attempt to avoid difficult issues of preservation, protection, and propagation.

In the eyes of some foreigners, [court music] is a tradition, but we believe that the true tradition does not lie there. **The authentic traditions are found among the people; this includes the folk music traditions and the intellectual's music traditions.**(RMYY 1982/12:7).<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup>My emphasis.

<sup>113</sup>My emphasis.

Leftist commitment to the protected development of "authentic" traditions is justified by the suppression that these traditions suffered at the hands of the dominant class in pre-Communist China and by the current threat of "bourgeois liberalism" (zichan jieji ziyouhua) and its "worship the West mentality" (chongyang sixiang). The former implies that these authentic traditions did not in the past develop as freely and as fully as they could have; the latter refers to the constant threat of damage to the traditions from foreign influences. Taken together they legitimate a Party-led, protectionist, development-oriented policy: a strong government hands-on approach to Chinese musical practices.

For kaifangde protectionism is principally a way to save -- and continue the development of -- those traditions threatened by economic modernization and the flood of Western ideas since the late 1970s. But it implies a freer kind of development than that intended by the leftists: namely, free from the political pressures of Party demands. Whereas leftists invoke populism and the need to "serve socialism," kaifangde talk about the need to respect "artistic laws of development" and the music workers' creativity.

D: Each kind of music has its own laws, its own tendencies for internal development. For it to develop in a healthy way these must be respected. And it is the artist who knows these laws the best. It is through his creativity that he gets to know them. ... Of course, outside influences are inevitable and good. But these traditions must be protected from the harm of too much change which comes too quickly -- whether this change is due to foreign influence or political policies.

Protectionism for the kaifangde, therefore, is also necessary for the healthy development of China's musical traditions. But this protectionism (through its demand for respecting artistic laws) combines with preservationism (through its artistic rather than political interest in music of past eras) to form a pluralistic conception of musical tradition and a freer conception of its development -- and these conceptions challenge leftist ones and threaten their dominance.

Having introduced the major issues surrounding the conception and treatment of Chinese music traditions and contexted them within the contemporary political culture, I will narrow my focus to one particular tradition which is typical in its engagement of these issues though unique in its attempts to solve them. In addition, it is a tradition which is crucial in its importance to the quality of the relationships between music intellectuals and the ruling Communist Party. And finally, it is a tradition which has been ignored by foreign scholars of Chinese music but which is in fact the dominant musical tradition among professional musicians in China.



**PART THREE**  
**THE CONSTRUCTION OF A CHINESE**  
**CONCERT MUSIC TRADITION (JUCHANGHUA)**

## Introduction

The "primary" or "principal" contradiction within the field of Chinese music is between Western music and Chinese music. This formulation defines Western music as an **internal feature** of Chinese music. In other words, this formulation contains within its definition of Chinese music the existence of Western music. The implications of this formulation should not be underestimated; primary among them is the conviction that **Western music is a part of Chinese musical culture**.<sup>114</sup> The question "What part?" is the crucial question to contemporary Chinese music workers, and is above all a prescriptive one.

The question of the place of Western music within Chinese musical culture has two implications: one is the question of the production and reproduction of Western musical pieces in China (performances, records, radio broadcasts, etc.). The other is more subtle (at least musically) and involves the question of the place of Western musical practices within Chinese musical traditions. The latter is the subject of this section of the dissertation, in which I will address musical and political issues raised by this question, analyzing (in the context of overall cultural modernization) certain musical trends as proffered solutions which simultaneously solve the problem and further political agendas.

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<sup>114</sup> In a recent survey of the listening preferences of Beijing residents, Western symphonic and solo instrumental music placed 3rd and 4th out of eight types of music listed, immediately behind two types of popular musics and well ahead of Chinese traditional and art musics. See Yang 1991:42.

### **The Goals of the New Tradition**

The goals of the new tradition are both nationalistic and internationalistic: this tradition is for both internal and external consumption. Chinese musicians, intellectuals, and government leaders want their music to express and reflect their sense of cultural and historical uniqueness; they also want international acceptance as being musically sophisticated and musically advanced. The question as to what kind of musical practices can fulfill these goals has in some ways been answered by Chinese twentieth-century musical history; that which has not yet been answered forms the central object of contemporary debate and struggle.

**It is obvious to almost all professional Chinese musical workers that some combination of Chinese and Western traditions is to become the music of a modernized China.** Rejecting Western music altogether, or keeping it at arms length and therefore separate from indigenous traditions is not seen as a viable alternative: Western music's presence in China is too powerful and its roots -- at least 70 years deep -- are too firm. This is not a cause for lament among musical intellectuals; many of them grew up listening to Western music. It is aesthetically (and politically) set into their musical senses.

BB (Chinese music history professor): It is impossible to go back to only Chinese music now. Western music is now part of our culture. We do not want to and cannot get rid of it. Western music has changed Chinese music forever. This is not a bad thing. We like the sound of harmony. We like the sound of the piano and the violin. They are not foreign sounds. Turning back the clock is impossible.

It is more often the case that musical intellectuals are unfamiliar with China's own musical traditions. Those who grew up prior to 1949 often took Western music as the music of modernity and contrasted this with their own traditions, which were seen as expressions of a backward, feudal culture. Younger intellectuals who spent their formative years during the Cultural Revolution were also taught that China's indigenous traditions were backward. Many intellectuals were persecuted during this time and sought the solace of Western classical music as an antidote to the stringent revolutionism of the model operas and the mass songs.<sup>115</sup> And the youngest generation of musical intellectuals -- those who have grown up in the era of Deng Xiaoping and have gone through the music conservatories on their way to becoming professional musicians or music scholars - - are often more interested in the "advanced" music of the West than in China's indigenous traditions.

CC (retired erhu teacher): There are more students at the conservatories studying Western music than there are studying Chinese music. Western music has more influential pieces to study. China's traditions are hard to learn. Many of these people say that, to understand modern Chinese music, you only need to understand Western music -- you don't need to know so much about Chinese musical traditions.

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<sup>115</sup> See Liu 1991a for an account of how a group of "xiaoyaopai" (groups of friends who tried to stay away from the politicism of the Cultural Revolution by engaging in other pursuits) got together during the early days of the Cultural Revolution to immerse themselves in recordings of Western classical music.

If it is a given that modern Chinese musical practices must combine Western and traditional Chinese elements the question that begs to be asked is "What combination of traits is the best one?" It is this question which has been at the crux of debates and struggles within Chinese musical circles since before the founding of New China in 1949. The search for a "symbolically significant balance" of Chinese and Western musical elements is the chief goal of music workers in contemporary China.<sup>116</sup> As we move to an analysis of the specific practical measures that have been taken as part of this search, two things must be kept in mind as contextual elements with profound meaning for the Chinese. The first is that **most Chinese musical intellectuals consider that modern Chinese music is still in its infancy.** The implications of this for their attitudes include a tendency to be patient and not too critical of pieces or trends that are ultimately seen as failures: it took the West hundreds of years to amass its collection of masterpieces --there is no reason to expect China to do it faster. Another implication is a tendency toward an experimental viewpoint: since there is not a particular style which is seen as the one which solves the problems of a Chinese modern music, new trends are to be welcomed.

The second thing to be kept in mind as this chapter progresses is that, as suggested in Chapter One, the single most important trait of Chinese music is its political significance. This significance can be read different ways by different people but is denied by none. It has inspired many of the practical changes in the history of modern Chinese musical practices, and continues to do so today. It acts simultaneously as an incentive and as a restriction on the experimentation

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<sup>116</sup>This term is taken from Bruno Nettl. See Nettl 1985:28.

mentioned above. **Every aspect of Chinese musical practice has political significance.** In this section of the chapter I will give practical illustrations of this - - illustrations taken from recent (twentieth-century) Chinese music history. In the final section I will analyze this aspect of Chinese music as a way to understand the "rectification" movement which has been going on in Chinese musical circles since the events in and around Tiananmen Square on June 4, 1989.

### **Xiandaihua and Minzuhua (Modernization and Sinicization)**

Xiandaihua and minzuhua are two concurrent processes existing in an uneasy tension within the life of China's musical practices. Managing the directions of these processes involves struggling with multiple contradictions. For example, xiandaihua must involve a strong influence from the West -- but not too much. The search is for an independent path which will draw from the West but not follow it completely. Minzuhua is the process called upon to help define this independent path -- but it is complicated by the lack of an homogenous national culture. The creation of this homogenous national culture is itself controversial, as it ultimately involves -- on a regional or local level -- another contradiction between xiandaihua and minzuhua: the imperatives to modernize and yet retain musical identity.

Ultimately, however, the uneasy tension of these two processes comes from their use by various persons for various political/artistic programs and from the varied politically-inspired definitions held of them. As we will see, xiandaihua and

minzuhua are used to further the political/artistic agendas of both sides of the leftist-kaifangde struggle in contemporary Chinese music.

For purposes of analysis and explanation, the tension between xiandaihua and minzuhua can be placed at three locations: instrument construction and combination (orchestration), performance goals and training, and composition. Each location reveals a different configuration of this tension; by juxtaposing them we can allow each to shed light on the others, thereby giving us a more comprehensive understanding.

#### Instrument Construction and Orchestration

DD (physics graduate student): The violin is simply superior to the erhu. It is more scientific. The erhu has a smaller, weaker sound. The violin's sound is fuller, stronger, warmer, and you can do more things with it. It is a fact of science: the violin is the better instrument. The erhu is backward.

One might question whether the attitude of a physics graduate student is typical of most contemporary urban Chinese. Although there are more subtle elements to the modernization of Chinese music than are found in this quote, it serves as an apt symbol revealing both the tensions inherent in Chinese music's

confrontation with the music of the West and the role the ideology of scientism plays as a major mediator in this confrontation.

Since its early development in the beginning of the twentieth century, the modernization of Chinese music has been characterized by this confrontation; and scientism has consistently mediated the confrontation. The Communist Party dates the emergence of the new Chinese culture from the May Fourth Movement of 1919. Building on the influx of Western musical ideas through the "xuetang yuege" ("school songs") which were part of the early twentieth-century education reform, the composers of the May Fourth Movement (e.g., Xiao Youmei, Zhao Yuanren, Li Jinhui, Liu Tianhua), "internalized the spirit of scientific positivism" as the basis for their musical work (Guo 1991:13).<sup>117</sup>

These early years of the century saw the emergence of "two extreme parties" which struggled over the future of Chinese music.

One had the set idea of using only what came from China's own past, rejecting everything from abroad. The other considered Chinese instruments obsolete, and wanted to use western ones only (Li 1957:372).

The first group was under the influence of and participated in the "New Culture Movement" (Xin wenhua yundong) of the immediate post-May Fourth

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<sup>117</sup> For a discussion of the xuetang yuege, see Zhang 1987; Wang 1984:14-25; and Wu & Liu 1983:317-326. For more information about the education reform which followed the abolition of the examination system -- and its effects on the arts -- see Teng & Fairbank 1963:231-238; Kao 1972:61-94 (Kao's specific interest is the impact of this reform on the visual arts); and Wong 1991. For a discussion of the influence of the "scientific spirit" on the May Fourth composers, see Guo 1991.



years. Their commitment was to science, to democracy, and to the building of a Chinese nation that could join the developed countries both in this commitment and in stature. The second group committed itself to the preservation of (mostly intellectual) previous musical traditions, and saw the importation of Western musical traditions as nihilistic. Their means to this preservation was to agitate for a rejuvenation of ancient Chinese musical traditions through organized study and performance of this music (Wang 1984:51-53).

The struggle between these two groups, emerging as part of the debates over China's cultural future --debates that characterized the first thirty years of this century (see Kwok 1965) -- was theoretically (but not practically) solved by the political unification of the country under the Communist Party in 1949. Devoted both to the scientific modernization of the Chinese culture (theoretically anchored in its Marxism) and to the revitalization of its traditions (due to its populism), the aforementioned "extreme parties" were rejected in favor of a more balanced approach --claimed to be the legacy of the May Fourth composers --which was aimed at combining Chinese and Western elements. The imagined result would be both Chinese and modern.<sup>118</sup>

"Improvement" of Chinese traditional instruments was a major concern of this new balanced approach. The Chinese term "gailiang" combines notions of "to

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<sup>118</sup> The official post-1949 codification of this approach is found in Mao Zedong's "Talk to Music Workers" in 1956. Although aimed mostly at Western-music educated music intellectuals (who tended to look down upon Chinese musical traditions), it also contains criticism of the cultural conservatives who (Mao says), in their struggles to save traditional Chinese culture, misunderstood the nature of modernization. See Schramm 1974:84-90 & Mao 1979 for English and Chinese versions (respectively) of this talk.

change" or "to transform" with "good" or "fine," thus revealing that this term assumed a specific direction of reform.

... only if we have good changes can we call these changes "improvements" (zhiyou "gai"de haode yueqi cai chengde shang "liang") (Ying 1989:246).

The "gai" in "gailiang" is the means; the "liang" is the end ("gailiang"de "gai" shi shouduan, "liang" shi mudi) (Zhang 1987a:239).

Gailiang can thus be translated as "changing in such a way as to make better." But how should "better" be defined? What would make one kind of change good and one bad? Han Kuo-Huang, in an article on the development of the Modern Chinese Orchestra (written in 1979), summarized some of the "more positive results" of this work:

- 1) Enlargement of the erhu fiddle into zhonghu, dahu and dihu; and invention of the gehu (4-stringed cello-like fiddle with a finger board, tuned and played like a cello using a cello bow).
- 2) Enlargement of the ruan plucked lute into [four sizes, adding] zhongruan, daruan, and diruan.

- 3) Changing of all frets in the lute-type instruments to chromatic and tempered arrangements.
  
- 4) Making of some flutes with wood instead of bamboo, and constructing them into two sections for adjustment in tuning; also making of a complete set of 12 flutes, one in each pitch of the chromatic scale for performance in different keys ...
  
- 5) Invention of the quick-change tuning mechanism for the yangqin [hammered dulcimer], and expansion of the range of the instrument on both ends.
  
- 6) Development of the low-pitched sheng [mouth organ] and construction of the paisheng, a mouth organ which although blown was played by means of a keyboard.
  
- 7) Development of a keyed mechanism on the zheng zither for quick modulation, and increasing of the strings from 16 to 18 and 21, etc.
  
- 8) Invention of the paigu, tuned set of drums of graduated sizes (Han 1979:18-19).

We can see that, as Han says, "All improvements are geared toward increasing volume, widening range, and enabling easier modulation" (ibid.,19).<sup>119</sup> Widening range here can mean both the extension of range possible on one instrument and the extension beyond the possibilities of one instrument through the building of instrumental families (different sizes of the same instrument). But the question must be asked: Why should the favored goals include increased volume, wider range, and easier modulation? In what sense are these improvements? The immediate answer is that the model for instrumental reform in China was the Western classical orchestra. But that just pushes the question back a step further; a deeper answer points to the historically-situated confluence of Chinese and Western traditions mediated by Marxist scientism mentioned above.

On one level, the most important reason for the use of the Western symphony orchestra as a model for the reform of Chinese traditional instruments was that so many of the musicians involved in the improvement of the native instruments had themselves been trained in Western music.<sup>120</sup> Speaking of the situation in the 1920s, Han Kuo-huang states:

... traditional music was not completely neglected in music education. ... But there were many more youths attracted by the new than the old. ... Musicians trained in Western style began to

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<sup>119</sup> For a corroboration of these generalizations by Chinese music researchers, see Zhang 1987, *Wenhuabu* 1980:287-288, and Wang 1991:68-73.

<sup>120</sup> One term often used to connote the Western-leaning direction of many of the 20th century reforms to various aspects of Chinese musical practices is "jiaoxianghua": symphonization.

think and hear music in terms of Western intonation, harmony, tone color, range, and above all, standardization of musical instruments. The new generation of musicians who played traditional instruments were also influenced by the same way of thinking. **The late Western Romantic concept of largeness became the norm ...**(Han 1979:13)<sup>121</sup>

This new concept of largeness differed from the previously existing Chinese tradition of instrumental ensemble music which, using a smaller ensemble, stressed individuality of tone quality within a heterophonic/melodic musical context. The shift to the stressing of instrumental blend within a harmonic/melodic musical context represented an aesthetic shift of enormous significance (to which I will return later).

Politically, the choice of the Western classical orchestra as model for instrumental reform was defended on the grounds that this orchestra could better serve the socialist cause than could traditional orchestras. Ancient musical traditions were seen as "feudal" and therefore unable to fulfill the needs of the modern audience. After Liberation this criticism of feudal society continued, it being seen as having hampered the development of China's instruments (BR 11/10/61:20). In a fledgling communist society needing to infuse the populace with revolutionary ardor, the "soft, sentimental strains for court and chamber in ancient times" would hardly suffice (BR 8/8/75:22). As a result, Western orchestras and bands (and orchestras and bands combining Western and Chinese instruments) were

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<sup>121</sup>My emphasis.

used for revolutionary purposes both before Liberation (Li 1957:376) and especially during the Cultural Revolution.

But to continue using Western instruments as the main carriers of revolutionary zeal after Liberation would be to abandon the balance sought by Mao and to capitulate to one of the "extreme parties" mentioned above: the Western-trained music intellectuals who tended to view Western music and musical instruments as the property of all civilized nations and traditional Chinese music and instruments as backward and not worthy of continuance. On the other hand the scientific reform of traditional instruments (based on systematic investigation of Western ones) in order to enlarge their range and volume would allow them to "burst forth with energetic, militant tunes for the masses" (BR 8/8/75:22) and thus serve the socialist cause. And, besides fulfilling the balanced approach of the regime, these instruments would serve as symbols of this regime's success -- socialist China's success -- in combining Western scientific techniques with China's musical traditions to create something which was both Chinese and modern.

From the standpoint of science, the reform of the traditional instruments on the model of the Western orchestra was viewed as making these instruments more advanced because of the rationalistic science which underlies the construction of the Western instruments and their combination within the orchestra. And this rationalistic science is at the core of modernity.

The "modern world" ... is characterized by rationality. To be modern is to severely limit the arational ... Planning and

organization overrule spontaneity and tradition (Dasilva, Blasi, & Dees 1984:98).

Furthermore, this rationalistic science belongs to no one nation or people: it is a "fundamental theory" which unites all those who can use it. Mao Zedong, in his talk to the music workers in 1956, made the following comments about Marxism (intended as an analogy applicable to the field of music).

Fundamental theory should be the same in China as in foreign countries. There should be no distinction between Chinese and Western things in fundamental theory. ... But this general truth must be combined with the concrete practice of each nation's revolution (Schramm 1974:85-86).

In other words, the study of Western music was to discover the "fundamental theory" of modern music, which had been not available to the Chinese people in their feudal past but which had been developed by the more scientifically-oriented Western countries. This fundamental theory was then to be applied to China's own "concrete practice," i.e., China's own characteristic musical instruments and expressive practices.

Starting in the early 1950s (just after Liberation), work on the improvement of traditional instruments and development of new ones increased rapidly and continued until the beginning of the Cultural Revolution in 1966.<sup>122</sup> The "planning

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<sup>122</sup> For a brief description of the reform work of the members of one orchestra during this period, see Lee 1990.

and organization" of Chinese musical instruments and instrumental ensembles on the model of the Western orchestra changed Chinese musical practices by making them more scientific, more national (less regional), and more rational -- i.e., more modern. And the retention of traditional instruments in this reform was to guarantee that China's individual and unique culture would not be annihilated in the process.

#### The Musical and Political Implications of Reform

There are two areas in which the movement to improve the national instrumental traditions manifested issues important to the goals of this dissertation. Both involved the tension between *minzuhua* (sinicization) and *xiandaihua* (modernization). The first was in the area of **aesthetics**.

**The improvements which were part of the modernization of China's traditional musical instruments revealed the emergence of a new Chinese aesthetic** -- an aesthetic which had become dominant within the cosmopolitan areas and (to a lesser extent) in the countryside. The two major changes in this aesthetic vis-a-vis the traditional Chinese musical aesthetic are results of the influence of the Western romantic symphony orchestra and are in the area of **harmony and dramatic expression**.

First, the new aesthetic featured an appreciation of 19th-century Western harmonic practices. These harmonic practices included above all the simultaneous sounding of different musical notes in a systematic way (the concept of functional



tonal harmony). Traditional Chinese ensemble practices had not developed this concept, preferring a spontaneous heterophony revolving around a selection of standard tunes (Thrasher 1985, Han 1979, Witzleben 1987). In addition, Western practices used a technique of instrumental blending which deemphasized the timbre of the individual instruments in favor of emphasizing the melodic and harmonic movement. Traditional Chinese ensemble playing tended to highlight the timbral contrasts among different instruments. In fact, timbre is often thought of by Chinese musicians as that aspect of music which their heritage has most highly developed (He 1957:380; Jiang 1991a:92; Liang 1985:24; Lai & Mok 1981:62).

The instrumental blend of Western orchestras consisted of a balance of instruments playing in the high, middle, and low sections of the sound spectrum. Traditional Chinese instruments tended to be clustered toward the high and middle portions of the spectrum (Liang 1985:23). Bass instruments had not been a part of this tradition. Therefore one of the most important tasks was the development of traditional instruments within this voice range. Taking their lead from the Western concept of instrumental families (several instruments of different size which share shape and construction features and therefore share timbral qualities -- e.g., violin, viola, cello, and double-bass), the Chinese developed mid- and low-range versions of existing traditional instruments (see numbers 1,2,4,8 from Han's article, above).

The adoption of 19th-century Western harmonic practices also demanded standardization of tuning for harmonic blend and a tempered scale for harmonic modulation (changes from one tonal center to another). Fixed pitch tuning was not a part of Chinese traditional musical practices and a "multiplicity of musical temperament" occurring simultaneously was "as essential an ingredient in [traditional] Chinese music as spice [was] to its cuisine" (Liang 1985:23). In

addition, modulation required access to all of the semitones of the Western octave. Most traditional Chinese instruments did not have this capability. Reform in construction therefore included adding frets and/or special tuning mechanisms, etc. to achieve the potential of playing the chromatic scale (see numbers 3,4,5,7 above).<sup>123</sup>

Secondly, the new aesthetic included an appreciation for the overt drama in Romantic Western art music. Earlier Chinese ensemble practices, dominated by a combination of Confucian and Daoist aesthetics, stressed moderation and introspection and specifically avoided and disdained the expression of extreme emotions (Thrasher 1981; Jiang 1986). Since the dramatic moments in Western orchestral music were (at least in part) realized through extreme contrasts involving tempo, dynamics, and melodic range, traditional Chinese instrumental construction was reformed in order to increase volume and range (numbers 5 & 7, above).

There were also profound **political implications** of the movement to modernize traditional Chinese instruments on the model of the Western symphony orchestra. These involve the relationship between the Party and music intellectuals (most of whom were trained in Western music).

There was one level on which the Communist Party and the music intellectuals agreed: that modernization of Chinese musical practices was absolutely necessary. Therefore the interest in xiandaihua was shared. The prescribed role of Western music in the process of modernization, however, became a point of bitter

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<sup>123</sup> Western writings on these instrumental reforms are scarce. For a brief description, in English, of the efforts to modernize the zheng zither, see Cao 1983:11; and of the reformation in construction of the dizi (transverse flute), see Lau 1991:10-14.

dispute. The Party, arguing for the study of Western music in order to better understand the fundamental principles of modern scientific music, was suspicious of the music itself for its ties to capitalism and its culture. They therefore advocated a socialist-inspired critical approach to the study and performance of Western music the ultimate aim of which would be the creation of a new Chinese music which would be modern but would not exhibit the bourgeois characteristics of Western music.

The suspicion on the part of the Party that the music intellectuals did not share its commitment to a socialist-inspired critical approach to the study of Western music was well-founded. Most of these intellectuals were not Party members. Their main interest in music was professional and aesthetic, not political. Those that did speak out on the political issues connected with the reconstruction of China's traditional instruments -- like He Luding -- saw this reform as an important part of the modernization movement. **They tended, however, to see Western music and musical instruments not as carriers of fundamental modern science contaminated by their development within bourgeois capitalist societies but as transnational traditions forming the pinnacle of scientific development and the essence of musical modernity.**

... the symphony orchestra should be the main point of emphasis in forming China's new musical culture. What we call "western" musical instruments have been developed to a very high degree of perfection by musicians and craftsmen in the different countries. The potentialities of a symphony orchestra are far greater than those of the Chinese traditional orchestra. A symphonic ensemble can

play both western and Chinese works, and give the latter a richer tone and colour than ever before (He 1957:382).

It is obvious that, to He Luding, so-called "western" musical instruments are actually the result of hundreds of years of cultural exchange among the artists of many different countries. This internationalism (as an understanding of Western music history and as a goal for Chinese music's future) is endemic to the generation of musical intellectuals to which He Luding belonged.

But the music intellectuals' preference for Western instruments was correctly interpreted by the Party as a symptom of a deep chasm between themselves and these intellectuals vis-a-vis the political significance of Western music. This caused a lack of trust to exist between the two groups, resulting in a succession of criticism campaigns and purges inflicted upon the intellectuals by the Party, starting in the 1950s and continuing today.<sup>124</sup>

### Recent Developments

Since the Open Door Policy of the late 1970s the dynamics of the relationship between the dual imperatives of xiandaihua and minzuhua have shifted. Modernization is still a major concern (and for the same reasons as during the earlier periods). But the flood of new musical information -- techniques, technology, philosophy, and styles -- has combined with a new political freedom vis-a-vis the attitude toward (and therefore the research of) previous Chinese

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<sup>124</sup>This issue will be taken up in more depth later in this chapter.

musical traditions to move the contradiction between xiandaihua and minzuhua to a higher level. At this level, fears of being overrun by Western cultural influences help to reinforce the demand -- supported both by leftists and kaifangde -- that modernization not equal Westernization. And an enhanced respect for Chinese musical traditions (felt as a political freedom as a result of the Cultural Revolution's repression of them) also reinforces this demand.

As a result, the modernization of Chinese traditional instruments has -- since the late 1970s -- slowed but broadened and deepened. It has slowed in the sense that many of the best known performers on the most common traditional instruments feel comfortable with the present state of instrument construction and are not interested in further reform. It is broader in terms of the number of instruments it touches and deeper by virtue of the increased work on reform theory, on the consolidation and organization of reform efforts, and on the nature and aesthetics of traditional instruments themselves.

Reform work in the early century and from Liberation to the Cultural Revolution tended to emphasize the modernization of (and extension through building families of) the most commonly used Chinese traditional instruments: erhu (two-stringed fiddle), dizi (transverse flute), guzheng (plucked zither), pipa (plucked lute), etc.. Recent reforms have broadened in two ways. First, reform work has been extended to include instruments from the fifty-five minorities in China (Ying 1989:250-251; CD 12/28/88:34). This not only serves the political purpose of bringing modernization to these minority groups (most of whom live far away from the major urban areas and are therefore not so quickly touched by modernization), but also increases the national resources vis-a-vis instrumental

timbres and techniques. This satisfies the demands of both xiandaihua and minzuhua.

Second, much work has recently been done on the research, discovery, reform, and remanufacture of ancient instruments long since forgotten (CD 10/21/83:5; Ying 1989:251-2; Wang 1991:72; BR 8/6/90:30; BR 4/27/92). This also increases the instrumental resources for China's modern musical culture; and it satisfies xiandaihua and minzuhua.

The deepening of the reform effort results from the consolidation of previous reforms (as improved instruments become standard within musical institutions and with performing artists); from the rationalization of reform through meetings and conferences (Zhang 1987a:237) and "the beginnings of the emergence of a relatively systematic music reform theory" (Ying 1989:247); and from increased empirical and aesthetic research undertaken into pre-modern Chinese musical practices.

As a result of recent trends the contradictions between xiandaihua and minzuhua have become clearer but not necessarily sharper. The failure of native experiments designed to replace the cello and double-bass with larger, modified versions of the erhu have resulted in a greater acceptance of the Western instruments as a necessary step in the modernization of traditional instrument ensembles. Indeed, there has been a growing tendency (especially among younger professional composers and conservatory students) toward a view of the modern Chinese instrumental ensemble as a mixture of Western and traditional Chinese instruments -- the mixture being determined "by the needs of the piece" (Jiang 1991:16). The solution posed here involves a rejection of the xiandaihua/minzuhua contradiction entirely, at least as it concerns instrumentation and the construction of

traditional instruments: Chinese instruments and Western ones are all simply resources for use in a new synthesis.<sup>125</sup>

But even the growing acceptance of mixed ensembles -- politically unstable though it is -- does not eliminate the need for the continuing modernization of traditional instruments. Actually it accentuates this need, for traditional instruments must be able to assert themselves in these ensembles. **As a result of the years of reform work there has emerged a consensus vis-a-vis what should be modernized and what should be retained.** And this has helped to produce a clearer notion of the contradictions inherent in the xiandaihua/minzuhua relationship (without necessarily making them easier to solve).

... a fairly unified point of view with regard to improvement [of instrument construction] has emerged. This is: traditional timbre, sound production and style should be retained as much as possible; range, dynamics, temperament and playing techniques can be developed... (Zhang 1987a:239)

It is obvious that this "unified point of view" is not terribly specific. There is still room for much debate over, for example, how much retaining of "traditional timbre" is "as much as possible" in the context of modernization of dynamics through reformed construction. Nevertheless the emergence of a common viewpoint (and one which is nonetheless more specific than earlier ones) is

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<sup>125</sup> As we shall see in the section concerning New Wave composers, this instrumentation practice does not solve the xiandaihua/minzuhua contradiction. It merely removes it from the area of modernization of traditional instruments and places it within the creative practices of the composer.

significant. It signals a stabilization within the musical community vis-a-vis practical attitudes toward the reform of traditional instrument construction.

Since the early days of this century the dictates of minzuhua have helped to limit the degree to which xiandaihua could be effected (and vice versa). For example, minzuhua has insisted that the total rejection of national instruments amounts to national musical nihilism, and therefore has acted as a braking mechanism against those who (especially early in the century) pushed for the "total Westernization" (quanpan xihua) of China's musical practices. On the other hand, xiandaihua has dictated that changing the national instrumental traditions is necessary to eradicate the negative effects of China's past feudal society -- and it has dictated the direction of change. The (perhaps ironic) fact that the direction of change has been toward the musical practices of the West has pushed the contradiction between minzuhua and xiandaihua to a higher level. The attempted resolution of this higher level has formed the core of 1980s and early 1990s musical practices. It is above all important to remember that (contrary to the situation in the West) the technical improvement of traditional Chinese instruments is a continuing feature of modern musical life in the People's Republic of China.

In addition to the improvement of traditional instrument capabilities, modernization has had a profound impact upon the performance practice of the traditional music itself. In the next section I will analyze certain aspects of this modern performance practice which shed light on the xiandaihua/minzuhua contradiction. I will show that the institutionalization and modernization of this practice has been a major contributor to the construction of a modern concert



musical culture in China (juchanghua); and that the political, musical, and aesthetic ramifications of this process have been profound.

### Performance Practice

#### Goals

In this section I will analyze the relationship between the abstract goals of musical modernization and the presentation of the music itself. I will show that modern musical presentations of modernized traditional music played on reformed traditional instruments serve multiple musico-political ends for groups with varying interests; and that these presentations both grow out of and attempt to resolve the xiandaihua/minzuhua contradiction which continues to be the engine propelling the evolution of modern Chinese music.

**There are specific goals to which those involved in the construction of a modern musical culture in China have aspired. Central among them has been the desire to have China take its place among the most culturally advanced civilizations in the world.** In the early years of the twentieth century it was the Western democracies (and later Russia) which represented this advanced stage of development. We have seen how the modernization of traditional Chinese instruments was based upon a Western model of instrument construction. This was due to the linkage (in Chinese minds) of Western music to Western power

(especially techno/scientific power) and the resulting view of Western music as an expression of advanced scientific civilization. Western aesthetic preferences, embodied in musical practices, became definitive of modernity. The desire to emulate Western musical practices was therefore born of nationalism (the desire for China to achieve modernity) and the emulation itself became a patriotic political act. Only through the adoption of scientific culture could Chinese civilization reestablish its rightful place among the world's most advanced civilizations, thereby throwing off the shackles both of thousands of years of Chinese feudalism and of recent Western domination. The tools of modernity -- the source of Western power -- could be and must be appropriated. Westernization was the road to revitalization.

As we have seen, the Chinese Communist Party's ascension to power brought a populism into official dogma which rejected total Westernization and entrenched a philosophy which has tried to find a middle way to modernization: a new way which is neither feudal Chinese nor Western. This middle way, it is hoped, will help to produce a new kind of music -- a music which is modern yet Chinese; national yet internationally respected. We will recognize, as we explore the means which the Chinese have used (and are still using) in the attempt to construct this new Chinese musical culture, another manifestation of the xiandaihua/minzuhua dialectic. This time it will reveal the complex, multi-leveled relationship between the governing Party and musical intellectuals. Sharing some goals and some means but not others, these groups are interdependent but mutually suspicious. Both have a stake in the direction of development of Chinese serious music.

## Means

Central to the construction of a modern musical culture has been the process, begun in the early twentieth century, of institutionalizing professional musical training. From the very beginning, this institutionalization has had intimate ties with Western art music. The founders of the early institutions devoted to professional musical education were either themselves trained in Western universities and conservatories or thoroughly familiar with and heavily influenced by the philosophies of Western educational and cultural institutions. For example, the organization which "laid the foundation for the development of professional musical education" was the Beijing University Music Research Group (Beijing daxue yinyue yanjiuhui) formed in 1919 by Cai Yuanpei (Zgyycd 1984:20). Cai (1868-1940) had spent the four years from 1907 to 1910 in Germany, receiving a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Leipzig University. His interests in the philosophy of Kant, in modern science, evolutionary theory, and comparative cultural studies led him to develop the notion that "social and cultural progress was the result of cultural exchange" and that art, like science, "transcended national boundaries" (Duiker 1977:21,19). Those nations who would lose out in the evolution of human civilization would be those who isolated themselves from the other nations.

Cai Yuanpei encouraged the reform of Chinese music through comparative research (and the publication of this research in music journals), through the creation and performance of new works combining Chinese and Western elements,

and through systematic musical education based on Western models.<sup>126</sup> The young musical reformers under his tutelage included such important figures as Xiao Youmei, Liu Tianhua, and Wang Guangqi (see Zgyycd 1984: 427-8, 237, & 400-401 for brief biographies).<sup>127</sup> For these reformers, as for others involved in the "New Culture Movement" (Xin wenhua yundong), China's cultural salvation demanded the creation of a new music which did not isolate itself from the advanced musics of the Western nations. Many of the reformers had received advanced education in Western countries (usually Germany, France or the United States). They were highly-educated intellectuals with broad interests and their fervent nationalism contained a firm commitment to cultural internationalism.

After Liberation, the Chinese Communist Party --because of its close relationship with the Russian Communist Party -- sent music students to Russian conservatories for advanced study and invited Russian music specialists to teach in the newly established conservatories in China (Mao 1991:108-109, CNA 7/21/61:2; Wang 1991:18-19). This close relationship between the two Communist Parties worked to legitimate Western musical practices in China: Russian music and musicians were, after all, a part of the Western classical music tradition. But this legitimation worked only within narrowly defined boundaries -- those of the

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<sup>126</sup> The founding of the first Chinese music conservatory -- the National Music Conservatory (Guoli yinyueyuan) -- by Xiao Youmei in 1927 was a result of the influence and encouragement of Cai Yuanpei (Zgyycd 1984:138, 427).

<sup>127</sup> For a clear and concise discussion, in English, of this time and these figures vis-a-vis their importance in the modern history of Chinese music, see Wong 1991. For a lengthier discussion, in Chinese, within the context of a general history of modern Chinese music see Wang 1984, especially pages 50-80. For a discussion specifically of the importance of Liu Tianhua as a modernizer of music for the erhu, see Liu 1988a:111-117.

"socialist realism" of Stalin/Zhdanov -- and did not solve the problem of the ideological animosity between the intellectuals and the Party.<sup>128</sup>

What the relationship with the Russian Communist Party did do specifically was to legitimate and give impetus to further development within Chinese musical communities toward internationally (i.e., "Western") respected (and defined) levels of musical performance.<sup>129</sup> Russian (and therefore Western) standards were accepted as necessary for the development of a modern musical culture. **These standards (virtuosity, group discipline, the striving for the ideal performance), seen as definitive for modern musical practices, were applied both to performances of Western music and to performances of Chinese traditional music.**

This rationalization of traditional Chinese music performance was seen as an important step in musical modernization. In the 1950s, traditional Chinese instrumental programs were instituted within the conservatories. Modeled after the programs for Western instrumental study in the same conservatories (themselves modeled after Western conservatories), the rationalization of Chinese instrumental performance involved -- as part of the adoption of the performance standards mentioned above -- the elimination of many pre-1949 musical practices. For example, the standardization of teaching techniques and textbooks (adopted from Russian models) helped to foster a national style which, although made up of

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<sup>128</sup> See the Conclusions to this dissertation for some elaboration of Zhdanovian socialist realism, its narrowly -- but vaguely -- defined limits vis-a-vis musical practices, and its influence on the development of modern Chinese music.

<sup>129</sup> It was in the mid-50s that the first of a young generation of Chinese musicians, trained in Chinese conservatories by Russian teachers, began to win awards performing Western classical music at international competitions (see CNA 7/21/61:2, Kraus 1989:81,162).

elements from regional practices, worked to eliminate the regional diversity characteristic of pre-Liberation traditional musics. In addition, the need for producing virtuosi demanded instrumental specialization -- a reversal of pre-1949 practices, in which a lack of ability to play on multiple instruments would "discredit, not enhance, the player's reputation among his colleagues" (Lau 1991:93).

Nevertheless, during the 1950s the populist and didactic goals of the Party worked against one final move in the establishment of a Western-styled concert culture: the institutionalization of concert hall performance as the dominant form of public musical presentation. The view of music as a tool for spreading revolutionary ideology, combined with a rejection of the elitism implied in Western bourgeois concert cultures, resulted in the mobilization of conservatory-trained performers for performances in factories to perform for the workers and into the countryside to perform for the peasants. Many of the musicians resented these activities (see Kraus 1989:109), claiming that they were inappropriate settings for the presentation of their musical art.

This dispute again revealed the profound ideological gap between the more revolutionary populists (leftists) and the urban musical intellectual elite. The intellectuals saw populist programs as a degradation of their years of hard work and as counterproductive with regard to their goal of achieving recognition within the international art music world. The populists continued their suspicion of the elite's preference for Western bourgeois artistic styles and used the Great Leap Forward of 1958 as a springboard for deepening and broadening support for their agenda. As the 1950s drew to a close, and the political leaders' attitudes toward Russia (the

only close political connection to a country with a Western art tradition) chilled, the populists' control over cultural production tightened.<sup>130</sup>

The 1960s continued this trend, and by 1964 the Maoist populists were in firm command. They issued a new slogan demanding that music be "revolutionized, nationalized, and made for the masses" (geminghua, minzuhua, qunzhonghua). In this same year the Party launched a criticism campaign against the musical elite of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing for refusing to abandon the teaching of Western classical music (CNA 4/9/65:3). The Party populists were a step away from completely shutting down performances both of Western music and of most forms of modernized Chinese traditional music as well.

The Cultural Revolution took this step, closing the major educational institutions, including music conservatories. Western music was rejected for its bourgeois nature; most traditional Chinese music was rejected as a remnant of feudal ideology. Instrumental music in particular (both Western and Chinese) was suspected of embodying decadent ideologies (see BR 3/1/74:15-17 & 6/7/74:18-22). The musical elite was sent to the countryside for reeducation. The experiments in Chinese musical modernization dating from the early days of the century were rejected.

CC (retired erhu professor): They [the Party] allowed folksongs during the Cultural Revolution, because they didn't think of folk music as feudal. Feudal music was court music and the music of

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<sup>130</sup> The specific tightenings and loosening of Party (leftist) policy in these years (and in the early 1960s) reveals a confused pattern which nonetheless moves in the direction I have outlined. For a concise description in English which is more specific vis-a-vis yearly trends, see CNA 7/21/61 and 8/25/61.

intellectuals. Therefore, the early modernization efforts were criticized. The xuetang yuege [early 20th century "school songs"] were seen as decadent, and the music of Liu Tianhua was not allowed. ... Music education stopped; we all went to the countryside.

After the fall of the Gang of Four in 1976, it did not take long for both Western music and Chinese traditional music to reemerge. There even arose a renewed interest in the study and performance of ancient (imperial) Chinese music. The conservatories, which had reopened in the early 1970s, once again began training students in all of these previously forbidden musics.

Since the late 1970s, under the Open Door Policy, the modernization of Chinese traditional music has resumed full force. As we have seen, the modernization of traditional instruments has deepened and has become more organized. The rationalization of performance practice has also resumed and deepened. With moderates in control, the populists (at least temporarily) at bay, and contact with the West the greatest since before Liberation, the early and mid 1980s saw the emergence of a true art music concert culture in Chinese urban centers.

**The modernization of traditional performance practices has demanded the rationalization of a variety of stylistic features as Western performance aesthetics have become institutionalized more firmly than ever. This has resulted in a profound break with traditional patterns of performance, especially with regard to the social relations of musical production. These**



changed relations (including performer-audience relations, performer-performer relations, and relations among the audience members themselves) are implied and enforced by the physical space of the preferred location for performance of "serious" music: the concert hall, itself an embodiment of the Western ideal listening dynamic.<sup>131</sup> This dynamic, evolved from the development of the Western classical musical tradition out of earlier forms of religious ritual, involves treating the music as a kind of ritual object: there is a stillness and quietness in the audience and rapt attention to the performance as it unfolds. The performers also exhibit this relative stillness and rapt attention. They exhibit very little unnecessary movement and assume a serious, concentrated (and sometimes entranced) posture.

In addition, there is a physical distancing of the performers from the audience. This distance necessitates, in order to be heard, that the performers (if the performance is of an ensemble) face not each other but rather face the audience. This is not the best physical situation for the performers to hear each other, which underscores the fact that this type of performance is not for the players themselves - it is for the audience.

The concert performance in Western cultures can be viewed as a modern descendant of the earlier religious ritual performance; its analogous conceptual development has produced the Western notion of "art."<sup>132</sup> The construction of a concert culture (juchanghua) in China has demanded the adoption of this concept of art and its application to a musical tradition which previously had no such

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<sup>131</sup> It was not until 1986 that the capital city of Beijing had its own concert hall (CFFA 1988:136) designed expressly as a vehicle for the performance of serious music.

<sup>132</sup> For a discussion of the rationalization and organization of this concept through the techniques of early Western philosophers, see Dahlhaus 1982:1-9.

concept.<sup>133</sup> This new concept, the listening practices which embody, fulfill and reproduce it, and the spaces set aside for the experience of it carry definite **stylistic imperatives** for the music itself -- imperatives for the development of musical elements which differ profoundly from those of pre-concert culture traditions.

Central to these imperatives is the **control of unpredictable elements in the musical presentation**. This is achieved through the rationalization of performance preparation: music is read off of a score and memorized for performance. The practice of writing the music down and strictly adhering to it in performance eliminates most chances for improvisation -- ornamentation is written down, also -- and allows for the controlling of musical dynamics and tempo. An emphasis on concentrated practice in preparation for performance (again indicative of the audience orientation of this tradition) opens up the possibility for greater technical virtuosity, both individually and as a group. This virtuosity is considered a positive value: it adds to the enjoyment of the audience.

**The visual element of performance-oriented presentation is also controlled.** Students are taught to incorporate smooth, graceful hand and wrist movements into their performances. Other than this, bodily movements are kept to a minimum. The result is a highly-organized visual presentation featuring practiced expressive gestures which serve as a kind of (highly controlled) visual ornamentation.

These new practices -- whose contrast with the older ones can hardly be overstated -- are firmly situated within the conservatories which are training the next generation of Chinese musicians. Through the influence of these institutions

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<sup>133</sup> For a discussion of the performance dynamics of a pre-concert culture Chinese ensemble music, see Witzleben 1987.

**the new practices are propagated as the musical orthodoxy -- i.e., as "the tradition."** Both leftists and kaifangde support this new orthodoxy, adding to its hegemonic thrust. Younger musicians are trained into these new practices, thus securing the position of "the tradition" for the future; and older musicians who learned to play traditional music outside of the conservatory (and who thus might constitute an oppositional community) have come to claim the superiority of the conservatory tradition over their own.

The following comments to me from an Asian-American scholar of Chinese dizi (flute) music concerning his experiences playing both with teahouse musicians and in a national competition for traditional music illustrate the depth of the schism between the new tradition and the old and the degree to which the new tradition has achieved hegemony.

...the professors at the conservatory found out that we had entered the competition and [they] decided that we needed a coach so that we wouldn't be an embarrassment to the conservatory. Of course, what this man taught us was quite the opposite from the style and weidao [flavor] we learned from the old guys in the teahouses. The essence of Jiangnan Sizhu, according to my experience and understanding, is found in the spontaneous reaction and interaction among players and the music, not the structured dynamic markings, symmetric contrast in intensity, choreographed body movement, cheap emotionalism, and above all sanitized and "polished" playing style imposed from without - this is of course a style ubiquitously found in almost all "concert" performances and conservatory

instrumental style. Under the constraints [imposed by the coach], we couldn't really reproduce the essence of the style.

[The conservatory groups'] understanding of the Jiangnan Sizhu style is close to nothing. They treat the music as some kind of resource on which they impose their own creativity, ideas, and interpretation to the extent [that] the characteristic stylistic elements in Jiangnan Sizhu are completely sacrificed. For example, the size of the ensemble ranged from a solo player to an orchestra; functional harmony was added to "enrich" the sound; virtuosity [had] become the key element; the tempo was much too fast; instrumental playing style was too abrupt and [there was] not enough spontaneity. What is more disappointing is the fact that the highest awards were given to those famous musicians (mostly from Beijing and the Central Conservatory) whose playing style violated all the basic rule of Jiangnan Sizhu.

The [teahouse] sizhu musicians feel that their style is inferior to the conservatory-trained style because the former don't know enough to "elevate" or "integrate" their music into the realm of "art" music. In the eyes of these sizhu players, music conservatory and professional performing groups consist mostly of musicians who were highly trained in music, thus their musical rendition and ideas must be better. "We better listen to them and follow what they do" (Lau 1991a).

The "virtuosity" alluded to in the quote is (along with rationalization) part of the scientism seen by the Chinese as the core of Western culture. Technical virtuosity becomes the criterion through which musical excellence is determined. Tan Shuzhen, then Deputy Director of the Shanghai Conservatory, spoke to this problem in a 1979 interview for the film From Mao to Mozart: Isaac Stern in China. Tan is speaking specifically about students of the violin, but his words apply equally to students of other instruments.

Most of the students want to play something difficult. Everything must be fast, loud, noisy. They think that if they can play something difficult and fast, they can get a good job. Everyone will get a job after graduation; but some jobs are better than others. So everybody's trying to play something difficult to show that "I am the best player" (Tan 1979).

**This move to prioritize technical virtuosity -- this "mechanization of aesthetics" -- is a direct result of invented attitudes in China about Western civilization.** Paramount among these attitudes is the notion that Western civilization is driven by science and technology, and is therefore (as one university student told me) much more "efficient." The effect of this upon aesthetics has been described by Lewis Mumford, and contrasted with pre-industrial aesthetics. Mumford's focal point was the effect of the machine on modern Western aesthetics.

Expression through the machine implies the recognition of relatively new esthetic terms: precision, calculation, flawlessness, simplicity,

economy. Feeling attaches itself in these new forms to different qualities than those that made handicraft so entertaining. Success here consists in the elimination of the nonessential, rather than, as in handicraft decoration, in the willing production of superfluity, contributed by the worker out of his own delight in the work (Mumford 1973).

The contrast Mumford makes between the modern machine-inspired aesthetics (precision, calculation, efficiency) and those connected to handicraft (the "willing production of superfluity" out of "delight") are appropriate in a contrast of conservatory and teahouse aesthetics in Chinese music. But what is more important is the degree to which hegemony has been achieved by the conservatory style. This is illustrated by the comments from the non-conservatory musicians themselves (see Lau 1991a, above). Through the conservatories, the new modernized tradition has been institutionalized and propagated. The only potentially oppositional group has accepted its superiority. **The conservatory style defines the Chinese musical tradition.**

### Composition

The third location for the tension of minzuhua and xiandaihua is in the development of musical composition. I have chosen two areas for analysis. The first is a piece of music written in the late 1950s; the second is a compositional style

which emerged in the mid-1980s. **Each of these has had a profound impact on the development of professional, specialized composers of serious modern Chinese music; each illustrates clearly the minzuhua/xiandaihua dialectic, its roots and its political/social/musical implications; and each, despite its importance within the field of Chinese music, has been virtually ignored by Western scholars of China.**

"This is our symphonic music"

The previous discussion concerning the treatment of and performance on traditional Chinese instruments dealt with taking indigenous traditions and modernizing them. But there is another aspect to the construction of a modern concert musical tradition in China: taking foreign traditions and "nationalizing" them (minzuhua). In this section I will address attempts to adapt the Western violin and its characteristic musical forms for the expression of Chinese music. The section will culminate with a discussion of the most well-known piece in this genre: the single-movement concerto for violin Liang Shanbo he Zhu Yingtai, known in China as Liang Zhu and in the West as The Butterfly Lovers.

There were two important elements to the Chinese musical and political communities' reactions, in the first half of this century, to the presence of the Western violin as the major instrument of Western orchestral music. One is scientific, inspired by the admiration for Western science and the belief that in this science lay the secret of Western advanced civilization. We have seen how this

view, which contrasted the "highly developed" and "scientific" violin to the "backward" native bowed strings such as the erhu, spurred the reform of erhu construction and playing style. But it also played a role in the move to adapt the violin itself to the expressive needs of Chinese music.

The other element is universalistic and fuels the notion that musical instruments are "tools" (gongju) which are international in their potential application. In other words ideology is not embodied in instruments. Therefore any country can use the violin, and each will undoubtedly use it in its own way, infusing the violin with its own national flavor. This notion of instruments as ideology-free tools was codified by Mao in his Talk to the Music Workers in 1956; it is part of the ideological traditions of both the leftists and the kaifangde.

The combination of these two notions -- that the violin is more advanced than is the indigenous erhu, and that the violin is free of ideological baggage -- paved the way for the development of a school of musicians devoted to the Sinicization (minzuhua) of the violin. Western-trained musical intellectuals preferred the violin's superior range, volume, etc.. They of course were not too concerned about its ideological baggage. Mao and his followers, on the other hand, were definitely concerned about the importation of capitalist ideologies via musical instruments; but the "instrument as tool" notion helped the violin to fit nicely into their "Use the West to Serve China" slogan ("Yang wei zhong yong"), and the "scientific superiority" of the violin satisfied their Marxist scientism. So both sides of the musico-political spectrum -- the Western-leaning musical elite and the Maoist populists -- saw advantages to violin minzuhua.

The first Chinese compositions for violin appeared in the 1920s and were composed by Chinese violinists who had been trained by foreigners, either in China



(in which case the teachers were likely White Russians) or abroad.<sup>134</sup> But efforts to establish this genre were hampered by the political turmoil of the 1930s and 1940s. After the Liberation of 1949 the Communist government supported the development of Chinese music for violin. Nevertheless, as the populist leanings of the government dictated that Chinese folk music be the basis of the music of New China, most of the works produced for violin in the early to mid 1950s were rather short pieces (less than five minutes duration) drawn from (and some merely transcriptions of) Chinese folksongs or instrumental folk music.

It was with the Great Leap Forward of the late 1950s that Chinese composers began to experiment to a greater extent with larger forms. Western musical structures such as sonatas and concertos were used as models in this musical Great Leap Forward. The melodic material for these pieces was still mostly taken from Chinese folk musics; but now Chinese opera (itself a longer form of musical structure) became an important musical, structural and programmatic source.

It was in this context that there emerged, in 1959, a one-movement violin concerto in sonata form (for solo violin and Western orchestra) based on an indigenous historical romantic tragedy. This piece, Liang Shanbo he Zhu Yingtai, drew heavily (in narrative structure and melodic material) on an opera of the same name that had become popular in the Shanghai area in the early 1950s, and of

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<sup>134</sup>The most important of this first generation of Chinese violinists was Ma Sicong, who would later become Director of the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. Ma (1912-87) studied violin and composition in France between 1923 and 1931, and by the early 1960s had been known "for more than twenty years as the leading violinist in China" (CNA 7/21/61:2).

which a film had been made in 1955 (Zgyycd:232).<sup>135</sup> The violin concerto (known in English as The Butterfly Lovers) was written by two students at the Shanghai Conservatory "under the supervision of Party officials" (Mao 1991:115). It achieved instant success with audiences but was controversial with both the musical intellectuals and Maoist populists. Some intellectuals "sneered at its pentatonic melodies and its easy popularity"; the populists saw it as "a romantic story which prettified the feudal order" (Kraus 1989:108-109).

Both sides, however, eventually came to applaud this piece as a successful combination of Chinese and Western musical elements. The Party abandoned its earlier misgivings and declared this concerto a "revolutionary document" which criticized the feudal marriage customs and therefore confirmed the superiority of the social order of the New China as led by the Communist Party (Mao 1991:115). Many musical intellectuals came to see Liang Zhu as (at least for its time) a particularly successful example of violin minzuhua.

Liang Zhu was first performed in May of 1959. The score was published in 1960. In a part of the preface to the score entitled "For the Performers," minzuhua is described as "uniting the violin's capabilities with the Chinese musical language; uniting the violin's systematic techniques with the expressive devices of Chinese musical style" (Shanghai yinyue 1960). It is stressed that the violin, being a Western instrument, has "a comprehensive tradition of performance techniques"; if the goal, however, is to perform China's music on this instrument, "it is obvious that [these techniques] cannot be wholly adopted" (ibid.).

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<sup>135</sup> The opera subgenre -- popular in Zhejiang Province -- from which this violin concerto draws its material is of relatively short history (since the early twentieth century) and is called **yueju**.

The solution posed by the composers of Liang Zhu to the problem of violin minzuhua included:

1. the direct adoption of melodic and accompanimental elements from the well-known yueju opera of the same name;
2. the direct adoption of expressive techniques from Chinese bowed-string instrumental traditions. These mainly involved the use of a variety of portamentos and bowings from the two-stringed fiddle (erhu);
3. the imitation of expressive vocal techniques from various Chinese opera styles, especially those from yueju and jingju (Peking Opera); and
4. the imitation (through bowings and rhythmic devices) of the typical expressive devices of such well-known traditional Chinese instruments as the guzheng (zither) and the pipa (lute).<sup>136</sup>

It is the adoption of Chinese traditional expressive techniques for use on the violin which makes this piece an example of violin minzuhua. The mere playing, in traditional violin technique, of Chinese melodies does not constitute minzuhua. Minzuhua is a process of "making it our own."

The violin is an international instrument. Each country plays it in its own style. This is true of Germany, and of France, and of Russia. Our task is to create our own style of violin playing. In doing this, we are creating something new (Situ 1987).

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<sup>136</sup> See Shanghai yinyue 1960 for two pages of examples of these adoptions and their origins. Also see Jiang 1991a:92 for a short description, in English, of some of these borrowings.

The process of minzuhua, as exemplified by Liang Zhu, builds upon the scientific/universalistic concepts (discussed above) laid down in the days before Liberation. This process's assumption is the ability of the scientifically advanced and ideologically neutral Western violin to satisfy the expressive needs of Chinese music; its goal is the realization of this capacity of the violin; and its means are the adoption and imitation of the expressive techniques of various Chinese musical traditions. There are, in addition, two other aspects of this process which need to be mentioned. The first is nationalistic and the second internationalistic.

**Minzuhua, in drawing from a variety of Chinese national, regional and local traditions, participates in the construction of a "national" style.** The use of the Western violin and its forms (sonatas, concertos) provides a "neutral" base upon which such a national style can be constructed. The violin concerto Liang Zhu borrowed its programmatic content and its main theme from the yueju style. But many of the expressive devices used in this piece came from other Chinese opera traditions and from indigenous instrumental traditions. The result was a new "national" tradition which brings together previously disparate musical elements. It is this homogenizing process which was celebrated, in the 1960s, in the claim that Liang Zhu is "our own symphonic music" and that it fulfilled "the historical task of contemporary Chinese composers," which was to create "a Chinese symphonic music made for the masses" ("minzuhua qunzhonghua de jiaoxiang yinyue" (Meng 1960).

**In addition -- and equally importantly -- the violin minzuhua process is seen as contributing expressive techniques for violin to the international violin community, thus enriching its musical language.** This is the "duty" of Chinese violinists and composers.

It is the duty of Chinese musicians to make our own Chinese music through the means of Western instruments and compositional techniques and to take this music to the rest of the world. This is the future. It has nothing to do with questions of which one is the better [music]. It is our duty to give our music to all of mankind to enjoy. It is very important not only for the Chinese people, but for the whole world. ... Chinese music must be part of the universal culture (Situ 1987).

This nationalistic/internationalistic dialectic expresses itself through the processes of minzuhua and xiandaihua. The violin concerto Liang Shanbo he Zhu Yingtai has been considered since 1960 the single most successful resolution of the tensions inherent in these processes and their interactions. Although there appeared throughout the 1960s many imitations of its style and approach, no piece has approached its success.

After the Cultural Revolution violin minzuhua became institutionalized through the rule that violin recitals and semester juries in Chinese conservatories must include at least one Chinese piece. In 1986 Beijing hosted the first International Youth Violin Competition, in which each entrant was required to play a Chinese piece. And in 1987 the first China Violin Competition was held in Shenzhen, in which forty Chinese violinists competed in performing Chinese compositions for violin (BR 3/31/87:5). For those involved in this development it is still "just the beginning of Chinese violin music" (Situ 1987). And the quest for a

repertory of pieces which combine Chinese and Western elements as successfully as did Liang Zhu continues.

It may take generations to establish a Chinese violin school ... [but]  
we must do this (Li Gang quoted in BR 3/31/87:5).

Xinchao: the "New Wave"

In the early 1980s there emerged a group of young composers -- mostly from the Central Conservatory in Beijing -- who posed a radically new solution to the minzuhua/xiandaihua dialectic. Influenced by renewed and deepened exposure to modern Western compositional techniques (such as atonality, aleatory, 12-tone and other serial techniques) as a result of the Open Door Policy, this new solution effected a "deep transformation of contemporary Chinese compositional style" (Tao 1989:53). The composers -- known collectively as xinchao (new wave) -- and their music have been, since the group's emergence, highly controversial.<sup>137</sup>

In this section I will discuss the musical style of the xinchao composers in its relation to the xiandaihua/minzuhua dialectic and analyze the controversy surrounding this group and its compositions. I will suggest that the xinchao group poses a most profound threat to the hegemonic strategies of the modern Chinese

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<sup>137</sup> For an introduction in English to four of the most important members of the Xinchao group, see BR 9/15/86. This piece, written during the "height of the Xinchao wave" (Liu 1988:8) is generally laudatory, as it predates the recently intensifying anti-Xinchao developments.

musical tradition as overseen by the Maoist government since Liberation; and that it does this by directly challenging the validity of that tradition.

Like previous modern Chinese music, the music of the Xinchao composers seeks to combine Chinese and Western musical traditions and thereby to create something new. But the combination posed by the Xinchao is a radically new one, separating from earlier combinations both in the Chinese component and in the Western one.<sup>138</sup>

The Chinese component in earlier combinations of Chinese and Western musics tended to center around the direct adoption of (or minimally-changed arrangement of) Chinese folksong melodies. This was especially true during the period of the Cultural Revolution which immediately preceded the period in which the Xinchao emerged (and which provided the musical landscape in which the Xinchao composers spent their early youth). The Xinchao composers, on the other hand, join other contemporary Chinese composers in rejecting the "narrow belief that national characteristics can be expressed simply by the direct adoption of a melody." Instead, these composers "dig into the depths of the traditional melody's essence and spirit, and recreate these using new musical concepts and new musical techniques" (Jiang 1991:15). In other words, the Xinchao practice is not mere adoption and/or imitation, but is philosophically based in a creative search for "essence."<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>The "earlier combinations" mentioned to here and in succeeding paragraphs refer to the practices of those Chinese composers from the early twentieth century until 1980 who made efforts at combining Chinese and Western musical elements. But, as we shall see, those practices which are especially rejected by the Xinchao composers are those of Chinese composers since Liberation.

<sup>139</sup>This change in philosophy toward how a composer expresses national "essence" is not limited to Xinchao practices. Rather, it is part of a more general modern practice which has emerged since the early 1980s. However, it did emerge

In addition, while earlier composers tended to adopt and/or arrange well-known, mostly pentatonic folksongs in their concert works, Xinchao composers tend to look for more unusual folk melodies, many of which are not pentatonic, and some of which do not easily fit into a tempered scale.

The Western component in Xinchao compositions differs even more dramatically with that used by earlier modern Chinese composers. The earlier composers almost exclusively adopted nineteenth-century Western romantic concepts of harmony, form and orchestration. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the large Western romantic orchestra and its music had become the standard by which modern, advanced music was to be judged. Liang Zhu is a good example of this tradition. The Xinchao composers, on the other hand, adopted the most advanced Western modern and avant-garde (xianfengpai) techniques. These techniques differ radically from romantic ones in their handling of melodic/harmonic relationships, in orchestration as a whole and in the treatment of individual instruments and the relationships among instruments.

With regard to **melodic/harmonic relationships**, Xinchao composers have experimented with modern and avant-garde Western techniques such as pantonality, atonality, microtones, and serial techniques. Although these techniques were occasionally found in pre-Liberation modern Chinese compositions (see Jiang 1991a:85-86), they were not allowed from 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution.

The **Orchestration** techniques of the Xinchao composers also differ markedly from those of previous modern Chinese composers, who mostly relied on

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simultaneously with Xinchao and is an integral part of the Xinchao approach to musical creation.



Western romantic conceptions of orchestration and accompaniment. Xinchao composers not only have adopted the modern Western tendency to view the orchestra as a group of soloists rather than as a block of sound, but also have broken down previous barriers which tended to keep Western and Chinese instruments separated.

... in the previous few decades the principles of western classical orchestration were applied in Chinese orchestras, while small Chinese ensembles kept their traditional forms of orchestration. Chinese and western instruments were usually not mixed in one orchestra or ensemble. However, in the present decade, the situation has changed greatly. The separation of Chinese and western instruments has been abandoned ... (Jiang 1991a:90).

The justification for this mixing of Chinese and Western instruments and the resulting creation of an essentially new ensemble with expanded creative expressive possibilities echoes of the scientific (and Maoist) universalism discussed earlier in this chapter:

In my opinion, there is no difference between Western and Chinese instruments. Instruments are merely bodies for producing sound. If I want to write for chang di (flute) or for cello, I contemplate the instrument's capabilities, and try to write something that will suit it well. ... I certainly don't think about whether or not this is a Chinese national instrument (Tan Dun in Jin & Lin 1990:24).

Xinchao orchestration techniques are not only important for their new approach to the mixture of Western and Chinese instruments, but also for the attention they give to the development of instrumental timbre.

**Timbre** has, as we have seen, traditionally been central to Chinese musical aesthetics, especially delicate changes of timbre used in musical presentation as an iconic embodiment of natural processes of change. But as timbre (especially in this sense) has not been central to Western classical music traditions, the Chinese adoption of the romantic Western orchestra as a standard for emulation demanded a downgrading of timbral significance. But modern Western music has, since the early twentieth century, become more enamored of timbral experimentation and manipulation and thus more appreciative of the musical possibilities of such manipulation. The Xinchao composers' adoption of modern Western compositional techniques allows them to re-open this traditional Chinese musical domain while still using distinctly modern musical concepts.<sup>140</sup>

In addition it helps solve one of the principal contradictions between Western and Chinese music: the melodic/timbral isolationism and contrast of Chinese traditional style and the blended, harmonic style of Western Romantic and Classical music. In previous modern Chinese compositions melodic/timbral development tended to be sacrificed in the interest of a Western style harmonic blend. The solution posed by earlier composers involved the composing of solo concertos so that the solo instrument could be extracted from the group and treated separately. The Xinchao adoption of modern Western approaches to orchestration allows for melodic/timbral development and contrast as an orchestration technique

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<sup>140</sup> This connection was recognized and encouraged twenty five years ago by Zhou Wenzhong. See Chou 1967:311 (especially f.n.#7).

within the context of the group without the necessity of extracting a principle soloist -- thus simultaneously satisfying contemporary Western compositional trends and reviving ancient Chinese aesthetic tendencies.

We have seen that Xinchao concepts of melody, harmony, and the treatment of instrumental combinations differ drastically from the concepts of previous modern Chinese composers. These differences have provoked (and continue to provoke) strong responses within the Chinese musico-political world.

#### The Response to Xinchao

The response within the musical community to the emergence of the Xinchao has divided this community into two camps. On one side stand those who oppose the Xinchao. These usually call upon arguments based in Maoist populism and/or materialism to criticize the Xinchao composers and their works.

On the other side stand those who support the Xinchao. They see the Xinchao experiments as a leap in sophistication over previous attempts at solving the Chinese/Western musical contradictions. They use arguments for pluralism and internationalism in their support, and criticize the previous tradition as too narrow.

In fact, the **Xinchao has become another focal point for the leftist-kaifangde power struggle**. With this in mind, let us look more closely at how this has come about and how arguments for and against the Xinchao are manifestations - - through public debate -- of this ongoing power struggle.

In 1983 a composition student named Tan Dun (from the Central Conservatory in Beijing) entered and won Second Prize in an International Competition in Dresden for a String Quartet entitled Feng Ya Song. This obvious commendation from the international community for a young Chinese composer's work received much attention within the Chinese musical community and in the Chinese press. But it raised fundamental questions about the nature of music and the political relationship of music to society; and opposition to Tan Dun and other contemporary Chinese composers soon emerged.

This opposition, at that time and consistently since then, based itself on three notions: populism, materialism, and a particular (selective) conception of tradition. I will treat each separately.

1. **Populism:** the argument from populism is that a composer should meet the needs of the masses. Musically this means that the Chinese melodic/harmonic relationship should be a tonal one since this is what the masses understand. Thus the Xinchao composers' usage of such modern Western techniques as atonality are inappropriate for a Chinese audience.<sup>141</sup> They will simply not understand the music and it will have no meaning for them. And if a music has no meaning for the vast majority of the Chinese masses its right to exist should be questioned.

If our compositions cannot influence people, cannot attract and fascinate people, cannot arouse people's interest, feelings, and

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<sup>141</sup> This is in essence one of the arguments made in a criticism by Lu Sheng of Tan Dun's String Quartet Feng Ya Song. This point has been mentioned by Peter Chang. See Lu 1984:7-8 & Chang 1991:128.

thought, then what significance can these compositions have? (Sun 1989:25).

Xinchao composers are also criticized for being too "subjective" in their compositions. The claimed over-emphasis on individuality on the part of the Xinchao composers is linked to the influence of Western bourgeois liberalism and, it is charged, serves to further these composers ideologically from the masses (and therefore to inhibit understanding between them).

2. **Materialism or utilitarianism:** the argument from materialism/utilitarianism holds that the main criterion for judging expressive culture should be social/political:

"Xinchao" composers strongly oppose the notion of music's social utility. ... [they want to] break themselves away from society, from life, and from the people by saying "Whatever you yourself want to write, go ahead and write". ... this is idealism. ... Materialism places music and other art forms in actual society. It observes and evaluates them based on their objective relationships with and within the real world. For a materialist, the music is secondary. (Sun 1989:26).

3. **Tradition:** the leftists have criticized the Xinchao composers for being anti-traditional.<sup>142</sup> For this argument to be understood it must be historically placed. It has emerged (as we have seen) at a time when the Chinese find their culture in a state of crisis as a result of the Open Door Policy and the relative ease of access to Western culture. Thus appeals to tradition are, on the one hand, appeals for composers to maintain a strong sense of Chinese identity in their works. The adoption of contemporary Western compositional techniques is seen as precluding the audience's feeling that the piece somehow expresses "Chineseness," whether or not the material for the piece had its origins in traditional Chinese music.

The works of many young composers today have something in common: they all show more and more influence from modernism. But [in them] the Chinese musical tradition as well as the background of modern Chinese life becomes more and more indistinct. In some of them we can even say that it is hard to recognize whether these pieces are written by Chinese or by foreigners (Lu 1984:9).

But there are two other aspects of these appeals to tradition. One is related to the populism and materialism mentioned above: the tradition in this sense is the political tradition of Chinese music since Liberation, and emphasizes what the goal of a Chinese composer should be. The other is the tradition of actual musical practice (i.e., compositional style) of Chinese composers since Liberation. This

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<sup>142</sup>For example, see Lu 1987:4.

emphasizes what techniques the composer should use to realize his (populist and materialist) goal. This tradition's dominant practice, as we have seen, emphasizes the adoption and/or arrangement of Chinese folksong melodies with Western (mostly Romantic) harmonic accompaniment. Departures from the model have at some times been considered heresy; during the 1980s there has been more room for flexibility; but the model is still presented as the dominant one.<sup>143</sup>

**Appeals to tradition are politically-loaded arguments made as part of efforts to protect and continue the musico-political hegemony of 40-year-old practices.** They invoke nationalism at a time when many Chinese feel their national identity threatened. And this invocation can be (potentially) all the more effective because the Xinchao trend against which it is made is identified as part of the threat.

The purpose [of the Xinchao] is really to aspire to a kind of Westernization through "gradual weakening of national individualities" and a "globalization of world cultures" (Sun 1989:24).

In sum, leftist arguments against Xinchao works are based in the Maoist traditions of populism and materialism -- traditions which have remained operative within the Communist Chinese political ideology since the 1920s. In addition,

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<sup>143</sup>The flexibility mentioned here manifests itself in two ways: (1) melodic material need not come from an actual Chinese folksong, but it should "have the feeling of the people" -- i.e., it should sound as if it did come from a folksong; and (2) harmonic devices and orchestration need not blindly follow Western Romantic models, as long as they are not too "modern." These developments attest both to an increased flexibility and to the continued hegemony of the model.

these arguments propose a particular selection from the various Chinese musical traditions -- revolutionary works and folk music before Liberation, and the mainstream developments based on these after Liberation -- as definitive of tradition itself. Counter-hegemonic thrusts from the musical intellectuals (such as Xinchao) are attacked as anti-tradition. And during the current cultural crisis, such attacks can carry significant emotional power. Let us see how the Xinchao and its defenders counter these leftist arguments.

Arguments in support of Xinchao (including statements from the Xinchao composers themselves) can also be divided into three categories: arguments from an artistic perspective, arguments invoking modernity (and therefore modernization), and arguments about the real nature of Chinese tradition.

1. One of the longest-lasting struggles between leftists and kaifangde in twentieth-century Chinese music history has been over the validity of notions such as the need to respect **artistic laws and the creative subjectivity of the composer**. These notions have been part of the kaifangde musical intellectuals' ideology since the beginning of the century. Simply put, the argument for the recognition of artistic laws posits that art has its own laws of development separate from those of society in general. In its extreme form, this argument states that art is an "autonomous" (zilulun) domain of culture. Therefore, criteria for its judgment should not be social or political -- they should be artistic.

This notion of the relationship between art and the socio-political order, learned from the West, became institutionalized within the musical intellectual community early in this century. It has by now been part of their ideology for generations and is reproduced in the next generation through the conservatories. In



addition, the claim for music's autonomy is useful in the struggle to "create a space" in which these musical intellectuals can work as they wish without constant harassment from the government: it is a wedge between themselves and the leftists. For this reason struggles between leftists and kaifangde since the early 1980s have often been manifested in theoretical debates over whether music is autonomous (zilulun) or follows the same laws (and therefore develops in conjunction with) other social domains such as the economic and political orders (talulun).

Besides arguing for zilulun, there are two other approaches which have been used to try to effect a break between music and politics. One claims that although music may not be autonomous it nevertheless is "more indirectly, more distantly and more vaguely linked to objective social life and to the economic base than are other artistic forms" (Li 1989:20). The other argues that music (especially instrumental music) is simply not suited for serving political ends because it "does not give a specific image or direction" to the listener's perception (Tan in Li 1986:13). To ask that music give a specific image (e.g., a political one) is to subvert its nature and to guarantee that it will be of low quality.

CC (erhu teacher): Chinese [instrumental] music does not have a specific image to direct to the listener. And whether the music is Chinese or not, if you investigate you will see that all great pieces are this way. They do not describe concrete images.

The goal of such arguments is some degree of separation between music and politics and a concomitant acknowledgement that music in some way constitutes a unique cultural domain.

The Xinchao composers emphasize the composer's subjectivity and individuality in the compositional process. They have adopted the Western view of the artist as "more perceptive, with a higher degree of understanding" as compared to the masses (Qu in Li 1986:13). As such, the artist's duty is not to express the feelings of the masses; the most important thing "is your own individuality" (Tan in Jin & Lin 1990:25).

Furthermore, an artist must use his or her higher level of understanding to be a kind of cultural pioneer, standing not with the era but in front of it.

artists should not advance along with the times; they should move in front of them. The more an artist remains with his era, the more limited his art will be (Qu in Li 1986:13).

This argument is in a sense for a kind of temporal (and therefore political) transcendence as a result of the artist's special gifts. If accepted, this view would exempt the artist from having to serve contemporary political ends with his or her art.

2. Arguments in support of Xinchao often invoke **modernity** as justification. They tend to emphasize two elements of modernity which bear directly on Xinchao practices: pluralism (duoyuanhua) and internationalism.

**Pluralism**, say the Xinchao supporters, is part and parcel of modern society. So it is natural that modern society's arts reflect such pluralism.<sup>144</sup> Therefore Xinchao pieces, even if they do not satisfy the aesthetic preferences of the Chinese

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<sup>144</sup>For this kind of position, see Wang Anguo in RMYY 87/12:4-5.

masses, have a right to exist for the small audience that does enjoy them. Furthermore, Xinchao composers themselves embody pluralism in their influences, and so are the essence of modernity.

Xinchao aesthetics has four sources: ideas about music as a social process (talulun), ideas about musical autonomy (zilulun), [ancient] Daoist philosophy, and [modern] Western expressionism (Ju in RMY 87/12:6)

This embodiment of modern pluralism not only has a right to exist, Ju says, but may even contain the answer to China's search for a modern yet distinct musical identity.

... social aesthetics is a kind of musical consciousness; autonomy is a kind of musical ontology; Lao [and] Zhuang's (Daoist) aesthetics is a kind of musical stylistics; Western expressionism is a kind of musical subjectivism. ... together these can combine to form a new way toward a more open system of Marxist aesthetics with Chinese characteristics (ibid.).<sup>145</sup>

Besides pluralism, Xinchao composers and their supporters believe that modern societies are characterized by ever increasing cultural exchange, resulting in a gradual lessening of cultural distinctions among them. The result of this process

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<sup>145</sup> The reference to "Lao [and] Zhuang" is to the ancient Daoist philosophers Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.

will be a new kind of **international musical style** shared by all modern countries.<sup>146</sup>

The goal is a universal music. Every country has influences from other cultures. The idea of calling this music Japanese, that music Chinese, and the other music European is nonsense. Chinese music must be one component of the music world (Situ 1987).

When I create music, the concepts I use are not innately Chinese concepts, nor are they innately Western ones (Tan in Li 1986:12).

I think that I cannot become a "Chinese" modern composer (laughs). It is better that I become a modern composer (Tan in Jin & Lin 1990:25).

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, cultural languages have become more and more global. News travels quickly, making the world smaller. It is becoming more and more difficult to conserve cultural traits; and the differences between East and West are lessening (Qu in Li 1986:12).

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<sup>146</sup> Chinese musical historians are quick to point out that such cultural exchange (between European countries) was an endemic feature of the development of Western classical music. The new international music will develop in a similar way, but on a more global scale (and with countries like China and India playing an important role).

The trend in music is toward a global style (Tan in Jin & Lin 1990:26).

Dedication to Chinese music's participation in the global style is shared by the Xinchao composers and their supporters. This interest in the development of an international style seems to imply a rejection of the conservation of cultural traits and therefore a rejection of the Chinese musical tradition. And we have seen that this is one of the main criticisms of the Xinchao coming from the leftists. Let us turn now to a discussion of the Xinchao's attitudes toward the Chinese musical tradition, for it is here that the key issues in the controversy coalesce; and it is here that the Xinchao poses its greatest political threat.

**3. Arguments in support of the Xinchao answer charges of being anti-traditional (fan chuantong) by questioning the validity of the dominant tradition since Liberation.** Thus the utilitarianism and populism of the Maoist/Marxist tradition is put under scrutiny and judged to be too narrow as criteria for artistic development. The emphasis that this tradition has put on the necessity of the artist to express the masses' feelings and on the "social content" of the music constitute, to the Xinchao, "a complete misunderstanding of what music is" (Ye in Li 1986:12-13). Furthermore, concepts put forth by the leftists such as "social content" (shehui neirong), "social effect" (shehui xiaoguo), and "socialist music" (shehuizhuyi yinyue) are too vague and have not been questioned -- either as to their concrete meaning or as to their usefulness.

The attack on the leftist notion of tradition places it within the framework of Chinese history. The result of this placing reveals this tradition to be a remnant of

feudalism and of pre-Liberation society, the implication being that it is out of date, unmodern, and therefore should be discarded.

Why has Chinese musical history come to this point [of emphasizing utilitarianism and populism]? I think that there are two reasons. One is historical: the legacy of Confucian emphasis on the didactic function of music. Another reason is a result of the needs of the [Japanese] war era. But after Liberation, these notions should have been changed (Li in Li 1986:13).

In addition, the selectivity of this tradition is attacked and it is shown that this tradition has neglected major portions of the Chinese musical past. The implication here is that the leftist notion of tradition is biased.<sup>147</sup>

The 1930s gave birth to three musical directions: one is the revolutionary music path, characterized by Nie Er and [Xian] Xinghai; another is the art music path taken by Huang Zi and Qing Zhu; the third is the folk music of Ah Bing. In the past they praised the first one and rejected the other two, not even recognizing their existence. This was a mistake.

The defense of Xinchao shapes itself even more directly into an attack upon the validity of the Maoist/Marxist musico-political tradition through suggestions

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<sup>147</sup> Notice how this argument fits in with the arguments over the nature of tradition discussed early in this chapter.

that this tradition has held up musical development in China. Thus, for example, the unique success of the violin concerto Liang Zhu is due to the fact that appraisal of this piece was set in political and not artistic terms. So instead of coming to an understanding of its artistic merits (which could then be further developed) composers merely tried to imitate it, with little success (Tan, Ye, Qu in Li 1986:14). The tradition of political appraisal thus cost the Chinese musical community lessons it might have learned from the artistic success of Liang Zhu.

This is but one example used by the Xinchao to mount their most damaging attack on the Maoist/Marxist artistic tradition, which claims that although there were some good Chinese musical pieces (by international standards) before Liberation, there have been few after Liberation. The obvious implication is that the reason for such a paucity of good compositions is not due to the composers but to the suffocating political policies of the regime (Tan, Qu in Li 1986:14).<sup>148</sup>

Further attacks on the dominant tradition suggest that the musical practices under this tradition are inappropriate for modern Chinese music. These practices, as we have seen, tended to combine Chinese and Western Romantic musical characteristics. But the Xinchao supporters make the point that, between modern Western music and Romantic music, Romantic music is the farthest from the Chinese tradition. But in the twentieth century Chinese and Western musics have moved closer together.

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<sup>148</sup> This notion has been put forward several times (through articles and speeches) in the last few years, and has played a large part in the controversies within the musical community since 1989, especially those concerning reevaluating Mao's Yanan Talks. See for example Liang 1988a and Fan 1990.

This is the reason that we absorb so much from modern Western music. It is not only because it is modern, it is also because its [practices and concepts] are close to ours (Li in Li 1986:14-15).

Furthermore, it is claimed that the previous tradition of combining Chinese and Western musics was too simplistic. So the claim that the Xinchao is anti-traditional is attacked through a questioning of the validity of the tradition as tradition.

The Xinchao has been called "anti" tradition. This so-called "tradition" normally points to the practices prevalent during the 1950s and 1960s which preserved local folk elements in the melody but which completely adopted Western classical and romantic techniques of melodic form, harmony, structural form, accompaniment and development. The Xinchao has indeed thrown off this "tradition" (Qiao 1990:12).

But the Xinchao composers do not reject Chinese musical tradition altogether. What they have done is to draw on ancient Chinese aesthetics -- especially Daoist emphasis on such notions as "emptiness" (kongbai) -- in an effort to understand the nature of music, especially of melody. Drawing on this ancient tradition of aesthetics pulls them toward the traditional Chinese musical emphasis on melody -- but with an immediate goal which is philosophical and not political. **Real Chinese music, to the Xinchao composers, is not the simple fusing of Chinese folksongs and Western harmonies. Real Chinese music has a "static**



sense of psychological time," a "spatial feeling" in which "melody is a bridge between spaces." (Qu, Tan in Li 1986:15). Thus the Xinchao see as their goal the reinstatement of Chinese tradition, not its overthrow.<sup>149</sup>

The Chinese and the foreigner see symphonic music in different ways. The foreigner feels the use of various techniques. But the Chinese, even when hearing an orchestra of over 100 people, will tend toward listening to the "dang ... dang..." of a single wooden clapper. This he can easily perceive (Tan in Li 1986:15).

In Chinese music, psychological time is static. This state is detached and very deep. This state is unattainable through Western music's dynamic qualities (Qu in Li 1986:15).

In sum, the Xinchao development is seen by its supporters as an advance over the previous tradition's rather simplistic treatment of the problem of combining Chinese and Western musics.<sup>150</sup> This treatment was the result of a narrow approach to music's political significance and a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of music and therefore of its place in society. **Xinchao can in this sense be**

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<sup>149</sup> For a statement of the Xinchao composers' tendency to emphasize melody and their revitalizations of ancient musical values, see Jiang 1991a:90,94 and Qiao 1990:11.

<sup>150</sup> See Table 1 for a comparison of Xinchao and leftist political, philosophical, and musical leanings.

**considered an attempt at the revitalization of Chinese tradition within the context of a simultaneous musical internationalization. To effect this revitalization the recent revolutionary tradition is rejected and the tradition chosen for modernization through the adoption of modern Western techniques is the pre-revolutionary tradition.**

Today we reject yesterday, not the day before yesterday (Li in Li 1986:18).

**Table 1****A Comparison of Xinchao and Leftist Ideologies**

	<b><u>Leftist</u></b>	<b><u>Xinchao</u></b>
1. Relationship to traditional music	folksongs	court music ritual music
2. Relationship to audience	mass line	ahead of era
3. Relationship to Western music	critically absorb	merge with
4. Laws emphasized	history	art
5. Philosophy	Marxist/ Confucian	Western/ Daoist
6. Attitude towards Mao's works	canon	historically limited
7. Musical evaluation comes from	social effect	musical criteria
8. Type of pluralism advocated	limited	unlimited
9. Western music preferred	Romantic and Classical	Modern and Avant-Garde
10. Musical meaning	specific	non-specific
11. goal of artist	express era, express masses, teach masses	cultivate self

### Xinchao and minzuhua/xiandaihua

The emergence of the Xinchao has precipitated a crucial challenge to the hegemonic strategies of the revolutionary musical tradition. It has attempted a simultaneous revitalization of and modernization of Chinese musical practices through the adoption and application of Chinese Daoist and Western Expressionist aesthetics. This process has prescribed a rejection of recent revolutionary aesthetics and the Confucian aesthetics upon which the Xinchao claim it is based. In this way, the Xinchao composers and supporters are struggling to redefine Chinese music in a way that will further the strategies of the kaifangde musical community at the expense of the leftists. As we have seen, the revolutionary tradition's own strategic tactics (e.g., modernization, concrete historical analysis, Marxist historical teleology, nationalism and internationalism) have been turned on their collective heads by the Xinchao composers and their supporters in an attempt to show that they have, in the end, failed to produce a modern Chinese music which is nationally and internationally effective (and affective). In other words the new music which this revolutionary tradition created ultimately failed to solve the minzuhua/xiandaihua contradiction. The Xinchao believe that it is their music which is the music of China's future; their combination of ancient Chinese traditions and modern Western ones will solve the minzuhua/xiandaihua contradictions through the construction of another new music which will be more internationally respected while simultaneously embodying a deeper sense of national musical tradition.

Of course, the leftists have met the Xinchao head on. They understand the dangers it poses, and use all strategies at their disposal (e.g., the authority of Mao

and of Marxism, the arguments of "historical necessity," the specters of bourgeois liberalization and of "complete Westernization" and its concomitant "national nihilism") in their attacks upon the Xinchao. These attacks have intensified since the Tiananmen Tragedy. In 1989 and 1990, some scholars lost their professional positions as a result of their support of the Xinchao. This is one of the powerful weapons at the disposal of the leftists: the removal from positions of influence of those who oppose them. Other scholars, however, have managed to weather attacks due to the protection of someone of a higher position and status. The dominant power rarely has a easy time of it: it is engaged in continuous struggle with anti-hegemonic groups.

As of the summer of 1991 the Xinchao had become for many kaifangde a symbol of their struggle. It embodied their desire for a more open space in which to do their musical work, and because the controversy surrounding the Xinchao had polarized the musical community along the same leftist-kaifangde lines that have existed since the early twentieth-century, their mutual support of the Xinchao bound them into a community of opposition.

DD (professional musical scholar, 45): If someone asks you about someone else whom they do not know, you do not have to say very much. All you have to say is that he or she supports the Xinchao [ta zhichi xinchao]. Then they will know that that person is one of us.

**PART FOUR**  
**CONCLUSIONS**

**People's Music vs. Art for Art's Sake:****What Does Socialist Art Music Sound Like?**

... these last few years, especially since 1986, there has been a fairly antagonistic ideological struggle going on within the [Chinese] music world. ... In my opinion, this struggle is reducible to questions concerning 'socialist music's direction and policies concerning this direction' (Li 1990:23).

In this chapter I have outlined and analyzed an attempt, beginning in the early years of this century and continuing today, to construct a tradition of Chinese concert music. This process has been hampered by a the lack of such a tradition in China's history and has been interrupted by revolutions, invasions, and a world war. In addition, it has since 1949 been further complicated by the fact that the Western aesthetic tradition which anchors and inspires the Western art music concert tradition (and which forms the aesthetic foundation of the kaifangde musical professionals) is fundamentally at odds with the Maoist populism which has formed the core of Chinese government attitudes and policies since that time, and which has remained the core of aesthetic thought for the conservatives (or hardliners) in the Party of the 1980s and early 1990s.

The struggles that have resulted from this contradiction are both musical and political and have basically involved two groups: Maoists (or leftists) and kaifangde musical intellectuals. Both groups believe in minzuhua and xiandaihua. Both groups are interested in strengthening both national identity and international

participation. Both groups agree that the new Chinese music must combine traditional Chinese and Western elements; i.e., both groups want neither "national nihilism" nor "complete Westernization." But the solutions posed by each group to the contradictions of simultaneous minzuhua and xiandaihua are profoundly rejected by the other and are seen as severely threatening. Each group correctly perceives that the solution posed by the other hides a strategy for the attainment of musico-political hegemony -- an attainment which, if achieved, would have severe consequences for those on the losing side.

The Maoists' power comes primarily from the military victory which established them as the politically dominant group in 1949. This allowed them to dictate the structure of government/music relationships and to institutionalize their dominance through the control of conservatory administration and of professional media (journals, newspapers, etc.). In addition, they have been able to impact profoundly the direction of musical practices such as performance and research through these channels and through the sponsorship of conferences, symposia, and anniversary festivities with agendas aimed at furthering their policies (and therefore their dominance).

The kaifangde power comes from the simple fact that Chinese music cannot be modernized without them. After 40 years of mutual distrust with the Communist government -- reaching its peaks during the oppression following the Hundred Flowers Campaign of 1957 and during the Cultural Revolution -- most kaifangde of the 1980s and early 1990s have a highly developed sense of discretion. Often this leads to professional silence and personal frustration.



D (professional scholar and music historian): What they want us to do, we do not want to do; what we want to do, they will not let us do. So we do nothing.

For others, speaking out as a counter-hegemonic activity is possible because of the protection of someone higher in the bureaucracy. The extreme ambivalence - - and occasional struggle -- within the government vis-a-vis the kaifangde intellectual community gives rise to a constantly shifting power game played out within the spaces opened up by relations institutionalized through conservatories and other government bureaucracies. It is a game in which the risks can be high, for the terms of the struggle and the definition of the accepted orthodoxy are constantly in flux. As such, any particular moment in this flux is, as Foucault describes it, an "instant photograph of multiple struggles continuously in transformation" (Foucault 1989:188).<sup>151</sup>

The political ramifications of the xiandaihua/minzuhua contradiction have resulted, as I have said, from differing definitions of xiandaihua and minzuhua -- differing boundaries and balances prescribed by groups with differing interests. And to make the situation more unstable, neither of these groups has had clear definitions of either xiandaihua or minzuhua vis-a-vis their practical applications. Thus, leftists are open to experimentation within limits in the creation of "Chinese socialist music" but harbor a lack of trust towards the kaifangde musical workers

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<sup>151</sup> It should be emphasized here that although these struggles take place within official institutions, they cannot simply be reduced to a conflict between, say, leftist government and nonleftist conservatory music professionals. The interpenetration of these two groups (and of those influenced by them) within both of these institutions precludes such a simplification. This is the thrust of much of Foucault's work on power (see Foucault 1989:188).

due what the leftists call a lack of critical attitude toward Western culture. The kaifangde see the leftists as having a lack of understanding of the nature of music and musical creation and therefore as being too narrow in their prescriptions for its development.

### Reassessing the Tradition: the Debates of 1988-1991

As a result of the profound changes in China's socio-political processes since the end of the Cultural Revolution, the late 1980s and early 1990s saw the emergence of a series of debates concerning the most fundamental issues in Chinese musical development. These debates, taking place within the structure of Party-sponsored conferences and in the official music journals, were also sites for power struggles within the musico-political community. Spurred by the relative liberalizing of the music field in the early 1980s (culminating in the peak of the *Xinchao* from 1985-1987), they have featured kaifangde attempts to reassess the Maoist legacy vis-a-vis music and leftist counteroffensives attempting to stop (or at least control) such reassessments.

The debates have centered around such fundamental questions as:

1. the relationship of Chinese and Western musics;<sup>152</sup>
2. the relationship of modern Chinese music to traditional Chinese music;
3. the relationship of the composer and performer to the audience;

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<sup>152</sup> See Han 1991:30-31 for a report on a conference devoted entirely to a discussion of this relationship.

4. the value of the revolutionary musical tradition since the May 4th Era vis-a-vis contemporary Chinese music; and

5. criteria for evaluating the musical product.

These questions have provided -- and continue to provide -- spaces for encounters which are not simply philosophical debates but rather are political struggles over the basic question of the correct relationship of music to culture. They are political struggles because they ultimately decide the direction for Chinese musical practices and the fate of those involved with them. That they are taking place -- and that they are accompanied by personal attacks and defenses as part of a general "cultural rectification" -- shows the depth and seriousness of the challenge mounted by the kaifangde since the beginnings of the Open Door Policy.<sup>153</sup> In general, the kaifangde had the upper hand in the early to mid 1980s; since 1987, the leftist influence has increased, and it has accelerated since the political upheavals of the Spring of 1989.<sup>154</sup> As of the fall of 1991, there had been a slight relaxation of leftist rhetoric, as an institutional restructuring had taken place to limit kaifangde influence. Kaifangde were trying to weather the storm, and were biding their time, waiting for the next opportunity. Most of the Xinchao composers had left the country to pursue advanced studies (several were at Columbia University). But their music still served as a symbol uniting the kaifangde community.

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<sup>153</sup> For a brief description, in English, of the "cultural rectification" taking place since June of 1989, see FBIS 4/3/90:38. For a longer defense of why it is important for the Party to maintain its control of the arts, see FBIS 7/10/90:25.

<sup>154</sup> Tan Dun has referred to the years 1982-1986 as a "Chinese Renaissance" (Tan in Jin & Lin 1990:25).

## Final Comments

I have shown in this chapter how the construction of a tradition of concert music in modern China has revealed the most fundamental problems that have faced China's modernization efforts since early in this century. I have shown that the principle contradiction in China's modern musical development has been that between Chinese music and Western music, and I have shown the historical nature of this contradiction, involving both the pre-Liberation and the Communist-led political systems. I have illustrated the concrete practical processes developing through time as reactions to and as embodiments of these problems and this contradiction via the three locations of musical construction, performance practice and composition. Finally, I have shown that the period following the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution, due to the reestablishing of contact with the West, has been a period in which many in the musical community have been struggling to break free from control by a musico-political ideology which is itself struggling for continued hegemony in the face of oppositional attempts to encourage "reassessment."

As was continually stressed in my conversations with musical intellectuals, this is still "the early stages" of modern Chinese music. Its true road has not yet been found. The goal of a popular national musical idiom satisfying both nationalistic and modernistic demands and which also meets international standards for "art music" has not yet been realized. The one piece which is considered to have realized the first goal -- Liang Zhu -- is considered "light music" or at best old-fashioned by Western musicians (see Nettl 1985:142). The group of composers which have satisfied the second goal of becoming internationally respected -- the

Xinchao group -- is chastised by cultural conservatives and leftists for abandoning the Chinese revolutionary tradition's insistence on popularity with the masses as a criterion for musical value. Though there are those which argue for a "middle road" between the leftist and kaifangde paths (see Jin 1989), the deeply political nature of Chinese musical practices makes the emergence of such an alternative extremely unlikely in an era of cultural crisis and political instability. In addition, the differences between the two groups are so deep and so fundamental that a middle way would be difficult to forge.

The process of creation of a concert music tradition in China -- and the practices and institutions which support this tradition -- has shown us much about the relationship between a political elite committed to "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" and a musical intellectual elite with deep bonds to pre-Liberation politics and to Western bourgeois art music. This relationship directly affects the current state of musical practices and the musical practices form a primary site for political struggle between the two groups. The terms of the struggle are set: the leftists want to retain control of the arts and are musically conservative; the kaifangde advocate a more open musical policy and are struggling for space in which to work more freely. But the configuration of the struggle is constantly changing, due both to its own internal process and to its dialectical relationship with other cultural domains. Together, these two groups have created a hegemonic tradition: the tradition of musical modernization. Voices that might urge for the abandonment of this tradition are rarely heard. The tradition of musical modernization is the dominant Chinese musical tradition of the twentieth century. The struggles between the leftists and the kaifangde are struggles within this tradition for control of its practices and their direction. These two groups are

dialectically linked, in that each is defined by its relationship to the other. The practices supported by each are influenced by and influence those of the other (it is this which marries socio-political processes and musical style). This struggle has lasted for more than half a century; it has been and still is the defining characteristic of modern professional Chinese music.

In the cultural crisis of the 1980s and 1990s, the salient feature of the Chinese musical world -- that feature which is most determining its movements -- is the instability of the relationship between these two groups. The future of this relationship is the future of professional music in China.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

## Brief Overview

In this dissertation I have viewed the Chinese cultural crisis through three distinct musical lenses. Each has given a different vantage point from which to analyze this crisis by revealing local, historically situated configurations of the dynamics of contemporary Chinese music. Each has had a different story to tell.

Chapter One revealed the critical situation concerning the traditional Peking Opera, showing (1) the historical roles of the Party in both supporting and subverting this traditional form; (2) the complex relationships of the performers to the modernizing policies of the Party and to the conservative tastes of audiences; and (3) the recent influence of economic modernization on points (1) and (2). **The crisis in Peking Opera results from contradictions among the following: Party pressures to reform; policies of economic modernization; a dwindling audience; and the power of tradition. And each of these is washed by a strongly didactic musico-political ideology based in a Maoist/Marxist aesthetic with a weakened legitimacy but lasting influence and use value.**

Chapter Two introduced the most vital and expanding form of Chinese music. Popular music is the music of choice for most Chinese youth (both urban and rural) but its connections to pre-Liberation China and to contemporary Western capitalist societies (especially the United States) makes it highly suspect to the Party in its role in overseeing Chinese cultural development. The chief contradictions revealed in this chapter are (1) between the openness necessary for economic modernization and the restrictions necessary to combat cultural imperialism; and (2) between the Party's need (for its own political future) to reproduce its ideology within the youth community and that community's rejection



(a direct result of the openness necessary for modernization) of that ideology. The Party's attempts to divest popular music of the influence of "bourgeois capitalism" have been met with increased appreciation for foreign popular music styles; the Party's attempts to infuse popular music with messages from Marxist ideology have been met with the construction of popular music as a symbol of rebellion against the Party and its ideology. **The dynamics of this confrontation -- ignored by most Western scholars of Chinese music -- are among the most vital in contemporary Chinese society.**

In Chapter Three I analyzed the Chinese attempt to construct a concert art music tradition. The history of this construction is the result of the (mostly antagonistic) relationship between two powerful intellectual/political/aesthetic elites. Each of these carries the baggage of over fifty years of historical development: the revolutionary line continues to commit itself to Maoist/Marxist prescriptions despite the gradual loss of legitimacy of those prescriptions (both among musicians and among audiences) since the late 1970s; and the conservatory-based music intellectuals ("kaifangde") continue to carry the deep influence of and to refer to Western art music despite their failure to develop an audience for the Chinese art music they have worked so hard to produce. The crisis within the professional music circles provides ammunition for each side against the other. The antagonism between these two lines of thought dates to before Liberation; it has intensified in the atmosphere of the Open Door Policy. What is at stake is control over the educational process of Chinese musicians -- i.e., the future of the musical profession in China.

I have analyzed the contemporary crisis in Chinese music from three different angles. The result is a complex, multi-structured configuration of clashing

ideologies and mixed motivations that takes on a different shape from each angle (and at each moment). The history and development of Chinese musical style is to be found in this fluid configuration. By limiting the view to a particular segment -- e.g., a particular genre -- I reduced the complexity and produced a historically-informed but temporally-situated (i.e., ethnographic) analysis. This analysis, while admitting of and allowing for fluidity, nevertheless showed the specific configuration (and its reasons) for a particular moment. The goal of such an analysis was to show that each of these moments is "overdetermined": that is, **each of these moments is the result of a confluence of multiple, dynamic processes that are in constant transformation but whose relative influence upon a given historical moment in the life of a society can be interpreted through situated ethnographic analysis.**

In these conclusions I will synthesize these analyses. My goal is to show that although each of the three musical genres analyzed in this dissertation has its own determining dynamic configuration, the materials out of which the configuration is built --and out of which legitimations for musico-political actions are drawn -- are common to all three. In other words, although each genre is uniquely situated, all are informed by and inform common historical processes and discourses.

### **Four Factors Influencing the Development of Chinese Music**

One of the most important processes through which musical goals and ideologies (and struggles over them) are mediated is a **tradition of discourse in Chinese Marxist aesthetics**. The political dominance of Marxism in China since 1949 and certain confluences between Marxist and traditional Chinese (especially Confucian) musical thought have legitimated the power of this discourse. Any valid analysis of music in contemporary China must come to terms with this tradition.

Analyzing the influence of Marxist aesthetics on contemporary Chinese musical practices serves two purposes: it provides a structure for holding and interrelating the various issues that emerged in chapters 1-3; and it helps locate these issues within contemporary Chinese musico-political discourse and practices, for the terms of this discourse and its criticism of these practices are drawn from dominant and oppositional aesthetic categories. In other words **the (public) terms of the political struggles that define past, present, and future musical practices in China are the terms of rival aesthetic ideologies**. These terms and the debates in which they are used legitimate prescriptive musical programs and interact dialectically with the personal and factional power struggles constantly taking place in the musico-political arena. To understand these terms -- to place them in an ideological tradition -- is to glimpse the process of these struggles.

Modern Chinese Aesthetics: Toward a Socialist Music with Chinese Characteristics

The connection between philosophy and aesthetics is deep in Chinese tradition and music has a central position in this tradition. Confucius, commonly held to be the most important philosopher in Chinese history, made significant contributions to Chinese aesthetics --in fact the appreciation of music was at the center of his philosophical system. The goal of this philosophy was the creation of the "cultivated person." Confucius believed that it was impossible for a person to become "fully cultivated" without studying music. It was music that was needed to "mould" the person's temperament so that he could become a "moral" person (Liu 1991:1-2).

After Liberation, Marxism became the official philosophy in the People's Republic of China. But Marxism did not have a highly developed aesthetic system:

"There is no `original' Marxist aesthetics for later Marxists to apply.

The history of Marxist aesthetics has been the history of the unfolding of the possible applications of Marxist ideas and categories to the theory of art" (Solomon 1979:5).

This "unfolding of possible applications" has been a major concern of twentieth-century Marxists interested in the arts. But the Chinese have been -- at least until the early 1980s -- largely ignorant of these "unfoldings" except those that have taken place in the Soviet Union. And their relationship with the Soviet Union arts policies was strongest in the period immediately after Liberation until the late 1950s. As a result the main influence from the foreign Marxist tradition upon

Chinese aesthetics has been the Stalinist/Zhdanovian aesthetics -- based in a stylistic conservatism known as "socialist realism" -- that dominated the Soviet art world at that time (see Laing 1978:34-43).

The indigenous Marxist tradition of the 1950s drew mainly from the pre-Liberation writings of Mao Zedong; the canon for aesthetics consisted of Mao's Yanan Talks of 1942 (some points from which were discussed in Chapter One), his "On New Democracy" of 1940, and his (post-Liberation) "Talks to Music Workers" of 1956. These works have remained central to the official aesthetic doctrine.

Due to the confluence of Marxist and Confucian ideas regarding the function and influence of music in society it could be argued that Maoist aesthetics is in essence a Marxist updating of Confucian aesthetics.<sup>155</sup> The major areas in common include convictions that (1) music expresses and reflects the real world; (2) music has the power to mould consciousness; and (3) it is in the interest of the society for the State to oversee musical production.

The Chinese Marxist development of these ideas has included the central notion that art is a form of propaganda that directly expresses, reflects and influences the real world. Due to the influence of the traditional Chinese emphasis (from Confucius) on the importance of music in the development of a person (a notion not central to the Marxist tradition) Mao could not allow music to lag behind other cultural domains in the degree to which it participated in socialist revolution and construction. In addition, his view of the relationship between the arts (part of the superstructure) and the economic base was emphatically dialectical. In other words there is a constant interaction and mutual influence between the

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<sup>155</sup> This is in essence one of the charges levied against the leftist line by the nonleftists. See Li in Li 1986:13-14; see Li 1991:6 for a rebuttal of this charge.

superstructure and the economic base. Music and other forms of expressive culture must participate in the creation of the new socialist person. And finally, Marxism's anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist thrust deeply connected Mao's aesthetics to an emergent Chinese nationalism with an increasing enmity towards Western capitalist democracies. Western music became by definition suspect as a carrier of capitalist ideology (due to the reflection theory).

**The Confucian tradition's emphasis on the cultivating influence of music and on the close relationship between music and politics and this tradition's acceptance of the notion of state control of the arts as a means of achieving social harmony merged with Mao's Marxist political and theoretical base to produce the didacticism typical of the Maoist aesthetic system.**

The other important aspect of Maoist aesthetics --its populism -- is the result of Mao's creative political adaptation of Marxism to Chinese conditions. Due to China's predominantly rural population, its lack of an urban proletariat, and the Chinese Marxists' view of the urban areas as "sources of social and ideological impurities" because of their close connections to Western imperialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Meisner 1982:99), Mao and the other Chinese Marxists turned to the peasants for support of their revolution and proclaimed the peasants the class that held the greatest potential for the development of revolutionary consciousness. It is in this creative turn that Maoism differs most profoundly from the Leninist Marxism that developed in the Soviet Union (see Meisner 1982:53-75); it also has had profound effects -- due to its emphasis on the folksong as containing the essence of Chinese music -- upon the development of concrete musical practices in China.

These characteristics of Maoist aesthetics --reflectionism, the dialectical interaction of base and superstructure, nationalism, didacticism and populism -- have combined to produce a set of prescriptions for the development of modern Chinese socialist music. These include demands that:

1. **an artist's main concern should be satisfying the needs of the masses.** At the same time the artist (whether composer or performer) must use his or her talent to raise the consciousness of the masses. To do this the artist must himself be politically progressive and he must have attained a deep level of understanding of the aesthetic preferences of the masses so that his creations will be understood and accepted by them;

2. **folk music should be the musical basis for modern socialist Chinese music.** In rejecting the total condemnation of pre-existing Chinese musical traditions as "feudal," Maoists have had to decide which Chinese musical traditions (or which parts of traditions) would be helpful to and which would hinder the realization of their political goals. Their decision has been that, of China's traditions, those connected with religious rituals and those connected with the imperial court are to be rejected. The revolutionary tradition can only be built from a base of folkmusic: folksongs, instrumental folk music and the music and songs of Chinese opera. Therefore an artist must use this material in his or her works -- either directly through arrangement of actual folk music pieces or indirectly through the creation of a melody that contains characteristics similar to those of Chinese folk pieces.

On one level this is another manifestation of a phenomenon common to (especially) Third World nations: the direct appropriation of indigenous folk melodies in the service of the construction of a new national music tradition that

will be nationalistic by definition due to this appropriation. But on another level this demand (in its Maoist/Marxist form) claims that **the music of the rural peasants -- folk music -- is the music of the most advanced Chinese consciousness**. In addition it is the "real" Chinese music due to its being untainted by contact with the Western imperialists in the major urban areas. Therefore an artist -- in order to produce music that is both culturally grounded and politically advanced -- must use folksongs as the basis for musical creation;

**3. modern Chinese socialist music should critically absorb China's past musical traditions and the musical traditions of the West.** China's past musical traditions contain the "essence" of Chinese culture; but they also contain feudal ideologies that would therefore hinder Marxist modernization. Western musical traditions are scientifically advanced but also contain ideological elements -- capitalist, bourgeois, imperialist elements -- that would corrupt and threaten Marxist modernization. Therefore critical absorption is the key to the treatment of these musics. Only in this way can the useful elements be absorbed and the useless elements rejected.

From 1949 to 1966 these three prescriptions --that the new music must be didactic, that it must satisfy the popular taste, and that it be modern but defiantly Chinese, made a push for hegemony that was relatively successful despite some resistance within certain groups such as the Peking Opera performers and audiences and the conservatory professors (see Chapter One and Chapter Three). From 1966-1976 the Cultural Revolution and its aftermath restructured these prescriptions somewhat, mainly in the direction of disallowing any Western music performance or study whatsoever. But **since the late 1970s the Maoist/Marxist aesthetic tradition has itself experienced a crisis of legitimation**. This crisis is partly due



to attacks by musical intellectuals such as the Xinchao supporters (as discussed in Chapter Three); but it is also due to a **gradual de-Maoization of Chinese political culture** at the hands of the Deng regime.

### The Dismantling of Maoism

Mao's works are still used for ideological legitimation. This provides a continuity that is useful to the Deng regime. But many of the things that made Mao's Marxism unique have been gradually discarded. Maurice Meisner lists the following trends as evidence of this phenomenon and of a concomitant emergence of a more orthodox Marxist ideology within the Deng regime.

1. A "newly found faith in objective laws of historical and economic development" and an abandonment of Mao's faith in "will" and "consciousness" as the answer to all problems.
2. The belief that the economic base should develop first, abandoning Mao's insistence on the simultaneous development of economic base and superstructure (including the arts).
3. A rejection of permanent revolution as a means of achieving socialism, a rejection of Mao's concept of the necessity of continuing class struggle, and the emergence of an evolutionary process of historical development through "stages" of socialism.
4. A rejection of Mao's glorification of China's past backwardness as making the transition to socialism easier and the emergence of a view that sees China's feudal past as a hindrance to present attempts at modernization.

5. The "principal contradiction" in modern Chinese society is taken to be between the productive forces (which are seen as backward) and the relations of production (which are socialist and therefore progressive). This entails a rejection of Mao's assertion that the principal contradiction in Chinese society is between social classes (especially the peasants and the intellectuals).

6. The acceptance (relative to Mao) of the existence of a bureaucratic class constituting a social elite. It was to dismantle such an elite that Mao had begun the Cultural Revolution.

7. The rejection of Maoist egalitarianism and the acceptance of the intellectuals as an elitist class "increasingly separated from the masses of workers and peasants."

In concluding, Meisner says "The doctrine that is still officially termed 'Marxism-Leninism-Mao Tsetung [sic] Thought' now bears little resemblance to what it was during the Maoist era" and claims that in the hands of the Deng regime socialism has been reduced to being "virtually equated with modernization and the rapid development of the productive forces" (Meisner 1982:217,235). One major effect of this process has been a relative lack of attention on the part of the government to Chinese musical practices.

(EE, Music Educator): In the "Yanan Talks," Mao was right about music; but his words have been ignored since the Cultural Revolution. ... The government has only been interested in the economic results of its policies. It has not paid enough attention to the social results.

(FF, Music Researcher): The government still has no clear policy.  
And they are too interested in economics to develop one.

When attention is paid to the direction of musical development (such as in the 1990-1991 leftist-directed rectification campaign against supporters of the Xinchao composers and against supporters of popular music), ideological legitimation is as apt to come directly from Marx and Engels as from Mao (e.g., see Li 1991). The leftists, however, still staunchly defend Mao's works on music when criticism of them arises (as it did in 1988); and in fact the contemporary leftist aesthetic ideology vis-a-vis the goal of modern Chinese musical production differs little from Mao's. But the deemphasis on superstructure in order to concentrate on economic development (along with the other changes listed above) has decreased the efficacy of the Maoist-Marxist aesthetic discourse. In addition it has restructured another of the main factors informing the contemporary cultural crisis with profound implications for the development of modern Chinese musical practices. This is **the relationship between the government and the educated class.**

### Red Versus Expert

The history of the relationship between China's intellectuals and the Party has been characterized by a general instability and by occasional wild and sudden swings between Party wooing of the intellectuals and repression of them. Mao's

dream, born of his experiences with intellectuals in Yanan in the late 1930s and into the 1940s, was a gradual remolding of the intellectuals away from their bourgeois tendencies toward a commitment to communism. This dream has never been realized, as the educated community has remained committed to a more open intellectual climate than that which the Party has decided it can tolerate. By the 1950s Mao had realized that the intellectuals were extremely resistant to political indoctrination (Schurmann 1968:93).

As a result the Party has vacillated between an emphasis on political ideology (red) and an emphasis on professional expertise (expert) in its management and directorial choices and policies. When political ideology has been emphasized the Party has decided that it doesn't need the politically tainted expertise of the intellectuals; as a result these intellectuals have found themselves criticized, removed from positions of authority, or otherwise oppressed. When the Party has emphasized professional expertise in its drive for modernization the intellectuals have found themselves in positions of authority and their ideology tolerated. The Cultural Revolution was the extreme of "red" emphasis; the period since 1978 has generally emphasized expertise.

The 1980s were marked by a general acceptance on the part of the Party of the necessity of emphasizing "expert" over "red." This resulted in an increase in the political power of the intellectual community as they attained positions of power within social institutions such as the music conservatories and on editorial boards of music journals. But this has been an unstable relationship as evidenced by the several rectification movements and criticism campaigns aimed at the influence of "bourgeois liberalism" within the intellectual community during this decade -- the latest being the post-June 4, 1989 campaign aimed at Xinchao and popular music

supporters and at others who questioned the legitimacy of the revolutionary line of musical development since Yanan.<sup>156</sup>

This relationship -- between a leftist-dominated Party committed to a defiantly nationalistic Marxism and to defending its tradition in China and an educated class committed to an open, internationalistic intellectual climate free from the fetters of a narrow didacticism -- has had a determining influence on the development of Chinese music. The Party has a hands-on policy vis-a-vis the arts. This policy combines remnants of Maoist voluntarism and populism with Marxist reflectionism and traditional Confucian didacticism to demand that modern Chinese music use materials from China's indigenous musical traditions as the basis for a music whose goal is to reflect the life of contemporary society in such a way as to aid in the development of a modern culture that is socialist with Chinese characteristics. But the Party is inconsistent in its dealings with the intellectuals.

The intellectuals hold positions of power within the musical institutions. They want a space in which to work more freely. The degree to which Confucian didacticism has given way to a Western (or revitalized Daoist) concept of self-expression and self-development varies among individual musical intellectuals; but neither easily accepts the narrow scope of musical goals and criteria for artistic judgment as imposed by the leftists. The struggle between these two groups and the instability of a final victory of one over the other has determined and is continuing to determine the course of dominant contemporary Chinese musical practices.

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<sup>156</sup> For a discussion of the Party-intellectual relationship from 1978-1986, see Link 1986. For the criticism campaign of 1989-90, see Xia 1991. For primary texts of this criticism campaign, see Renmin yinyue (People's Music) 1990/5. The entire issue is devoted to giving voice to this campaign.

### Scientism as a Legitimator of Reform

The reification of science and technology as those aspects of Western civilization that if appropriated would transform a feudal, backward Chinese culture into an advanced modern one has had (and continues to have) profound effects on musical practices. From the early twentieth century until well into the 1950s, appeals to "advanced scientific culture" legitimated the transformation of instrumental construction, of musical forms, of music educational techniques, and of musical institutions. In concrete terms this usually entailed (as I showed in Chapter Three) the adoption of and/or imitation of Western techniques of instrumental construction, Western musical forms, Western educational techniques and Western musical institutions. The legitimation of these appropriations comes from a totalizing ideology that was "imported to replace the old cultural values" (Kwok 1965:12). Science was equated with modernity. Hu Shih, writing in 1923, alludes to the ideological power of Western science and to its connections to the modern.

During the last thirty years or so there is a name which has acquired an incomparable position of respect in China; no one, whether informed or ignorant, conservative or progressive, dares openly slight or jeer at it. The name is Science. The worth of this almost nationwide worship is another question. But we can at least say that ever since the beginning of reformist tendencies [1890s] in China, there is not a single person who calls himself a modern man and yet dares openly to belittle Science (quoted in Kwok 1965:11-12).

Among China's musical intellectuals and among those politically involved with music in China it has (since the early twentieth century) often been stated that Chinese music has fallen behind Western music in its development because of China's continuing its feudal culture at a time when the West was developing a scientific culture (e.g., He 1957:379); sometimes the blame for this is placed on the Chinese imperial court (Li 1957:375) and sometimes it is placed on the imperialism of the Western capitalists (Mao 1977a:58-59). The legitimations of borrowing science and technology from the West at that time came from Darwin-derived notions of social/cultural evolution (popular with both liberal intellectuals and Marxists in the early twentieth century) from lower stages of development into higher ones. Since Western culture had continued to advance while Chinese culture stagnated, Western music had naturally attained a higher level of development. And just as China could borrow scientific techniques and technology and "catch up" to Western industrialism, Chinese music could catch up to Western music by borrowing the latter's advanced "scientific" methods and technologies.

In addition, for the nascent Communist movement of the 1920s and 1930s, emphasizing the role of the imperialistic Western countries in keeping China backward could arouse nationalistic sentiment in the masses. This provided further political legitimation of the appropriation of Western science and technology: if China could learn and apply Western science to her own development she could free herself from Western imperialistic domination. China could use the weapons of her oppressors to free herself from oppression.

The cultural pride of the Chinese intellectual made him loathe to admit of the West's cultural superiority. Debates over the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two cultures raged in China during the 1920s (see Kwok 1965). After

Liberation Mao used the notion of "fundamental theory" to legitimate borrowing artistic techniques from Western countries that were political enemies for the new Communist Chinese nation. Fundamental theory is the same for all countries. It transcends cultural barriers and is therefore free of cultural/ideological/class baggage. Fundamental theory is free for the taking by anyone who can use it. For Mao the concept of fundamental theory served the purpose of legitimating learning from the West (see Mao 1974).

For the first half of the twentieth century, therefore, the ideological power of scientism came in its usefulness in cultural and political battles waged by liberal intellectuals and Marxists against feudalism and against imperialism. Science was the chief means by which China could throw off the fetters of these forces hindering her progress and leap into modernity. Science could solve economic problems -- the poverty of the masses -- and the cultural (including musical) crisis. **Science was a means of national salvation.**

Since Liberation, scientism in China has shown itself chiefly through the continuing rationalization of musical practices (as analyzed in Chapter Three), from performance goals and preparations to the institutionalization of educational techniques and tendencies toward specialization among China's music professionals. The rhetoric of scientism is more subtle in the 1980s and 1990s than it was before the Cultural Revolution. But scientism itself is still at work behind (1) the continuing improvement of Chinese traditional instruments; (2) the emphasis on the training of specialists in all fields including music; (3) appeals to "objectivity" in methods of political and cultural analysis; and (4) appeals to Marxism as a source of "universal truth." The rhetorical value of science continues to be as a savior from the fetters of superstition and as a means toward the ideal of an independent nation



able to hold her own among the world community. Struggles between competing groups may reveal differences as to what constitutes superstition and what the culture of an independent China should be like; but all sides agree as to the value of science in their quest.

### The Open Door Policy

The Deng era in Chinese politics is considered to have begun in late 1978 as a result of Deng and his supporters having come to dominate the party leadership at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Party Congress in December of that year. Deng's stressing of political stability and the need for economic reform and technological modernization -- and the openness to foreign countries thereby implied -- replaced the class struggle and isolationism typical of the Mao era. The catchword for Deng's campaign is the Four Modernizations; the overall policy is known in the West as the Open Door Policy.

I have already touched on two political results of the Open Door Policy -- the general dismantling of Maoism and the restructuring of the relationship between the Party and the educated class -- and some of their ramifications within musical circles. Here I want to talk more specifically about the effects of the Open Door Policy on musical practice and ideology. First I will talk about the effects of the general opening to foreign cultures; then I will discuss some specific effects of economic reform.

As a result of the Open Door Policy there began in the late 1970s a tremendous influx of foreign (especially Western) technologies and scientific and artistic products. Chinese musicians and music students were reintroduced to modern Western music, its techniques and its ideologies. The emergence of the Xinchao composers discussed in Chapter Three is a direct result of this influx. In addition, Western-influenced youth-oriented popular music flooded the mainland -- both in the form of Western (mostly American) pop music and in the form of the Gangtai pop music from Hong Kong and Taiwan discussed in Chapter Two. The 1980s ideological crisis within Chinese professional music circles and the crisis within the traditional music field (due to dwindling audiences) are both results of the Open Door Policy.

As a result of the influx of modern foreign cultural products and of the general relaxing of political pressure on musical practice there began in the late 1970s both a surge in the modernization of Chinese music and a reemergence of an interest in traditional musical practices. The development of a concert culture for an emerging Chinese art music crystallized in the 1980s. There was a recommitment to the development ("improvement") of traditional Chinese instruments and to the modernization of "minzu yinyue" (national music traditions) so that both could participate in this concert art music tradition.

As with the Peking Opera, however, the relaxation of political controls of musical performance after the Cultural Revolution allowed the reemergence of traditional (non-modernized) performances. Amateur and professional groups formed, devoted to the preservation and dissemination of non-modernized traditional music. A series of concerts was held (the first was in June of 1982) to introduce ancient Chinese music to the general populace (Qiao 1990:13). Music

scholars felt free to research traditional and folk musics in their rural non-professional forms for purposes other than the gathering of material for professional composers and (with the help of the government) instigated an ambitious program for the publishing of such music.<sup>157</sup>

As the 80s progressed a split emerged within the liberal musical intellectual (kaifangde) community between those devoted to the modernization of Chinese traditional music into a modern art music (the dual processes of xiandaihua and minzuhua) and those who leaned toward a preservation or protection of traditional (pre-modernized) practices. The former are (as we have seen) ideologically committed to the notion of an international art music style with regional variations; the latter are more nationalistic and musically conservative. They insist that it is a music's uniqueness that assures its value within the international community. Increasingly influenced by Western ethnomusicologists, they accuse the modernizers of destroying China's musical traditions and view themselves as protectors of their musical culture.

The Party's relationship with this new group is full of contradictions. Marxism is irrelevant to the musicians trying to save Chinese musical culture. They are ideologically "kaifangde" and have nothing good to say about the Party's past meddling in musical affairs (e.g., see Zhou 1989). However, they need help from the Party (or at least tolerance) in order to do their work. And generally their work has been given less attention by the Party than has the work of musical modernization. But from a context of the 1980s' increasing Party concern about cultural bourgeois liberalism, the leftists began to portray themselves as protectors

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<sup>157</sup> The first collection of the series -- of folksongs of the Hubei area -- was published in September of 1988.

of China's cultural heritage. And this new group of musical intellectuals is a potential ally for the Party in its struggle with the liberal intellectuals in the conservatories.<sup>158</sup>

But there is another contradiction: were the Party to come out in support of non-modernized traditional music it would be supporting a music it had for generations labeled ideologically "feudal," "backward," "counter-revolutionary," and a hindrance to modernization. Therefore it is in a difficult position. But it may not have to move quickly to solve this contradiction. The influence of economic reform may soften the ideological contradiction.

Since 1978 the Deng regime has initiated a program aimed at an eventual combination of planned and market economies (see BR 10/7-13/91:22-24). The government will continue to exercise macro-control over the economy, defining the direction of development and formulating policy. But at the same time the government is encouraging more local autonomy and (especially since 1984) is moving toward holding each institution and each enterprise "responsible for its own surplus or deficit" (Wang 1987:93). I have discussed how this has affected the performance of traditional Peking Opera and the government's ability to control the affairs of the opera troupes. Less state subsidy translates into less state control: **the musical product is now partly determined by economic criteria and not solely by ideological criteria.** The resulting commercialization of the music industry has

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<sup>158</sup> In one potentially revolutionary move, a scholar named Du Qingyun suggested (in 1991) that Chinese music is essentially a music of oral transmission and that therefore this method should be used in Chinese conservatories. The adoption of Western teaching methods, he claimed, led to a gradual alienation from a true understanding of Chinese music. Du has some support for his suggestions within the Party; the conservatory musicians vehemently oppose him. See Du 1991.

generally been to the advantage of popular music and to the disadvantage of both traditional and art musics.

In 1991, however, in this context of an increasing economic crisis and an intensifying struggle between the Party and the musical intellectuals over popular music and the Xinchao, traditional peasant musical ensembles (*guchuidui*) from outside of Beijing began coming into the city -- with the financial support of entrepreneurs -- and giving performances to enthusiastic audiences.

These groups are making money hand over fist. The Central National Traditional Orchestra [which plays modernized traditional music on improved Chinese instruments] tried to give a concert in Beijing recently. No one bought tickets. No one is interested. But these peasant groups are selling out (Shen 1991).

Is it possible that a reemergence of non-modernized Chinese traditional music is taking place? The businessmen who would financially support such a reemergence generally do not like the conservatory music. Many of them are older and/or are from rural areas and have no interest in an "art music culture." The early 1990s increased pressure to make ends meet financially is damaging to a traditional style like the Peking Opera, due to the number of performers needed to stage an opera; a small musical ensemble, on the other hand, is extremely mobile and need only consist of three to five musicians. Its financial needs can be met by a small audience and modest business sponsorship.

This emergent phenomenon illustrates the reconfiguration of power relations within the Chinese music world of the early 1990s. The Deng regime's increasing reliance on economic decentralization on the micro level (known as the "contract responsibility system") compromises the regime's political control on this level. As the groups involved drift away from the political center (the Party and its Marxism) the Party reacts with criticism campaigns in attempts to bring them back. But the Party positions -- for modernization but against bourgeois liberalism; for Chinese cultural traditions but against "feudal" ideologies; for micro economic independence but against micro political independence -- are rife with contradictions, for the dyads in contradiction are interactive. Modernization has by definition involved the ideas of bourgeois liberalism; Chinese cultural traditions grew out of and still contain "feudal" ideologies; micro economic independence implies some degree of political independence.

The Party is attempting to maintain macro-control (of overall direction and policies) while encouraging micro-independence. The result is confusion and struggle as the macro direction and policies are vague and abstract (e.g., "Serve the People" and "Serve the Four Modernizations"). The micro (concrete) practices are supposed to adhere to these vague political policies and to become economically and managerially independent. But the influx of Western ideologies and the demands of local economic responsibilities --direct results of the Open Door Policy -- work against satisfying the political requirements of the Party.

The crisis of Chinese music is dialectically linked to crises in the economic and political realms. The processes of development within each affects the others. And all of these processes have been severely (though uniquely) restructured by the implementation and continuing developments of the Open Door Policy.

The interactions of these four factors -- the Marxist aesthetic tradition, the relationship between the Party and the educated class, the influence of scientism, and the Open Door Policy -- have profoundly influenced the course of modern Chinese musical development, and continue to do so. The restructuring of any one affects the others. In addition, each can become a prime location for power struggles -- both within and ruling Party and between the Party and another group -- and ideological trends within these locations can become legitimators of hegemonic strategies. The instability of both stylistic and contextual musical practices in contemporary China --the musical crisis -- is a function of the instability of these locations and of their interactions. Musical style is determined by its dialectical interactions with its own history and with the histories and synchronically situated contexts of its interactions with other cultural domains.

### **Closing Remarks**

The musical genres discussed in this dissertation have been virtually ignored by Western ethnomusicologists. This is surprising, as these genres together make up a large portion of the music listened to in contemporary China. Western ethnomusicologists seem content to leave the study of the most well-known symbol of the Chinese folk music tradition (Peking Opera) to historians of theatre. The study of popular music has become an important facet of the ethnomusicological literature on Africa and South America, but works on Chinese popular music are just beginning to appear. And Chinese art music -- indeed, the whole tradition of

musical modernization in China -- has received scant notice from American scholars of Chinese music.

The issues raised in this dissertation have also been largely ignored by students of Chinese music. Theories of musical change through time, though central to much ethnomusicological work in general, have gotten little attention from Chinese music scholars in the West. In addition, the connection of politics and musical style is simply not a question that has been asked by most of these scholars. I have shown in my work that **musical style cannot be comprehensively grasped without an understanding of historical, social, and political context.**<sup>159</sup> Musical style is a product of man and man is a socio-political being. The investigation of musical style as a product of socio-political forces can help us more deeply understand the dynamics of the musical process.

Therefore this dissertation is a beginning attempt to fill a void. Much still needs to be done. Large in-depth studies of any one of these three genres and/or their subgenres (opera alone has over 300 subgenres in China) are badly needed. Also, ethnographic studies centering on any one of these genres would do much to further our understanding of Chinese musical practices as human and cultural processes. China is a large country with a large and diverse population (including 55 ethnic minorities) and three thousand years of literate history. The opportunities are practically boundless.

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<sup>159</sup> This concept got its first full application in the work of John Blacking. It has been expanded and deepened by a new generation of scholars active now in ethnomusicology and the anthropology of music, and has contributed immeasurably to our understanding of much of the world's musics. But its effects upon students of Chinese music has so far been negligible.



American scholarly work on Chinese music has been dominated by a single approach. The scholars who espouse this approach and the students that they have trained have done excellent work in collecting data on various Chinese musical traditions. However, these scholars tend to be more interested in strictly musicological questions than in cultural and political ones (or in those arising from the interactions of these domains). Therefore their work and the work of most of their students have not been touched by the recent advances made in ethnomusicology vis-a-vis the combination of musicological and cultural/political theory. This dissertation is a first step in applying these advances to the music of China. It is hoped that this more eclectic approach can take its place alongside (and be compatible with) the dominant method. If there are contradictions between them, let us hope that they can be -- as Mao would say -- nonantagonistic ones.

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**Chinese Language Periodicals, Newspapers**

RMXJ: Renmin xiju (People's Opera)

RMYY: Renmin yinyue (People's Music)

XHYB: Xinhua Yuebao (New China Monthly)

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CFFA: China Facts and Figures Annual. John Scherer, ed.. Gulf Breeze, Fla.: Academic International Press.

CNA: China News Analysis, Hong Kong.

CR: China Reconstructs. Beijing: China Welfare Institute.

GD=government document

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NYT: New York Times.

## VITA

Timothy Lane Brace was born in Houston, Texas on November 23, 1951 to Kenneth Walton Brace and Doris Ann Norton Brace. He graduated from Jesse H. Jones High School in Houston in 1969 and entered the University of Notre Dame, majoring in engineering. In 1973 he entered the University of St. Thomas in Houston and majored in music performance on the classical guitar. The spring of 1977 was spent at the International Music Center in Vienna, Austria studying 12-tone composition with Gunther Kahowez. He graduated from St. Thomas with a B.M. in music performance and a B.A. in philosophy in 1978, receiving that university's music department's Outstanding Graduating Senior award. He then entered graduate school at Dominican College in San Rafael, California, majoring in classical guitar performance (studying with George Sakellariou) and receiving one of two graduate assistantships offered. After graduation with an M.M. in performance in 1981, he taught music history, music theory, guitar ensemble and "early music" at the Performing Arts High School in Houston.

In 1985 he entered the doctoral program in ethnomusicology at the University of Texas. In the spring of 1987, he was granted a teaching assistantship and for the next four years taught a course on the history of rock music. In 1987 and again in 1989 he went to China to study Chinese music for his dissertation. His first publication appeared in the summer 1991 edition of the journal Asian Music.

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